

CLAUDIA MOCK

FIGURATIONS OF CHILDHOOD

MIDDLE-CLASS TOPOLOGIES
IN NAIROBI AND BERLIN

Worldwide neoliberal urban planning and securitisation create childhoods marked by segregation, confinement and isolation. Especially in middle- and upper-class milieus, childhood appears as a spatial crisis in which children are patronised and disempowered in the name of protection. Claudia Mock draws on intergenerational biographies and mental maps from Nairobi and Berlin to reveal how security discourses intertwine with bourgeois values and architectures, reshaping childhoods in these cities in surprisingly similar ways since 1960. By identifying bourgeois lifestyles and adultism as integral to anthropocentric urban crises, she calls for cities to be reimagined through intergenerational spatial justice.

RE-FIGURATION OF SPACES

[transcript]

Claudia Mock
Figurations of Childhood

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*For all those
who shared their childhood stories with me:*

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Narrative Assemblage Part I

'We lived in a multi-ethnic, um, community. So, I'm from the Luo community, so I had friends from, um, the Kikuyu community, from the Luhya community, from the Kamba community. And I think, once in a while, we even had a few foreigners who lived amongst us.' (Eddah¹, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.) 'Well, there is this very large meadow, and we lived there in a complex called Amalienpark. [...] It was built in the late Art Nouveau period in 1895 as some kind of urban villa. [...] And that was, so to speak, the most important place in my childhood.' (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)² 'I was very young, so I didn't have much to worry about at that age. And, so most of the memories, then, uh, are good. [...] I think it was just the solitude. I was there, no one bugged me, yeah. Yeah, I think I liked home. It was safe.' (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.) 'I grew up in a family where there was domestic violence. I rarely wanted to go home early. I'd finish school at 3 pm, and I'd chill in school till 5 pm, 6 pm, then head home, yeah, I'd say around 7. [...] I didn't have a fun childhood, because my family was really dysfunctional. Do you know what I mean?' (Amina, 21 yrs, *1998, female, Ruai, N.) 'My family is there; when I'm sad, when I'm angry. And I can cuddle with them and talk loudly or quietly. And well, you can laugh with them. And I think it's great that I'm not an only child, because otherwise my sister always says that if you're an only child, you're spoilt [...]' (Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.) 'So, if you live in a compound, it's very boring if you're the only child. [...] It's just a place where you have, uh, like, one house in just a big chunk of land. [...] You just can't tell your parents, "Can I go out?" because it's a compound. It's not an estate. [...] Yeah. In an estate, it's more fun 'cause more kids live there, so it's more fun and noisy' (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.) 'So, when I think of my childhood, I actually think of those endless school breaks in the summer, where I was sad when we had to go on vacation. Because I actually wanted to stay at home. And where we just lived on the street from Friday afternoon to Sunday evening. The houses were all open. At some point, our parents decided to replace the doorknob with a handle, so all the kids could come in anywhere.' (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.) 'Everyone played in front

1 Pseudonyms were used for all speakers for purposes of confidentiality.

2 All Berlin speakers spoke to me in German. The passages used here were translated to English by the author. 'N.' stands for Nairobi and 'B.' stands for Berlin.

of the house and on the street. In Buruburu, we also played a lot in other children's homes. [...] The street was the most important place to me growing up.' (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.) 'There is not this one space in my biography that had this central role for me. [...] At most, you could say that this bubble or this sphere is somehow a unit. It forms a unit where I could somehow say that this was my radius. And for me, it was like a world in which I lived, like a miniature world.' (Fabian (38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.) 'Home is important to me, because I don't have to sleep out.' (Yao, 10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.) 'Music was always important at home; everyone learned the piano somehow and went to music school.' (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Köpenick, B.) 'We go to school then come home. Then if you have no homework, we go and use a gadget, like we go watch TV or play games on the computer or on the phone, or on the tablet.' (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.) 'I would actually quite like to live in the countryside or something, because it's just quieter there and there aren't so many cars. My parents got married in a kind of countryside. [And how can I imagine it there?] All grass, parties all the time.' (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.)

Auto-Ethnographic Notes

This narrative assemblage of interview passages gives an insight into diverse figurations of home. Furthermore, it hints at how these figurations are entangled when spaces suddenly start to look, smell, or feel alike, even though they are in geographically distant places, such as the streets in front of semi-detached houses in Buruburu (Nairobi) and Zehlendorf (Berlin). I wish I could keep silent and listen forever. But I also appear in their stories, and they appear in mine. So, who am I in this narrative assemblage?

Am I even legitimised to speak for those I will speak about in the following?

In *Representing the Colonized*, Edward Said criticises that the questions ‘Who speaks? For what and to whom?’ are not asked or at most appear as a strategic choice (Said 1989: 212). Leaving ‘the field’ and writing the process of my knowledge production into a structured table of contents of a monograph or, even more generally, into written form has, at times, felt violent to me. Violent in the sense that it takes away the speakers’ voices, their laughter, their gulping, and the sound of them cleaning their throat when speaking. But also the voice of the bird singing or the noise of dense traffic in the background. This muting process already starts when an interview is transcribed. Throughout the process of transforming the lived experiences from the field into a book, we translate and, in doing so, merge multi-sensorial and often highly emotional processes into reduced forms of knowledge. My emotions were also reduced in this process. My emotions as a *mzungu*.¹ As a white woman. As Claudia. Nairobi was a new place to me, but the biographical stories I collected in Berlin – where I have been living for 17 years – changed my relationship with that city as well, because the childhood memories and experiences of others inten-

1 *Mzungu* is a Bantu word that means ‘wanderer’ and became connected to European, Indian, and Arabic traders and explorers during the 18th century. It is used in predominantly Swahili-speaking nations, such as Kenya. Today *mzungu* addresses or refers to foreigners and generally to white people. My personal experience in Kenya was that I would be called *mzungu* daily, as either directly referred to or indirectly spoken about.

ripple,
swell.
ripple, ripple, ripple.

In this way, I won't presume but encounter the axioms of power that relate these (hi)stories. I listen to the waters. Topological time-spaces will be the (anti-)trophies of my (anti-)travels. The journey is not mine. It is collective. My boat's navigation system is not strongly led by my ideas but by the (hi)stories of the biographical speakers that provide the waters that carry me, my project, my legibility to write and ride as

ripples come
and
ripples go.

I ride my boat so that it could, at any moment, run dry, because the waters could easily turn flow to ebb. Withdraw their consent and take my legitimation away. I get lost. I realise I am not made for water. I get moved across the multi-biography ocean that I created but never ruled. There is a thin line between these orders of interpretation. But I try to make their thinness as visible as possible:

wave, back (!).

Boat. Waters. Ocean. Journey. I sound pathetic! The way I write oscillates between images of colonial masters and refugees. What a paradox it is that they share the same waters.

The flat waters turn into waves. In front of me a man appears in the water. He stretches out his arm towards me. Not an arm, a mutilated remnant of an arm. Scarred skin on the remains of his ulna and radius, grasping at my hands like a crab. Powerful. Powerless.

I want to save him, pull him into the boat, but another man, dressed in a blue-collar shirt, approaches and yells at me: Let him go! If you save him, you will only save his suffering. You are preserving the system. Let him go!

I am afraid of him. I am afraid of both. I let him go. A storm arises; the waves turn into uncontrolled masses of water. Everything is water now. Darkness.

I wake up and find myself still in the boat, which is barely moving. The waters are calm again.

Days of slow motion. Days of wondering, not how I failed to save the men, not how I was frightened by the other. I wonder why I am so surprised to meet a man like him, filled with bourgeois cold, here on the Indian Ocean. Why would I expect him elsewhere and under a different sky, under a different skin?

I meet pink swarms of butterflies in bluer skies,
clear blue waters turning into green,
coral reefs and all kinds of things my eyes have never seen.
The ocean of childhood memories, so innocent and virulent,

wave back!

The waters also face me with my inner, non-innocent assumptions and positive racisms. Being a guest in the ocean of childhood memories feels less like retarding, unlearning, regressing, releasing. I do not only travel in space, but I also travel in time.

I wake up in the past. It is January the 5th, 2019. I am in the clouds. A man is sitting next to me on the plane from Istanbul to Nairobi. He is Ahmad from Mogadishu. We are about to land. It is the first time that I am going to Nairobi. Ahmad seems to pick up on a conversation we had before my nap and insists that it won't be safe finding my way to my accommodation on my own. He is speechless when I say that nobody will come to pick me up from the airport. It worries him so much that he finally proposes to drop me off there on his way to Eastleigh. His kind act causes me to feel like someone who needs refuge while he is on his way to a neighbourhood that is densely populated by Somali refugees, some of them his relatives. Positions alternate.

Much of what I thought I knew until then crumbles already. In the following, more common logics falter; even knowledge from postcolonial readings can seem misleading. Stuttering. Discomfort and dissonance. I am a *mzungu*, and I am understanding more and more what this means. I realise that I won't get far with what I know, yet I realise that it is not simply about learning something new. I need to un-learn.

wave, back (!). Remember Ahmad, the kind man from Mogadishu!

During my research between Nairobi and Berlin, between de-legitimation and legitimation, I felt very vulnerable towards the many positions ascribed to me from outside. Although I was legitimated to speak for Berlin, the question of whether I was legitimated to speak for Nairobi was conceived very differently. As a childhood researcher, I always wonder whether I am legitimated to speak *for*³ children.

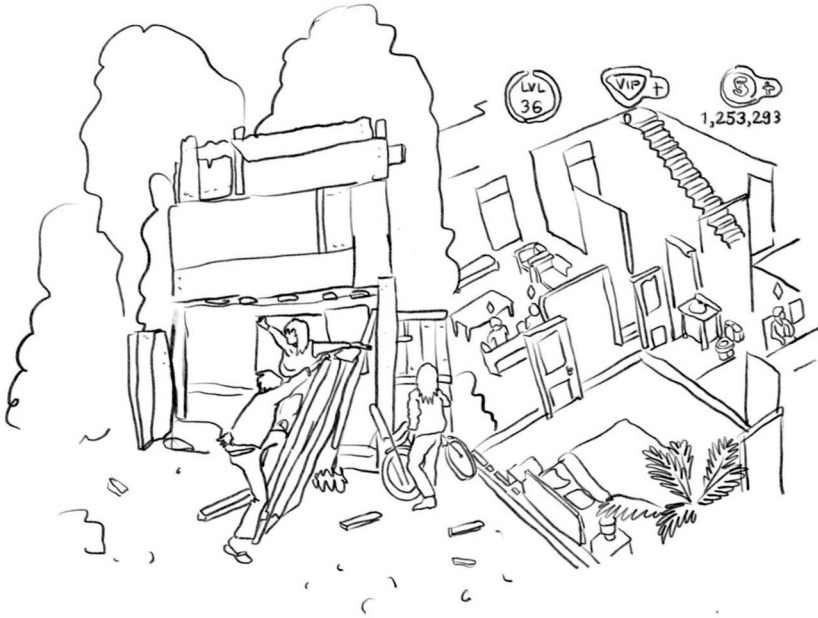
In time, I figured out that I will never resolve the tension described above. I will move with and against colonial powers of pasts, presents, and futures. I am caught up in the neo- and postcolonial entanglements of Western academic thought and practice, and I reproduce them when I am sent to Kenya to do research funded by the German Research Foundation. The power given to me could have been given to someone else. No matter how much I try to find ways to harness this tension – no matter if honestly or as 'strategic choice' – I will partly remain the colonial figure, and this is the most vivid limitation of my work.

3 I follow the suggestion of the new social studies of childhood and the sociology of childhood in that I always aim to speak *with* and not *for* children. But still, I believe that the process of academic language production always results in a speaking *for*, no matter how much voice we give the speakers, narrators of informants, or interviewees that we are working with. This is why I write *for*.

Preface

I was born in 1987, and my sister only arrived in 2003. When my sister was still very young, she often commented on my lifestyle in very accurate and illuminating ways. I often felt that I became a playful child engaging in that world with her, where one object constantly figurates into something else. Being 16 years older also turned me into her parent every time our/her parents left the house. Age was no longer what it had meant before. It became relative, while at the same time, it mattered more than ever before. Through her arrival, not only did the generational order change, but it also imported powerful new spatial orders. I observed in her what I had partly gone through 16 years before, in the same village and the same single-family house. This constellation brought back many childhood memories, making me realise how things had changed. When I was seven years old, I had a group of friends with whom I spent a lot of time building huts in the forest after school and during weekends. When my sister was seven years old, friendships were confined by the school hours and facilities. It was no longer fashionable to visit each other beyond that. Neither her nor her friends were allowed to go to the woods to play. The woods were now reserved for family walks. 'Nowadays, the woods are no longer safe', parents would say. Walking through that forest today, I realise how small it is compared to when I was seven. Besides this, I have become a stranger to it. As a child, I had much more orientation there. As usual, I walk the same repetitive tour to take a break and breathe fresh air. While I walk, I think that back then, time felt different. Today, I can estimate how long my walk will take. Back then, time was not measurable like that. Back then, time felt different because I went there not to take a break but to be there. We were so agile then. With no formal education in constructing and building, we erected several homes in the forest that accommodated our play for several summers. Some of their remnants are still there today. When my sister was seven, she she excessively played *The Sims*. *The Sims* is a series of so-called life simulation video games in which players build homes for virtual human characters who reside in the same city and whose lifestyles and lifepaths are narrated by the players throughout the game. While both of us played home, I played it all over the village and in the woods, while her play was confined to the single-family house and the garden – a social topology mirrored on the other side of the screen.

Figure 1: Making home in the village in the 1990s and in the 2000s.



Source: Drawing by the author.

'We go to school, then come home. Then if you have no homework, we go and use a gadget, like we go watch TV or play games on the computer or on the phone, or on the tablet'. (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, Nairobi)

Urban societies around the world are increasingly creating environments designed to be safe for children, where they can be educated and entertained. Whereas historically children were much more visible in urban public spaces all across the world, today they spend a lot of time in domestic spaces, which are, as Nuhu's example illustrates, increasingly equipped with media and technologies. This spatial figuration of childhood is strongly affected by and entangled with neoliberal urban planning and securitisation, which create childhoods marked by segregation, confinement, and isolation. This trend, noticeable since the 1960s and amplified through the new media accessible for children since the 1990s, reflects a spatial figuration of childhood that is accompanied by changing figures of the child and altering ideas of a 'good' life and 'good' childhood. Recent studies highlight the global pervasiveness of this phenomenon, yet they largely miss what I wish to focus on here: This figuration can only be accurately understood as contextualised by global inequalities, such as class differences. This book engages with this gap and explores the changing figures of childhood contextualised by class. Drawing on biographical interviews, mental mappings, and architectural ethnography, conducted with

people aged four to 62 years from Berlin and Nairobi, the study reveals how security discourses intertwine with bourgeois values and architectures, reshaping spatial figurations of childhoods in these cities in surprisingly similar ways since 1960. The findings highlight that dichotomies, such as urban and rural or private and public, that urban middle-class topologies inscribed into the city as a means of dealing with anthropocentric urban issues, such as traffic, social inequalities, and environmental decay, are answered with securitisation (e.g., gated housing and private play spaces), reproducing the child-adult binary. Childhood appears in this context as a spatial crisis in which children are patronised and disempowered in the name of protection, especially in middle- and upper-class milieus. The book engages with these middle-classed ways of acknowledging and grappling with urban insecurities and concludes that bourgeois lifestyles connect with exclusionary (topo)logics where urban spaces are increasingly organised around discourses of risk, control, and protection, creating 'safe spaces' where segregation then becomes a form of temporal crisis management, shielding privileged children from environmental and social collapse. From this perspective, 'child-friendly' or 'safe' spaces appear motivated by dangers and the preservation of individual physical health, rather than being part of a radical transformation towards a more just city marked by intergenerational spatial justice. This figuration of childhoods connected to securitisation entails a class paradox: when middle-class children gain mobility across the city by being chauffeured and spending time indoors, they do not just lose orientation but also contact with the social and multi-sensory fabric of the city. In times in which cities are increasingly erecting child-free zones (e.g., Seoul), this book exposes adultism as part of anthropocentrism and calls for reimagining cities through the lens of intergenerational spatial justice.

As part of this reimagining, this book grapples with the spatial crisis of childhood, characterised by the growing social and material child-adult binary, by re-centring age as a category of social difference in the following three contexts. The *first* context is social and spatial theory, where I rethink and further conceptualise childhood theory beyond the generational order to also include a spatial order. The *second* context is intersectionality, in which I re-centre age as a category that has thus far been marginalised and draw on its relation to class. The *third* context is that of global inequalities, in which I focus on the situation of children, as well as their situatedness (Haraway 1988), with the aim of developing more careful and responsible comparative methodologies. These re-centrings are not all entirely new but merge for the first time in this book as theoretically and empirically grounded in a comprehensive comparative study of the spatial changes of childhoods since the 1960s.¹

* * *

1 This book is based on my PhD project, which was affiliated with the Collaborative Research Centre 'Re-Figuration of Spaces' (CRC 1265) at the Technical University of Berlin, where I worked on the subproject 'Biographies of the Middle Classes: Spatial Experience and Meaning in the Life Course Narrative' (AO5, Phase I) between April 2018 and February 2021. The choice of comparing Nairobi and Berlin is contextualised by the subproject, which carried out empirical research in Germany and Kenya with a focus on Nairobi and Berlin.

Until now, childhood and class have been conceptualised primarily through an understanding of culture as associated with the boundaries of nations or along the Global South and North divide. But how do globalisation processes, such as social media, architectural transfer, and the privatisation of urban landscapes, circulate imaginations of the good life and its socio-material manifestation and, as such, affect childhood globally? How does the 'good' materialise in space, for example in architecture, and how do these 'good architectures' reciprocally perform or suggest what is desirable? Which spaces emerge for children in the modern parts of diverse societies, and which might disappear over time?

I assume that children worldwide grow up in situated globalities (Law 2004, cited in Blok 2010: 508) whose multi-scalar entanglements are becoming increasingly visible and tangible, as we can see in the example of the 'Fridays for Future' movement. With this spatial inquiry, I aim to contribute to deconstructing the binary representation of childhoods according to the global divide in which children from the Global North appear overprotected, while children from the Global South often are portrayed as victimised (cf. Abebe/Ofosu-Kusi 2016: 304–305). Inherent in this is a focus on majorities, which leads to the invisibility of local minorities, even though these local minorities are increasing in number on a global scale (for example, emerging global middle classes). Looking at childhood under the condition of 'global inequality' (Milanovic 2016; Weiß 2017) allows me to explore what it is that entangles different societies or individual aspects of them – their pasts, presents, and futures – from a largely unexplored perspective. The empirical basis for this analysis encompassed narrative-biographical interviews and map drawings conducted with 46 people aged four to 62 years. The participants, referred to as speakers (see subchapter 4.2), narrated and mapped their childhood stories by emphasising the spaces that were important to them. In addition, I collected ethnographic material about their homes and housing types. To understand how, on the basis of this material, the spatial orders of childhoods have been figured from the 1960s until today and beyond their respective cities, I have contextualised my research with the following three questions:

- a) Which social topologies (for example, field, enclave, route) appear in the material
 - as middle class-specific,
 - in one or both urban contexts, and
 - across time or specific to a certain time (1960s to 2020)?
- b) Which type of spatial practice is dominant in the context of these social topologies, and hence, which spatial figures (for example, territory or network) do they produce?
- c) What does this spatial figuration tell us about normative concepts of 'good' childhood in middle-class milieus, and how do they alter the position of children in the Anthropocene?

The theoretical conceptualisation of childhood as a classed spatio-temporal order is developed here in a performative manner of transdisciplinary discourse and beyond the confines of academic language. By setting up a theatre play of socio-spatial debate, I developed a theoretical base and heuristic that does not only allow for a detailed and tailored analysis of the figuration of childhood in the context of my study but also serves as an extension of socio-spatial theorization that synthesises areas of spatial discourse that have so far run parallel to and unconnected with one another into a structured as well as open topology of spatial figuration. This topology is applied empirically in a trans-generational, translocal, and cross-classed comparative case design and addresses important gaps within childhood studies, providing important insights into the empirically insufficiently grounded discourse on collective orientations of global middle classes (GMC) from the perspective of childhood and social reproduction (for more, see Mock/Weidenhaus 2022), and thus informing a globalisation research that is often too obsessed with the market economy (cf. Katz 2001a: 710).

But the multi-sited research I advocate here also raises challenges and questions: *How do I, as an adult, talk with and about children and for childhood? How do I, as a white person, talk with and about Black people and people of colour? How do I, with my rural working-class background, talk with and about people who grew up in urban middle-class settings?* These questions not only accompanied the writing but continuously challenged me during the research process. Besides reflections about the asymmetrical power constellations between myself and the speakers, I reflected on my methodological choices and concluded that biographical research, which enables the speakers to develop their narrations and relevance settings, is key to tackling the power asymmetry inherent in empirical research designs.

Overview The journey the readers are taken on through this book does not follow a strictly linear structure, nor is the book written in academic language and style throughout but also includes poetry, fictitious playwriting, and auto-ethnographic notes. This multi-modal writing style was necessary, as some things could not be said in genuinely academic language, which does not offer the appropriate terms, words, expressions, and atmospheres. This is, amongst other things, because many topics are emotional and complex and therefore not accurately expressible through the sometimes cold and rational tone of academic writing. Through the auto-ethnographic elements, I appear not only as the researcher but also as one of the speakers and aim through that to make my power in this project visible.

PART I: Childhood in Situated Globalities Part I of this book is structured into two chapters. The first chapter looks at the theoretical conceptualisation of childhood within childhood research and builds on the attempt of the new social studies of childhood to overcome the adult-child binary by conceptualising children beyond their state of becoming. Instead of following this conception, I propose to denaturalise not childhood but adulthood by framing people of all ages in a state of becoming. Furthermore, I stress the importance of acknowledging childhood as a spatial order beyond and entwined with its more common conception as a generational order. I therefore frame the human condition as 'spatial becoming'. With a critical stance towards adultism, I stress the need to look at the figures of the child within the Anthropocene, better framed by Toby Rollo as '*adultocene*' (2016:

242), within their entanglements with colonialism and capitalism, where the figure of the child as becoming and as human capital developed.

The second chapter expounds the role of class in this study and introduces a concept of class based on the assumption that a globally connecting pattern of middle-class subjectivity is that people have to and can invest in their status in order to remain middle class. This notion is closely related to the figures of the bourgeois child as not yet being but still becoming (development) and as a form of human capital. With this focus on cultural-historical aspects of middle-class subjectivity, I aim to add empirical weight to the insight that global cultural patterns shape middle classness, uncovering previously largely invisible (hi)stories of bourgeois childhoods in cities of the Global South, such as in Nairobi. Connected to that, I briefly introduce the current discourse on the global middle classes, expose its limitations and research gaps, and dismantle the modernisation myths inherent in it. Such myths reproduce bourgeois patterns of childhood globally and feed the Anthropocene crisis by promoting development and progress, while overshadowing other possible narratives of caring as alternative ways of world-making and -repairing.

PART II: Countertopological Figurations (Methodology and Spatial Theory) Part II frames the processual and spatial theoretical basis of the study in a way, led by the reoccurring question *'Am I legitimised to speak for those I will speak for in the following?'* and extending it to *'Which theories and methodologies are legitimised to speak for those they will speak for in the following?'*. Stressing the need to grapple with such an endeavour collectively and collaboratively, I draw inspiration from the 'string figure' metaphor proposed by Donna Haraway (2016), first, to highlight the complex network of (usually) invisible actors that impact a research process and, second, to describe the necessary collaboration across different academic fields needed to tackle the complexity of spatial realities. To move the idea of string figures beyond being a metaphor, I then engage in a playwriting that brings together actors from post-mathematical topology, critical urban theory, sociology of space, science and technology studies, actor-network theory and new materialism to gather at the Lieberose Desert in Brandenburg. There, under harsh climatic conditions, a debate about the current status of space in social sciences heats up and, in the process, develops the spatial theoretical part of this book and opens it to a wider audience, where spatial figuration is made tangible and applicable through transdisciplinary exchange.

PART III: Who Speaks? How, for What, and to Whom? Part III is devoted to the methods of conducting and analysing and reframes the earlier question as follows: *Which methods are legitimised to speak for those they will speak for in the following?* This question is discussed under the premise of position(ality) and elaborates on the complex and specific asymmetrical power constellations underlying the research process (Chapter 4). Led by Edward Said's provocative question, 'Who speaks? For what and to whom?' (1989: 212), to which I add the dimension of *how* – the ways in which it is spoken – I contextualise myself and the speakers and identify the *how* as *sharing*, which I elaborate on by reflecting on the condi-

tions of sharing that I set with my methods and through the feedback the speakers gave on the experience of sharing their (hi)stories.²

The fifth chapter situates this process of sharing within methodological discussions in decolonial studies and actor-network theory, which stress the importance of reflecting on the power of methods to order worlds and on the capacity of methods to reach the plurality of worlds beyond white and Eurocentric ways of collecting material. Connected to these reflections, in the subchapters that follow, I introduce my multimodal methodological triangulation of biographical interviews, mental maps, and architectural ethnography.

Chapter 6 engages with my ways of handling the multimodal material collected for the empirical analysis and establishes four steps to analyse the ‘messy’ material, encompassing how I inductively developed spatial codes that were identified as scales, which structure the empirical analysis. I furthermore explain how I apply my theoretical framework of spatial becoming to the material to reconstruct the social topologies of middle-class childhoods with respect to spatial practices, social topologies, and spatial figures.

PART IV: Fluid Subjectivities, Territorialised Housing, and Avoidant Mobilities Part IV is the last part of the book and is divided into an empirical chapter (7) and a concluding chapter (8). The presentation of the results in the empirical chapter unfolds along a scalar entanglement: (a) the scale of the subject and body (subchapter 7.1), (b) the scale of home (subchapter 7.2), (c) the scale of the city (subchapter 7.3). The scale of subject and body engages with children’s corporeal becoming, looks at classed subjectivation processes related to changing biographical future orientations, playing cultures, and forms of discipline and control. The scale of home offers a profound insight into the classed changing practices of housing and home-making, which draws on the performative agency of the built environment, evident in different housing types. Finally, the scale of city engages with the social topologies of children’s spatial mobilities paired with a shift in the perception of security and safety, revealing the access of children to public spaces to be strongly related to class differences, which are additionally shaped by the historical east-west divide that characterises both cities. This multi-scalar figuration reveals the dominance of the spatial figures of territories and fluid spaces, as well as the increasing figuration of voids in the spatial relations of middle-class children’s relations to the city.

The concluding Chapter 8 begins with discussing the historical persistence of the three scales in middle-class contexts and from there dives into a deeper reflection about fluids, territories and voids, which were identified as spatial figures that become increasingly constitutive for middle class childhoods in both locales. Connected to this figuration a class paradox arises: As middle-class children gain mobility across the city, their contact to its messy, multisensory fabric shrinks and is increasingly replaced by artificial environments that often compensate their loss of urban realities within hyperreal environments. Here, I question whether discourses in which middle-class children are associated with environmentalism and democracy and are – not only since Fridays for Future – increasingly becoming bearers of hope for a better future are viable when these

2 It remains to be considered how the speakers perceive what is written about their (hi)stories. This is a question for future research.

children are surrounded by material cultures and spaces that are often located right next to or are even a part of the centres (and symptoms) of capitalist extraction, such as shopping malls. The book ends with a critical reflection on the efforts to create more and more specialised 'safe spaces' for children by accounting for their power to constitute children in a state of becoming and to reinforce adultism, beyond their function of protecting children. From there, I advocate for deeper structural changes towards intergenerational spatial justice in cities, as well as for the centralisation of childhood within capitalist critical spatial studies.

PART I

Childhood, Space, and Class

1. From Human Being(s) to Spatial Becoming(s)

'We must, rather, abandon this apposition of Being and beings: renounce the fruitful maxim whereby Being is relation [...].' Édouard Glissant 1997 [1990]: 170

Until now, childhood research has been widely based on concepts from developmental psychology and their age-based classifications, such as Sigmund Freud's five stages of psychosexual development (1991) or Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1936). In this line of research, children are conceptualised as being in a state of *becoming* determined by their anthropological difference from adults. As a result, children's perspectives and participation have been marginalised. Instead, adults and other educational or pedagogical professionals have served as representatives for children and childhood. Since the 1980s, the new social sciences of childhood and the sociology of childhood have significantly contributed to a paradigm shift (Prout/James 1997) within the conceptualisation of childhood, partly sparked by the work of the French historian Philippe Ariès. Philippe Ariès claimed that childhood, as a modern Western concept of a particular stage of life, emerged only gradually from around the 16th to the late 17th century, peaking at the end of the 19th century (Ariès 1965). In addition to Ariès, Michael Sebastian Honig (1999) also denaturalised childhood by highlighting its social construction as a generational order determined by the child-adult binary. This was during the 1990s, when childhood sociologists globally were stressing the need to understand childhood as a social construct that needs to be critically examined. As a result, children were increasingly considered as the experts of their own social worlds (Qvortrup 1987; Bühler-Niederberger 2005; Jenks 2005; Zeiher 2005). During the early 2000s, with the advent of the Anthropocene debate and inspired by posthumanism and new materialism, the new wave of childhood studies (Lee/Motzkau 2011; Ryan 2012) appeared, arguing that childhood as a social construct and children's agency had been overemphasised. Hence, a (re)conceptualisation of children's emotions and relations as 'more than social' was called for (Kraftl 2013: 19). Reconsidering the material and biological determination of children's practices and childhood, the new wave of childhood studies stresses the importance of understanding children's corporeality, as well as their relations to terrestrial and non-human others (Horton/Kraftl 2006; Kraftl 2014; Spyrou et al. 2018; Kraftl 2020).

This very short insight aimed at illustrating how figures of the child are fluid, even in childhood theory itself. As a result, children's social and more-than-social positions remain highly ambivalent. Even though I sympathise most with the approach of the new social sciences of childhood and the sociology of childhood to deconstruct the child-adult binary by putting children on an equal footing with adults, I also believe that this conceptualisation again (re)produces adultism. This is because although children's positions are conceptually 'corrected', the positions of adults remain fixed: The adult remains complete, and adulthood equals an accomplished state of being.

I am arguing the other way around: To deconstruct the child-adult binary, I would instead like to question the status of adults as complete and no longer becoming. So instead of freeing children from their position of human becoming(s), I propose to understand the human condition regardless of age as in a state of becoming. Such a perspective allows one to differentiate 'the immaturity of children [as] a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful [as] a fact of culture' (La Fontaine 1979, after James/Prout 1997: 7). 'Childism', first coined by the psychiatrists Chester Pierce and Gail Allen (1975) and further developed by John Wall (2019), seems to be a good framework under which all three imaginaries – the psychological, the constructivist, and the bio-social – can collaborate towards a more comprehensive understanding of becoming under the condition of ageism and generational ordering. Childism, as John Wall argues,

represents an effort in academic and social life not only to include children equally to adults, but in addition to respond to children's marginalized experiences by [...] critically restructur[ing] historically engrained norms of adultism. Doing so requires approaching childhoods as not only research objects, but, in addition, lenses of social subjectivity with which to examine any research object whatsoever. [...] Childhoods then become prisms or microscopes through which to deconstruct historical expressions of adultism and reconstruct more age-inclusive social imaginations. (Wall 2019: 4)

Hence, by approaching childhood as a prism or microscope, the concept of childism makes it possible to look at the imaginaries of childhood in different societies, at different times, and across academic fields. Additionally, it helps to reverse the idea of development: away from the idea that we are becoming adult, which is to say complete, fully human, and so on, towards questioning what being adult actually means.

1.1 Childhood as Spatial Order and Period of Spatial Crisis

Much attention has been paid to childhood as a generational (temporal) order. Aspects of its spatial constitution, by contrast, have long been neglected. This is perhaps also an effect of the general excessive concentration on time and temporality in the humanities. Nevertheless, the spatial turns have also reached childhood studies. Children, often studied in cities, have received growing attention within critical urban studies, and as a result are increasingly invited to participate in urban design and planning, as well as policymaking, often academically driven. In Anglo-American childhood research, children's spatial relations have been the focus of the geographies of childhood and chil-

dren's geographies approaches (Holt 2011; Hörschelmann et al. 2011; Kraftl et al. 2012; Skelton/Aitken 2019). Whereas the latter concentrates on the spatial practices of children as spatial actors, the former analyses the structural aspects of the spatial production of childhood (cf. Schreiber 2015: 10; Reutlinger 2021: 14). Newer and more indirect spatial accounts of childhood have additionally pointed to the role of ontological design for childhood. Fraga (2022) and Spyrou (2022), for example, reflect on the constitution of childhood through design. Within urban studies, children appear globally as negatively affected by neoliberal urban planning and the growing securitisation of their lives in cities (Akkan et al. 2018; Severcan 2018). Susan Ruddick's work (2003), for example, illustrates how constitutive elements of capitalist globalisation, such as risk discourses or the need to modernise, are being (re)produced within Western concepts of childhood that uphold and sustain capitalistic and neoliberal systems, becoming a normative discursive element of the social constitution of childhoods on a global scale. Cindi Katz's work furthermore shows how different global restructuring processes, such as structural adjustment programmes and austerity politics, are changing the everyday lives of children in different places in sometimes similar ways (Katz 2004). On the scale of the city, studies such as that of Nadine Marquardt and Henning Füller (2009) furthermore refer to the commodification and simultaneous homogenisation of everyday spaces of children and young people, which, as the authors argue, 'can also be interpreted as an expression of a specific form of self-control by individuals' (translated from *ibid.*: 72). They also associate this type of spatialisation with a very specific type of subjectivation against the background of an optimisation strategy: 'The basis of this form of subjectivation is the overarching risk construction of a (neoliberal) competition [...]' (*ibid.*: 72). Susann Fegter's work additionally draws attention to the potential of praxeologically informed approaches, which make it possible, on the one hand, to address children as the experts of their (urban) environments and, on the other hand, to analyse spatial preferences as social practices. It is those practices, she argues, 'in which children participate as children (i.e., from the social position of children) and thereby become children, but also visible and invisible as well as more or less socially recognised' (translated from Fegter 2014: 531).

What comes closest to a theoretical conceptualisation of childhood as a spatial order are two influential spatial models of childhood, the 'zoning model' (*Zonenmodell*) (Muchow/Muchow 1998 [1935]) and the 'insularisation model' (*Verinselungsmodell*) (Zeiler 1983). Martha Muchow's study and eponymous book *The Life Space of the Urban Child* (Muchow/Muchow 1998 [1935]) was published by Hans Muchow after Martha Muchow's tragic death in 1933.¹ Martha Muchow explored the access to and experience of space among proletarian children in Hamburg in the early 20th century. Their zoning model represents childhood as predominantly placed in areas unfolding in concentric circles from children's homes. She observes how these zones are appropriated by groups of children interacting without the direct supervision of adults. During the 1970s and 1980s, and with reference to Martha Muchow's study, European sociological childhood

1 Martha Muchow can be seen as a pioneer of German ecological/environmental psychology. Tragically, due to her close relationship to the Jewish professor William Louis Stern, the National Socialists expelled her from all public positions and threatened her. She committed suicide in 1933.

research noted a growing domestication, familiarisation, and insularisation of childhood (Zeiber 1983; Zeiber 1990; Behnken/Jonker 1990; Zinnecker 1990; Zeiber/Zeiher 1994) as a result of modernisation and urbanisation during the 20th century (cf. Löw 2001: 82 ff.). The model of insularisation states that children no longer appropriate a contiguously expanding coherent area around their homes, such as in the zoning model by Martha Muchow.

At the end of the sixties and beginning of seventies, a modernisation push of the conditions of everyday life took place in Western Germany, leaving strong traces in the spatial world. New special places have emerged for children but also for adults. Both have consequences for where children find space for their daily lives. (translated from Zeiber/Zeiher 1994: 17)

These specialised places, framed as 'islands', such as the school, the climbing gym, and the many playgrounds reserved for children, contrasted with '[t]he many interstitial areas that belong to the adults and are as such less interesting, dangerous, inaccessible, and often unknown' (ibid.: 26). Whereas these two models suggest that childhoods unified generally during the first and second half of the 20th century, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa et al. conclude on the basis of a 'meta-analysis' of a wide range of children's spatial attachments from international childhood research that there is not one spatial model of childhood: 'Instead, they have become increasingly multi-layered and complex, for they are impacted by different features that simultaneously overlap, [and] become intertwined [...]' (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2023: 38).

What all these spatial approaches to childhood demonstrate is that it is necessary to theorise childhood beyond the generational order to also include a spatial order. Thus, in the following I will conceptualise childhood as a generational and spatial order against the background of the entanglement of time and space stressed by some followers of the spatial turn. Doreen Massey, for example, points out the risk of understanding space and time as disentangled, because it holds them in a binary in which 'each pure imagination on its own tames the spatial' (Massey 2005: 86). Martina Löw furthermore notes that 'it is illogical to conceive time and space as fundamental factors of human existence and to understand the one concept as a social construction, but to reify the other, for example as a territorial concept' (Löw 2016: 50). Gunter Weidenhaus's concept of a 'social space-time' (translated from 2015) addresses this theoretical and empirical gap. He calls for a determined engagement of empirical approaches with the connection between historicity and social-spatial constitution and presents this connection as a desideratum of empirical social sciences (cf. ibid.: 54 ff.). Building on these considerations, I argue that only the entanglement of a temporal-spatial order serves as a good basis for conceptualising childhood. With the spatio-temporal order as an ontological dimension for childhood, I also want to offer an umbrella term for more specific and generic proposals in the same vein, such as that of Spyros Spyrou (2022), who points to the importance of ontological design for childhood. Finally, conceptualising childhood as a spatio-temporal order is crucial to me because for most societies childhood is a structural element and therefore a social construct that unfolds global power on the basis of this order. Conversely, this order shapes children's experiences and their ideas of a 'good' life.

To further theorise childhood as a spatial order, I will apply it within Michel Foucault's work, inspired by its feminist rereading in Silvia Federici's study *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004). In the second half of the 20th century, Michel Foucault stated that,

'[w]hen, with Rousseau and Pestalozzi, the eighteenth century concerned itself with constituting for the child, with educational rules that followed his development, a world that would be adapted to him, it made it possible to form around children an unreal, abstract, archaic environment that had no relation to the adult world. The whole development of contemporary education, with its irreproachable aim of preserving the child from adult conflicts, accentuates the distance that separates, for a man, his life as a child and his life as an adult. That is to say, by sparing the child conflicts, it exposes him to a major conflict, to the contradiction between his childhood and his real life.' (Foucault 1987:81).

Even though Foucault did not consider the situations of children much in his work, this quote sums up the figuration of childhood as a spatial order, perhaps quite generally but vividly. But the figure of the child he draws here is not that of any child. It is most generally the bourgeois child. The bourgeoisie has positioned children not only within specialised pedagogical and educational spaces but also within the reproductive spheres of capitalist systems. Therefore, Michel Foucault's work, especially his concept of 'crisis heterotopias' serves as a suitable umbrella term under which the specific nature of the special spaces for children that proliferate globally can be explored as 'counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites [...] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1984a [1967]: 3). Crisis heterotopias refer to spaces that are 'reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society [...] in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly' (ibid.: 4). His idea of 'heterotopias of deviation' furthermore refers to spaces 'in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (ibid.: 5), such as rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and retirements homes. Most of the social positions Foucault ascribes to the spatialities of heterotopias are those of subjects who are temporally or chronically unable, prohibited, or unwilling to be productive in the capitalist system – which accounts for most children in the world, except for those who are working. What Foucault notes for the old aged counts in the same way for children: 'after all, old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation' (ibid.: 4). In relation to the norm, children in modern societies are in constant crisis because they are not yet (allowed to be) what they will have to become: (productive) adults. The following subchapter will delve deeper into the genealogy of that 'unreal, abstract, archaic milieu' for children that, according to Foucault, developed in the 18th century in the wider context of the Anthropocene.

1.2 Figures of the Bourgeois Child in the Anthropocene

At the beginning of this research project, I aimed to understand how middle-class children in Nairobi grow up similarly to or differently than their Berlin counterparts. The focus of this exploration was on space, on children's spatial relations and sense of (un)belonging. I wondered how and where middle-class children in these geographically distant and culturally diverse places spend their time, and I wondered how this has changed from the 1960s until the present day. Now, after listening to the childhood memories and experiences of 46 individuals, I realise how much their (hi)stories, not only reveal insight into the spatial order of childhood in these two cities but also co-tell broader stories of socio-spatial relations in the Anthropocene.

So, I grew up in the 80s. Nairobi was stunning. It was like green city in the sun. Trees everywhere. Um, there are not that many tall buildings. You know, when you're growing up and you watch TV, you keep thinking, I want my city to be that way. But now I'm thinking, I wish my city would go back/go back to the green city in the sun. We had rain, we had fog because it was so cold. It was beautiful. (Ruby, 39 yrs, *1980, female, Kabete, N.)

I refer to the biographical narrations on which this study is based as (hi)stories, because I understand the biographical narrations as part of the discursive production of history in general and as co-constitutive of worlding processes. The complex relations revealed by (hi)stories, such as that of Ruby, tell the story not just of childhood, class, and space but of changing conditions of becoming within the wider context of anthropocentrism. In Ruby's narration, she speaks not only about her personal biographical perception of the environmental changes of Nairobi. She also refers to colonialism and the British vision of Nairobi as 'the green city under the sun'. In this way, Ruby's (and others') stories reveal the complex entanglements between personal biographical storytelling and broader anthropocentric processes of world-making. These (hi)stories are human-centred but also de-centre the human within spatial constitution. The (hi)stories constitute space from pasts, presents, and futures and from 'intra-actions' (Barad 2007: 33)² between human and non-human, their diverse power and agencies, and also from norms and values that render space into good and bad, secure and insecure, private and public. I propose that these and other childhood (hi)stories can inform the often nebulous Anthropocene debate from a biographical perspective.

The Anthropocene, also called 'Capitalocene' (Moore 2016), 'Chthulucene' (Haraway 2015), 'Eurocene' (translated from Sloterdijk 2015), or 'Technocene' (Hornborg 2015), is a very nebulous public and academic discourse. However, '[t]he core of the initially natural science-based Anthropocene idea is the diagnosis that humans or the anthropos have become the strongest geological force and that their earthly influence has set irreversible geochronological developments in motion' (translated from Block 2021: 203).

2 'Intra-action' refers to Karen Barad's understanding of relationality within 'the mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (2007: 33). 'Intra' thereby highlights that subjects do not preexist but 'emerge through their intra-action' (ibid.: 33).

As such, the Anthropocene has been debated in several academic disciplines since its advent in 2000 (Crutzen/Stoermer 2000). Although the approaches to the Anthropocene are myriad across disciplines, for the sociological tradition, Katharina Block points out a ‘consensus that the idea of the Anthropocene expresses a “caesura” [and] thus represents something “radically new”, which brings “new challenges” for sociology’ (translated from Block 2021: 212). Peter Sloterdijk speaks in this context about the loss of a ‘cosmic serenity’ (translated from Sloterdijk 2016: 20).

Within childhood research, a small but growing number of publications centre children or childhood in the Anthropocene debate (for a more detailed literature review, cf. Sjögren 2023). Within such approaches, children appear in multiple ways, most of all as victims of earthly destruction, and hence at the same time as agents drawn on to legitimise sustainability discourses (Malone 2018), firing up discourses around (in)security. But beyond the figure of victim, children also appear as bearers of hope, highlighted by their capability for intrahuman, more than human, or posthuman acting (Taylor 2020, Taylor/Pacini-Ketchabaw 2019). Very few approaches view childhood, as proposed in the earlier-cited passage by John Wall, as a prism or microscope, and thus as an analytical category for exploring the power structures within processes that constitute the Anthropocene (Ashton 2022). With my work and its findings, I would like to contribute to this perspective by reflecting on the role of childhood as a generational as well as a spatial order that can be explored as a structural element of different societies and at different times. This exploration, as I will argue and show, must go beyond the notion of societies as spatially contained by the borders of nation-states and temporally framed as continuing since their advent. Rather, I argue that childhood – and therefore generational-spatial ordering – must be more broadly understood as a constitutive part of the Anthropocene.

There are diverse proposals for a periodisation of the Anthropocene that define different starting points somewhere between 1610, due to the tangibility of the massive changes provoked a century before by the conquest of the Americas (1492 Columbus), to the entrance into the nuclear age after World War II. Another possible event that is considered to be the starting point of this geo-social epoch is the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, triggered by the invention of the steam engine around 1784 (cf. Crutzen/Steffen 2003: 61). This last periodisation shows similarities with the emergence of the child-adult binary, as reconstructed by the French historian Philippe Ariès. Ariès claimed that childhood as a ‘modern’ Western concept of a particular stage of life emerged only gradually around the 16th to the late 17th century. This shift in the perception and positioning of the child had, as Philippe Ariès argues, become tangible by the end of the 19th century at the latest (cf. Ariès 1965). Philippe Ariès saw this in correlation with the time of industrialisation, also called the time of great acceleration, and with the concurrent rise of the bourgeoisie (and bourgeois lifestyles). My aim here is not to support one periodisation of the Anthropocene over another, but to highlight the simultaneous emergence of the bourgeois concept of childhood, which positioned children within a child-adult binary alongside the productive-reproductive dichotomy, and the point at which humans became the strongest geological force. This is to read the history of anthropocentrism as extending beyond the history of a materialism that centres on the factories, machines, and wars of humankind and shifts its perspective to the sphere of

reproduction and the reproductive work that enables and sustains factories, machines, and wars within the Anthropocene. A constitutive part of that sphere is the shifting figures of the bourgeois child, the child that did not have to (or was no longer able to) work and instead was schooled.

From the works of modern political philosophy, we know that schooled meant educated to be fully human, as the disciplining hand and knowledge of pedagogues helped the child to perform its transition from nature (wild) to culture (civilised). A closer look into modern philosophy shows that conceptualizations of the nature of human, such as those of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, drew heavily on the culture-nature divide, which was constitutive of their understanding of children as feral beings that are not yet fully human (which in their understanding meant modern, bourgeois, European and white) and therefore need to be educated. To approach and theorise the entanglements of adultism and anthropocentrism, the political scientist and childhood researcher Toby Rollo offered the term '*adultocene*' (Rollo 2016: 242).³ In the following, I will focus on the entanglements of colonialism and capitalism within the axiom of power, what Rollo calls the *adultocene*, as two of the central processes which frame anthropocentrism. I am aware that these are extremely complex phenomena, as well as dazzling terms; needless to say, I will not touch deeply or by any means profoundly on either of them. My aim is more to exemplify the potential of childhood conceptualised as a generational and spatial order employed as a prism or microscope to further explore the figures that constitute and therefore define anthropocentrism.

1.2.1 The Child as Trope in Colonialism

I have pointed to the similarities between the advent of childhood and the Anthropocene periodisation. While one periodisation brings childhood into historical entanglement with industrialisation (18th/19th century), the other marks its emergence as taking place much earlier, in 1610 and in relation to European expansion. In this and the following section, I will consider both of these entanglements. I am aware of recent studies that criticise Ariès's assumption that childhood was a consciously European project (Richard-Elsner 2015; Marten 2018), and I would argue that a revision of Ariès's work is absolutely necessary against the background of the concept of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000) and historical research on the global bourgeoisie (Dejung et al. 2019). However, although the bourgeoisie has been present worldwide since its emergence, through expansion, the European bourgeoisie was highly influential in instilling the child-adult binary within and through their pedagogical practices, framed by missionarism in the colonies. This suggestion is also supported by Bill Ashcroft's (2001) research on colonialism and missionarism as collaborative projects of mental control in the form of disciplining, pedagogisation, and education. In his work, Ashcroft reconstructs links between the historical power of the imperial and pedagogical discourses to represent *the other*. The historical relationship of childism and colonialism has so far received little recognition. Therefore,

3 By referring to Toby Rollo's '*adultocene*', I do not wish to offer another term to substitute the Anthropocene but to rather add another important perspective to the ongoing debates surrounding the term.

Ashcroft takes on a highly unexplored perspective on the genealogy of the power structures between suppression and subjugation, arguing that

[t]he eighteenth century, which saw the emergence of the child as a philosophical concept, also saw the emergence of race as a category of physical and biological variation. (Ashcroft 2001: 37)

Based on the idea of the child as becoming and the adult as being, the child-adult binary is at the core of colonial and missionary ideologies. Ashcroft furthermore notes that ‘no trope has been more tenacious and more far-reaching than that of the child [...] because it absorbed and suppressed the contradictions of imperial discourse itself’ (Ashcroft 2001: 36). The child as trope was, as Ashcroft reconstructs, powerful and useful at the basis of colonial practices of suppression.

As a child, the colonial subject is both inherently evil and potentially good, thus submerging the moral conflict of colonial occupation and locating in the child of empire a naturalization of the ‘parent’s’ own contradictory impulses for exploitation and nurture. The child, at once both other and same, holds in balance the contradictory tendencies of imperial rhetoric: authority is held in balance with nurture; domination with enlightenment; debasement with idealization; negation with affirmation; exploitation with education; filiation with affiliation. This ability to absorb contradiction gives the binary parent/child an inordinately hegemonic potency. (ibid.: 36, 37)

Kathryn Yusoff also shows that the basis of colonial legitimisations to oppression, which lies in the binary of human and nonhuman, culture and nature, and adult and child, is deeply rooted in academic knowledge production. She reminds us of the scientific practices of ‘colonial earth-writing’ (Yusoff 2019: 2), which she analyses in the historical context of the language of geological science, which coded ‘inhuman, property, value, possession’ as categories that move ‘across territory, relation, and flesh’ (Yusoff 2019: 4). This geological coding became powerful enough to inform the *Civil Code of Louisiana from 1867*, in which Art. 537 claims: ‘Natural fruits are such as are the spontaneous produce of the earth; the produce and increase of cattle, and the children of slaves are likewise natural fruits.’ (Fuqua 1867: 82)

With the framing of the ‘white Adultocene’ (Mock 2025) I similarly find that the source of such de-humanisation lies in academic practice itself and trace the power of white European adultism within the history of racial oppression in the Anthropocene – which from the angle of white modern philosophy appears more as a white and adult Anthropocene. This stresses the need to reconceptualise who we are blaming when we speak of the devastating effects of anthropocentrism by asking who the anthropos is, understood in any case as an equal category of being, when humans are randomly shifted in and outside of the human realm. From here it seems highly important to trace the academic practices of what Kathryn Yusoff terms ‘colonial earth-writing’ (2019: 2) within the context of the Anthropocene debate and from the perspective of childhood. The previous considerations suggest that the concept of the complete human being should also be examined in relation to class differences. This is because being fully human was histori-

cally not only reserved for white adults but seems to have also been restricted to the bourgeoisie in general. This becomes evident in Frantz Fanon's work. In his analysis of Black psychology *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), he shows that the binary of nature and culture is still at the root of white European thought. With a focus on language, he describes how in contemporary French society Black people are still considered as the inhuman or not-yet-human other who could only become fully human (or French) by the power of white bourgeois education. In the following, I examine the basis as well as the continuity of these concepts and practices of othering and exclusions within the figure of the child as (global) human capital.

1.2.2 The Child as (Global) Human Capital

Childhood, conceptualised as a spatio-temporal order, serves as a structural element of most societies worldwide. This is because under the global capitalist condition, childhood, as a biographical stage of protection and education, is rendered more and more similarly, as many societies consider children in the function of being human capital and childhood as a period to grow that capital. That children have historically been treated as human capital is also supported by Silvia Federici's work on women's reproductive labour. She shows that the persecution of women regarded as witches during the early modern period at the transition from the 18th to the 19th century in Europe was often connected to women who did not want to have children, who performed abortions (either as mothers or midwives), or whose children died during pregnancy, during birth, or afterwards (cf. Federici 2004: 93 ff.). This shows that the bourgeois image of the child as human capital that emerged at the same time ascribed to women a completely new role that forced them into reproduction, as nations wanted to grow in their obsession for expansion and development. Later, during the 20th century, figures of the child were politically restructured once again. The value of children shifted from economic to emotional. The early 1900s brought about children's rights movements, which promoted children's legal protection and restricted child labour. The child would increasingly be drawn as a victim of anthropocentrism and a symbol of hope for a better future. Yet the emotionalisation and victimisation of children were also not innocent of developmental ideologies. On the contrary, especially in bourgeois milieus, the emotionalization and protection of children involved an excessive investment in the future of the child by making education a right but also a compulsion, in which bourgeoisie children and their families often entered into competition and normalised this developmental competition beyond their classed relations.

Development norms, together with the development phases, also specify development speeds. The individual pace of development can be constantly checked against them as against an objective yardstick. [...] The norm creates fear of falling behind the norm as well as ambition to surpass the norm. The child is supposed to be one of the best later on and already recognisably so. This creates pressure to perform even in early childhood. With baby chairs, baby swimming and intelligence-training toys, attempts are made to accelerate development. (translated from Zeiher/Zeiher 1994: 34)

While the state laid the responsibility of children's education in the hands of the family as a societal institution, in affluent nations such as Germany we can later observe a shift away from the family-centred child towards a childhood in social institutions. 'Defamilialisation' describes how the welfare state redistributes care and support services so that the individual can secure its existence independently of the family network (Lister 1997; Esping-Andersen 1999; Ostner 2007). But developmentalism does not leave the scene here either. Ever since, there have been voices criticising that social welfare systems and their child investment policies actively reproduce the modern concept of childhood, as they position children as 'human capital' within the social investment state (Olk 2007; Prout 2000; Mierendorff 2014). Thomas Olk describes the social investment state as, amongst other things, 'future-oriented [...] and it declares children to be the most important social policy target group because social investments in this population group promise the highest productive effects and profit expectations in the future' (translated from Olk 2007: 46). On this basis, Thomas Olk cautions that positioning children as future investments for societies is highly problematic, because often 'the focus on the future is bought by a neglect of children's well-being in the present[, while additionally] this investment orientation leads to a growing interest in controlling children's [development]' (ibid.: 53).

The role of children as human capital is increasingly attracting attention as a transnational phenomenon (Gerhards et al. 2016). This happens in two ways: One is that the discourse of so-called GMC also propagates child investment policies, and the second is that this investment is directed more and more towards a 'transnational human capital', suggesting that child investments are no longer only framed by national welfare systems but that parents from the middle and upper classes already prepare and equip their children for a globalised world. In this and the context of Kenyan middle-class parenting, Gunter Weidenhaus and I found that, a good parent can be both '[a] secure harbour and the gate into the world' (Mock/Weidenhaus 2022: 151). This double quality of parenthood is furthermore understood as the condition of realising what seems like a central aspect to many middle-class parents, which is, as one mother put it, to raise their 'child to become a world citizen' (ibid.: 151). These ideas of good childhood and parenthood must be seen as a product of the flexibilisation of the productive sphere and how it rescales childhoods. In this context, findings indicate that middle- and upper-class families who prepare their children for globalisation also reproduce global social inequalities by doing so (Gerhards et al. 2016). It can be summarised that the figure of the child as human capital persists across time and space in the geo-social epoch of the Anthropocene. This is because the concept of child development is based on a similar idea of development as social progress: It 'suggests a linear process of perfection, it has an evolutionist connotation[, where i]ndividual and human development [likewise] follow a [...] linear progression from lower, simpler to higher, more complex modes of functioning [towards] the fully developed adult of Western societies' (translated from Honig 1999: 61).

In sum, the short and fragmental insights of these two figures of the child in the Anthropocene illustrate that the child as a social category was used not only as a social power but also as a biological as well as geological power. This biological power connects the child as a trope in colonialism, where it served to legitimise the oppression and exploitation of African peoples as slaves by regarding them as children unable to ever fully

become human (which meant white bourgeois European adults). The geological power inherent in this child-based legitimisation strategy lies in the effect of enabling the extraction of natural resources all over the world during and after the colonial period. In the form of global human capital, the category of the child furthermore shows how modern bourgeois conceptions of the child have produced lifestyles and ideas of development that persist despite the anthropocentric social, geological, and biological crises caused by them.

2. Invisible Childhoods - Invisible Globalities

Although the concept of childhood as a spatio-temporal order is universal to almost all societies, the reality of childhood is far from being universal. When exploring the spatial order of childhoods, it is important to remember that social orders rest on the social matrix of domination (Collins 1990). In this matrix of social inequalities, nine-year-old Hamza lives in an apartment flat in Fés (Morocco) and is the same age as Marilyn, who is growing up in a gated community in Cape Town (South Africa). Hamza's parents own a kiosk. Marilyn's mother runs an NGO, and her father is the deputy of a private hospital. After school and on Saturdays, Hamza helps his parents in the kiosk. Marilyn, on the other hand, visits different clubs, where she learns horse riding, dances ballet, and practises the contrabass. Marilyn and Hamza are children. Surely, both know they will have more freedom and responsibility when they become adults. We could assume this without asking them. But we can only understand what childhood, adulthood, freedom, and responsibility mean to them if we ask them. What they say will give us direct or indirect insight into their societal positions within their nuclear and extended families, neighbourhoods, and societies. No matter what they say, their '[r]elation is only universal through the absolute and specific quantity of its particularities' (Édouard Glissant 1997 [1990]: 178). And so is the material world that surrounds them, because '[a] Mayan wristband worn by a Californian youth and an American t-shirt worn by a Guatemalan teenager are not symmetrical in the power relations they inscribe' (Ansell 2009: 196).

When exploring spatial orders and their relations, which supposedly produce the world, we must keep an eye on how we contribute to the representation of these worlding processes through our explorations. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully watch which relations we hide while others become overemphasised. In the following subchapters, I will point out hidden relations (invisibilities) which, in the context of my research, I aim to shed light on. These are children's missing perspectives in globalisation research, the missing consideration of class in childhood research interested in global spatial figuration, and the epistemic dichotomies that uphold these invisibilities.

2.1 Age, Social Reproduction, and Globalisation

The *first* complex of hidden relations I want to discuss is *age* as a category of social inequality within globalisation research, connected to the generally marginalised position of social reproduction within the same tradition. Although (even) its (critical) leading scholars are interested in the consequences of a global market economy, they lose sight of the restructuring of social reproductive relations (Katz 2001a; Nagar et al. 2002). This might also be a side effect of Marxist-informed approaches dealing with globalisation. Feminist scholars have criticised that Marxist theory upholds the separation and hierarchisation of the reproductive sphere, relegating it to a devalued position in relation to the sphere of production (Crenshaw 1989; Winker/Degele 2009). This hierarchy is, at the same time, gendered: The reproductive work appears as a supposedly female family affair, while productive work appears as a supposedly male affair of the market (cf. Becker-Schmidt 2019: 67). To challenge the social difference caused by this gendered hierarchy, feminist scholars demand exposure of the process dependency of the two spheres and equal acknowledgement and remuneration of the work in both of them (Meillasoux 1972; Bock/Duden 1977; Beneria 1979; Dalla Costa/Dalla Costa 1999; Katz 2001a). This might also be why, in the context of globalisation research, Marxist-informed analysis, which does not consider the feminist critique, reproduces the primary focus on the productive sphere. This asymmetry is highly problematic, because it reproduces the gendered hierarchisation of the spheres within the framework of theory formation, leading the reproduction sphere to appear as an ‘appendage’ of the production sphere within the framework of historical materialism. This could be another reason why globalisation research often fails to set up its analysis intersectionally. Overemphasising the global market economy entails suppressing reflections on social categories of inequality, such as gender and age.

Let me give an example of how the focus on the reproductive sphere might change the outcome of what is made (in-)visible: One of the most well-known effects caused by globalisation is the phenomenon of what David Harvey calls ‘time-space compression’ (1990: 426) and Milton Santos describes as ‘temporal unicity (the convergence of moments)’ (Santos 2021: 124) – and thus the product of diverse technological innovations (from the telegraph to the internet), driven by the global expansion of capital, that compresses (as in condenses) distances of space and time, making it possible to perceive the simultaneity of different events from different global coordinates. Whereas these two globalisation researchers, which focus on the market sphere, see the globalising world as shrinking, Cindi Katz, a feminist geographer who engages with the reproductive sphere, sees the world as expanding. She encountered what she calls ‘time-space expansion’ (Katz 2004: 226) in the lives of children and young people of rural Sudan, restructured and complexified by structural adjustment programmes. Katz vividly concludes this paradox herself when noting: ‘While from the perspective of transnational capitalists and those living directly in their midst the world may indeed be shrinking, on the grounds of places like Howa – ever more marooned by these processes – it seemed to be getting bigger all the time.’ (Katz 2004: 226)

But besides the overemphasis on the productive sphere, another reason seems to maintain the invisibility of childhood in globalisation research, namely the fact that the

reproductive sphere in general and childhood in particular are attributed to local scales. The home, the street, or the neighbourhood – scales that seem connected to the reproductive sphere, often fall out of the frame of global world-making processes as long as they are examined within a spatial analysis based on a Euclidian understanding of space and scale. But once proximity and mobility are understood as relational spatial processes, these scales no longer appear primarily local. From a relational or, as I will later argue, topological perspective (elaborated on in subchapter 3.3), which looks at the processes of scale-making and does not set scale a priori, the social constitution of home often appears beyond the actual house where one lives, unfolding as an emotional spatial arrangement entangled on different scales. A topological understanding, moreover, shows how even the diverse materialities of housing and home-making no longer appear local once we make ourselves aware of the global architecture transfer, also based on classed concepts of housing, which in return regards the middle classes as increasingly global, as my findings (subchapter 7.2) will show.

2.1.1 Class in Research on Children's Spatial Relations

This brings me to the *second* complex of hidden relations, caused by the missing or insufficient contextualisation of *class* as another category of social inequality within childhood studies (concerned with space). Social inequality is often depicted by the global divide (South and North). This points to a problem which I will in the following refer to as 'methodological hemispherism', with a reference to what other scholars frame as 'methodological nationalism' (Beck 1997; Friedberg 2001; Gille/Ó Riain 2002; Hage 2005; Beck 2007), but on a different scale. In the context of 'methodological hemispherism', Tanja Betz argues that childhood research in the Global North causes a universal conception of 'childhood as modern'. She notes that, '[t]he analysis of social and ethnic lines of differentiation within the group of children is conceptually not wanted. Childhood is to be treated as a uniform phenomenon; children have more in common than what distinguishes them [...] (Qvortrup 2005)' (translated from Betz 2009: 462). In such a perspective, children are analysed – regardless of their classed differences – in their capacity as children who are confronted with specific developmental tasks. Betz argues that this might also be caused by childhood studies and its analogies to women's studies, where 'the dimension of "gender" plays a far more central role than the dimensions of "milieu/class" or even "ethnicity"' (translated from Betz 2009: 462).

Only recently have childhood studies based in the Global North critically observed the undeniable overrepresentation of middle class-situated childhoods in their own field. If we look at childhood studies concerned with space, such as in children's geographies, class similarly remains implicit if not absent. Exceptions are, amongst others, Helena Pimlott-Wilson's (2011) study of familial habitus, Marlies Kustatscher's (2017) study of children's own class identity, and negotiations of class boundaries by Imane Kostet et al. (2021). A deeper look into childhood studies concerned with space shows that, within this critique, we must distinguish between (a) studies that do not contextualise the socio-economic backgrounds of their study participants and (b) approaches that build upon findings or concepts of other studies without mentioning or considering the socio-economic contexts these findings are based on. Especially in the case of influential spatial

models of childhood, such as the 'zoning model' (*Zonenmodell*) (Muchow/Muchow 1998 [1935]) and the 'insularisation model' (*Verinselungsmodell*) (Zeiber 1983), the model itself stands so much in the foreground of its reception that it is often applied without its specific (classed) contexts. The study by Martha Muchow already introduced above, for example, explored the access to and experience of space of proletarian children in Hamburg in the early 20th century. Hence, it is questionable whether the insularisation model found by Zeiber did not maybe appear much earlier than the late 1960's and 1970s in bourgeois families. The study of Zeiber (1983) addresses children from two neighbourhoods in Berlin. One of the neighbourhoods was that of the new urban working class profiting from complex modernisation processes during the late 1960s, changing their socio-economic position. The other was a rather educated middle class still strongly identified with the 68er generation. Economically, these two groups were not so different from each other (*ibid.*: 181). From a cultural perspective, though, they had very different ways to 'equip' (*ibid.*: 189) their children: While for the 'well off' working class it was important to enable their children's consumption and material security, the educated middle class focused on what Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1977) identifies as cultural capital in the form of organising different formal and informal educational and play encounters (Zeiber/Zeiber 1994). While in educated middle-class families, mothers were more often fully responsible for the reproductive work and currently not employed, they also consciously anticipated and pushed to realise the future of their children, whereas the 'new' working class showed a 'traditional [...] strong commitment to the present and little future orientation' (translated from *ibid.*: 190). On the basis of their sampling of a 'broad new middle class' (translated from Zeiber/Zeiber 1994: 21), Hartmut and Helga Zeiber draw a rather pessimistic picture of childhood as being dispersed and splintered throughout the city. Even though the studies of Muchow (1998 [1935]) and Zeiber (1983) rely on very different socio-economic contexts, they are received as a general account of the spatial figuration of childhoods from the early 1900s up until the present day and regardless of class differences. In her study of children's spatial relations, Elisabeth Pfeil (1965 [1955]) does not explicitly give any information on her sampling strategies – it rather seems as if she draws on observations from all over the city or from several cities – but her somewhat scattered observations still contextualise socio-economic contexts. For childhood in the 1960s she states that within working-class contexts, Martha Muchow's zoning model still prevails. Yet she differentiates: "The more bourgeois the urban family, the more it tends to protect its child from contact with other children" (*ibid.*: 16). In the same context, Imbke Behnken and Agnes Jonker, who investigated the urban spatialities of play in working-class and lower-middle-class children with informants from the birth cohorts of 1875 to 1920 in Wiesbaden (Germany) and Leiden (Netherlands) (Behnken/Jonker 1990), draw the distinction that in the 'last half of the 20th century [...] the tendency of the domestication of childhood became unified [and that] street childhood as a historically surviving form of life has since then only applied in Western Europe to the children of sub-proletarian population groups, such as homeless families and subgroups of foreign working-class families' (translated from Behnken/Jonker 1990: 166). However, it remains unclear how, on the basis of their research with working-class and lower-middle-class children, they conclude that beyond the two above-named lower-income groups, childhood became, as

they say, ‘unified’, as children from wealthy, upper-middle- and middle-income groups were not part of their sample.

These models count as classics of childhood spatio-temporal analysis and have been received in historical childhood research as evidence for the spatial figuration of childhood. The problem with an asymmetrical comparison between childhoods and, more generally, the concept of childhoods within models is that they risk suggesting that there is a single spatial history of childhood rather than childhoods in the plural. From this perspective, it also seems questionable whether the emergence of the insularisation, domestication, and familiarisation of childhood is historically primarily connected with the urban modernism of the 1960s or whether it started much earlier with the emergence of the bourgeoisie. The classed re-reading of the spatial models indicates that there is not and never was one single spatial model, nor has the simultaneous existence of diverse models increased, as Ignacio Castillo Ulloa et al. (2023: 38) suggest, but that these spatial models always co-existed, depending on the classed positionality of the models’ protagonists.

Whereas figures of childhood in Europe such as the street childhood are regarded as having disappeared, childhoods in African contexts in particular remain imagined as their counterparts (De Moura 2002). In this context, postcolonially informed childhood researchers, such as Tatek Abebe and Yaw Ofofu-Kusi, criticise the

two dominant portrayals of African children. The first is predicated on notions of vulnerability and innocence whereby children are presented as passive victims. [...] The second image of African childhood is based on a romantic view [...], which tends to exoticize, particularize and, sometimes, universalize children’s experiences as ‘indigenous’ and unique. (2016: 303–304)

Nonetheless, even approaches that challenge this victimisation, such as that of working children in the book *Postkoloniale Kindheiten* (Postcolonial childhoods) by Manfred Liebel (2020), the dichotomy of poor (Global Southern) versus wealthy (Global Northern/European) childhoods dominates the analysis. Childhood research that focuses on children’s everyday lives growing up in urban contexts of the so-called Global South mostly depicts them as negatively affected by the current processes of city development and planning. Even though such perspectives are crucial and still rather scarce, they run the risk of becoming representative of the so-called Global South childhoods. While they rightfully criticise the victimising Western gaze, at the same time they draw a highly essentialist image of the Global South in which children seem to generally grow up poor. What remains invisible within and beyond childhood research are the social realities of middle class-situated children positioned within broader globally marginalised contexts. Once the category of class is out of the intersectional scope, certain childhoods seem to be too. In this way, the plurality of childhoods within diversely situated globalities is rendered invisible. And this is crucial, if we remember how fast these local minorities are growing in number globally, such as middle-class childhoods in urban Kenya.

2.1.2 Beyond Epistemic Dichotomies

In this subchapter I would like to briefly point to the effect of intersectional categories that are epistemologically based on spatial and scalar dichotomies, which, even if they coincide in most cases with the dichotomies hegemonised in world society, do not always seem to be useful in a transnational comparison between middle-class milieus in Nairobi and Berlin. Categories such as BPoC vs white, Global South vs North and non-Western vs Western are often naturally attributed to a binary opposition with underprivileged vs privileged, suppressed vs supreme, uneducated vs educated, and so on. These dichotomies often even linger in critical approaches sensitive to intersectional categories. This is partly also because these epistemological concepts have developed within specific contexts in which this binary is very powerful.

bell hooks, for example, writes how feminist reforms by privileged white women in the US often failed to achieve their goal of social equality for all women in existing structures. The fact that 'black women/women of colour' have not benefited in the same way from these reforms, she argues, has led to the 'spreading of fear that feminism would only repeatedly lead to the strengthening of white power' (hooks 2000: 42). Hooks describes this 'white power' problematic in terms of a global hierarchy in which 'Western women have gained class power and greater equality because a global white supremacist has enslaved and/or subordinated masses of Third World women to them' (ibid.: 43). Based in the American context, hooks addresses the paradox that 'emancipated', 'white', 'Western' women enjoy the privilege of being able to afford the reproductive labour of less privileged 'Black women and women of colour' from the 'Third World'. A critique of feminist theory and practice rightly questions its emancipatory character for all women. The opposing subject positions offered here – Third World vs First World/West and BPoC vs white – are each connoted in a complementary way as precarious (oppressed) or privileged (oppressing). Although this representation of power relations might work within American socio-historical contexts, they are not easily applicable in the context of Nairobi, because other social positions uphold and produce the same or other power relations within the local middle-class milieus. If we turn hooks's example around, we will see that compared to the other location of my research, Berlin, much more urban middle- and upper-middle-class families in Kenya employ domestic workers, who often reside directly in the family's household. In comparison with Berlin, we must still argue that working women who raise children without state support (Nairobi) cannot be compared to those who receive this support (Berlin), yet is it important to acknowledge that the Nairobi middle classes also employ women less privileged than themselves and the domestic workers of hook's American example. What I would like to acknowledge here is that life is so pluralised that these dichotomies do not easily apply. Still, it is important to keep these hegemonies in mind. My comparative research in Nairobi and Berlin made me realise the importance of what McFarlane calls the 'context of contexts' (2011b: 375) to reflect multiple power constellations from diverse positions and beyond the hegemonial structure. Qualitative empirical material, such as that evoked within narrative-biographical interviews, helps us to understand the very specific context of contexts of the speakers and additionally challenges the asymmetry between speaker

and researcher – an important aspect of my research that I will elaborate on further in Chapter 4.

In summary, the missing scopes that I want to address with my research are, in part, caused by a lack of consideration of the intersectional category of *age* in globalisation research and *class* in childhood studies interested in children's spatial relations. Additionally, I argued that some of these invisibilities lie in the complexity of the specific contexts in which children grow up, which often cannot be grasped at all with critical intersectional approaches, as intersectional categories often rest on spatial and scalar dichotomies, which often but not always apply in other political, geographical, or historical contexts. I aim to counter this development with a spatial analysis that uncovers childhoods such as those of middle-class children in Nairobi and their entanglements with children of similar 'situatedness' (Haraway 1991) in Berlin. But how must this comparison be built and conceptualised so as not to end up in other asymmetries? How is it possible to focus on *class* without reifying socio-economic situatedness itself?

2.2 Children in the Global Middle-Class Discourse

In dealing with global entanglements of childhoods from a middle class-sensitive perspective, I am at the same time dealing with another not invisible yet quite foggy and nebulous thing: the current discourse on the so-called global middle classes (GMC). The 2030 Global Trends Report of the US National Intelligence Council (2012) describes the growth of the GMC as one of the megatrends at the beginning of the 21st century. In Asian economies, such as China and India, in Brazil and Chile in South America, and in Africa, a significant part of the population is experiencing income growth. Growing with it is an international discourse on the GMC, which is based largely on purely economic definitions. According to these definitions, the GMC comprise approximately 10 to 30% or even 50% of the world's population (Banerjee/Duflo 2008; Kharas 2010) and have roughly doubled since 2000 (Pezzini 2012; Milanovic 2016). On the basis of the definition of the World Bank, the African Development Bank (2011) calculates a middle-class Kenyan household income of four to 20 US dollars per day, calculated in purchasing power parities. However, four dollars a day is just above the nationally defined poverty line (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2018). It is therefore questionable how this allows for a middle-class lifestyle, especially in Nairobi. The average income in Kenya is just under 600 US dollars per month (about 20 US dollars per day; CEIC Data 2020), but it is extremely unevenly distributed (Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics 2018).

Beyond the economic definitions, the GMC are associated with several positively described collective orientations: As a group, they are said to be the central driving force for social change, and have as such become the bearers of new lifestyles. Considered to be strongly integrated into global, technological, and media structures, they are regarded as the driving force behind innovation processes (Kharas 2010). Even though there is very scarce empirical evidence for it,

[t]he middle classes, more than any other social group, are seen as the promoters of education, science, and the rule of law, as well as the pillars of capitalist market

economies and an open public sphere. They seem to be the prerequisite for the emergence of civil society and the project of modernity as a whole. Indeed, the subject has fired the imagination of global corporations and institutions such as the World Bank, McKinsey, or Credit Suisse, as they consider these groups the promoters of free markets, liberalism, and democratic institutions. (Dejung et al. 2019: 38)

According to the African Development Bank, African middle classes are ‘a key source for private sector growth in Africa, accounting for much of the effective demand for goods and services supplied by private sector entities’ (African Development Bank 2011: 1). Beyond ‘economic growth’, the African Development Bank furthermore argues that the development generated by the middle class ‘is also essential for the growth of democracy’ (ibid.: 1). Besides the estimations from investment-driven actors such as the African World Bank, African scholars also express hope that the emergence of African middle classes will foster consistent economic growth, despite the global recession (Ncube/Lufumpa 2015).

What marks the global as well as the African middle-class discourse in its sum is that it addresses and describes the group it constitutes as modern and modernity as salvation for all. As a modernisation discourse, it promises well-being and prosperity through development ensured by controllability and plannability. The GMC discourse proposes a linear historical narrative by inviting the so-called underdeveloped nations to put all their efforts into reducing poverty and strengthening their future towards a modern ‘developed’ nation. As such, the discourse (once again) implies European historicism over the world – a problem that has long been raised within postcolonial studies, because it rests on a ‘first in Europe, then elsewhere structure of global historical time’ (Chakrabarty 2000: 6). Postcolonial scholars criticise that the modernisation narrative positions so-called developing countries as if they were ‘behind’ the Western world, ‘impos[ing] a theory of progress’ (Bhambra 2007) that reproduces the discourse of the ‘West and the Rest’ (Hall 1994: 137). This is highly problematic, because such a linear idea of global history also evokes the colonial discourse of the West that brings education, salvation, and wealth, which not only trivialises the terrifying practices of imperialism and colonialism but also silences the multiple crises the West is currently facing. From this point of view, it also seems disturbing that the GMC discourse encourages those which it addresses as ‘developing countries’ to repeat Western history. The primary focus on the future typical of modernisation seems like a manoeuvre to overcome a past that would, if processed deeply, never allow us to believe in such a linear narrative. This narrative once imposed development that was utterly uneven globally. The violent inscription of a modern world logic and the extraction of social and natural resources also caused what is today finally forcing even the West to its knees: war over territory, political secession and separation, environmental decay and dwindling resources, the resurgence of nationalism, and growing inequalities. The future suggested here is, moreover, utterly paradoxical, because within the narrative of historicism, the future is prophesied, and because it is prophesied, it also already tells us that this future vision is utterly dystopic. First, who and what is left to be suppressed, exploited, and extracted, and second, on which inhabitable planet (Chakrabarty 2021)?

However, in the narrow definition referring to social and economic wealth, the GMC discourse attracts and in this way also creates postcolonial subjectivities that strive for a better job, better house, and better life. In cities like Nairobi, where poverty is all too present, this striving is often accompanied and also amplified by the anxieties of losing one's hardly earned status. Yet this again deepens social inequalities and weakens social cohesion locally, where, against modernisation myths (Pineault 2021), resistance could grow into new futures connected to indigenous knowledges and practices as more inclusive and sustainable counter-developments. Instead, hopeful futures are being built on devastating pasts through myths of modernisation.

Beyond contextualising these myths of modernisation, in the following I will additionally point out four challenges that appear within the academic debates on GMC and elaborate on how I approached them in my research. The *first* challenge addresses the disproportion between the often positively connoted ideas and imaginations about the globally connecting cultural patterns of middle class-situated people and the scarce empirical evidence of such patterns. As described above, the GMC discourse, which is defined predominantly in economic terms, attributes collectivising and socially desirable cultural attributes to its subjects. As a group, the GMC are believed to be the central driving force for social change, the bearers of new lifestyles, and important actors in global, media, and technological innovation processes. Although there are a few exceptions (Spronk 2012; Melber 2016; Kroeker et al. 2018; Dejung et al. 2019; Korte/Weidenhaus 2021; Mock/Weidenhaus 2022), the general assumptions about cultural patterns and values that are commonly shared among the GMC are predominantly built on speculations and urgently need further empirical evidence. The previously named studies furthermore show that it is not easy to even decide who will be the right study participant, as conceptualisations of global middle classness that extend beyond economic definitions are still missing and are often based on Eurocentric ideas of class. In addition, most studies only investigate the lifestyles and cultural patterns of so-called members of the global middle class. What remains unclear is whether the cultural aspects do not equally apply to other socio-economically situated groups. Middle class is a term referring to a heterogeneous spectrum. Approaches mainly aiming to sharpen a definition run the risk of essentialising middle classes instead of portraying their diversities.

Hence, when composing the sample, I took care to represent a group of people with contrasting socio-economic and cultural backgrounds reaching from lower- to upper-middle class and beyond, including people of different ages, genders, ethnicities, nations, and neighbourhoods and with different religiosities (for a detailed overview, see subchapter 4.2). Furthermore, I chose a biographical perspective to get to these self-constructions, because such a perspective is very likely to enrich this debate, as it enables us to trace similarities and differences in class or forms of belonging from a 'bottom-up' perspective, revealing how broader geopolitical processes matter in people's lives according to their classed positions. So instead of starting the analysis with a definition of global middle classness, I will keep it a question of my empirical findings, which should enlighten the discourse and debate on GMC by bringing in empirically grounded insights on how the GMC discourse is reflected in the spatial relations of people positioned within these situated globalities. Therefore, my findings promise a new perspective on the cultural analysis of middle classness through its focus on socio-spatial relations and so-

cio-material cultures. Tracing the spatial relations and material cultures of the middle classes is promising with regard to understanding processes of socio-structural change. As 'legitimate speakers in socially recognised positions' (translated from Bischoff/Betz 2015: 264), the middle classes have the power to implement their ideas about and the desired conditions for a successful life in the socio-historical discourse, thereby generating normativity. Thus, we can assume that their ideas gain a far-reaching discursive efficacy, influencing the specific anticipation of societal well-being in the future and, for example, also (de)legitimising certain ideas and norms of good childhood and parenthood. Conversely, these ideas of the good life and, more broadly, good personhood can be read as complementary to the ideas of development and the myths of modernity. Through my scope on childhood, I explore the GMC discourse from a biographical perspective that remains highly unexplored yet promises a deep insight into these ideas of the good life.

The *second* challenge I want to point to is also a spatial one: Paradoxically, the GMC have been studied primarily within national containers. In this way, one runs the risk of reifying them within these nationally framed logics instead of analysing them 'as a global phenomenon by comparing middle classes across the world or by tracing their global entanglements' (Dejung et al. 2019: 3). An exception is the work of Eva Korte and Gunter Weidenhaus (2021) and myself (Claudia Mock) and Gunter Weidenhaus (2021). To address this challenge, I explore the spatial relations and material cultures of GMC through a trans-local comparison between Nairobi and Berlin (elaborated in Chapter 3). I draw on biographical narratives from Nairobi and Berlin – globalities situated in more than one nation-state and in more than one global hemisphere. This 'global' comparison also needs a more than local (and more than Eurocentric) theoretical base of class commonalities, as proposed by Olaf Groh-Samberg et al. (2014). Such a base is not found exclusively in middle-class milieus but represents a transnationally connecting element for subjects of the middle classes, because it establishes a connection between resources and lifestyle. According to Olaf Groh-Samberg et al., middle class subjects are, beyond their classed local specifications, characterised by a pattern of 'investive status work' (translated from Groh-Samberg et al. 2014: 226 f.), which refers to both the ability and the need to invest in status in order to remain middle class. To maintain or increase their status, they must invest in the future (for example in the form of education for their children) and, to achieve that, eventually forego consumption in the present. Subjects of the lower classes, on the other hand, rarely have anything that could be invested, and members of the upper class do not necessarily need to invest to the same extent. Therefore, both groups (lower and upper classes) appear more centred in the present (here and now) compared to the middle classes. Future orientation and investment are therefore assumed to be a globally collectivising attribute of the middle classes.

The use of a solely economic concept of middle classness is particularly inappropriate in a trans-local comparison between such different societies. It is more appropriate to also consider an aspect of leading a middle classed life that Max Weber described as a 'rationalized, methodical direction of the entire pattern of life' (Weber 1956 [1922]: 271), which refers to more of a cultural approach. Therefore, I follow middle-class approaches that define their sample as being at the nexus of economic middle strata and cultural life conduct. This enables me to also use the concept of class sensitively in 'non-European and non-Western' contexts, because it helps me to analyse the self-identity of the group

and the esteem associated with it. It therefore remains an empirical question whether the analysis of the spatial relations of middle-class childhoods show globally connecting cultural patterns. And furthermore: Can these cultural patterns be interpreted as positively as the GMC discourse implies?

A *third* and at the same time fundamental challenge is that the discourse and discussion on the ‘new’ middle-class strata of societies in the so-called Global South furthermore suffer from the difficulty of applying concepts that were drawn from the analysis of Global North societies. This issue can be contextualised further with the help of concepts such as ‘the provincialism of European universalisms’ (Patel 2014: 609) and ‘epistemic inequalities’ Anna Amelina et al. (2021: 305, 310), as a part of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called epistemic violence (1988). The term class is empirically linked to the conditions of early industrial European societies, as the forms of life conduct have multiplied ever since, and the concept is often portrayed as old-fashioned and Eurocentric. Nonetheless, Ditmar Brock (2012) and Vivek Chibber (2013) argue that the trend of micro-sociological structural analysis might also cause us to fail to see the re-figurations of socio-economic boundaries, which segregate societies as much as they were in the 19th century. Ditmar Brock argues that ‘what seems to matter slightly more than the organisation of work is the accessibility of material culture’ (translated from 2012: 67). A concept of class beyond the notion of economic status includes occupation, education, value orientation, lifestyle, and political orientation (cf., e.g., Hradil 1987; Burzan 2011; Mau 2014; Groh-Samberg et al. 2014). Recent publications in this tradition call for these approaches to be opened beyond national containers (Mau/Verwiebe 2009; Pries 2010; Burzan 2011). On the one hand, the formation of the social structure against the background of a globalised economy within the framework of methodological nationalism alone is no longer suitable (Beck/Grande 2010). On the other hand, the fact that the future of societies is dependent on how the middle classes deal with their lifestyle errors and challenges is not only applicable to Western societies (Groh-Samberg et al. 2014). Yet, the problem with the concept of class remains that it offers a specific scope, risking the researcher becoming blind to what lies beyond the concept’s reach. In the worst case, this might result in the description of what lies out of the concept’s scope as deficient, backward, simple-minded, or simply as other. In the wider context of studies on historical materialism, Walter D. Mignolo additionally criticises the focus on capitalism, such as in Wallerstein’s world system theory, because

it maintains the social sciences in an overarching epistemic totality that parallels the overarching totality of capitalism. Alternative economies in tension with capitalism as well as alternatives to capitalism have no place in Wallerstein’s conception of the social sciences, in which the very notion of historical capitalism is founded. Since the colonial difference is blurred in Wallerstein’s notion of historical capitalism, it is impossible to foresee the possibility of thinking from it or of thinking the tensions between capitalism and other economic organizations as well as the alternatives to capitalism from subaltern perspectives. (Mignolo 2008: 243)

Therefore, it seems crucial to carefully observe the power of the theory one applies. But this perspective paradoxically also entails the risk of constructing non-Western contexts

as the 'other' contexts. For childhood this means that one must not, as I noted earlier with Tatek Abebe and Yaw Ofosu-Kusi, 'exoticize, particularize and, sometimes, universalize children's experiences as "indigenous" and unique' (2016: 303–304). This might become visible when we look at it from the opposite perspective: For a long time, middle classness has been considered exclusively Western, and as a consequence, '[s]imilar social groups in other parts of the world have been considered as merely pseudo-bourgeoisie, if they have been considered at all' (Dejung et al. 2019: 3). In an increasingly globalised economy, it is important to consider existing middle-class approaches outside of national boundaries. Christof Dejung et al. argue that 'the establishment of transnational regimes of labor and the worldwide emergence of middle classes happened concomitantly; both can be considered as a consequence of an emerging global economy' (2019: 7). To be sensitive to the epistemic problems, yet not oversee the trans-local entanglements caused by a globalising market economy, I suggest that when we are working with the concept of class as a Eurocentric theory in non-Eurocentric contexts, we must apply it in a generic, open, unorthodox manner. This should be done in conjunction with constant reflection on the researcher's positioning, accompanied by a dense description of experiences in the field and a methodological reflection. A collaborative way of conducting academic work can be useful for that – a point I will elaborate on in subchapter 3.2.

The *fourth* challenge is entrenched in the modernisation myth that lies at the bottom of the GMC discourse, which is based on a rhetoric of the 'West and the Rest' (Hall 1996: 184). This rhetoric also makes it look as if the GMC (or the middle classes beyond the Global North) are an entirely new phenomenon. Moreover, the historical genealogy of the GMC in Africa (and beyond) seems to be under-researched. One of the few exceptions is the 2019 anthology of the rise of middle classes in the age of empire by Christof Dejung et al. In one of these contributions, Emma Hunter traces historical evidence of 'imagined' (2019: 106) global middle classness connected to the negotiation of modernity in the context of print media in colonial East Africa. She concludes that even though privileged East Africans were still highly restricted to local scales 'within the tight constraints of a colonial public sphere that limited the emergence of an independent press, print allowed them imaginatively to insert themselves into a collective which transcended space and the repressive confines of colonial rule' – a resistant form of (un)belonging and negotiating boundaries through class which she refers to as the concept of 'jumping scale' (ibid.: 121, 122). However, generally empirically grounded studies are missing, beyond the scarce contributions to the historical genealogy of global middle classness. While I cannot travel back in time to address the vagueness surrounding the historical development of the middle class, my intergenerational approach allows me to work with collective memory and oral histories, which provide insights into the origins of the GMC dating back to the 1960s.

Above, I have described how the GMC discourse circulates myths of modernisation, which fosters the globalisation of Western lifestyles, overshadowing urgently necessary alternative imaginaries of planetary wealth through care and solidarity. Pointing out five challenges within the academic discourse on the GMC and introducing my response to them, I have already given insights into some of the methodological premises my work is based on. In the following subchapter, I want to address a fifth and final issue of the GMC discourse, the missing perspective of children and childhood, and highlight some 'signs'

signalling that centring children in the GMC discourse is highly promising, especially against the background of the previously marked modernisation myth of the GMC as the bearers of hope for a better future.

Even though, as Bashford states, '[m]iddle-classness is signalled, and perhaps even achieved, by having fewer children compared with the poor' (Bashford 2019: 88), children themselves remain highly marginalised within the GMC discourse, and global middle classness is seldom the subject of childhood studies. There are only a few works on global middle classness that focus on the sphere of social reproduction and take the cultural aspect of class into account (Heiman et al. 2012; Katz 2012; Spronk 2012; Mercer 2014; Spronk 2014; Kroeker 2020; Kroeker et al. 2018; Korte/Weidenhaus 2021; Mock/Weidenhaus 2022). At this point, it is important to draw on the contextualisation of the PhD project at the basis of this book through my affiliation to the Collaborative Research Centre 'Re-Figuration of Spaces' (CRC 1265, phase 1). From spring 2018 until spring 2021, I worked there in subproject A05, 'Biographies of the Middle Classes: Spatial Experience and Meaning in the Life Course Narrative', together with Gunter Weidenhaus (head of the project) and Eva Korte (student assistant). In this project we compared middle classes in Kenya and Germany with the aim of understanding to what extent the trans-local structural changes of late modernity, such as the flexibilisation of labour, might have led to a global institutionalisation of middle-class biographies. With a focus on biographical spatio-temporal patterns –the ways in which people lead their lives by making choices such as whether one or many places are home or whether one or many futures are possible to them – we explored how these patterns experience rupture when people become parents, potentially increasing the tension between the productive and the reproductive sphere. This exploration consequently revealed cultural aspects, such as ideas of good parenthood and childhood. These ideas were often characterised by norms, such as providing children with a stable home, referred to as a 'safe harbour' in the present moment (translated from Mock/Weidenhaus, 2022: 151), while simultaneously equipping them with the necessary skills to 'become a world citizen' in the future (ibid.). Thus, the construction of a good childhood interestingly seemed to be situated at the point of scalar tension between local and global, accompanied by the temporal tension between present and future. This tension also connects 'status work' as well as a global orientation as a globally connective pattern of middle classness proposed earlier as applying to childhood.

'Raising world citizens in a safe harbour' as a normative pattern of good parenting already proposes something that seems to be hardly realised beyond the economic position of the middle classes and that must be a challenge even for those who have that status. Connected to this, there has been criticism in childhood research of Western or European middle-class concepts of childhood and their power to circulate normative ideas of the good life and good childhood worldwide (Burman 1996; Boyden 1997; Nieuwenhuys 1998). But figures of good childhood circulate in Nairobi as well, some of them on sky-high billboards in the city.

Figure 2: Madison Group Kenya billboard located near the National Social Security Fund Headquarters on Ngong Road, Nairobi.



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

Figure 2 shows one of the many billboards of the life assurance company Madison Group Kenya advertising guaranteed funds to ensure children's education. Erected during 2019 in Central Nairobi as some of the largest in town, the advertisements portray children dressed, in this case, as businesspeople, and in others as chemists, doctors or teachers. The slogan '*Bima ya Karo* [school fee insurance] means my dream is realised' accompanies the children with clear future aspirations of middle- and upper-middle-class working positions. The Madison Group Kenya website on the *Bima ya Karo* initiative states:

Education is the key to the liberation of our people, empowering your children and loved ones with education is the best thing you can do for them. However, it is said that the opportunities available to many are left to go begging as the parents/guardians have no money to cover the costs involved. To salvage this situation, we developed an education policy that seeks to enable your children live their dreams. (Madison Insurance Policies 2018)

The Madison Insurance Group mobilises a deeply paradoxical discursive framework here. While it selectively appropriates vocabulary associated with Black and decolonial struggles – most notably terms such as “liberation” and “empowerment” – it simultaneously constructs itself as a salvational authority, an institution positioned

to rescue or salvage a supposedly deficient social condition. This rhetoric of salvation is historically sedimented in missionary epistemologies and Christian morals, which were frequently imposed through coercive and violent colonial encounters in Africa. Within this genealogy, Madison's language reproduces the modernisation myth: the assumption that progress, security, and agency can only be achieved through Western epistemic frameworks, formal education, and the rationalisation of risk. Crucially, this discourse is also embedded in neoliberal logics of financialisation, where social vulnerability is reframed as an individual problem to be managed through market participation. By positioning insurance and future-oriented investment as the primary mechanisms of empowerment, the company displaces structural and historical inequalities onto personal responsibility, thereby recoding liberation as financial inclusion and empowerment as compliance with actuarial regimes of risk management. These billboards can be seen as a materialised example of the ongoing discursive production of a middle-classed discourse of good childhood. Furthermore, they can be analysed against the background of 'status work' in the form of investment in the education of children. Another look at the Madison Group website shows another scene (Figure 3) that makes it seem relevant to also engage with the material cultures of housing and homemaking connected to the modernisation myths constitutive of the GMC discourse.

Figure 3: Bima Ya Karo guarantees funds for education.



Source: Photo by Madison Group, 2018¹.

The photograph (Figure 3) portrays three people that I read as (from left to right) 'daughter', 'mother', and 'father'. They are seated on a large beige couch. The couch faces the television, not captured by the photo but hinted at by the remote control in the mother's hands. With her other hand, she holds her daughter, who hugs her mother

1 Image available at: <https://www.madison.co.ke/protect-your-future/bima-ya-karo/> [Accessed 5 March 2026, 10:25]

with her whole body and squeezes her smiling face against her cheeks. In this intimate moment, both are held in the father's arm, while his other arm stretches towards the viewer, presenting his watch and wedding ring. He is wearing a light-blue collared shirt that is loosely opened. The nuclear family is portrayed in a tidy, clean, and spacious living room with big windows that fill the room with light. Some books are positioned in the background directly behind the daughter's head. A modern home also appears as a dream to be realised. In this picture, we can trace how different aspects of modernity relate to the middle-class discourse. The image chosen for the *Bima ya Karo* initiative conveys global middle-class norms, such as the nuclear family model with the single child positioned in a homely scene, which seems to deliberately avoid any cultural reference to Kenya. Taken out of context, it is impossible to say whether this scene is taken from a home in Nairobi, Los Angeles, Istanbul, or Berlin.

But besides this material discourse of Western purity and order, middle-class children and their parents are also addressed in so-called African urban phantasies (Watson 2014), such as in the private city development project Tatu City in the north of Nairobi. As part of it, Tatu City Education Village was commissioned at the World Architecture Festival in 2018.

Figure 4: Architectural rendering from the Tatu City Education Village proposal commissioned at the WorldArchitecture Festival in 2018.



Source: Boogertman + Partners Architects. World Architecture Festival 2023.²

According to the developer's website,

'[e]ducation is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' – Our beloved Madiba (Nelson Mandela). The site, set in a golden African savannah, is located near a rural settlement outside of Nairobi, Kenya. The new facility will form

2 Image available at: <https://www.dblog.hr/price/kakav-svijet-nas-ocekuje-u-2019/attachment/education-boogertman-partners-architects-tatu-city-education-village-nairobi-kenya-3/> [Accessed 5 March 2026, 10:18]

an integral part in the upliftment of the community and the education of its children.
(World Architecture Festival 2023)

The Madison Insurance Group advertisement and the architectural project description operate within strikingly similar ideological terrains, despite belonging to different fields. Both mobilise emancipatory language – liberation, empowerment, upliftment, education – while simultaneously reinscribing hierarchical relations between a Western or institutional actor and an African subject imagined as lacking, vulnerable, or in need of intervention. The invocation of Mandela’s quote – “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” – functions as a moral legitimising device, cloaking the project in the authority of an iconic anti-colonial figure. Yet this citation is detached from Mandela’s broader political critique of structural injustice and redeployed to justify a development narrative centred on institutional intervention. Education is framed as a singular, almost self-evident solution, while the architectural project assumes the role of benevolent catalyst for “upliftment,” implicitly positioning the local community as passive recipients rather than active producers of knowledge, space, or futures. The setting of the project in a “golden African savannah” further reinforces this asymmetry. Much like the insurance advertisement’s abstraction of social vulnerability, this romanticised landscape aestheticises Africa as timeless, rural, and underdeveloped – a backdrop against which external expertise can perform its transformative role. This echoes colonial and missionary imaginaries in which African space is rendered as both pure and deficient, simultaneously picturesque and in need of correction through education, infrastructure, and moral guidance.

The architectural rendering in Figure 4, just reinforces the same discursive problems. The architectural rendering selected to represent the project involves highly problematic material and social boundaries, raising the question of who this education is for. The ‘education as weapon’ metaphor becomes somewhat absurd in this context, because those who have access to the facility, and therefore the necessary education, are exclusively white people, whereas the people positioned outside of the educational building’s gated site are the Maasai – a group that has already been left outside once before, when the British started building the settlement which would later become Nairobi. Ever since, the Maasai have been the victims of these symbolic but also material weapons of the Europeans, and they are still a highly marginalised group in Kenya today. The Maasai outside the educational facility function as ethnographic signifiers rather than participants, reinscribing a long colonial history in Kenya in which Maasai land, mobility, and autonomy were systematically curtailed in the name of progress. By situating them in the savannah as static foreground figures while education and futurity are spatially enclosed within the building, the image reproduces a developmental hierarchy that separates indigenous life from institutional knowledge. In doing so, the project visually echoes missionary and colonial logics that framed the Maasai as temporally “behind,” requiring settlement, discipline, and uplift rather than recognising their historical resistance and epistemic sovereignty.

Read together, the two examples show how contemporary neoliberal and humanitarian discourses continue to recycle colonial logics under the guise of care, progress, and empowerment. While their rhetoric gestures toward decolonial ideals, their underlying

frameworks reaffirm asymmetrical power relations, transforming emancipation into a managed process delivered by institutions rather than a political project articulated by the communities themselves. These three examples illustrate the material and symbolic manifestation of the GMC discourse, which circulates myths of modernisation accompanied by Western visions of good childhood, good parenting, and the good life. These myths in turn circulate norms, such children having to invest in their futures as early as possible, preferably grow up in a single-family model where the father is the breadwinners, and enjoy education in classed and privatised environments that perpetuate existing social inequalities in their societies. Although children are missing in the debates of the GMC discourse, they are hyper visible targets of middle-class markets and are often instrumentalised as the agents of modernisation myths, and they will hence be at the centre of attention here.

PART II

Methodology and Spatial Theory

3. Countertopological Figurations

In this chapter, I will develop the methodological approach on which my work is based and (re)formulate a processual-spatial heuristic that enables me to work on the outlined problems and challenges in searching for the spatial figuration of childhoods. With this, I want to contribute to the ongoing endeavour to think of space as relationally constituted (Soja 1989; Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Löw 2001; Amin 2002; Thrift 2006; Paasi 2011) and inseparable from time (Löw 2001; Massey 2005; Santos 2021).

3.1 Countertopology of Situated Globalities

To take these considerations and reflections into account and endeavour not to (re)produce the stereotyped image of African children as the victimised or romanticised ‘others’, I will pit the spatial heuristic against what I earlier called ‘methodological hemispherism’. Methodological hemispherism can be compared to its neighbouring concept ‘methodological nationalism’, which criticises that

‘social theory assumed the nation-state as its unit of enquiry; the terms “society” and “culture” referred unreflectively to what were perceived as distinct, independent and relatively homogeneous entities constituted by national borders, institutions and laws’ (Beck/Grande 2010: 189).

Methodological hemispherism orders and in this way reifies the world in similar categories but on a different scalar entanglement, taking as its unit of enquiry the ‘Global South’ versus the ‘Global North’ and treating them similarly as if they were homogeneous entities constituted by hemispheric borders. In order to avoid reproducing the logic of such hemispherisms in the context of my study, I shift the focus from *Where in the world are the speakers of my research situated?* to *How are they situated there?* This shift aims to avoid reproducing the global divide as a social divide within social theory.

It is important to note that the uneven landscapes based on categories such as ‘Global South’ and ‘North’ still prevail even though we have put a ‘post’ before colonialism. Nonetheless, much re-worlding is happening beyond this hegemonic spatial order, and

the social sciences sometimes fall short of grasping it. This is not only caused by the uneven concentration on contexts of the 'Global North'. It is also indirectly caused by an important but partial shift towards emphasising the postcolonial world – partial because the dominant focus lies on its on precarious pasts, presents, and futures, which unwillingly reproduces the representation of the 'Global South' as victimised, whereas the social worlds of local minorities, such as urban middle classes, and their global entanglements stay out of sight.

In this regard, I aim to undertake a less asymmetrical comparison of middle-class childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin. This comparison is of course also asymmetrical, but according to the above-described research gap, this asymmetry of children's situations has almost no empirical evidence and therefore must be explored. To theoretically grasp the situation of middle-class children in these two different locales, I draw on John Law's concept of 'situated globalities' (Law 2004, cited in Blok 2010: 508). Law criticises that the global is considered a singular, coherent, and big thing. He notes that '[o]n the contrary, the global is situated, specific, and materially constructed in the practices which make each specificity' (Law 2004: 22). The focus on the heterogeneous spectrum of middle-class childhoods in these geographically distant cities aims to contribute to the dialectical and constitutive power of both global and local processes in the production of childhoods.

This brings me to Cindi Katz's critical methodology of 'countertopography' (Katz 2004: xii, 2011:50), which she developed 'to connect disparate places and social formations by virtue of their analytic relationship to a particular material social practice, social relation, and/or cultural form' (Katz 2011: 58). Her approach has greatly inspired my methodological considerations, leading me to rethink the situatedness of children and childhood against the background of not one but many globalities, which also counters hegemonic cultural narratives connected to nation-states or contexts that frame my comparison, such as Africa or Europe. I discovered Cindi Katz's work at a point where I was struggling to make sense of the comparison between Nairobi and Berlin – two sites that were predetermined for my fieldwork by my aforementioned project affiliation with the CRC 1265. Cindi Katz's work explores 'the relationship between capitalist globalism and social reproduction' by 'examining global processes in their particular historical geographies' (Katz 2004: xii). This counter-perspective, she argues, helps to 'disrupt the seemingly contradictory assumptions that the imperatives of global capitalism are homogenizing, while at the same time their effects in one locale are separable from their effects in another' (Katz 2004: xii). In aiming to co-tell (hi)stories that counter dominant cultural narratives and cartographic depictions, I would like to consider my work as an additional perspective in her methodological tradition. Her critical methodology has been helpful in carefully developing the comparative analysis, as well as inspiring, allowing me to rethink the spatial-theoretical concepts on which such a comparison can be grounded.

In contrast to Cindi Katz, who frames her methodology as *countertopography*, I consider and later (subchapter 3.3) develop my methodology on the spatial-theoretical level as a *countertopology* of two situated globalities: middle-class milieus in Nairobi and Berlin. This does not mean that I contrast topology with topography, but rather, as the topological rationale suggests, topology can be understood as a wider frame for spatial inquiry (see Martin/Secor 2014: 422). As a network theory, the topological rationale

additionally rests on an understanding of space that is marked by relations and, as such, has a lot in common with the spatial theory developed by the sociologist Martina Löw (2016 [2001]). Martina Löw's relational and processual concept of space is important to my work because it offers a comprehensive theorisation of space, which is, despite its precision, open for collaborations with other existing spatial theories, because it was not strongly developed from a specific standpoint. As I will elaborate later, as such, it can easily be applied and modified in and by the myriad contexts my comparison brings with it. This approach resonates with premises articulated by the promoters of flat ontology (Marston et al. 2005; DeLanda 2006b), who – to say it very generally – wish to develop social sciences towards a more sensitive inquiry, which does not presume and therefore search for certain power structures in social space, while overseeing others.

These considerations frame the qualities of the spatial-theoretical concept, which, in conclusion, needs to make it possible to

- grasp spatial change contextualised by strong scalar dichotomies (e.g. Global South and North, local and global) beyond these dichotomies,
- document human and non-human agencies within the spatial constitution,
- understand spatial change from an intersectional perspective,
- and allow for the acknowledgement of all kinds of spaces, which could be myriad in the case of the spatial imaginaries that children are capable of.

In the following subchapters, I will develop a spatial heuristic to research figuration. For this, I will bring into collaboration several actors of spatial inquiry that have much in common but have so far practised rather little exchange and interaction. The actors come from spatial disciplines as different as sociology; human, cultural, and political geography; mathematics; anthropology; and philosophy. This collaboration will be conceptualised by the metaphor of string figure games.

3.2 Collaborating for Space in String Figures

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2021) argues that the crisis of the Anthropocene in all its facets worldwide forces us to rethink our often Westernised understandings of concepts such as modernity, globalisation, and, even more generally, historical processes. Cross-disciplinary collaboration is necessary to follow Chakrabarty's call. Some scholars of different disciplines have started to decolonise their tradition's history, and few have furthermore touched on its contribution in (re)producing the so-called nature-culture divide, such as in sociology (Latour 2005), philosophy (Komárek 2009; Gumbrecht 2012), afro-ecofeminism (Maathai 2006 [1985]), and neurosciences (Slaby/Choudhury 2018). In the 1950s Roger Callios developed the idea of a 'diagonal science' (1959) as a way of thinking and collaborating that synthesises science and the humanities to trace surprising connections. By creatively crossing disciplines, it breaks down boundaries to uncover common patterns that shape reality. In the following I will apply this method to develop synergies that are won on the spatial-theoretical level from the collaboration between different

fields of spatial inquiry, some of which have developed relatively unaware of one another in parallel debates.

For this I draw on and extend Donna Haraway's idea of 'string figures (sf)', which relates to 'science fiction, speculative fabulation, [...] speculative feminism, science fact, so far' (Haraway 2016: 2). As Katharina Block writes, '[t]he whole spectrum of Haraway's approach is hidden in the inconspicuous abbreviation "SF": Epistemologically, there is the claim to think outside of modern Western thinking, [...] the situated contingency and historical conditionality of forms of knowledge' (translated from Block 2021: 215). On the ontological level, the string figures appear next to scientific facts, and hence, 'the metaphor of the string figure in Haraway stands for an ontological, or better: ontogenetic figuration of the relational and steady becoming-with (sympoiesis)' (translated from Block 2021: 215). The string figure metaphor furthermore resonates very well with Chakrabarty's call to rethinking our often Westernised understandings of concepts, as playing with string figures can be a form of 'becoming-with, for staying with the trouble of inheriting the damages and achievements of colonial and postcolonial natural-cultural histories in telling the tale of still possible recuperation' (Haraway 2016: 125). Impossible to be played by a single person and usually played by many, the string figure guides me to generate knowledge and theory not as truth but as palimpsest. Hence, knowledge overlaps with other knowledge, sometimes creating figures that gain clear shapes, whereas others might be barely visible and therefore of a significance yet to be discovered. The degrees of saturation of such figures inform us about the relation between these overlapping knowledges. Studying these outlines in relation to what connects them at their centre seems very promising, because it helps me to come out of the position that I carry from my affiliation with one specific research tradition and enables me to shift perspectives. The string figure furthermore points to the possibility of the multiple in one. It does not just draw ideas and concepts from *one* history of each of these fields but from the many genealogies of epistemic thought.

Yet, amongst all the positive aspects of collaboration that I pointed out here, there is also the need to carefully handle the concepts of the diverse fields with which I collaborate. In this context, it is important to keep in mind what Jaques Derrida stated: 'Concepts are not elements or atoms and since they are taken from a syntax and a system, every particular borrowing drags along with it the whole of metaphysics' (2007 [1970]: 251). It is important to argue what exactly makes it a useful tool in understanding the subject of our research in its particular contexts, and it is important to be able to articulate which inherent assumptions, foci, or preferences it has that we perhaps distance ourselves from. Lastly and connected to that, collaborating in string figures as a creative form of diagonal science must bear a certain degree of insecurity in times of academic uncertainty, where it is worth making mistakes or working with some degree of imprecision instead of constructing the world again and again within the frameworks of our singular disciplines and concepts, marked by often Westernised understandings of social realities. I am calling for vulnerability here, vulnerability as a performative act against the stereotype of the clear and neutral academic (di)stance. I am calling for a position that sees the value of fragility, uncertainty, and experiment within collaborative knowledge production in cooperation between scholars and fields. Performing academic vulnerability is key to collaboration because it opens the representation of the thick and smooth struc-

ture of knowledge that we ascribe to our respective sciences and fields, and ultimately to ourselves.

Therefore, in the following I will invite different actors of academic spatial debate to a ‘string figure play’ – to creatively get into a theatrical dialogue, led by the aim to collaboratively develop a spatial theoretical base for my countertopology, as well as to develop spatial theory further in general and against the nature-culture divide in particular. The reason why I explore the potential of this form of collaboration in the form of a performance is, as Karen Barad notes, because

[u]nlike representationalism, which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being. (Barad 2007: 133)

Representation comes with a certain distance, while performance comes with personal as well as collective engagement. The importance of this engagement has been aptly described by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, here summarised by Katharina Blocks, as a way to

expose oneself to encounters free of analytical assumptions and premises and to allow oneself to be productively irritated by renouncing common research practices – such as taking an analytical distance, problematising one’s own presence reflexively, or entering the field with strong social theoretical premises – in order to allow new assumptions to emerge. (translated from Block 2021: 221)

The web character of the string figure is thereby not understood as a fixed pattern to be applied top down to the social realities of spatial inquiry but as a fragile and therefore reactive web that permeates the academic concepts. It is a translucent figure that webs into the concept like a rhizome, as it is precisely not entrusted with predefining the contours of that reality like the pattern would but is instead understood as a tool for signalling tension, marking where the thread of the string figure should be lost, dropped, picked up again, handed over, or cut. The negotiation of this process of losing, dropping, picking up again, handing over, or cutting the string in the figure will now be performed in what I call the ‘string figure play’.

The aim in doing this is to develop a spatial theoretical base that can grapple in the widest sense with the political economy of ageing, which views age as a social construct based on generational as well as spatial orders, which play a central role in the Anthropocene. As outlined in subchapter 1.2, the figures of the bourgeois child in the Anthropocene operate not only as a social category but also as a biological and geological force. Positioned historically within the colonial discourse of othering, the child served to justify the dehumanisation and exploitation of colonised peoples by framing them as permanently immature. This legitimisation extended to the large-scale extraction of natural resources, embedding the child trope within broader structures of global exploitation. Furthermore, modern bourgeois ideals of childhood have sustained developmental narratives and consumer lifestyles that contribute to ongoing ecological and social crises. Therefore, the spatial theory developed in the following must be able to trace how these

historical and material constructions of the child operate across space and scale. As such, it must move beyond symbolic representations and engage with the material topologies of power embedded in the figure of the child, enabling a global critique that spans the social, political, biological, and geological dimensions of the Anthropocene.

3.3 String Figure Play: Towards a Theory of Spatial Becoming

The Players Martina Löw • Gunter Weidenhaus • Anna Secor • Lauren Martin • Annemarie Mol • John Law • Eric Sheppard • Bob Jessop • Bruno Latour • Karen Barad • Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, reincarnated as a Janus-headed lilac dog • Girl named Mishiko, with a red painted face and a melon helmet • Lioness named Moombi • Woman from the audience who plays Doreen Massey • Claudia Mock

The Stage *The play takes place in the Lieberose Desert – a 500-acre wide open sand field in Brandenburg, southeast of Berlin. The desert initially developed after a huge forest fire in 1942. Later, the site became the core of the Soviet military training area Lieberose. Today, it is part of the Lieberose Terminal Moraine nature reserve. It is the end of summer. A day much too hot for that part of the season. Important props are a barren tree and a tiny sun sail span from one of the tree's branches towards the ground. Underneath it is a cooling box filled with bottles of water. Above the scene a hologram box is installed, which displays changing text and image projections in 3D and occasionally projects images onto the scene.*

3.3.1 Figures for Space

Text and Image Projection: Human-Beings Spatial Becomings

The Play *Everyone except the girl, the lioness, and the woman from the audience is gathered in the field and chats with each other in groups of two or three. At some point, Claudia Mock arrives and reads out loud the following poetic manifesto.*

Claudia Mock:

We become in space, and spaces become through our becoming.

Becoming is transcendental

by the dynamism of the universe's performance.

A universe in which some humans centred themselves as humans,
while decentring others as non-humans

in uneven landscapes barely tangible in their gated communities.

Becoming is gated.

Gates that are unsurmountable for small people.

By the inevitable failure to jump, they measure themselves.

The measurement indicates: 'child'.

Diagnosed children, they soon become adolescents.

Adolescents become adults, lawyers, drunkards, and eventually parents.

Generational orders. Generational conflicts!
 – amplified by the free speech of free internet.
 A great moment for resistance against ageism, but...

You will not be able to leave home, sister.
 You will just be able to get online
 and skip out for piddle during power cuts.
 The revolution will not hack your geo fencing app
 and tell you to go out on the streets.
 The revolution will not keep you from losing yourself
 on a Skag in Borderlands.¹

The revolution will not be televised on your CCTV.

Everything that is solid melts into the air.
 Crumbling figures of bourgeois childhoods.
 The next revolution might declare the becoming of all,
 by ruling out the being of some.
 The enemy is the idea of being itself –
 an idea that serves to exploit and rule over those
 whom it opposes as becoming.

Yesterday: Posthistory
 Posthumanism Now?

I am not blind.
 I see that de-centring the human is again about the human.
 My centre is the child.
 I de-centre the adult.
 From there, I think through space.

1 Skags are “large Pandoran creatures, easily identified by their canine appearance, strong bony armor plates, aggressive behavior, and distinctive three-jawed mouths”, which are part of the action role-playing first-person shooter video game Borderlands (Borderlands Wiki, n.d.: para. 1).

Text and Image Projection: String Figure

Figure 5: *Os Pontos Cardeais Acrobatas [The Acrobatic Cardinal Points]*.



Source: Illustration by Andrés Sandoval | Cosac Naify | São Paulo, Brasil | 2013²

While the text is displayed in the box, the image (Figure 5) is largely projected as a 3D hologram onto the sand and over the entire scene, including the players' bodies. Their movements distort and alter the string figure depicted amidst the hands.

Claudia Mock: I welcome all of you to the string figure play. I am very glad that we all gathered under the big sun today. We are here to collaborate for space and enact the synergies that can be won from both the similar and the different ways we imagine it. I understand childhood as a generational but also spatial order, which is constitutive of the Anthropocene. When it comes to childhood, I tend to emphasise with a radical thinking. This is because children's positions remain highly ambivalent compared to other vectors of inequality in the matrix of domination. Toby Rollo brings precisely to the point something that overarches my political position as a scholar when he states:

Despite centuries of progressive resistance, the enduring structures of empire, settler colonialism, hetero-patriarchy, white supremacy and neo-liberal capitalism have proven resilient. Alternatives have been forged within different scales and spatialities [...] yet these structures of domination persist and in some cases become stronger. [...] I argue that efforts to radically democratize norms and institutions have faltered because they have not been sufficiently grounded in relations of equality and mutual aid among children and adults. (Rollo 2016: 235)

Mock continues: The child-adult binary that Rollo describes here as an axiom of power is a perspective from where he concludes that it is not the Anthropocene we are cur-

2 Image available at: <https://andressandoval.com/os-pontos-cardeais-acrobatas/> [Accessed 5 March 2026, 10:25]

rently in but something that ‘is more aptly called the *adultocene*’ (Rollo 2016: 242). From this perspective, I understand the very act of becoming adult as part of anthropocentrism. This is why I am stressing the idea of *spatial becoming*, which sees everyone, despite age, in constant progress and regress, and outside a natural linearity of the stages of life. Such processes of human becoming, I would argue, are much less easily differentiable from other types of becoming, such as those of non-human others, and can therefore lead to a further understanding of the myriad processes at play within spatial figuration. Children, even though most affected by the geo-social epoch of the Anthropocene, have at the same time been utterly marginalised within its debates. By exploring childhood as a spatio-temporal order and from a classed perspective, I wish to contribute to uncovering children’s positions within this order in different locales and reflect on the ways in which middle-class children are raised – accompanied by classed material cultures and values and within certain spatial arrangements. Engaged with debates on the Anthropocene, I would like to understand how these figurations of upbringing may participate – perhaps implicitly – in sustaining socio-ecological relations and temporalities associated with Anthropocene conditions. I would like to collaborate with you to build a spatial-theoretical foundation sensitive to such an endeavour. To collaborate, I want to play string figure games with you today. As Donna Haraway puts it:

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn’t there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand, digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site [...]. String figures can be played by many, on all sorts of limbs, as long as the rhythm of accepting and giving is sustained. Scholarship and politics are like that too – passing on in twists and skeins that require passion and action, holding still and moving, anchoring and launching. (Haraway 2016: 10)

Mock continues: The string figure games, I hope, will lead us to collaborative figures that can help me to explore children’s *spatial becoming* beyond dichotomies, such as local/global, nature/culture and child/adult. I also hope it will help us better equip spatial inquiry in general to be applied to the challenges that the Anthropocene presents us with as scholars but also as humans. The situation is a little bit like that I put you in today, as there are too many of us for the water bottles and shade available, so either some of us are going to get thirsty and sunburned, or we will collaborate. To open the string figures games, I would like to ask you to speak out loud the terms, concepts, epistemologies, or subjects most central to our understanding of space. All at the same time! One, two, three!

Everyone says different words out loud, which appear as a word cloud (Figure 6) displayed out of the box as a 3D hologram.

Text and Image Projection: Relation

Figure 6: Word cloud.

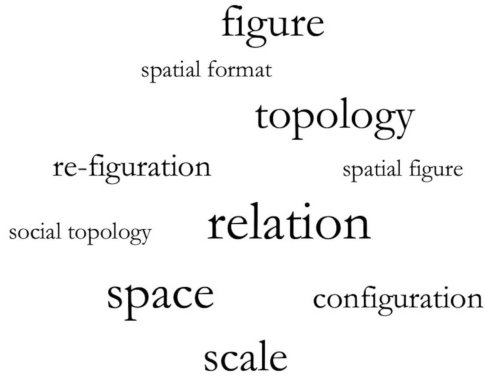


Illustration by the author.³

Claudia Mock: As I look at the cloud of words, I note that one term is most prominent: *relation*. Martina, would you like to take up the thread and start the string figure by telling us what relation means for your understanding of space and then pass the thread on to the next player?

Martina Löw: Yes! I understand the relational processes of spatial constitution in a way of observing ‘what is arranged and how spatial arranging occurs’ (Löw 2016: 164). Anna and Lauren, would you like to continue the figure?

Lauren Martin: It’s our pleasure! ‘[T]opology focuses on continuity, connectedness, and compactness and derives from set theory the principle that the relations among the elements, rather than the nature of the elements themselves, are the important aspects of a topological space.’ (Martin/Secor 2014: 423)

At the back, Anna Secor stands up and sits down under the shade next to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. She looks very exhausted. She takes a bottle of water and drinks it in one gulp.

Claudia Mock: Thank you! The second interest that many of you share is that in figures. Who wants to continue the string figure here?

Annemarie Mol stands up and walks while speaking.

Annemarie Mol: I tried to prepare a bit for this game – even though I was not sure what awaited me – and this is when I noted that there are many similarities between the

3 This word cloud (Figure 6) does not rest on a scientific analysis of the frequency of terms used by each of the scholars involved in the string figures games. It is rather a collection of terms evident in their work, which are relevant to my spatial theoretical considerations.

conceptualisations of ‘spatial figures’ (translated from Löw/Knoblauch 2021: 14), ‘social topologies’ (Mol/Law 1994: 641), and ‘spatial formats’ (Jessop 2019: 77). All our research seems to have led to spatial patterns, and I wonder how these patterns relate. This is striking to me, considering that we have developed our theory mostly ignorant of each other’s conceptualisations of space so far. This is not to say that we are not ignorant due to the differences between us, but I must admit that I was tempted to find out how we can learn from these differences. Of course, above all, I wonder how this can inform the spatial-theoretical foundation of Claudia’s PhD on children’s spatial figurations in Nairobi and Berlin.

Eric Sheppard: I noticed the same. And I would also be curious how they relate, but there’s one question I’m itching to ask: Why was Henri Lefebvre not invited?

Laughter and chatter.

Claudia Mock: Thank you both for pointing to the patterns that already seem to create a web between us. Let’s not lose this figure and come back to it later! Thank you for your question, Eric! I decided to concentrate on Martina’s sociological conceptualisation of space, even though, as Gunter once put it, Henri Lefebvre’s is similarly capable of ‘offer[ing] categories that guide an empirical approach to spatial analytical considerations’ (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 72) but, ‘[i]t is clear from Lefebvre’s concept that it was developed in the context of the city and therefore always includes the dimension of (state) planning in the form of “conceived space”. How this dimension of conceived [...]’ (ibid.)

Anna Secor’s body suddenly drops to the ground.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Oh no! Anna fainted!

Annemarie Mol: Bring us some water, John!

The group is in motion to help Anna Secor. Gunter Weidenhaus takes a notebook from his jacket pocket and fans her with some fresh air. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari carry ice cubes from the cooling box to gently position them around her head while Karen Barad holds up her legs. After a few seconds, Anna Secor opens her eyes again. She is smiling.

Anna Secor: I’m fine. Don’t worry about me! I had a terrible night at the airport. I did not sleep, and now the sun is so hot.

In the meantime, Martina Löw has reached for her phone to call an ambulance. This is when she notices that her phone has no reception.

Martina Löw: There’s no signal here. It’s very hot, and Anna is not well. We should return to the university and continue our string figures games there.

Bruno Latour: No!

Karen Barad: Bruno, how can you be so ignorant? Anna is not feeling well.

Bruno Latour: I’m sorry, Anna; if you wish, we will leave, but if not, I would like to ask that we stay a little.

Anna Secor: I'm fine. If you don't mind, I'll just sleep a bit under the sun sail.

Bruno Latour: The sun is unbearable, and the water is limited. It's very hard to concentrate, indeed! But on the other hand, the heat can inspire us to collectively build a spatial theory that can grapple with the crisis of the Anthropocene right here, where the Anthropocene is tangible.

Silence.

Claudia Mock: Bruno makes a very good point, yet the most important thing is that all of us feel safe while playing string figures games. If any of you would like to return to the university, kindly let me know at any moment during our game.

Silence.

Claudia Mock: Where was I? I said that how Henri Lefebvre's 'dimension of conceived space is to be analysed in the case of a social constitution of space such as "homeland [*Heimat*]", however, remains unclear' (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 73).

Rob Shields: Henri Lefebvre's work is magnificent, yet his concept of space furthermore underlies a linear temporal approach that is deeply framed by Marxism and its respective historicism. Connected to this, he, like many others of his time, has a deficient view of so-called primitive cultures. And well, he didn't give women any recognition beyond what was mainstream for his time either (Shields 1998).

Claudia Mock: What I appreciate about Martina's concept is that it is not contextualised much. Her attitude towards conceptualising reminds me in some ways of that of Michel Foucault. Foucault always understood his concepts as 'little toolboxes' (Foucault 2002 [1975]: 887) that one can change and modify according to the context applied. Martina's spatial theory has exactly this quality. As such, it is applicable in diverse contexts. Its conduciveness to transformation and collaboration has already been noticed by scholars who work at the interface between architecture and sociology, such as Theresia Leuenberger, who points out the potential of merging it with insights from the actor-network theory (Leuenberger 2015, 2018). Martina, would you mind briefing us on your relational concept of space, so that we all start from the same ground?

Martina Löw: In my book *The Sociology of Space*, I develop an understanding of space in distinction to that in Antony Giddens's structuration theory. I aim to conceptualise space beyond the notion of a 'concrete place' (translated from Löw 2016: 199). Space, therefore, stands as an analytical category next to place, not as something abstract that derives from it. '[S]paces emerge initially only by being actively linked by people' (Löw 2016: 134). I therefore understand space generally as a social constitution and, more precisely, as a 'relational arrangement of living beings and social goods' (ibid.: 131). To reconstruct the processes of spatial constitution, I argue that it is helpful to analytically distinguish between 'what is arranged and how spatial arranging occurs' (ibid.: 164). I conceptualise these analytically distinct but empirically messy processes as 'spacing' (What relates to another?) and the operation of 'synthesis' (How does it relate to another?). Spacing refers to the process of spatial constitution 'through the

placing of social goods and people or by the positioning of markings that are primarily symbolic to identify ensembles of goods and people as such' (ibid.: 164). The operation of synthesis, on the other hand, is 'required for the constitution of space, that is, goods and people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory' (ibid.: 165). But if I may hand over the string here: What is space for you who work with the topologist rationale?

Lauren Martin: I would like to say that I see many patterns in post-mathematical topology that relate to your sociological concept, Martina. This is because '[t]opological thinking holds, for many, the promise of a post-Euclidean spatial theory, a way of thinking about relationality, space, and movement beyond metrics, mapping, and calculation' (Martin/Secor 2014: 420).

Rob Shields: The topological rationale was initially developed in mathematics and quantum physics as a network theory (Shields 2013). Like the relational space within social sciences, topology has a special position within mathematics – both spatial theories were conceived to grasp 'other' kinds of spaces and spatial processes.

Lauren Martin: Indeed! And in fact, to 'destabilize [...] the sedimented assumptions of Euclidean geometry' (Merzbach/Boyer, 2011, cited in Martin/Secor 2014: 422).

3.3.2 Social Theory and Societal Theory

Text Projection: Levels of the Game

Martina Löw: As we are all from diverse backgrounds, including those of our respective languages, I find it important that we understand each other to navigate the analytical level on which we play and collaborate. In the context of Marxist-oriented capitalism-critical urban studies, and precisely within the work of David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Neil Smith, and Edward Soja, I have noted that Anglo-American urban studies, in particular, tend to 'mix social-theoretical [*sozialtheoretische*] conceptual work and societal theory [*Gesellschaftstheorie*]' (translated from Löw 2018: 12). This is why it is important not to equate social theory in the Anglo-American sense with German social theory. Yet I would like to argue that the differentiation is 'helpful, however, in distinguishing the conditions of the possibility of the social from the specific manifestations of the social' (translated from ibid.: 13). Social theory marks what 'can be determined and grasped across societies and epochs' (translated from ibid.: 12). As such, it is always 'challenged by [the] results [of societal theory] and must change. The concepts of social theory are designed in such a way that they can be used to analyse different societies at different times. Even if this often fails in detail and the definitions of terms have a bias towards contemporary history, it is the goal of social-theoretical work that, for example, the concept of action or communication, but also the concept of space, be defined in such a way that they can be used to understand socialist and capitalist, early modern and modern societies.' (translated from ibid.: 13)

Gunter Weidenhaus: I agree with Martina! The differentiation helps us to keep apart 'which general statements on space as a social-scientific object [...] are separated from statements on different possible and historically changeable modes of consti-

tution of space' (Weidenhaus forthcoming: 74). It helps us, in other words, to distinguish what space is from how it is established.

Bob Jessop: I am glad to learn about this distinction. We could perhaps split the game into two rounds. Let's start with level one: What is space?

Text Projection: Lessons from the Möbius Strip (Level I)

Gunter Weidenhaus: Martina and I state that 'spaces are the ordering forms of proximity' (Löw/Weidenhaus 2017: 557). Therefore, on the social-theoretical level, I argue that '[s]pace as the possibility of proximity emerges on the basis of (positional) relations and enables orientation in the world in the form of meaningful, social-spatial constitutions' (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 82). I see this as an ontological quality of space and claim that '[f]or two different entities to exist at the same time, they simply have to be somewhere else; otherwise they would not be distinguishable' (translated from *ibid.*: 77).

Claudia Mock: How would you translate proximity to German?

Gunter Weidenhaus: 'Nebeneinander' (Löw/Weidenhaus 2018: 212, Löw 2001: 66)

Claudia Mock: Ok, let me rephrase this: Things exist if they are distinguishable because they are next to each other (*Nebeneinander*), and when things are distinguishable, there is space. The distinguisher is the human, right?

Gunter Weidenhaus: Correct! From a sociological perspective, space is only relevant if it is socially constituted.

Bruno Latour: I disagree here, Gunter! I imagine a different kind of sociology. 'Even though most social scientists would prefer to call "social" a homogeneous thing, it's perfectly acceptable to designate by the same word a trail of associations between heterogeneous elements. Since, in both cases, the word retains the same origin – from the Latin root *socius* – it is possible to remain faithful to the original intuitions of the social sciences by redefining sociology not as the "science of the social" but as the tracing of associations. In this meaning of the adjective, social does not designate a thing among other things, [...] but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social.' (Latour 2005: 5) If we trace associations, we cannot presume that space exists only from the perspective of humans, who can distinguish entities.

Claudia Mock: From a physical point of view, for example based on the uncertainty theory, you cannot attribute an exact location to a particle. Therefore, you can never be sure that two 'entities' do not exist in the same place. If the human body, which is made up of an uncountable number of bacteria, were, for example, understood as an entity, then none of these bacteria would exist according to that spatial theory, as they reside within its space. Concluding from this, it seems necessary to first define what entities are. Are entities

- everything, including atoms and particles and stuff humans don't know yet or no longer know about?
- only what humans can perceive and understand (with/without the help of technologies)?

From here, the question of who can distinguish entities and how seems more complex than the term *Nebeneinander* suggests.

Karen Barad: Excuse me for cutting you short, but ‘posthumanism has no patience for principled claims presuming the banishment or death of metaphysics, especially when such haughty assertions turn out to be decoys for the covert resurrection of Man as the unspoken measure of what is and isn’t observable or intelligible.’ (Barad 2007: 136)

Claudia Mock: This raises the question of whether and when entities should be spoken of at all in the social-theoretical foundation of spatial theory. For if we assume that a relational theory of space examines processes in which humans, non-humans, and matter are involved, then not only does the directionality of these process participants in relation to each other remain a question of (historical) process, but so does the point where something in space ends and something new begins, and thus, in fact, the nature of the entities themselves.

Karen Barad: I have been thinking about this for a long time, and I am suggesting seeing entities as ‘phenomena’ and thus ‘dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world. And the primary semantic units are not “words” but material-discursive practices through which (ontic and semantic) boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world’. (Barad 2007: 141)

Anna Secor wakes up and joins the group again.

Gunter Weidenhaus: I see what you mean, but the social-theoretical base of spatial theory only serves as a ‘heuristic [which] has practically no empirical content whatsoever’. With only this level, ‘we would have a necessarily tautological nominal definition of space, which tells us what we call space, but nothing [...] about how we can analyse it’ (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 74).

Claudia Mock: But in that case, there would be no more space where two entities are in one place. What about pregnancy? It is not very easy to distinguish the unborn subject from the pregnant subject completely. Of course, as the unborn grows, the belly grows, so space is gained. But there are so many materialised processes between the unborn and the pregnant subject that cannot be attributed to just one of them. Think, for example, of the umbilical cord and the placenta! There we can’t say where the unborn subject as an entity ends and the pregnant subject as an entity begins. Wouldn’t it be more logical to leave the directionality of these relations as an empirical question to be answered at the level of societal theory, questioning how space is constituted?

Anna Secor: In social topology we ‘treat figures as manifolds – spaces whose coordinates are not extrinsic, as in a line embedded within a Cartesian grid, but rather intrinsic to the surface itself – and focus on what aspects of a figure remain constant (such as the figure’s dimensionality or number of edges) when the surface is bent, stretched, or rotated, but not cut or augmented’ (Martin/Secor 2014: 423). So instead of focusing on what this space is between the unborn and pregnant subjects in the sense of defining borders, topologists would perhaps argue that their relation can be two in one.

Gunter Weidenhaus: This is interesting. Could you elaborate a bit more on this intrinsic-extrinsic relation?

Anna Secor: Let me show you the Möbius strip! Anyone got paper, pencil, and glue?

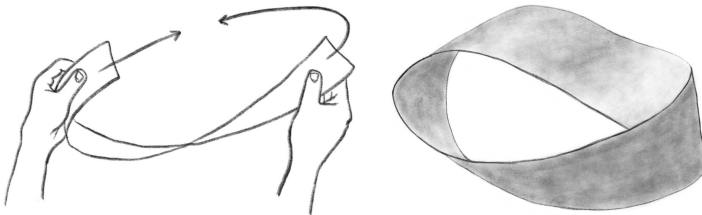
Karen Barad: I have paper and pencil.

Félix Guattari: I have a piece of chewing gum. It can be used as the glue.

Félix Guattari takes the chewing gum from his mouth to give it to Lauren Martin, who is folding a slim part of the paper to tear off a strip along the folded line.

Lauren Martin: Ok, I have a paper strip here (Figure 7). I will draw a middle line on it, just like this! Now, I twist the paper in the loop like this and glue the ends together with Félix's chewing gum – yummy! Now, I cut along the middle line. Voila! One large, twisted loop. [T]he Möbius⁴ strip [is] a single-sided topological surface (a manifold) that nonetheless maintains a distinction between its two sides. [This manifold] has been drawn on by many theorists to explain a relationship in which difference and identity become indistinguishable. That the Möbius works in this way is easily demonstrated; a person can grasp the paper strip with fingers at the same point but on “opposite” sides, thus affirming that the figure has two distinct sides. Yet, if one runs one's finger over the twisted strip, it will cover “both” sides and end up where it started, thus proving that the figure has but one side.’ (Martin/Secor 2014: 432)

Figure 7: Möbius strip.



Source: Drawings by the author.

Martin continues: In that context, Anna Secor and I suggest enforcing the topological form of the Möbius strip to enable conceptualisations of space to move beyond the dichotomies of intrinsic or extrinsic. The Möbius strip, we argue, helps to describe processes in which, for example, ‘a movement between two inseparable states of being’ (ibid.: 433) occurs.

4 Spelling as in the original text.

Claudia Mock: I think the Möbius metaphor effectively describes the spatial relation in which the unborn and the subject are.⁵ It also resonates with Stefan Hirschauer's description of the foetus as the 'internal external one' (*inwändiger Auswärtiger*) (translated from 2015: 95). Hirschauer also points out the inability of social theory to adequately describe 'prenatal sociality' (translated from *ibid.*: 94) and the communication between the pregnant woman and the unborn. He notes that against the background that the unborn can neither be seen nor can make itself understood linguistically, 'it is clear that under these premises what [...] sociological theory (for example, Luhmann 1995) has defined as communication cannot take place. On the other hand, such concepts of communication also contain premises that are not sufficiently attuned to this empirical case – prenatal sociality.' (*ibid.*: 94) As a childhood researcher, I find it important that spatial theory can engage with prenatal sociality. I see prenatal sociality as the example par excellence for being capable of inspiring the contested debates on nature-culture but also child-adult binaries. Therefore, prenatal sociality serves as a good point for collaboration.

Text Projection: From Developing to Becoming (Level I)

Gunter Weidenhaus: What would you suggest as an alternative to the term *Nebeneinander*?

Claudia Mock: I think that it needs to be a term that indicates temporality as well as spatiality and works without presuming direction. Lauren said that the Möbius metaphor helps us to describe movement between two inseparable states of being. This made me think of movement as a term. Yet movement also makes it seem as if we were dealing with physical space. Maybe *becoming* is a good term. It indicates movement in time and space simply as a process, without already ascribing a direction to this movement. It draws on neither succession nor continuity and therefore eludes a notion of development, which indicates linearity, acceleration, and therefore progress. Let's see how it sounds!

Space, as the possibility of becoming, emerges on the basis of (positional) relations and enables⁶ orientation in the world in the form of meaningful, social-spatial constitutions.

I also like becoming because it answers Doreen Massey's call to emphasise the dialectics of space and time and stresses the importance of concepts which move beyond this binary (Massey 2005: 86).

Martina Löw: Are you suggesting that space, as an organising principle of *Nebeneinander*, and time, as an organising form of *Nacheinander*, are hegemonic in modern societies

5 I would like to point to a work in which the Möbius metaphor is also applied to analytically describe a relation of two in one. This is the work of Joris Atte Gregor (2015) who, based on biographical material, analyses how intersex is constructed socially.

6 It enables, but it also *necessitates* orientation. For example, in cases of a sudden loss of orientation, when, for example, a person becomes a refugee, suffers postnatal depression or is challenged by a sudden blindness, but also more generally, as every spatial constitution is also ordering the social and, therefore, we *need* to orientate ourselves within it.

and must be understood as a historical phenomenon, which must be conceptualised on the societal-theoretical level?

Claudia Mock: Exactly! Because whether space is the possibility of juxtaposition, emergence, or culmination, and whether time is linear, episodic, or cyclic is historically contingent.

John Law: Oh my god! There is a lioness over there! Watch out!

Everyone is looking at the lioness, who resolutely approaches the crowd.

Karen Barad: Stay calm! We are many. I don't think she would attack such a big group of people. Don't scare her or make any loud noise or fast movements!

Rob Shields (nervously whispering): Jesus, how did she end up here? Shouldn't we run away?

Karen Barad (seriously): Don't move!

Now the lioness is approaching Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Oh no, she's coming to us. *Sacrebleu!*

Karen Barad: Stay calm. I'll take you in my arms, Gilles and Félix. It'll be alright.

Slowly, Karen Barad moves towards Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and takes them into their arms. The lioness stops her walk and sits down. Silence. Suddenly, there is a whistle from afar. The lioness jumps up and looks out for the whistle's source. From across the field, someone is approaching (Figure 8). Someone with a huge head. It's a girl. As she moves closer, her face appears painted red. She squints a little. She is wearing a helmet cut out from a melon on her head. When the lioness joyfully runs towards her, shouts of relief go around in the group.

Figure 8: Mishiko.



Source: Photo by David Favrod, 2012.⁷

7 Image available at: <https://www.davidfavrod.com/projects> [Accessed 5 March 2026, 10:25]

Gunter Weidenhaus to Martina Löw [whispering]: Could she be the suspected lioness filmed in Kleinmachnow in the south of Berlin back in the summer?⁸

Martina Löw to Gunter Weidenhaus: Possibly. They could not find any traces afterwards, so they ended investigations and said that it was possibly just a wild boar.

The lioness walks next to the girl, who gently pets her head. As she reaches the group, salutations are sent towards her. Calmly, she smiles and waves back.

Claudia Mock: Hey, how are you?

Girl: I'm good. How are you?

Claudia Mock: We were a bit scared by your lioness, but it looks like she is very calm.

Gunter Weidenhaus (excited): Is this the lioness that was in the news in July?

Girl: Yes. Her name is Moombi.

Claudia Mock: And who are you?

Girl: My name is Mishiko. It means 'light' in Japanese. Who are you, and what are you doing here? I live here, but I have never seen you around.

Claudia Mock: My name is Claudia. I'm pleased to meet you and Moombi. We're scholars from different fields of social sciences. We all care about social spaces – spaces that go beyond a house, where being together with others can make it feel like a home. Through the string figure games, we're trying to combine our similar and sometimes different understandings of social space.

Girl: I'm not sure I understood you.

Claudia Mock: Let me give you an example. You said you live here in the desert, right? I guess you've built yourself a little shed or something.

Girl: Yes, true! I also have several hiding places, and there's also a place where Moombi and I go to see the sunset. The desert is our home.

Claudia Mock: Voila! Then you've described very well yourself what a social space can be. Home is not just made of the shed and the ground you erect it on; it's also made of your ideas and, first of all, the urge to build a shed for yourself. It might be connected to feelings of safety or tranquillity. Also, Moombi belongs to it. Home is not the same thing for everyone. Some people have several homes or avoid being at home, rather feeling safe when they are out and about. And this is what all of us find so interesting.

Girl: But what about the string figure games?

Claudia Mock: Well, we're different players with different ideas about space, which we want to share here. One says something to start the game, while others join in, and figures arise. These figures arise from our positions. While some of us stand close together, others stand more apart, and this relation creates a figure that we can then discuss further. From there we find a new figure, and so on. To avoid overstretching the string, we might change our positions and see it from the other's perspective. But we can also drop it or tear it. Everything is possible.

8 On the night of the 19th to the 20th of July 2023, the Berlin police were informed that a lioness had been sighted in Kleinmachnow in the south of Berlin. Several search troops were sent out to catch her. Residents of the surrounding districts were instructed to stay at home via the NINA warning app. The lioness remains missing until today and is believed to be an optical illusion by those who reported on seeing her.

Girl: Can I play with you?

Claudia Mock: Yes please!

Everyone: Yes!

3.3.3 Space and Place

Text Projection: All Spaces Matter. All Matter is Space (Level II)

Everyone, including the lioness, sits down in a circle. The game continues.

Girl: Can I ask a question? What's the difference between space and place?

Claudia Mock: This is a good question, Mishiko! And to be honest, I'm not too sure about this either. In the past, Martina and Gunter, you said that in contrast to a space, 'place means a location, a position that can be specifically named, generally geographically marked' (Lów 2016: 167). Later you blurred that distinction to me by conceptualising space as theoretically distinctive from the spatial metaphor – which, as you argued, has no geographical position.

Martina Lów: This is true; we said that spatial metaphors can be used to describe social phenomena, such as 'family structures', 'communication networks', or 'class structures' (translated from Lów/Weidenhaus 2018: 209) spatially. A sociological perspective instead emphasises space as a relational arrangement with at least one geographical position. It draws on the 'positional relations' (of beings and social goods), a term that Gunter and I borrow from Benno Werlen (1987) to 'understand spaces as a product of linking performances between bodily objects' (translated from Lów/Weidenhaus 2018: 212).

Claudia Mock: I find the gesture of putting the geographical space and therefore matter 'back' onto the agenda important, because this can be seen as the first step towards modifying the theory, which, despite its social constructivist conviction, does not ignore material space. I also agree that the examples you gave are spatial metaphors, and it is very handy to differentiate. The challenges I am seeing are twofold and connected: first, I think that it is hard to differentiate place and space; therefore, place needs to be newly conceptualised. The second point is that we must be clearer in how we want to handle spatial metaphors and imagined places, such as heaven or hell, as these types of spaces challenge us to make clear how, in the sociology of space, Euclidian, social, and imaginative space are related.

Gunter Weidenhaus: Like virtual spaces, 'imaginary spaces, such as "hell" or "Atlantis", can [...] be understood as special cases [of space], whose elements derive from the imagination. This differentiation is ideal-typical, that is, there are no systematic boundaries between these types of space: The "eternal hunting grounds" consist of a mixture of material and imaginary elements (the spirits of the ancestors dwell on this mountain), and spectacles whose lenses function as displays can mix virtual and material elements (the billboard on this skyscraper is played or a Pokémon sits by this fountain), which can be synthesised into a spatial constitution, into so-called "augmented realities" (Weidenhaus 2015: 39).' (translated from Lów/Weidenhaus 2018: 211, in footnote)

Bruno Latour: But why do we need this analytical differentiation? What do we gain from declaring certain spaces 'special' types of spaces? Aren't we also creating a normative standpoint here? What about Claudia's question: How are Euclidian, social, and imaginative spaces related?

Lauren Martin: You're pointing here to a problem that topological theory is also dealing with. For us, the same question might be, 'What is the relation between topographical and topological space?' Despite the various forms of topological inquiry, many scholars use topology as opposed to topography. Anna and I found 'that geographers are attracted to topology because it provides a way of conceptualizing non-Euclidean space, but these approaches rely upon a problematic dichotomization [...], wherein topography becomes an analogy for fixity and topology for flow' (Martin/Secor 2014: 422).

Claudia Mock: Yes, this describes my point well. Let us think about the Earth's ice: on the one hand, it is something fixed. We might call it Euclidian or topographical and see it as something that only becomes social as it becomes a spectacle for touristic expeditions. But beyond that, through anthropocentric effects, such as carbon emission, it is also something very much in flow and topological 'by itself', because the ice is melting and changing the topology of the entire globe as the sea level rises. Its waters are also everywhere – hard to locate. As such, the melting ice is also a spatial metaphor for the climate crisis. It is real, yet imaginative, because very few people have seen it in reality. This is also why some people can claim that the ice is not melting and climate change is a myth.

Lauren Martin: This is why, instead, we argue that topology could be mobilised to work against the dualism of topological versus topographical, because 'no matter how much topology draws our attention to unexpected forms of connection and continuity, it must also account for processes of partition, filtering and hierarchization' (Mezadra/Nielson 2012: 59, quoted in Martin/Secor 2014: 430). So, in topological theory, 'Euclidian space [can be understood] as one possible topology among others' (Martin/Secor 2014: 430).

Claudia Mock: Then I would argue that not only Euclidian space but also imaginative spaces must be understood as one possible topology among others.

Gunter Weidenhaus: I'm not sure if you really understood me. Let me give an example: A chatroom is not a space but a spatial metaphor, because 'the positional relations of the communication partners have no meaning [...]. For understanding social processes in the chat room, a communication analysis is more promising than a spatial analysis. Accordingly, the internet in its entirety is initially not a space but a communication system.' (translated from Löw/Weidenhaus 2018: 210).

Claudia Mock: I agree partly here, because even if I think that a communication analysis works well in that example, I think it will inevitably lead us to socio-spatial questions. Your communicative partners are not spaceless. They do not communicate from the same standpoint. What is missing is the meaning of their own positionality. When you 'argue that objects of a spatial sociological consideration have a relevant "where-in-the-world" and that the relational positions of the elements that constitute the space are important' (translated from *ibid.*: 212), then this also applies to the chat partners in the chat room, as their communicative practice is also imbued

with the meaning of the 'where-in-the-world'. Just because the room itself is a spatial metaphor, it does not automatically mean that spatial inquiry is no longer useful.

Bruno Latour: Spatial constitutions are full of complex associations, and the borders between virtual, imagined, and real space are so thin. They overlap and change from one to another. Look at the example of Moombi, the lioness. She was captured by a video in July 2023 in the suburbs of Berlin – a place that is of course not her natural habitat. Her video went viral all over the city and beyond. Moombi's appearance created a wide media space in which local newspapers installed so-called life tickers showcasing the progress of her search, in which warning apps sent out messages to citizens advising them not to leave their homes and animal welfare organisations debated the morally just ways of catching her. A lioness in Berlin is a good example of positionality, as she is seen as not belonging there. She is positioned to the 'South'. To the inhabitants of Kleinmachnow, where she was first sighted, a lioness is exotic and dangerous. In fact, her appearance also made Kleinmachnow exotic and dangerous. The lioness is a non-human actant that performed a heavy agency through her appearance in a space identified not to be her natural habitat. As she was acting in real space, virtual space, and spatial imagination, she was real, virtual, and imagined. All three types of spaces and all three types of existence constituted each other and her reciprocally.

Text Projection: The Trouble with Place (Level I)

Girl: You still haven't answered my question! What's the difference between place and space?

Martina Löw: Place in differentiation to space must be understood 'as the goal and result of placements. [...] In contrast to spaces, places are always markable, nameable, and unique.' (Löw 2016: XVII) 'Space is a relational arrangement of social goods and living beings in places.' (ibid.: 178) I also argued that places could be 'generally geographically marked' (ibid.: 167) and that they 'are identifiable when occupied by social goods or people, but they do not disappear with the removal of the object, but rather are available to be otherwise occupied. Place is thus the goal and result of placement and not – like people and social goods – itself an element placed in spacing.' (ibid.: 167)

Claudia Mock: To be honest, this confuses me, because that means that place is both a 'where-in-the-world' and the result of spatial constitution.

Loud shouting appears from the audience and freezes the scene of the play, as everybody looks towards the scream's source.

Woman: Arrrrggggh! I can't stand this any longer! Why aren't any of you bringing up Doreen Massey? She has written about place excessively.

Claudia Mock: Would you like to join us here on stage and play Doreen Massey?

Woman: What?

Claudia Mock: I would be very happy if you joined us on stage and played Doreen Massey. Would you like to?

Woman: If you wish. Fine by me.

As the woman walks towards the players, the audience and the players applaud her.

Woman: We should not understand '[p]laces [...] as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time, as *spatio-temporal events*' (Massey 2005: 130). We should understand places 'as woven together out of ongoing stories [...] as in process, as unfinished business' (Massey 2005: 131). And this history, as Bruno once said, 'is no longer simply the history of people, it becomes the history of natural things as well' (Massey 2005: 138, quoting Latour 1993: 82). Place is not a fixed thing but rather in a constant process of becoming – no matter how deeply collective memory might sculpt it out of and into the space again. We might forget that monuments also alter, so they document something different each time. Their very matter alters, and the way they matter alters too. To understand what place is, I suggest asking what 'here' is. "Here" is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities (so "now" is as problematic as "here"). But where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history. It's the returns (mine, the swifts') and the very differentiation of temporalities that lend continuity. But the returns are always to a place that has moved on, the layers of our meetings intersecting and affecting each other; weaving a process of space-time' (Massey 2005: 139), which I am calling 'a global sense of place' (ibid.: 131).

Figure 9: Ammunition remnants on the former Lieberose military training area.



Source: Photo by Martin Roemers, 1998, Panos/Anastasia Photo.⁹

9 Image available at: <https://martinroemers.com/relicscoldwar/photos/#gid=2&pid=29> [Accessed 5 March 2026, 10:25]

A sudden rain breaks down from the sky. The players all squat down in a huddle and turn to the ground together to protect their faces from the heavy rain. The rain is so strong that the sand begins to open up, revealing remnants of ammunition. Slowly, the players return to the scene and discover what has been hiding under the sand (Figure 9).

Gunter Weidenhaus: This is incredible; the rain washed away the present and rinsed out the past. These must be the remains of ammunition from the former Soviet military training area that was here during the Cold War. How impressively this event relates to Doreen's sense of place that we just listened to.

Woman: 'What is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or of the eternity of the hills. Rather, what is special about place is precisely that throwtogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now [...]; and a negotiation which takes place within and between both human and nonhuman.' (Massey 2005: 140)

Claudia Mock: I think Doreen's open or global sense of place once again speaks for the difficulty of distinguishing space and place, because it stresses the process-like nature of what is part of the placement and thus constitutes the placement on the level of performance, in which place is not a fixed entity but a 'throwtogetherness'. That connects place to practice or action. This means that place is always a spatial constitution. But then we can't say that 'space is a relational arrangement of social goods and living beings in places', as you mentioned before, Martina. Otherwise, we would ascribe place to a where-in-the-world.

What I propose is that we understand place as a spatial figure or format, and thus as something that is constituted through connections made between elements or phenomena, similar to a network or a territory. We said that places are always the result or goal of spatial constitution. Therefore, place should be an analytical category on the societal level of spatial theory. That means that analytically, the event (spatial constitution) does not occur in place but in space and always in relation to the specific position from which spatial constitution derives or to which it is projected. This is analytically spoken, because as always, in reality these processes are messy, and it is possible that a spatial constitution is made at a place, which was the result of another spatial constitution in the simple sense that I set up a home in a city, and that city might be a place.

I therefore advocate that analytically we should no longer call the position in space and time at which a spatial constitution occurs a place but a position, and we should only speak of place when we are talking about spatial figures. This is not easy, as we must separate ourselves from it colloquially. Analytically, it does not make sense to me to assert that a space is always made in a place on a social-theoretical level, because it could just as well be made in a network or territory. Places are complex spatial figurations, not a neutral where-in-the-world, as a positions in time and space.

Text Projection: Space Is... (Level I)

Claudia Mock: I think we've arrived at a clear figure here, which I would like to apply in my analysis of figurations of childhoods. In the figure, I see that

(a) space as ‘where-in-the-world’ is always bound to a specific ‘when-in-the-world’. Every event or phenomenon owns such a position. This position is not a fixed thing but should be understood as a process. Therefore, the relativity of time and space does not allow being but always produces becoming. This is what I call figuration. Figuration always refers to the becoming of space and the spatialisation of time.

This space-time dialectic causes everything that figurates, and thus also every type of space that figurates (Euclidian, imagined, geographical, metaphorical, topological, topographical, augmented, social, cosmic, etc.), to be bound to a where/when-in-the-world. That means that every space matters – imagined or not – as it is bound to matter. As such, it is performative.

Therefore, I see space, with some modifications, similarly to Gunter and note that, on the basis of these premises,

(b) space, as the possibility of becoming, emerges on the basis of (positional) relations and enables¹⁰ orientation in the world in the form of performative spatial constitutions.¹¹

Performative stands for the various types of agencies – human or non-human – that are part of each spatial constitution.

(c) Space is an analytical category on the first, the social-theoretical base, contrary to place, which is analytically located on the second, the societal-theoretical level, similarly to other spatial figures, such as territories or networks.

3.3.4 Adulthood and Spatial Theory

Text Projection: De-Centre the Adult from Spatial Constitution

Bob Jessop: Here we go! For now, we will leave the social-theoretical foundation and come to the second part, the societal-theoretical level, and thus to the different possible and historically changeable modes of spatial constitution, which we have already touched on with the discussion on place. This will lead away from the question of what space is in general to how space is produced. And with the question of how arises the question of who produces it.

Martina Löw: Exactly, Bob, ‘[s]ocietal theory works on the conceptual foundation laid by social theories and strives to describe the forms and content of concrete societies [...] or to explain their mode of operation’ (translated from Löw 2018: 12).

Girl: Are only humans making spaces?

Bruno Latour: If you ask me, I will say that the social, as well as the spatial, is realised in the relations of humans and non-humans. I am advocating for a symmetric sociology; in this scenario, human actors are not a priori seen as asymmetrical to non-human actors.

10 It enables, but it also necessitates orientation.

11 This version comes much closer to Massey’s definition of space: ‘We understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality’ (2005: 9).

Martina Löw: For me, 'space is a relational arrangement of living beings and social goods [and therefore] spaces emerge initially only by being actively linked by people.' (Löw 2016: 134)

Claudia Mock: Here, we can see the difference in the concept of the social that lies at the bottom of your theories. *The Sociology of Space* was originally based on Anthony Giddens's structuration theory and is now more and more reworked with the approach of communicative constructivism, informed by the sociology of knowledge (Knoblauch 2020; Knoblauch/Steets 2022; Weidenhaus forthcoming). Actor network theory-informed approaches in human geography and architecture have been actively involved in and transformed by the ongoing debates about the Anthropocene by challenging the nature-culture and human-non-human divide. Approaches that apply the spatial theory of the sociology of space, on the other hand, have not been much involved in these debates. The spatial-theoretical foundation developed here as the foundation of my research shall continue to rework sociological spatial theory against the background of this goal. But to continue the string figure, Martina, could you again remind us how you conceptualise spatial constitution?

Martina Löw: Sure! To reconstruct the processes of spatial constitution, I argue that it is helpful to analytically distinguish between 'what is arranged and how spatial arranging occurs' (Löw 2016: 164). I conceptualise these distinct processes as *spacing* (What relates to another?) and the operation of *synthesis* (How does it relate to another?). Spacing refers to the process of spatial constitution 'through the placing of social goods and people or by the positioning of markings that are primarily symbolic to identify ensembles of goods and people as such' (ibid.: 164). The operation of synthesis, on the other hand, is 'required for the constitution of space, that is, goods and people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory' (ibid.: 134–135). I thus conclude that, 'spaces emerge initially only by being actively linked by people' (ibid.: 134).

Girl: Don't you think that Moombi can also perceive, imagine, and memorise things and combine several things into one space? Otherwise, how would she find her way around?

Gunter Weidenhaus: I don't know if I can answer your question about Moombi, but I also noted that 'the act of synthesis (the combining of several elements into one space) seems a little like the act of a lonely self who, against the background of its socialisation, ultimately constitutes spaces on the basis of individual perceptions, ideas and memories' (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 75).

Claudia Mock: As a childhood researcher, I would like to amplify Mishiko's question and point out an even more general problem here: Social theory remains connected to research traditions such as that of modern philosophy, which, with Hobbes and Locke, reserved the status of being fully human and connected to the realm of culture to white European adults, whereas children and Black people were considered feral beings in a temporal or permanent state of becoming and connected to the realm of nature. A sociology that argues that the constitution of space, as Martina says, 'emerge[s] initially only by being actively linked by people' (Löw 2016: 134) does not only rest on the ambivalent heritage of the humanities but furthermore positions the human at the centre of all worlding processes. It is a sociology that puts itself at the

centre, while other sociologies provoke questions like: ‘Can the non-human speak?’ (Chaplin 2017: 509).

Text Projection: Materialised Discursive Practice (Level II)

Bob Jessop: How can we develop spatial theory so that it stays sensitive to these issues?

How, exactly, can we modify Martina’s societal-theoretical dimension of spatial theory towards a more inclusive version?

Claudia Mock: This question makes it necessary to discuss the understanding of practice.

In that sense, I find the debates at the intersection of subjectivation and spatial theory interesting. A growing number of scholars are stressing the potential of discourse-analytical perspectives (informed by Michel Foucault) within the field of geography and other spatial sciences, because they can help us to dismantle the relationship between power, knowledge, and space (Best/Gebhardt 2001; Glasze/Mattisek 2009; Füller/Michel 2012; Füller 2018). Henning Füller and Boris Michel conclude that a hitherto almost non-existent examination of space in Michel Foucault’s works is useful, because ‘the emphasis on the spatial suggests a topological perspective that is more capable of perceiving asynchronies and contrary developments’ (translated from Füller/Michel 2012: 8). Hence, the authors advocate for a ‘re-materialization’ of Foucault’s notion of power. For many, this sounds contradictory, as discourses are predominantly understood as language, while the authors have pointed out that saying is just another form of doing.

Materiality, as Nadine Marquardt and Verena Schreiber note, ‘is not a passive carrier of meaning in Foucault’s analyses, spaces are not the “result” of the discursive production of meaning, they do not emerge as the end product of powerful discourses.’ (translated from Marquardt/Schreiber 2012: 44). Thus ‘discourses are not a form of representation that is superimposed like a secondary layer over reality, which is now only accessible to us in a mediated way’ (translated from Marquardt/Schreiber 2012: 44).

In the *Order of the Discourse* (1984) Michel Foucault states that, ‘[i]f discourses must be treated first of all as sets of discursive events, what status must be given to that notion of event [...]? Naturally the event is neither substance nor accident, neither quality nor process; the event is not of the order of bodies. And yet it is nothing immaterial either; it is always at the level of materiality that it takes effect, that it is effect; it has its locus and it consists in the relation, the coexistence, the dispersion, the overlapping, the accumulation, and the selection of material elements. It is not the act or the property of a body; it is produced as an effect of, and within, a dispersion of matter. (Foucault 1984b: 22).

With a focus on power, everyday practice, and bodies, Antje Langer and Daniel Wrana also write about the relation between discursive and non-discursive practices in Foucault’s work. They argue that it is not very useful to conceptualise the non-discursive as what marks the border of the discourse. Practices, they note, ‘are not simply discursive or non-discursive, but rather [...] contain the discursive in different ways’ (translated from Wrana/Lange 2007: n.p.).

Karen Barad: I find the re-materialisation of Michel Foucault's work very difficult. Also, 'Judith Butler's performative account of mattering thinks the matter of materiality and signification together in their indissolubility; however, Butler's concern is limited to the production of human bodies (and only certain aspects of their production, at that), and her theorization of materialization is parasitic on Foucault's notions of regulatory power and discursive practices, which are limited to the domain of human social practices' (Barad 2007: 145).

Claudia Mock: Thomas Lemke only partly agrees with this 'charge' (Lemke 2015: 5). He points to 'a posthumanist approach implicit, but not developed in Foucault's work by focusing on the idea of "a government of things", which Foucault presents in his lecture series on governmentality' (ibid.: 8). What matters to me is that Michel Foucault's notion of discursive practice, just like Martina's concept of space, can be modified in ways that allow me to frame my concept of *spatial becoming* as discursive becoming as long as I follow a dichotomy of discursive and non-discursive practice. Thus, I want to develop a spatial heuristic that avoids recognising only those who speak a language as being performative within spatial constitution. This means that I would like to understand both the living beings and the matter – from frogs to lava rocks – as a discursive formation, which, as such, acquires a quality that can suggest, enable, or constrain certain practices (Schrage 2005: 1806).

Karen Barad: This is what I call intra-activity. Also, to me, '[d]iscourse is not a synonym for language. Discourse does not refer to linguistic or signifying systems, grammars, speech acts, or conversations. [...] Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said.' (Barad 2007: 147) 'Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements. Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities. This field of possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity.' (Barad 2007: 147)

Claudia Mock: This field of possibilities sounds like what I would call space (laughs). But how, exactly, do you integrate matter here, Karen?

Karen Barad: 'Matter(ing) is a dynamic articulation of the configuration of the world. In other words, materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses of bodily production; matter emerges out of, and includes as part of its being, the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries).' (Barad 2007: 151–152)

Gunter Weidenhaus: Then discursive practice is also material?

Karen Barad: Exactly! '[D]iscursive practices are always already material (i.e., they are ongoing material [re]configurings of the world). Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity.' (Barad 2007: 151–152)

Gunter Weidenhaus: But then, which role do the dimensions of meaning and knowledge play in your conceptualisation of posthuman performative practices?

Karen Barad: 'Meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility.' (Barad 2007: 149) 'Knowing entails differential responsiveness and

accountability as part of a network of performances. Knowing is not a bounded or closed practice but an ongoing performance of the world.’ (Barad 2007: 149)

Anna Secor: This connects well to our proposal of a poststructuralist potential that a post-mathematical reworking of topology holds to overcome the duality of subject and object. We also critically note that there are various and sometimes contradictory approaches and applications of topology in human geography, resulting in different possibilities to (re)think the subjects and their agency of research. Actually, there is an inherent relationship between structure and topology, and we think it is necessary to rework and develop instead of taking it for granted that topology will ‘automatically allow us to avoid modern presumptions of subject and object’ (Martin/Secor 2014: 421). To overcome the duality of subject and object, we draw on the power of the Möbius strip as a metaphorical figure for existing and emerging orders of spatio-temporal continuity of world-making processes. ‘[T]he Möbius¹² topology is thus one that enacts a poststructuralist dialectic in which it is difference itself that enacts the figure. Unlike structuralist dialectics, in which two distinct objects act on each other, a Möbius relation describes a movement between two inseparable states of being. [...] The Möbius thus demonstrates how the insights of topology – from the multiplicity of manifolds to the interplay of transformation and continuity – can be harnessed for the development of poststructuralist spatial theory.’ (Martin/Secor 2014: 433)

Claudia Mock: All these considerations are extremely helpful for conceptualising the theoretical base for my empirical analysis, but although I follow the suggestion of applying the Möbius strip to overcome the subject/object duality, I do not agree with the dualistic depiction of structuralism versus poststructuralism. I would also propose a Möbius thinking here and claim that the Möbius metaphor is also helpful in challenging the polarity between determination and freedom or structuralism versus poststructuralism.

As Daniel Wrana notes, ‘[T]he subject perspective does not assert that the subject is always active; rather, it postulates that the subject is fundamentally capable of doing so and demands that it redeem this potentiality. In more structure-oriented approaches, the central point of operation of meaning and agency is not located in the subject but in social, cognitive, discursive, or cultural processes. [...] However, even in such theories, subjectivity, reflection, agency, etc. are thought of and described as phenomena. Human actors are considered active agents insofar as they participate in processes and practices.’ (translated from 2015: 123–124)

The childhood researcher John Wall has furthermore criticised that both structuralism and poststructuralism have neglected age as a category of social inequality and failed to ask ‘[w]hat type of approach can move the conversation from not only understanding and including children’s experiences to also, and at the same time, critiquing and transforming the adultism of larger scholarly and social norms?’ (2019: 10). Childism, as Wall argues, ‘calls for new ways of understanding social theory itself: as a groundwork for not only constructing or deconstructing social relations but finally also, and in a more complex way, reconstructing them difference-responsively’ (2019: 12).

12 The spelling is as in the original text.

To summarise what I would like to take from this discussion: **I see spatial constitution as a discursive practice, and I understand discursive in Barad's re-materialised sense.** This helps me answer John Wall's call for finding approaches that can look at the intersection of children's voices and agencies, as well as the power constellations of wider societal processes and structures, such as the earlier framed *adultocene*. From this perspective, I would like to look at both – structure and agency – and stay open to the subversive potential in every spatial constitution.

3.3.5 Social Topology, Spatial Practice, Spatial Figure, and Scale

Text Projection: Becoming Through Differentiation, Assemblage, Linkage, and Movement (Level II)

Gunter Weidenhaus: But how, precisely, do you want to connect this perspective to the theoretical conceptualisation of spatial constitution? How does this affect the ways in which spaces are produced?

Claudia Mock: To Martina, *spacing* refers to the process of spatial constitution 'through the placing of social goods and people or by the positioning of markings that are primarily symbolic to identify ensembles of goods and people as such' (Löw 2016: 164). What is missing here next to the social goods is materiality, perhaps a formation of stones, which I will call *matter*. This does not mean that I understand the formation of stones as not social, because if we look at a drill core sample, its sedimentary layers will also illustrate the social inscription in matter. In other words, we will see the traces of human creation and destruction, which can be read in the sedimentary layers, for example as epochs with high carbon dioxide emissions. Nonetheless, the term social goods seems very human-centred; it hints more at classical human-made objects, perhaps those that belong to the market economy, such as a car or a building. Matter, understood as becoming-with humanity, seems to grasp wider aspects of (new) materiality. Another aspect that is missing here is non-human others. Besides 'people', Martina optionally uses 'living beings' (e.g., Löw 2016: 134). I would like to resolve this ambivalence, emphasise the living beings, and call them *becomings*. Therefore, a new materialist reading of Martina Löw's conceptualisation of *spacing* would argue that

spacing refers to the process of spatial constitution through the placing of becomings and matter or through the positioning of markings that are primarily symbolic to identify ensembles of matter and becomings as such.

Let us now come to the operation of *synthesis*, which, as Martina argues, is 'required for the constitution of space, that is, goods and people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory' (Löw 2016: 134–135), and therefore, Martina concludes that, 'spaces emerge initially only by being actively linked by people' (ibid.: 134).

Bruno Latour: Martina, I really like that you call the process of relating 'amalgamate' here. In the further course of your book, you speak of 'linking' (ibid.: 135, 169), but I think amalgamate better describes that the relation in which living becomings and matter are entering does not leave them in their initial form, shape, or condition. Rather, they reciprocally change. The *synthesis* also brings us back to Mishiko's earlier

question. She also wondered about Moombi's ability to perceive, imagine, and memorise and asked why Martina ascribes these attributes only to 'people'. It is clear that animals can perceive; most animals can also memorise, and as studies show, some animals can also imagine in no less than three forms: 'mental imagery, pretending and other forms of "perceiving as", and creativity' (Mitchell 2016: 326). Furthermore, spatial constitution also happens all the time beyond the perception, memory, and imagination of those who are part of it. This applies especially to the body. Corporeality is altered by multiple processes, in which living beings, such as bacteria, fungi, and parasites, but also matter, such as fine particles, UV rays, and toxins, take part in spatial figuration.

Claudia Mock: From this perspective, I propose to de-centre the human in the spatial constitution and define ways of **spatial constitution as a more-than-human performative practice**, arguing on the basis of Martina's considerations that **synthesis is required for the constitution of space, that is, living becomings and matter are amalgamated to spaces by way of an ongoing more-than-human performance of the world, within and beyond the consciousness of perception, imagination, and memory, beyond here and now.**¹³

Annemarie Mol: Claudia, do you feel that with the processes of spacing and synthesis, you can theoretically grasp the spatial constitutions that go on in the stories you have been collecting?

Claudia Mock: Thank you for this question, Annemarie. I am not sure whether spacing and synthesis alone serve to grasp the various ways in which spatial constitution takes place in the biographical stories. The more I read, look, and listen, the more I see different spatial patterns. Something that is strong is, for example, the act of differentiating. Often, a space, spatial relations, and spatial attachments are referred to through differentiation, and definition of its other.

Gunter Weidenhaus [to himself]: There we go; sounds like a territory!

Claudia Mock: What did you say, Gunter?

Gunter Weidenhaus: I said this sounds like a territory. What you are referring to strengthens my hypothesis that on the second level of spatial theory 'no general principle of [spatial] constitution can be asserted anymore' (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 2). These considerations are not entirely new and are based on Martina's and my previous extensions of the sociology of space, in which we added 'differentiation' (Löw/Weidenhaus 2017: 559) to spacing and synthesis. In my extension, I additionally propose the action category of 'movement' (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 73). In fact, I follow one unified concept of space-making and argue that spacing, synthesis, differentiation, and movement are ways in which different societies at different times constitute spaces.

Claudia Mock: This is interesting. It makes a lot of sense that there are different types of spatial constitution. But the processes of spacing and synthesis, as Martina has

13 This is not to take the human out of the responsibility, but to point to the matters of dynamism that still acts beyond the spatial constitution of a dump site, of its perception, imagination and memory.

developed them, seem so fundamental to me that I would have a hard time imagining them on the same level with practices of differentiation, which, as you argue in your joint article, forge the constitution of borders and therefore territories (Löv/Weidenhaus 2017; 2018).

Maybe we need to distinguish spatial constitution from spatial figuration. I think of spatial constitution as being on the level of social theory with spacing and synthesis, whereas spatial figuration, such as differentiation, is on the societal level. The processes of placing and synthesis are then always the necessary foundation for every spatial figuration, as they describe more the necessary processes of cognition that are at the base of spatial constitution. The practice of differentiation is then another layer of spatial constitution. It does not produce or acknowledge space and spatial relation as such but regards space as being in a certain figuration, e.g., a territory or place.

Text Projection: Becoming in Territories, Networks, Fluids, and Places (Level II)

Gunter Weidenhaus: Ok, despite the modification you made here, I still want to point to the relation that I see between spatial constitution, if you will, on the societal level of spatial theory, and spatial figures. Spatial figures, such as territory, network, trajectory space, and place, were coined by Martina and Hubert Knoblauch to function as ‘a heuristic for the analysis of refiguration’ (translated from Löv/Knoblauch 2021: 14). I propose that different spatial figures and different types of spatial constitution are connected with each other, at least they are if we speak of the dominant action of the constitution of a spatial figure. This then allows me to see both the actions and the spatial figures as generic ‘historical phenomena’ (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 74), as ‘[t]his part of the theory should be understood as historically highly transformable, because certain spatial figures emerge only at specific times in history and because it is necessary to maintain an openness to new or as yet undescribed constitutional logics’ (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 74).

Let me draw it in the sand!

As Gunter draws the table in the sand, it simultaneously appears as a 3D hologram projection.

Table 1: Table of systematisation of spatial action and spatial figure.

	Dominant action	mandatory action	Possible action	rather irrelevant action
network space	synthesis	placement	movement	differentiation
territory	differentiation	synthesis	placement	movement
trajectory space	movement	placement	synthesis	differentiation
place	placement	synthesis	differentiation	movement

Source: Translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 90.

Weidenhaus continues: This is how the connection between such figures and action could be, by means of an ideal typology. As the table (Table 1) also shows, spatial figures can each be assigned a specific category of action, which can be highlighted as the ‘dominant’, ‘mandatory’, ‘possible’, and ‘rather irrelevant’ (Weidenhaus forthcoming: 90) action in the mode of the production of spatial figures.

Claudia Mock: This can help me to analyse whether there are spatial figures that can be seen as middle class-specific. Also, it will be interesting to compare the nature of territory in childhood narrations from Nairobi with those in Berlin. It helps me to grasp the similarities between the two locales better, because a gated community is hard to imagine in Berlin. Yet when a gated community is theoretically broken down in spatial terms to the practice of differentiation as constitutive of territories, it helps me find other types of gatedness that also exist in Berlin. But let’s see how I can modify it according to my differentiation between spacing and synthesis as fundamental processes of spatial constitution and those of spatial figuration. Do you mind if I modify it right here in the sand?

Gunter Weidenhaus: No, go ahead!

Claudia Mock: Ok, if spacing and placement are analytical categories that are reserved for the social theoretical level, then I think the spatial practice for forging a network may be better described as linking, and thus in the sense of collaborating and connecting. And for a place to be enacted, the practice of assembling there is suitable.

Table 2: Extended table of systematisation of spatial action and spatial figure.

	dominant practice	mandatory practice	possible practice	rather irrelevant practice
network space	linkage	assemblage	movement	differentiation
territory	differentiation	linkage	assemblage	movement
trajectory space	movement	assemblage	linkage	differentiation
place	assemblage	linkage	differentiation	movement

Source: Translated and modified from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 90.

John Law: Gunter has already pointed to the messiness of these ideal types in real life, and I agree that in certain moments, it can be very hard to differentiate linkage and differentiation, because everything that is linked also indirectly marks a boundary and excludes (what is not linked). Ideal types, after Max Weber, are, as he warned, very powerful categories. They seduce us to adopt a specific focus and develop associated filters in our ways of seeing. We all know the satisfying effect when empirical results can be classified into ideal typologies. Almost magically, a figurative structure emerges, transforming a multitude of notched worlds into a smooth globe. Alternatively, they thicken the fragile border lines between worlds, strengthening dichotomies.

Gunter Weidenhaus: You're right, John, but I would like to emphasise one problem related to that, which is that the 'research-guided character' (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 74) of spatial theory must be improved, and ideal types seem very promising for that. But I still agree with you that what counts for this aspect of spatial theory also counts for categories, such as ideal types: These categories need guidance.

John Law: I see that we agree. Then I propose that we enable an appropriate degree of reflexivity by continuing to web the string figure here. Annemarie, earlier you pointed to the relation between spatial figures, formats, and social topologies. Would you like to continue your thoughts here?

Annemarie Mol: Yes! So John and I are using social topologies, such as 'networks', 'regions', and 'fluids' (Mol/Low 1994: 641), to describe the analysis of the social space of anaemia. When interviewing medical doctors about their practice of treating anaemia, we started off wondering, 'Where in the body is anaemia?' (ibid.: 641), and we figured out that "blood" disturbs the spatial securities of anatomy [while] "anaemia" [...] disturbs other kinds of spatial securities' (ibid.: 642). Our research on medical practices concludes that anaemia, like blood, 'transforms itself from one arrangement to another without discontinuity' (ibid.: 664). This is what we call a fluid space.

Text Projection: Topology-Practice-Figure (Level II)

Anna Secor: Lauren and I see the generalising problem with ideal types, but we have also felt the need for such conceptualisation. The various phenomena, which are explored as topological, vary from 'borders, networks, computing security, memory, power, cities, bodies' to 'mobility' (Martin/Secor 2014: 420) and are '[a]ccompanied by a vocabulary of flows, deformations, twists, folds, torsions, severations, and cuts' (ibid.: 421). While Lauren and I value these different approaches, we also critically note that '[d]espite the fertility of these new spatial imaginaries, however, the sheer scope of these alternative topologies (fluid, fire, gel, or smoke) raises the possibility that their full potential for the development of spatial thinking may be lost in their endless proliferation' (ibid.: 425).

Claudia Mock: I think we can collaboratively find out how to deal with the tension that arises between the generalisation of complex realities and depthless descriptiveness. As an impulse, I would like to suggest that, first, the differentiation of social and societal theory, which served as the two levels for our game, can generally work to frame this 'endless proliferation of spatial imaginaries' without suppressing other possible imaginations. If fluid, fire, gel, smoke, etc. are framed under the societal-theoretical premise, then they can exist, but they do not have to everywhere and at all times. This theoretical classification immediately makes them appear less overwhelming. Second, we must recognise the potential of ordering through the action-theoretical focus Gunter proposed: By looking at how social topologies and spatial figures are constituted, no matter whether through action, intra-action, or discursive practice, commonalities could be found between, for example, fluid, fire, gel, or smoke, which could help the societal-theoretical spatial diagnoses to gain an epistemological sharpness. This could also mean that social topologies are what describe spatial relations on the social theoretical level, while spatial figures describe the spatial fig-

uration of space that is historically contingent and therefore lies on the second level. Annemarie and John, how do you, for example, define regions, networks, and fluids?

John Law: In the case of regions, ‘objects are clustered together, and boundaries are drawn around each cluster’ (Mol/Law 1994: 643). For networks, they are quite the opposite. In them, ‘distance is a function of the relations between the elements and difference a matter of social variety’ (ibid.: 643). Fluids then are both what region and network are not and what both are at the same time. Fluids are ‘the other kinds of space’, in which ‘neither boundaries nor relations mark the difference between one place and another’ (ibid.: 643).

Gunter Weidenhaus: Don’t you think that this classification comes very close to what I have drawn in the sand here if ‘one takes all territorially constituted spaces (for example, nation-states, regions, continents, etc.) as regions and translates “fluid space” with “trajectorial spaces”, because they are based on the movement of objects or living beings’ (translated from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 49)?

Bob Jessop: What exactly is a trajectorial space?

Martina Löw: ‘The concept of trajectorial space was developed by Gerhard Vinken (2008) in connection with a critical analysis of modern urban planning. Using Le Corbusier’s suburban visions as an example, he demonstrates how the contemporary city is, for the first time, consistently divided into spatially separated, formally and functionally differentiated zones and how the trajectory has implicitly been established as a leading figure in urban planning. Ulrike Jureit points out that these dynamics in modern society manifest themselves not only in urban contexts but also in the voyages of colonial discovery. Explorers, land surveyors, and adventurers followed clearly defined routes on foot or on horseback with the aim of expanding their knowledge of space. In fact, the linearity of their routes transformed the paths they took into trajectorial space. The information gathered along the way merged into a single map, so that the spaces beyond the route remained white areas on the map and were perceived as “empty” space.’ (Knoblauch/Löw 2020: 274–275)

Claudia Mock: Gunter, I agree with you in terms of regions. A territory rather than a region appears when ‘objects are clustered together, and boundaries are drawn around each cluster’ (Mol/Law 1994: 643). A region might be a type of territory and could, therefore, point to the potential of sub-types of these spatial figures. I don’t see the relation between what Annemarie and John identify as fluids with trajectorial spaces, because the fluid space is not necessarily based on repetitive action, nor must this action be institutionalised. And this brings me to an important point: I can see a highway, flight routes, or the routes of colonial exploration as trajectorial spaces, but in your unpublished habilitation project ‘The Spaces of the World’ (*Die Räume der Welt*) you draw on the indigenous culture of songlines in Australia (Weidenhaus forthcoming: 52) to exemplify this spatial figure. Here I would differentiate between different types of movement. But since both the spatial constitution of songlines and that of highways are connected to movement, I find fluid space much more fitting to frame the spatial figure under which these diverse types of movement can be placed. Movement does not necessarily lead to trajectorial patterns, and cultural routes should not be confused with infrastructural routes. What I propose is that

trajectorial spaces (e.g. highways) as well as routes (e.g. the songlines of indigenous Australians) are two of many possible social topologies that, through their dominant practice of movement, promote the spatial figure of fluid space. Although both social topologies are connected to the dominant action of movement, they are not connected to the same mandatory actions – for trajectorial space the mandatory action is differentiation and for routes it is linkage – a further engagement with them allows for reconstructing how the first is closely connected to the spatial figuration of the territory, whereas the latter is more closely connected to the spatial figure of network.

Text Projection: What About Scale? (Level II)

Bob Jessop: What about scale? Without scale, we are dealing with a flat ontology here, but such an anti-scalar approach ‘risks neglecting the hierarchical relations that often exist within and among networks’, because it equates ‘scale akin to horizontal network’ and fails to grasp ‘the complexity of links among different scales of action, which could be linked vertically, horizontally, transversally, centripetally and centrifugally’ (Jessop 2019: 59). Therefore, I would propose the territory, place, scale, network (TPSN) scheme developed by me, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones (2008) as a heuristic for studying ‘spatializations, spatial formats and spatial orders’ (ibid.: 77).

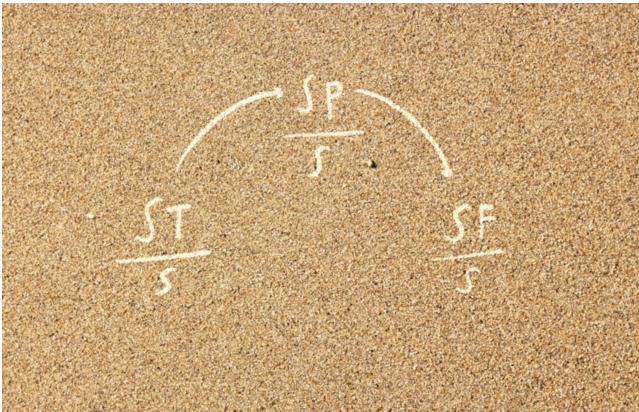
Claudia Mock: The scale debate is very important to my analysis of children’s spatial relations. This is, on the one hand, because of the general overemphasis of ‘agency over structure, concrete over abstract and local over global’ (Ansell 2009: 7) in childhood studies, which, as Nicola Ansell argues, inevitably leads to assumptions about children’s worlds as limited by the ‘micro-scale’ (ibid.: 7). Children then appear to have agency only in the concrete local, whereas they seem to be predominantly determined by structure in the abstract global. Nicola Ansell argues that this even accounts for critical scalar approaches, because they ‘largely juxtapose concrete (local) outcomes with abstract (global) causes’ (ibid.: 12). To overcome these binaries and hierarchisations, she suggests working with a topological ‘understanding of scale that rests on the material relations [and] requires a qualitative (but not dualistic) distinction between relations that are near or far’ (ibid.: 19). Additionally, scale matters to me because my comparison between Nairobi and Berlin is also strongly connected to the scalar entanglement of global and local, and I aim to show which aspects of this entanglement matter in children’s lives and how they reshape this entanglement.

Martina Löw: I also see that scale is important, but ‘[i]t is [...] of little help when [you], Bob [and your colleagues] (2008) suggest that every analysis of space must be structured around the categories “territory, place, scale, and networks” [...] [although you] do not provide a theoretical framework for these elements’ (Löw 2016: Preface IX). I do not understand scale as a spatial arrangement that develops in the process of communicative action between bodily subjects and material objects, but rather as a ‘possible form of synthesis’ (Knoblauch/Löw 2020: 273).

Claudia Mock: I agree with Martina that scale itself is on a different analytical level. But I would not agree that the practice of scale-making lies on the social theoretical level of space (like synthesis). On the contrary, I think that the making of scale, for example if a group or society is characterised more by the scale of the body or the scale of

the nation, is historically contingent and part of the societal spatial figuration. This theorisation of scale might also bring you into dialogue with the promoters of flat ontology. I say this because it solves a problem that Bernd Belina points us to when he notes that ‘the territory, place, scale, network scheme approach delivers a rather narrow structural approach, from which it looks at, and this way underestimates, social practices’ (translated from Belina 2013: 132). But if we emphasise the ways in which scale matters and how scale is produced, altered, and manoeuvred, as in the societal level of spatial theory, then we emphasise scale without setting it a priori. What must be clear is that scale will remain a matter of the empirical findings of my analysis. By looking at practices of scale-making, I situate the inquiry in between. Contrary to what the promoters of flat ontology suggest, I don’t conceptualise scale theoretically as flat. Nor do I assume it is within a fixed hierarchical order. Instead, I follow Nicola Ansell’s advice and empirically excavate the topologies inscribed into the biographical narrations and maps to see the material and social practices of scale-making inherent in them and the ways in which they co-produce spatial figures. Let me illustrate this order by drawing it in the sand (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Social topology, spatial practice, spatial figure, and scale.



Source: Illustration by the author.

Mock continues: This shows how I am theorising social topologies and spatial figures differently but in relation. Social topologies describe space in its ambiguity, processualism, and relationality. Social topologies are therefore important for arriving at the spatial figures in a sensitive manner in the analysis and for keeping the processual nature of spatial figuration in view. The social topologies thus help me to avoid defining space merely in terms of spatial figures. In doing so, I am guided by a focus on the practices that produce space in reconstructing figuration. This approach should also be in the spirit of the representatives of flat ontology, as space only takes on a powerful figure, for example that of territory, through a dense topological, i.e., relational, description that also looks at practices of spatial figuration. It should be

emphasised that the spatial figures compiled here are only the beginning of a figurative description of space and that, despite the logic of the ideal type, it is always a matter of keeping an eye out for new figures, regularly questioning the typology for pitfalls of epistemic violence, and rejecting or modifying it accordingly.

Now the good thing about theorising space on both levels of the spatial theory is that I can both choose a scale or scalar entanglement a priori, for example the home, and find out what social topologies are connected to the homes of a certain group of people. Let's say I am looking at the scale of the home in the context of upper-middle-class residents in Singapore. Perhaps on the scale of home, I will encounter the social topology of smart living and see which spatial practices are dominant in that topology. Eventually, I will recognise the many autonomous processes of monitoring and securitisation that can be described by the dominant practice of differentiation (for example the strong demarcation between public and private), which then forge the spatial figuration of territories in such contexts. But I can also look at the practices of smart living in Singapore and reconstruct the scalar entanglements connected to them. I might realise that the scale of home is contextualised by social topologies and spatial figures that are connoted not at all with the local urban site but with a global 'smart' urban community mediated to all kinds of technologies, virtual realities, and cultures that are part of the homely practices, such as a room with a huge screen, where partners who live in long-distance relationships meet through screens.

Bob Jessop: It would be helpful to add to Gunter's table so as not to lose the figures we made through our last string figure.

Claudia Mock: Good idea! Let me continue the drawing (Table 3).

Claudia Mock takes a branch and continues the table in the sand. As she draws, the table appears as a 3D hologram projection.

Table 3: Table of systematisation of spatial figure and practice, spatial topology, and scale.

	dominant practice	mandatory practice	possible practice	rather irrelevant practice	social topology examples	scale
network space	linkage	assemblage	movement	differentiation	Möbius space pregnancy symbiosis	body
territory	differentiation	linkage	assemblage	movement	enclave Vatican City dichotomisation	city/ nation

	dominant practice	mandatory practice	possible practice	rather irrelevant practice	social topology examples	scale
fluid space	movement	assemblage	linkage	differentiation	trajectorial space <i>Autobahn</i> linear movement	nation
place	assemblage	linkage	differentiation	movement	field <i>brownfield</i> playing	district/ global city
...

Source: Translated and modified from Weidenhaus forthcoming: 90.

Annemarie Mol: Claudia, do you think this table (Table 3) can help you to analyse your material well? Do you feel that collaboratively, we have thought of everything that seemed important to you? I also wonder how you evaluate the collaboration in the form of a string figure.

Claudia Mock: Thank you, Annemarie. I think it is a good moment to reflect, as it also feels as if with this last figure our play were coming to an end. Our collaboration initiated a deep engagement with spatial theory, which we reworked for contexts in which my analysis is situated. I am now equipped with a theoretical ground that allows me to see children's spatial subjectivity as fluid, processual, fixed, and static at the same time. It helps me to neither merely see the subject determined by structures that are topographically inscribed into space nor position the subject before the discourse as the authors of all spatial constitutions produced it from a sovereign subject position. Keeping a dialectic perspective enables an understanding of children's spatial relations 'as topologically established and topographically conditioned' (Kallio 2016: 375). Furthermore, it allows scales to be seen as fixed hierarchical sequences that structure the lives of children and powerful interpenetrating units in which children are embedded – but also as structures that children engage with, manoeuvre through, and re-constellate. A relational analysis of the complex reciprocal processes of the constitution of childhood and space conceptualises childhood and generational order, as well as space and spatial order, as both condition and effect of discursive practices. These practices are understood as performative, iterative, and mimetic and derive from certain subject positions, which are also always spatial and start from an individual or bundle of positionalities.

Additionally, with the reworking of Gunter's ideal-typical overview of spatial figures, we have developed a tool that can guide my analysis in a way that can grasp the figuration on the theoretical axiom of social topologies, spatial practices, and scalar entanglement. The collaboration on the social-theoretical level developed into a theoretical concept of space that supports me in grasping spatial progress beyond human exceptionalism and guides me in uncovering the middle class-specific material cultures and their performativity in the constitution of childhoods. In summary, we reached my goal of developing a spatial theory that guides my research in a way that I can

- document human, non-human, and matter performances within the spatial constitution.
- acknowledge many types of spaces, which could be myriad in the case of the spatial imaginaries that children are capable of.
- understand spatial constitution as a discursive practice, beyond a differentiation of discursive and non-discursive.
- reconstruct spatial figuration on the basis of spatial practices through a helpful ideal typology that is open and works with structuring analytical premises but also describing them in a complex way.
- grasp spatial figuration contextualised by strong scalar dichotomies (Global South and North, local and global) beyond these dichotomies.

Mock continues: But my goal was not only to play with you to develop a theoretical grounding for my analysis; I also aimed to develop socio-spatial theory further against a nature-culture binary and from an adult-critical standpoint. Playing and collaborating with you in this way kept my motivation to engage deeply with spatial theory in the context of my study. It was a test, an experiment, and as I noticed, it was sometimes hard for us to leave our positions and engage in playing. Therefore, I would like to thank you, Mishiko, for asking your prompt questions. They really helped us to get back to the essence of our respective thinking and writing on space. I see great potential in practising this collaboration more often and in more trans-disciplinary contexts. When Mishiko and Moombi arrived, I realised that we are a homogeneous group in terms of age and profession, and I realised how little we as people are contextualised in non-European or non-Western worlds. I would like to imagine playing string figures beyond white academic practice and as a way to open up academic discourse for a broader audience. Additionally, I think that the experimental character resonates with the new situation the Anthropocene puts us in. And as Bruno mentioned earlier, it makes a lot of sense not to be locked into a university building while playing. As we were all here together in our presence, we automatically communicated in much more collaborative ways. The immediacy between us allowed us to dig deep and discuss things in real time, to pose questions and ideas more flexibly. We played it together in a different ‘rhythm of accepting and giving’ (Haraway 2016: 10), a rhythm that differs from that in the monologue of our publications. I want to thank all of you for joining me today.

The sun is about to set. The shadows of the players are stretching longer. The air is breathable again, and the sky is slowly turning from orange to pink. Out of the blue, music appears. It is the Kenyan sound artist KMRU, who is slowly walking through the scene and disappearing again at the horizon of the sand fields. He is wearing a vendor’s tray with built in speakers which play his piece ‘Spaces of Uncertainty’ from the Album Jar, released in 2020.¹⁴ The music clears our heavy minds.

14 Sound bite available at: <https://kmru.bandcamp.com/track/space-of-uncertainty> [Accessed 10 December 2025, 14:30]

While the music is playing, the stage crew is joining the scene by de-installing the hologram projector and collecting the props. Everything and everyone disappear. Only Mishiko and Moombi remain.

3.4 Figuration

It is illogical to conceive time and space as fundamental factors of human existence and to understand the one concept as a social construction, but to reify the other, for example as a territorial concept. This creates an imbalance of structurally like concepts. It is logical to juxtapose the organization of succession to the organization of contiguity. (Löw 2016: 50)

With the terms *Nacheinander* and *Nebeneinander* (Löw 2001: 66), translated in the above quotation as ‘succession’ and ‘contiguity’, Martina Löw rightfully stresses the need for conceptual acuity in theory. In the string figure play, I clarified why I distance myself from the definition of space as an ordering form of proximity or contiguity. Now I would like to do the same for succession, following an understanding of time as a general ordering form of the linearity implied by the term. This is because understanding becoming on the basis of the temporal logic of contiguity would mean looking at process on the basis of the notion of transformation or development. Yet both notions suggest that there is a starting and ending point; therefore, becoming would be marked by acceleration. Such a notion would contradict my understanding of *spatial becoming*, and it would also seem wrong in the context of my methodology of countertopology, which compares the spatial figuration of middle-class childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin. Such an understanding of historicity would inevitably lead to an understanding of spatial processes under the global condition that derives from and reproduces hegemony. An example is the Eurocentric understanding of history inherent in modernisation theories that conceptualise development as progress, which creates entities that are fixed in time instead of understanding the entangled processes of complex relations – which I call *figuration*.

In the following, I will draw on the notion of figuration from the sociologist Norbert Elias to develop a heuristic that is suitable for theoretically and conceptually grasping the notion of time and process that underlies my analysis. In doing so, I will first introduce Elias’s notion of figuration and point out its similarities with the theory of assemblage. Inspired by their similarities and differences, I will then explain how I am distancing myself, on the one hand, from aspects of Norbert Elias’s work that already stand under a postcolonial critique and, on the other hand, from some ways in which the collaborative research centre’s *Re-Figuration of Spaces* (CRC 1265) has applied Norbert Elias’s notion of figuration. Lastly, I will discuss the methods I use to conceptualise the translocal comparison between Nairobi and Berlin, drawing on the topological metaphor of wormholes.

3.4.1 Re-Figuring: An ‘Assemblaged’ Reading of Figuration

Norbert Elias uses the concept of figuration (1970, 1988) to explore the processual interactions between subjects and society, pursuing the goal of ‘overcoming a sociological subject-object dualism’ (Mikula/Lechner 2014: 28). Figurations can thus be described as pro-

cessual and dynamic social entities that emerge from the interweaving contexts (Elias 1978) of different actors or even players. With this spatial-theoretical extension of Norbert Elias's figuration theory, spaces can be understood as figurations in terms of the processualism of subject-object relations and examined as such. In this way, the concept of figuration enables an investigation of space that, first, allows the practices of various actors to be examined as performative practices that produce space, i.e., performative actions, and, second, allows the performance of material arrangements to be examined. In that context, Norbert Elias criticises the effects of the separation of human and natural sciences in the ways in which they suggest perceiving the world as divided into "nature and society", "nature and culture", "object and subject", "matter and mind" or "physical and experienced time" (Elias 1993: 85), while he notes that

all these dichotomies represent hidden battlefronts. [...] Each representative of a scientific specialism tends to perceive his own field of study as an object in isolation; he is apt to contribute to it an absolute autonomy in relation to the object of other sciences. [...], without asking the obvious question of how these different fields relate to each other. (ibid.: 86–87)

This aspect of figuration as a process-sociological concept that is critical to the nature-culture divide is very important for my analysis of *spatial becoming*, because it allows me to understand and analyse children's involvement with non-human others as well as the ways in which childhood as a classed spatial order materialises. Additionally, as such, figuration has much in common not only with the criticism of the nature-culture divide in actor network theory but also with the theory of assemblage (Deleuze/Guattari 1987; Deleuze 2006a; Manuel DeLanda 2016), which is often used as an alternative to structure, as it 'allows us to think about spatial formations as products that must be constantly defended, held together, maintained and repaired. Rather than [as] an underlying structure or a structural context, space thus appears as a relational effect.' (Fariás 2011: 370) Increasingly applied as an alternative to structure in human geography (Fariás/Bender 2010; McFarlane 2011a; Swyngedouw 2004), '[a]ssemblage – whether as an idea, an analytic, a descriptive lens or an orientation – is increasingly used in social science research, generally to connote indeterminacy, emergence, becoming, processuality, turbulence and the sociomateriality of phenomena' (McFarlane 2011a: 206). I am drawing on figuration with its similarities to assemblage theory to conceptualise the change I am documenting in the study of spatial figurations in Nairobi and Berlin on the basis of an idea of process and away from notions of progress.

The conceptual framework of 're-figuration' (Knoblauch/Löw 2017), later modified to 'refiguration' (Löw/Knoblauch 2021), was developed by Martina Löw and Hubert Knoblauch as an umbrella term for the interdisciplinary exchange within the CRC 1265, in which my PhD project was situated. The CRC 1265 is keen to explore societal change under the global condition from a spatial perspective. Löw and Knoblauch's suggestion of applying Elias's concept of figuration to 'grasp [...] change from its start as spatial' (translated from Löw/Knoblauch 2021: 25) seems very convincing to me, moreover, because of its specific processual character: Figuration aims to understand processes beyond a linear understanding of time and therefore serves to conceptualise the modes in which

complex relationships evolve and constantly change beyond a starting or ending point. In this way, it is suitable for grasping change beyond the idea of transformation and therefore allows qualitative analysis that aims to understand societal processes beyond the notion of one possible (narrative of the) past, present, and future. They furthermore note that 'Elias puts the focus on the *how* of the transformation' (Knoblauch/Löw 2017: 11). As such, it fits well with my understanding of *spatial becoming*. Knoblauch and Löw note that Norbert Elias's processual concept of figuration (Elias 1978) 'refers to the relation of interdependence; it is, therefore, explicitly relational in a way that does not separate different levels a priori, such as *macro*, *meso* and *micro*' (Knoblauch/Löw 2017: 11). Additionally, it serves as a methodological framework for grasping processes of globalisation precisely because it can serve as 'a conceptual answer to the [...] criticised static dichotomy of the local with the global and the national respectively' (translated from Löw et al. 2021: 11). In the anthology *Am Ende der Globalisierung* (At the end of globalisation) Löw and Knoblauch state that 'the plausibility of the concept of globalization [not globalisation itself] is coming to an end' (translated from Löw/Knoblauch 2021: 25). 'Refiguration', according to them, 'is a conceptual response to the [...] criticised constant juxtaposition of local and global or national and global' (translated from Löw et al. 2021: 11) in the concept of globalisation.

As such, the concept of figuration is a suitable framework for my endeavour to understand how the spatio-temporal order of childhoods changes over time and in two geographically and culturally distinct places. In the following, I will explain why the additional framing of 're-' proposed by Löw and Knoblauch brings with it a historical framework that I would like to distance myself from. Beyond adding an additional historical framework, I also see the danger that old Eurocentric frameworks inherent in Elias's work, like others of his time, are reenacted by it. Within Elias's writings on time and the process of civilisation, one can find several passages that point to his Eurocentric standpoint. In that context, he often speaks of developmental stages of societies and, for example, argues that '[t]here are, thus, stages in the development of human societies where men have hardly any social timing problems which require active synchronization of their own communal activities with other changes in the universe' (Elias 1993: 49). According to Boike Rehbein, claims as such do not rest on any empirical evidence, as his 'theory of the civilizing process [...] empirically disregards non-European societies and applies European criteria in assessing the state of civilization' (translated from Rehbein 2016: 171). Besides this necessary criticism, it must be noted that Norbert Elias's ideas of developmental stages and of 'primitive versus advanced' societies do not, as in the case of many of his contemporaries, rest on an unequal understanding of the human itself. After pointing to the increasingly complex interconnections that can be observed in what he calls 'higher' societies, he clarifies that

the highly differentiated and unrelenting attention to time which forms part of the social habitus of those brought up in more differentiated and more complex industrial state societies is no more surprising than the capacity of the hunting tribesmen to form a detailed picture of their prey from a couple of footprints. [...] There is no zero-point of civilizing processes, no point at which human beings are uncivilized and as it were begin to be civilized. (Elias 1993: 145–146)

Rehbein additionally argues in this context that ‘a closer study of the criticism reveals that Elias’s Eurocentrism is rooted in an objectivistic theory of science. The concept of figuration, which Elias applies in his theory of the civilising process, should therefore be decoupled from this theory of science and the associated Eurocentrism in order to construct a theory of the social sciences that is viable in the twenty-first century’ (translated from Rehbein 2016: 171). I elaborate in the following how this could look in practice.

In the meantime, assemblage theory will help me to explain why I find it more appropriate to work with the concept of figuration as a social-theoretical concept (ontological), which, as such, cannot be framed by a societal diagnosis of historical character that is moreover predominately observed from a certain geographical standpoint, such as Eurocentric or Western. This is precisely because, as Löw argues, and as elaborated in the string figure play (subchapter 3.3), social theory (in the German sense) must aim to serve as a theoretical conceptualisation of social processes beyond different societies and epochs. However, Löw and Knoblauch note that the concept of re-figuration

also holds the potential to point to changes and intensifications of social upheavals in recent decades in the sense of describing a refigured modernity. (translated from Löw/ Knoblauch 2021: 28)

They thereby rely on historical perspectives that are based on modernisation theories such as those of Charles S. Maier and Jürgen Osterhammel, who date a shift in the spatial order of the world (globalisation from a spatial perspective) to the late 1960s and early 1970s. This shift, they argue, has led to ‘the principle of centrality, hierarchical order and territoriality giving way to translocal work organisation, network structures and decentrality’ (Knoblauch/Löw 2017: 8). These relevant changes in globalisation processes (observed from the West) serve as a historical framing, which is theoretically set by the ‘re-’ as a prefix to figuration. In this context, the authors argue that ‘[a]lthough modernization theories represent a Western view of societal transformation, they make it possible to analytically highlight these societal and spatial changes in the globalization process’ (ibid.: 8). It is unclear to me what it is that we could gain from such a perspective. First of all, it seems questionable why a processual theory should be historically framed at all, and second, I wonder, against the background of my research in postcolonial contexts, why Löw and Knoblauch propose such an obviously Eurocentric perspective when re-figuration is intended as a concept for exploring spatial change all over the world, as it obviously highlights the ‘Western view’, as they admit, but not without the price of its epistemic violence. Therefore, in the context of my research in postcolonial contexts, I cannot adopt such a view, as it risks ordering the transnational comparison before I even come to scrutinise its figurations. Even though this is and will always be a side effect of research, this effect can be dealt with more carefully. Consider, for example, the major changes Nairobi and Berlin have undergone since the 1960s from a geo-political perspective, such as the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 or the collapse of the East African Community in 1977. Due to their complex socio-historical and political entanglements, these examples also illustrate how difficult it is to nevertheless determine a spatial form based on them. This is also because territories once drawn keep radiating their power. Hence, in the case of Kenyan independence in 1963, it is quite questionable whether the spatial figure of the

territory really lost its centrality or whether it was more about the change from one territorial logic to another, or whether the territory was, in other words, simply rescaled, as postcolonies are still politically and economically caught up in multiple global dependencies today, such as in the context of financialisation and the global depth economy (for more, see Federici 2019: 34–50). Even with the reference to specific indicators of re-figuration, Löw and Knoblauch remain largely on a genuinely Western perspective when they draw on the phenomenon of decentralisation in Western societies:

Indications of this re-figuration are changes in the economy and the development of communicative capitalism (Dean 2005), the massive deindustrialisation of Western societies, the transfer of advanced industries to other areas of the world and the reduction of the industrial workforce due to substitution by automatised, digitalized and increasingly roboterised production agents. (Knoblauch/Löw 2017: 8)

However, it must be borne in mind that this Western decentralisation, despite its global impact, does not produce the same spatial figures everywhere. This is because its spatial logic, particularly in the ‘Global North’, increasingly leads to deterritorialisation – through mobile capital, flexible production, and growing digital infrastructures. Yet this apparent deterritorialisation masks a simultaneous process of reterritorialisation elsewhere. Where outsourcing occurs, the underlying logics are also displaced and imposed. Crucially, these logics remain territorial at their core. Capitalism is historically and structurally grounded in a spatial logic of enclosure, extraction, and differentiation. This territorialisation enables the regulation of labour, the capture of value, and the reproduction of hierarchies. Far from being abolished in the process of globalisation, this spatial logic is reconfigured and intensified at the peripheries. Capitalism, no matter whether communicative or not, is therefore hardly conceivable without territorial differentiation, because it depends on uneven development. So the question is rather: For whom are the territories disappearing as the hegemonial ordering form of space? In a volume published in 2021, which presents their more advanced reflections on re-figuration, Löw and Knoblauch concede that

[t]his simultaneity [...] of various processes of spatialisation already occurred in earlier phases of social developments and in other regions, so that refiguration itself by no means describes a new phenomenon. What is new, however, is the development of the digital mediatisation of social action, which has been accompanied by massive spatial changes since around the 1970s. (translated from 2021: 28)

I consider this clarification important, even though I would still not assume a logic of increase in the sense of an increase in the complexity of space, but at most formulate it as an empirical question. For even if re-figuration is a vaguely hypothetical social-historical phenomenon to be verified by empirical findings and is thus situated at the level of societal theory, Western historiography is inherent in it through the conceptualisation of the prefix ‘re-’, as it were, and additionally in some ways contrary to Elias’s understanding of figuration as a process and not as a progress.

The concept of assemblage, which has a lot in common with figuration and its understanding of processualism, is applied in much more fitting ways. Therefore, I would like to suggest an understanding of figuration that is close to Manuel DeLanda's reading of assemblages, which, as he notes, 'emerge from the interactions between their parts, but once an assemblage is in place, it immediately starts acting as a source of limitations and opportunities for its components' (2016: 21). With this strong focus on interactions, it can trace 'how globalization is reproduced through local places in practice' (Woods et al. 2021: 284). From this perspective, societies are not understood as entities but '*as an assemblage of assemblages*' (2016: 37), which could, in the string figure, perfectly intersect with an understanding of society as a *figuration of figurations*.

But then why not title the book 'Assemblages of Childhood'? The reason is that I do partly agree with the criticism of Brenner et al. that the concept of assemblage lacks depth due to its excessive emphasis 'on the ground' (2011: 230) – especially approaches that work with the assemblage theory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) and its application by followers of the actor network theory, such as DeLanda 2016 and researchers inspired by the promoters of flat ontologies (Marston et al. 2005; Escobar 2007; Anderson et al. 2012). In particular, the predominantly 'descriptive focus associated with ontological variants of assemblage urbanism leaves unaddressed important explanatory questions regarding the broader (global, national and regional) structural contexts within which actants are situated and operate' (Brenner et al. 2011: 233). Therefore, I find a middle ground by relying on the concept of figuration and reading it with the processual and relational understanding of assemblage theory. As illustrated in the string figure play, I therefore develop a topology of process that endeavours to enact analysis, typology, and power as well as description, topology, and agency with the aim of tracing a relation in a way that it 'cannot be "proved" because its totality is not approachable' (Glissant 1997 [1990]: 143–144). In this way, '[d]escription is no proof; it simply adds something to Relation insofar as the latter is a synthesis-genesis that never is complete' (ibid.: 143–144). With Edouard Glissant's notion of relation, I also reject an understanding of history that sees the world as a process that is becoming increasingly complex. Instead, I agree with Cindi Katz, who argues that

[h]omogenization is not the script of globalization so much as differentiation and even fragmentation. In fact while globalization may be nothing new, what is new, suggests Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1996), is the greater awareness of global processes among increasingly fragmented populations all over the world. (Katz 2001b: 1215)

Bruno Latour furthermore illustrates this by differentiating that while in the past modernity was related to progress whose direction was marked by the 'global attractor' (Latour 2018: 29), now the former positive connotation of 'globalization-plus' – a trans-local process that increases complexity and diversity – has been joined by 'globalization-minus' (ibid.: 13) – 'a *single vision*, entirely provincial, proposed by a few individuals, representing a very small number of interests, limited to a few measuring instruments, to a few standards and protocols, has been imposed on everyone and spread everywhere' (ibid.: 12–13). In order not to reproduce this dichotomy in social theoretical thought, I propose being sensitive to the practice of scale-making, starting the analysis from a flat ontology

that relies on an 'assembled' reading of the concept of figuration to fathom change and transformation. With this heuristic foundation, then, I do not assume that the spatial relations of children in general were fewer, simpler, more coherent, etc. in the past and that they will be more complex, multi-layered, and simultaneous in the future. Instead, I assume that it is possible, that according to uneven development and social inequalities worldwide, there are and always have been very specific differences according to the intersectional variables of age, class, gender, race, colour, sex, etc.

According to the art critic John Berger, who is famous for his analysis of paintings, 'consequences', contrary to what the term suggests, lie not (only) hidden in the future of their causes. Instead, he argues that '[i]t is space, not time, that hides consequences from us' (Berger 1974: 40). Similarly, Edward Soja warns us about the hidden forces of space as a tool for creating societal norms when he notes that '[w]e must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology' (Soja 1989: 6). Yet as Doreen Massey reminds us, it is important to keep in mind the dialectics of time and space. She stresses the importance of concepts that move beyond their binary, in which 'each *pure* imagination on its own tames the spatial' (Massey 2005: 86).

With the term re-figuring, I would like to follow Massey's call for un-taming and Berger's and Soja's call for un-hiding to make the historical frame or reach of my analysis transparent. This frame and the prefix 're-' are therefore employed here in ways that delineate the limits and potentials of my methodology, which draws from the experience and memory of childhood from people born between the 1960s and the 2010s and which allows me to re-figure the spatial order of childhood accordingly. Hence, I would like to differentiate between three ways of re-figuring:

- *Un-taming* is re-figuring spaces by theoretically grounding the analysis aware of epistemic dichotomies. First, this means that spatial theory cannot function without concepts of time or history. Second, it means that we have to become aware of the often hidden spatial dichotomies that are inherent in concepts and methodologies.
- *Un-muting* refers to re-figuring spaces by listening to those who are not heard or supposedly cannot speak (yet). In a posthuman context, un/muting does not mean that we figure out how to speak to mushrooms or make the mushroom speak to us but that we find ways in which we can listen to and take part in its world and from there trace relations, as Anna Tsing (2015) does in her ecological analysis of Matsutake and its relation to global capitalism.
- *De-archiving* points to the necessity of continuously reflecting on the power to co-produce history and archive, thus contributing to order and remembering the world (in that order). As such, this form of re-figuring is highly contextualised by the postcolonial power structures in which the research and the academic system are entangled. This accounts, for example, for practices of cartographical mapping but also for questions such as: Whose stories do we collect (in, for example, biographical research) and whose do we not collect?

In the following and last subchapter of Part II, I will elaborate how this method of re-figuring can work in a translocational comparison.

3.4.2 Figurations Behind Wormholes

“Uneven development is social inequality blazoned into the geographical landscape [...]” Neil Smith 2008 [1984]: 206

Figure 11: The Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space-Map Projections, The Doughnut, ink, metallic paint, and pencil, 43.8 x 37.5 cm.

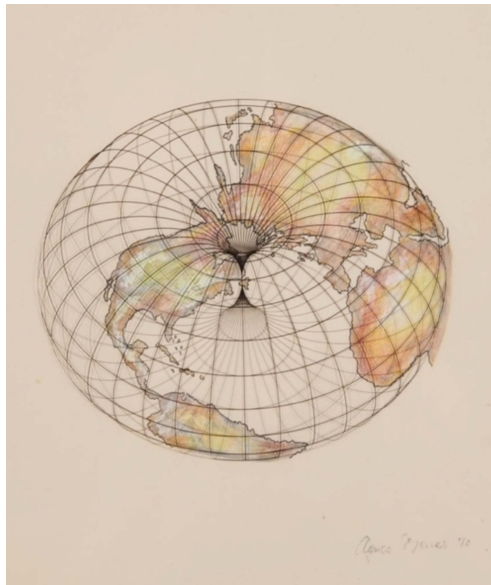


Illustration by Ágnes Dénes, 1980. Resized by the author¹⁵

Equipped with the spatial-theoretical foundation that resulted from the string figure play (subchapter 3.3), I would now like to reconnect to the methodology to lay out the processual theoretical base of the study (subchapter 3.4). It is entwined with the spatial, shaping what I mean by the wormhole metaphor, which serves to visualise the translocational comparison. This metaphor imagines the globe as a doughnut with antipodal points connected through a wormhole, as visualised by the conceptual artist Ágnes Dénes (Figure 11).

Admittedly, the globe is not as smooth as a doughnut, nor would a connection between the planetary positions of Berlin and Nairobi give it this shape, but from a topo-

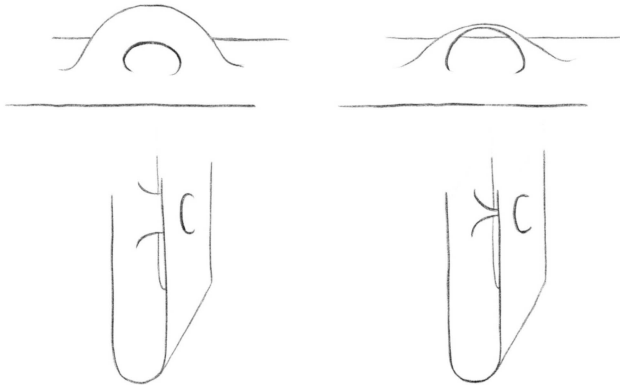
15 Available at: <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/agnes-denes/> [Accessed 5 March 2026, 10:25]

logical perspective, where relations matter, that does not change the figure (see Martin/Secor 2014: 423). With this figurative metaphor for comparison, I follow the call to think cities through elsewhere (Robinson 2016) and ‘develop methods and theoretical practices which allow conceptual innovation to emerge from any urban situation or urbanization process, sustaining wider conversations while insisting that concepts are open to revision’ (Robinson 2022: 3). It is important to note that it is not Nairobi and Berlin being compared through this wormhole but the childhood biographical narrations and maps, combined with architectural ethnographic material that I collected in both contexts and on the scale of home. The speakers were identified on the basis of socio-economic sampling ranging from lower- to upper-income groups, with a large proportion of middle income at the centre of this spectrum. Therefore, I am looking at entangled inequalities, framed here as situated globalities.

Neil Smith’s idea of uneven development is very helpful for studies like mine, which explore how intersectionality and spatial figuration relate. Societies worldwide are becoming increasingly uneven in terms of who has access to and who can participate in space. Therefore, we must recalibrate the perspectives from which we try to understand such global inequalities. In the following, I want to explain how this approach of re-figuring works in the context of my study. For this, let us try to visualise Neil Smith’s (2008 [1984]: 206) depiction of uneven development as ‘social inequality blazoned into space’ and imagine the globe full of small holes, like an Emmental cheese, but much bigger! Whereas most spatial process is imagined on the surface of the planet, I would like to make use of an imagery that follows the traces of mycelium – the complex root structure of fine filaments (hyphae) that spreads out like a mesh underneath a mushroom. Mycelium is a neural network that enables plants to communicate and nurture each other – as such, it takes part in multiple processes of becoming. Now, let’s imagine the people who participate in my study as mushrooms and their (hi)stories as mycelium, which shape an interconnecting network between the times and spaces of their lives. People who are similarly situated but differently dispersed and therefore again differently situated. It is important to note that my mycelium is not natural. Even though natural processes might participate in it, it remains a scenario. A narrative. A spatial imagination. Produced in my, the researcher’s gaze, their social relations are metaphorically traced through the world from two azimuthal standpoints. Although, in a topological sense, the planet is much more accurately depicted by complex hyphae structures, barely visible to our naked eye, my study only manages to grasp it, at most, at the complexity of a doughnut, such as that envisioned by the artist Ágnes Dénes in Figure 11. Yet treating the planet as a topological figure enables me to explore spatial figurations that are ‘blazoned’ *through* and not only ‘into’ (ibid.: 206) the planet’s surface.

As a part of my practice of re-figuring is working with people’s memory, I additionally do some sort of time travelling through their (hi)stories. In a utopian vision, wormholes do not just enable us to travel through space over great distances and in a short time; they also serve as a possibility of travelling back through time, a point I will come back to later (subchapter 5.1.1.2).

Figure 12: Two examples of long wormholes (top) and two examples of short wormholes (bottom) with different throat circumferences.



Source: Drawing by the author.

The wormhole (Figure 12) is a topological manifold that serves as a metaphor for imagining and exemplifying what countertopological research can aim for in a methodological sense. In the following, I will illustrate how the wormhole metaphor helps me not only in the common sense to time travel but to uncover new or better hidden or unseen relations between two seemingly different worlds or points in space-time. When the wormhole metaphor – a hypothetical tunnel connecting two different points in space-time – is applied as a tool for comparative research in Jennifer Robinson's sense of 'thinking [spaces] through elsewhere' (2016), an important methodological question appears:

Are the ends of the wormhole intra-universe (exist in the same universe) or inter-universe (exist in different universes)?

Applied to the context of my research, this raises the first important question: Are the middle-class milieus that make up my sample part of the same or a different universe? This question brings me to Eric Sheppard, who developed the metaphor of wormholes as a tool for describing 'the concrete geographies of positionality and their non-Euclidean relationship to the Earth's surface' (Sheppard 2002: 307), which he contextualised by the routes of colonial expansion:

When Captain James Cook sailed the *Resolution* into Waimea Bay, Hawaii, on 19 January 1778, the effect was to radically restructure the space/time vectors connecting Hawai'i with London. This rift in global space/time instantiated what I conceptualize here as a dramatic shift in positionality, opening a wormhole in social space/time that qualitatively increased the connectivity between the two places. The 19-month voyage to Hawaii seems desperately slow by contemporary standards, but it effectively con-

space x and space y from that moment on in a way that makes the uneven development connected to them practically irreversible. In fact, these examples end the existence of both in the same universe (intra-universe). Later in his text, Sheppard (2002) criticises 'the space/time imaginary of many mainstream neoliberal globalization theorists who argue that globalization makes old territorial structures irrelevant and equalizes development possibilities everywhere' (ibid.: 309), but at the same time he draws a picture of worlds fully unconnected before globalisation. What I would rather like to identify here as a problem common to academic thinking about globalisation processes is the common idea of development and historicism, which renders the world, just as in the logic of capital accumulation, as developing from 'primitive', 'simple', and 'unconnected' towards 'advanced', 'complex', and 'networked' – a problem that becomes highly evident in the context of multi-sited studies.

At this point, it seems important to note that I do not see both types of spatial relation as static and fixed (intra-universe and inter-universe). Socio-material relations oscillate between intra- and inter-relations. Whether the speakers in Nairobi and Berlin are either inter- or intra-universe relations depends on the positionality of standpoints and on the scale from which such a question is posed. From a global perspective, growing up in Nairobi and Berlin might seem utterly different, as a global perspective might highlight the unequal rights to move across the planet and point to the wider postcolonial entanglements that render the childhoods of the Global South and North extremely uneven. From a perspective that regards the local and global as reciprocally constitutive, these differences might shift to the scale of the house and home-making, where the type of house children grow up in renders their lives very similar, although one of these houses is located in a city of the 'Global South' while the other is located in the 'North'. Wormhole metaphors are to be understood as tools in which we can move beyond the common and maybe hegemonial orders of worlding processes. Yet this view, as the critics of flat ontologies warn, must always be reconciled and examined in relation to the hegemonic powers that frame what has been viewed.

Only this dual perspective can reveal deep insights into the mechanisms of power. Speaking with Cindi Katz, looking at situated childhoods in situated globalities then means re-figuring 'intersecting effects and material consequences of so-called globalization in a particular place, not to valorize either experience of the local, but, quite the opposite, to reveal a local that is constitutively global' (Katz 2001b: 1214). This means that what I found in Nairobi and Berlin are not necessarily global (hi)stories but rather (hi)stories that can be found globally. Sarada Balagopalan, in this context, pleads for a new perspective on the 'universal' – a term that has been, for good reasons, under criticism within post- and decolonial discourses. Yet beyond that, she also noted that

[t]he critical reconsideration of the 'universal' [...] is not the same as saying that childhood is 'socially constructed' but rather about disclosing that these constructions are always already constituted by an exercise of power that has been global in character, with a recognition that what constitutes this 'global' shifts over time. (2019: 26)

Therefore, if we look at the ways in which children in Nairobi and Berlin are growing up generally, we will find livelihoods that are hard to compare. But if we sharpen the

PART III

Who Speaks? *How*, for What, and to Whom?

4. Position(ality)

After laying out the spatial and processual theoretical base and introducing the methodology of comparing (countertopology), I will now clarify and discuss further methodological aspects of the study in Part III of this book. This includes a combination of the methods applied, decisions on sampling strategies made, and reflections about the power dynamics connected to my positionality as and beyond being an adult, white European researcher.

After listening to so many childhood stories, I have come to realise that I have, on the one hand, gathered enormously deep and multi-sensorial impressions from the lives of those who shared these with me – so multi-layered that I cannot even process it all in this book. On the other hand, I have such a lack of common life experience with many of them that I must again question my legitimacy to speak here. To engage with these asymmetries, I connect to Edward Said's call for critical reflections on power structures within research processes, which he stresses by raising the question of '*Who speaks? For what and to whom?*' (1989: 212). Whereas Edward Said's works focus on postcolonial power structures in the context of what he framed as Orientalism (Said 1978), my reflections build on and precede this scope and consider the problem of adultism in research with children. Aiming to take the discussion towards a critical reflection on positionality beyond the 'neutral' façade of the researcher, I add another aspect to Edward Said's question and ask, *How does one speak?*

While biographical and oral history research has explored questions around agency, belonging, gender, and class, it has neglected the importance of space and its inseparability with time. Moreover, memory studies have long neglected postcolonial contexts and entanglements (Rothberg 2013; de Wolff 2021). When we furthermore look at the absence of children's voices within these research traditions, the questions of *Whose biographical material do we have?* and, most importantly, *Whose do we not have and why?* cannot be overstated. In the context of the multi-sited comparison that I undertake here, many intersectional categories appear and make the reflections about relations of positionality extremely complex. This is also because some of these categories appear as rather decentral on the local scale, while in the global comparison they make visible how unequally all the speakers are positioned in this world. In order not to lose sight of this ambiguity, I find Eric Sheppard's proposal for an extension of the positionality framework beneficial.

In response to Richa Nager and Susan Geiger's characterisation of this framework as including 'social situated-ness [...] in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and other axes of social difference' (2000: 2), Sheppard notes: 'Geographic situatedness is missing from this list, and that is the aspect of positionality that I emphasize here (I could use geopotentiality, but that term seems excessive).' (Sheppard 2002: 318) I find this perspective very helpful for carefully handling the transnational comparison between middle-class childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin. This is because Sheppard's emphasis on geographical (and at the same time geopolitical) position helps me to theoretically frame what I said before in the beginning of Chapter 2, which stands in close relation to my study's comparative design: 'A Mayan wristband worn by a Californian youth and an American t-shirt worn by a Guatemalan teenager are not symmetrical in the power relations they inscribe' (Ansell 2009: 196). I agree that geopotentiality seems excessive, but the emphasis is also necessary. We might reach the same when emphasising position by adding brackets: position(ality).

Position(ality) is a term that emphasises the ambivalent role of the geographical position at the basis of each intersectional reading of a person's situatedness. It is ambivalent because, on the one hand, the geographical position we inhabit can be very powerful and must be considered, yet it is important not to reify these positions. The brackets in position(ality) therefore point to the need to look at both. In the context of my research and its methodological design, I was first confronted with the question of what position(ality) and subalternity mean. Beyond some theoretical insights, the following reflections will be widely based on my experiences in the field.

Most research underlies the asymmetry of the positions of the 'researcher' and the 'researched'. In the vast majority of cases, this asymmetry goes along with writings, such as publications, in which we hear very little about the position(ality) of the researcher. But there are also exceptions, such as that in which, for example, ethnographic fieldwork can, at times, lead to very long and intense encounters in which ethnographers might live within a small community and are also subjected to all kinds of investigations from that group (e.g. Heike Behrend 2020). But no matter how collaborative, autoethnographic, shared, etc. the research process is, it is clear who the ethnographer is, and as such they hold a strong power. This asymmetry also characterised the relations between the speakers and myself. Yet I realised that the obvious reasons for these asymmetries in theory – e.g. white researcher vs Black speaker – did not always prove to be obvious in practice. This made me reflect on the categories of postcolonial subalternity, which seemed questionable as a permanent state of oppression or as generally connected (in the sense that [post]colonial equals subaltern). This also made me see subversive practices that challenged the research process as asymmetric – reflections that are, at times, better framed mutually as 'ours' (the speaker's and mine), as some aspects of position(ality) were openly talked about. This connects to my first reaction to Edward Said's question of '*Who speaks?*' which he poses to make us aware of the silence and invisibility that comes with the researcher's often-claimed neutrality. So besides trying not to hide myself, in the following I will also explain how much I have managed to let those who shared their childhood stories with me speak for themselves. Therefore, and overall, I would rather explore how postcolonial subjectivity (instead of subalternity) varies within the biographical material and reflects children's societal positions in its discourse.

4.1 Who Speaks?

This subchapter has to be read as a continuation of the autoethnographic notes at the beginning of this book, which in academia is also called a monograph. Monograph – a term that in the context of a critical reflection of position(ality) in research settings seems rather odd, considering the many speakers, as well as everyone named in the acknowledgements who contributed to this project. What also contributed to it was my project affiliation at the CRC 1265 (AO5, Phase I), which to some extent predetermined my study contexts of Nairobi and Berlin and where during the first year and before I went to Kenya, I often struggled over whether I was legitimised to carry out the research there. This insecurity added to the already existing and similar question regarding the power imbalances between me and children, which I had been dealing with from the outset of my academic work. At some point, I started to see the relations between these two problems and felt the urge to make this discomfort a subject of my study. Anna Amelina, in this context, somewhat frankly asks, '[s]hould we, [...] suggest revolutionary change and replace the figure of the “non-migrant” researcher with the figure of the “migrant researcher” to enhance alternative and counterhegemonic knowledge production?' (Amelina 2022: 16), and finds this scenario rather insufficient, not least because it would bring the 'danger of essentialization of researchers' biographies' (ibid.: 16).

I am a white working-class child, the first to study in my family. I am a mzungu in Kenya. I am a mother who grew up in a Catholic village in the former East Germany. When I met the speakers in 2019 and 2020, I was between 31 and 32 years old.

These attributes suggest, but do not guarantee, that I have much in common with other working-class children, mothers, and people who are my age or grew up in rural areas of the former east or are also *wazungu* (plural of *mzungu*) in Kenya. Yet all these attributes matter, because they either privilege or underprivilege me, shape my ways of (un)belonging to specific environments, such as the forest, the Catholic 'community', small-scaled spaces, or 'the east', and therefore render my life experience either quite different from or similar to that of the speakers. Even if these categories are as tricky as they are useful for understanding power structures that produce social difference, in the following I will try to map some of the structural asymmetries underlying my research:

- Child/Adult
- BPoC/White
- Global South/Global North
- Middle Class/Working Class
- Local/*Mzungu*
- Parent/Non-parent
- Women/Man
- East/West
- Rural/Urban

What should be clear from this exercise is that the asymmetries between speakers and myself are not easily captured. How can one's position(ality) be addressed and reflected on systematically, when '[o]ne cannot "be" either a cell or molecule – or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on –' and when '[v]ision is always a question of the power to see and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices' (Haraway 1988: 585)? What system could be established when people are, as Haraway suggests, not one but many – some of them by choice and some by the violence implicit in our visualising or reading practices. I don't read you in the same way the person passing down at the street might read you. You don't visualise me as my sister friend would visualise me – in fact, I am a completely different person to both of you. Although envisioning and reading are context-specific, at the same time they are not pure nor innocent of the institutionalised representations of 'the other', which are partly also established within academic knowledge production deeply rooted in Eurocentrism and its colonial pasts, presents, and futures.

Beyond the methodological and ethical debate on children's agency and their vulnerable position during research settings and within the adult-child binary, Imane Kostet calls for the need 'to approach children as social actors who are also able to impact adults' (Kostet 2021: 4). To understand power not as static but as shifting constellations, Imane Kostet reflects on moments during interviews with children where she 'got vulnerable' due to her background as a 'female minority ethnic researcher with a working-class background in Flanders (Belgium)' (ibid.: 3). In the context of my research with young and old, female and male, Kenyans and Germans, Ghanian-Germans and French-Kenyans, etc., I also noted these variously shifting asymmetric power constellations during the continuous temporal and spatial border-crossing between Nairobi and Berlin.

In general, the research methods created incredibly intimate situations that could sometimes resonate but also be in dissonance with episodes from my own biography. In the latter context, for example, I should admit that I grew up in a Catholic village, and many of my relatives were and are staunch Christians. To me, the religious and often para-religious practices and rituals of that village 'community', which I experienced during my childhood, seemed opposed to us and contradictory and made me feel estranged. This caused me to be rather reserved or unable to engage with the importance of church in the lives of many speakers. One speaker, for example, invited me to her First Communion. I was flattered by the invitation to her important day, but immediately felt inner resistance. When I arrived there, I found a seat at the back. When I looked around, I realised it was not enough to be here with this ambivalence in me; I was also the only white person. I wanted to be invisible. When the white pastor and his altar boys entered the church, an incredibly strong iconology surrendered them, somewhat breathtaking in an intimidating sense. I directly felt how I was immediately linked with them along the physical marker of being white and felt a great urge to leave. But before I could, the pastor had noticed me and approached me to greet me personally, finally making me hyper visible to everyone in that church. I was overwhelmed with feelings I had never felt before. In that moment, my face resisted smiling – a moment that was watched by the entire congregation, including the family that had invited me. As soon as the pastor and his boys reached the altar, I fled, not to feel better but to feel incredibly ashamed.

Why am I sharing this story here? Because it shows the depth of the problem raised by Edward Said's question, and because I must admit that the empirical analysis is rather short on religiosity, as I do not feel like an appropriate speaker in that context. Connected to this church experience is another type of intimacy that comes with the problem of lost integrity. While the above examples point out the intimacy in the direct encounters with the speakers, other forms of intimacy, which appeared in daily life during my stays in Nairobi, were not always welcome. This intimacy concerns the violence of being looked at or addressed in public spaces in Nairobi. My identity in the field was permanently co-produced by people's words and gaze as the white female 'other', as whom I was constantly subjected to shifting appellations (Althusser 1976; Butler 1997), being seen or approached as wealthy, attractive, strange, young, powerful, silly, vulnerable, exotic, boring, supreme, superficial, etc. While these shifting gazes often challenged me, depressed me, and at times frightened me, they also helped me to understand the asymmetrical condition established within the colonial historical process as a base for our encounter.

4.2 The Speakers

I refer to the protagonists of this study as 'speakers', first, because all of them spoke to me, regardless of their age (four or 62 years). Speaking was the main mode of engaging with their childhood stories, even though a mapping exercise – illustrating and drawing – was part of this engagement, as were participant observations in many of their homes during and after the interview, and sometimes during trips I joined on their everyday routes. I do not find it appropriate to call them 'informants' or 'interviewees' in a more common sense, because the former suggests a distance between the researcher and the researched that was surely crossed many times in the encounters I had in the field and through the sheer fact that sharing the story of one's childhood cannot be accurately framed by the practice of 'informing'. I was not *informed* about their lives; it was an act of *sharing*. Due to the open and narrative character of the biographical narration, in which the speakers could decide what, to what extent, and how they wanted to share their (hi)story with me, they can also not accurately be framed as 'interviewees', as it does not quite grasp the partly dialogical character of our encounters, in which the roles were often reversed, for example when at the end of the biographical narration I was asked to share my (hi)story in return. Second, both 'interviewees' and 'informants' are rather passive. At maximum, they have a secondary role. This 'monograph', on the contrary, is highly collective and would never have existed without the trust and involvement of each of them. They are the protagonists. With their oral and visual storytelling, they actively participate in the processes of worlding and rewording. I am just piecing them together into an assemblage, trying to lay open the topologies I followed to link them up with. I archive and de-archive. I initiate and frame. I curate and coordinate this multi-biography.

But I also act violently.

I decide who speaks and who does not. By giving voice to one, I automatically mute the other – even if I intend to let those speak who seemed to me unheard. As a researcher, I will always choose and collect and represent, and there is always a degree of violence in this, which has many but colonial historical entanglements.

4.2.1 Sampling

The speakers are 46 individuals who shared their childhood stories with me. The youngest of these speakers was four, and the oldest was 62 years old. I have assembled them into a contrastive case design in which I do not treat Berlin and Nairobi as two cases but each speaker as one case. This case design is important to me, because my aim was to compare not Nairobi and Berlin but the entanglement of each of the speakers' lives – not in a single globality but within situated globalities. Treating each speaker as a single case allowed me to compare the entire corpus of material along different lines of social difference.

The sampling group covered 36 speakers from Nairobi (4–62 yrs) and 10 speakers from Berlin (9–58 yrs). The Nairobi sampling group was composed of 20 female- and 16 male-assigned speakers. The Berliner sampling group included 5 female- and 5 male-assigned speakers. The following Table 4 shows the age distribution of the sampling in total.

Table 4: Age distribution of total sampling.

Age Group	Ages Included	Total Frequency of Speakers
0–5	4	1
6–10	8, 9, 10	9
11–15	11, 12, 13, 15	9
16–20	-	-
21–25	21, 24	3
26–30	26, 28	3
31–35	31, 23, 33, 35	5
36–40	38, 39	4
41–45	41	2
46–50	49, 50	3
51–55	51	1
56–60	57, 58	4
61–65	62	2

Source: Table by the author.

The number of cases differs between cities. Although I planned that the number of cases in the Nairobi sample would outweigh that in the Berliner sample, mostly

because I lack background in this generally empirically underrepresented context, the COVID-19 pandemic ended my fieldwork in Berlin earlier than expected. Despite being a shock initially, I do not see this as problematic now, especially because of the excessive overrepresentation of German and European middle-class childhoods in studies concerned with children's spatial relations. The following table shows the monthly family income in economic spectrums per city and gives an insight into the contrastive case design regarding socio-economic situatedness.

Table 5: Monthly family income.

Spectrum (Location)	Monthly Amount (Net)	Total Frequency
1 st spectrum (Nairobi)	15,000–80,000 KES ¹	25%
2 nd spectrum (Nairobi)	80,000–300,000 KES	42%
3 rd spectrum (Nairobi)	300,000–500,000 KES	25%
4 th spectrum (Nairobi)	Above 500,000 KES	8%
1 st spectrum (Berlin)	1,000–4,000 EUR	10%
2 nd spectrum (Berlin)	4,000–7,000 EUR	50%
3 rd spectrum (Berlin)	7,000–10,000 EUR	30%
4 th spectrum (Berlin)	Above 10,000 EUR	10%

Source: Table by the author.

As Table 5 shows, the 2nd spectrum is always the strongest, followed by the 3rd. These two groups mark the lower-, middle-, and upper-middle-class spectrum of the sampling and are repeatedly compared to the first and second spectrum at its margins. 'Family income' is understood here, first, by care constellations that vary between heteronormative single-family models, separate parents in two households, patchwork constellations (for example, polygamous fathers), extended-family households (aunts/uncles and grandparents), and households with/ without (permanently residing) domestic workers. Although family income is designated here beyond the income of two parents, most speakers in the second and third spectrum spent their childhoods in heteronormative household and family constellations. Second, 'income' refers to the approximate total amount of monthly income that was collectively earned by the respective care constellation. The two sample maps in Figure 14 and 15 show that the most contrastive case design covers a variety of neighbourhoods in both cities, including places of residence in both the former West and East Berlin, as well as Westlands and Eastlands in Nairobi.

1 KES means Kenyan shilling (1,495 KES = 10 EUR).

Figure 14: Sample map with places of residence during childhood in Nairobi.



Source: Illustration by the author.

Figure 15: Sample map with places of residence during childhood in Berlin.



Source: Illustration by the author.

4.2.2 Field Access

My fieldwork in Nairobi and Berlin was structured by the fieldwork I simultaneously conducted in the context of my project affiliation at CRC 1265 (Ao5, Phase I). Unlike what might be usual in the context of a PhD realised within an externally funded research project, I did not base my study on the project-affiliated material but conducted material that was independent from it. Although people who were participating in the study of the CRC's subproject were not additionally interviewed for my study, it happened that a child I interviewed for my PhD project had a parent, aunt, or grandmother whom I also interviewed for the subproject. These relations were one way of accessing the field. In Nairobi, other connections were retrieved from the University of Nairobi, where I had forged cooperation between the local Chair of Sociology and Chair of Political Science and the Chair of Sociology of Space at my home university, the Technical University of Berlin. As a research fellow at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies in 2018, I was introduced to Kenyan researchers, one of whom connected me to a speaker who organised several contacts in Nairobi on the basis of a paid contract organised through the project affiliation with CRC 1265. Additionally, a master's student from the same university who was doing field research in Nairobi's middle-class milieu provided connections.

I received big support throughout my first stay in Nairobi from my roommate, whom I met at my first accommodation. He supported me with my research and field access. His support was later institutionalised by a contract with the Technical University of Berlin to conduct a couple of exemplary interviews as a local. This position(ality)-shift provided me more insight into the power asymmetries within the research encounters and allowed me to see how the narrations change when a local interviews a local. The results show that surprisingly little difference could be observed throughout the interview situations. Minor differences regarded the common knowledge about local aspects. The speakers knew that I did not grow up either in Nairobi or in Kenya. Therefore, I was often asked during the recording if I was familiar with the context of their subjects. As I did not, these contexts were spelled out to me, which would not be the case with the local research assistant. So the very fact that I am a foreigner allowed me to hear their very personal ideas, descriptions, and feelings about the most ordinary things, which would otherwise have been handled as common knowledge and not mentioned between two locals. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this research assistant only interviewed two children in my project; these reflections should therefore also be seen as contextualised by his skills in engaging with children in such situations, instead of leading to fast assumptions about the irrelevance of position(ality) here. As the two children knew that their recording was going to be shared with a researcher from Germany, it is furthermore questionable whether he appeared as himself or was already contextualised as an 'other' by this aspect. Beyond this, people I met at local (European) institutions such as the Goethe Institute, the Alliance Française, the French Institute for Research in Africa, and the local Kuona Artist Collective also provided connections in Nairobi. In addition, I found two speakers through an announcement I posted on the search/offering boards of small malls and shopping centres, and I met one speaker on the dancefloor of a club. The

noting that her research ‘deals with stories of rather un-heroic entanglements and cultural misunderstandings, of conflicts and failures’ (translated from Behrend 2020: 11). What drives her work is reflections of what she frames as the ‘inverse gaze’² (translated from *ibid.*: 14), which can be understood as the reversed perspective from which she as the ethnographer is looked at by those who are the subjects of ‘her’ research. I would like to situate my research in this tradition, and generally in the tradition of those moving ‘towards shared research’ (Haller/Zingerli 2020). This is to avoid what bell hooks once aptly framed when she wrote,

[n]o need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk. (bell hooks 1990: 343)

Most of the time, if at all, those who are the subjects of a study are introduced to the reader through a certain contextualisation of their backgrounds. But whereas people sometimes share their life stories as the material basis for an analysis, the researchers stay silent and barely visible. As such, they are predominantly mediated as people we also know a lot about, as we can easily download their professional biography (CV) online. Yet this visibility renders their personal biography somewhat invisible. This is problematic, as it also makes scholars emotion- and affectless and hides their vulnerability in the research process. There is no neutrality of knowledge. Knowledge is intersectional and powerful. But why are we so hesitant to emphasise our role in this power relation? When we tell a story, we ultimately tell a story about ourselves; otherwise, we’ve done a great deal of work to hide it. And this work of hiding seems to have a very contradictory function and value in the social sciences. Through language, we hide and claim that ‘this work shows ...’, ‘the analysis came to the conclusion that ...’ or ‘the data indicates that ...’.

In the context of my study, in which many people shared some very personal (hi)stories with me, I also shared mine when the speakers reversed the situation. These instances tempted me out of my position of researcher and enabled fairness in sharing. Often, comparisons were made once I had shared insight into my life. Such moments I experienced in Nairobi are extremely important encounters, often provoking us to uncover the reciprocal gaze from which we looked at each other or how we imagined our ‘backgrounds’ – a gaze that often proved on both sides to be biased and prejudiced. These moments encouraged me to trace the linkages between our geographically distant yet sometimes strangely related lives. The following example shows why this reciprocal sharing is important and also helps to overcome asymmetrical power constellations. When I met 62-year-old Pepe in the garden of the Alliance Française in the Central Business District in Nairobi, he seemed confused about the situation I put him into. Although he

2 Heike Behrend’s interest in the inverse is inspired by the works of a relatively small German francophone research tradition called ‘inverse ethnography’, which Julius Lips, among others, founded in 1937 (for more insight, see Julius 1973).

soon relaxed and dived deep into his childhood narration, he only dared to assure himself of who I was at the end of the interview – when the recording device was switched off. From my appearance, he had read me as a teenager, barely 20 years old, and this confused him, as he had imagined a PhD student from Germany to be nothing like me. That confusion opened a space for him to ask me further questions about myself. Space to share parts of my story with him. But it also created an important mirror to me. This and many other similar encounters made me realise how diverse the intersectional patterns that condition the power structures of research processes are. But it also made me realise how eager the speakers were to know me. To know who they had just shared their most personal memories and experiences with.

This practice of sharing is important during the research process and beyond. At times, sharing mattered in ways in which the very condition of sharing was that I ‘was taken under investigation’ to see if I was reliable and trustworthy. This renders questions visible, such as *How do I introduce myself and my research? How much or how little do I say up front?* Paul Mecheril et al. precisely point out that it is also about ‘which opportunities the researcher gives to the interviewee through their act of interviewing and what kind of thematic-social space is suggested to them’ (translated from 2003: 93). All in all, I met with an impressive amount of agency from those who shared their (hi)stories with me – agency to not only turn the roles of ‘researcher’ and ‘speaker’ around, to navigate within what I had prepared or planned for our encounter, but also to alter it. Giving this freedom to change the situation and to modify it towards their needs was an important aspect of what it can mean to forge research towards a shared experience. I was able to realise this process of altering by generally planning a very open session in which there was plenty of space for the speakers to decide what to share with me in the context of their childhood or by reversing the roles, but also by leaving the management of time to them, according to their needs, capacities, and preferences. In practice, this meant that speakers could end their narration after 30 minutes (which was rarely the case) or, if we could not finish during our first meeting, we could meet again the next day.

Sharing did not only occur during our encounters. Sharing mattered in many moments, such as in making the documents I had collected for my research accessible to them, but also in keeping them strictly confidential from others. Sharing also mattered beyond these moments, because what struck me most is that many of the speakers I have maintained contact with regularly ask me if I have finished my writing and remind me to share it with them. I imagine a truly shared research practice in which the research does not end but picks up speed once this part of sharing is reached. From there it will be important to get feedback about my ways of assembling, contextualising, describing, and interpreting their spatial relations and to reverse the gaze once again to understand how the speakers feel depicted by my writing. Besides this being one of the greatest motivations during my writing, it inspired me to anticipate future research in which I would like to carry my writings back to them. One such project is a work in process in the form of a mini comic – which will be published in a graphic essay on the classed meanings of home and conditions of housing – where two young speakers meet in a fictitious story based on their biographical interviews and maps and take one another on a tour around their poor and wealthy neighbourhoods, sharing what they like, their fears and future anticipations.

But how else and how more generally can a shared experience of research be reached? What data collection practices are suited to avoid amplifying the power constellations on which research is based, generally and specifically? In the context of these questions, I asked myself whether, for example, the method of participant observation is really that innocent. Within my academic peer practice, I have often had the impression that when it comes to research ethics and research data management, the method of participant observation has been handled as the least invasive one when it comes to the problem of privacy and data rights of the research participants. This was mostly justified by the idea that observing people and taking notes produces much less personal data than an interview transcript or even a photograph that directly depicts the person. But I wonder whether it is not the 'indirect' aspect in particular that is at the same time most prone to conflict. Yes, we are just watching, but as Fred Moten and Wu Tsang highlight, '[t]here is no non-violent way to look at somebody' (Moten/Tsang 2018: 650). Is it not precisely observation that creates power constellations that are utterly asymmetrical, where the person observed is in some sense kept in a passive position, where unlike in a conversation they cannot follow what is collected from them? Field observations create documents that are much less accessible to those who are studied. Observational notes, on the contrary, are something much more biased by the position(ality) of the researcher. During and after my fieldwork, many speakers asked me to share the material with them. So at some point I started to share the material with the speakers from the outset. Some of those whom I had not shared it with at the beginning later reached out to me, and their requests came with very touching purposes. One speaker wanted to use the recording to write her autobiography, while the son of another speaker, who had passed away, asked me to share the recording to help him prepare his mother's eulogy. Being able to share the material collected is therefore an enormously important aspect of transparency. In research with children, this applies even more, as they might listen to the recording later in their lives.

Another aspect of sharing is connected with data security and consent. Although signed consent forms from a legal guardian are required for children under 18³ in Kenya and for children under 16 in Germany, this seemed dissatisfactory in the social-theoretical context in which I frame childhood (*spatial becoming*). Therefore, I designed an additional consent form (Figure 16) for those who were below this age.

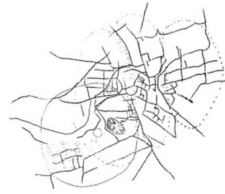
The process of giving consent was scheduled before the interview, and it was emphasised that consent could still be withdrawn after the interview. As a ritual, this process served as more than an act of signing. It created an additional space to get to know one another and to 'warm up' together. The information sheet and consent form addressed the young speakers directly. Most of the time, the children received the consent documents before they met me, so they knew what to expect and could decide to participate without the pressure my direct presence might have caused. They read the text themselves, or it was read to them by their parents or me. The process of introducing myself and the project and the act of signing meant winning extra time to talk and ensuring that children were comfortable in the situation. This care seemed very important to me, al-

3 There are currently debates about lowering the age of consent in Kenya to 16 years.

though my overall experience was that most children were thrilled to be listened to; they appreciated being listened to and did not take it for granted.

Figure 16: Example of consent form for speakers younger than 16 years old.

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Child Consent Form

My name is I am/4... years old
and I would like to participate in the research project „Childhoods Nairobi Berlin“.
I understand that I am free to say if I don't want to participate in the project at
any time without consequences. My actual Name should be replaced with the
following project name Claudia has
informed me about the procedure of the project and I agree that excerpts of my
interview, my drawings, maps and photographs can be published in books and
articles and can be furthermore used for future research.

.....

Place, Date

.....

Signature

Source: Generated by the author.

While gathering material, I was exposed to what Cindi Katz describes as people's 'fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life' (2001a: 710). Even though I met most of the speakers only once or twice, the encounters often felt very deep, and this experience resonated with how many speakers wrapped up their experience by saying, 'This was therapeutic!' or 'This was healing!'. While their voices still reverberated in my ears, I was already gone, many miles away from them. Whenever I changed my geographical location, I saw these (hi)stories from elsewhere. I was near and far. This helped me to reflect about all the impressions left in me, but it also felt strange to just come and go, when

people had shared so much with me. But the intimacy went further: In the moment of our encounters and this process of sharing, a secret, a self-realisation, a future vision, or a dream was sometimes revealed. Some speakers shared things with me that they had not shared with anyone before. While often the recording device stands as a material agent that keeps a formal distance between researcher and speaker, in many instances this material agency was circumvented when speakers asked me to stop the recording, such as when their narration included a political statement or a very personal aspect of the story, for example regarding feelings of shame. These moments showed me how much agency a device like this has in the process of sharing, but also how it is possible for speakers to share beyond it, which I acknowledged as a sign of trust.

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.

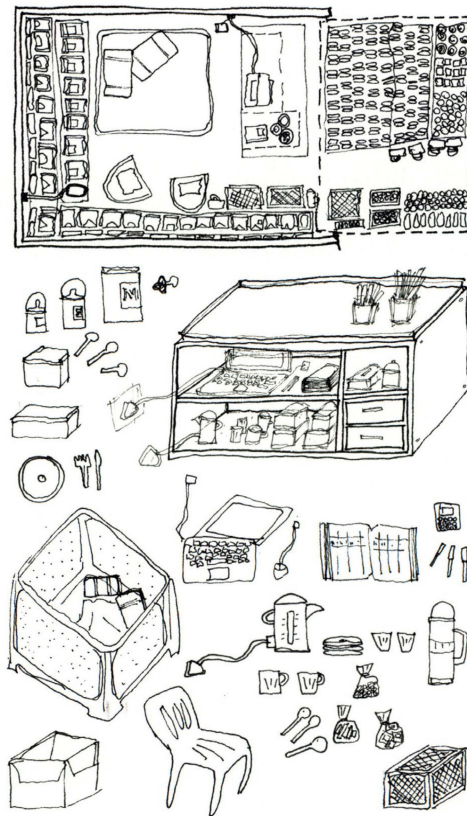
In the following, I will explain my approach to architectural ethnography and my use of methods to explore the speakers' homes as the socio-material spatial processes that have been marked as most important in the context of middle-class childhoods. When exploring the meaning of home, I documented architectural 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 topologies 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.

6. From 'Mess' to Re-Figuring

After introducing the approach of 'methodical careful-mess' and sketching out how I dealt with the messy material, I will now, in the following and last subchapter of Part III, summarise the subject-theoretical inferences resulting from the above considerations and furthermore explain how the continuous oscillation between the empirical material and the methodological considerations (in)formed my method of analysis.

6.1 Topologies of (Un)Belonging

The focus on important spaces within biographical narrations and deep emotional mappings reveals aspects of (un)belonging through a topological perspective that brings about emotional qualities of space and spatial relations which are discursively produced. While discursive potential is attributed to spaces, they are at the same time understood as products of discursive socio-material practice. According to the spatial-theoretical premises I developed in Chapter 3, I conceptualise the oral and visual (hi)stories of the speakers as topologies of un/belonging that are produced relationally,

- from different position(alities) and
- in specific situations, conditions, and contexts of speaking – such as in the interview situations framed by a focus on important places and spaces during childhood and
- the diverse (a)symmetrical power constellations of each encounter.

I frame the topologies that appear in the material as topologies of (un)belonging generally, because I set that frame in our encounters, asking the speakers to not only share their childhood (hi)stories with me in general but to focus on the important spaces of that period. The prefix '(un)' in brackets signifies the ambivalence of belonging, of belonging somewhere by choice and structure. This points to my understanding of children's topologies from the intersections between a post-structural and structural stance, as 'we' elaborated in the string figure play (subchapter 3.3). It also draws on the fact that every time we are either made to belong or choose to belong somewhere, we mostly do this in distinction to and demarcation from others who we do not want to or feel as if we belong

to. The emphasis on '*longing*' (in italics) refers to the aspect of relation through desire, because what we desire or long for depends on what is (de)legitimised and (de)moralised in societies, in the situations and contexts in which we are positioned. That does not mean that we only desire what we have been told to desire. But our desire is greatly influenced by norms and values that are hegemonial in our societies.

The empirical material shows that the emotional topologies of (un)belonging are processual constructs that figure on different scales and scalar entanglements and from the vantage point of different speaker and subject positions and are, as such, additionally based on the reciprocal relation of the self and the human or non-human other. This perspective does not set scale a priori but re-figures how scale matters from the speakers' perspectives. Starting from this rather flat ontology (open narrative-biographical narrations and maps), the reciprocal process of empirical analysis and theory building has led me to re-figure processes of scale-making. I came to this finding during the very beginning of the analysis – when it felt rather like an odyssey within an endless ocean of oral and visual (hi)stories, their visualisations, recordings, and transcripts. Intentionally, I did not start this search with a pre-drawn map of orientation. As explained earlier in subchapter 5.1, I designed my conducting methods to retain the participant's independency and relevance-setting in the interview situation. This format led to very long and unstructured narrations and an enormous corpus of data. The visualisations at the end of the 'interview' sessions helped above all to reduce the free narration again and to break it down to another setting of relevance made not by me but by the speakers themselves. In the foreground of the analysis was the question: What is/was important to the speakers in relation to the spaces that they made relevant? Thus, it is about contexts of meaning that were determined by their relevance settings in the open framework of the narrative interview.

6.2 Four Steps of Analysis

In the following, I describe four steps that I developed and used to analyse the material. As I have already mentioned, the process of mapping served to generate additional insights beyond the narration, which often evoked stronger phenomenological aspects of the speaker's spatial relations. I considered this insight in the analysis and additionally used the maps as a more focused iteration of the complex narration, helping me to grasp the spatial order on which the spatial figuration of childhood was made relevant according to the speakers. The analysis of the maps was therefore integrated into the five steps illustrated in the following. When working with the visual material, I relied on documentary method of image interpretation by Ralf Bohnsack (2009), thereby pursuing an inductive-reconstructive theorisation of biographically relevant materiality of objects, artefacts, bodies, and their socio-spatial relations in the maps. In doing so, however, I remained critical towards connected concepts, such as that of a 'conjunctive experiential space' (*konjunktiver Erfahrungsraum*) in which it is assumed that subjects acquire action-guiding orientation knowledge conditioned by 'commonalities of action practice, biographical experience, fate, i.e., socialisation history' (translated from Bohnsack 2005: 377). In this context, the common social position of being a child, or being of

the same generation, is assumed to lead to such a conjunctive space of shared experience. I do not agree with this assumption and argue that such a conceptualisation of shared experiences is not intersectional enough and can easily lead to a strong essentialisation and naturalisation of the category of the child itself. Rather, it is a matter of empirically reconstructing the effects of this powerful discursive structure of the child or the generation and its impact on biographical self-interpretations from the perspective of the visualisations of their spatial relations. Approaches such as Cornelia Renggli's (2014) discourse-analytical work with images appear helpful for this modification. Based on the assumption that social reality is not only represented by visualisations but is also constituted in them, the maps serve as a medium for accessing phenomenological stocks of spatial memory, experience, and knowledge – above all the habitual, routine action acquired in the mode of internalising social scenarios, gestures, and facial expressions – which constitutes the material nature of biographically relevant spaces. The subsequent section will provide a summary of the analysis process, as outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of analysis steps.

Material	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Childhood biographical narrations and maps	<i>Spatial codes</i> , e.g., playgrounds	<i>Scales</i> that emerged from spatial codes, e.g., home	<i>Social topologies</i> , e.g., safe spaces <i>Spatial practices</i> , e.g., exclusive protecting	<i>Spatial figures</i> that emerged from A and B, e.g., territory
Architectural ethnographic material on housing type and home-making practices (drawings, notes, photos)	<i>Housing types</i> , e.g., settlement of semi-detached single-family houses	<i>Scalar entanglements of home</i> , e.g., house as home	<i>Topologies of Home</i> combination of housing types and home-making practices, e.g., private community	<i>Spatial figures of home</i> , e.g., home as territory

Source: Table by the author.

STEP 1: Spatial Codes One of the most complex tasks was deciding how to analyse the narrations and maps according to their spatial orders. The complexity of the material, the focus on *class* and *age*, and additionally the translocal contexts demanded a structural logic that could not be answered by the existing methods, which are used (mostly either) for visual, biographical, or more general narrative material. Hence, I developed my own method of analysis that derives from the foundation of the research tradition of grounded theory (Glaser/Strauss 1967). This means that the processes of data collection and theory building were interrelated. I started by coding several interviews in the software MAXQDA. But soon I noticed that I somehow lost the people behind the transcripts. Something real and complex became strangely disassembled and hard to grasp. It seemed tempting to be

scrutinised its entanglements. Against a 'parochial' scalar thinking that works with scales as if they were part of a pre-existing nature of space or reducible to a merely physical or geographical structure of near and far (Ansell 2009: 4), I looked at scale as elaborated in the spatial-theoretical framework (subchapter 3.3). From a relational perspective inspired by the topological rationale, scale, can appear in many ways, such as scale as size (cartography), scale as level (global, national, regional, and local), and scale as relation (for example, glocal) (Howitt 2002: 305).

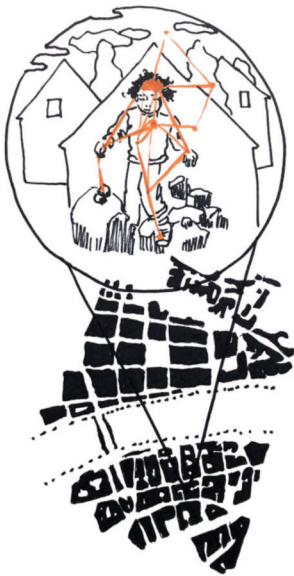
Let me give an example: Economically, Yao (10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.) and Pierre (13 yrs, *2006, male, Lavington, N.) are the most contrastive cases of the sampling. In his mapo, Yao only marked spaces that are within the scale of his neighbourhood. None of the spaces that he has marked as important lie beyond the scale of the city. This is the opposite for Pierre. He only marked two spaces within his neighbourhood, and most others lie beyond the scale of the city and nation and even connect to another continent, as he is also living/has lived in Burkina Faso and France. If we look at scale from a geographical or physical perspective, we could easily draw the conclusion that Pierre has a wider world reach. But if we measure 'world reach' by a relational or topological understanding of scale, then we might see that Yao, as the supposedly disadvantaged and immobile person, is engaging in many different intergenerational socio-spatial practices, which are constituting the scale of the neighbourhood through intense socio-material relations. The spatial arrangement he is part of may be small in geographical size, but that space is used in depth. Pierre's world reach, on the contrary, is geographically large and entangles on many different scales, but on an everyday basis he has no access to them. Meanwhile, a purely relational understanding that neglects Euclidian space would run the risk of romanticising Yao's childhood, denying the fact that he might never get a visa to leave the country. This example shows us that scale alone does not tell us much about power, as long as we do not have a clue about how scale matters in young people's lives.

Although these scales must be understood as the first empirical findings of the narrative assemblage, it is important not to draw the conclusion that these are the only scales that matter in children's lives. The existence of scalar entanglements goes far beyond them, yet in some ways they very vividly represent the scales on which children are positioned, or rather not positioned. Nevertheless, as the narrative assemblage will show, children's narration about their home, for example, can at times take global or planetary forms. Therefore, as I have already clarified, the scales must be understood on the basis of a relational or topological understanding of space and not as a measurable unit that spans over physical space.

Therefore, I understand scales not as separated and progressive, but as entangled and processual (difference illustrated in Figure 19), in which they are messy, partial, overlapping, and always in the making. Hence, it is important to note that the following structuring of the subchapters by scales should not be understood as a measure of chronological relevance or size structure indicating that the subject is the smallest and the city the largest scalar unit. Instead, it is my aim to show how, and against this structure, the scale of the subject can cover the entire planet, while the city geographically remains utterly small in the biographical narration, because the city might be only constituted by a couple of islands to which a child has access.

Figure 19: Left: Scales separated and progressive; right: Scales entangled and processual.

separate and progressive



entangled and processual



Source: Illustration by the author.

STEP 3: Social topologies and spatial relations On the basis of this scalar entanglement, the spatial codes, for example playgrounds, were now considered in terms of the spatial practices that constitute them as social topologies. That is, they were considered from a perspective that does not emphasise the object (playground) itself but its spatial relations. In the example of playgrounds, many of them could then be identified as safe spaces, as they serve to protect but also to monitor children (for example, through a fence).

STEP 4: Spatial figures From there, I analysed the social topologies in terms of their dominant spatial practices. Safe spaces, for example – a social topology that emerged from certain types of playgrounds – are spaces that are specifically designed for children. As such, they not only address but also reproduce the child-adult binary. As they are also sometimes exclusive (for example, requiring entrance fees), the dominant spatial practice is better framed as exclusive protection, which is most dominantly connected to the spatial practice of differentiation. Therefore, playgrounds as safe spaces must be understood as spatial figurations of territories (spatial figure). It is important to note here that the spatial figures of territory, network, fluid space, and place elaborated in the string figure play function as an open typology. Therefore, one of my aims was to find out whether there are other spatial figures that cannot be precisely captured by the spatial practices of differentiating, linking, moving, and assembling.

Shifting between Nairobi and Berlin: Concluding Remarks As elaborated earlier, my analysis is strongly contextualised by my position(ality). An important and not yet mentioned part of that positionality is that I also literally changed my geographic position between Nairobi and Berlin. Huda Tayob relates this shifting to Edward Said's notion of 'crossing of boundaries' (Said 1989: 225, cited in Tayob 2018: 210) as a practice that 'could lead to new narrative forms' (ibid.: 210). In that context, she explains that 'drawing and writing on site took time and therefore required a level of engagement with inhabitants' (ibid.: 217), whereas her practice of 're-drawing' when she was later resettled to London 'disrupted the linearity' of the process, 'offered analytical distance', and 'enabled an analytical spatial reading of the sites' (ibid.: 218).

In connection with the questions of *Who speaks? How, for what, and to whom?*, I considered it very important to keep myself as much as I could from drawing consequences (un/hiding) from the material and instead try to find evidence for consequences which the speakers already revealed individually and in relation to the other speakers. Hence, I would like to frame the general mode of handling the analysis beyond the above steps as a practice of 'following', in which I trace the relations the speakers directly and indirectly draw (at times also to other speakers, without knowing). In this approach of following, I started by treating the oral and visual (hi)stories as a whole – regardless of the categories of social inequality, such as age, class, gender, and location – as if I were handling a multi-biography, a biographic assemblage, to trace its relations from a flat ontology. In such a topological perspective, the speakers, their bodies, imagination, and social positions, are seen as nodes of the material and social relation to the world. The question then is not only how dominant discursive formations of scale, such as the nation-state, shape their subjectivities but also how they produce scale through their doings and sayings, therefore participating in the mimetic process of the constitution, reification, compression, expansion, or subversion of socio-spatial orders (of middle-class childhoods).

PART IV

Fluid Subjectivities, Territorialised Housing, and *Avoidant* Mobilities

7. Narrative Assemblage Part II

The fourth part of this dissertation provides insights into the spatial figuration of middle-class childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin, as well as guiding us through the points at which they are intertwined across locales or stay in contrast due to their unique characteristics. It is dedicated to the second part of the 'narrative assemblage', a term through which I frame what is commonly known as the empirical analysis. Instead of emphasising the neutrality of the researcher's role in assembling parts of the (hi)stories shared with them, assemblage emphasises the researcher's active role in this process. The material's very nature is emphasised by the narrative, which it was my aim to capture as much as possible by letting the speakers talk. As elaborated earlier, this process of assembling is guided by the scales of 'Subject & Body', 'Home', and 'City', which emerged as the dominant spatial reference systems among middle-class speakers across space and time. This is the first overarching finding, which I will now unfold in detail before returning to analyse it in Chapter 8.

7.1 Subject and Body: Fluid Subjectivities

This chapter will deal with the spatial figuration of childhood on the interwoven scales of the subject and the body – a relation that I frame as *corporeal becoming* (*corporeal subjectivation*). In the collected material, the social topologies of play and discipline are central to this scale. The figurations drawn thereby will be strongly embedded in a methodological reflection, as the narrations of this scalar entanglement offer very important insights about the controversially discussed (dis)ability of children to take on a biographical perspective.

In the context of scalar debates, Deborah Bird Rose (1999) argues that 'the dominant western view of the self as coterminous with the body is completely inadequate for understanding Aboriginal views of the self' (Rose 1999, cited in Howitt 2002: 308). What Deborah Bird Rose deems important for studies on indigenous cultures appeared important to me despite any specific position(ality) of those who are subject to the research. Within Western research traditions, the body has been conceptualised as either location, source, medium, or scale. As a *location*, it appears, for example, in the works of Judith But-

ler and Michel Foucault, in which the body is produced by discursive regimes as humans are made a subject of governmental control, a process in which they also become gendered bodies through the interpellations of a heterosexual matrix. The body conceptualised as a *source* appears in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in which the individual is an embodied material being, and as such the condition of experience, senses, and perception. As a *medium*, the body is understood in structuration theory; for example, Pierre Bourdieu explores the reciprocal and constitutive relation between the body and the social world. Individuals are understood here as embodied actors that shape social fields but also get habituated by them (for example, taste, rituals, etc.). Conceptualising the body as *scale* is not new. The body as scale has been conceptualised in a way that it 'serves as the foundation upon which all other scales are based' (Herod 2011: 59). As such, it also came onto the agenda of human geographers, often informed by feminist writings. But although the body itself is theoretically contextualised in all these different ways, body theories still often rely on the dualism of the interior and the exterior. To grasp corporeality beyond this dualism, Elizabeth Grosz proposes the Möbius strip as an alternative model, which

has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes the other [and which] provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychological interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside. (Grosz 1994: xii)

Her Möbius body model offers me a way of exploring the scalar entanglement of subject and body in the childhood biographical narratives and maps. From the biographical material, the body often emerges as a scale that plays a central role in some of the earliest memories of the speakers. It appears in many ontological forms, from prenatal/postnatal, whole/partial, strong/weak, loved/violated, and desired/repelled to subverted/obeyed. The amplitude of corporeal becoming that emerges from the material is surely more complex than the following scope allows. Nevertheless, it provides great insight into how the subject-body relation is constituted, experienced, and perceived in relation to space. As a theme, corporeal becoming appeared strongly contextualised by a diverse range of topics, from (in)security discourses connected to feelings of (un)safety, gender differences, food cultures, death, and social as well as spatial family and kinship relations. Even though the outcome leaves space to write about all these aspects and their entanglements, my analysis focuses on the figurations of children's corporeal becoming in the context of the most dominant social topologies of play and discipline. The analysis illustrates how social topologies are constituted from situated corporealities, and thus from a specific sensual body each speaker is equipped with, but also from the collective experience of having a child's body and hence being positioned accordingly in societies. It considers the speakers' classed corporeal becoming and observes how this relation figurates on the basis of the age comparison and through specific spatial figures that can be identified as middle class-specific in the overall comparison.

7.1.1 From Live Route to Life Trajectory

It is not new that the subject and the body are constituted by a sort of Möbius relation – from Pierre Bourdieu's cultured bodies to Georg Simmel's body as a tool to understand the relation between self and society; from Karl Marx's productive and alienated bodies in capitalism to the cultural identity expressed through the body in Émile Durkheim's work; from the classed, black feminist body of bell hooks and Angela Davis to Frantz Fanon's relation of psyche and body. All have shown the inseparability of these two scales. Yet, and this is crucial, children's corporeal becoming appears utterly marginalised within these works and is generally a neglected topic. Some exceptions can be found in feminist studies (Young 1980), in the German-speaking branch of educational anthropology and its focus on mimetic processes and performativity (Gebauer/Wulf 1998; Wulf 2001; Gebauer/Wulf 2003), within approaches that look at the constitution of the child's body in society (Prout/Campling 2000), and within a growing branch of children's geographers that puts the body at the centre of their research (Colls/Hörschelmann 2009). What still remains scarce beyond these approaches is a class-sensitive biographical perspective on children's corporeal becoming.

As there are very few studies with children that follow a biographical approach, perspectives which focus on the child's corporeality from a biographical perspective practically do not exist. Nevertheless, even in these few studies, the body still appears, such as in Nicoletta Eunicke's research, which finds that accidents are a common starting point of children's biographical narrations.

Gumbrina interrupts the interviewer with her opening question and impatiently begins to talk about a broken arm [... This] shows that Gumbrina begins with an experience from her early childhood. So she doesn't choose birth for the introduction, but an event from her life that she considers important. In doing so, she also follows the interviewer's request to tell 'stories' about herself. (translated from Eunicke 2018: 298)

Thematisations of early accidents like that of Gumbrina can also be found in the speakers' narrations. Accidents in that context come up so promptly that they almost seem to impose themselves. When the body is in a state of exception and sometimes even crisis, the memory about it is often very vivid long after, and as such accidents are one of the earliest memories we have access to. This renders the connection between subjectivity and corporeality so important. One example for this is 13-year-old Analia, who also starts her biographical narration with the memory of an accident:

When I was small, [...] my mom was, like, you know, getting me ready for bed. And [...] then I fell, and I hit my head. That's why there is a mark over here. [...] Yeah. [...] I started bleeding, and I got stitches. (Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.)

But it is not only the children whose memory of accidents is very present. The same applies to adults, even though they would still mostly follow the common code of starting the narration with their birthplace or day. The body seems to play a big role in the process of saving the memory, so to speak, as the experience of the body. This is because

experiencing the body in a state of crisis or shock inscribes itself into the memory of the person affected, but also those who witnessed the accident. Likewise, the body seems to be highly involved also during the process of remembering, as some of the memory sits in the body literally, when a smell or a sound, for example, triggers such memory. The body in a state of exception is not only caused by accidents and diseases. The body can also experience panic or anxiety, such as in Ijhanya's moving example of her getting lost as a child.

[O]ne day my mom took, took me to the baby centre. So, some big, some big children came and took my things. [...] So, I just went to find them, but I was lost in the village. So, my mom came back to the baby centre to take me home, but she didn't find me [...] the dark came and I was so scar[ed]. Then I went to one house in the village. I knocked [on the door], I entered, and I said, 'I am lost, please can you find my home?' They ask, 'Who's your mother?' I didn't know. 'Who's your father?' I didn't know. [M]y mother took a picture of me [...] and she [showed] everybody. Have you seen this girl? Have you seen this girl? One day, she found me. [C.M.: It took some time?] Uh, like two days." (Ijhanya, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Deep Sea Slum & Parklands, N.)

Experiences like these set the body under shock. As such, they often inscribe themselves into the memory and constitute corporeal becoming, which, from a biographical perspective, belongs to a very present layer of memory. But it can also be the other way around. Traumatic events can become completely locked into one's memory, as the psyche could not do anything better than to evict the event that was experienced as so harmful. This applies to people of all ages. In the context of a methodological reflection, the findings show that children are more likely to start their life story with their first memory. Adults, even though they have similar first memories of the body in exceptional situations, on the contrary, predominantly follow common codes of storytelling and start with a co-constructed memory, such as the story of their birth. This indicates that children who are not limiting their biographical narration by common codes of storytelling (for example, from the start to the end) must be highlighted in their ability to share their life memory beyond a subject-body dichotomy, which in adult narrations distort the actual biographical memory.

When I consider Sya, a 12-year-old speaker from Nairobi, who lives in a gated compound that she is not allowed to leave on her own, I find that she has very little agency on the micro-scale. Although she believes in the necessity of such security measures, she has her qualms with them, as they make her present life 'boring', and she often feels 'lonely' (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen N.). She envies other children that have siblings or live and interact together in other housing types. As she is also home-schooled, her life merely spans between the house and compound, the mall and the church. Although it was initially hard for her to engage in the interview, as she felt she did not have much to talk about, she suddenly got overexcited when her narration shifted towards her future anticipations.

[W]hen I'm 25, I'll start designing. And then when I'm maybe, when I'm 30 or 31, I've already built my own [design] company. Then, I will start spreading it around other

countries and cities. [...] Where I would start my company is here cause Kenya is my home. So, then after that, I will move it to Paris, then/Then I'd go to/Move it to Greece, and then London, and, uh, maybe, uh, move it to Washington, and then, um, there are so, so many places, then, go to/Spread it to France, Germany as well, and, um, India too. [...] And then I will, like, visit places, many cities, countries and then afterwards, I will build my dream home in Greece, and then I'll settle there [...]. And then, like, when I'm 30, 36 I would start building my dream home in Greece. [...] After I have like spread my company around and I have built my house and everything I've wanted has come through, I can start a family. (ibid.)

Sya's future is clear. She has one goal, and she's thought it all through. She is actively investing in that future. The way she describes where her life is headed illustrates a linear trajectory of spaces that relate to their respective milestones: earn, travel, settle, and reproduce. The chronology of life events is clear. As such it points to the pattern of investive status work as earlier introduced as a common global pattern of middle-class subjectivity. To her it is clear that her goals in life must be reached in a specific chronology, because having a family demands a certain amount of personal, spatial, and financial stability.

From the local present, in which she has very little agency (other than that often depicted for children), she directs all her energies towards a global future in which her life is shaped by spatial freedom. In Sya's case, there is a shift that can be interpreted as an act of self-empowerment by 'jumping scales' (Smith 1993: 90). Sya's example shows that '[t]he "global" and the "everyday" are not separate in young people's emotional lives: their fears and hopes represent both a place-based and scale-jumping critical reflexivity as they navigate the present and look toward the future' (Pain et al. 2010, cited in Judge 2016: 256). The act of jumping scales leads to liberation from her subjugated position in the here and now. It is precisely this aspect that highlights the temporal entanglement of scales, as Sya is jumping not only from the 'here' but also the 'now'. From the local presence, where her narrations are dominated and limited by security measures, Sya travels through biographical space and time, when she shifts into her entrepreneurial future self with planetary agency and freedom of movement.

When we look at the aspect of scale-jumping more closely, Sya seems to directly reverse the scalar depiction of children's agencies as stronger in the local than in the global. Through her future anticipation and planning, she not only actively works on overcoming the local scale, but she is also utterly busy with overcoming her status as a child by a strong future orientation. This also becomes clear when we consider what she wants to design:

[T]here are certain clothes I'd love to wear [...] but I can't cause they're for an adult. So, at least for the kids that are growing up, at least I can do those clothes so that they like [them]. I want to wear something like this but it's only for adults but, 'oh wait, this person designs them'. Yeah, then there's like a certain doll I want to design. It's/I would call it an android doll [...]. [Y]ou have this remote control thing where you can control it. You can see through its eyes with the, the remote control [...] (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.)

Because it's where you get a lot of knowledge to see what you can become in the future. [...] So, in the future, you can be someone who has so many talents, too, and you can find out. Yeah, 'cause some want to be doctors; so the, the teachers say you just have to keep on learning how to do the science things. Yeah. (Lale, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Maziwa, N.)

There are many examples in which the children of the sampling anticipate their futures. It becomes clear that, first, these future aspirations are very realistic and have very little to do with becoming a princesses and astronauts. Second, against the background of the socio-economic comparison, the importance of the future also appears to be middle class-specific. As this applies to children in Nairobi and Berlin alike, this finding supports Olaf Groh-Samberg et al.'s (2014) hypothesis that status work, such as investing in the future, for example through education, is a translocally connecting element of middle classness and additionally accounts for middle-class children. Although the young middle-class speakers want to explore their talents and do not shy away from aiming big (for example, becoming a football star), they also know how important it is to be modest and to have a plan B (Stephan). Most young middle-class speakers had one possible idea of their future.

The examples of Sya and Stephan show that children are very much engaged with their own biographies, actively constructing their life course and working on realising their talents. Conversely, it turns out that the adult speakers did not say as much about their future aspirations as children. This makes it rather hard to see a figuration here. Nevertheless, the extracurricular education (e.g. in music or art schools) that the middle-income speakers already received as children during the 1960s indicates that status work is nothing new. This is different in the lower-income spectrum across the sampling, where the topologies of formal education are confined to the time spent at school. Children of that socio-economic spectrum also relate differently to their futures. However, they too have a vision of themselves in the future, such as 10-year-old Tatiana, who says that 'when I grow up, I would like to be a teacher' (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.).

The class comparison, however, shows that children from the third and fourth spectrum share much more thoughts about the future and often have clearer visions of the next steps towards realising their goals, which are often globally oriented. It is very likely that this difference to some extent relates to the ability of middle- and upper-income children to invest towards this future – either because their families have the economic capital to invest in additional education, or simply because of the cultural capital that children like Stephan have, whose grandfather was also an architect and has left a small library of architecture literature to him. The childhood future visions of children from lower-income groups often remain unrealised, because their life conditions often do not allow them to reach them due to their limited access to the necessary resources. Life instead sends them on routes where they must often manoeuvre through precarious realities, full of detours and spontaneous junctions. Children from middle- and upper-middle-class spectrums, by contrast, have much more planning reliability in realising their future goals. We can assume that with the rapid increase of spaces that aim to develop children's skills as part of meritocratic systems, the lives of middle- and upper-middle-

class children unfold much more easily on linear trajectories. The life trajectory specific to middle classness comes with certain costs, as such a life is only reached by status work. The following engagement with the topologies of play and discipline illustrates how the corporeal becoming of children has been forged towards reaching that status. This engagement simultaneously brings with it a highly relevant insight into cultural aspects of status work from the perspective of childhood and informs the vague discourse on global middle classness on the scale of the subject and the body.

7.1.2 Topologies of Play and Discipline

In the following subchapters, I outline the spatial figuration of childhood on the scale of the subject and the body, concentrating on aspects of play and discipline. In doing so, I focus on how corporeal becoming is discursively produced and figurates on the basis of the specific social topologies that are connected to play and discipline and figured within the age comparison.

7.1.2.1 Ludic Bodies in Field Figurations

Children are involved with material and immaterial worlds full of fiction, speculation, and possibilities, sometimes without clear boundaries between what is real and what is imaginative. Their imagination is full of mimetic relations with the material world. But that does not mean that their play is limited to the cultural orders of that material world. Playing instead manoeuvres children's figurative selves through worlds constantly transforming while setting objects free from their cultural meaning in a constant process of re-worlding. Hence, a fruit crate turns into a sailboat, and two stones held in front of the eyes figurate into binoculars. This romantic vision of children's play twists a little abruptly when Neo says that play is also 'endless creation and playing on the server, together with more than [a] thousand people' (Neo, 10 yrs *2010, male, Neukölln, B.). The following illustrations of the topological figurations will engage deeper with that rupture and show how middle-class childhood play is related to fields that have figured tremendously over time and against the background of mediatisation and digitalisation. Fields are social topologies that are very dominant in the narrations connected to children's play. Many games require a flat surface – a space where play can be staged and evolve. In the following, I will illustrate how these playing fields figurate over time and how this figuration discursively alters children's corporeal becoming at the same time.

7.1.2.1.1 Gendered Play: Competition versus Care (1960–1990)

'We used to play marbles most of all', says Elliot (15 yrs, *2004, male, Kariokor, N.). He continues, while staging a little tutorial for me on the red-white checked cloth that covered our table in the garden of Alliance Française in downtown Nairobi:

We would dig a hole – a small hole. Then we draw, uh, no, we draw the marbles. Let's say we're playing, me and you; you have a marble, I have a marble. We throw it. Maybe yours lands here – here's the hole, and then mine lands here. So, your aim is to hit this marble that's here, and then after you hit it [...], you hit the marble here, and you, you're,

let's say, you've hit my marble, your marble comes here. So, your next aim is to throw the marble into the hole, but if you miss, the game continues. (ibid.)

A couple of days later, at the same table, Chola (26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ajani, N.) tells me that as a kid, 'you just wake up, brush your teeth, take breakfast, and you're outside the door. Yeah. You go play with marbles'. During the following week, again sitting at the same table, Pele remembers how he 'played with marbles [...] a lot' (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.). If we consider the example of marbles and look at the spatial relations of play, one thing that immediately becomes vivid is that marbles are played on flat ground. They are small, often colourful glass balls approximately the size of the eye's iris. Marbles are played delicately by hands, which snap and flick, while the body must get close to the ground. That ground must be even, so the ball does not roll into any obstacle. It needs to be a field, and for some variations of the game, the field is, at best, a dry and hard soil ground where one can dig little bowls. Many such competitive games that the speakers played during childhood require fields. Usually these fields are outside. They work like open-air stages, where ludic bodies perform and play, for example, 'rounders, [or] dodge ball' (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.). Until the late 1990s, the games that appear in the narrations were various outdoor games. Even if they, as I mentioned, at times vary depending on specific contexts, it is recognisable from the perspective of the body that all these games bring the body into strong motility, as they are (variations of) sport games. Within these sport (related) games, children's play is structured by their respective specific socio-material topologies. As Kili's example illustrates, matters of power and agency are constantly negotiated during this type of play:

Shake is a kind of game where it's split into [...] territories that you're guarding. [...] This is their square to guard. So, you're not supposed to get passed them. When you get to this end, this part [is] called Shake. [...] We used to draw on the floor with stones. [...] So your point is for you guys, for only one of you, to make it from this point to this point and back. So, if you make it to this from, from the beginning to this end and back, you win the game, and it only has to be one of you to make it. So, it, it helped us learn how to, to work as teams, [...] /Let's say this is about 20 kids playing this game. [...] So, so, we learned how to strategise. Some of us would be sacrificial lambs. So, the only point is if I tap you like this, you're out. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

Splitting, guarding, teaming, being tapped out. All these play-related actions are constituted by the social practice of differentiation and are therefore linked to the spatial figure of the territory. While the game is based on a territorial spatial figuration, the dimensions of social interactions learnt or practised during the game that Kili described are also teamwork and strategising. Both draw on specific modalities of the body's spatiality at play. Within teamwork, the body must accomplish complex tasks within an assemblage of, in this case, 20 other bodies. Therefore, the players must bring their bodies into collaborative motility with each other. These bodies must act relative to one another and to the field drawn on the floor. All bodies must collaborate to make the game happen, but the collaboration is different according to the side to which the body belongs. Within this most general collaborative rule or logic of the game, each group needs to 'strategise',

as the overarching goal is to compete. That means that the players must put their bodies in motion in a logical way that must be communicated with nine other players of the same team, and this communication should not be completely transparent for the opposing team. Most of this communication is done with facial expressions and gestures and without words. The body is highly alert. All this is framed by a social hierarchy in which 'only one of you [is going] to make it', while others remain as 'sacrificial lambs' (ibid.). The corporeal knowledge that is trained here is at the same time a spatialised knowledge, one that experiences the full body in space, in which the body can be driven to its boundaries:

So, we'd have a play fight. So, we're tougher than you. So, there's this term we used [to] call the first body. I don't know if you've heard of that. First body means like the alpha male. Basically, the, the person who no one can, no one can, no one can beat. So, we'd go over, and we'd have play fights. And it's an actual fight and I'm just wondering how we were able to be safe. Cause, cause, cause, as kids, we'd play dangerously, you know. (ibid.)

Kili's memory of playing games renders these sport-related games as gendered as genuinely masculine – following the logic of the survival of the fittest. Instead of creating safe spaces for play, these games function to leave the safe zone and risk something as part of the proving of boy- or manhood. But playing with risk as a boy goes further than being involved in play fights.

We used to play dangerous games, man. We used to put our feet in the/on top of a car to run us over, man! (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.)

Chola's narration does not just deepen the gendered order of these games, contextualised by lower-income childhood, but also highlights the degree of corporeal engagement, where bodies are in intense contact with other human and non-human bodies – experimenting with limits of pain and mutilation. Connected to these class differences, we can also notice that the field is not the hegemonial base of games in lower-income childhoods. While they surely exist, they exist in extended forms, where a field, in the most basic sense of the ground, is opened and space behind the flat surface is discovered.

Essentially, Kibera or Ayani area was a cemetery for the Nubians [Sudanese community] [...] When we were growing up, I remember when we used to dig out, [...] guns. Like, skeletons of guns, [...] like, AK47s. [...] We used to dig out so many things when we used to play. (ibid.)

Chola's play practices show the complexity of play that evolves between groups of children that roam relatively freely in their neighbourhood and socio-material worlds, which at times turns them into archaeologists. In their play, they unconsciously discover traces of global political entanglements. Chola and his friends' play goes below the surface of the world. With this, he brings his body into a completely different spatial order that blurs

common ideas of intrinsic and extrinsic and stresses the fact that we are not on the planet but an integral part of it.

Until the mid-1990s, makeshift toys appear in most of Nairobi's narrations regardless of gender. These toys, above all else the makeshift ball, appeared additionally throughout the entire socio-economic spectrum. However, for less affluent children, the lack of industrial toys also increases the variety and complexity of makeshift toys. To create them, children like Chola really needed to gather information and material to realise their toy creations:

We never had the money to buy these toys [...]. So we used to, we used to make our own toys and make cars through/With wire. [...] So, when we watched *Home Alone*, [...] we saw remote cars for the first time, yeah? [...] So, we were like, 'Eh, man, you guys, we have to make a remote car with these wires.' So we even made a remote car with wires. [...] There's one we made using, like, wire. We drive them along with steering wheels. There is one we made them with like, uh, motors and batteries. Yeah. But, yeah, we used to make wires, and then we make boxes with, uh, cars with boxes of milk. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ajani, N.)

Besides these more complex field figurations accompanied by complex makeshift toy making – where the materiality of that space is not only used as a surface to play on but is a constitutive part of the game – most middle-classed social topologies such as fallows, courts, and pitches are gendered and prevail more dominantly in the male speaker's childhood narrations and maps. As such, they are more marked by physical competition in groups characterised by hierarchies and spatial practices of differentiation marked by a high degree of competition. These games do not unfold spontaneously and usually relate to an abstraction of space and spatial relations, such as a field drawn on the floor. They are played according to strict rules, limiting the amount of invention during the game. These games are often highly competitive and based on territorial logics of differentiation, often enacted by competing teams. As such, they (re)produce the spatial figure of territories.

While the social topology of fields in which children compete against each other or in teams could be identified as more central to the male speakers, the play practices of female speakers were additionally and more strongly characterised by the social topologies of corners and niches in which caring and collaborating was the hegemonial social practice. Whereas the field-related play of the male speakers in fallows, courts, and pitches took place exclusively outdoors, the play in corners and niches belongs to both outdoor places in which an indoor place (mostly home) is staged and to indoor (and often domestic) places. The games predominantly named by the female speakers, such as 'mother, father, child', 'playing house', 'playing cooking', or 'hide and seek', often require much smaller topologies that tend to be more cluttered. Unlike competitive sports games, these games are more often cooperative and based on role play involving objects, such as dolls or cooking equipment, and elements, such as water, leaves, and soil. In the games more commonly played by female speakers, the play often begins with objects being assembled or referring to an already existing assemblage, as Paula (58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.) described: 'But sometimes some rubbish was lying around there [in the woods], and we

kind of played house with it.' As such, they reproduce domestic topologies even though they are played outside. In these games, children mimic domestic rituals and engage in role play in which care-work relations are central.

We also played, uh, what we call *kalongo*. *Kalongo* is [...] role-playing. So, you are the dad. You're the mom. [...] So, we would go, uh, take leaves and start cutting. [...] I think that really he-, helped us bond, and you also learned to share. (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.)

These small-scale domestic and care-related characteristics of the games may also relate to the fact that most female speakers grew up comparatively more protected and spatially restricted than the male speakers. Furthermore, the unequal parenting roles are reflected in these games – where mothers are much more involved in the domestic sphere and in reproductive practices.

The spatial figures produced within the topologies of corners and niches are places, as they involve an assemblage of objects (for example, blankets over a table) and players that enact and mimic other social topologies or the reference to an already existing assemblage (such as that of 'mother, father, child'). These games remain important throughout the generational comparison. Noteworthy is that these gendered aspects of play cannot easily be related to socio-economic status. Gender therefore cuts through the socio-economic comparison. Religion additionally plays a role here and is entwined with the gendered aspects of children's spatial motility and mobility. Analia (13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.), who is growing up in a Muslim family, for example, is not allowed to play with male children at all.

Besides the gender-related differences, there are also many similarities in children's play. There is even evidence for children who actively reverse common gender roles connected to play. Additionally, the gender difference seems to be contextualised by age. In that context, Kili (32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.) told me, 'So, when we were younger, we'd mix with the girls'. It becomes clear that space and spatial relations take part in the discursive re/production of a gendered corporeal becoming through play. But against discursive spatial order, children do not just occupy the positions kept for them by their specific societal context; they also reverse them, like Mildred, who remembers,

Mostly, I used to associate with the boys. The football. Uh, we used to play a game called, um, *chapa ngoto*. It's, um, okay, you're playing football. Like, you have one goal post, right? One goalkeeper. Now, you know, like when the ball passes between your legs, you get hit over here on the head? Yeah. So, *chapa ngoto* is like you're being beaten. I don't know what they call a *ngoto* in English. I really (laughs) I, I don't know. I loved playing that game in/When it's rained, and there is mud, and there is water. (Mildred, 39 yrs, *1979, female, Karen, N.)

These structured, as well as domestic care-work-related games, were frequently played until the late 1990s and in both cities by the second-, third-, and fourth-spectrum speakers of the sampling. Therefore, they can be described as typical for middle-class childhoods beyond their national scale. This does not apply to the speakers at the fringes of

the sampling. In these milieus, these games remain connected to the access to outdoor play spaces. Most of their play is less structured by rules and often involves drifts within wider geographical realms, paired with some sort of serendipity, bringing them into all kinds of situations. Finally, these middle class-specific games are marked by temporal structures that follow time patterns, where play often fills the time gaps between appointments in the weekly programme. This limited and scheduled time for play marks a big difference from children from less affluent families.

7.1.2.1.2 Game Boards and Screens (1990–2020)

During the late 1990s, the games that until then had been characteristic of middle-class childhood are mentioned much less frequently in the narrations. This must be viewed in relation to the figurations of the social topologies that middle-class children have access to, as they spend less time outdoors. From this point on in all childhood narrations, boardgames, TVs, computers, and other gadgets appear. Hence, game boards and various screens become the new field topologies, increasingly replacing the outdoor fallows, courts, and pitches, as well as corners and niches. These new field figurations become central mediums of children's play within the third and fourth socio-economic spectrum.

When it comes to the gendered aspects of this increasingly screen-related play, chatting and social media seem to be slightly more popular for female speakers, whereas male speakers are more involved with playing video games. When I asked Sya (12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.) how she spends her time on the phone, she responded, 'Uh, like right, now my friend is on holiday, so I, like, chat with her. Sometimes, we just play games together, and we chat'. When I asked what kind of games she plays, she answered, 'Truth or dare, two truths, one lie, something like that. And then, like, maybe I play a few games but/Like, Subway Surfers or Gymnastic Queen 'cause I'd love to learn how to do gymnastics' (ibid.). Tatiana highlighted another gendered activity connected to screens; when she is on her computer, she watches movies like '*Wonder Woman*' or 'play[s] a baking game' (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.). Like the older female speakers, who would play, for example, 'mother-father-child' or 'house' in the social topologies of niches and corners, the younger female speakers are also involved in more cooperative and care-related themes, such as chatting or baking. These findings show that neither TV nor internet and social media overcome children's gendered (play) practices but rather reproduce them, as in the previous example, where womanhood, domesticity, and caring, as in catching up with each other, matters more to female speakers.

Male speakers, on the contrary, say they 'grow up with a lot of PlayStation' (Milo, 15 yrs, *2004, male, Kileleshwa, N.). The games they play involve fighting that is often connected to politics contextualised by the Cold War, such as

Call of Duty [which is] a first-person shooter [where]; you're like a prisoner of war [and] are [being] captured by the Russians, and you are brainwashed to kill the President of America. (ibid.)

Other games that are central to Milo's gaming culture besides *Call of Duty* include *Tekken*, which is 'a Japanese fighting game', and *Mortal Combat*, another 'fighting game'. Most

of these games (re)produce the gendered play practice of competition and differentiation that was already constitutive of the outdoor field topologies dominant in past childhoods. Children spend so much time engaged with these media cultures and technologies that they often have no 'free time' left after formal education in curricular and extracurricular activities.

We go to school, then come home. Then, if you have no homework, we go and use a gadget, like we go watch TV or play games on the computer or on the phone, on/or on the tablet. (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.)

This means that after a day of sitting in school, those who engage with these new media cultures of play again sit and move only virtually. When I imagine Nuhu's body throughout his narration, changing between all the screens – from that of the car's window to the various gadgets he uses – some sort of new version of the homunculus appears, with eyes incredibly big and thumbs so long and thick compared to the rest of his steadily shrinking body. In all these screen topologies, children engage in complex worlds. In these worlds, motility plays a huge role, as through their avatars, children are sent on missions to fight for humanity. While their virtual bodies are brought to extremes, their analogue body experiences only vicariously. Children's corporeal becoming figurates drastically with this topological shift, as they do not experience themselves in space but as projected onto space. Their corporeality transcends as it shifts onto the bodies of the avatars – the other selves that children now identify with in their virtual games. But motility also gets more extreme, involving bleeding and sweating, setting the (avatar's) body into a state of exception while 'racing [and...] fighting' (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.) Worlds unfold in which children have an incredible amount of agency during 'endless creation' (Neo, 10 yrs *2010, male, Neukölln, B.), while they sit at home on the other side of the screen, protected from any possible and mostly unwanted adventure outside of the house. One does not need to speculate much to realise that the adventure-driven characteristics of these games serve as a substitute for all the adventures lost out there when middle- and upper-middle-class children are protected and sheltered.

The shift in field topologies that has taken place since the 1990s is notably a shift in size. Field topologies figured from relatively large outdoor spaces (fallows, courts, and pitches), which used to be situated in yards of homes, churches, or schools that allow big groups of children to play together, to indoor spaces and spaces sized down to boards and screens. However, we must also note that behind these screens, large or perhaps endless virtual worlds unfold. While size therefore does not seem to de- or increase, the position of the body shifts from being a tiny part of that huge analogue world to being the director of what unfolds behind that small screen, holding possibility for 'endless creation' (Neo). Consequently, the relation between the body and the world of play is rescaled. At the same time, this shift is related to losing the body in the experience, as the body stays out of every experience behind the screen. Even though on the server you can still 'play together with a thousand other people' (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.), this play is no longer characterised by children who know each other and become with each other in a corporeal co-presence during their play. What really changed in middle- and upper-middle-class milieus is the motility of the body itself. Whereas bodies used to be in

action, today a big part of children's corporeality becomes obsolete, substituted by virtual avatars. Yet interestingly, corporeality and motility play a big role in these games, whereas for the playing child the body stays on the outside of every experience. Something that should feel like an ontological crisis does not, because there are avatars who bridge the experience, such as in ego or first-person shooter games, where the avatar is represented just as the player would see their own body from where their eyes are. Interestingly, despite all this change in the spatial, temporal, and social quality of play, the topology of fields has remained dominant for children's games, and with it the spatial figuration of territories has survived.

When zooming out again to the overall generational comparison, it becomes apparent that, even though board games and TVs rarely appeared before the 1990s, there are exceptions, possibly related to the socio-economic situatedness of the children. Caroline, for example, who was born in 1957 and belongs to the fourth spectrum, recalled that she played many board games and also mentioned the role of the TV during her childhood. The games that 'would be [played were] Ludo [as well as] Snakes and Ladders [...]. Yeah, the board games, [...] and then, of course, there was TV, you know' (Caroline 62 yrs, female, Karen, N.). During the 1990s and early 2000s and in the narrations of the speakers of the second spectrum, such as Analia, playing outside, within the compound is still integral part of her topologies of play. Next to that board games and TV take on a central role. However, other gadgets, such as computers, tablets, PlayStations, and Xboxes were not mentioned and were also not visible at her place.

But you can go play downstairs, watch TV, whatever. We just play normal games, [...] Snakes and Ladders, Uno, [...] The Game of Life. [...] Uh, like catch and catch downstairs, or ice and water, or playing bikes downstairs. (Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.)

This is the same for Steve, who also belongs to the second spectrum and describes his topologies of play in a very similar way when he mentioned what he and his brothers do after playing football outdoors:

[I]f we get bored and tired [...] we go inside the house, we could play a card game, maybe even monopoly or we watch TV' (Steve, 11 yrs, *2008, male, Kawangware, N.).

While home is becoming increasingly central to all children in the generational comparison, there are enormous differences regarding class. Children from the third and fourth spectrums prefer to be 'at home because you never know you can miss a new episode and it's not going to come back' (Makena, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Westlands, N.). Home is the new place to be. Media, such as television series, thereby create time regimes that repeatedly place the home at the centre of children's spatial relations at certain times of the day, every day. Whereas television programming was scheduled at set times throughout the day, the internet offers a wealth of entertainment that is both infinite and simultaneous, breaking down any sense of structure in time and causing children to lose their sense of time completely.

[O]n weekends [...] we don't like [to] go outside and come over and things like that, we, we just, we just stay and, you know, watch our phones, um, playing, you know, just in the house not doing much. (Pierre, 13 yrs, *2006, male, Lavington, N.)

Since around 2010, the frequency of screen topologies has increased even more with smartphones, computers, tablets, PlayStations, and Xboxes. Aside from exceptions, such as gaming lounges and internet cafés, where children of the first and second spectrum would go with friends to 'play the PS [PlayStation]' (Elliot, 15 yrs, *2004, male, Kariokor, N.) occasionally, most screen topologies appear in the house – a place where children of the third and fourth spectrum increasingly spend their time. Pele's comparison of his own school routines and that of kids today, gives an idea, why children might be currently more drawn into staying home:

[S]chool was 8:30. [...] Not like these kids of nowadays; I pity them. They wake up at 4:00 am in the morning, they're back home at 8:00 pm, and they've still got to do homework, then they've got to sleep and wake up – not us. (Pele, 62 yrs *1958, male, Westlands, N.)

Throughout the generational comparison, the time that school children have daily to play freely is reduced increasingly. While during the early 1970s, children 'used to play games most of the time, [and had] very little homework [to do]' (ibid.), during the early 1990s, 'childhood was filled with a lot of play' (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N). Also for Elliot, born in 2004 from the third spectrum, outdoor play after school seems to have little space next to his daily routines:

[At] six, I should be in school. So, at 5:30 [I] wake up, yeah, [...] school [starts] at six. [...] then] study, till four, but we also played marbles in school, soccer in school. Those were like 30 minutes every day in school. Then, go home at four. After home, [I] take a shower, go out again, play a little, come back, do homework, supper and then I sleep, yeah. (Elliot, 15 yrs, *2004, male, Kariokor, N.)

Similarly, Nuhu's example suggests that playtime keeps in general reducing. He is from the upper-third spectrum of the sampling, and he says, 'We play [...] but not that much 'cause most of the [time] we're busy with homework' (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.). Tatiana's following example shows that the dominance of school commitments during the week also breaks down socio-economic differences:

On a school day [...] I wake up. I take a bath. I go down and have some breakfast. I come back and brush my teeth, and I go to school. I come from school. Um, I change. I take another bath. I do my homework. I revise, and I go to bed. I eat supper then I brush my teeth and I go to bed. [No time for play?] No, I don't play on weekdays. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

On weekdays, the play patterns of children from the first and second spectrums therefore differ little from those of children from the third and fourth spectrums. The differences are more noticeable at the weekend, when school commitments tend to take a less prominent role.

For the Berlin speakers, school-related activities also take up a lot of time during weekdays. Instead of going outdoors, Neo says that when school is over, ‘then I usually game [*zocke*], then I read’ (10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.). In Berlin, homework also appears in the weekends for secondary school children.

Then [after Sunday church] I’ll go home, get some rest. And then I start either studying or doing homework. And when I’ve finished that, I hang around again, reading or on my mobile phone. And sometimes, I also help out in the kitchen. Then we eat. (Lana, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

For middle-class and upper-middle-class children, this structure is not new. Raphael, born in 1988, for example, says that his childhood was ‘limited to the flat, to school and then to music school’ (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.). He adds, ‘I was never the kind of person who didn’t want to go home, [...] who somehow ended up roaming around [...]’ (ibid.). And even his mother, Rosi, reported something similar.

The school was [...] a part-time school [...] And apart from that, it was quite normal to go home briefly and have lunch. [...] And then, I often withdrew relatively quickly after lunch and read a lot before I did any homework. So reading was a real relaxation for me; I enjoyed it so much. So, and then I did my homework [...]. At that age, I also went to sport at least once a week in the afternoon. [...] So, there was a relatively tight rhythm, I think. (Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.)

In the transnational comparison, we observe the growing loss of disposable time (Marx 1973) in children’s play through extracurricular activities much earlier in Berlin than in Nairobi. In East Berlin this also relates to the politically motivated competitive extracurricular sports activities funded by the socialist system of the German Democratic Republic.

At some point when I was older, I went to the sports club with a friend, so we did a lot of sport on the River Spree. [...] [S]everal times a week; that was always the case in the East: if you do sports, then it needed to be right away competitive sport (laughs). And then I was somehow training three times a week and at least one day at the weekend. (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Köpenick, B.)

Although homework seems at least a little less central during primary school in the Berlin sampling, the younger speaker of the third- and fourth-spectrum perform an extracurricular programme after school, which Stephan described as follows:

[On Mondays] I go home at 3.30 pm. I do my football things. [I] wait for dad. And then we go to football training, [...], then we shower there and get changed. And then we go home. [...] Then Tuesday is my day off, so I come home at 4.00 pm, and then I’m on my own and do whatever I want. [...] Or every Wednesday I also have French [...] And on Thursday, I go at 4.00 pm, I play the flute. And then I go home alone, and there’s usually dad with mum, and everyone is there. And then we play a bit, and then we have dinner. (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.)

In Nairobi, these extracurricular activities are also strongly connected to socio-economic situatedness. This is because these activities for children are mostly part of private school programmes in so-called 'clubs'.

And then we have the clubs on Fridays, and that's my favourite day. We usually have clubs, and we usually do/do more activities. See, like, they come to teach you different stuff, like when I said horse riding is one of the clubs, first aid, uh, skating, basketball, football, hockey. There are others. But, I [have done] first aid [since] Year 4. So, that's what I do. [...] It's very fun. It's a big place. Then we have, like, different activities to do. There is swimming, hockey, football, tag rugby and basketball. (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.)

In such weekly programmes, children do not just freely play, and even if they do, this play-time is part of the structure and is scheduled for a certain day. Most of these extracurricular programmes predominantly aid in the development of children's skills and must therefore be seen as productive. It seems that leaving children to play freely is not seen as promoting their talents. Looking at the figuration of corporeal becoming from the 2000s onwards, it is clear that children's bodies are becoming much more constrained, while at the same time they are supposed to unfold under guidance (for example, sports or music education). Children are therefore subject to enormous temporal structural constraints that constantly determine when they should be in one body (for example, doing maths, playing music) or another (for example, playing football). Children, regardless of their socio-economic situation, thus learn at an early age to conform to and reproduce structures. However, it is clear that structuring increases with socio-economic status, which means that middle-class and upper-middle-class children have very little disposable time. In that context, Lisa admits of her ballet class that 'sometimes I don't enjoy it, but it's important for my body' (Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.). In such a perspective, extracurricular activities are highlighted with reference to their aim of developing children's skills, thus strengthening the hypothesis of investive status work as a translocally connecting pattern of middle classness.

7.1.2.2 Subjugated Bodies - from Discipline to Control

In this subchapter, corporeal becoming is contextualised by experiences and memories of subjugation through violence, discipline and control. Both are integral parts of children's lives worldwide. Within the adult-child binary, the child's body is inferior and easily becomes the subject of subjugation, as it to some extent needs guidance and protection. However, the experiences of subjugation that some of the speakers shared with me go far beyond guidance and protection. Especially in Nairobi, many speakers shared experiences of family related as well as institutional mental and corporeal violence. In this context, many speakers shared some of their most transgressive and intimate experiences and memories with me. That the body is so often the object of discipline and control is crucial when we remind ourselves that the body is

the opposite of a utopia: that which is never under different skies. It is the absolute place, the little fragment of space where I am, literally embodied [*faire corps*]. (Foucault 2006: 230)

This inability to escape one's body renders the scales of the subject and the body so inseparable and, unfortunately, so fertile as a medium, source, and location for discipline through subjugation. Whereas Michel Foucault's historical analysis of governmentality, discipline, and biopolitics largely missed to incorporate the perspectives of children (and, as we know from Silvia Federici (2004), that of women), the following analysis gives important insights into the urgent necessity to engage with children's situations. The range of subjugation shared by the speakers varies with the different topological contexts in which subjugation was exercised on them. Whereas the scalar entanglement of subject and body must be understood as the object, the medium, the source, and the location for this subjugation, the spatial order in which subjugation is practised is embedded in other social topologies that contextualise it. Interestingly and shockingly, it is the home, church, and school – so those social topologies in which children are largely believed to be safe – which are the spatialities in which children are most exposed to mental and corporeal violence from adults.

7.1.2.2.1 Domestic Violence

We knew which family would be having a father beating the mother. We would hear the screaming at night. It happened in my family. I felt so embarrassed because I knew everyone would know that [it was] us. That really had an effect on my self-esteem. (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.)

Until the 2000s, domestic violence is a central topic in the Nairobi speakers' narrations. It is hard to say whether domestic violence decreased after that, or whether, perhaps, the young speakers (with one exception) just did not mention it. If it was silence, that could be related to the fact that, as most young speakers were met at their homes, their family members were close by, even if they usually did not stay in the same room with us. This could make it hard for a child to share such experiences. The only exception was four-year-old Said, the youngest of all speakers. After she told me how much she liked her sister, I asked her who else is important to her in her life, to which she replied: 'Not my, not my, my, my, my grandma. I don't like her. She beats me' (Said, 4 yrs, *2016, female, Parklands, N.). The biographical narrations reveal, that although home is often related to the idea of a safe space, children are often at risk in this social topology. Gathi also notes that 'home was not always connected to good memories', and explained what caused that impression:

[W]hen my parents had a huge fight, and [her] baby sister was lying on the floor on a blanket, while [her] parents were screaming, and [she] was really worried about her (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.)

Corporeal violence at home appears regardless of the socio-economic status of the family. As such, Amina, situated in the first spectrum of the middle-class sampling, shared similar experiences, where she felt safe as long as she was not home.

[I] grew up in a family where there was domestic violence. I rarely wanted to go home early. [...] Like, I grew up being the good kid, you know, school, home, doing all my chores on time. (Amina, 21 yrs, *1998, female, Ruai, N.)

When it comes to gender, domestic violence and discipline are exercised by both parents and grandparents. But discipline was not only a matter of the core family. Several examples in the narrations also show that children, especially those of the first and second spectrum, used to belong to a larger community, which supported them but also disciplined them.

Like, uh, my neighbour can be like my mom. She can beat me up when she feels me, like, doing something wrong. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ajani, N.)

Discipline takes on different shapes, but many speakers were directly exposed to corporeal violence at their homes, where, as Mildred remembers, 'any mischief we got into, we always [...] got a whooping' (Mildred, 39 yrs, *1979, female, Karen, N.). Kili framed this form of discipline by situating it in a wider African cultural context when he said,

There was discipline at home. Our [...] parents beat us, yeah, being from an African home. But it wasn't, it wasn't sadistic punishment. It was punishment [because] you've done something wrong, you know. Uh, it was different from what I see in the movies [...] Ours was, we had a tree at the front of our house. So, my mum would pick a branch this, this size, exactly, like this, and it would/By the time you're running it's, it's hit you on your back, or on your neck, you know, but she's hit you once, and then she'll call you and tell you 'this is the reason why'. So, it was, it structured. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

Whereas in the context of home, it is domestic violence, in upcountry,¹ it is 'hard manual labour' (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N) that contextualises children's experiences of subjugation. Until the 2000s, Nairobi children were an integral part of the harvest work in upcountry. The harvest season fits perfectly into the long summer school break, during which working city parents are in urgent need of supervision for their children.

So, we'd go and help out. And I think, also, yeah, 'cause August was also/was harvesting time. So, we go to the garden and harvest maize and, uh, what else was there? There was maize, predominantly. There was maize, there were avocados, big avocados, and, yeah, pretty much that[s] it. I think that's also why he [her grandfather]

1 Upcountry is commonly referred to as 'ancestral or tribal land' in Kenya, elaborated on and relating to the scale of home (Chapter 7.2).

wanted us there. He would say he wants to see us, but, no, he just wants additional hands. (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.)

Upcountry was therefore also an integral part of the time management of urban families. But beyond these matters of time management, Stella, like many others, pointed out the cultural meaning of upcountry.

[T]hey didn't want us to get spoilt. So, and they wanted us to learn both the urban life and the rural life. [... O]ur holidays were usually three weeks [...] [so] we'd be taken to the rural area, and there we'd be left with my aunt and my grandmother, and there we'd learn the hard life. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

This figure of learning the 'hard life', sometimes referred to as 'real life', was a distinct educational pattern of urban middle-class families in the past. Today it can still be found, but in the context of middle-class milieus it has lost its fundamental role in children's upbringing. Stella summed up what this 'hard life' was like:

[M]y grandmother was not a very jolly person. And I think that she resented us. She felt that we were very spoilt. [...] So, in the morning, when you are waking up at six o'clock, they're yelling at you. It's freezing cold because the area we come from it's very dry, so the mornings are very cold. And then you go to the *boma* [building] with the cows, and you're walking through dung [...] and it's sticky, and it's smelly and whatever, and then you have to learn how to milk and [...] get them prepared, walk them a long distance. When you get there, to the river, you know, if it's dry, then you have to make a hole and then get the water, and then also fill the jerry cans with water, and walk back and make sure they don't lose any cows because you're going to get into trouble. So, that, that time it was just so stressful, and we don't/and you haven't done it that often so it was hard for us. And then after that, the whole day was packed. [...] [T]he whole day and cooking with the three stones and [...] pounding maize. It's in a long hollow board, and then you put dried maize in it and you mash it to take out the corn, the cover of the corn. And then after that, you put it [in] a grinder and then that's what you'd use as *ugali* [traditional East African cereal porridge]. [...] So, uh, that was our reality check. [...] You can't slack off and, you know, take a break and hang out. It was continuous manual labour for hours in the hot sun. (ibid.)

Stella's elaborate description of upcountry highlights that it was not only the physical exhaustion from hard manual labour, the responsibility for huge animals and the weather conditions that were challenging for the children. It was also the social coldness with which some children were addressed and treated as spoilt by the city and unworthy around the topologies of nature. For many children, that meant switching from being disciplined at home and in school in their everyday life to undergoing the discipline of the harsh rural environment, which was not at all comfortable and where the children felt like 'urban others'.

The sensory depth of the memories in the context of upcountry is also crucial here, as many speakers describe their bodies as if they were not in their element – a situation, that evoked stress and anxiety.

When darkness creeps in now, it comes with some fear of the unknown. You don't know what to expect. [Y]ou will hear the, the sound of wild, wild animals from afar, uh, and [...] there are still cheetah[s] around, there are lion[s] around, there is this one around, so at night [w]e should always be indoors. Uh, so that was a bit, you know, threatening. (James, 41 yrs, *1978, male, Jericho, N.)

Besides hard manual labour and the fear of darkness and wild animals, cultural aspects, such as the imposed idea of belonging to the external family or the ethnic community, could be experienced as confusing for children. James remembered how people in up-country were introduced to him.

'This is another brother of yours. This one is your father. This one is your mother.' So, this was creating some sense of a little bit of confusion because then everybody is my brother if he's (laughs), he's of the same age or so. And everybody is my father if he's/he is of the age of my dad. Everybody is my mother if [she is] the age of, of my mom. Okay, I came to interpret it later on that, uh, uh, it means they are extended family, and you are bound by some blood relations. [...] He [father] used to say that these are, are your people, uh, more than those ones whom you are/you think you are closer to [who] are in Nairobi. (ibid.)

There were no (hi)stories of corporeal violence from upcountry. Discipline here rather took the form of hard manual labour. The fact that children were involved in labour looks first as if the concept of subjugation that rests on the child-adult binary is subverted within the topologies of the rural. Children worked just like adults. But with regard to the emotional aspects of this experience, they did not feel empowered and on an equal footing with adults but instead felt subjected to their power, rituals, and traditions. What is rendered as problematic here is not so much the life lived in the rural per se as the fact that as city children the speakers found themselves in unknown territories, with different rhythms that they often felt they had not been given time to adapt to, while they were expected to function.

7.1.2.2.2 Institutional Discipline: School and Church

Other than in the context of home, where only one younger speaker shared experiences of corporeal violence with me, in the context of school and church, such experiences accumulate throughout the entire age comparison.

We also have a parade ground [at school], where we all assemble and listen to the headmistress speak to us. She tells us how we should, like when we do something wrong, she corrects us. She tells us to do the right thing, obviously. It's a Catholic school, so the mistress is a sister. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

Religious institutions, predominantly Christian, still run many schools in Nairobi. The formal school system was developed in colonial Kenya, where it was strongly linked to missionaries. Connected to that today is a memory of a welfare system that privileged a few, such as Morris, born in 1962 in Embakasi Village, one of the settlements erected for Kenyan civil servants in colonial Nairobi.

[T]hey used to sponsor so many students, children, yeah. And, uh, you/Like I learned in a Catholic school, yeah, before the government took over. Things used to be so good [to] a point that we'd receive books, everything on time. They used to run the school so well. Even you are given lunch. Yeah. (Morris, 57 yrs, *1962, male, Embakasi Village, N.)

Here, 'before the government took over' means before independence. Morris's memories of the colonial times are positive. As the son of a civil servant working for the railway industry, he was one of the few comparatively privileged Black Kenyan children allowed to live in the city in government housing. Pele, whose ancestors were close to the colonial government, also retains a friendly tone towards that past and emphasises the intergenerational transfer connected to the values and norms of those days.

My grandparents grew up in a mission with missionaries, so we're very [...] biblical [...]. So, Sundays, Sunday church was a must whatever happened. So even me, I instilled it in my kids. (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.)

The term 'instilling' is very prominent in the Nairobi narratives of the speakers born before and during the 1960s. Many speakers reported having been subjected to some sort of instilling. Etymologically, *instil* comes from the Latin root *stilla*, meaning a drop. Something instilled in a person relates to both their subjectivity and corporeality. The scale of the subject and body appears fluid here – fluid in a way that drops can be instilled in it and it changes its figure. Instilling can be related to a mutually agreed transfer of norms and values from one person to another or from one generation to another, but it can also relate to rather violent inscriptions. In the context of her experience studying at a Catholic school in Nairobi, Tatiana describes the ways in which the instilling of norms and values is practised in her school.

Um, they [teachers] take sticks, and they beat you [in school]. Sometimes, they take bamboo sticks. They are white. Then they put cello tape, then they punish you. [C.M.:And where do they hit?] The hand. The hand or the buttocks. For boys. Only the buttocks for boys, but for girls, obviously only the hand. [They do it] when you do something really, really wrong [like] making noise [or] playing in class. [What do you feel about being punished that way for the things that you do?] It's not bad, but I don't like being punished. But it's not bad because they're just correcting us. [...] Because once you have been punished, you learn from your mistake. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

In Kenya, corporeal punishment has been banned since 2010 by the new constitution, which states that 'every person "has the right to freedom and security [...], which includes the right not to be – ... (c) subjected to any form of violence from either public or private sources; (d) subjected to torture in any manner, whether physical or psychological; (e) subjected to corporal punishment; or (f) treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner"' (End Corporal Punishment 2022: 1). Even though the age comparison points to the success of the illegalisation of such acts against children, the findings show that they exist today. Tatiana's example also reveals not only that these practices of corporeal disciplining instil moral discourses of what is 'good' in children but also that

corporeal punishment is an integral part of what is 'good', as it shapes and 'corrects' you – not in the sense of a defence but as a normative pattern of education that directly addresses the scalar entanglement of subject and body in which the social topology of the subject appears, which is strongly mouldable by all kinds of adults, from the lord (and his will) to the mistress (and her whip).

So, that is one thing about public schools which I think most of us went through. The beating, the caning. Um, yeah, sometimes it was extreme, and [I] would get blisters. [...] Personally, I feared my teacher more than my parents (laughs). [...] The first day [in standard one], I got pinched (laughs) so badly. So, I didn't even know what I had done. I think I was talking to other people and, um, yeah, so I'm called to the front and, um, you know, she, she, she, she pinched me, uh, right, um, on my thighs. And, um, yeah, I did something very crazy (laughs). I peed on myself. I cried. It was so painful, I peed on myself. (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.)

The practices of 'instilling' could be as manifold as the apparatus built for it. That means that 'you're beaten with a cane or a pipe or in some extreme cases there could be a whip' (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.). But this is not everything; the range of apparatuses invented to instil fear into children's bodies is wide and included also the precise documentation of children's behaviour in school.

You know this, um, watering pipe? So, they used to be cut, they used to be cut into about an inch. And if you, and if you did something wrong, if you didn't do your homework, uh, if you were a noisemaker in class, [...] your name would be written down. So, you're on the naughty list. Uh, but we called it the noisemakers' list. If you talked twice, it was written X2; if you talked thrice, it was written X3. So [...] that would mean that [...] you're going to be, be punished the most seriously. [...] So, so the boys would be beaten on their bottoms with the pipe. [...] And the girls would be, the girls would be beaten on their hands, on the hands. [...] I was afraid, I was really afraid of being beaten by, by that pipe. [...] and then it instilled fear. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

Corporeal violence was not always exercised directly by the teacher. There were also indirect forms of violence in which children were forced to perform various tasks, most of which were physically demanding.

I remember we used to be given a stump. A, a tree which has been cut. And, uh, a big tree stump and you're told to uproot it. For two weeks, you're not going to class. You wake up in the morning, kung, kung, kung, kung, kung until [...] Our hands were, hands were just having blisters because of, uh, digging, digging, digging, um. [...] Oh, it was hell that time. (Morris, 57 yrs, *1962, male, Embakasi Village, N.)

These cruel practices of 'instilling' in educational institutions were furthermore not limited to primary but already started in nursery school, where children were exposed to practices of degrading that were in themselves racialised, where children were taught to stigmatise others at a very early age.

And one thing I remember about it [nursery school] was that they used to divide us. We were divided in[to] one bench called rice [on] one side and another on the other side called *ugali*². If you are placed on the side of *ugali*, it meant you are stupid, and you didn't perform well. Being placed at the side of rice, on the other hand, meant that you are a good child. It's the first time, I remember, that I encountered differentiation. And I would say it made me unfair. We were making so much fun of and really bullying *Wakorino*³. The religious people with Turbans. That was really wrong. (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.)

The moral education children received there from such an early age was mostly based on the practices of differentiation and competition. In such an environment, children learn to survive for themselves instead of practising solidarity. The violent pasts of education in both Kenya and Germany also have to be seen in connection with the figure of the child as 'wild', that developed within the rise of the European bourgeoisie during the 18th century – a figure of a child that does not yet count as human and is therefore inferior – and is as such still prevalent today.

7.1.2.2.3 Historical and Methodological Context of Subjugation

By this point, it must have become clear that all memories of corporeal violence at home and in schools were shared by speakers from Nairobi. It is known that Germany also has a long and dark history of discipline through corporeal punishment not only from the terrifying framework of educational concepts in Nazi Germany, as documented by several studies in historical educational research (e.g., see Bühler et al. 2023). Sabine Andresen, President of the Child Protection Association (*Bundesverband Kinderschutzbund*), even concludes that '[t]he history of education [in Germany] can be told as a history of violence in educational relationships' (translated from Andresen 2018: 6). The missing talk of corporeal violence and discipline in the German sampling must be furthermore reflected on in historical and method(ological) contexts and should not give the impression that children are not subjected to violence in Germany at home and in care institutions. The sampling is not sufficient to be representative in this regard. It is furthermore important to question whether corporeal violence as a form of disciplining was not experienced by the speakers or was simply not shared with me.

Even though corporeal punishment does not appear in the German sampling, school was predominantly referred to with negative connotations and in connection with other forms of discipline involved in children's corporeal becoming.

Unfortunately, I also spend quite a lot of time at school. [...] Because you only study there and can't do anything else. [...] Because you sit there all the time and aren't allowed to do anything. (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.)

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- 2 *Ugali*, common throughout East and Southern Africa, is a dense, cake-like porridge made from white maize or cornmeal.
 - 3 The Akorino are a community of African Christians who follow a faith rooted in the principle of non-violence and spiritual discipline. They are especially recognized for their distinctive white turban, which symbolizes peace, purity, and devotion.

This negative connotation of school can be found throughout the entire age comparison. While Neo complained about the body that cannot move, Anne remembered how she was embarrassed by the teacher in front of the class because she had made a mistake.

Then the [teacher] asked me: 'And one plus one?' And then I said 'one' because I thought/Or maybe because I had also heard one times one. Or because I simply didn't know and just hadn't listened and didn't realise. And then she stood up and laughed at me in front of the whole class. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

It is furthermore important to acknowledge that none of the Berliner speakers went to a Christian school. Most of them went to school in the German Democratic Republic (East Berlin), where corporal violence and other forms of power abuse were banned much earlier (1949) than, for example, in the schools of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Berlin) (1973). It becomes apparent that the specific political orientation of the parents also matters here, when Anne, who grew up in West Berlin, instead highlights the lack of discipline and order in her family.

I don't think we ever ate dinner at the same time in my entire childhood. [...] So, there were no constraints in the sense that we all sat at home so nicely [*artig*]. [...] But my mum, because she was always extra unconventional, didn't work at the table. She actually had all her school things [...] always spread out on the floor. And she just sat cross-legged on the floor, smoked, drank wine, and did her schoolwork. Music with her. Someone always came [a]round. [...] And I hated that. I became a super orderly person because of it, I'm pretty sure. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

Like Anne, many Berlin speakers grew up with a *laissez-faire* parenting style within politically more left-oriented, atheist families. Some of these families were additionally influenced by the ideals of anti-authoritarian education, which was promoted as a part of the 1968 movement in Berlin and elsewhere. In this movement, parents (often students) organised themselves to develop care arrangements in which children would be addressed as self-determined actors – a pedagogical ideal that is critical towards adult abuse of power and as such (even though it exists in other contexts all over the world) has to be seen as embedded in a very specific socio-historical context in Germany.

This is because the anti-authoritarian movement was engaged in critical reflection of the cruel disciplining and subjugation practices of the National Socialist regime. Even though the movement must be understood as heterogeneous, what connected all of them was, on the one hand, a critical engagement with the prevalence of the heteronormative concept of the bourgeois core family and, on the other hand, the urge to develop alternative pedagogical concepts that would prevent children from subjugating themselves to such authoritarianism again (see Baader/Sager 2010: 257). Even though this movement has experienced a lot of criticism, in the intellectually left-oriented milieus in Berlin, we can still find advocates of this educational style, which strongly reverberates in the Berlin narrations.

In this context, Fabian also 'experienced a childhood that wasn't so strongly characterised by parental caesura. [...] [I]t was just cool at home. And, of course, we had enough

space and everything. We didn't step on each other's toes, and my parents were also relatively flexible' (38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.). Even though the anti-authoritarian education movement had one of its centres in West Berlin with the establishment of the self-help parent-led childcare institutions (*Schüler- und Kinderläden*) during the 1960s and 70s, the ideals of such education or anti-education can, at the same time, not be seen as representative of Berlin or Germany in general, as there is a high plurality in parenting styles, many of which are also highly characterised by Christian conservative norms and values. While the pedagogical anti-authoritarian movement is an important context in the Berlin of that time, the lack of subjugation in the memories and experiences of the Berliner speakers also must be reflected on within my entanglement with this milieu and how this relates to the problem of position(ality), which also affects sampling strategies. This also shows that it is much harder to overcome one's position(ality) in terms of sampling strategies in a city where one has lived for more than 15 years, compared with Nairobi, where I was a stranger.

Therefore, the disparity between Nairobi and Berlin must be seen as biased by my sampling and the specific historical context that influenced education concepts in Berlin. This is important, as the current widespread investigations into child abuse in Germany once more point to the existence of an entirely different idea of education (*Erziehung*) that frames children as inferior to adults. These investigations show that it was the norm for adults to use their physical superiority as part of educational measures in the past. They furthermore reveal that the social topologies in which children were (and are) exposed to discipline through corporeal violence, especially often similar to what is observed in the Nairobi narrations, are the home and educational institutions, often run by the Catholic church – social topologies in which children are moreover threatened by sexual abuse (for more, see the publications of the Independent Commission for the Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse, Germany).⁴ Within the reflections on position(ality), I would finally also like to draw from my own biographical context and the experience of diverse Catholic educational institutions and argue that in Christian milieus, such as that one I grew up in during the late 1980s and 90s in the predominantly Catholic rural area of the (former) German Democratic Republic in what is now the State of Thuringia, corporeal punishment and power abuse was part of the education in schools, and participation in church-related rituals was often performed under the pressure of families and the wider village community. Therefore, my and also my parents' 'German' experience of education styles is much closer to that of the Nairobi speakers, even though the degree of violence my 'generation' experienced in that rural area is not comparable to theirs.

7.1.2.2.4 Re-Framing the Past - Re-Gaining Control

One aspect that connects many of the Nairobi speakers' narrations with regard to discipline and subjugation is that they shift their speaker positions throughout their narrations about discipline and control. What is experienced as threatening, confusing, stressful, and at times traumatising as a child is often later and in retrospect evaluated and re-framed as necessary, or even becomes appreciated.

4 Independent Commission for the Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse: <https://www.aufarbeitungskommission.de>

So, that time when we'd be taken to the rural area, we hated it so much. But now, I understand the importance of it [...] [N]ow I do appreciate [what] I learnt at that age. So, I can start a fire by myself. I can/if I had cows, I know things. If I was dropped in the bush, I can/I know how to survive. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

Like Stella, James reviewed the meaning of his relationship with his extended family in upcountry and concluded that

[When] I was young, I thought that these people who I am with [in Nairobi], these are my people. [But] now I agree, uh, with what, with what he [father] was saying. [...] People [who] are closer to you are those ones, uh, who are miles and miles away from you. (James, 41 yrs, *1978, male, Jericho, N.)

This biographical reflection shows that the speakers actively shift their speaker positions throughout their narration. On the one hand, they share their biographical memory from the position of being a child as though they were transporting themselves back to the event and their emotional entanglements 'as a child'. On the other hand, they can speak from their position of being an adult, the perspective of their current position, where the distance from the situation, paired with other experiences that they made throughout their life, shapes how they now view these memories. These reflective moments during the interviews confirm, on the one hand, that our perceptions and the way we relate towards past events can alter throughout the life course. It furthermore shows that these changes do not necessarily happen unconsciously and that people who share their life story in a biographical interview are actively involved in making these shifts in speaker positions visible. Hence, these positive re-framings of events that were experienced negatively in the past occur not only in the context of manual hard labour in upcountry but also in the context of the corporeal violence that many speakers experienced at home or in educational institutions.

But there is nothing you will do about it [corporeal punishment in school]. Yes. (laughs). [...] I mean, when you look at that today, we laugh about it, and you say, 'Okay, I think those teachers made us who we are today'. (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.)

In the overall comparison, it seems that many speakers experienced corporeal violence and discipline as the norm. But how can we explain the paradox of the shift from resistance to adaptation? Why do the majority of those who experienced corporeal violence conclude that it was important because 'it structured' them? What is this structure about?

[W]e're so regimental. Nairobi School used to be, I think it was, we were brought up militarily [...]. So, it started as a military school. So, we had, uh, we even had a shooting range in school. I was a goodie [...] I never got into that kind of problem [corporeal punishment]. But, uh, some of my friends did. People got caned. I heard about it. [...] I was not one of those guys. [...] I was a good boy. (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.)

Pele's example points to the colonial entanglements of this discipline and how they connect to bourgeois subjectivity ('I was a goodie'). Nairobi School was founded in 1902 by British colonists serving exclusively white pupils. It was only in 1962 that the school admitted '1 African and 5 Asian boys' (Old Cambrian Society, n.d.: n.p.). Indirect or direct relations drawn between education, discipline, and colonisation appear in the narrations often. Stella connects formal education to the colonial times when she says,

[W]e were considered to be wealthy in that community and privileged. [M]y grandfather was a tax collector [...] interacting with a lot of the colonialists, and by that time, he was able to understand the value of education. So, he tried to get his children educated. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

Morris was also the child of a civil servant who worked for the colonial government in Nairobi. As an attempt to counter the growing unrest during the 1940s and 50s, which later sparked the upheaval of the Mau Mau freedom fighters, the colonial administration privileged some Kenyan civil servants who were migrating from upcountry to the city with providing social housing in Nairobi where they could finally also settle their families. However, as Banyikwa highlights, these places were strongly regulated by the colonial government, instilling a strong sense of safety through order.

The architecture-planner's contribution to land use change in Nairobi was cast in terms of creating rigidly segregated colonial social stratification of Nairobi's residential areas on racial grounds, a strong concern with health and safety aspects, layout and visual appearance, conformity with accepted standards, densities and development principles. (Banyikwa 1990: 189)

Morris, who was born in 1962, one year before Kenyan independence, grew up in one of these social housing settlements in Embakasi Village. Even though his childhood fell largely in the postcolonial times, his memory provides evidence of how much the norms, rules, and laws of the British rule lived on in everyday life.

[A]t that time you, you could not, um, plant, uh, some vegetables around your, the, uh, backyard. [...] You're not supposed to do any cultivation there because the ground is for the council, not for you. [...] And there's a time the City Council, uh, Inspectorate came around and took our dog because we never took it for, for injection. Things, things were in order. They were so straight, yeah. Things were very, very strict. [...] Because there were some orders, the Europeans left. Written down orders, strict orders [on] how a country should be run. [...] But these days, there [are] all these dogs around. Things are left around like that. (Morris, 57 yrs, *1962, male, Embakasi Village, N.)

Morris mourns a loss of order. As an aged man, he feels unhappy with the current chaos in the city. He does not see the condition of his country as caused by the European expansion that exploited the African continent and caused global inequalities, as would be my approach. Morris does not blame anyone or anything that is long gone and unchangeable; he is dissatisfied with the current politics in Kenya, like many other Kenyans. While

he remembers how things around him were in order, he also remembers the orders he had to follow as a child.

I would say that life [...] used to be good because any child who would mess up, any parent would spank the child, kind of discipline the child on the s-spot and go and report the child to the father and the mother, yeah. [...]. It was the community-based character, yeah. And if a child goes haywire kind of un-disciplined a small group of association, uh, meets and discuss about that child. And, uh, they call the child, eh, and talk to the child, and in case this child continues, he's taken to an approved school. [...] [C.M.: And what happens at the approved school?] Discipline, severe discipline. Um, you're spanked, you're told to do [a] hard job [...] like in a sort of military training [...] It's the government school, eh, it's sponsored. (ibid.)

Approved schools, also known as school prisons, developed in England in the 1930s as a part of the industrial school system, often led by Christian institutions. A child who was assessed as a juvenile delinquent was sent there, kept there, and disciplined with all kinds of techniques – from a monitorial system that included incentives for punishment and corporal punishment (Gear 1999: 166 ff.). Shortly afterwards, the British government also erected several of these approved schools in Kenya, which were often run by missionaries. Philista P. M. Onyango's research about approved schools in Kenya shows that children are sent to these schools most of the time for 'stealing (44.8%)' or 'refusing to go to school (30.4%)', whereas other children are sent there because of 'vagrancy and need of protection (24.8%)' (Onyango 1983: 10). Tatiana's examples show that the figure of the 'evil' child is even today connected to children that either live on the street or are kept in approved schools and is used for moral education. In this context, these children are literally exhibited to other school children as part of the extracurricular activities of their school to warn them to follow the Christian laws in order not to share the same destiny.

We were taken to the house for boys who/ [...] they can't think for themselves [...] /Then, then one of them was tied to the bed. Yeah. He was/We were told by Sister, that Sister, that he is, he is too wild. So if he gets loose, he can beat people, eat stones, those things. So, he's tied up. Yeah. We saw him, and we were told not to get too close to him because he was still trying to get out of the bed. He wanted to run. [C.M.: How, how did you feel about seeing that?] Sorry, and I hope that never happens to me. We also saw others who are in the cage, who are put in a certain cage, because if they get out of the cage they can push you and push you without caring. They just push. Sometime later, they are open for/They are let free to roam, and then sometime later they are put in again. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

How can such a representation of the 'good' come about in the narrations, and why is the discourse of the 'good boy' (Pele) maintained? These examples make it clear that children are educated to be pious, which also means that they suppress their emotions, urges, and desires and can only show themselves to be exemplary if they learn to practise renunciation. In such a perspective, subjugation is rewarded and is normalised. Max Weber saw a similar connection between the modern economic ethos and the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism. Although Max Weber's (2006 [1929]) thesis was strongly

influenced by the European context, and although Christianity in postcolonial Kenya has evolved strongly from its European roots, the results show how deeply colonial ideas have been inscribed in local cultures and that these inscriptions are maintained through fear. While the source of this fear might have changed from being beaten in the past to being marginalised and economically disempowered in today's society, it remains an integral and stable part of education. So whereas the medium of education used to instill fear through the body, this instilling practice is now shifting to the subject, who is called upon to exercise self-control, which requires renunciation.

I was 11, and I was like 'I want to, to start designing' and [...] I had like many things in my head. Then I was 12, I was like [...] I'm gonna leave the rest of the stuff I was planning to do and just go to designing. [...] I write songs and poems, too, but my main thing is designing. I was also thinking of being an actress, but I was like, mmm, mmm, it looks a bit hard. So, it's like designing; I like sewing, so I'll just go with that. (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.)

Sya is a good example, because at the age of 12 years, she feels pressured to decide what she wants to become in the future and to start working for that now. Staying without a perspective and keeping several options open does not seem wise to her. To accomplish her dream one day, she is convinced that she must start working on it now and practise self-control. When we look at Sya, it does not seem helpful to issue Max Weber the red card of Eurocentrism overhastily. Given the interwoven nature of discipline and status work, it must be remembered that although colonialism in its original form ended, capitalism did not disappear with it. What remains is a system that significantly upholds European and Christian-influenced ideologies of progress and good life and the necessity to be 'a goodie' (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.).

If the exhibition of shackled children serves as teaching material for moral education in schools in which children are made so afraid that they cannot help but take refuge in the self-narrative of 'goodness', then another European concept imposes itself: bourgeois coldness. The 'moral philosophical metaphor' (translated from Stückler 2014: 280) of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002 [1944]), Horkheimer (2011 [1936]), and recently further developed by Henrike Kohpeiß 2023,

describes to a certain extent an essential moral principle in capitalist society [in which] bourgeois subjectivity [is] characterised by a quasi-schizophrenic simultaneity of adaptation and resistance: on the one hand, the bourgeois subject is, at least according to the aspiration, an autonomous, responsible and therefore also critical individual equipped with high moral values who is able to question social grievances. On the other hand, however, it is also a functionary within the bourgeois-capitalist order and must adapt and subordinate itself to it in the interests of self-preservation. (translated from Stückler 2014: 280)

It makes sense to discuss the discovery of such bourgeois coldness in the biographical narratives with a view to its emergence in the context of Kenya's colonial 'heritage', because, as a moral principle, it also appears within postcolonial studies (for more, see Kohpeiß 2023). In this context, an example of colonial pedagogical practice can be con-

sidered, which Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o recalls from his school days in his essay *Decolonise the Mind*:

English [...] was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking *Gĩkũyũ* in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Who ever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community. (wa Thiong'o ([1986] 1994: 11)

On a spatial-theoretical dimension, this disciplinary practice can be compared to Michel Foucault's panopticon – a prison architecture in which the inmates have no view of the guards, who, for their part, can see every inmate in every cell. According to Michel Foucault, the inmates discipline themselves by constantly observing their peers – the discursively produced guards. Once this institutional discipline has been incorporated, it becomes more and more self-control in the course of the biography. This self-control works so well because societies create and use systems of exclusion, in which, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes, people are 'being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community' (ibid.).

As long as there are children who are 'tied to beds' or kept in 'cages' (Tatiana), they become evil performative spectacles for other children who are told they had better be pious or their destiny will become theirs, and so they follow the lord, the headmistress, the system. And as long as there are children who are haunted by these 'evil' children in their dreams, they had better become 'rice' and not 'ugali' (Gathi) by quickly passing the 'button' (wa Thiong'o) to another person. This postcolonial form of subjugation, specific to the bourgeoisie in the context of the child's corporeal becoming, is a form of subjugation that Silvia Federici describes in the context of witch-hunting, which, according to her,

did not disappear from the repertoire of the bourgeoisie with the abolition of slavery. On the contrary, the global expansion of capitalism through colonization and Christianization ensured that this persecution would be planted in the body of colonized societies, and, in time, would be carried out by the subjugated communities in their own name and against their own members. (Federici 2008: 21)

Last, I do not want to finish without highlighting the ambivalence in the act of reframing the past. Kili in particular oscillates between several positions on the corporeal violence and discipline he has experienced and witnessed in the past by reflecting on the mechanisms of subjugation and its wider effects on personhood.

If we weren't disciplined in that way, we would have been more expressive [...]. [W]e were afraid. You're in a cocoon. [...] You see, it makes you less [...] of a critical thinker [...] Now that I've grown up, I can think. But if you had asked me that, like probably 15, 15 years ago [...] I didn't have a sense. I just, I just knew [I'd] done something wrong I'm being punished [...] I didn't think it was wrong. I think, I thought that's just how it was, it was done. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

It is furthermore important to note that the shifting speaker positions from resistance to conformity were not performed in the first socio-economic spectrum. Although the speakers of the first spectrum also experienced physical violence as a means of discipline, there is no change of perspective towards the utilisation of the experience throughout the narration. On the contrary, there is a defence against it. These speakers remain in their resistance. It appears that this also results from the lack of reward in the event of an attempt to ally oneself with the traitor, which, as Chola points out in the following passage, would be classified as an offence and not rewarded at all in their community.

[L]iving in Kibera, [...] as a child, me I grew up knowing that I can't speak English, and I'm learning English in school, [...] [b]ut when you go home, most guys from the slum area, they [...] will be like, 'Eh, [...] that's not the lingo around here' or something like that. [...] So me, I learnt [English], but when I went home, either you're talking Sheng' or Kiswahili. [...] So, in Kibera, it's not like/We don't pretty much follow the things, 'cause [...] for us it's more like the system is, like, teaching you things that [are] not really as relevant as you would want them to be. So, for you to lack the respect of education was very easy. That's the reason why so many guys from Kibera will tell you they are dropouts, 'cause you're teaching them things they're not, they're not relating with. [...] You keep on telling them they are failures [...] You keep on telling them that they/In the system perspective, they can't make it. [...] Or you have education, but you never got a job. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.)

What Chola says here makes it clear that in precarious environments, such as Kibera, these disciplining practices are hardly working out, because Kibera itself is often used as the metaphor for failed and unaccomplished lives – a social space that is pointed at when children are told to practise discipline if they do not want to end up in the same space. As Chola reports, the young people in Kibera know quite clearly that it is not worth it to obey the discipline that school instils in them, as this will still not change the fact that there is no employment and no future for them.

In sum, the oral and visual (hi)stories reveal how Nairobi children occupy profoundly subjugated positions within educational institutions, where suppression by professional adults is both routinized and legitimized. What initially appears as the disciplining of children's bodies to comply with institutional rules gradually transforms into more subtle practices of mental governmentality. Through constant evaluation, comparison, and measurement of success, power shifts from overt discipline toward diffuse regimes of control that seek not only obedience but self-regulation. While the experiences of discipline articulated by the Nairobi interlocutors differ significantly from those narrated in the Berlin context, a historical contextualization – alongside a critical reflection on the limitations of the study's sampling – problematises any interpreta-

tion of these differences as exceptional. Instead, the findings point to the persistence of historically variable yet structurally comparable formations of discipline and control to which children have been, and continue to be, subjected across space and time.

The classed comparison further sharpens this analysis by showing how middle-class children, in retrospect, tend to reframe experiences of subjugation as necessary or even formative. This reframing can be understood as an expression of *bourgeois cold*: a socially produced emotional and moral distancing through which suffering becomes intelligible only insofar as it appears functional for later success. Within this logic, middle-class children emerge as occupying comparatively fluid subject positions, marked by an ability – indeed a necessity – to shift perspectives, adapt to evaluative regimes, and internalise institutional demands. Such fluidity should not be read as autonomy, but rather as a condition of success within educational contexts shaped by neoliberal rationalities.

In this sense, the retrospective normalisation of subjugation aligns with the formation of the entrepreneurial self, for whom discipline is reinterpreted as investment and constraint as opportunity. Adult recollections thus risk reproducing the very power relations they seek to describe, converting structural coercion into narratives of individual adaptability. This capacity to reframe domination is unevenly distributed and deeply classed, enabling middle-class actors to neutralise harm while obscuring enduring asymmetries of power. Rather than offering closure, the analysis foregrounds the need to critically interrogate how discipline and control are affectively cooled, narratively legitimised, and differentially internalised across social positions.

7.2 Home: Territorialised Housing

Home has permeated all the biographical narratives of childhood, shaping the peaks of their emotional topologies. The importance of being able to relate to a home is prevalent regardless of age, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender and religion. Nevertheless, the actual constitution of home – from its meaning to its geographical and social as well as material and temporal composition – has produced very heterogeneous and classed topologies of (un)belonging. Within these, home appears as an imaginary spatial arrangement that materialises in the politics, practices, and artefacts of housing and home-making.

In research exploring housing and home-making from the childhood perspective, the situation of middle-class childhoods in the 'Global South' is missing. Research is often dominated by a focus on inadequate housing conditions (Coley et al. 2013). Other studies employ quantitative designs with child assessment based on adult-centric and normative understandings of self-accomplishment, overseeing children's perspectives, standpoints, and opinions (Haurin et al. 2001). Hence, they also (re)produce norms and idea(l)s of good childhood and good housing in which good is equated with security measures, overlooking emotional aspects of safety within the family or wider community. Amy Clair also notes that the research around housing and childhood 'tend[s] to focus on adult concerns around risk behaviours, behavioural problems and educational attainment [and] neglect[s] the impact of housing on children's lives beyond these concerns' (2019: 609). Last, there is little engagement with the architectural and socio-spatial rela-

tions in which children are involved within their homely topologies. Accordingly, there are no comparative housing studies that engage with children's home-making practices from a translocal perspective.

For the general research on housing and home-making, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling note that home has often been explored as a dualistic concept, associated with the 'feminine' opposed to the 'masculine', the 'private' opposed to the 'public', 'domestic' opposed to 'civic', 'reproduction' opposed to 'production', 'local' opposed to 'global', 'stasis' opposed to 'change', etc. (2006: 17). These binary contextualisations of home cannot grasp the complexity of home-making practices and continue to disqualify the topology of home as a relevant research topic for global spatial figuration. To fill this research gap, the following analysis offers a classed engagement with the meaning of home in children's lives, considering how the material agency of the built environment becomes enacted within the practices of housing and home-making in translocal contexts.

7.2.1 Home as and beyond the House

Along with the process of the insularisation of childhood, which I introduced before (subchapter 2.1) and will elaborate later on the scale of the city (subchapter 7.3), scholars often also refer to a growing domestication (strongly connected to familiarisation) of children's lives (Behnken/Jonker 1990; Zinnecker 1990; Zeiher/Zeiher 1994). Although this research concentrates more on the spaces outside of the home – the islands that increasingly gain meaning in children's lives – it tends to treat the subject of the home itself only on the margins. It thus comes as little surprise that the theory of domestication also lacks a theoretical concept of home. Similarly to its sibling, insularisation, it seems to be widely based on a geographical/Euclidian understanding of space. But although home can be the house, it can also be composed beyond that and by diverse spatial relations, which sometimes unfold on a multi-scalar entanglement. For others, home is not connected to the walls of any building(s) but connected to themselves or their families. In this chapter, I contribute to a plural and processual understanding of home as and beyond the house based on children's emotional topologies of home-making. The following analysis shows how home transcends the mere physicality of a built dwelling and represents a complex interplay of emotional and topological dimensions, some of which could be entangled on diverse scales.

7.2.1.1 House beyond the House

Even though there are extremely diverse notions of home in the childhood narrations, certain scalar entanglements are found in connection with these notions. The speakers of the first socio-economic spectrum tend to constitute home as house the least. This is often related to their domestic space being rather limited. Therefore, to Yao, for example, the 'house is important [because] you don't have to sleep out' (Yao, 10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.). To him and Chola, home relates to a wider topology, including many people beyond their core family, and is constituted on the scale of the neighbourhood. In this context, Chola said, 'To me, Kibera was home' (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.). Interestingly, and relating to my previous research on children's street play in the Tarlabaşı neighbourhood in Istanbul, Turkey, it is not only the concept of home

that reaches beyond the house. Reciprocally, it is also the concept of house that can reach beyond the house.

Figure 20: Domestic practices on the streets of Tarlabaşı, Istanbul.



Source: Photo by the author, 2014.

As Figure 20 shows, children's play and care-work (e.g., clotheslines are hung between the houses) indicate that the notion of house can go beyond the house. That makes the idea of the domestication of childhood even more complicated, because children in Tarlabaşı spend a large amount of time within domestic topologies, but that does not mean that they are not on the streets.

Back in the middle classes of Nairobi and Berlin, we find a spatial figuration of childhood that corresponds more to the notion of 'house as home' (Blunt/Dowling 2006: 88). Thus, in many cases, the constitution of home and the physical confinement of the house are defined by the same boundaries. When I asked Stella what the most important place during her childhood was, she replied,

This! [pointing at the building she lived in as a child]. I felt [...] most comfortable in [here]. It was easy, again, [a] nuclear, small family. [...] Um, I had siblings that I liked. Um, my parents are very nice people; um, very generous, very warm, very nice people. Um, and yeah, I think it was just the solitude. I was there, no one bugged me, yeah. Yeah, I think I liked home. It was safe. Yeah. Yeah, there was everything there. We had dogs. We had, I don't know, everything, a place to play around. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

In the middle-class milieu, we also find speakers whose notion of home goes beyond the house. In Sya's case, this is not so much because there is not enough space at home but because she is a single child. As she is additionally home-schooled, she is very eager to meet with peers and complains about being isolated at home. This is why she enjoys accompanying her mom for grocery shopping and loves to eat out. 'Nakumatt [a local supermarket] is like home' (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.) to her and, as such, becomes part of her constitution of home, which even has a biographical relevance.

I used to go there [...] since I was a baby. (Laughs). So, like, I was also known there too 'cause the people who work there, they knew me since I was/Since even before I was born. (ibid.)

Many speakers from the third and fourth socio-economic spectrum regularly eat out when grocery shopping at shopping malls. Sya again made me realise that these practices are connected to domesticity and, as such, must be considered important for practices of housing and home-making. This is because the domestic practice of eating is decentralised from the house and its kitchen and includes commodified practices of eating, including their spatial relations. As such, they enlarge the house as house as well as home.

We tend to go to Java Karen a lot. And then we sit there because that's, like/I can say it's kinda like home, except it's a restaurant. (ibid.)

From this perspective, it must be argued that domestication cannot adequately be understood as withdrawal from outside into the 'house as house', because domesticity spreads out into the city.

7.2.1.2 One Family - Two Households

Another relationality of home that could be identified in Nairobi was a constitution of home as an urban-rural connection. Most of the Nairobians, especially the older generation, expressed a very ambivalent connection to the city. Biographically, the city often appears as a 'necessary evil'. For many Nairobians, it is the place for working and living throughout the middle passage of life, whereas they see their future and old age as taking place in the rural ancestral land referred to as upcountry. As such, the urban-rural dichotomy also points to a generational order that is connected to it, which I will elaborate more deeply on the scale of the city (subchapter 7.3).

This ambivalence comes as no surprise, because the city also comes as an already ambivalent colonial heritage. The colonial regulation for African rural-urban work migration plays a big role here. Compared to the rural, urban social realities have been a marginalised subject in historical research on colonial Kenya (see Lonsdale 2002: 207). This could be because less than ten per cent of Kenyans were living in towns at independence; most of them were in Nairobi (267,000 inhabitants) and Mombasa (180,000 inhabitants) (ibid.: 207). Even by the late 1960s, only three per cent of Nairobi's population had been born in the city. In the racially segregated Nairobi of the 1930s and 1940s, the African population was very small and predominantly female, as most of the African sup-

Many children's home-related spatial relations in Nairobi must be seen at the scalar entanglement of urban and rural. In some cases, this marks a big difference in children's urban spatial mobility. This becomes very explicit in Rebecca's childhood map, in which she portrays both urban and rural (Figure 21). Rebecca used two sheets of paper for mapping: one for the city and one for upcountry, while other speakers drew upcountry as one additional space on their map. In this way, upcountry seems more disconnected but also more elaborated. While the second map clarifies that upcountry is an extension of home far away from home, its large and detailed representation also emphasises its importance in Rebecca's life. Both maps are characterised by arrows, indicating her spatial mobility. According to her narration, only a few arrows indicate her independent movement on the urban map, whereas all arrows on the rural map mark the radius of where she could go. Figure 21 (right) shows a property in Kakamega County that belongs to her extended family. Three bordering 'homesteads' are depicted. They belong to her father and his two uncles, who participate the family's agricultural business. The family and permanent and temporary workers, such as harvesters, reside there, creating a vibrant social field that promotes Rebecca's spatial independence and co-constitutes her topology of housing and home-making.

But upcountry enlarges not only the house as home but also the family as home. Connected to this is what James said earlier in the context of the sense of (un)belonging he acquired from his father.

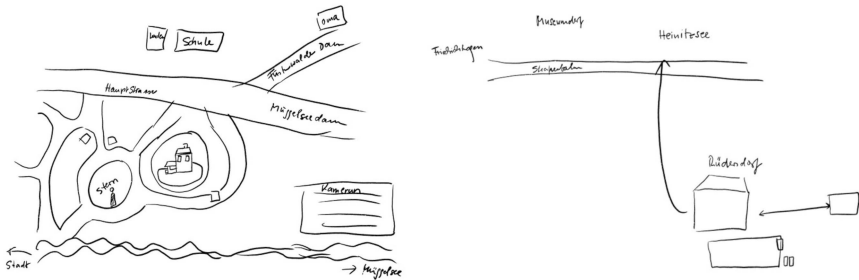
My people are far away from where, from where I am residing [...] people [who] are closer to you are those ones, uh, who are miles and miles away from you. (James, 41 yrs, *1978, male, Jericho, N.)

Such ethnic notions of (un)belonging co-constitute an understanding of home that differentiates where someone *resides* from where someone *belongs*. This topological order shows that emotional proximity is not always measured by Euclidian proximity.

Even though there is no such historically forged idea of upcountry in Germany, the existence of another place of belonging, such as the ancestral home, referred to as homeland (in German, *Heimat*, a term unfortunately denigrated during Nazism), exists too. In the narrations, great importance is also attached to grandparents and their homes, which enlarges the concept of home. Thus, Paula depicted her grandmother's place on an additional map (Figure 22, left), marking it as important, where she had access to

'a very nice garden [...] and a] shed where [they] were allowed to play in the attic' (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.).

Figure 22: (left) Map of childhood in Berlin, (right) Map of grandparent's place in suburban Berlin.



Source: Mental map of Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.

My grandma, in particular, was very important. [...] She was also very musical, sang a lot with us, and we sang a lot of folk songs and so on with her. So she also demanded it when we came round. And first she sat down at the piano and then we put the books down, then we sang [...]. And yes, we were very often at my grandma's [...]. (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.)

In this subchapter I aimed at highlighting the history and culture-specific relation of home as an urban-rural link specific to Nairobi and the entanglements to Berlin. In the next subchapter I will elaborate on this idea at the scale of the city, constituted by the rural-urban dichotomy.

7.2.1.3 Home Is Where the Internet Is

My home is so important to me, especially because I have Wi-Fi there. (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.)

The meaning of being able to connect to an online society or virtual reality occurs in all socio-economic groups and both cities, unsurprisingly among younger speakers. As such, home, a topology often reduced to a local imaginary, appears suddenly as very global, contextualised by the worldwide internet, where children connect 'on the server [...] [w]ith over a thousand people' (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.). Wi-Fi is a highly emotional part of the topology of home, appearing daily.

And that's one of the worst days I've ever had in the house. You don't have power, and there's no TV and power on the laptop. (Yao, 10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.)

Home is where the internet is. But it has not always been like this, as Henry, born in 1999, reflects:

I still live there [in his estate] today. [...] Our kids now, uh, back home [...] Most of them have phones. Like in, in my court [...]. So, uh, kids don't play as much as they used to. (Henry, 21 yrs, *1999, male, Buruburu Phase II, N.)

Although internet access is marked as an extremely important factor for all children in the sample, the upper-third and fourth spectrum of the young Berlin speakers show some difference here, as they emphasise a restricted and self-aware approach to the internet and new media, which goes hand in hand with a devaluation of blunt media stimulation or excessive media consumption.

Well, I'm more in the social networks. I never really play mobile phone games or computer games. And if I do, it's card games. [...]. I think it's more important to read and then realise the different stories and immerse myself in them. And then also to be excited and somehow have your own ideas. (Lana, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

While Lana emphasises the importance of appropriate use of the internet and new media, in Stephan's narration, the internet and computers do not feature at all. He instead addresses a restrictive and ritualised approach to watching films.

So we're only allowed to watch films at the weekend and on Friday evenings and sometimes on Mondays too. (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.)

Interestingly, even though the internet, tablets, smartphones, video game consoles, and laptops are often portrayed as very important within the topology of home of the younger speakers, the spatial-biographical narration does not unfold but rather stops here – as if the screen were a kind of boundary to a spatiality that is not so easy to talk about. Even though I tried to emphasise this topic during the narrations, speakers had a hard time sharing what makes the connection to the internet and these devices so important. Besides connecting to a global community, which was named in some instances, such as when playing on the server (Neo) or being on social media (Sya and Lana), it seemed challenging to figure out how this connection extends and diversifies children's spatial relations. Even though I tried to elaborate on these spatial relations in subchapters 7.1 and later in 7.3, I also got the impression that what happens there is, in a way, also part of children's privacy and a topic they were not too eager to speak about. Here, my position(ality) plays a role because, to the children, I appear as a total stranger to all the social networks and games they engage with. Consequently, I lack a common space of experience with them, making it harder for them to communicate with me.

7.2.2 Topologies of Housing and Home-Making

Unlike analysing the scales of the subject and body as well as the city, analysing the scale of home depends not only on the biographical narrations and maps but also on the architectural ethnography of the diverse housing contexts. Together, they compose what I frame here as housing and home-making.

Studies that look at the impact of global capitalism on residential city development show that despite the global growth of cities caused by it, local urbanisation processes are not necessarily homogenised and speak in this context of context-specific variations such as 'vernacular neoliberalism' (Park 2019: 63). With regard to housing and the actor dimension of the recipients – the dwellers themselves – there are also studies that show

that even if there is a global architecture transfer, local cultures of using these structures often differ from what the architects and planners had ‘calculated into the civil engineering of the[se] structures’ (Schwenkel 2014: 169/70). This relation of built and lived housing and home-making must be taken into account, as it might highlight the culturally specific aspects of this relation. The findings of my study, however, also point to the other side of this process and to something that Jane Jacobs frames as ‘repeated instances’ (Jacobs 2006: 6), which are unmissable and are rendering more and more cities homogeneous, such as ‘the sheer multitude of instances of tall buildings’ (ibid.: 6). These repeated instances help us to understand specific aspects of the city as a process rather than the city at large as a fixed entity. This process can appear as global assemblages – as repeated instances of situated architectural globalities, which shape childhoods globally.

In the following analysis of housing and home-making practices, based on my contrastive sampling, I argue that, on the one hand, home is an extremely vague concept that can only gain sharpness through empirical evidence of the meaning of home in people’s lives. On the other hand, it is a globally existing concept increasingly shaped and reshaped by a globalising housing industry and centuries of global architecture transfers that have been documented poorly (for exceptions, see, e.g., Guerrieri 2020; Roesler 2021; Heynickx et al. 2021). To follow the effect of such transfer on the ground and in the buildings themselves, I look for these ‘repeated instances’ within the topology of housing and home-making in my material. By doing so, I will show that class as a category of social inequality is very powerful at forging such repeated instances, while at the same time it is just one of many categories that matter there.

The overview in Table 7 shows the categorisation of the speakers, which is divided according to housing types. It also shows which speakers were part of my architectural ethnographic documentation (see those marked in bold). The age comparison shows that whereas most of the speakers younger than 16 years old live in tenements or private apartments, most of those older than 16 years reside(d) in semi-detached or terraced structures. Interestingly, these two groups also mark the highest number of middle-class speakers (upper-second to lower-fourth spectrum). Therefore, according to my sampling, these two building types can be seen as middle class-specific in both cities.

These house types are to be understood as a rough categorisation that describes the purely built form of the house as the type used to refer to the respective dwelling in everyday language, which I will combine in the following with the topology of home-making, as elaborated in subchapter 5.1.4.1. Whether this classification (Table 7) also leads to similarities in the childhood experience and how, precisely, these similarities constituted or whether they develop independently or across contexts will be analysed later from the topological perspective (practices of home-making). It should already be anticipated that specific housing types also have a common topology. But the results also highlight many examples in which this is not the case or is ambivalent.

Table 7: Housing typology of speakers' childhood residencies.

Typology	Single-family house (detached) (private ownership)	Semi-detached and terraced structures (private ownership)	Flat in tenement and private apartment block	Mixed
Speakers total	8	17	15	6
Speakers younger than 16 yrs	2	1	12	4
First spectrum		Amina, Mercy, Yao, Chola , Ruby	Amina, Mercy, Yao, Chola , Ruby	Ijhanya
Second spectrum		Henry , Matthew, Kili, Eddah , Martha, James, Gathi , Falak	Rehema, Neo, Tatiana , Makena, Fergusson, Rose-Ann , Elliot	Steve, Said, Analia
Third spectrum	Mildred, Sya, Paula, Stella, Rebecca	Fabian , Morris, Anne	Ben, Lale & Nuhu, Milo, Lisa & Lana, Rosi	Steph, Eliah
Fourth spectrum	Pierre , Caroline, Pele	Raphael	Stephan	

Source: Table by the author.

7.2.2.1 Private Community

What I will describe in the following as framed by the social topology of 'private community' represents all terraced, semi-detached house structures that are characterised by, first, their repetitive elements (e.g. same floorplans and building materials in every building), second, common spaces that residents can access, such as a private and semi-private streets, fields, or communal gardens, and last, their horizontality. These structures can be accompanied by a larger estate they belong to, which can be (un)gated and (un)guarded. The reason why I do not refer to their topologies by the much more common term 'gated community' is because not all of them are gated, which does not make them less private. However, the term gated community is strongly connected to a negative connotation, which often describes its exclusionist character to the outside very well, but is only poorly suited to describing the gated community from the inside – a perspective I will elaborate on in the following. In contrast to the current use of the term gated community in critical urban studies with the term private community, I want to emphasise both the communal character and simultaneously the private nature of this housing and home-making topology.

7.2.2.1.1 Playing in the Residential Streets of the 1970s

To illustrate this simultaneous inner inclusion and outer exclusion, Anne from Berlin and Gathi from Nairobi, who both grew up in semi-detached housing, serve as a good vantage point. They stand out from the speakers in the translocal comparison somewhat as each other's translocal antipodes. Even though they grew up geographically distanced, their biographical narrations show many similarities. As such, they serve as vibrant examples of the methodological metaphor of the countertopology, because they seem to be at the exact ends of the wormhole. In many ways, they represent what I framed earlier as intra-universe and epitomise what I mean by situated globalities. Both grew up in the early 1970s: Anne in Zehlendorf, in the American sector of what was then West Berlin, and Gathi in the Buruburu Phase II (Figure 23), one of five similar estates built for the growing middle classes in Nairobi Eastlands between 1974 and 1976 (Rukwaro/Kieti 2018: 35).

*Figure 23: Housing type of Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.*



Drawing by the author, 2019.

Every house was designed in the same way and had the entrance towards the front. So, all the children would always use the front door to go outside, and you would see each other immediately there. Everyone played in front of the house and on the street. [...] The street was the most important place to me growing up. It was where I was free to play, talk openly and take charge of my friends during games. It was where we spent a carefree time playing or just sitting to talk about life and things that we hoped for. It's where I felt most wanted and most useful. My opinions mattered, and I felt valued by [my] friends. It's where we made plans on what to do, where and with whom. It's where we played all our games. (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.)

Anne also strongly emphasised the description of the housing type and the arrangement of the street at the centre around which the houses were aligned. The street in front of their house not only appears as central to the housing type in which they grew up but also as central to their lives. In this context, the meaning of the street is depicted similarly by Anne in Figure 24.

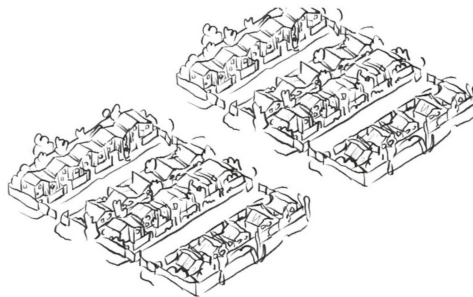
*Figure 24: Housing type of Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

I grew up here in Zehlendorf [in] a semi-detached house [...] that all looked the same, all the same size, all the same windows, all the same fence [...] and] with a garden, with a street in front of the door. There were only young people with small children in the estate. That means we all grew up together, [and] we all went to school together, some of us in the same class. [...] And we lived on the street from Friday afternoon until Sunday night. [...] Maybe they were my only friends on the street. I was always an outsider at school. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

*Figure 25: Estate of Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

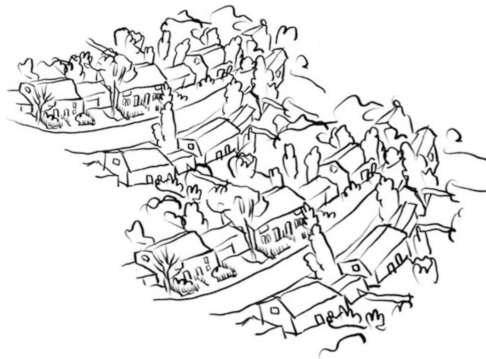
Semi-detached, terraced housing often features elements that emphasise certain socio-economic strata and milieus, family routines and household sizes, borders of private and public, and material cultures (e.g., space for a family car). As such, their physical materiality often gains a performativity that prescribes or suggests a specific use to its inhabitants. But contrary to these built aspects of social engineering, Anne's and Gathi's

examples also show that the communities they were part of only adapted to some of these built orders, whereas they changed or exaggerated others.

Let me give an example – while the plots at the back of the houses in such settlements were originally planned to inhabit the core family in their private outdoor space, Anne says that, nevertheless, ‘[w]e also had a garden, but we didn’t actually use it much because everything happened in front of the house’ (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.). Also, Gathi remembers ‘a field behind the house [...] but we hardly ever played there. Instead, we played in front of the house at the empty car park and on the street’ (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.). In Buruburu Phase II (Figure 25), not every family who could afford such housing during the 1970s had enough to additionally invest in a car. This created additional free space for children’s play. On the contrary, most families owned cars in Zehlendorf (Figure 26), but according to Anne, this did not compromise the children’s play space:

And on weekends, I can remember when things got really heated, and we drew with chalk and then somehow/We drew our own streets and then stopped at the traffic lights with our bikes and scooters and Kettcar/and then looked for parking spaces. So, we drew our own little city traffic system. That the parents, some of them, drove their cars onto the nearest big road so that we had a bit more space. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

Figure 26: Estate of Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

In Anne’s and Gathi’s narrations, the street appears as an emotional topology of (un)belonging in which *belonging* is characterised beyond the core family and connected to the wider residential community. This sense of belonging is strongly connected to solidarity and social cohesion. Parents would, for example, support each other by providing care-work for each other’s families, which made the organisation of the household, as well as childcare and supervision, much easier.

Our parents sat in the front gardens and chatted. And my mum could actually go shopping, even when I was little. [...] And she just let us play there in the street because she knew the other parents were looking out for us. (ibid.)

In this constellation, older children would also take over the responsibility of looking after the younger children, to an extent that Anne describes as follows:

[W]e brought each other up, didn't we? So, we made sure that the little ones weren't beaten up somehow, that the older ones pulled themselves together. (ibid.)

In this context, children would also collaborate with each other and forge alliances that, in Gathi's case, led to the development of information (travel) systems, which involved the following:

[I]n case you have not done your chores or homework yet, they [the other kids] will inform you that your parents are on the way home so you can quickly start with it. (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.)

In this housing and home-making topology, children grow up beyond the child-adult binary, also as a community of children who establish cultures to which adults have no access, such as the information system. But this is not the only case in which the topology of the settlement fosters a flow of information. The medium-density development of semi-detached, terraced, or row houses also promotes a certain communal control connected to sensory aspects such as hearing.

We knew which family would be having a father beating the mother. We would hear the screaming at night. It happened in my family. I felt so embarrassed because I knew everyone would know that [it was] us. That really had an effect on my self-esteem. (ibid.)

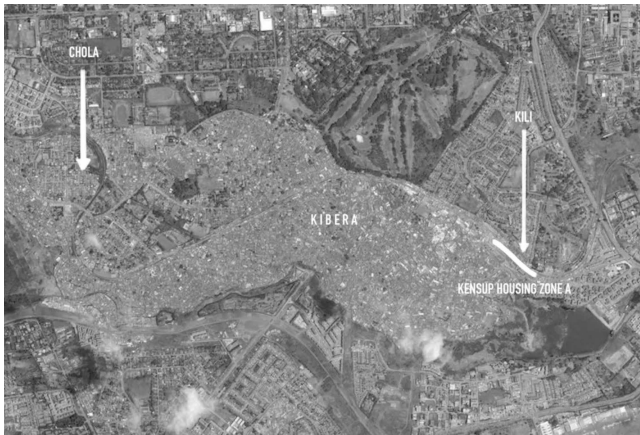
Even though Gathi felt ashamed that the estate could hear there was domestic violence at her place, the fact that domestic violence becomes public means that there is at least a chance that the community can intervene.

7.2.2.1.2 Möbius Borders

As part of the topology of private community, I found another intra-universe around Kili from the lower-third and Chola from the first socio-economic spectrum. This time the tunnel connecting the universes does not go through the globe but through socio-economic discourses of the sociality connected to their respective housing typologies (slum vs middle-class settlement), both of which reproduce by referring to people from the slums (like Chola) compared to people from middle-class estates (like Kili). However, although their description of the respective other predominantly reproduces existing discourses of both spatialities, their self-description is in many senses similar. Therefore, two supposedly different people talk about each other without knowing it and, in doing so, resemble each other remarkably in their differentiation from one another. Geo-

graphically, Chola belongs to a slum and Kili to a middle-class neighbourhood. However, a closer look shows that they are actually at the geographical and socio-economic boundaries of these neighbourhoods. As the map in Figure 27 shows, Chola grew up in the comparatively affluent part of Kibera (slum), while Kili grew up in a middle-class estate bordering Kibera and the railway in a part of Kibera called Laini Saba, on the upper right, where the KENSUP (Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme) housing Zone A is marked by a line today, taking the direct view from Kili's childhood room over Kibera.

Figure 27: Home of Chola and Kili.



Source: Map adapted from Google Maps by the author.

In his biographical narration, Kili reports how he and his friends went into Kibera 'on adventures' (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.). During one such adventure, an incident happened where Kili and his friends were chased by children from Kibera, who threw stones at them. One of the stones landed in Kili's childhood room, and another hit his head. This traumatic experience drastically shaped Kili's imagination of 'the other' from Kibera.

So at that point, that's when it hit me. 'Hey, I think we're different. These guys don't, they're, they're not, they don't think like I do.' So I/From that point, um, we never, I never, like we never went over to go and interact with the children from that side. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

The borders drawn here also exist in the public discourse. This became evident when I visited Kili at his place and the controversial housing blocks – multiple story buildings that stand like a wall along the railway – had already been built by KENSUP, displacing many people at the margins from their trading practices along the former colonial railway (Figure 28).

Figure 28: (left) Housing blocks built by the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP) at Kensup Housing Zone A, Kibera, Nairobi, (right) Photo of railway in Kibera, Nairobi.



Source: Photographs by the author, 2019.

When Chola was a teenager, his parents earned enough to afford to move out of Kibera and into a flat in South C – a well-known middle-class residency in the south of Nairobi. Although this move was connected to the promise that life would become better, Chola experienced it as the quite opposite.

Living in Kibera is like a culture. I have my boys. I call them. We go sit around. Stories. Walk around. [...] Then I moved out from Kibera [to South C] and then I realised in this other section where the guys are called middle class or upper class, the guys don't go out for walks. (Laughs). The guys don't call each other to do like, 'Hey, bro. Let's go eat, uh, *bhajia*⁵ from the same plate.' It wasn't like that, and I missed that [...]. My childhood, that's very social. [...] But where I am now/ [...] They will tell you, 'Oh, go home. I think you're supposed to eat lunch.' [...] The first two years living in South C, eh, it was so difficult for me 'cause I used to stay outside looking at people, waiting for them to, like, wave at me, like, the way they would in Kibera, but nothing. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.).

If we now zoom out of the scale of the neighbourhood and into the homes, we see that Kili and Chola both grew up in what is framed here as a private community – Chola in a tiny bungalow arranged in a rather small u-shaped gated estate, cut out of the wider heterogeneous building an dwelling structure of Kibera (Figure 29) and Kili in a rather large estate with semi-detached one-storey housing arranged in several mirrored rows that are characterized by order, similarity and aesthetic repetition.

5 *Bhajia* is a deep fried, crispy snack as part of Indian cuisine.

Figure 29: Estate of Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

Kili and his siblings had a lot of freedom to play. He and his cousin Eddah, a speaker living in the same estate, express their feeling of belonging.

So, the first place that was really important for me was Magiwa Estate growing up. It was a close-knit community. [...] We knew the neighbours. [...] We played, uh, we played. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

Eddah positively frames the community in the estate as 'multi-ethnic', adding that they were 'a huge group of kids who've come from whichever neighbourhood just going to visit other estates' (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.). Eddah and Kili emphasise that they spent most of their time as children outside in their estate's common space. This is similar to Chola, who played a lot in the area between the houses as a child (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Path between houses in estate of Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.

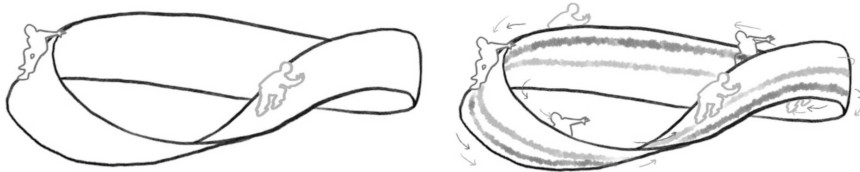


Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

[In] Kibera our life was never inside the house. Our life was outside the house, 'cause first of all the house is not big enough. (Laughs). [...] I saw the difference when I left, 'cause now [in South C] my, my life is literally inside the house. [...], I've lived there for how long? Five years now. And I, I would say I don't even know the second name of my neighbour. But then ask me anything about the guys we grew up with [in Kibera]. We were like brothers, man. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.)

Kili and Chola describe themselves in opposition to an imagined topological other. By doing so, they reveal what is important to them, and it is quite moving that, in this way, they come to many agreements. As such, the topology of their self/other description forms a Möbius strip. No matter how much they position themselves on the opposite sides of the strips, they always arrive at the same side (Figure 31), as they both appreciate the community and constitute home as a place where they urge to belong.

Figure 31: Topology of self/other description as Möbius strip.



Source: Illustration by the author.

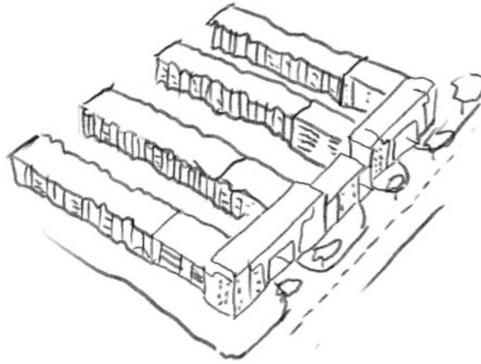
7.2.2.1.3 Commons

Gathi's, Anne's, Eddah's, Kili's, and Chola's (hi)stories resonate with many others who grew up in structures with planned-in communal spaces, which were used by children frequently. In Berlin, these structures are usually existent in the urban periphery. However, Fabian instead grew up in such a structure within the city centre in Tiergarten (Figure 32), which he refers to as an 'inner-city idyll' (Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.).

The house was relatively big for the standards of that time. It had just been completed by the International Building Exhibition [*Internationale Bauausstellung IBA*]. [...] And these houses were designed in such a way that there were different types of houses that were repeated but aligned differently. [...] [T]hey were semi-detached houses [...] and between these houses were two alleys, and we lived in one of these two⁶ alleys. And the alleys ultimately also defined the social space between these houses, where many other, I'll say, middle-class families moved in at the time, all of whom also had children. (ibid.)

6 The townhouses in Lützowstraße have three of these alleys. The incoherence here is not clear.

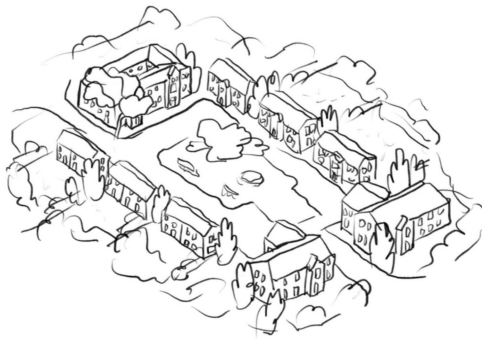
*Figure 32: Estate of Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

The common spaces used by children in semi-detached, terraced house structures are not always streets. In Raphael's case, who grew up in Pankow, a 'park-like situation' (Figure 33) accommodated their play.

*Figure 33: Estate of Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

Well, there is this very large meadow, and we lived there in a complex called Amalienpark. [...] It was built in the late art nouveau period in 1895 as some kind of urban villas. In the end, these were actually detached houses with six units, each with a garden, a relatively large garden behind it. And these were eight⁷ villas, which were placed in such a park-like situation. And that was, so to speak, the most important place in my

7 Amalienpark comprises nine buildings, one of which was partly destroyed during World War II. It was later reconstructed. This could be why Raphael mixed up the number of units that belong to the park.

childhood and also that of my sister, who is significantly younger than I am. And we had a lot of children in the neighbourhood there, and we occupied this place very strongly for us, so to speak, the front gardens and back gardens around the houses. (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)

Raphael must be seen as a special speaker within the topology of the 'private community'. This is because the housing type he lived in and the practices of home-making are somewhat between the topologies of 'private community' and 'vertical capsules' (the housing and home-making topology that will be elaborated on in the following subchapter). This is, on the one hand, because he grew up in a structure built at the end of the 19th century by the architect Otto March – a time in which a park-like agglomeration of terraced urban villas can be seen as a special type of housing per se, as it stands in contrast to the topology of Berlin, the biggest tenement city in the world at that time. Topologically speaking, including the dimension of home-making, Raphael's spatial mobility and the amount of participation within a residential (children's) community also show clear differences from, for example, Anne and Gathi, who present the common space in their housing typology as immensely important to their lives. This becomes clearer when Raphael clarifies,

And if you break it down now, it's ultimately just an outlying village that's relatively well connected to Berlin, but in terms of what it offers in terms of urban space, it's no different from a small town. [...] So, of course, we were supposed to stay at home, and we were more at home, but if we said we were going to the park, then that was fine. (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)

But commons as part of housing and home-making practices do not only relate to common spaces. Anne's home (as house) was not just home to her and her core family, but it was where her parents (mainly her father) hosted gatherings of something that I would frame an 'extended political family'.

My father, who was a journalist, worked for an [...] extremely left-wing newspaper. And he was head of the politics and news department there. [...] So all his newspaper friends were always hanging around our house. And my mum, she loved cooking foreign food [...] she could cook Spanish, she could cook French, she cooked Yugoslavian here and so on. So, they were all always with us. And we children, they all had children, were always allowed to join us late. And when we were tired, well, then we were put on the floor, and you had to make sure that we slept or didn't sleep. It didn't matter. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

That the house is home to people beyond the single family also became evident when Gathi filled out the socio-economic questionnaire. When she was asked to write down all homes that she has lived in since her birth and add the number of people that she shared a household with, this seemed a very odd task to her.

'Kikuyu never count people'. That's what my mom used to say. Sometimes here in the States [where she lives now], people ask me: How many people came to your party?

And I'm like, 'WHAT? – I did not count them'. (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.)

Figure 34: Example of demi-detached house with front yard in estate of Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

The house in which Gathi and her family lived was aligned in a row with other two-storey semi-detached houses along a street and on both sides. Each house had a little car park (Figure 34) in the front and a field in the back. A gate separated each property from the street. Even though all these material agents for creating privacy existed, according to her narration they were not used. The accessibility resulting from this was not only limited to adults visiting each other but regarded as a children's community with access to each other's homes – a feature strongly shaping this topology. 'In Buruburu, we also played a lot in other children's homes' (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.). What characterises 'private communities' is that the commonality does not end at the entrance to the house or at the gate but that its residents break with the private-public order. Its physical materiality is generally performed through private material agents, such as front garden fences and gates. In Anne's case, the communal use of homes went far into the private sphere, all the way into the bathrooms.

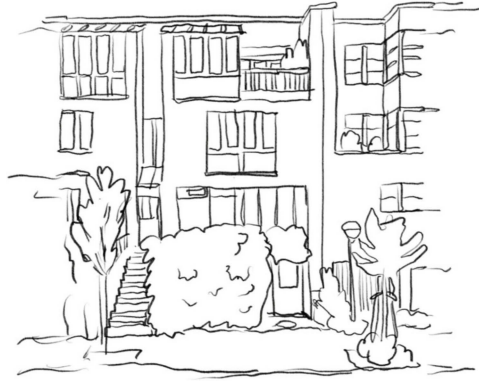
[W]e kids just played outside, and if you had to go to the toilet and it was just at the other end of the street, it didn't matter. Because there was someone there, you could go in somewhere. And you could get a bite to eat, and an apple in your hand and so on. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

But this is not all. The climax of opening the private sphere took place when the residents in Zehlendorf, '50 per cent of whom were also genuine left-wingers' (ibid.), decided to quite literally open their doors.

The houses were all open. At some point, when I was relatively young, my parents started to have door handles from the outside, not a knob, so that all the children could get in everywhere. (ibid.)

This example shows how strongly the respective community modifies the built materiality of housing as part of their home-making practices and according to their needs and ideas of a 'good' life through commoning. But open doors do not only appear in Berlin in milieus of 'genuine left-wingers' of the 1970s; they also existed in the townhouses in Lützowstraße (Figure 35) in the late 1980s.

*Figure 35: Example of townhouses with granny flats in the estate of Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

I think in primary school, it was more characterised by this immediate proximity, this being outside so much in the neighbourhood, if you like. [...] When I was four or five, I was actually allowed to go out on my own as long as I stayed in the immediate vicinity. [...] And then I could actually go out relatively early and go to the other children's houses. (Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.)

Similarly to many other older Nairobi speakers from the second and third spectrum, Gathi remembers how her home in Nairobi was very lively and filled with friends and relatives 'coming and going' (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu, N.) and sometimes even staying for longer periods if they had work to do in Nairobi. Whether the home was a base for the extended family has to do with generational orders and the urban-rural link, which contextualises many family models in Kenya.

In African households, um, or rather let me just talk about my house, our household, we had relatives visiting. My mum was the, was the first born [in] her family. And my dad was also the, [...] he's the first boy, and so he was the first person to really make it out of the village and come up this side. So, you can imagine, we would play host to everyone; anyone who needed to do something in Nairobi would come and visit us. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

It is not uncommon for these generational orders to be framed by a wider 'African' culture. Stella also introduces the home as a communal space framed by that scale. Beyond the feature of the open doors, the private communities are also characterised by commons. Several families used objects and goods beyond the notion of private ownership, serving as the commons of the community.

Figure 36: Learning bike.



Source: Drawing by the author.

We all learnt to ride there, all on the same bike. First without training wheels, then with training wheels. That actually went through [...] all the children, through all the households, that little red learning bike. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

The communal bicycle (Figure 36) on which children from the whole street learnt to ride also appears in the Nairobi speakers' narrations. The range of the socio-economic differences between these speakers shows how sharing communal objects is not limited to the economic need to do so.

We used to ride bikes together. Uh, bicycles were like a communal thing. My/I had one bicycle. So now my, my friend, my cousin, the one I'm telling you [about] who used to live in Karen, the one who was rich, you know, he gave me one of his bikes (laughing) and then, then that one bike became the whole estate's bike. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.)

More interestingly and against the dominant (and important) narrative of terraced, semi-detached and row house settlements as socio-economically homogeneous bubbles, Chola's and Martha's examples show that socio-economic difference still mattered there.

Or yes, if, uh, you were privileged to have a bike because not everyone was privileged to have a bike, then we would ride your bike. (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.)

Besides the bicycle, several other material agents appear as commons in the context of such housing types. Against the principle of private ownership, children developed rituals of sharing.

If one person had a football, uh, we/He will just share it with everyone. [...] You just come outside with it then we all play with it. [...] Like, sometimes we used to come out with our toys. Everybody had, like, separate toys. Maybe somebody has a car. Just come outside and play with them. (Henry, 21 yrs, *1999, male, Buruburu Phase II, N.)

Sharing commons was again not only limited to the outdoor space; objects fixed and installed inside houses could likewise become commons.

In Buruburu, [...] some homes were really famous around us cause they had TVs. But [the] TV was exceptional, mostly we played outside in the streets. Playing outside was anyways the best thing. (Gathi, 50 yrs, *1969, female, Buruburu Phase II, N.)

7.2.2.1.4 The Borders of Commoning

After sharing much about the communality of the community, I will now address its exclusionary characteristics. The cases presented show that the community and its spatial qualities and relations appear as an emotional topology of (un)belonging, in which children's cultures were free to evolve, whereas the adult community was perceived as protective in the background. Interestingly, this social cohesion only applies to the confines of its respective residential type. Hence, none of the speakers who lived in a terraced or semi-detached house settlement expressed this cohesion beyond their residential confines.

And I would say that there were maybe 20 to 25 houses, semi-detached houses, on one side of the street. [...] [It was a] private road. Only residents. [...]. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

Even though from the perspective of a child that resides in such topologies this private street seems very inclusive, from the perspective of the city at large, private streets and gated estates do not promote a right to the city for all children. This is also because of its horizontal character, which seems hardly sustainable in the overpopulating cities of Berlin and Nairobi.

Let us look at Fabian's case and the townhouses in Lütztowstraße (Figure 37), planned and built in the context of the International Building Exhibition (*Internationale Bauausstellung* [IBA]) between 1982 and 1984. The homes designed there were 'ultimately exclusive residential property' (Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.), even though they addressed young middle-class families who were given reasonable loans.

Figure 37: Private street between townhouses in the estate of Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

Additionally, the planners added flats with separate entrances as part of each unit of the townhouses. These flats, also called ‘granny flats’ (*Einliegerwohnungen*), could be rented out, either to extended family members or to friends or strangers, and were supposed to allow the house owners to ‘co-finance the loan’ (ibid.). Although the architects and planners had additionally imagined these flats as fostering diversity through ‘low renting costs throughout the first 20 years’, Fabian admits,

we never had that much contact with the tenants [...] and the guy who lived there was/ We didn’t notice anything about him. He didn’t play a big role in my life. (ibid.)

This shows how the built environment had not lived up to its intentions (diversification) but created a socio-economically mixed topology of housing and home-making in which the economic other remained the social other. In Fabian’s case, there is already an ambiguity of private and public within the topological community; generally, the ‘private community’ is private because, in the most general sense, it somewhat ends with its layout.

[M]um was totally anxious, constantly afraid that something would happen to her girl. So that we would go shopping and be attacked, kidnapped, raped. [...] I wasn’t allowed to go anywhere alone. I was always dropped off; I was always picked up. It was extremely restrictive for me. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B)

The material shows that the socio-material process of securitisation has increased significantly since the 1960s. This applies not only to Nairobi but also to Berlin. For example, after the audio recording was stopped, Anne told me how the residents of the semi-detached houses in the street eventually installed alarm systems prominently positioned on the house’s wall. Similarly, Fabian talks about a clear shift in the securitisation of the townhouses in Tiergarten.

[B]ack then, everything was always open. Today, it's not like that at all. That's partly because the same people no longer live there and also because of how prostitution and crime have developed. [...] And now they've planted high hedges. This path, which, of course, used to be intended as a passageway, is now closed off with gates that are locked. [...] Now the people there all have motion detectors of some kind and also secure themselves to a certain extent [...] because the security situation in the city has simply changed, in that place. (Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.)

Figure 38: The wall that connects to the gate that Kili refers to in the following passage.



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

Many speakers who still have access to their childhood homes told me they no longer see children playing there. The small streets and open spaces are empty, and far fewer children live in the neighbourhoods today, while the older generation remains. My architectural ethnographic observations in Anne's street show how the front doors, previously fitted with door handles, were returned to their original state. The doorknobs have been reinstalled. The alarm systems that Anne mentioned are recognisable. The increasing fortification (Figure 38) of the private community towards the outside becomes visible when the speakers who resided in these topologies (most older than 20 years) reflect on the present situation of their childhood homes.

When we were younger, our gates were all see-through, right? [...] But as we grow older, people started putting gates up, you know, uh, or rather solid, making it solid. When I was younger, [...] our gate would stay open the whole night, and you're not afraid, but nowadays it's, eh, the gate [is] closed. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

Eddah also reflects that her childhood, which is portrayed here as a private community, was communal in nature. However, it seems questionable whether the same typology would still be lived in and described in such a communal way today, with the increased security that has been added over time and that hinders community-building practices of children.

As we grew older, we'd go as a group and go [...] to other estates. [...] So, we would/you'd find a huge group of kids [...] just going to visit other estates. [...] Nowadays, you can't really enter the estates. You have to leave your ID [person identification], and we were children; we didn't have IDs. [...] (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, female, Ngumo, N.)

Henry, born in 1999 and the youngest in the topology of the private community, directly answers to Eddah's assessment and confirms the growing securitisation, which ended a sense of (un)belonging of children across estates.

Figure 39: Security check at the entrance to a middle-class estate in Nairobi.



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

In my childhood [...] we never used to, like, go to other people's courts, like, to play. [...] because people don't know you there. And then, you know, the security guards, they used to like, uh, check people who are coming in. (Henry, 21 yrs, *1999, male, Buruburu Phase II, N.)

Looking back again to the 1970s, even though 57-year-old Morris remembers his childhood in the 1970s as comparatively safe, he also marks the socio-economic homogeneity of his settlement as the condition of this safety, thus again highlighting the borders of the private community.

People used to trust each other, yeah. You'd leave and go to a family who you don't know and, uh, you just stay there until in the evening, you play with their children, and you go home. [...] We used to have, uh, you know, a, a kind of a village kind of a set up where we know everybody. Because, you know, in a, in a, in a place like Embakasi Village, you know, all parents know each other because they work in the same area. So, when you go to somebody's house, and you say that you were at so and so's house, then they'll say, 'Okay. It's fine.' But these days and this time, in the same village, nothing like that can happen. (Morris, 57 yrs, *1962, male, Embakasi Village, N.)

When Morris relates safety to the fact that 'all parents know each other because they work in the same area', he describes the social coherency used to secure children's spatial mobility based on exactly that colonial imaginary of security: socio-economic stratification and segregation. In Morris's and many other contexts, this order comes with same-designed settlements, which have performativity based so much on order and repetition that the homogeneity of the physical structures must be seen with its often economically homogeneous groups of residents. This, as we remember Martha, does not mean that there is no difference between the homogeneous group, but this difference is relatively big or small depending on the perspective (internal/external).

7.2.2.15 Summary: Moving In as the First Generation of Families

It can be summarised that the private community features predominantly horizontal ways of living that can promote social interaction and communal support easily because it connects dwelling structures to a semi-public space (e.g., [semi-]private streets and paths, empty parking, little gardens) which, as the examples above show, have been frequently used by children and as such often also play a broader biographical role. What also differentiates this typology from more vertical typologies, such as tenement and private apartment blocks that can also have a common area, is that the number of residents is much lower, and as a group their 'members' are relatively comprehensible. This difference could also indicate that the ability to know every resident strengthens social cohesion and promotes a sense of safety among the residents. Beyond addressing the human scale (by being comprehensible), the material fabric of such horizontal private communities is that the repetitive typology of look-alike structures necessarily brings its habitants into relation.

The findings indicate that the social topology of private community can be found across class differences, whereas each community is relatively class-homogeneous. Hence, cases like Fabian's show that as soon as a socio-economic mix is allowed or promoted by the design of private communities, such as in the IBA model of 'granny flats', the difference planned and designed here is lived outside or parallel to the community. This is what again marks the private character of this topology.

Regarding the age comparison, it can be noted that this form of housing strongly represents the speakers born between the late 1960s and late 1980s. When we look at the intergenerational difference (which is limited here due to the limited number of younger speakers who live in such structures), it appears as if practices of communalisation decrease over time. This decrease must be seen in relation to growing insecurity discourses surrounding childhood on the one hand. In the following subchapter 7.3, I elaborate on what could be connected with such a change when I look at the spatial mobility of children on the larger scale of the city. On the other hand, it turns out that all the speakers who resided in the topology of private community, except Henry (the youngest), are part of families that were the first generation to move into these newly built homes. Therefore, there is a common understanding that they are the inhabitants of a settlement that is newly built, and as such often commonly known across the city. Starting a life in a place called home together must be experienced as a collective act, which also shapes the collective identity of such places, as people are much more open to getting to know each other when everyone is new. This special circumstance, related to the growing urbanisation of the 1970s and 1980s in both cities – a period in which many homes were built – must be kept in mind when interpreting the material with regard to figuration.

7.2.2.2 Vertical Capsules

[...] living in Kibera it was like [...] probably like a better place like, uh, I don't know, in a court or an apartment, uh, 'cause in Kibera now, the families were more communal. Even the difference that I'm experiencing now after moving out from Kibera going to where I live now is, like, in Kibera in the middle of the night if your salt is over, you can call the neighbour and tell them, 'Hey, give me some salt *kidogo*⁸ [...]'. Where I live now [South C], (laughs) you can't even do that. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.)

Contrary to the topology of private community, the social topology of vertical capsules will, in the following, refer to the vertical topologies of housing and home-making in diverse apartment blocks, with no or only limited common space (for example, a backyard or garden). These inhabited units can be tenements or privately owned. Perhaps they are part of a perimeter block development (typical of Berlin); therefore, they are indirectly gated or directly gated and guarded within an estate. Generally, this is the topology most commonly inhabited by the younger speakers of the sampling, marking the first and biggest difference from the previous type. The types of building blocks vary in terms of the periods in which they were built (from the 19th century to the 1990s) and the sizes of the speakers' flats (approximately 45 to 130 square metres).

7.2.2.2.1 From Horizontal to Vertical

Rosi was 58 years old when we met. She grew up in an 'academic household' in Pankow (Figure 40), in the north-east of Berlin, where she lived with her parents and her sister during the 1960s and 70s.

8 *Kidogo* is Kiswahili and means 'a little bit'.

And that was a so-called gap building, basically from the sixties. [There was a gap between buildings in a large square with a lot of greenery at the back. So not as densely built up as Prenzlauer Berg and in a flat that was actually quite modest by today's standards. [...]. So it was four rooms [...], about 70 square metres, relatively modest. (Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.)

*Figure 40: Street in front of tenement block of Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.*



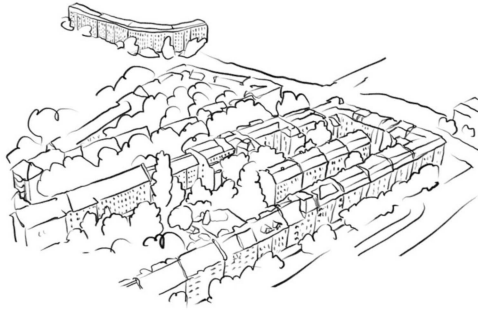
Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

Rosi is Raphael's mother, and coincidentally, they spent their childhood in two different housing types that, in the topological perspective developed here, are both somewhat special cases. Like Raphael's topology of housing and home-making, Rosi's lies somewhere between private community and vertical capsule. Differently from most of the following characteristics of the vertically framed topologies, Rosi and her family had access to a garden-like yard. As shown in Figure 41, this garden is part of a rather large and long garden backyard (*Karree*) inside a structure that looks like a stretched perimeter block.

As with the speakers who resided in private community topologies, outdoor play was important during Rosi's childhood. Yet this outdoor play differs from the private community examples, as it was largely concentrated in the garden-like yard.

So, we were really outside a lot. We played in the street, so to speak, or in our yard, really down in the yard and in the bushes, building huts, so to speak. We rode scooters. [...] It's practically a square [*Karree*] there in Pankow. [...] And there was a plot in the centre [...] that belonged to the church [...] You weren't allowed in there, but there were the best fruit trees and so on. And, of course, there were holes in the fence. And then sometimes we secretly climbed in or something. [...] So that was an important place. (ibid.)

Figure 41: Backyard garden of Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.



Drawing by the author, 2019.

Besides the garden-like yard behind the house that plays a very minor role in the narratives constituting the private community, Rosi's narration also differs regarding the size of the group of children she played with, which was comprised only of her, her sister, and a boy from the neighbourhood. Another difference is that the social group of the private community is age-heterogeneous, whereas in Rosi's and the following cases community is limited to the children's play – which means that although children interact across households, their parents organise the care-work within the nuclear family.

My mum was at home, which was an outsider under the conditions in the GDR [German Democratic Republic] at the time. They [the other GDR children] were all at nursery school, like that. So, it was a bit different for us. (ibid.)

Rosi, who grew up in the East, and Anne, who grew up in the West, thus represent two (hi)stories that turn the dominant narrative of the working mother in the East versus the housewife in the West around. Another element in Rosi's narration that testifies to an exclusion from the topology of the horizontally lived private community is the complex description of the interior space, where the flat itself, and thus the home as flat (and some garden), is central to her childhood memory. Whereas the interior space is rarely mentioned in the speakers' descriptions of the private community, Rosi offered a vivid impression of the flat and the family 'codes' constituting it.

There were also certain, you could say, codes or something that came from things. For example, when we were expecting guests, we would somehow switch on the lights in the corridor so that we could see everything clearly or something. I've still got that down, yes. I also switch on the light when someone arrives and doesn't have to come in in the dark. And that was always called 'switching on the dolphin'. And I don't know if you know [Jaques] Tati, that French director, Tati. [...] There are many films. And Monsieur Hulot is an absolutely planned-out guy who always goes to his sister [in] this insanely modern house. And there's this dolphin in the garden. The dolphin is in the garden. And whenever the doorbell rings, she switches on the dolphin first. And

that was the standing expression in our house. [...] 'Turn on the dolphin' then meant: 'So now, come here, get everything ready!' (ibid.)

Figure 42: Dolphin fountain.



Source: Film still from the movie *Mon Oncle* from Jaques Tati (1985), screenshot by the author.

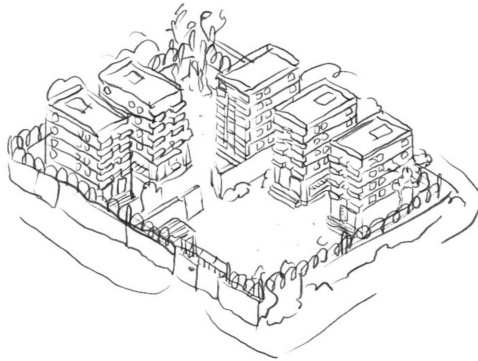
In his 1958 film *Mon Oncle* (Figure 42), Jaques Tati parodies the idea of rationalisation that emerged in the context of Taylorism, which from then on spread to all domains of social life and not only controlled work processes in factories but also shaped, for example, the functionality of bourgeois domestic environments, gender roles, and housework. The hypermodern, rather poorly automated house of the family portrayed in *Mon Oncle* is the symbol of household management taken to extremes and trimmed to increase performance, in which functionality, clarity, automation, and compartmentalisation determine the spatial atmosphere and thus also reflect a rather functional, almost mechanic social interaction of its inhabitants and their guests. The depiction of this milieu reaches its caricature-like climax in a recurring scene in which a dolphin-shaped fountain in the front garden is only ever switched on as soon as a guest arrives and presses the doorbell on the opaque gate. Rosi's family takes over the dolphin gesture ironically. This describes them as a reflective middle-class nuclear family aware of its status. In other contexts as well, Rosi repeatedly establishes this difference from others by referring to her closest environment.

[T]here where I lived [...] not that many people lived there, at least from my class, because the school was between two centres, so to speak. [...] And there were new blocks of flats built at the back. And that's where most of them lived. So, if you think about it, the streams that went to school, then maybe I went with a friend and two others/ we went in one direction, and the whole crowd always went in the other direction. And

sometimes, I was a bit envious. I found it so exciting. They were closer together. Maybe three people from one class happened to live in one house [...] they perhaps had a stronger sense of community as a result. (Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.)

In this description, Rosi does not merely relate to others in her neighbourhood as different. She does this in a specific way that does not testify to bourgeois coldness as in Tati's film but in positive recognition of the 'other'. In this recognition, she furthermore expresses appreciation towards communality. In this way, Rosi clarifies her position as a speaker in the topology developed here, in which she occupies a marginal position, and from this position refers to another marginal or special case in the vertical topology, namely the cousins Tatiana and Rose Ann, who are residents of a large tenement housing estate in Donholm, in the south-east of Nairobi.

*Figure 43: Estate of Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

When I arrived there the day I met them, the taxi driver dropped me off in front of a supermarket on Outer Ring Road, from where I started my walk. The streets were lively. Shops, fruit vendors, and stands, small restaurants, hair salons, a hospital, a gospel centre, and a fuel station bordered the main road. The residential homes are located along the small streets. Shops appear more jury-rigged than in Westlands. There are trees on some corners, and potholes are bigger than where I came from in Upper Hill. Soon my eyes met Abra, Tatiana's mother, waving at me, accompanied by her three-year old niece, Eve. Wastewater had flooded the muddy road leading to the estate. I carefully observed how Eve navigated her tiny body through the big puddles, reaching the aquamarine-coloured metal gate without getting wet. The estate was somewhat older (Figure 43). It was carefully decorated with cactus flowers. The inner estate was additionally bounded by a fallow concrete wall with a coloured gate.

Unlike Rosi, who is in the upper end of the third spectrum, the cousins are in the lower end of the second spectrum and, in terms of the number of people living with them in a household, have much less living space, perhaps similar to that of the children from the

block Rosi refers to. When I asked Tatiana how an ordinary Saturday in her life looked, not too much of it sounded like a community.

Saturday, I wake up late. I wash my face. I come down and have breakfast. [...] If they have not cooked, I cook break-/I cook tea. I take the tea. I brush my teeth. I do homework if there is any. I wash my socks. I wash my/I polish my shoes. I iron my/I iron my clothes. I go to church for catechism. I come back from church. I wash the utensils. I look for lunch. [...] I brush my teeth, [and] then I watch TV. Yeah. [C.M.: And you never play outside with your friends? Saturday?] When, when the people come out. Sometimes they don't come out. Like yesterday, there were no people outside. [C.M.: How is it on Sundays?]. I shower. I go to church, and I come back from church. I have breakfast. [...] Sometimes I just come back and stay in the house. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

As Tatiana's example shows, it is not only at school where children spend a lot of time during the week. In the Christian majority of Nairobi, children also spend a lot of time in church on weekends. As such, the church must be considered an additional topology of community. Even though, as the drawing in Figure 44 shows, there is a certain amount of communal space in the estate, a children's community or play in these spaces do not appear prominently in Tatiana's narration. She often seems too busy with school and the chores she must do.

*Figure 44: Inner yard of estate of Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.*



Drawing by the author, 2019.

In contrast to the communal household spaces familiar from the GDR blocks, such as the laundry room, the time spent on housework in the estate in Nairobi is primarily tied to the private sphere. Every household is for itself. This is what makes this form of housing so vertical. The only thing that breaks with this verticality is the fact that

most of the time it's not a must for me to go outside the court because there are two shops inside the court. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

In my field observations, I saw smaller interactions between the residents who met in these places. Although these interactions usually do not last longer than a few minutes,

they promote social exchange in the estate community. Seeing each other frequently also inevitably creates a social cohesion in which, for example, it would be noticeable if a resident is not seen for a while. The contact also leads to people keeping up to date with what is going on with each other, at least on a superficial level. While Tatiana, at age 10, still plays games with her peers in the estate, depending on the time available, her cousin Rose Ann, who is 13, mostly stays in and spends time on social media. As the 13-year-old also attends a boarding school, she spends very little time at the estate in general.

Let us move back to Berlin, where Neo (ten years) and Stephan (nine years) are the last two speakers who, with certain aspects of their topology of housing and home-making, can also be located at a transition from the horizontal to the vertical. While they, on the one hand, spend a lot of time at home, or in Stephan's case, in extracurricular spaces, such as the sports centre and language school, both have access to a public space that is outside their home but near it. In Neo's case, this is a traffic-free square in Neukölln (Figure 45), adjacent to the apartment block, a late-19th century building, in the following referred to as *Berliner Altbau*, where he lives with his family.

Figure 45: Aerial view of traffic-free square in front of tenement house of Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.



Drawing by the author, 2019.

I like my home, the square and the bakery next to me [...]. I think it's very cool there because [...] you can play table tennis quite well. [...] There are actually quite a lot of nice people living there too. [...] [C.M.: Are you allowed to be outside on your own, or do you always have to go out with your parents?] Of course, I can go out on my own. [...] Playing table tennis [at] Böhmischer Platz. (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.)

The closure of the square to vehicles is part of one of several neighbourhood block initiatives (*Kiezblock Initiative*) underway in Berlin and was driven by various small and local resident initiatives. Unlike superblocs, known in Barcelona as *superilles*, neighbourhood blocks usually focus on traffic calming, which can be implemented without costly reconstruction measures and with the local district administration. This does not result

in elaborately designed play areas, as in Sant Antoni and Poble Nou, Barcelona, but in traffic-calmed areas, where eventually children's street play evolves, such as here at the Böhmischer Platz. Children's play here is accompanied by an active local community that, for example, diminished several attempts by the surrounding cafés and restaurant owners to extend their seating in the square, in this way privatising it. These local and informal practices of (re)claiming public space are strongly connected to the community work of a children's theatre and community centre located directly at the square (Figure 46).

*Figure 46: Close-up of traffic-free square in front of tenement house of Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.*

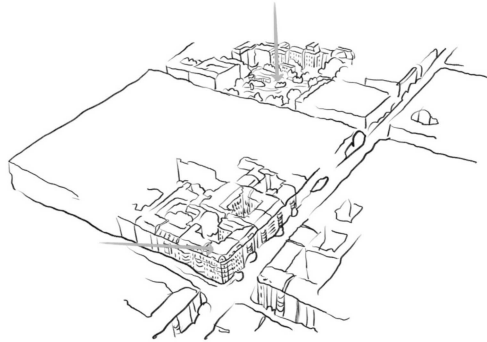


Source_ Drawing by the author, 2019.

From here, let us look at the north-east, where the Prenzlauer Berg district and Stephan's home are located. He lives in a Berliner Altbau with his parents and two smaller siblings, which is part of a perimeter block, similar to the one in Neukölln but much larger and typical of the area around Kollwitzkiez. Stephan is not lucky enough to live directly on a traffic-calmed square, but there is a nearby playground and football pitch next to his school, where he is allowed to go on his own (Figure 47).

I just have to go along the road, then there's a road across and then turn right, and there's a playground right next to our school, [...] it's quite big. There's a football pitch, a large meadow, table tennis [...] bushes where you can hide. A pirate ship and a balancing course. And a football pitch and a running track. And a sand pit for jumping. [...] I go there four or five times a week. [...] And the playground is also so that I can run around and I can't do that here in the flat. And I can just move around and sometimes be a bit free with my friends, for example, playing football. (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.)

*Figure 47: Proximity of playground and tenement house of Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

With a frequency of four to five times a week, the playground marks an important space in Stephan's life. But still, and like the other speakers above, the interior space of the flat gets much more attention throughout the interview. Whereas Neo from Neukölln spends a lot of online or screen time at home and regularly plays games, Stephan relates to his flat (Figure 48) most prominently regarding the importance of his family and privacy.

*Figure 48: Street view in front of tenement house of Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

So for me, the flat is definitely very important. [...] Yes, it's also important that I can sleep comfortably here [...]. For example, even if the weather is not good, that you have a roof over your head and that you are protected and that you have something like that, maybe a space where you are a bit more in your family [...]. So first, because you're also protected from some/for example, storms or something, if you also have your privacy more or less that you can't just come in and, yes, listen to everything. And that you are also here with your family and yes, that you can do a lot here with your family. (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.)

The private sphere appears very strongly in Stephan's description of the home. The flat encapsulates him and his family and nests him. A capsule seems necessary for compensating city life, which he sometimes perceives as overwhelming in a city of many and in which it is 'not always really easy to find your way through the crowds of people straight away' (ibid.). Even though the playground is near his home, it strongly belongs to the topology of the school and enlarges the school instead of his home. This is also visible regarding his social relations there.

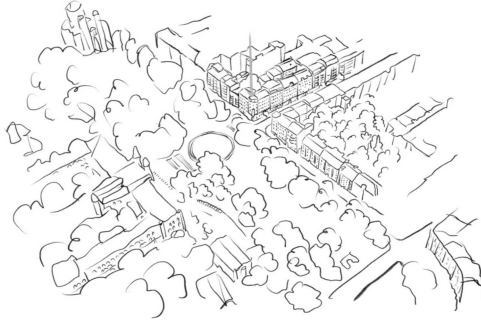
Well, I go to the football pitch, so there are a lot of people I know on the football pitch. I sometimes see them on the football pitch. I don't even know the names of some of them, even though I often see them on the football pitch. And yes, that's also because we're really, we're really focused on the game and don't really talk to each other much. But when you go there, you usually see the usual people. (ibid.)

Here, too, the difference to the private community becomes apparent, as the group of children Stephan regularly meets remains at some sort of personal distance. Also, regarding the level of the parent community, it must be said that Neo's and Stephan's parents benefit from civic participation in their neighbourhoods but are not directly involved. If they were, the increasingly homogenising area around the traffic-reduced square could also be understood by the topology of private community; private because only those who can afford the rent in that area would be in proximity. However, as the families also stay out of these initiatives, the topology of their home is strongly rendered by the topology of the vertical capsules. The meaning of the capsule once more becomes evident when we look at the strong emphasis on the interior space and its activities.

7.2.2.2.2 DomestiCity

The figure of the vertical capsule becomes clearer when we look at the last five speakers, which includes two pairs of siblings who live in the same household. For them, the flat is an important place of retreat that does not include any other public or semi-public spaces on the scalar level of home. For them, home is the flat and whoever and whatever is in it. The difference from the previous marginal types becomes clear when we look at the spatial environment of Lisa and Lana's home, who live with their little brother and parents in Kreuzberg near Mariannenplatz.

*Figure 49: Surroundings of tenement house of Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, and Lana, 13 yr., *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.*



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

They also live in a Berliner Altbau, depicted here in Figure 49. As a family in the upper-third spectrum, they have a 120 square-metre flat that is located directly on the public, heavily greened forecourt of the former Bethania hospital, which is now a listed building due to citizen participation processes and is home to art and cultural projects, including exhibitions under the name *Kunstraum Bethanien*. Although this place is right on their doorstep, so to speak, and the road that must be crossed is a bicycle road, on which motor vehicles are allowed to travel at a maximum speed of 30 km/h and bicycles have priority, and even though they can cross the street at a zebra crossing (Figure 50), the two sisters do not spend time in the park.

*Figure 50: Street view and road signs in front of tenement house of Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, and Lana, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.*



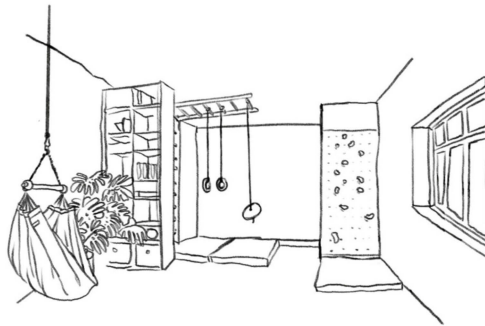
Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

In contrast, the flat is constituted as the absolute centre of life. When I entered the family's large, stylishly furnished flat, I first had to climb over a so-called balance board to then make my way through the open-plan hallway to the large kitchen-living room via

a small course made of so-called stacking stones. There was so much to discover here. In a nutshell, the ensemble had something of a showroom for children's toys that emphasised physical movement. Lisa's room was a bright room, measuring around 35 square metres with a high ceiling. A swing and other gymnastic equipment were attached to a wall bar in her room. Opposite a hanging chair suspended from the ceiling was a small climbing wall. We sat on the floor. Lisa told me what she currently does after school.

Then [after school] I usually go home, then I eat something small, then [...] I like to draw a lot, I also listen to something. I also play with my Furby. That's the red thing in the corner. And I water my plants. I also like doing handicrafts. And I also swing a lot. Sometimes I play here, or I'm in there [points to a hanging chair]. [...] And well, I just think it's so great here [...] because of all the things that are in here, all the things you can do with them. Yes. [...] So there's a wardrobe in here, a bed, a chair, [...] a Lego castle. [...] Lots of pens. Plants [...] A cello, [...] Cuddly toys. Savings cat and lots of other things. This is a swing. And this is a hammock, like a beanbag. (Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

*Figure 51: Scene from childhood room of Lisa, 9 yrs,
2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

Lisa and Lana own many objects, transforming their childhood rooms into an indoor playground (Figure 51). The importance of these rooms is extremely great and, as for Stephan, is associated with a positive connotation of privacy.

That you can just sit alone in your room [...] to do your homework. But then also to just relax, read, write with friends [...] in my room, I tend to be on my own. And yes, I keep myself busy on my own. [...] I have a Kindle [...] But I also have quite a few books [...] that I can read. [...] So, mostly [I am] in my room when I listen to music, and then I sing along. (Lana, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

In addition to the function of privacy, the children's room provides numerous opportunities for (physical) activity. This too contrasts with children in private communities, who usually seek out the same (physical) activities much more in the outdoor space and

communal areas of their residential topology. In contrast to being alone, being together takes centre stage. For Lana and Lisa, as for Stephan, home also has a strong emotional connotation and protective character,

because it's just so familiar and you can just be angry without the other person thinking: 'Okay, what did I do wrong?'. And that it's just that you're here and that you're with your family, that you're together. (Lana, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

The topology of their housing and home-making can thus be characterised even more as a sort of protective capsule, which is also strongly linked to the familial cohesion described here.

7.2.2.2.3 From Capsule to Tiny Fortress

For a further manifestation of verticality, I turn to the siblings Lale and Nuhu, who live with three other siblings, their parents, and a domestic worker in a 120 square-metre flat in Maziwa, a neighbourhood located in the west part of the city between Kilimani, Lavington, and Kawangware. When I arrived at their gated estate, I had to call their father, who came down to inform the security guard at the gate that I was their visitor.

*Figure 52: Window view to the inner yard of the estate of Lale, 13 yrs, *2006, female, and Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.*



Drawing by the author, 2019.

The estate is a gated square-shaped agglomerate of the same type of building, with relatively similar-sized flats that even come with similar-looking built-in furniture and a relatively large inner yard (Figure 52). Even though this marks some typological similarities with the private community, I did not see any children playing there. I spent an ordinary Saturday with Lale and Nuhu – surely knowing that having a stranger, a white woman (even though read by the children as a teenager) from Germany, at their place

was not going to be anything like ordinary to them. Nonetheless, this day gave me insight into the practices of home-making and housing in the context of their narration. First, when I returned, I again saw that no child was playing in the yard. I arrived after breakfast, and the children and their mother got ready to go to a nearby shopping mall to run some errands and collect lunch for the befriended children who would be coming to visit that day. Their driver picked us up inside the court. As we arrived at the mall's car park, we took an elevator to arrive inside the mall. After the security check up and some window shopping, we picked up pizzas at Pizza Hut and a huge box of fries and chicken wings at Kentucky Fried Chicken. The driver was waiting for us in the parking area and drove us home. Here, Wanjiku, their domestic worker, waited for us to help carry things up the stairs.

Shortly after our return, the befriended siblings arrived. As they arrived, the father of the family got a call from the security guard, went to the balcony, from where he can see the gate, and told the guard to let the visitors in. Meanwhile, the three oldest screamed out of happiness, running down the stairs to welcome their friends. Their father stopped them, instructing them from the balcony to stay away from the gate. The children obeyed and stopped at the house's entrance. Only when the car had entered and the gate had closed were they released by a firm 'ok' from their father and ran towards their friends, who got out of the car. After screams, hugs, and laughter, they quickly ran together into the house and arrived at the TV and seating area. A loud mix of English and Kiswahili was exchanged, involving the PlayStation in front of them. In the meantime, Wanjiku had warmed up the food and set the table. The food was served and soon devoured by the crowd of children. Then, it was playtime. The children gathered around the PlayStation, and a long match began. While the older children played on the PlayStation, the younger ones played on the tablets. The families' children spend every second or third Saturday like this. Nuhu also describes what he does on a regular Saturday.

I come and eat breakfast. I go shower. If I didn't shower at night, since I'm tired, I shower in the morning, then I change. I come to the sitting room. I, I play some games [and] watch some cartoon[s]. Yeah, that's what I do. Oh, and watch movies; that's what I do. (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.)

Saturday is surely connected to home here, and home is connected to self-care and screen-related indoor play. All other play is not played at home and the estate but in malls, their indoor play areas, and the private school where they spend most of their day and have extracurricular activities. The emotional aspect of home also comes up indirectly when Lale explains that having a home like hers in Nairobi is not a matter of course.

Um, most people here [...] in Nairobi, um, they don't really have a good place to live in. [...] It's really hard for them to make a living. So, most of them live on the streets 'cause their parents either die or abandon them or, or does something really weird to them. So, they run away from home and, like, it's really hard for them to live. But then there are also thieves on the streets. (Lale, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Maziwa, N.)

As the story progresses, the outside space is constituted more and more as dangerous. Home thus takes on greater significance as a protective space. Lale and Nuhu are part of a big family. As such, they have a lot of family-related company, even though they are extremely sheltered at home. It appeared to me as strongly restricted how they were accompanied to the mall and advised to behave in their estate's yard. To break with that confinement, they receive visitors from outside. Yet the extent to which the flat encapsulated them also features analogies with the following topology: the enclave, fortress, and island.

7.2.2.3 Enclave, Fortress, and Island

The social topology of enclave, fortress, and island represents single-family homes with an (un)gated or (un)guarded garden or compound. Regarding age, the topology is relatively heterogeneous; with regard to the socio-economic status of its speakers, it is the most homogeneous topology (third and fourth spectrum). This is unsurprising, because few in the middle-class spectrum can afford to live in a single-family home in cities like Berlin and Nairobi.

7.2.2.3.1 Enclave

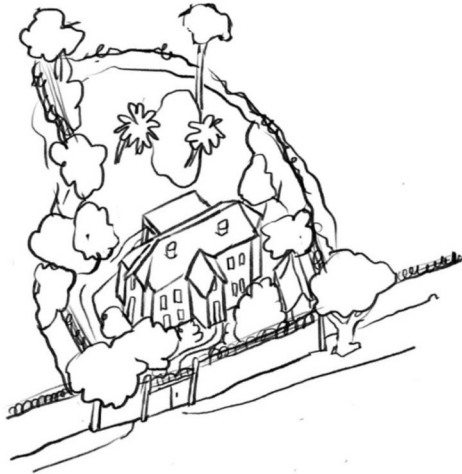
Pierre was 13 when we met. He and his family were born in France and moved to Burkina Faso when Pierre was three years old. Pierre has little memory of that place. The family moved to Nairobi in 2013, and Pierre's parents separated shortly after. Since then, he and his brother have lived in the so-called exchange model, staying one week with their mother and one with their father. When I met Pierre, he was staying with his father and brother in a villa with a large garden in the Lavington district in Westlands, Nairobi. Apart from them, there is also

one gardener, [...] one housekeeper [during] the day and two at the night. [One of them is] Moses, [...] he drives, he cooks, he yeah, he does lots of, lots of things. (Pierre, 13 yrs, *2006, male, Lavington, N.) (ibid.)

When Pierre and I met at his father's place, we sat on the veranda overlooking the garden (Figure 53). This is the starting point of Pierre's biographical memory in Nairobi.

The first two years in Kenya, I always went to the, to the garden. So, I have, uh, I have things over there [that] I could play with. But, now, um, I always stay in the, in the living room and in my chamber. So, yeah, I don't really go to the garden. [...] We don't really go out, we don't always go out because [we need] to take the car and, you know, see when the, when the driver can take you back or all that stuff. But, uh, so we don't really go out, especially here. [...] [W]e don't like [to] go outside and come over and things like that; we, we just, we just stay and, you know, watch our phones, um, playing, you know, just in the house not doing much. (ibid.)

Figure 53: Compound of Pierre, 13 yrs, *2006, male,
Lavington, N.



Source: Drawing by the author, 2019.

At some point during our meeting, I noticed movement on the neighbouring property, but densely overgrown bushes and trees blocked the view. When I asked Pierre who lives there, he replied,

Uh, other neighbours, I don't, uh, I don't know them. The only moment when I see them it's when, uh, just the car comes, and that's all. (ibid.)

The day before, I had met Chola, who spent his childhood in Kibera. I remembered his story about the salt. As I sat with Pierre, I seemed to be in a place where it is unusual to ask the neighbours for salt at night and perhaps also during the day.

So, I had a friend over there just next to me here. [He, he still lives here?] No, no, he went. Like, I think all my best friends [...] left Nairobi [and] went to another place [...] it's the expats. (ibid.)

Sometimes, Pierre stopped his narration, getting lost looking at the garden. I stayed quiet with him, taking that moment to feel the space's serene but gloomy atmosphere – both beautiful and isolated. When he continued, Pierre told me how different life was when he was in Paris for the holidays. He misses it. Just then, his father came outside and spoke a few words in French with him and disappeared again. Shortly after, Moses arrived with croissants and tea. The more I stay, the more I get the impression that the topology he resides in shows analogies to an enclave. He's in Nairobi, but in a way, this place seems a part of somewhere else – a place where French rules apply and French culture is lived. The detached house with a garden created a completely different space-time that is individual and connected to an elsewhere. During a break and walk through

the garden, I saw the high wire mesh fence with electric and barbed wire, barely visible because the structure was entwined with green plant tendrils. I could hear electric whirring nearby. Small, steady beats. The concert of birds and insects had drowned it out. We looked at the fish in the pond and returned to the veranda.

When Pierre and his brother are with their mother, who lives in a much smaller rented flat a little south of Lavington in Kileleshwa, everything is different.

My mum's house just behind the Junction [shopping mall] where with my brother we go, we always go over there to [do] some shopping and watch some, uh, go in the cinema and/[...] Yeah, there is a[nother] place, a place where you can get drinks, [...] some food and, uh, chips and things like that and, [a] stage in front where you can just hear music, uh, like, yeah. [...] And, and, in between the bar and the, the, the place where you hear, uh, the music [...] it's a hallway where, uh, where with my brother we go over there because of the hallway, and he can do skateboarding. (ibid.)

Pierre's mother works in Nairobi's cultural sector. She knows the scene well and lets her sons participate in a lifestyle filled with cultural events. Here, Pierre and his brother spend much less time at home; if they do so, friends are often invited. The activities are therefore strongly initiated by his mother, who, as Pierre says,

doesn't like when we just do nothing so, she, she push[es] us to go to the Toi Market, to the forest and, you know, things like that. (ibid.)

Pierre has two different lives in the same city, each derived from the different topologies of home that his parents and their socio-economic situations strongly shape. The social topology of enclave does not only appear in the younger part of the sampling group. Mildred's (39 years) and Caroline's (62 years) childhoods were also shaped by protection, and the home played a big role. Caroline and her sisters were sent to boarding school for their primary years, as their parents were in Europe for education and work. When they were in secondary school, the family settled in the Karen neighbourhood in the south-west of Nairobi, an area well known for its single-family houses and villas in gated, park-sized compounds, with so-called servants' quarters and places for farming and animal husbandry. For Caroline, born in 1957 and nine years old at the time, that home in Karen was one of nine places she had already lived, and the place she finally stayed after much change related to her parents, who studied in Europe and had to leave their daughters in the care of grandparents and boarding schools. While the boarding school and the time during which her parents were abroad felt rather 'traumatising' to Caroline, because they were left by themselves at an early age, the life that continued with her parents after their return to a single family house within the nuclear family was extremely sheltered in comparison.

My parents were very strict. [...] We were not allowed just to go anywhere, and more so when we became teenagers. (Caroline, 62 yrs, *1957, female, Karen, N.)

Karen, at that time, was still predominantly white, and Caroline shared that she and her family were affected by racism within the neighbourhood. She remembers how, in local shops, ‘they would always be like looked down on, you know, like “What are you doing in this neighbourhood?”’ (ibid.). Here, like Pierre, the home appears as an enclave: a Black Kenyan family as outsiders within the predominantly white late colonial society of Karen.

As such, the topology of Caroline’s home shows similarities with that of Paula, who was born in 1961 and grew up in Köpenick in East Berlin.

We grew up in an old part of the city, an old villa colony, so to speak. It’s on the Spree. And in a detached house with a garden; so, we were naturally quite privileged, I would say, in retrospect. (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.)

Growing up privileged in the socialist GDR system with its Marxist-Leninist principles already renders them outsiders. Even though they were not the only outsiders in that system, the exceptionality of Paula’s position additionally finds expression in the meaning that home used to have in Paula’s childhood. Interestingly, her mother’s parental leave is also part of the importance of home, which adds up to the counter-narrative that I already pointed to in Rosi’s and Anne’s childhoods. Like Rosi, who also spent her childhood in the east part of Berlin, Paula had a mother who did not – as was usual – send her daughters to nursery school and kindergarten but stayed at home even when her daughters went to primary school.

My mum started working again [when Paula started secondary school]; before that, she was at home for a long time, but she was an exception. Actually, all the mums worked relatively early on. And that meant we didn’t go to after-school care [*Hort*] or anything but went home after school. (ibid.)

Here, too, we find an example in the East in which the home is of great importance and has a temporality that is deliberately extended despite the given structures of institutionalised childcare. However, the home as the private sphere also appears in a further entanglement that emphasises the enclave character of the topology and knits the counter-narrative further. In Paula’s narrative, the GDR system appears more as a regime to which the family only felt a limited sense of belonging, which is why her mother sought refuge in a Christian church community, among other things to provide her daughters with an alternative milieu to that of their ‘classmates[, who] were somehow infiltrated by their families’ (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.). Perhaps feeling a little more at home in the west of the city, in some aspects, Paula and her family lived a rather ‘parallel’ life, one that belonged to an elsewhere.

And so we were already in the Christian school early on. [...] And well, and then I had my own circles. (ibid.)

The relationship between Christian institutions and the socialist state in the GDR is by no means easy to explain. However, the Church and its followers saw themselves at the

mercy of systematic oppression. Paula's story, but also my own in the Catholic Christian community in a rural area in Thuringia, formerly East Germany, clarifies that this was not always successful with a Christian majority in the country. Nevertheless, both Paula and I (even after reunification) were confronted with the dominant narrative that there was no Christianity in the GDR – a narratives that renders the many sorts of enclave topologies within the time of Germany's division invisible.

7.2.2.3.2 Fortress

Whereas the previous examples point to a parallel world one resides in during childhood, others are marked more by isolation and fortification. To Caroline, the home in Karen had an enclave-like character, promoted by colonial racial segregation, yet to Sya and Mildred, Caroline's granddaughter and daughter, the same typology altered from enclave to fortress. This figuration must be seen as strongly contextualised by socio-political change connected to Kenya's independence in 1963, which drastically shaped the composition of Karen's residents. While the neighbourhood became much more heterogeneous in terms of colour, the socio-economic homogeneity of privileged people remained. Mildred, who was born in 1980, describes the generational order that shaped her childhood home in the same compound as follows:

The home I grew in, grew up in, was basically/I had my grandparents, and I had my aunts. [...] So, my mom is a single mom, so my grandfather was my father figure, and then there is my grandmother who was more like the disciplinarian, and then my aunts, um, who at the time they were in college and others were in high school. So, I would say my childhood was very sheltered, and I grew up alone. I have a sister, but she came 11 years later. (Mildred, 39 yrs, *1979, female, Karen, N.)

Whereas for Caroline, the danger outside her home was racism, for Mildred, it was Nairobi's economic crisis and the political unrest that developed during the 1990s in Kenya – two contexts that will be elaborated on in the following subchapter 7.3. Being sheltered and lonely is even more a topic for Mildred, as she had no siblings at that age. The way she talks about home is forging a topology of fortress – a place that protects her but also isolates her from the world.

For me, it was my world. It was just me, you know? So, it was all about me. I wouldn't say I was spoiled. Maybe my mother would, but to me, I wasn't. But I was/I took every single opportunity to play, 'cause once I got home, there was nobody. (ibid.)

Interestingly, she home-schools her daughter Sya today, who lives in the same compound and complains about her loneliness. But Mildred is sure about the need to shelter her.

And if anybody is to talk to her, you know, you're always like, 'Are they right? Are they okay? Is she okay?' You have to have/Like, if she's with her phone, I have to track her. If she is/I don't let her go out with her friends yet unless it's parent[a] supervision. (ibid.)

Fortunately, I was able to interview all three generations – Caroline (grandmother), Mildred (mother), and Sya (daughter). Therefore, I can share Sya's take on that amount of supervision.

Life in Nairobi is interesting. It can also be a bit boring (laughs) [...] it's better when you have a sibling. Because [in] some places where you live, it's only compounds. So, if you live in a compound, it's very boring if you're the only/If you're the only child. [...] In an estate, it's more fun 'cause more kids live there, so it's more fun and noisy. (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.)

Sya first emphasised the isolation that comes with the topology of single-family homes. Second, she described this isolation as affecting single children more than those who have siblings. It becomes visible in the following excerpt that Sya's mobility is severely restricted, because she is not allowed to leave the compound without adult supervision, and she is additionally home-schooled there.

[The] compound is [...] all fenced up. No one should get in or out without the person's/ The owner's permission. And then it's just one big house or one small house in a big chunk of land. (ibid.)

The topology of her home can be described as a kind of fortress in which she and her mother and grandmother are kept safe from the dangers of the outside world. Perhaps it is no surprise that Sya was the only speaker younger than 16 I did not meet at home. Instead, she came to mine. This is despite her mother and grandmother being speakers who all grew up in the same house.

Sya strongly describes her present life as shaped by solitude and boredom. Her relation to the world is primarily limited to her home and some islands of consumption that co-constitute and enlarge her topology of home. But despite her situation, Sya empowers and emancipates herself from her present local situation by imagining herself as a financially independent and successful global citizen in the future. However, beyond all that subversion, in the end the plans she makes are mainly dedicated to status work and her future investment in a steady home. Hence, she makes a U-turn back to where she currently is, just elsewhere. This is because, in fact, the topology of her dream home will not change. It will remain a fortress. The only change is that the danger lurking outside will not be racism (as for the grandmother) or political unrest (as for the mother) but her own 'fans' (ibid.).

Well, I want one with at least, um, uh, um, like, uh, let's say nine bedrooms. And then I want a sitting room, a dining room, a kitchen, of course, then there's a family room, and then I want the kid's room where they have their/All their toys. And then, I of course/ Like I want, I want a big chunk of land like, um, like maybe nine acres 'cause I build a mansion and then I have the pool, then I have the pool house/And then down like far from the house I want a place where I can just have horses 'cause I love horses. And then, like, I want to have a spot, like near my house, I like want to have two peacocks. 'Cause I love peacocks. And then, like, eventually, I want to get a, a baby panther. Panther, yeah. I love black panthers. I find them amazing. And then, when it's a teen, I have to put it

in a cage. [And will your house be gated?] It will have to have a fence. I don't want fans to come [to] my house and find them at my doorstep, yeah. (ibid.)

7.2.2.3.3 Island

But fortification does not always come with isolation or the effect of loneliness. It can also be perceived as living on a beautifully secluded island. This was the case for Pele, who grew up in Westlands Nairobi, as a child of a 'father [who] was a big shot' (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.). His family moved to Westlands when he was nine years old and settled there until recently, when they sold the property.

It was a huge compound. [...] There's a gate. There's, uh, a field this side, uh there's a veranda. It was a Spanish-styled villa [...] Would we call it Spanish or Mediterranean? It had those fantastic tiles, [...] the sitting room, which was quite large, kitchen, dining hall, uh, I think we had four bedrooms. [...] It had an upper floor also. [...] Did we have a watchman? We didn't have a watchman. It was open, open door, open gate. There was a doorbell when they [got] inside. (ibid.)

Even though Pele and Caroline's single-family homes did not have guards when they were children, they were still in highly privatised areas in colonial Nairobi. Caroline describes the recent past of these areas as 'places you couldn't come [to, otherwise] you'd be shot dead' (Caroline, 62 yrs, *1957, female, Karen, N.). Caroline and Pele are part of the relatively small percentage of children that grew up, back then, in predominantly white areas of colonial and postcolonial Nairobi. But whereas in Caroline's memory, the racism that she faced at school and in her neighbourhood in Karen overshadowed her memory, for Pele, the memory of privilege, strongly connected to the ability to eat good food, predominates and strongly shapes his topology of home as island.

We had a cook and two servants. One to look after the kids, and one to do the cleaning. Yeah, we were many; nine children. (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.)

Beyond the children's community, Pele also remembers how his father 'gave a lot of his relatives jobs', and in that context, the family,

'always had at least two or three visitors staying with us [...] that] would live with us temporarily. So, we got used to living with strangers and whatnot. [...] Some even stayed for years. (ibid.)

As this network does not reach beyond the family or the work-related connections, the topology of Pele's home cannot be compared to the private community, as it stays highly exclusive for those who belong to the family or people related to his father's work. Yet it shows in what diverse ways life in a single-family topology can be perceived and lived beyond the single family. Likewise, this points to the limits of what can be grasped through the type alone, for example the 'single-family house', as in Pele's case it was more of an extended family house. His biographical memory of home is strongly constituted by the community within his family, which is carried by the hard work of domestic workers,

who surprisingly, for the first time in a narration, appear with personal features, even though these features relate predominantly to their work.⁹

The one who used to do the ironing, [until] now, I still remember how he used to iron [...] the trousers, mmm, and the shirts, oh fantastic. [...] There was a driver. There was always a driver. [...] We became very close to the driver. There was one called Nasa. He used to stay in Kangemi, an old, an old Kikuyu man; he used to drive my dad around. His sons became our friends. (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.)

Pele's entire narration is strongly contextualised by memories of eating. Eating appears as his passion, playing a significant role in the constitution of home and its scarlar entanglements. As such, domestic food cultures also shape his relation to the world.

My dad used to travel a lot, a well-travelled man. [...] So we used to eat a lot of home food, but we also used to eat a lot of what I'd call *mzungu* food. Uh, like weekend, we used to have [a] full English breakfast. You know, the eggs, the sausages, the baked beans, the mushrooms, and all those funny things. Weekend now we were full *mzungu* mode. (Laughter) Weekdays African, uh, okay, milk, bread standard, a lot of porridge, uh, a lot of, uh, corn on the cob, a lot of, uh, what we call *githeri* [...], chapattis and all that. [...]. 'Cause we had a cook who used to cook for a British household, so we used to eat funny things like shepard's pie, steak and kidney pie. Uh, steam pudding, and, uh, bread pudding, and all, all those [...]. So, we always used to love when you're playing, and you smell, 'Uh, today it's chicken. Uh, the leg is mine, the breast is mine, (laughs) nobody touches!' (ibid.)

According to Pele's narration, the practice of nine siblings eating at the table must be imagined as a lively ritual where children communally experience themselves. Pele's socialisation through eating customs, which he frames as being 'Africanised' but also 'Europeanised' (ibid.), also relates to his liberal and cosmopolitan self-world relation, in which he appears at home in a globalised world.

[I am] Luo. But my son is married to a Kikuyu, so nowadays (laughs) it's mixed (laughs). [...] He got married just before the elections.¹⁰ And I was receiving calls, and I said, 'No, if that is who he loves, that is who he loves'. [...] I was never brought up in a tribal whatever [way]. I've never. I've never seen tribe. I've never seen colour. [...] We didn't even know religion. We didn't even know that these ones are, uh, Hindus, these ones are Muslims, we didn't know. Even later on in school, uh, [until] now, my best friend is a Somali, mmm, from school, mmm. My daughter has told me she might marry an Indian. I told her (laughs), 'It's your life'. (ibid.)

9 Overall, it is shattering how many care workers and domestic labourers stayed invisible in the narrations. This is striking because, geographically or physically, they are so close to children; some even breastfed them. Regardless of this proximity, these people receive little recognition throughout the biographical memory. This finding deserves further research, which should also be contextualised by the colonial history of care-work and domestic labour.

10 Refers to the post-election violence in 2007/2008 in Kenya, which involved clashes between different ethnic groups.

This self-positioning is also conditioned by the experience of home as island instead of fortress and enclave, which is connected to the privilege of being part of a powerful Kenyan family and situated in a world where childhood memory, connected to the British, is not entwined with colonial suppression, but with community, luxury, and good food. This cosmopolitan orientation connected to the memory of eating customs can also be found in Stella's – the daughter of another 'well-travelled' father – memory of home.

[M]y dad, he travelled, and [...] he was so proper. So, in the evening, even breakfast, the way we had our/the table was set up it was set up properly in the British way. He went to a British school and afterwards/and so we'd/we'd have the proper cups, saucers, [0:15:25 unclear utterance]. If [we] had eggs, we had the egg holders and fork and knife, and everything was placed the proper way [...]. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

These examples show how much eating customs are part of the emotional topologies of (un)belonging in general and strongly co-constituted on the scale of home. Stella had just returned from abroad when I met her and explained how important it is for her to be back 'home' in Nairobi, but also Kenya and Africa. Stella coincidentally also grew up in a single-family house, which is better framed as an extended family house shaped by the topology of island, because even though it was highly characterised by seclusion, it was also highly communal.

[We] lived in this huge house, and we didn't live alone; most of the time our/and our African culture is, you always help out your immediate family, so we always grew up always with cousins, family friends, my parents educating them, so the house was full. It was a big house, and we had/we were five girls and then extra people. [...] But, I'm grateful, I'm happy for that. I had a big family and sisters that I [could] share the burden with, and we can/it was easier. And also, I'm lucky that we grew up in a family/loving family, [and] that we all liked each other. So, being around my aunts, uncles and my cousins was easier. Eh, so we had that comfort within there and again, we didn't have to go outside. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

Stella's narrative clarifies how much the single-family home depends on the family's social constitution. Nevertheless, it is also important to emphasise that in the respective typological structure (single-/extended-family house), children are highly dependent on the functionality and quality of their families. This is the case in all topologies of home, but here seclusion is so strong because children have no compensational space for everyday social encounters beyond their private property, as in the case of private communities. Due to the amount of seclusion and isolation of this topology, everything that takes place here remains hidden for the time being. Unlike in the private community, it would be very difficult to hear domestic violence, for example, and even if it were heard, it is hard to imagine that, for example, Pierre's neighbours would bother. As such, the topology of enclave, fortress, and island is not only based on actions of differentiation between private and public, thus creating the spatial figure of territories. If we look at the scale of home and the social topology of the single-family house, we could think of it

as a territory. But if we listen to Pierre's narration about it, we see that the territory does not quite capture its spatial figuration. If we furthermore look at the associations this type of housing and home-making has for children, such as loneliness, boredom, isolation, fear, and unheard domestic violence, the single-family house seems to be rather an instance of void, where social life disappears.

7.2.2.4 Dwarf Galaxy

The last topology derived from the material is the dwarf galaxy. As an outer space phenomenon, it serves here as a metaphor for topologies of housing and home-making that comprise little galaxies, so heterogeneous inside that they almost appear as a miniature version of the city at large. They are characterised in rapidly growing cities by their age – they are old and thus surrounded by a history that has materialised within its matter. Layers of time are inscribed in them – like layers of cosmic matter, stars, and dust. As such, they have the same magic as stars. You never know if they are still there or their existence has been already terminated. They might still be visible from where we are but already faded from the time where they once were. As I write this today, the dwarf galaxy described in the following has already ceased to exist.

7.2.2.4.1 Patches

In dwarf galaxies, matter has altered, relations have shifted, orders have collapsed and resurfaced, people have died and been born. One and the same part has never remained unchanged, as it has served first as homes for chickens, then for humans, and now for their bees. Patch on top of patch fulfills different needs at different moments. Nothing here has only a single purpose. The purpose is manifold, as in the place installed for beekeeping in the tiny gap between a house and the estate's wall in Figure 54. Purposes coexist, co-inhabit, and co-figurate, forming a layered and dynamic environment where each element reshapes the meaning of the other. Life in such spaces is improvisational, contingent, and resilient, revealing the constant negotiation between function and inhabitant, between use and imagination.

In astronomy, dwarf galaxies are small versions of galaxies, less complex than their larger counterparts, yet retaining the essential properties that define a galaxy. Galaxies are accumulations of diverse cosmological elements – stars, dark matter, dust, gas, planetary systems – held together by gravity, some of which derives from the invisible scaffolding of dark matter that surrounds them. Dwarf galaxies, unlike their larger spiral counterparts, often take on irregular, amorphous shapes, their boundaries diffuse, their structure flexible. These cosmic features resonate as metaphors for the topology of housing and home-making I encountered in two homes in Nairobi: irregular, improvised, resilient, and shaped by the forces – social, material, and historical – that hold them together.

Just as dwarf galaxies evolve through the accretion, collapse, and rearrangement of matter, so too do these homes adapt over time. Rooms, courtyards, and makeshift additions fold into one another, creating spaces of multiplicity and hybridity. A courtyard may serve as a playground in the morning, a workspace in the afternoon, and a site for communal gatherings at night. Each layer of use does not erase the last but adds depth,

complexity, and resonance. In both the cosmic and the domestic, the irregular, the improvised, and the ephemeral emerge as vital features – testaments to survival, creativity, and the ongoing negotiation between structure and life.

Figure 54: Place for bee keeping in the compound of the author's accommodation and home to Said, Analia, and Ijhanya.



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

The first one is Steve's home. Steve lives with his parents, one baby brother and two stepbrothers from his father's side, whom he considers his full brothers, in a one-storey house. This house is shared with another couple who stays downstairs. The building is located in a compound, with a *shamba*¹¹ and otherwise approximately 300 square meters of free space. The house, initially not built for such a purpose, was modified to give

11 *Shamba*, which translates to 'plantation' in Swahili (plural: *mashamba*), is an agricultural approach widely employed in East Africa, with a notable presence in Kenya. This method involves integrating various crops alongside resources like beekeeping and fodder for livestock. Through this diverse cultivation, farmers achieve increased income, food security, and employment opportunities. Additionally, this polyculture model is more environmentally sustainable and leaves a smaller ecological footprint than monoculture practices. The size of the *shamba* varies and is often practised in the confines of the compound.

the two living units separate entrances. This lengthy description draws awareness to the special constellation. But this is not all. On my way to Steve, the taxi driver started the ride towards the west from Upper Hill. Ngong Road was closed for construction, so we took a left on Kingara Road to Junction Mall, where we turned right on Naivasha Road – a road on which vendors sell huge rugs of tarpaulin for tent-making – and drove further west into the southern part of Kawangware, one of Nairobi's bigger informal settlements. The streets here are neatly cleaned. *Mabati* (corrugated iron) shacks accommodate hair salons, fruit and vegetable vendors, and little eateries. The shop fronts are colourfully painted with brandings, products, and illustrations of services. Everything is makeshift. The streets are not tarmacked. I feel ridiculous driving through them with a car that leaves the carefully decorated shop fronts in a cloud of dust. It was Monday, 8:30 am. I was tired and confused. Hadn't the contact person confirmed that Steve was growing up in a middle-class household? Looking at the landscape of rusty *mabati* shacks that unfolded behind the tidy shop fronts, I doubted he had. The ride continued, but soon, the driver stopped in front of a gate. This must be the local church, I thought. But no, Google Maps confirmed I had arrived. This was Steve's compound.

As I stepped out of the car, a man sitting in front of the gate asked me for 'ten bobs' (10 Kenyan shillings = 10 cents). As I searched my pockets, Steve picked me up at the light-blue metal gate, kindly greeting the two of us. He led me through the garden into the house, plastered in light yellow colours. The compound was around 300 square metres. There were no guards and no doorbells. Five *kassod* trees aligned the wall that bordered the road. *Skuma* (collard greens) grew in a small shamba outside the house. As we entered the house, we went upstairs. A wooden staircase led us to the top. I slid my left hand over its yellow-painted but partly worn super smooth wooden rail. It made me think of Bruno Mundari's example of the worn steps of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which form a 'strange helicoidal groove', because '[t]he angle of the tower makes you climb on the inside of the spiral staircase when the wall is leaning inwards, and move over to the outside edge when the wall slopes outwards' (Munari 1971 [1966]: 124). While the common flow of life in informal settlements is that they will be replaced by 'upgraded' structures, the scene here does not look like that. The prevalence of informal shacks and *mabati* huts rather looks threatening towards this remaining piece of the compound, which looks different in shape and size but, in terms of its age, is in no way inferior. Steve and his family live in this compound, but Steve's conception of home does not end at the gate. He feels at home in the neighbourhood and interacts with the community there.

There's when you go straight, there's this road [...] I just like going sometimes there; there are some people there who sell *maandazis* [fried bread], yeah, and then I just stay there. [...] I talk to them/I sometimes, I just sit there and think or I can go and talk to them. Yeah. (Steve, 11 yrs, *2008, male, Kawangware, N.)

Even though Steve is from a middle-income family, located at the upper part of the second spectrum of my socio-economic sampling, and lives in a double-family house within a gated compound, he is not spending his childhood secluded in the compound together with his brothers but often interacts with the wider community of the neighbourhood.

We normally play outside this compound. [...] There's even this field, this green field [...] People just go, carry a ball, and play football. Yeah, there's a sewage place over there, but then there's a small path where you can walk. (ibid.)

Despite their difference (income and housing) from the rest of the neighbourhood, they do not withdraw from the outside world, nor do they shy away from a playground connected to a 'sewage place'. As Steve is growing up right next to an informal settlement, he also gets to interact with people who collect money on the street for a living.

There are a lot of beggars in this sort of suburb. [...] I don't give them money all the time; I also sometimes offer them something to eat and something to drink. Yeah, like water and a fruit. Yeah. Yeah. And then they say, say thank you and then I just continue my walk. (ibid.)

But this interaction goes beyond partial moments during everyday life, taking on a depth that must be emphasised against the background of the topology of home.

There's actually one who lives near the gate. His name is [Ronnie]. [...] We [talk] a lot: Where he lives, how he gets home and comes there. He said he takes a bus to near the gate, he makes money. (ibid.)

It became clear how much impact these encounters with street vendors and 'beggars' had on Steve when he told me Ronnie inspired him to make money.

Well, you see, I sell sweets. [...] I sell Tropical mints. Yeah, even at church, sometimes on the streets, but I don't like selling on the streets. I like selling at church to different people who are my dad's friends, who are even my friends. Yeah, so, but normally at church. [...] Well, I go almost everywhere with my sweets depending [on] who's there. (ibid.)

The special location and typology of Steve's home could easily forge it into a topology of enclave, but Steve and his family do not live according to it. Instead, they mingle within the neighbourhood's community and act beyond their position(ality). Therefore, their topology of home must be seen as part of the surrounding topology, because the walls of their compound seem more like a remnant of the past than a fortification structure. Within the otherwise segregated city, they build a little galaxy together, one with a highly irregular shape.

The second case that can be considered a dwarf galaxy is the home of Maria and Said, who are sisters, and Ijhanya. Ijhanya is from a different family. They reside in a compound in Parklands with mixed structures, some of which were added over time, inhabited by an ethnically and economically heterogeneous group of residents, which I was temporarily part of (1.5 months). Therefore, this explorative, in-depth analysis strongly involves reflections on my position(ality). During my last visit to Nairobi, I wanted to stay in Parklands, as so far I had not been in contact with the Indian community, which is one of the biggest ethnic minorities in Nairobi – one that, until today, struggles with the ambiguous position it had in colonial Nairobi. Even though Indians had been in East

Africa long before, the most significant Indian migration to Kenya began following the creation of the East African Protectorate in 1895. Many Indians, often engineers, came as what some frame as sub-imperialist agents, from then British India. In racially segregated colonial Nairobi, the Indian community was positioned in a hierarchy of power after the British colonial settlers but privileged in comparison to the African community. Parklands is part of what was the ‘racial zone’ for Indians, which was and is today an extremely diverse population often referred to more generally as Asians. Still today, this position comes as a both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because many Indians still own land in the city and a curse because they are also facing off with a stigma connected to the colonial past.

Figure 55: Aerial photo collage of the compound in Parklands.



Source: Photos and collage by the author, 2019.

When I was looking for places to stay, I had heard that most of Parklands is owned by the Indian community. So even when I booked my Airbnb in Parklands and Layla, my host, whom I had read as a Kenyan without Indian context, communicated with me, I still assumed that she was hired by an Indian landlord. Therefore, I was quite surprised when I arrived at my accommodation in Parklands in 2019 to realise that none of this was the case and that Layla was indeed the daughter of the property’s landlord. As I entered the gate, Layla told the security guard that I would be staying there. The online pictures on the Airbnb platform did not indicate the surroundings. It was pitch dark, but once I walked around the corner of the house, following Layla to my door, I was welcomed by a warm light from a kitchen window. Through the window, I saw a veiled girl looking back at me while washing dishes and putting them onto a metal shelf hanging on the pink-painted wall for drying. This captured moment stayed in my head like a snapshot. As there were no lights, I had only one piece of the puzzle of where in this world I was. It turned out that her name was Analia and that she had also wondered where in this world

I came from, and so she played a big role in opening up paths to figure out where I had landed, while I satisfied her endless curiosity about my life in Germany.

Not bigger than 600 square metres, the compound (Figure 55) was home to 22 people (including me), all sharing a backyard where the washing was done and the children could play. The residents were of different ages, and some had migrated from India and Pakistan. Others were Kenyans, like Ijhanya and her family, who had moved there from their former home in Deep Sea Slum in Nairobi, strongly altering Ijhanya's daily life.

Um, it's fun because it is fenced well and has, it has a big compound for you to play. It has the people who live here; they are very kind and good. If you have – if you want something, you can go ask them, and they will give [it to] you. They will not even slap you, beat you like in Deep Sea; they'll just give you. Yeah. (Ijhanya, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Deep Sea Slum and Parklands, N.)

The people to whom Ijhanya refers have various occupations. They are watchmakers, tailors, car mechanics, mothers who run households, kiosk keepers, street vendors, real estate managers, beekeepers, and construction workers. Apart from plenty of birds and insects, such as glow-worms, three cats, several chickens, and a bee colony additionally resided in the compound. While the bees had one keeper, the chickens were owned and cared for collectively. Their eggs and meat were shared among the community. As I was often invited for tea and cookies or sometimes even a meal, I started a ritual of occasionally baking banana bread for sharing in the backyard. This ritual was continued by Said and Analia's mother after my departure. The community at Parklands turned around many aspects of the dominant cultural and spatial narratives I had heard about the city. Thus, the socio-material constellation of the dwarf galaxy topology and its inhabitants does not produce a clear form. Just like dwarf galaxies, its figuration is irregular and marked by differences. Part of this exceptionalism is that the land in Parklands was owned by a Kenyan family that rented the biggest building in the complex to an Indian family. This Indian family belonged to the relatively small community of Muslim Indians in Nairobi. The owners' children (my host and her brother) also lived in one of the rather small structures.

It is only recently that Layla rented out one of them on the Airbnb platform. I was only the second renter. Layla and I regularly met for lunch, and it was this first impression that led me to ask her questions about the compound. In time, I realised that being different was what this whole community was about. In addition to the differences shared by the residents, a white researcher from Germany added to the place's already existing logic. Soon, I got the impression of entering a parallel universe each time I returned home and passed through the gate. Outside, the city was shaped by colonial and racial segregation, which was not reproduced by the socio-material composition inside the compound. Boundaries were drawn differently here. Rather, they were not drawn but constantly negotiated within the residents' communal differences. A diverse group must negotiate a lot with each other, including religion-specific aspects of living together. And so, of course, I was also part of this negotiation. I realised just how profound these differences can be when I spoke to Analia about her school, a *Madrassa* (Quran school), and she answered my naïve question about her school subjects:

We learn Quran over there. [...] There is maths, sports, English and Kiswahili and, you know, all those other languages. [C.M.: And you have arts and music and stuff?] No. [C.M.: Ah, you have history?] We don't do history, actually. Our school never/Doesn't like history because, you know, our, our, our religion doesn't have to be made on history. And you know the stories of/What is that queen called? [...] And, you know, they say that first we were monkeys, and then we turned into human beings, and I don't know. Yeah, so we don't believe in that. (Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.)

On another occasion, I decided to go to the public swimming pool and asked if any of the children wanted to come along. While the Kenyan children were allowed to go, the mother of the Indian Muslim family explained to me that Said and Analia are not allowed to go to public swimming pools, because they cannot cover their bodies properly from men's gaze. When we met again after this occasion, Analia explained the restrictions and rules she follows as a Muslim. She also told me about the gendered order of her home connected to her religion.

[C]hildren stay together, divided by female and male. Because they can't sleep together. Like, you know, in our, uh, our Islamic thing, we, we can't sleep together with boys and girls together. [...] When my brother [who stays in a boarding school in Mombasa] comes, he has to sleep in the sitting room. He can't sleep in the/Where I sleep. [And you said you're going for prayers. Where do you go, like in a certain room in your house?] No, there's/You can pray anywhere. [Ah, you don't go to the mosque?] The men have to go to the mosque, and then the ladies have to pray at home. (ibid.)

Analia's father only slowly warmed up to me. Her mother told me he was very strict with clothing, and he thought I was showing too much of myself. Feeling very alienated by this information, I decided to meet him for tea, during which I had a surprisingly differentiated talk with him, sharing my experience of religion in the context of growing up in a Catholic village. He clarified that, to him, Islam is the only sensible alternative to capitalism, explaining that asking his daughters to cover their bodies is not just following a religion but meant as a critique of capitalism and its sexism. Another frequent interaction I had in the compound in Parklands was with Aleezeh, a woman from Pakistan who rented the flat beneath mine. She frequently called me and served tea and biscuits in front of her flat (Figure 56) – a space, part of the backyard, which she had beautifully decorated with scented geraniums the children loved to smell. Aleezeh did not speak English, and I do not speak Urdu, or enough Kiswahili to deeply converse with her, so our conversations were full of gestures and pantomimes. Sometimes, her son translated for us. From this I understood that she has a daughter who lives in Pakistan, whom she misses very much and whom I apparently reminded her of. This is how I came to understand her motherly care for me.

Figure 56: Tea and biscuits from Aleezeh.



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

The openness with which I was welcomed is part of a long-established communal way of life in which the children are also welcome everywhere and feel safe.

[I] [would] go to [Layla's] and disturb her (laughter) when I was young. And then come over here to my aunt's house. She used to live here before she went over there. So, I would come over here. I would go over there, disturb her a bit, and come back downstairs, and then disturb [Layla] again, then play outside with [Ijhanya], and [Said] was not yet born [at] that time. Yeah. [...] Over here, there is a lot of peace. Like, there's no shouting [or] robberies. We have never had a robbery over here, so we are safe. (Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.)

7.2.2.4.2 The Mortality of Dwarf Galaxies

Everything sounds idyllic, and yet a sword hangs over the property. A conflict is constantly being negotiated and is greater than those arising due to the differences in daily life. Layla's father wanted to sell the property for many years and found himself in conflict with the residents. Nevertheless, matters were handled respectfully, as the project had been transparent for a long time, and its realisation has been repeatedly pushed back. Layla explained that it is important to find the right moment for everyone and that this must be decided mutually. In galaxies, also their dwarf versions, the black holes are held

responsible for the decrease in the production of new stars, which causes the galaxy's death at some point. Even if all topologies must be understood as processual and as part of figurations, against the background of the growing neoliberal governance of cities, it seems to be the dwarf galaxy that is in particular danger. Therefore, another characteristic of the dwarf galaxy is that it is vulnerable and temporal.

*Figure 57: Wall in the corridor of the home of Said, 4 yrs, 2011, female, and Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.*



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

When I visited Analia and Said's family for the first time in their house, I was allowed to capture a beautiful artefact of biographical time, which is portrayed in Figure 57. Here, the topological memory that materialises in a house throughout time becomes visible. Analia knows that one day, this wall, documenting the figuration of the family member's body height, will be demolished.

All the other places that he [the owner] had have already been demolished, and they have already started building, building. So, the last place that they are building is gonna be here. You know, once they finish that building, they will come over here to demolish it. [...] [How do you feel about that?] I don't know, 'cause this place has been

here all this time. And I think it needs to be demolished. It's really an old place, you know? [...] I have been living here, so it's actually gonna be sad moving out of here. And I feel bad for this place, and he/Yeah. [...] this house really matters to me, actually. Because, you know, we've been staying here, and there's so many of my friends that stay here. And then if we shift, I don't think we'll meet again actually, 'cause, you know, we can't just move to the same place, maybe. (Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.)

Figure 58: New building behind the wall of the compound of the author's accommodation and home to Said, Analia, and Ijhanya.



Source: Photo by the author, 2019.

Analia also knows that it is the place that holds the community together. And it is true: Things are not shiny here, and if they are, it is because the body oil of the hands that have used it over and over has made it smooth and shiny. There are no sharp edges left. The compound in Parklands does not look like it has been photoshopped into the city. What is specific about this topology is that it has a highly biographical effect – and not only because of the wear and tear inscribed in their materiality but also because they simply stand out in their surroundings and their appearance seems threatened, for example between other vertical new buildings, with facades smooth and shiny, so that no dust

sticks to them (see Figure 58). As solidarity systems, they are also ‘eyesores’ threatened by investment in neoliberal urban imaginations.

7.2.3 Growing Up Global at Home

On the scale of home I illustrated how housing and home-making practices play an important role in children’s lives. Even though most speakers marked home as the most important place of their childhood, the actual constitution of home has produced heterogeneous social, geographical, scalar, and material constellations. These heterogeneous topologies are furthermore classed and, based on that, establish different spatial figurations. In that context, the findings indicate that middle-class topologies of housing and home-making are more likely reproducing the spatial figures of voids, territories, and fluids, compared to the low-income cases, where the figure of place and network is more common and where housing is much less connected to the degree of privacy and seclusion. Therefore, when we look at the quality of spaces that connect to middle-class families’ lifestyles, we note that these figures are closing space rather than opening it. Connected to this are increasing security measures in the narrations and the architectural ethnographic observations. The material agents installed to secure middle-class family life and property are manifold. There is some evidence of a shift from securitisation based on fixed materials, such as walls and barbed wire, and security labour, such as guards, towards a (digital) tech-based security industry, which makes human trust obsolete. Such as for Rebecca, whom I thanked for sharing her precious time with me, even though she has a little baby, and who then promptly assured me this was no problem, opening an app on her phone showing me a live monitoring of her child in the living room with her ‘nanny’.

The findings elucidate the inseparability of housing and home-making practices. They show the process in which a house (dwelling structure) becomes a home (house as home). But they also inform us about how home can be conceptualised beyond the material confinement of a house, a flat, or a building on multiple scales. On the one hand, the results point to the important role of the built environment in the constitution of home, the ways of living and the specific spatial order of childhood across generations, scales, and locations. On the other hand, they show the material aspects of the global middle-class discourse by giving insight into the types of housing structures designed or affordable for the middle classes, while home-making practices show how they appropriate these structures.

The results show that the practice of living in certain types of housing plays an important role in shaping childhoods across generations, scales, and locations. In some cases, the typology of housing is therefore even more involved in the production of specific childhood experiences or memories than, for example, a child’s age, gender, or place of residence. Therefore, this figuration of childhood on the scale of home, introduced through the topologies of ‘private community’, ‘vertical capsules’, and ‘enclave, fortress, and island’, can be seen as consisting of situated globalities of middle-class childhoods. As such they offer a differentiated translocal insight into what is often reduced to or overseen by the notion of gated community.

These findings stress the need for a deeper engagement with global architecture transfers based on an architectural ethnography that is actor- or inhabitant-centred and takes into account the subjective and collective practices of home-making connected to different architectural types. Through this perspective, it is possible to trace how these ‘travelling architectures’ also circulate classed ideas of a good life, thereby rendering geographically distant lives at times very similar through their form. These situated globalities, on the one hand, make us aware of the translocal agencies of the built environment and their effects on the spatio-temporal order of childhood. On the other hand, they point to the importance of local cultures in shaping and reshaping life within these environments. Furthermore, the findings promote the topological rationale, which stresses the need not to ignore the importance of Euclidian space in relational spatial theory. As the findings show, the spatial constitution of home can also perfectly end up looking like a container space in which, for example, the gendered, generational, or private/public built-in topo-logics directly structure the culture of living in a house. This strengthens the spatial theoretical foundation I developed and shows that topology matters within sociological spatial inquiry. This is because it makes us aware that Euclidian space is one possible social topology amongst all the others and becomes visible in the examples of house as home. With regard to the transgenerational comparison, the findings show that living in the same typology (e.g., semi-detached house) does not mean that the topologies of housing and home-making of the 1970s are equivalent to those of the 1990s. It is important to note that in some cases the communality between the families and children of the 1970s was also connected to the condition of being the first generation of residents moving into these newly built middle-class structures.

7.3 City: Avoidant Mobilities

The scale of the city will be the last scale on which I will reconstruct the spatial figuration of middle-class childhood. While the first subchapter, ‘Insularization’, is concerned with aspects of figuration based on children’s spatial (in)dependent mobility, the second subchapter, ‘DichoCity’, engages with the dichotomies on which the city is constituted, some of which are connected to borders, which were highlighted as important socio-material processes of children’s subjectivation within the biographical narrations and maps.

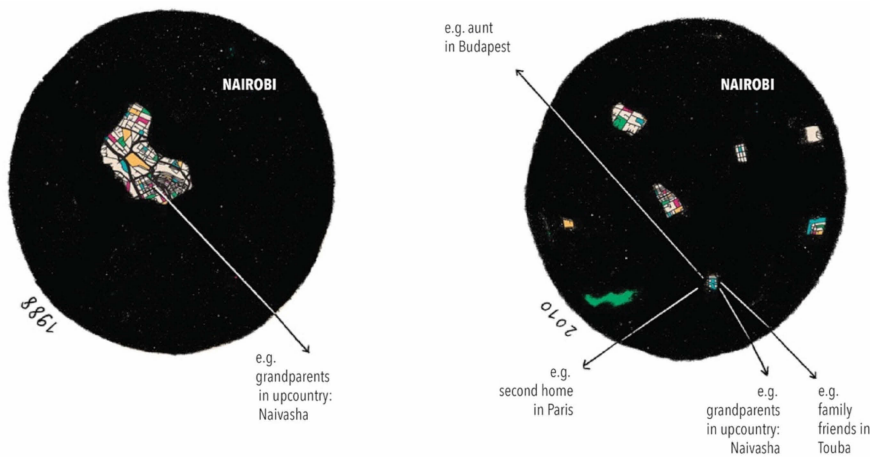
7.3.1 Insularisation

So it was home, church, school. [All in walking distance?] My dad is a big shot; we used to be dropped in the Mercedes Benz in school we’d not walk. [...] It was the thing those days. Everybody had to be dropped in a car. [...] I even remember the number plate. It used to be called KMV. [...] All my friends used to call it the King of Motor Vehicles has come. [And your dad would come pick you up and drop you or you had a driver?] There was a driver. There was always a driver. (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.)

Pele indirectly points to what Helga Zeiher (1990) has termed the insularisation of childhood (orig. *Verinselung der Kindheit*). Insularisation, as introduced earlier in my discus-

sion of the state of research, describes a shift in children's access to the city that became increasingly visible at the end of the 1960s: from independent mobility in small areas or zones that children appropriate by time towards accompanied and motorised mobility in which they are transported to several islands often institutionalised and splintered over the cityscape. The illustration in Figure 59 illustrates this phenomenon and additionally points to the possibility that these islands might stretch further than the city's boundaries and, at times, also reach a global scale. Since I have already elaborated on what insularisation describes in subchapter 2.1.1, I will concentrate in the following mostly on how insularisation appears in the childhoods of the speakers.

Figure 59: *Insularisation of childhood.*



Source: Illustration by the author.

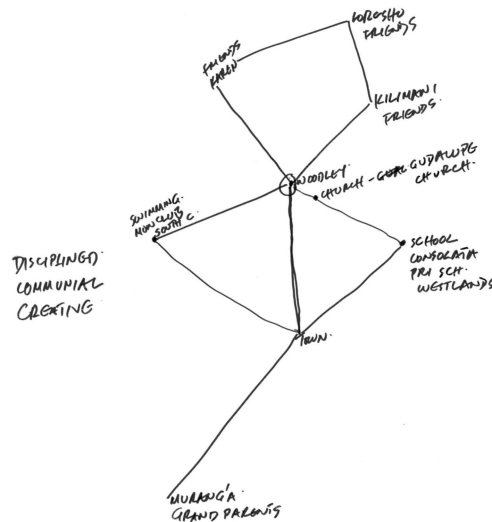
As I said before, Helga and Hartmut Zeiher have been criticised for the spatial conception that lies at the bottom of their work, which imagines space as a 'territorial, physical-material, delimitable place' (translated from Kogler 2015: 48).¹² As such, it is not sur-

12 A deeper look into Helga and Harmut Zeiher's work shows that their spatial theoretical reflections lead to an action-based concept of *Umwelt* (surroundings, environment), in which they conceptualise space beyond something that just contains the social, towards an idea of environment that is neither merely objective ('everything that exists around the human being in terms of physical conditions and that can be grasped in a physical-geographical object language') nor primarily subjective, which 'renounces "the world in itself" and sticks to – what is represented as an image, – as a conception of the world in the human cognitive system.' (translated from Zeiher/Zeiher 1994: 57), but subjective objective. Despite Raphaela Kogler's criticism, which is crucial against the background of the insights social sciences concerned with spatial questions have gained over the last 20 years, a closer look into Helga and Harmut Zeiher's space-time approach shows how much ground-work they have already done in conceptualising social action as constitutive of space and time and vice versa. Furthermore, both studies are crucial for the recognition of children as actors in urban environments. In that tradition, equipped with the insights gained by empirical and theoretical spatial inquiry from sociology, psychology, and human geography over the last three decades, I

but they can also be tiny time-spaces, such as rides, during which important events are happening. In this context, I would like to point out the touching work of Carla Shedd, whose research draws on the experiences of racism, violence, (in)security, and (un)belonging of black Afro-American youth on the daily routes between their school and home on Chicago's south side (Shedd 2015). In relation to the experiences that these young people had, a place like a bus seat could become one of the most memorable spaces of one's biography – something that we already know from the story of Rosa Parks.¹³

7.3.1.1 Islands and Trajectories

Figure 61: Map by Matthew, 51 yrs, *1968, male, Langata, N.



Source: Map by speaker Matthew.

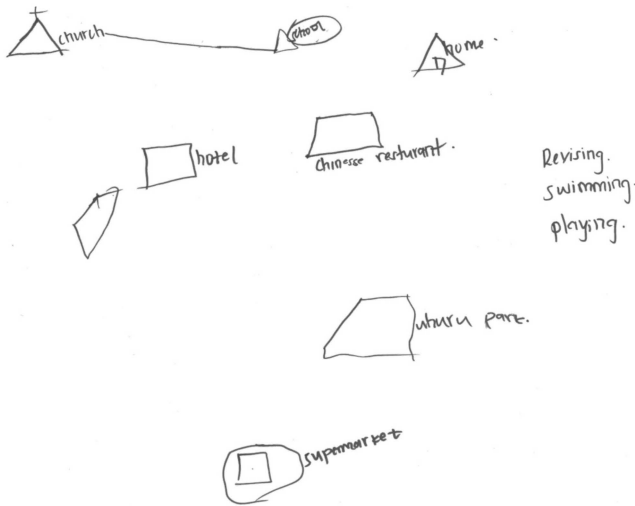
In view of the research on the spatial change of childhoods in European contexts discussed in subchapter 1.1 and the prevailing assumption that childhood is becoming more and more insular, I have shown that an increasing insularisation of childhoods similar to that found in the European context can also be observed in Nairobi. Even though there are many differences regarding the specific spatial characteristics of insularisation, the social topology of islands and the fact that children are accompanied by their parents or other adults in a car or other means of (public) transportation to reach them prevail in both urban contexts. On the scale of the city, this figuration of children's mobilities is

13 The African American activist of the civil rights movement, Rosa Louise McCauley Parks, refused to give her bus seat to a white person and was arrested on 5 December 1955. Her act of civil courage inspired the Montgomery bus boycott, for which she has been honoured as 'the first lady of civil rights' and 'the mother of the freedom movement'.

And then I set off on my bike, and it was a combination of self-made routes, short-cuts, and official roads. I always tried to avoid traffic lights. So, over the years, I tried to find the fastest way through everything. And that was a route that led through a lot of greenery. (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)

Nonetheless, these routes are exceptions and, in Raphael’s case, must be seen in the context of the suburbanisation of middle-class families during the 1980s and 90s, which his family was part of.

Figure 65: Map by Rehema, 8 yrs, *2011, female, Langata, N.



Source: Map by speaker Rehema.

As illustrated in the map of Rehema (Figure 65), in the 2000s, we see that these routes disappear. Insularisation has increased and displaced most other social topologies. Yet, we still notice these empty areas – not accessible to children.

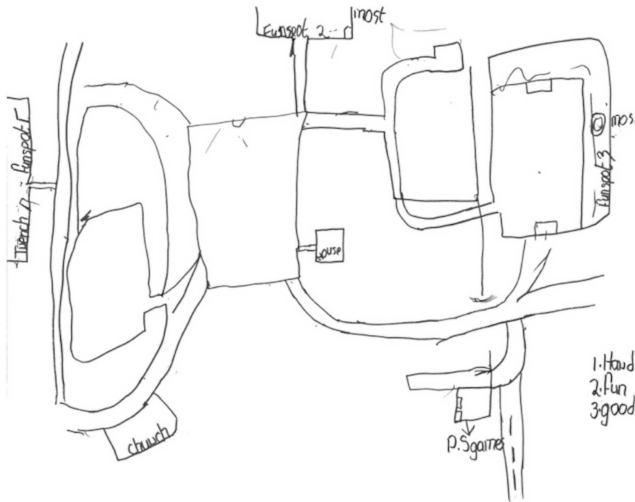
Routes and Fields: Whose Insularisation? Generally, zones and routes are something that appear less frequently over time in the material. Yet this does not apply to the first and second spectrum of the sampling, regardless of age. Regarding the material, which dates to childhood during the mid-1960s, we cannot assume that insularisation only started to become tangible as a phenomenon in cities during the 1960s. My findings suggest that social differences of that sort have existed ever since. However, as my sampling does not allow me to ‘re-figure’ beyond this period, I cannot prove this, but I would suggest that further biographical research is necessary and crucial here.

What I was able to reconstruct with the material was that there are great differences in children’s mobilities regarding their classed situations. Even if insularisation affects everyone – for example, fallow land that was previously accessible for children’s play disappears in the urban landscapes as cities become increasingly dense in population and

traffic during the course of urbanisation – there are clear differences regarding the socio-economic comparison but also other aspects, such as gender, religious affiliation, and specific material contexts (as shown in subchapter 7.2).

Insularisation instead turns out to be a distinct spatial signifier of middle and upper-middle classness and also characterises the childhoods of the wealthy sampling on the scale of the city. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, it is crucial not to apply the spatial topology of children from working-class contexts found in the studies of Martha Muchow in the 1930s as the past of children generally today. So far, the island has been seen as the social topology of urban childhoods that historically follows the zone. But this linear figurative depiction no longer applies when children from lower-income families play much more often in outdoor spaces, and in 2019 they still have independent access to (more than) a zone around their home as visible in Figure 66.

Figure 66: Map by Yao, 10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.



Source: Map by speaker Yao.

Yao is the speaker in the sampling with the smallest family income. He lives in a tiny one-floor stone house with his mother, aunt, uncle, and grandmother. ‘Lumumba’, his neighbourhood, he says, ‘has three fields’, also called ‘fun spots’. To be certain what that means, I ask, ‘When you say fields, you mean this, uh, what’s, what’s in front of us outside? Like, it’s free open space?’ and point to the brownfield outside his home. Yao nods, ‘[y]eah, this one’. He adds, ‘there’s another one, that one where I can stay with my friends, and there’s this one, which I like playing [in], and there’s this one, the casual one, where everybody is there’ (Yao, 10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.). It becomes clear that the fields are very important to Yao when he explains the freedom he enjoys: ‘Every time I go to that field, I find my friends [and] everybody there. [...] I know just I can be [free] to [do] what I want. When I come back here [home], you know, they tell me: go there! Do this! Don’t do that! [...]’ (ibid.). Yao’s map portrays a topology of fields surrounding his

house, connecting different and strongly body-related social activities, which connects to the church where he goes to Mass on Sundays. During the narration, he only names one more place beyond what is depicted on the map: The school is the only island 'located in Makadara', about six kilometres from his house. He says, '[w]hen I walk there in the morning, which is usually dark, [...] I see nobody has opened, so just quiet around, and you just go to school. In the evening, there's a lot of people, interactions, business, just like that. So, that's why I like walking' (ibid.).

The social topology of the field does not only appear in Yao's map. Fergusson too marks a field between his house and the river as 'the origin of so many other adventures' (Fergusson, 24 yrs, *1995, male, Langata, N.). Fields are, moreover, social topologies that appear as public spaces with a high amount of access for children.

There's even this field, this green field, this one, yes. [...] People just go, carry a ball, and play football. [...] Yeah, but there are like a few times when it's not [a] holiday, and you can only see like one kid there. Yeah, [they] just play by themselves, bored and lonely. Yeah, but once it's the holiday, we normally go. [...] When they normally come, like at 1 o'clock. 1, and then they play like [...] to around 4 [o'clock], and then they go home. The person who has the ball, if he goes home, everyone just goes home because there's no ball to play with. (Steve, 11 yrs, *2008, male, Kawangware, N.)

As Steve's narration clarifies, these spaces are also characterised by their informality and spontaneity. Children do not need to make appointments there, because these spaces are visited by groups of children at daily reoccurring times anyway. These spaces should, therefore, be understood in the sense of Doreen Massey's 'global sense of place' (2005: 131), and thus 'as integrations of space and time, as *spatio-temporal events* [emphasis in the original]' (ibid.: 130) which are 'woven together out of ongoing stories, [...] as in process, as unfinished business' (ibid.: 131) 'and where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history' (ibid.: 139). This renders fields as some of the very few examples of the spatial figure of place and places as spatial figures that appear as rather scarce in middle and upper-middle class childhoods, while they are much more dominant in the first and second spectrum of the socio-economic sampling.

So, yeah, that was it, growing up in Eastlands, going to school by foot. [...] But walking to school was fun. You will come out of your house, and then you walk two [or] three streets. Someone else comes out, and you're walking to school together. [...] And we were so many children going to different directions, you know, so again, at that point, friendships were made. Yeah. So, we go talking about what we ate yesterday for dinner, talking about what we watched on TV. You talk about your family like, 'Oh, this is what happened: ...' [There were different] routes to school of where we used to pass [...]. Of course, there was the option of using a main road but, um, we, we loved going through other routes, you know? Because they were hilly or muddy, so we'll play with the mud a lot. (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.)

Yao's and Martha's examples show that children from less affluent backgrounds have a few islands within their city topology, such as the school, yet in that context, it is necessary to differentiate between the type of movement between these islands – the social

topologies that constitute the fluid space between them. While the middle-class children move through the city in social topologies of trajectorial space, the movement of less affluent children can be better described by routes, as in Yao's case. Even though both figures are based on movement towards a destination (for example, school), Martha's and Yao's examples show that their movement is much less characterised by the strict linearity of a trajectory, because they stop here and there, pause and explore. In that context, Amina says, '[I was] eating my bus fare at times to eat mangoes according to the season, and then I have to walk home. It was/it was really fun' (Amina, 21 yrs, *1998, female, Ruai, N.). On routes, you interact. When the sun is up, you sweat. You take a break and do something unordinary, at times even risky, because '[g]rowing up poor you [can't] afford [to go] to the swimming pool, so you invent your own kind of fun [swimming in a quarry]' (ibid).

In Nairobi, most speakers from the first and second spectrum of the middle-class sampling walk, but they also take a matatu from time to time. The matatu culture is a means of transportation that comes from less affluent communities based in Eastlands, bringing along a culture of re-using, repairing, and patching old buses again and again, over and over. Matatus are tightly packed means of transport, equipped with televisions and (super loud) stereos. They are packed mobile living rooms filled with visual cultures of stars and celebrities (for more, see Mutongi 2017). Matatus are sweating and screaming machines that scramble people together and throw them onto one another. A matatu does not beam you from one end of the city to another without friction, like a subway. It bounces, shakes, and brakes. They take routes where a Kenyan city bus would not transport you, routes that pass through areas where there are fewer gates and where life is visible on the streets. As such, in the Nairobi context, class and the quality of space are highly different on the scale of 'public'¹⁴ transportation, as matatus drive on routes while the city bus moves on trajectorial space.

Although the spatial figure of fluid space, which is constituted by linear movement on the social topology of trajectorial space, such as in the family's car, train, or bus, appears in middle-class childhoods of both cities as a translocally connecting element, it is still important to point out the differences that come with the context-specific features of each city. In this sense, the socio-material fabric of the cities and their atmospheres are so incredibly different that it is important not to equate a ride in Nairobi with a ride in Berlin. In this way, even traversal and trajectorial movement creates spaces that must be understood in connection with specific local socio-material features. Whereas in Berlin the linearity of moving is carried more by the given order, in Nairobi movement is shaped by the potholes and chaos of traffic that rule the street, at times cutting through your plan of being on time, sending you on detours, and catching you waiting in the lanes leading to 'roundabout[s] of death' (Pierre, 13 yrs, *2006, male, Lavington, N.). It is important to trace these differences in the spatial figurations of childhood more precisely to understand global social inequalities better and without reifying the social category of class by overlooking its specific local expressions.

14 Matatus are privately owned, but their fares are still much cheaper than those of the state-owned city buses.

When we compare how one travels, for example, in the matatu in Nairobi, to how Rosi describes the type of movement in her family's car in Berlin, it becomes clear how different fluid space can be depending on the classed social topology that constitutes it. Rosi's description of the things she saw on her regular car rides between Pankow (home) and Köpenick (summer house) can almost serve as a metaphor for the connection between class and social topology: 'As a child', says Rosi '[I] also grew up with car driving [and I've] always paid attention to certain things when [driving] anyway' (Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.). When I asked her what she observed during the car rides, she referred to 'two points that were very important' when she drove through Alt-Köpenick:

One point, on the left, was an old house, and an old woman lived in it. And if we were lucky, she was at the window. And that was the best thing, when they were at the window. [...] And on the other side, a little further on, there was a square. I don't even know if it still exists or [if] something has been built there. And there was an old pub, and in front of it were two [...] streetlamps. And you could always see someone sitting in there [...] and they were these bald heads who always looked like Zille figures, really like that. And I always thought they were still sitting there from some other time. (ibid.)

'Zille figures' refers to so-called Berliner originals that were portrayed within the visual milieu studies of Berlin's proletariat by the artist Heinrich Zille at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. What Rosi sees through Zille's eyes, or more the fact itself that Rosi sees through Zille's eyes in some ways, also points to her classed gaze at the city. Raised in an academic household, with two parents interested in arts, her background shapes her in how her gaze on the city receives a certain bourgeois confidence, with which she looks at the life worlds that display themselves to her through the car's trajectorial movement, a movement within a certain distance of the city and its social life. From the car, scenes of city life appear as caricatures, scenes that repeat in the exhibitions she visits with her parents and the books she finds on the living room shelf. Moving through the city in her parents' car differs drastically from walking. The city becomes a screen to watch and to connect to what has been seen or read in the books or heard in the stories, stories that have no smell, no sound, and no taste. The sensory experience of car rides is at most connected to the overarching smell of traffic. Once again the body is cut off from the experience in space.

But again, exceptions also cut through the class as well as the age comparison; they appear in both cities, and some are very specific to the respective urban context. One example comes from Nairobi from the 1970s. When Falak was born, his family was not well off. They used to live in Ngara in the Starehe Constituency, which he describes as 'one of the lowest, uh, kind of a place to be, in the way people look at it, in the Asian community kind of way. But I, I don't feel ashamed of it. It's taught us a lot' (Falak, 49 yrs, *1971, male, Ngara & Parklands, N.). Later, when he was eight, his parent's jobs and business improved, and the family moved to a middle-class residential area in Parklands. Interestingly, this did not change much about his spatial independence; on the contrary, he must be seen as the speaker with the largest independent spatial mobility in both cities.

We used to walk down into the alleys, small streets in Nairobi, you know, quite a bit of walking [...]. [W]alk into the farming areas, you know, and go down the stream – the Nairobi River – sit back and, you know, just watch the, the, you know, the water flow by [...]. Nairobi River was quite clean, uh, quite healthy. [...] So, people would go and have a swim in it and all. We did all that. We used to make little paper boats. And put them into the river, you know, watch them float down, flow into the river and all that. [...] We used to do, you know, high long-distance bicycling or like hikes carrying the bikes. [...] Spring Valley, Thika Road, just drive down straight for miles and come back home in the evening, you know. [...] Mum would have made a lot of fries for us, you know, for my mates. [...] [W]e'd just go sightseeing. We'd stop/And at that time, in Spring Valley, I remember we used to [...] just sit back and watch the horses and, and, you know, spend our time. [...]. We used to go to [the] CBD [central business district]. We used to take [...] the local bus, Kenya Bus Service; it was a yellow bus; I still remember that. [...] uh, we'd go to the modern buildings and get into the lifts and run up and down with the lifts, yeah. [...] and look at the view and say 'wow!'. And look down and look at the little, tiny, you know, people from [that] height and come back down again and go back up again and come down. That's all. Come back home, venture into the stores and see the new matchbox cars, you know and, and get fascinated with the toys. Well, we couldn't buy them at that time. [...] So that's, that's the kind of thing we used to do. (ibid.)

Falak's spatial mobility is largely unrestricted. It exceeds Martha Muchow's zoning model, which stands as the ideal-typical model complementary to the islands. Falak finds himself in all possible kinds of topologies. He traverses several spatial figures. His movements synthesise all of them. Together they create a thick, multilayered, and multisensory experience of the city. The family's past and their experience of being poor seem to come with spatial mobility that does not change with their improvement in socio-economic status. Additionally, his Punjabi¹⁵ culture plays into the consistency of his spatial freedom.

We [Punjabi's] live for now. We don't do any kind of savings. We just say okay, whatever the Lord provides us, we take it from there and move on with our lives. (ibid.)

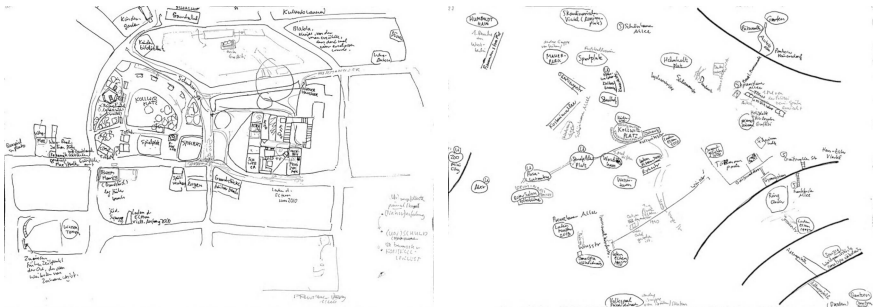
This life mantra might explain why his independent spatial mobility has not changed, even though his family experienced a shift in economic mobility. Investive status work seems to be eliminated by this mantra – what counts is the here and now. Status work always comes with a certain need or urge to secure one's status by, for example, investing in the future. As such, status work does not just materialise in the gated community but also in the subjective spatial order of (in)security and (un)safety, which is also connected to children's spatial mobility.

Whereas in Falak's case ethnic and religious belonging cuts through the economic comparison, in Ben's case his map (Figure 67) indicates another type of belonging that does the same: that of a sprayer.

15 In this context, Falak tells me that 'the majority of people in Kenya, the Asian community, [are] all Guajaratis. It's, it's ninety percent them. Or probably you can say ninety-nine per cent of them. The Punjabis are only one per cent. So the lifestyle we have, the lifestyle they have, is quite, is quite different' (Falak, 49 yrs, *1971, male, Ngara & Parklands, N.).

And then, of course, when we started spraying, you had to get spray cans from somewhere. There were no spray can shops in East Berlin. [...] And that just really expanded the urban space. [...] We went everywhere trains went. And we looked somewhere along the S-Bahn lines to see where there were still vacancies. Or where something was so bad that you could paint over it. [...] And somehow, we unlocked the city like that [...] And I did that on my own quite early on (Ben, 35 yrs, *1984, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.).

Figure 67: Map by Ben, 35 yrs, *1984, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.



Source: Map by speaker Ben.

As Ben puts it, the practice of spraying played a major role in how, to him, the 'city [was] unlocked'. This freedom was by no means just given to him, but for a long time it remained unnoticed, as Ben, like many other kids, was a so-called latchkey child (*Schlüsselkind*) – a child with parents who worked beyond the opening hours of daycare institutions and who had a key to the house to go home independently after school.

7.3.1.2 Voids and Dark Matter

After this excursion into the economic as well as culture-specific differences connected to children's spatial mobilities, the following part will centre the middle-class childhoods again and elaborate on the quality of spatial relations within the figuration of the mobility pattern of insularisation. As highlighted earlier, the proliferation of islands is connected to a shift in mobility that is characterised by escorted rides in motorised vehicles, where children move across the city on trajectorial lines. But now what happens when children move on these trajectorial lines instead of walking through the city? Paul Virilio puts this very vividly:

The faster we go, the more we look ahead in anticipation and lose our lateral vision. Screens are like windshields in a car: with increased speed, we lose the sense of lateralization, which is an infirmity in our being in the world, its richness, its relief, its depth of field. [...] Screens have become blind. (Virilio 2012: 36–37)

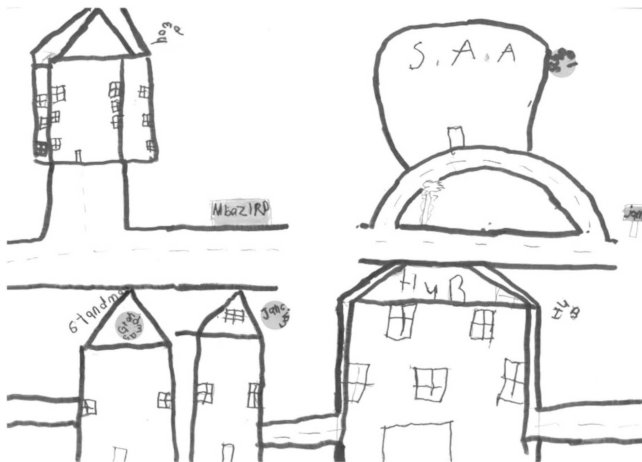
This blindness created by the social topologies of trajectorial space is what I refer to as the social topology of dark matter. Children know that the areas beyond their trajectories

exist, but they have no contact, no actual real evidence of it. This relates to the quality of dark matter in outer space, which we know is there, but since it plays these tricks with light, we cannot see it. As such, its spatial quality fosters the spatial figuration of voids in the city.

[Do you know Nairobi well?] Not so much. But I went out of the country. I went to Dubai once, and also I went to Malaysia and I also went to Uganda for holidays. (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.)

The mobility of middle-class children is becoming less characterised by their neighbourhood than by either pedagogically guided or commercial and consumer-oriented fragments of the city, including other such fragments of other cities connected to tourism. Exceptions are neighbourhoods characterised by public spaces that are used extensively by a relatively homogeneous group of local people with children and social cohesion, such as the Böhmischer Platz (Neukölln), the traffic-calmed space in Neo's childhood narration, or Stephan's football pitch near the school in Prenzlauer Berg. When we look at the maps in the age comparison, we note that while in some instances (like Rehema's map earlier in Figure 65), the empty areas increase, in others, they shrink, and in some cases, they even seem to disappear as visible in the maps of Nuhu (Figure 68) and Lisa (Figure 69).

Figure 68: Map by Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.



Source: Map by speaker Nuhu.

This disappearance does not indicate that children regain access to a zone where they can move independently. Instead, the splintered, the fragmented, and the sequenced become the new normal. The islands are the dominant spatial figures that children have access to, while the rest of the city, and with it public space, is swallowed and appears as a

void. These voids are both immaterial, as in the children's mental maps, and material, in the sense that public spaces quite literally disappear and get replaced by private spaces.

Figure 69: Map by Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.



Source: Map of speaker Lisa.

At this point I want to stress the need to include the void in the typology of spatial figures of territory, place, network, and fluid space. The void allows me to describe places that disappear over time in both imagined and materialised spatial realities – spatial processes that cannot simply be grasped by the spatial figure of the territory – as every territory must always be actively constituting its borders by differentiation. Voids, on the contrary, describe the other side of it, and therefore the loss and emptiness that might be caused by territorialisation. The void is a spatial figure in itself. Voids are all the unknown spaces that lie between the islands. As such, they can be fully unknown without being tangible, or they can have the agency of ‘dark matter’ – something that cannot clearly be seen or reached but is known to be out there. Matter that is unknown and inaccessible beyond the windscreen of the car or bus, which cuts across the city space in trajectorial movements. As is known from research and explorations to outer space, the void itself does not lead us to a non-space. Rather it leads us to something not visible and often not even tangible. This dark matter is there because it has a force or gravity that is indirectly visible, because we assume that it holds things together that would otherwise fall apart (for example, rotating galaxies). I would like to use dark matter metaphorically as the social topology to refer to everything that is swallowed up by the straight lines that create the sections in Lisa’s map (Figure 69), or by the voids between the islands in Nuhu’s (Figure 68) and Rehema’s (Figure 65) maps. If we look at the figuration of space guided by spatial figures, we must no longer only look at what is visible and what we can perceive, as there is more that matters and the void is one more figure that can help us to grasp it. These spatial figurations are not visible but indirectly tangible, such as the changes of the vegetation in the neighbourhood caused by the pollution of the dumpsite elsewhere or spaces

that are indirectly visible to us from cartographical maps, movies, and stories. They have gravity in the sense that our imaginations are drawn to them. Just as they hold together the galaxies that rotate in the universe, they also affect children's spatial relation. This is because the voids are also the source of fearful spatial imagination.

Topologies of Fear and Risk The void is a spatial figure that holds the ambiguity of space that is there but not, and therefore open to all kinds of imagination. Although this space for imagination could spark utopian urban visions (e.g. brownfields [*Brachen*]), it also includes scenarios in which fear is projected onto it. On the scale of the city, childhood narrations are highly contextualised by discourses of fear and risk. The following analysis shows that fear and risk have always shaped city life. While some threats, such as dense traffic, appear mostly in the narrations of the younger speakers, others, such as the threat of child abuse and kidnapping, have always been there. It is striking that the young speakers talk much less about the real threats they have experienced. On the contrary, the anticipation of threats is much more present. This is different for the older speakers. Some, even though very few of them, have been caught up in dangerous situations. From the analysis of the subjugated body we know that it is especially the islands in which children are subjected to all kinds of threats and danger, yet it is the space beyond these islands that children and their parents fear most. Unsurprisingly, parents appear prominently as co-constitutive for children's perceptions of threats. In the narrations, the fear of mothers is much more present than that of fathers. Even though this gendered aspect is visible in both cities, I would refrain from jumping to conclusions here. Overall, women do not worry more about their children and are not generally more anxious than men. According to the findings, the family's care-work is often the mother's responsibility. This means that even if there are domestic workers who support care-work, mothers are responsible for coordinating, distributing, and at times mediating it and additionally tend to spend the most time with the children in the early years. If we keep that in mind, it does not come as a surprise that it is mothers whose worries children remember, as mothers are predominantly responsible and present. Additionally, the fears that mothers express towards their children are often social threats that statistically happen much more often to women than to men.

In the narrations of both cities, the street is the social topology most connected to the discourse on fear and risk. In Nairobi this became very present in the 1990s, when streets in the central business district and politicians' residencies appeared particularly dangerous. Mildred finds reasons for this shift in the 1990s in the 'dictatorship from Moi' and the 'one-party system', which caused 'the fighting for multi-partyism' that sparked 'random riots in Nairobi' (Mildred, 39 yrs, *1997, female, Karen, N.). On 7 July 1990, when a nationwide riot (today remembered as Saba Saba Day) broke out, Mildred, her mother, and her aunt 'got caught in the middle of it' on their way 'to town'. The aftermath of these nationwide protests took so long that

for about a week or two I couldn't go to school because there was literally no transport [and] nothing was safe, 'cause you're finding most of the affluent politicians were living in this area in Karen. So, nothing was safe. No one was safe. You couldn't even speak. Even a gathering like this. Everybody was on high alert. (ibid.)

Many Nairobi speakers mark a shift in the 1990s, when, under the ‘dictatorship’ of Daniel arap Moi (the second Kenyan president from 1978 to 2002), the economy also stagnated and, according to Stella, ‘Nairobi got the nickname [...] *Nairobierry*’ (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.). In that context, she remembers:

When you were walking downtown, you couldn’t walk with, uh, any expensive earrings, jewellery, even in your cars. A few times, we were robbed of our cars. And like, people come up to you and snatch stuff off [...] from the window or when you’re walking grab your handbag [...] or] a lady would come with her kids, and she’d carry shit in her hand, and she’d walk up to you and say, ‘Give me money or I’ll apply this on you!’ (ibid.)

Also, Rebecca remembers that

it used to be very secure until I think [...], I’m trying to remember when there was/97 or ’92, I think there was a, a political shift. That’s when [...] security started becoming something different, unlike in the late ’80s when you would just walk to the neighbour’s house and play [...]. So I think in 1992 is now when we would not even go out to the church without an older person going with us.” (Rebecca, 38 yrs, *1982, female, Lavington, N.)

This shift in security standards as part of an active memory of the speakers during the 1990s is context-specific in Nairobi. In the context of political unrest in Berlin, Raphael remembers 1 May in Berlin:

The only time I know that I was forbidden to go out was first of May, or 30 April 2002, 2001. And that really sounds like a miracle today. The whole of Kollwitzstraße was on fire. You can’t imagine that nowadays. There was still a squat in Kollwitzstraße, and then there was a massive battle [...], and I wanted – for whatever reason – I wanted to go somewhere. And they said: ‘No, you’re not going out today.’ (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)

Besides occasional political protest that renders streets potentially dangerous, streets are also perceived as threatening topologies when they are connected to drug consumption and sex-work. Fabian remembers that

on Lützowstraße and Kurfürstenstraße and on all the neighbouring streets [there was a] street prostitution hotspot [...] I still remember it. [...] So there were always condoms and syringes in the playground and things like that. Then, one day, some kid touched a syringe and things like that. And then you were afraid that you’d somehow get infected with something or so. (Fabian, 38 yrs, *1982, male, Tiergarten, B.)

In the younger speakers’ examples, streets appear as risky topologies, most generally because of the traffic. Steve, for example, told me:

Those motorbikes over there [...], they go really fast, and I don’t think that’s l-legal. There’s like a specific limit [...] but] they don’t think about it, they just go. Well, some-

times motorbikes can also not give you way. Like, they'll, you're here, you're walking, and then it will come, but then it takes a while for it, for the person who's riding to turn, so you get like sort of scared, and that's quite annoying. Yeah. (Steve, 11 yrs, *2008, male, Kawangware, N.)

Such examples appear multiple times in the narrations. As such, traffic is often perceived as destructive and evil, not only cutting through one's city but also capable of cutting through one's life, as Fergusson remembers:

As my mom was going to get off this matatu, you know, we get out of this side, this other matatu came swooshing past like whoosh. [...] He almost hit her, and that was a very traumatic moment in my life. (Fergusson, 24 yrs, *1995, male, Langata, N.)

Besides the traffic, it is also the so-called stranger-danger that is feared on the streets. This also connects to public discourses about Kreuzberg's security issues, concentrating on the area around the subway station Kottbusser Tor, not far from Lisa's home.

I don't feel particularly comfortable without company either [...]. I'm sometimes scared because there are strange people walking around [...] So once, I think someone approached me, but then I ran away very quickly. (Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

Lisa's older sister Lana also feels unsafe on the streets. When I asked her what scares her there, she replied,

so that you somehow do something wrong and then someone is angry with you. Or that you are the way you are and the other person doesn't accept you. Or that you are somehow [...] judged because of your actions. (Lana, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.)

According to Sya, some of these 'strangers' could also be thieves; this is why 'whenever [her] mom is on the phone on the street, [she] keep[s] telling [her]: "Not on the street! Because it's dangerous"'. Sya is very fearful of being robbed on the streets, so she carries her 'bag cross-body [...] I like carrying it on my one shoulder [but] I do cross-body for safety' (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.).

Often streets are also perceived as more dangerous in connection with voids. This is the case in extremely gated neighbourhoods, where people mostly leave their house by car and where the gates are so high and the streets are so empty that social cohesion on the street itself is very poor. This void characteristic is also connected to nighttime.

In the evening, when there aren't many people there, I sometimes get scared. But during the day you can also see that there are a lot of people there. That means that if something happens to me, there are a lot of people there. And, yes, I'm not actually afraid during the day. (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.)

The darkness also makes the atmosphere 'creepy sometimes, because there are so many strange people on the street. And personally, I'm quite a scaredy-cat (smiles). Especially at a certain underground station or generally when it's dark. Or when I'm travelling alone; in other words, when it's dark during the day. It's good to be in a group or with a friend or with your parents. You just have people around you that you know and trust.' (Lana 13 yrs, *2006, female, Kreuzberg, B.) In Nairobi, one additional specific type of stranger is feared. When I asked ten-year-old Tatiana if there are 'other places in the neighbourhood that [she can] go to alone?', she replied 'No, my mom is afraid I can get stolen' (Tatiana, 10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.). Tatiana is not the only one who brings up this topic. When I reassure myself and ask Sya, 12 years old, 'and you said you can't go out?', she replies, 'No. It's not safe. You can get kidnapped. [...] I was never allowed to walk alone.' (Sya, 12 yrs, *2007, female, Karen, N.)

While the street appeared as the most prominent, the social topologies of slums and forests were only occasionally mentioned in the material concerning threats.

[W]e did go exploring over to, it was called, *Kibera Line Saba*. So, we would climb over the wall. That's a bit later, from probably at around 12 to 13 [years] [...] at that time [...], we didn't think that there's any difference between, between me and this person from *Kibera*. [...] So, I met children from there, played with them [...] and then we got, we got familiar with these kids, and we're thinking 'Hey, we're not different, [...] we're the same.' [...] So, what happened is, um, at some point some, um, we went back and climbed over the wall, and some of, uh, the kids followed us, and they pelted us with stones, and we were wondering [...] 'Why are you throwing stones at us?' [...] So, like the stone, the stone hit my upstairs bedroom window and broke it. [...] I remember my big sister was like, [...] 'Why did you go down there? What were you doing? What were you thinking?' And as she's [...] telling me, [...] a stone comes over and hits me square on the head, and it was a big stone. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

After sharing this story with me, Kili continued, thinking aloud, admitting that children can sometimes be naughty. But to him, what he had experienced 'seemed different – [...] it wasn't being bullied. It seemed like it was a vendetta that there was something. So, at that point, that's when it hit me: "Hey, I think we're different. These guys don't [...] think like I do." So I/From that point, um, we never, I never, like we never went over to go and interact with the children from that side.' (ibid.) Kili described how this childhood event had a biographical effect on him, that not only a stone but a realisation 'hit' him about the otherness of people from 'that site' – a space-related experience that still shapes him and his feeling of (in)security in the city today. While some of the speakers had traumatic experiences, for many others, stories like Kili's serve as reference points.

Forests are another social topology of fear and risk. The threat experienced in or ascribed to such topologies comes from various actors. In this context, Caroline says, 'Ngong Forest is just there [outside the house]. [...] And a lot of the land was not even occupied yet. So you'd find animals would come up to/Yeah I think even can come up to these areas, yeah. [...] I remember times when we'd be in the house, and you hear the hyena just passing outside. [...] Or you see prints of, uh, maybe a leopard [...]. Yeah, that's the other reason why you couldn't be out at night.' (Caroline, 62 yrs, *1957, female,

Kileshwa & Karen, N.) Another fear that is related to places like forests in the city is the fear of being raped.

[T]here was actually a family of friends who lived in the street [...] they had a daughter who was my age. She was actually raped there [in the little forest] when she wanted to go swimming at Krumme Lanke in the summer. Several times. And she was actually severely traumatised. My mum told me all about it years later. She actually [was] left dying on the way there and will never have children in her life. [...] So she was really ruined. [...] And that in super quiet Zehlendorf, right? So what used to be considered a neighbourhood with/People have money there, nothing happens there. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

Anne's story makes it clear why it is so hard to resist the constant production of children at risk; as Anne says, experiences as such have effects on children's lives that can never be reversed, because they accompany and restrict them throughout their lives and sometimes even 'really destroy' (ibid.) them. What Anne's story also clarifies is that these things should no longer be attributed to stigmatised and often disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city. They can happen anywhere, regardless of a neighbourhood's status.

If we compare the number of personal experiences of threats that the speakers shared with me contextualised by the social topologies of home and educational institutions and also consider current studies about child abuse in Germany, which indicate that it is actually on these islands that children most often fall victim to, for example, abuse (see The Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues),¹⁶ then it is striking that these islands are seen as the spaces where children are safe, whereas the public space outside is perceived as highly dangerous. Given all the highly transgressive experiences that children have had on these islands, it would be perfectly legitimate for children to say, for example, that it is too dangerous to go to school.

Risk discourses are discursive matter that somewhat grants the urban space itself an agency – one that holds the possibility for all kinds of dreadful imaginary and, as such, relates to the omnipresence of the void topology in the younger speakers' narrations, in which the city sometimes appears so unsafe that it could swallow you up at any moment, such as in the case of a kidnapping scenario. The examples introduced here highlight that older speakers tend to have more direct or indirect experience of threats in public spaces. Over time, however, the discourse of risk becomes more central to younger speakers, but also more speculative. Even though I do not want to doubt that there is real danger connected to the social topology of dark matter, the anticipation of danger is so high that fear seems to become an omnipresent atmosphere regardless of any direct danger. In this context, it is important to acknowledge the figuration of fear itself that becomes visible in the generational comparison. Not getting into danger and preventing risk must therefore also be seen as a globally connecting pattern of middle classness as a form of status work.

16 Available at <https://beauftragte-missbrauch.de/themen/definition/wo-findet-missbrauch-statt> [Accessed 23 February 2024, 16:00]

From a critical perspective that takes children's right to the city into account, it is important to highlight the practice of *avoidance* in that form of status investment: The more middle-class people avoid being in public spaces, the more the dark matter can grow in cities, which then again serves as projection surfaces for fearful spatial imaginaries. The *avoidance* itself then leads to a loss of control through a loss of connection. At the same time, these voids create a weak spot that a whole industry of risk and fear addresses by selling insurance, security services, geo tracking apps, and CCTV, as well as fortification hard- and software. Through this vicious circle, fear manifests and materialises in cities by fostering 'an expansion and normalization of security culture, as urban residents rehearse daily their evaluations of this or that checkpoint, share their annoyances, encounters, fears, and frustrations – [a state in which] [w]hat is produced is a shared social and affective environment in which security is a constant touchstone' (Glück 2017: 43).

7.3.1.3 The Problem with Safe Spaces

The material shows that the problem of (real/perceived) growing insecurity and the lack of public spaces for children in cities is addressed by the creation of safe spaces (e.g. islands). Thanks to the wide biographical lens, I can describe further the quality of these islands and trace which spatial figure they uphold, relate, or connect to. If we look at Nuhu's building blocks connected by thick roads and Lisa's sharp boundaries, which appear as if the city is cut into sequences with clear linear boundaries, rather than an interwoven fabric or texture of human and more-than-human assemblage, then we see practices of differentiation and exclusion. Lines are very prominent in these maps, but unlike in the examples of the 1980s and early 1990s, they indicate much less movement. The outlines which are portrayed in Lisa's and Nuhu's maps are solid. The figure of a network of islands erodes, as the islands seem rather territorial. With the network, the topology of safe spaces disappears; for a space to be safe it must be inclusive – but these places do not include all children. This becomes clearer when we take a closer look at Nuhu's map again (Figure 68), where we see islands such as 'home', 'school', 'grandma's' place, 'Junction' (shopping mall), 'The Hub' (shopping mall), and 'church'. These places are either family related, private institutions or highly commodified consumer-oriented spaces and, as such, constitute themselves by practices of differentiation and social exclusion, because not everyone can enter the same church, and not everyone can pay for private schooling or can afford something in shopping malls. Most of these spaces work either with highly institutionalised safety and security regulations (especially in the Nairobi context) or with otherwise coded classed aspects of belonging: material objects, such as clothes. What becomes clear is that these islands are highly exclusive in terms of class-related accessibility (for example, entrance fees).

The class comparison shows that economic status also raises the degree of temporal structuring during the week. The third- and fourth-spectrum children are much more likely to perform and participate in a programme of extracurricular activities that repeat every week. In Nairobi, these extracurricular activities are often part of the offers of private schools, where children can 'choose a club, like horse riding or first aid or other stuff' (Lale, 13 yrs, *2006, female, Maziwa, N.). Lale's example points to the context-specific difference in how these islands are related in the two cities. Whereas in Berlin, we can

describe the islands in their sum as an archipelago – a network of territories distributed over the city; in Nairobi they are more and more concentric. The private schools in Nairobi cover most extracurricular activities within their facilities, but in Berlin these islands are spread all over the city. Therefore, the island figuration in Nairobi is more and more transformed by the simultaneously growing materialising concept of gated communities or private cities. Gated communities increase their inside worlds, offering facilities and services, such as supermarkets and hair salons. Private schools do the same. As such, the islands in themselves grow bigger and function like private neighbourhoods in which children again regain a certain degree of independent spatial mobility, not within the city but within a gated homogenous social group. As these places reproduce the uneven landscapes of social life in cities and are additionally strongly fortified, they are based on differentiation – of private and public – and must be understood by the spatial figure of the territory.

The findings show that middle-class childhoods are strongly affected by discourses of risk. Throughout the generational comparison, childhoods in general, but urban middle- and upper-class childhood in particular, appear to be a period of spatial crisis. This crisis is answered with the proliferation of safe spaces as well as security technologies. Both of them often instrumentalise and commodify the globally trending discourses of child-friendly spaces. The findings highlight to what degree this discourse is already being appropriated by neoliberal city planning and integrated into the marketing strategies of consumption-centred spaces, such as shopping malls. Most of the safety measures are motivated by dangers and benefit individual physical health, rather than being part of a radically transformative approach guided by visions of intergenerational spatial justice. My research strengthens this criticism, because building more child-friendly places as safe spaces also *avoids* necessary conflicts over space. Furthermore, it (re)produces the figure of the child at risk and confirms the need for securitisation and the limitation of children's urban mobilities, thus reinforcing the child-adult binary.

Currently debates and discussions about child-free spaces started to intensify. To me, this highlights the condition of childhood in the middle- and upper-class milieus where these spaces exist. Encountering these exclusive spaces in postcolonial contexts furthermore raises connections to the history of apartheid with the colonial spatial practices of racial segregation, where now (or again) children are somewhat drawn as the so-called wild other, highlighting the need to rethink intergenerational spatial justice in cities from the ground up.

7.3.2 DichoCity

In the last subchapter of the analysis, I explore how social differences are spatially constituted through 'borders that relate' (Löv/Weidenhaus 2017: 553) and draw out the figuration of these bordering practices in the lives of children. I will introduce the figuration of the social topology of spatial dichotomies, which in the following I refer to as 'dichotopias'.¹⁷ In three subchapters, I will introduce these dichotopias, framed as 'west vs

17 Whereas Martina Löv and Hubert Knoblauch (2020) use the term dichotopias to describe the tension between specific spatial logics that open and close simultaneously, I use the term here to cap-

east', 'urban vs rural', and 'nature vs. technology' – which are the scalar entanglements they rest on. On this basis, I will elaborate the spatial figuration of middle-class childhood and middle-class subjectivity, connected to the social differentiation practices that come with them. Thereby I will show how it is not only islands but also these dichotopias that shape urban middle-class childhoods across locales. Besides highlighting the powerful structure inherent in them, I will also shed light on moments in the narrations in which these structures are irritated, resisted, and subverted.

7.3.2.1 City Spheres: East vs West

'The colours were somehow different in socialism, maybe' (Ben, 35 yrs, *1984, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.).

The biographical narratives clearly reflect the historical processes of establishing political and socio-material boundaries. In connection with this, a scale that has received little attention in social science spatial research became visible: the 'city sphere'. Interestingly, city spheres are prominent in the spatial biographies of both cities, and even more surprisingly, the division refers similarly to east and west. This dichotomy of spheres simultaneously reflects the discursive inscription of geopolitical polarisation practices into space, such as the racial zoning and its apartheid structures in colonial Nairobi, but likewise the erection of the Berlin Wall with the spatial division of the city into allied territories in post-war Berlin. The following examples show that both historical processes have left the cities and its inhabitants in some ways divided until today. As the following analysis points out, these borders matter most prominently in the school and the home context for children.

In the context of the school, Raphael, who grew up in Pankow (former east) in the recently reunified city of Berlin, recalled a school trip during which he and his parents realised that the borders had not yet disappeared from the minds of the teachers.

The most western thing that we saw in the whole of Berlin was the Red Town Hall [*Rotes Rathaus*]. That was as far as we got. And then we were told: 'Yes, that was our Berlin trip.' And my parents said: 'Oh, those damned Ossis. Why can't they just do a little bit?' And then they said: 'Okay, you have to go to school in West Berlin so that your horizons [are] broadened a little bit.' (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)

Raphael's quote highlights the critical stance of his parents towards the political system of the GDR. Even after reunification, the system's spatial relations are reproduced by the school, as they mourn. However, Raphael's narration also illustrates the enduring impact of these borders, with The Berlin Wall playing a central role in his narration. It becomes clear how his sense of belonging was constructed throughout his biography when he says:

Until I got to high school it had no meaning at all. And the moment I crossed the border, and it was reflected that [I] come from the East, it suddenly became important. [...] And,

ture the various spatial constitutions that have an inherent polarity which scales and reciprocally produces space and spatial action into subcomplex counterspace.

therefore, the border had a great meaning. But now, not necessarily THE [emphasis] border. It was rather this form of border, which could be felt in school when the West children said: 'You are from the East.' (ibid.)

Like Raphael, Martha, who was born in 1991 and grew up in Donholm in Nairobi Eastlands, experienced the meaning of belonging to that side of the city sphere in her transition to a new school.

[I was] [g]rowing up in Eastlands [...] So, later, I come to boarding school and [met] other kids who come from other areas. I see noodles for the first time, and I call them spaghetti, and everyone just laughs at me. So, I'm told it's called noodles. And then, um, I got to learn slang. So, slang is a mixture of English and Kiswahili. It's a bit more sophisticated, and it shows [...] you are very urban, and you come from [the] above-average class of citizens who live in Westlands. You've gone to a private school. You live around Kilimani or, uh, Muthaiga [...] and, uh, Hurlingham. So, yeah, high school was a bit difficult because it meant adapting to this new kind of life. This new kind of language. (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.)

These two excerpts illustrate how east and west are conceptualised through the relational boundaries of dichotopias. The negotiation of east and west appears in these narratives as emotional topologies of (un)belonging, of experiencing being subjected to otherness. This otherness is highly classed and constitutes itself via language and material cultures, such as status objects. The following example from Amina elaborates on this class aspect and also connects it to school.

I was born in Njiru. Njiru is in Eastlands – the Eastlands part of Nairobi. I went to [primary school in] Ruai. [...] I went to Hospital Hill in high school. That's in Westlands, and that's when I came to terms with, uh, the suburb part of Nairobi where rich people stay (laughs). (Amina, 21 yrs, *1998, female, Ruai, N.)

In most passages that touch on the dichotopias of east and west, the speakers from the (former) east feel disadvantaged against the west. The wealth and privilege connected to the west strongly reverberates in the narrations. Some of the speakers have even directed their future anticipations as children towards the wish to be part of that 'western other'.

I remember [...] the road we used to take to school. [...] It's called Peponi Road. [...] Um, there were very wealthy people. You know, Westlands is a very wealthy area. [...] I was always curious who lives in these homes? You know, why not me, right? [...] And I keep driving there, and I'm like, I'm still thinking yes, I'm yet to make it. (Ruby, female, 39 yrs, *1980, female, Kabete, Kiambu County¹⁸)

The political dismantling of these borders with the fall of the Berlin Wall and Kenyan independence did not lead to a dissolution of the borders that (re)produce the spheres. Their boundaries are still unfolding and hold a strong meaning for the practices of

18 Kiambu County borders Nairobi in the north-west.

(un)belonging, also determining people's accessibility to the city. This also quite literally touches on infrastructures that remain within these respective dichotopias even today. Raphael, for example, describes how it took him '45 minutes by public transport [...] and nine minutes by bike [...] to get to his new 'west school' in 'Reinickendorf'. In this context, he draws attention to 'an urban space problem that is still no concern for urban planners today: [...] the direct connection between East and West Berlin [which] still does not [...] work' (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.). As such, these borders have both hauntological power – as walls in people's minds – and quite material borders, such as the dichotopic public transport system that remains in these divided orders.

Paradoxically, it is the education system – i.e., the social topology that is arguably best placed to ensure the reunification of the spheres through education – that appears to be the most haunted by the ghosts of this past. At the same time, this is not surprising, as schools were probably the most strongly contained (*eingehengt*) by the systems of the respective spheres.

Tigoni Primary [School in Westlands, Nairobi] at that time, they were all whites. So, when he [her father] tried getting [us] in – you know, [...] my dad coming from Europe, he'd already broken that barrier of white, black [...] so when he came back, he didn't see why his kids cannot go to an all-white school – [...] and he [director] says, 'No, we can't have African children'. (Caroline, 62 yrs, *1957, female, Karen, N.)

The example of Caroline, born in 1957, tells us why these borders and boundaries still matter after Kenyan independence from the British and still today and why they are so deeply intertwined with other categories of social inequality. It is, moreover, an example of how trajectorial spaces, such as borders, cut not only through terrain in the sense of a here and now. In addition, they inscribe themselves deeply into historical process and might never – in the most literal sense – stop mattering in people's lives. This is because they have been, as Caroline described, denied access to education and, for example, affected by racist colonialism directly, but also because they have created a 'we' and a 'the others' and forged many people into coalition, creating a sense of (un)belonging that extends into the future.

In addition to the social topology of school, the home also received attention in the context of the dichotopias of east and west. Falak, who was born in 1971 and grew up in both spheres during his childhood, describes moving from Ngara (Eastlands) to Parklands (Westlands) as follows:

It's like how you can say? You see Sylvester Stallone and you see the Rocky movie, him moving from now from, from the rags to the riches, it's similar to this way. [...] So, this is what happened with us. So, when we went into that kind of society, we needed to sort of adjust ourselves. (Falak, 49 yrs, *1971, male, Ngara & Parklands, N.)

This example shows that the classed dichotopias based on the scale of the city spheres are, at times, much more important than even ethnic or religious belonging. Even though Parklands has the highest Indian population, the fact that Falak came from 'the rags' on the 'other side' made it hard for him and his family to be accepted by Parkland's commu-

nity, which, as he remembers, 'looked down at you living in *Ngara*' (ibid.). In Rosi's narration, this is even taken further, when the social differences connected with the spheres are powerful even within family relations in which the culture connected to one's own sphere is seen as the norm.

My grandmother from Hamburg used to visit us every year, yes. However, she was just a, yes, a little *Westomi* (laughs). [...] She was just never a grandmother like that, like the one of my husband, for example, who somehow stood there in the Spreewald and somehow made yeast dumplings for the children or something like that. No, my grandmother was just a chic grandmother who had different underwear on weekends and holidays than during the week, and somehow, a little bit, yes, she came with her west side, and then you smelled it. Still nice and all. But a different kind of distance, I would say. So, not this normal grandma, yes. (Rosi, 58 yrs, *1962, female, Pankow, Berlin)

With regard to Rosi's passage, it becomes clear that she can refer to collective discursive figures such as *Westomi* in telling her story to me, who also grew up in East Germany. What is also visible is that Rosi speaks from a position(ality) that associates her with the east in a positive way. This is the place where 'normal' grandmothers, who are humble (with their clothing preferences), 'make yeast dumplings', and provide emotional connection, are from. What I mean is that the sheer fact that I – as a researcher who was born in 1987 and who has little memory of the divided Germany – can still be addressed with these discursive figures during the interview speaks for the extent to which these dichotopias are still anchored and legitimized in our thinking and speaking today.

From City Spheres to Global Hemispheres If we examine the passages that thematise city spheres, we see that the west dominates in the narrations of both cities. While the speakers from the former east speak about the east and the west, the west only speaks about itself.¹⁹ It seems hard to find a universal explanation for this asymmetry, especially because in Berlin, most speakers are growing up or grew up in the (former) eastern sphere. But it is visible that many speakers aspire to a good life, and for some accomplishing these aspirations is often experienced or imagined in the west. In these examples, the scale of the city sphere becomes highly entwined with the global hemispheres. This means that most of the speakers' global orientation or attraction is directed to only one 'side' of the planet. This attraction can also be noted in Anne's narration and her childhood memory of growing up in the American sector:

That's an extreme childhood memory of mine. A super positive one. [...] And not far from us [...] were the barracks. [...] And this image of the American soldiers with their families shaped me extremely [...]. So Zehlendorf was made up of 80 per cent Americans. [...] How am I supposed to explain that? That sounds totally silly. I don't even dare to say it. But I developed a [...] how should I put it? America mania. That's when I started listening to the music. Then I started watching the films. I had an English ad-

19 In Berlin this finding must be seen as contextualised by the much smaller sampling, in which there is only one speaker who spent her childhood in the former West Berlin.

vanced course; I was extremely good at English. [...] So I really thought: 'Wow, if I can emigrate to America one day'. (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

It is interesting that this image of American family life shaped Anne's future aspirations as a child, even though she grew up in a very leftist capitalist-critical household that perhaps portrays the opposite of the American middle-class family dream.

Well, my parents are both academics. [...] They brought us up with an artistic, left-wing attitude, and I grew up with that, too. We didn't have any furniture. So we spent all our money on travelling. My parents travelled a lot with me. We travelled to Morocco and Yugoslavia by car and so on. So, we really poured money into it. But at home, we had [...] boxes of oranges that my father just put there. And on top of them some cushions, sheets, I don't know. And that was just our sofa. There was no television either. I wasn't allowed to watch TV during the day until I was 16. Instead, we had other things to do. So, then you had to read. Or my father was really into political discussions. (ibid.)

Against all attraction from the West, which seems to supersede even the primal parental education, it is also important to note here that Anne's narration of her childhood family is very ambivalent and filled with memories about the importance of her parents' political orientation, which was paired with a lifestyle and a failed parental relationship that, as a child, Anne experienced as extremely overwhelming and stressful. I suggest that it is also important to see this aspect as a possible reason why the opposite model of family life became her ideal. Anne's case already points to a shift in the spatial figuration of dichotopias that can be observed in the age comparison. In this context, I noted that the younger speakers do not place as much emphasis on these city spheres in their narrations – this might be simply because they have not quite left their sphere yet to realise an otherness or be subjected to othering. However, there is also evidence in the material that the younger middle-class generations are shifting their orientation beyond the city scale towards the global. The attraction of the West, which appears in many shapes, such as the American core family (Anne), the British colonial homes of the affluent (Ruby), the global (northern) design company and dream home in Greece (Sya), and the importance of already travelling as a child to 'discover places, in case you want to work abroad' (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.). These are just a few examples in which the West is the 'global attractor' (Latour 2018) to which aspirations are often directed towards a more global citizenship (also see Mock/Weidenhaus 2022). Further research is necessary here, especially as being from the East connected to socio-economic status is already found to be influencing the global future trajectories of children (Hörschelmann/Schäfer 2007).

7.3.2.2 Urban and Rural

Many speakers from both cities describe growing up in the city by contrasting it with the rural and vice versa. On the scale of home (Subchapter 7.2), I elaborated the historical processes that foster such a dichotopic narration in the case of Nairobi and its history of the 'one family, two households model' that connected and at the same time kept apart the rural and the urban during colonial times. The dichotomy of urban and rural also appears in the Berliner narrations and is contextualised by processes of sub- and reurbanisation

and, more generally, with city escapism. Interestingly, most Berlin middle-class speakers I found, or who were referred to me, grew up in the suburbs. As such, they must be seen as part of another spatial figuration of urban middle classness: suburbanisation, which led to a situation in which ‘in the mid-1990s [...] there was still talk of “urban exodus, the dissolution or even the disappearance of cities”’ (Herfert/Osterhage 2012: 86, cited in and translated from Frank 2014: 157). In contrast, all the young speakers in Berlin are growing up in much more central areas. This could also be seen in the context of the trend that follows, which Susanne Frank frames as ‘inner suburbanisation’ of educated middle-class milieus (translated from Frank 2014: 158). Inner suburbanisation describes when middle-class families lead a suburban lifestyle in the middle of the city but in some sort of homogenised bubble, often supported by the material and architectural characteristics that make such a life possible, such as traffic-reduced zones and so-called *Kiez* (small neighbourly units) structures, which are available to Neo in Neukölln-Rixdorf – a partly intact village under cultural heritage protection, as well as Stephan in Prenzlauer Berg, known for a middle-class family-centred gentrification. But not only do the rural and urban stand in a dialectic relation in these *Kiez* structures in Berlin; they also describe the fragmented omnipresence of the rural in Nairobi’s urban.

Um, so I grew up about ten minutes from [the] Westlands area. Um, so what’s interesting about Nairobi is it can be very city or very rural, but still Nairobi. You can meet cows and very nice malls at the same time. So, where we were was a bit rural, and my mom was a farmer, and my dad was an accountant. So, we would come from home to school in the city and go back in the evening. (Ruby, 39 yrs, *1980, female, Kabete, N.)

However, we also find clear differentiations between urban and rural, where it becomes clear that growing up in Berlin does not necessarily mean that one grew up in a city.

Well, I would say I’m not so much shaped by big city life; instead, somehow, nature has always played an important role. I would say it’s also a normal part of the city, of course, with, I don’t know, shops and so on. But, of course, everything is much closer to nature than if you lived in the city centre. (Paula, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Köpenick, B.)

Paula, who grew up in Köpenick, a district in the south-east of Berlin, notes that her childhood was strongly characterised by a ‘sense of seasons’ (ibid.) – a context in which she remembers these ‘bushes with these berries that you could pop like that [with which she] spent afternoons’ (ibid.). However, when the family ‘had a friend in [their] house, a boy who lived with [them] for a few years’, Paula recalls that ‘he really came from the village [...]. And he felt that this was a big discrepancy to what he had experienced’, but she ‘didn’t understand that’, because she ‘didn’t perceive this difference at all’ (ibid.).

Sometimes, urban-rural dichotopias create a transition out of and into the city in which questions of (un)belonging are rendered important, in which not being from the city centre makes it hard to belong anywhere (limbo):

You said, literally, that you’re driving into the city, although, of course, you’re in the city, but it’s clear that you’re outside. You are aware of that. I would say it’s more of

a demarcation inwards, so to speak, rather than outwards. So, you don't differentiate yourself strongly from the rural area because even in Pankow, you're far too far inside the city to have a connection to the countryside. It's more of a demarcation towards the city centre. [...] We would never say we were on the outside, but we travelled into the city. [...] And in that respect, let's say when we were 12 or 13, it was already clear that there was this connection between outside Berlin and Berlin. (Raphael, 31 yrs, *1988, male, Pankow, B.)

Interestingly, this example shows that even though Pankow at that time belonged to Berlin and the symbolic border constitutes Raphael as a Berliner, the geological characteristics of the of the place forged in him a sort of Möbius identity – where he belongs to both sides at the same time, but never just represents one.

Upcountry: From 'Hard Life' to Recreation In Nairobi, in contrast to the city, upcountry is connected to cultural aspects, such as specific festivities and annual meetings that are held to maintain the relationship with the extended family and one's rural, ethnic, or 'tribal' (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.) self. Upcountry must be seen as a model historically grown out of a specific milieu of Kenyan workers who were working for the colonial government. Before the colonial administration built houses for the African railway workers, many of them were commuting between urban (place of work) and rural (place of residence). Even today, the urban and rural divide stands for a cultural divide and as such also connects to the ambivalence of colonial conformity and resistance. This is because, historically, those commuting or almost oscillating Kenyan workers also had to negotiate their subjectivities amidst their own 'privilege'²⁰ of having restricted access to what they were once deprived of at the price of 'cooperating' with the perpetrators. As I elaborated on the scale of home, up until today there is a 'one family, two households system' in Nairobi, which connects the urban with the rural, commonly referred to as 'upcountry' or 'ancestral land'.

Upcountry is where your grandmother lives, where your grandfather lives. [...]; it's where you're from. So, like, I'm Luhya. I'm from Western Kenya. [...] It's where your parents originated. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

However, the following example from Kili also shows that the traditions connected with upcountry are still practised by middle-class families, but not without certain modifications.

So, I grew up in an urban area in Nairobi where basically, um, we don't follow the traditional, we don't follow the traditional practices as much, but certain things still remain, still are constant, still are important. One of them is initiation – being, being circumcised. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

20 'Privilege' is in inverted commas here because the act of colonial exploitation, land grabbing, and racial segregation, to which some of those exploited indigenous groups were given restricted access, is not framed as privileged, as these people were already deprived of their rights. Yet those who worked as civil servants were privileged over the other Kenyans.

Kili vividly recalled an initiation ceremony he witnessed in his upcountry in the Luhya community. It shows that cultural practices of initiation for Luhya are strongly connected with nature and therefore tend to be somewhat harder to practise in urban environments. He describes the rite of passage as an event that starts with being 'completely naked top to bottom' and being 'dipped in the river' so that 'the cold will numb' the body in passage. Another important element is soil, as 'mud is put on their head' with 'a stick at the top and then a piece of meat is kept there'. Once they reach the homestead, Kili says, the boys will 'get circumcised with [...] the same knife', so that it would 'bond them' as 'blood brothers' (ibid.). It is hard to imagine the same ritual in Kili's home in Nairobi. Even though all the elements that constitute the rite (for example, river, mud, meat, knife) are available there, they are simply not the elements of the ancestral land. For him, as a Nairobi middle-class child, it is still important to create a sense of belonging to his Luhya culture, but it is also important to be 'modern' and express the danger of 'transmitting diseases' (ibid.) that lie in how the ritual is performed with the same knife. Therefore, his initiation took place at the hospital in Nairobi, where they 'still followed kind of traditional practices but from a modern perspective' (ibid.).

Every year we meet, and we go to [...] the rural area, and the whole extended family meets. [...] So, if they're Kamba and they know, oh, we're from the same place they have a relation, we understand each other. [...] They're very close and close-knit because I guess it's also with the tribal thing. (Stella, 41 yrs, *1978, female, Kileleshwa, N.)

In opposition to the urban, the rural appears as the melting pot of culture, language, rituals, and traditions. It is where life starts or at least originates from ('ancestral land'/'roots'), where life transitions are performed (initiation/marriage), and finally, for many, life ends and transcendence begins when they are buried in the ancestral soil.

For a long time, children were sent there to 'learn the hard life [because their] parents didn't want [them] to get spoiled' (ibid) in the city. But there lies even more functionality in the upcountry. Not only does life in the rural teach children things they would not learn in the city, but children would also be sent there during the school breaks, a time when parents have to work and need additional support with childcare. In that sense, the extended family meant extended support in reproductive matters.

During the 1980s, it was still common for middle-class children to be included in the harvest work during school breaks. Today, however, the narration of the hard life seems to be losing its centrality, at least in the narrations of the younger middle-class speakers, who associate upcountry more with holidays and recreation. For upper middle-class families, upcountry is increasingly losing its function as a solidarity system that helps people in times of financial, social, and health-related crisis but retains the function of being a retirement home. Today, upper middle-class families increasingly manage their care responsibilities with the help of domestic workers or within the hetero-normative single family model, where the mother stays unemployed on the market and is responsible for the reproductive work. If we look at the age comparison, upcountry is still important, but its role is shifting towards a place for leisure time, city escapism, and recreation. As such, it is becoming similar to the role of the rural in the Berliner context.

Even though in the Berliner context there is no such historically grown rural-urban household model, many children have grandparents in the countryside. And many of them regularly pay them visits. Beyond the grandparents, there are also diverse holiday places that children go to with their families, motivated by the idea of being away from the city. In the Berliner narrations, the rural does not imply hard manual labour but physical and mental regeneration. Unlike Nairobi, this applies not only to the younger speakers but to the entire sampling. This is also because the chance that middle-class children in this age range have grandparents who have agricultural businesses is much higher in Nairobi than in Berlin. There are few references in the Berlin narrations to tradition in connection with the rural, such as work traditions. This is, for example, the case for Neo, who told me that when he goes to his uncle, who lives in the 'mountains', he has 'a few mining tools – picks and such, hammers [and where he has already got] a mica collection – very thin plates that shine really nicely and look a bit like silver' (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.). As children today tend to visit rural areas predominantly for recreation, visions of the rural are forged that are shaped by the experiences of the exceptional. This perhaps leads to a romanticised vision of rural life in which the countryside appears as an 'idyll', which can be seen as an important social topology that also reappears in the future aspirations of children longing for a better place to be (*long*).

Well. I'd actually quite like to live in the countryside or something, because it's just quieter there and there aren't so many cars. [And how can I imagine it there?] All grass, parties [once] in a while. Drinking coke all night long. Going to some kind of pub and watching the football match there. And fishing. (ibid.)

Besides imagining the rural as predominantly connected to fun and leisure, Lisa also connects it to natural resources and ecologies free of certain chemicals. In her narration about her grandmother's place in Kallinchen, a village '40 kilometres outside Berlin', she says, 'you can make a campfire, which you can't do so well here [in Berlin]', and there is a 'beautiful lake where you can jump in', which is 'just better than in the swimming pool because it's not all full of chlorine' (Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.). Many young speakers expressed the urge to leave the city and imagine rural places as the better place to be 'because, you know, they are so peaceful, not like Nairobi' (Analia, 13 yrs, *2007, female, Parklands, N.). In the urban-rural comparison, the city sometimes appears like an abyss that devours life-sustaining elements, whereas the rural is imagined as well as experienced in short visits as a life-sustaining idyll.

A peek into interviews that I additionally conducted with children from rural Germany renders the rural much less idyllic. Marlene, a nine-year-old speaker from a small town (3,710 inhabitants) in Thuringia, told me about the environmental threat to the most important place in her life, her family's garden, which she refers to as a 'ranch'.

'There's a cycle path, and Elli [dog] found a huge pig's leg there. I thought it was really disgusting and we were eating cake and she arrived under the table with this huge leg [...] she had found it on the cycle path. Because lots of people throw their rubbish there too. [...] and there's a huge mountain of rubbish here. And they dump it there, and nobody cleans it up, and I think that's really bad [...]. There's plastic rubbish and leftover[s]

from the slaughter and stuff. [...] They always do it in the evening when nobody sees it because, er, they don't want to be reported. (Marlene, 9 yrs, *2010, female, small town in Thuringia, Germany)

In summary, the age comparison shows that in Nairobi, the meaning of rural for middle-class children shifted from a place where one who was 'spoilt' by the city was sent to learn the 'hard life'. Today, city life, on the contrary, often appears as 'hard' in the narrations, whereas the meaning of the rural has shifted to a place for leisure and recreation. Strikingly, the children view the cities as being in constant decay. Last, and very importantly, I must note that the romanticisation of the rural and the wish for nature and recreation, which sometimes even causes one to long for a life in a better place, does not appear as middle class-specific. The melancholia about the city's environmental decay can always be found, despite the speaker's position(ality), and even in the rural itself.

7.3.2.3 Nature- and Technoscape

As the previous subchapter showed, urban and rural are often entangled with nature and technology; therefore, it is hard to differentiate them from one another. Yet the dichotopia that rests on the nature versus technoscape goes deeper than the scalar conceptualisation that the rural and urban suggests and indirectly points to the hybridity of nature and culture. What will follow in this subchapter is a deeper engagement with this dichotopia, contextualised by many facets of environmental decay – a loss of nature in the city that is countered with a hyper-real (un)happy end for middle-class children.

'Back then, we still had real winters with real snow.' (Anne, 49 yrs, *1970, female, Zehlendorf, B.)

Environmental decay is a topic in the narrations of both cities. Whereas speakers like Rubi, who were born in or before 1980, refer to this decay in contrast to the past, since the 1990s, environmental destruction has been part of the childhood experience in both cities, regardless of socio-economic status.

So, I grew up in the [19]80s. Nairobi was stunning. It was like [a] green city in the sun, trees everywhere. Um, there are not that many tall buildings [...] I wish my city would go back/go back to the Green City in the Sun. We had rain; we had fog because it was so cold. It was beautiful. (Ruby, 39 yrs, *1980, female, Kabete, N.)

Examples such as that Anne's or Ruby's point to a type of collective melancholia in the narrations. Ruby's furthermore relates to the colonial vision of the 'green city in the sun'. As such, this melancholia is highly ambivalent, because it refers to the loss of something that was doomed to destroy itself: colonial forms of dispossession and extraction. The British had not just created the green city in the sun but also inscribed a deep dichotomy between nature and culture within the grounds from which everything else was going to soar up – unequally bound to the modern capitalist world economy. The Kenyan feminist environmental activist Wangari Maathai notes that

'the cultural values and systems of indigenous Kenyans were eroded, trivialized and deliberately destroyed in the process of colonization. As a result, many people are less appreciative of the environment because they now perceive it as a commodity to be privatized and exploited' (Maathai 2006 [1985]: 48).

What Wangari Maathai says directly reconnects to Ruby's narration. This is because Ruby shared her melancholia in the context of her strong memory of Peponi Road – a street where the 'wealthy' reside that she used to pass by on the school bus every day – during a time when the materiality of these private homes became the leitmotif of her vision of good life. Even though she notes that 'it was not so much the material wealth' as the 'tranquillity and peace' (Ruby, 39 yrs, *1980, female, Kabete, N.), she still connects to a relation that the British had also left and that connects with the nature-culture divide they had inscribed there: the architectures of racial zoning and social inequality. In Nairobi, those who are wealthy can afford to live near nature in tranquillity and peace, whereas the poor must reside next to the city's dumpsites. Wangari Maathai notes that '[e]ven after colonization, it is unfortunate that cultural values still continue to be suppressed today in the name of modernization, civilization and Christianity', something that causes the loss of 'indigenous biological diversity, knowledge, practices and wisdom' (Maathai 2006 [1985]: 48).

7.3.2.3.1 Ecological Ruins – Romanticising the Past?

In the context of environmental decay, the melancholia about Nairobi River and Nairobi Dam refers to two examples of dying ecological systems that many of the older speakers can relate to, as these were important sites of their childhood topologies. These social topologies no longer appear in the narrations of the younger speakers.

That time, Nairobi River was, was clean. So, there's a section of [...] that was up there in Riara. [...] We used to go there we/And then we, we take lobsters from there, like small ones. And then the fish, we take them up. Then we go back home; we put them in our pond. (Chola, 26 yrs, *1993, male, Kibera Ayani, N.)

Nairobi River is part of a water network that has several streams. This network is highly polluted, which is crucial for the local environment, because it connects to the Athi River, which flows all the way into the Indian Ocean.

In the 60s, um, I discovered this later, uh, uh, a neighbour of mine was showing me photos that actually have, um, boat rides on the, um, Nairobi Dam. I mean, literally from the photos I was shown. [...] They actually used to sail on the dam. But, like right now, it's not there. There's something called hyacinth. You've heard of hyacinth? Hyacinth is a plant, uh it, it grows on water. [...] I never saw Nairobi Dam as in its all, in all its glory. (Kili, 32 yrs, *1987, male, Ngumo, N.)

Nairobi Dam was commissioned by the colonial administration of the city as an embankment dam in 1953 (reliefweb 2004). Serving as a water reservoir and recreational site in the past, today the dam has become polluted by water hyacinths and dried out over time. Kili's story about the Nairobi Dam shows that the city also consists of the social topology

of ecological ruins. In the past, Nairobi Dam and Nairobi River could be described by the spatial figure of 'places', but over time and through their constant decay and the loss of their biodiversity, their spatial figuration has changed. This is because their place-based spatial figuration pairs more and more with that of 'voids'.

Connected to the pollution of the city are not only natural sites, which decay over time, but also increasing traffic. In this regard, the intergenerational comparison makes it really visible how the children today are already paying for the comfort related to the motorised mobility of the older speakers. Until the 1990s, middle-class children were 'growing up with riding the car' (Rosi, 58 yrs, *1961, female, Pankow, B.) – a place that appears in the narrations as an expanded living room with a constantly changing view. From the third to the fourth spectrum, the memory of the family's car even comes with some sort of euphoria. Especially in Nairobi, the car appears here as a positive status symbol. Many speakers vividly remember and share the type of their family car with me: from a 'small [red] Fiat' (Caroline, 62 yrs, *1957, female, Kileleshwa & Karen, N.) to a 'sky blue' Volkswagen Beetle' (Morris, 57 yrs, *1962, male, Embakasi Village, N.), a 'Mercedes Benz' (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.), and 'the most common car[, which] was a Peugeot 504' (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I, N.). For the speakers from the 1960s until the 1980s, the car was part of very positive childhood memories, where they were taken 'on road trips' (Caroline, 62 yrs, *1957, female, Kileleshwa & Karen, N.), or 'dropped in the Mercedes Benz [the King of Motor Vehicles] [at] school' (Pele, 62 yrs, *1958, male, Westlands, N.), or spent 'fantastic [...] Sundays [where] we'd all go to church [...] and all squash in [the small car] [...] siblings carrying the other' (Rebecca, 38 yrs, *1982, female, Lavington, N.), or would 'just take the Beetle and [...] go into Bellevue [drive-in cinema] [...] and just sit on the outside of the car and watch' (Falak, 49 yrs, *1971, male, Near & Parklands, N.).

Since the 1990s, the connotation of cars has changed drastically in both cities. The problem of traffic dominates the narrations. Motorised vehicles are connected to dangerous 'traumatic' events (Fergusson, 24 yrs, *1995, male, Langata, N.) or threatening because of the driving style of the person who drives it (Steve, 11 yrs, *2008, male, Kawangware, N.). Besides the danger that comes from cars moving across the city, air pollution was marked as a central reason that makes it 'bad to be here [in Berlin], because there are just so many [cars]', and 'sometimes I wish I was somewhere else [...]' (Lisa, 9 yrs, *2010, female, Kreuzberg, B.), because 'actually it's pretty disgusting in Berlin because of the cars', which is why Neo 'would actually quite like to live in the countryside or something because it's just quieter there and there aren't so many cars' (Neo, 10 yrs, *2010, male, Neukölln, B.). One thing is clear among the young speakers: without cars, there would be 'less pollution' and the 'weather [would be] better' (ibid.). Nonetheless, many of the younger speakers' families have a car.

For us, the car is also very important, even if it produces a lot of pollutants, but we also travel a lot, and a car is actually quite good for that, but we only really use it for long journeys. (Stephan, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Prenzlauer Berg, B.)

In the methods chapter (5), I pointed out a discourse which claims that aged people often romanticise the past, distorting their childhood memories. Interestingly, I noted when

working with the older speakers' biographical narrations that many of them differentiate between environmental and social aspects of the past. In that regard, there is rather little evidence of the social that is mourned or missed and that they would like to return to. Instead, it is the environmental condition of the world, such as the access to space and resources for recreation, that indeed appears much better in the past to them. That means that it is not so much the social position they had as a child in the society; it is the air they were able to breathe, the waters they swam in, and the tranquillity of less polluted nature that constitute the past as better. And who would doubt that? This finding, here only touched on briefly, is highly meaningful for biographical and oral history research. It highlights the danger of resting on the generalising and additionally age-stigmatising discourse that claims that older people tend to romanticise the past and to overlook important evidence about the devastating environmental as well as social effects of anthropocentrism.

7.3.2.3.2 Towards a Hyper-Real Nature

But what if nature is no longer easily accessible in cities, and city life stands in conflict with the romantic vision of a good childhood? While some move to the suburbs at the price of the trajectorial spaces between their islands growing bigger, others stay and participate in the growing compensation of the nature-scapes in cities. Here childhood itself appears in a romanticised relation to nature and as a site for the hyper-real nature industry, which strongly connects to the visual cultures of Disney World. Jean Baudrillard already connected Disney to the hyper-real in the early 1990s and prophesied an ongoing Disneyfication of the world, when he claimed that '[a]t Disneyworld in Florida, they are building a giant mock-up of Hollywood, with the boulevards, studios, etc. One more spiral in the simulacrum. One day they will rebuild Disneyland at Disneyworld.' (Baudrillard 1996 [1990]: 42) Whereas in the past, theme parks promoted themselves as being for everyone, on 12 June 2015, an article published in the Washington Post claimed that 'theme parks like Disney World left the middle class behind'. The article's author writes that since 1971, 'Disney has raised the gate price for the Magic Kingdom 41 times [...], nearly doubling it over the past decade' (Harwell 2015). Neither Berlin nor Nairobi has a Disneyland, but there is an increasing amount of institutionalised play spaces, some of which have Luna Park characteristics. Many of them simulate ecological sites and seem to respond to the growing melancholia about the loss of nature in cities, thus also often presenting themselves as safe spaces for children. The term safe space originated in the queer and feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s. These spaces were places where people could gather and freely express their sexual as well as political orientations and connect with like-minded people – (possibly) victims of stigma and even attack – who were seeking a safe environment. As such, many of these places developed into translocal networks of solidarity. Ever since, the term has been used but exploited in many ways, shifting its spatial topology of single places or plural networks towards rather exclusive territories.²¹

21 Queer *safe spaces* can be perceived as *territories* in which other strictly coded behaviour can exclude queer people themselves, as shown by the magnificent biographical research of Marc Thie-

The discursive figure of safe space is often also connected to playing grounds for children: In Nairobi one such example is Funcity, a sort of amusement park in the eastern suburbs of Nairobi, where Tatiana (10 yrs, *2009, female, Donholm, N.) likes to go on the weekends. In addition to roller coasters, restaurants, swings, race car rides, a trampoline, a 7D cinema and a children's casino, Funcity provides birthday packages and swimming classes. It calls itself the 'ultimate kid's paradise' and has a 'Fun Garden' where one can find 'a dragon swinging boar, a blood-curdling round swing, a merry-go-round, a big kid's swing and a play area. It also has a swimming pool and a baby pool. The bouncing castles and Shark Slide finish off this amazing collection as you sit and eat around the set-up.'²² Luna Park 'is a utopia for kids that love gaming and rides. The spacious indoor amusement park comes with 3D arcade racing, shooting and strategy games. You also get to ride motorbike simulators and play hoops. There are hoover boards and toddler rides that babies will love.' (ibid.) Besides Funcity, Tatiana also likes to visit malls, because she is 'a fan of shopping'. In Nairobi, children visit malls not only for shopping but also for playing. At 'TRM [Thika Road Mall]', Steve also visits Funscares East Africa, 'Nairobi's 1st Family Entertainment Centre' (TRM n.d.: para. 1.) where you go whenever you are 'looking for good clean wholesome' fun (ibid.: para. 2.). 'All these places promote themselves not only as being fun but also in relation to children's development, as they 'enhance the skills of children' with 'specific games and activities [...] designed to teach toddlers better hand-eye coordination; [enable] young children [to] take out their energies in the soft contained play structure which replicates the outdoor play area like climbing, sliding, obstacle crossing in a safe indoor environment' (ibid.: para. 2, 3).

It becomes visible that not only the queer vision of safe space but also the Marxist vision of utopia is appropriated here and thereby turned into a capitalist dystopia when we look at the major elements of the previous promotion: violent virtual games, consumer and shopping culture, extreme sensory stimuli (perhaps compensating for the passive bodies of children on car/bus/subway rides and on school benches), child development propaganda, control and surveillance, and commodification and exclusion (of children who can't pay the entrance fees). Another example comes from the prestigious Village Market shopping mall in Nairobi. It features the 'Family Entertainment and Recreation Centre Under The Sea' (Figure 70).²³

Under The Sea is a safe space for toddlers and preschoolers for their play dates, themed parties and school trips. It's a fun, engaging and exciting place to grow your child's fine and gross motor development activities. Under The Sea is the perfect way to develop their colourful imagination and their social and coordination skills. Under The Sea includes Marine Mountain which is the main play area, interactive games, Kids Craft Workshop and Love the Ocean program which is an environmental education program. (Village Market n.d. (a): para. 1)

len (2006) on the experience with Berlin's LGBTQIA+ scene of gay Iranians who fled the repressive politics of their country.

22 Available at: <http://funcity.co.ke/2017/10/30/the-ultimate-kids-paradise/> [Accessed 10 December 2025, 12:34]

23 Available at: <https://villagemarket-kenya.com/store/under-the-sea/> [Accessed 10 December 2035, 14:07]

Compared with the safe spaces of queer and feminist communities, Under The Sea only keeps safe those who can afford it. From Friday to Sunday, “[a]ll children pay KES. 1,000²⁴ for the 2 hours of fun activities’ (Snippets of Nairobi n.d.: n.p.). Additional costs are charged for those who want to play ‘Arcade Games’, which are ‘KES. 200 per game’ (ibid.). When taking a closer look at the visual publicity work on their Instagram feed, we get an idea of what children are protected from. Hygiene seems to be a top priority here, as one staff member is portrayed disinfecting the slide’s handle (Figure 70, right). Unlike safe spaces in queer and feminist communities, Under The Sea does not protect children from being addressed as children. On the contrary, this safe space directly works by constituting children as children and as becoming (for example, developing skills, protection). From that perspective, the safe space promoted here rather forges spatial figures of the territory. As such, they successfully cover the main goal of including affluent children in the topologies of malls’ consumer culture by using the constant dwindling of accessible public space for children in cities paired with the growing discourses of fear and risk.

Figure 70: (left) Ball bath, (right) staff member cleaning a slide at the Family Entertainment and Recreation Centre Under The Sea.



Source: Photographs posted on Under The Sea Instagram feed, 2023²⁵

A closer look at the visual imaginaries of these safe spaces shows that nature often becomes incorporated. To answer these spaces’ aspirations of being sites for ‘Family Entertainment and Recreation’, they address children with(in) a hyper-real nature. In the biographical narrations, different types of play spaces for children simulate experiences in nature. In these play spaces, nature figurates more and more towards a hyper-real environment. When we look at the age comparison, we note that these places figurate from an artificial nature-escape, such as an open-air water fun park, towards a hyper-real simulacrum of nature-related experiences. This nature simulation must be seen in connection to the fact that a few speakers mentioned barely any contact with nature in their

24 1,000 KES are around 6–6.50 EUR

25 (Left), post from 28 January 2023, available at: <https://images.app.goo.gl/HiXFfkzixwVFvF1v9>, (right) post from 06/07/2023, available at: <https://images.app.goo.gl/7DNxcVnP2W3YApXw6> [Both accessed 5 March 2026, 10:25]

childhood narrations. One of them is Nuhu, born in 2010 in Nairobi. Nuhu, similarly to most young speakers in the sample, is not allowed to leave the estate without the company of an adult. When I asked him if he ever plays outside of the flat in the inner yard of his estate, he responded,

We play, but not that much 'cause most of the [time] we're busy with homework. And then we have to buy some stuff. (Nuhu, 9 yrs, *2010, male, Maziwa, N.)

To 'buy some stuff', Nuhu's family regularly visits malls. Nuhu does not mention any contact with nature in his weekend routine either.

I come and eat breakfast. I go shower. If I didn't shower at night, since I'm tired, I shower in the morning, [and] then I change. I come to the sitting room. I, I play some games [and] watch some cartoon[s]. Yeah, that's what I do. Oh, and watch movies; that's what I do. (ibid.)

Indirect relations to nature appear only when he talks about what he and his family do at the malls:

We go there [Village Market mall] to buy stuff and play games. And then we go there to have, uh, dinner or lunch. There are, like, there are these slides you go. You climb, and then you go down from a very high spot, and then there's a sand pit, then a Lego pit. (ibid.)

The games that Nuhu plays are in the 'VR Gaming' section in Village Market mall. On the mall's website, the VR Gaming site literally advertises with escapism to compensate for or even 'escape' reality through gaming, in which five of six games recreate nature-scapes.

VR Gaming is the virtual reality arcade designed to take you to a different universe ideal for fantasists and gamers looking to escape reality. VR Gaming is fitted with Xtrematic VR and KAT VR equipment of the highest quality. A variety of games are available, including Skydiving, Bungee Jumping, Skiing, Motorcycle Racing, White Water Rafting and the Pump-It Up Dance Machine. Special surround sound effects add on to the feel of the gaming area. It is safe for players above the age of 10. (Village Market n.d.(b): n.p.)

When we look at the figuration of spaces for children that aim at providing 'entertainment and recreation' on the basis of the age comparison, we see that artificial nature spaces have been part of the figuration of childhood at least since the 1990s. Yet these spaces have changed from a rather artificial to a hyper-real nature. One such artificial and not yet hyper-real example is Splash, a former open-air water fun park, which was the favourite place of Eddah, born in 1988. Splash combined nature and technology within the city. Splash consisted of swimming pools and water slides and areas of trees and other kinds of plants. In cities with no sea, water is precious and often becomes an element to which less affluent people have restricted access. Therefore, water has to be understood

as a classed element of urban social inequalities and also appears as such in the narrations.

If I was a good girl or I performed well in school, my parents would occasionally take [us] to swim. [...] There were three pools [at Splash], and they had water slides. Of course, the water slides weren't free; you had to pay. And also/also getting into that complex was, um, you had to pay a little something. So it was, uh/it was a treat for an occasional Sunday after church. (Eddah, 31 yrs, *1988, Ngumo, N.)

While to Eddah, who is situated in the third spectrum of the socio-economic sampling, Splash was the favourite childhood place, to Amina and Marta (first and second spectrum) it is the quarry. Martha, born in 1991, remembers how 'if the rains came [...] there will be pools [quarries]. So, we loved going to the pools to swim. Yes. (Laughs)' (Martha, 28 yrs, *1991, female, Umoja I., N.). Amina too talks about her 'most favourite place[, which] was [...] this big quarry', in which she and her friend 'used to go swimming when it rained' (Amina, 21 yrs, * 1998, female, Ruai, N.). Amina also remembers that she was

not supposed to go here because you'd fall, and you can even die. But if it rains, and we'll go because it's filled with water and you can swim, and then it's like a big place. But it was risky. Some kids used to die. [...] We were not supposed to go near any quarry at all. (ibid)

Indeed, a search for 'quarry in Nairobi' on Google brings up plenty of articles reporting people who died while swimming. Interestingly, the same applies to amusement parks. Although there might be different types of quarries and amusement parks, some safe and some not so safe, I would like to point out the price – symbolic or material – that a child has to pay in cities to fulfil one of the most basic reproductive needs, which is swimming for recreation. While children from less affluent backgrounds in cities like Nairobi swim in freedom but are at risk of drowning or swimming in toxic waters, children from more affluent backgrounds swim inside a hyper-real nature filled with, as Lisa reminded us earlier, 'chlorine'. Splash and the quarries illustrate that natural resources accessible for children in such cities are diminishing drastically. What is left are the basements of shopping malls, which are turned into undersea worlds made of plastic hyper-real adventure, where nature increasingly turns into a product that compensates for the ecological ruins caused by urban extractivism.

8. Ambivalent Hopes

In the final chapter, I will summarise the analysed spatio-temporal order of middle-class childhoods across the three scales and examine the historical continuity of their scalar entanglement in the bourgeois context. Building on this analysis, I discuss the spatial figures – fluids, territories, and voids – identified as dominant in middle-class childhoods. I then argue that this socio-spatial figuration constitutes an obstacle to the project of establishing a just society capable of overcoming the social inequalities caused by white adultistic anthropocentrism (Mock 2025). Finally, I conclude the book by examining the tensions that emerge both within the spatial figurations of middle-class childhoods and between, on the one hand, patterns of investment in status work as a prerequisite for middle-class belonging and, on the other, the positive attributes and future-oriented hopes – such as environmentalism and democracy – that dominate the global middle-class discourse. These tensions ultimately call into question the assumption that middle-class children, and children in adultist societies more broadly, can be unproblematically expected to be the bearers of hope.

8.1 The Classed Persistence of the Three Scales

The empirical analyses illustrated an order of childhood in depth on three scales that appeared as prominent for middle-class childhoods across time and space. They were identified as the scale of the subject and the body, the scale of home, and the scale of the city. On the scale of the subject and body, the findings show that middle-class children strongly emphasise their futures and actively invest in their status at an early age by setting clear life plans and goals. This is marked by a change from subjectivation through educational disciplining, including corporal violence in school and at home (especially in Nairobi), towards a self-governing of subjects, which intentionally and actively shape their own lifestyle and life path. Findings on the scale of home show that there is a growing withdrawal of children from urban public spaces into the domestic sphere. Yet the degree of access to this sphere is strongly dependent on children's socio-economic position (connected with the quality of housing). Therefore, the notions of home, e.g., as house or as neighbourhood, vary strongly among the cross-class comparison. Addition-

ally, the types of housing commonly found in middle-class milieus prove to play an important role in children's social relations, as they either limit or promote social interaction and cohesion. On the city scale, both urban societies investigated in this study increasingly produce specialised, often commercialised spaces for children, presenting them as 'child-friendly'. However, the access to them is classed and excludes less affluent children from the idea of safe space. Their fluidity lies in the paradox that their existence might evoke the image that cities are becoming more child-friendly, while the erecting of specific spaces for children must also be acknowledged beyond continuing social inequalities amongst children, and as (re)producing the child-adult binary. Through the strong emphasis on safety, they furthermore (re)produce the figure of the urban child at risk. Middle-class children are furthermore escorted from one of these spaces to another in often adult-curated weekly schedules, cultivating spatio-temporal relations that *avoid* and isolate children from the city's multisensory and social fabric. Additionally, with the colonial racial segregation in Nairobi and the post-war division in Berlin, both cities share the historical demarcation of borders, which still reverberate in children's notions of (un)belonging today. The urban-rural dichotomy furthermore connects to specific forms of household constellations in Nairobi and to the romantic ideal of childhood in nature overall.

Last, it is important to further interpret the fact that the spatial figuration of childhoods could be identified as strongly contextualised by specific dominant scales or scalar entanglements throughout the transgenerational as well as translocal comparison. This means that specific scales of childhood are persistent, regardless of space and time. This finding informs us about the connection of scale and class (or power) and shows us that the body and subject, the home, and the city are scales that endure across time and space, as they are key infrastructures for reproducing middle classness. The first scale, the body and subject, has long been connected to status and selfhood – where the formation of the habitus (Bourdieu 1977), of the 'good' body/person, is cultivated through bourgeois norms and values that manifest in discipline, health, and success/self-accomplishment, increasingly paired with a global orientation (global citizen). The second scale, the home, functions as the primary site of the bourgeois family. Family as both ideology and institution is regarded as the main site for social reproduction, which goes along with the reproduction of class and exclusion. As for the third scale, the city, the urban environment strongly mediates access to what is necessary for forming that habitus through education, culture, and mobility. This is therefore a scale through which middle-class families navigate through choices of schools, neighbourhoods, and educative leisure spaces, which all foster children's social and cultural capital, securing their status. In sum this scalar-entanglement of middle classness once again highlights that the categories of social inequality must be understood not just as social orders but also as spatial orders, thus fulfilling the promise of this study to explore childhood (age) and social inequalities as a spatio-temporal order. In addition, the study revealed in detail and through empirical depth how bourgeois idea(l)s of 'good' childhood/parenting are defined through a govern(mentality) of these scales: by keeping the body/mind healthy and productive, creating a fixed and 'secure' home connected to status, and navigating the 'good' parts of the city, while *avoiding* the 'bad' ones.

8.2 Fluids, Territories, and Voids

Whereas Martina Löw et al. (2021) and Ignacio Castillo Ulloa et al. (2023) state that the territory has become decentralised since the late 1960s in conjunction with the overlapping of different spatial figures, my analyses of the figuration of middle-class childhoods show that the territory remains strongly central. The spatial figure of the fluid, which proved to be dominant in the middle-class childhoods, has in the meantime succeeded in strengthening their finding of an overlap of figures. However, there is no significant evidence that the overlap or simultaneity of spatial figures is new. Another increasingly tangible spatial figuration that is not new in the world but in the typology is the void. It is associated with multiple anthropocentric crises and environmental decay, as well as the rise of technologies and a shift in middle-classed everyday mobilities and is thus missing in the typologies found in spatial debate. The void consists of spatial relations in which social practices (as well as spatial practices in which spatial relations) become invisible, shrunk, or polluted or are simply no longer tangible or perhaps not existent or stigmatised on the mental maps of specific and hegemonial groups or individuals. This spatial figuration illustrates how, in both of the situated globalities examined in this study, the hegemonial mode of spatial production adds to differentiating and enclosing practices of world-making and, as such, contributes to the closure of space by, for example, making it private and exclusive – an act often legitimised via children's protection.

8.2.1 Fluid Spaces: Spatio-Temporal Dissonance

The prominence of ambivalent spatial practices fostering fluid spaces that are both open and closed (for example, private and public) points to the general, ambivalent position of the middle classes within the socio-economic strata: not here, not there, but in between. Located there, this income group is under pressure, as it is in the middle of the tension between the poor and the wealthy, and is therefore the space in which their tension discharges and normalises. This relates to the moral metaphor of the bourgeois cold addressed earlier, as the ambivalence materialised in space and spatial relations can be exemplary for the degree to which middle classness is inevitably connected to the paradoxical simultaneity of conformity and resistance. This moral and spatial ambivalence reminds us of the cultural pattern of status work, characterised by a paradox of the ability (difference from lower-income groups) and need (difference from higher-income groups) to invest in one's status.

The findings also need to be reflected on in the context of a larger societal shift from a society of discipline (Foucault 1994 [1975]) to a society of control (Deleuze 1992) – which took place in both contexts. When we look at the shift from severe discipline exposed on children's bodies, we see that in the younger speakers' narrations, this is replaced with a high amount of self-control and future orientation, which shows that status work is by no means limited to adulthood, as children perform a good amount of status work and actively think about their futures. These findings also tie in with the hypothesis that due to the 'erosion of central institutions of an "organised modernity" (Wagner 1995) – work, family, and the welfare state' (translated from Bührmann 2012: 145), a new mode of subjectivation is emerging, which Ulrich Bröckling defines as the 'entrepreneurial self'

(translated from 2007) and which can be understood by ‘individuals working on themselves as part of newly emerging governmental rationalities, in which previously external, i.e., institutionalised disciplinary practices, have now been or are being shifted to the individuals’ (translated from Bührmann 2012: 145).

As this ‘organised modernity’ has never even been fully established in the Kenyan context, we can assume even more so that the subject figure of Bröckling’s entrepreneurial self is even more visible. Sya’s story, for example, seemed to be an example of entrepreneurial self par excellence. This must also be seen in connection with the erosion of and selective access to central institutions of modernity brought about by the colonial system.¹

The constitution of fluid spaces, connected to status work and middle classness, should be further investigated as a globally connecting pattern of middle-class subjectivity. It also connects to a certain type of biographical space-time constitution, which Gunter Weidenhaus coined ‘concentric-linear type’ (translated from 2015: 162) and which appears here as middle class-specific. Paired with the ambivalence of the fluid space common in middle-class milieus, this type of biographicity creates a somewhat ambivalent situation, because a concentric-linear orientation indicates that someone is strongly future-oriented (and thus never fully in the present) and, at the same time, tries to centre themselves somewhere specific (here). Hence, this type of biographical space-time constitution can be framed as a ‘space-time dissonance’, in which, contrary to when biographical space and biographical time are resonant, for example when ‘here is now’, they are out of sync, such as when ‘here is over or here is later’. This finding of the spatio-temporal dissonance also reinforces Gilles Deleuze’s depiction of the subject’s space-time in the shift from discipline to control: ‘In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything – the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation.’ (Deleuze 1992: 5) Therefore, middle-class subjectivities and their society-based conditions must be accounted for in globally (re)producing specific biographical space-time constitutions, where children might become so fixated on their futures that their sense of the present alters, as the present is connected to the pressure of performing well. Contemporary societies, or their classed regimes, in which people, as Deleuze points out, are ‘never finished’, also reproduce the figure of the child as becoming and reinforce child-adult binaries.

8.2.2 The Secret Life of Territories

A space is a place if you can easily run away from it. Spaces like playgrounds in shopping malls are not places one can easily escape from.

1 In this context, it is important not to undermine the multifaceted structures of non-state-based solidarity practices in Kenya, which also work beyond ethnic and family relations, such as in the concept of ‘Harambee’, a kind of self-help community system that includes crowdfunding, among other things.

As one arrives [at Disney World] by car, one is greeted by a series of smiling young people who, with the aid of clearly visible road markings, direct one to one's parking spot, remind one to lock one's car and to remember its location and then direct one to await the rubber-wheeled train that will convey visitors away from the parking lot. At the boarding location one is directed to stand safely behind guard rails and to board the train in an orderly fashion. [...] Once on the train one is encouraged to protect oneself from injury by keeping one's body within the bounds of the carriage and to do the same for children in one's care. Before disembarking one is told how to get from the train back to the monorail platform and where to wait for the train to the parking lot on one's return. (Shearing/Stenning 1985: 301)

Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning describe this Luna Park experience as related to the materiality of power by which its spatial relations are constituted. Drawing on the shift from a society of discipline to a society of control, they identify a shift from 'Panopticon to Disney World'. Both the prison (on which the idea of Michel Foucault's panopticon is based) and Luna Park are territories, but whereas one is quite honest about its territorial assets, the other one is in disguise. This is because, as Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning note, Disney is 'an exemplar of modern private corporate policing [...] in which discipline and control are, like many of the characters one sees about, in costume. [...] Potential trouble is anticipated and prevented. Opportunities for disorder are minimized by constant instruction, by physical barriers which severely limit the choice of action available and by the surveillance of omnipresent employees who detect and rectify the slightest deviation' (ibid.: 301, 302)

Many special spaces erected for middle-class and affluent children, often promoting themselves as child-friendly, have (at least some of) these characteristics. The findings also show that often, these territories are not immediately visible as such. With regard to the age comparison, territories do not lose centrality but multiply in dazzling disguises (for example, safe spaces). As many territories appear in disguise, speaking of forms may be helpful. This helps us to describe, for example, that territories as spatial figures are multiplying in their forms. But the spatial figure of territory was not only found in the context of indoor commercial play spaces, but also in the middle-class practices of housing and home-making and in connection with the urban dichotomies created through demarcation of the rural from the urban and the East from the West.

Many of these territories exist and grow beyond their exclusionary character, legitimised in the name of protection. In that regard, they are hyper-visible in the context of middle-class childhood – a societal position heavily encapsulated by discourses of risk. In conjunction with these discourses, a shift again towards control is visible when we look at the intergenerational comparison: In the past, the evidence of actual experiences of threat and danger was replaced by a perceived threat and the omnipresence of an in/security dispositive, which is normalised by diverse security practices: from avoiding public spaces to the numerous security checks in Nairobi, producing an omnipresence of fear and propelling industries of securitisation – amplified by the recent experiences with terrorism. It is not surprising that the territory did not lose its centrality in the context of wider geopolitical changes during the 1990s either, which connect life in Nairobi to that in Berlin. Both German unification and the beginning of the political

era of the Kenyan President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi were followed by social, political, and economic crisis, which brought instabilities and ruptures causing a growing sense of insecurity in people's lives. German unification produced profound insecurities by dismantling familiar institutions and life trajectories, particularly for people in the former GDR. Childhood and class positions were destabilized as educational credentials, work biographies, and social roles lost value, exposing families – especially those with fewer resources – to downward mobility and stigma. As such, this also relates to a wider political restructuring, where global geopolitical events, including the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, influenced the spatial order of livelihoods, including childhoods.

Whereas until the 1990s one could (provided that one profited from it) associate the horizon of modernization with the notions of progress, emancipation, wealth, comfort, even luxury, and above all rationality, the rage to deregulate, the explosion of inequalities, the abandonment of solidarities have gradually associated that horizon with the notion of an arbitrary decision out of nowhere in favor of the sole profit of the few. The best of the worlds has become the worst. Looking down from the ship's rail, the lower classes, now fully awakened, see the lifeboats pulling farther and farther away. The orchestra continues to play 'Nearer my God, to Thee,' but the music no longer suffices to drown out the cries of rage... And it is indeed of rage that we must speak if we want to understand the reaction of defiance and incomprehension in the face of such betrayal. If the elites felt, starting in the 1980s or '90s, that the party was over and that they would have to build more gated communities so they would no longer have to share with the masses, especially not the 'masses of color' that would soon be on the move throughout the planet because they were being chased away from their homes, one can imagine that those left behind also understood very quickly that if globalization were tossed aside, then they too would need gated communities. (Latour 2018: 19, 20)

With his Titanic metaphor, Latour even suggests an interpretation of the 1990s in which the middle classes and the elite are the late bloomers who had managed until then to close their eyes to the anthropocentric processes they themselves had triggered or profited from, processes that now seemed irrevocable to them with their unstoppable crises and had destroyed their misguided belief in security through prosperity reached through exploitive capitalism. What became apparent at this point, if not before, was that the territory was no longer sufficient to provide protection and, perhaps because it was identified as such, could be attacked much more easily. However, this did not mean that territory ceased to be a central figure. Instead, social topologies were created that staged spatial figures like liquids, obscuring and concealing territories.

8.2.3 Voids and the Figuration of Fear

In the analysis, many middle-classed practices, such as trajectorial mobility in cars, forge a kind of blindness to the social realities that surround, depend on, and are affected by these practices. This blindness relates to diverse social topologies that close spaces and foster the figuration of voids. Some of these relate to spaces of dying biodiversity (ecological ruins), while others are enacted by an extreme degree of domestication, where the home becomes a bastion and place of isolation (enclave, island, fortress), and still others

are those areas of cities that are increasingly growing (dark matter) between the islands (for example, piano lessons, play centres, and language classes). Hence, it also relates to the figuration of fear, because a world perceived as potentially dangerous does not extend but shrinks. This is, in part, simply because we start to *avoid* the world and all potentially threatening parts of it, trying to secure each of our steps.

But right now what I went through, my daughter can't go through it. You see, she can't go out and explore like I used to. She is sheltered in, and if anybody is to talk to her, you know, you're always like, 'Are they right? Are they okay? Is she okay?' You have to have/Like, if she's with her phone, I have to track her. If she is/I don't let her go out with her friends yet unless it's parent[al] supervision. I am there, or a parent is there. So, my childhood is so much different from what she [has], though she has/In the compound, she has her dogs and her cat, which keep her busy. (Mildred, 39 yrs, *1997, female, Karen, N., about her daughter, Sya)

What is it that makes you say all of this, Mildred? What is it, mother, that made you say back in the early 2000s that the forest is no longer safe? What precisely is it that makes me sometimes feel incredibly worried about my son?

In 1980, the German family law changed, which covered the substitution of the notion of 'parental authority' (*elterliche Gewalt*) with 'parental care' (*elterliche Sorge*) (translated from Baader 2014: 416). This reflexive shift from authority to care must be considered within the simultaneous shift from discipline to control. Visible in the topologies of the childhood narrations and maps, these shifts come with and are connected to the figuration of an (in)security dispositive, which itself is spatial and which Paul Virilio draws our attention to:

[F]ear is now an environment, a surrounding, a world. It occupies and preoccupies us. Fear was once a phenomenon related to localised, identifiable events that were limited to a certain timeframe: wars, famines, epidemics. Today, the world itself is limited, saturated, reduced, restricting us to stressful claustrophobia: contagious stock crises, faceless terrorism, lightning pandemics, [and] 'professional suicides' [...]. Fear is a world, panic as a 'whole'. (Virilio 2012: 14–15)

In his description of the spatial figuration, Virilio indirectly answers the questions above when he says that fear has become an 'environment' – where fear envelops us not only temporally but spatially and disconnected from the event. Overall, on the scale of the subject and the body, the findings indicate that the corporeal becoming of middle-class children is discursively produced as a constant state of crisis, never safe outside the proliferating safe spaces, from child-friendly cafés to child-friendly cities. This proliferation of child-safe spaces normalises a world that is not safe for children. This is why I would also argue that erecting more playgrounds for children in the city is yet another form of territorialisation in disguise. This is crucial because they not only substitute but also sustain various forms of privatisation in the city, such as the construction of more roads for traffic. Instead of demanding a real structural change that tackles the growing issue of traffic and the general liveability of cities, the continuous creation of safe spaces for

of the metaphor of 'sitting (or sinking) in the same boat'. Murat Arsel notices that there is a hopeful imaginary, such as that of Dipesh Chakrabarty, that points out that the climate change problem is bigger than capitalism and therefore might promote cross-class collaboration. In his book *The Rise of the Global Middle Class: How the Search for the Good Life Can Change the World*, the economist Homi Kharas also spreads hope for the planet, pinning it on the middle classes. The other imaginary, by contrast, anticipates that climate crisis will amplify class differences and weaken social cohesion. Murat Arsel furthermore notes, with reference to Ulrich Beck's risk society (1986), that

whereas there is no material interest for the members of the bourgeoisie to fight against most of the myriad ills of the capitalist mode of production, they too have vested interest in overcoming its environmental blind spots because, without genuine and dramatic changes, the negative impacts of climate change are likely to be catastrophic at a planetary scale. (Arsel 2023: 68)

What is clear, Arsel argues, is that the theoretical foundation of class and climate change must still be clarified. In their study on carbon emissions in emerging middle classes, Babette Never et al. conclude that 'the differentiations between developing/developed countries in the global climate debate may be outdated: It is about being part of the global middle classes or not' (2020: iv). Findings such as these not only point to the plurality of globalisation processes as entangled and situated but also stress the need to rethink the myth of modernisation inherent in the current global middle-class discourse and the necessity to see the interconnectedness of global capitalism and the climate crisis. We have reached a point where it is clear that economic growth in the capitalist systems (for example through fossil fuel dependency, deforestation and land-use changes, overconsumption, waste generation, short-term profit motive, corporate lobbying, and policy influence) is only and always possible at the expense of limited planetary resources. This is why further research on the relation between modernisation myths and the cultural practices common in diverse middle-class milieus seems particularly important. It can reveal how ideas of the good life, of good family and good childhood, sustain capitalist extraction of social and natural resources and promote social inequality, while also substantiating what is already clear theoretically: namely, that social cohesion and post-growth societies are inevitable if we are to counter the growing social-ecological crisis. What do the findings of the narrative assemblage contribute to the contested debates about the group they frame as the GMC? What can they contribute to the hopes and doubts pinned on this heterogeneous group from the perspective of the spatial figurations of middle-class childhoods? Will it be the new generations of global middle classes that will bring about this change in collaboration with (their) others?

Not if Yorgos Lanthimos's exaggerated parable of the 'dogtooth' turns out to be more than the imagination of a dystopian future. The parable appears in Lanthimos's eponymous movie, in which three children are sealed off from the world inside a single-family house, where their parents told them they are only ready to face the danger outside once their canine tooth falls out. In this study, childhood has become a prism through which I envisioned figurations – figurations of fear and hope.

How much hope should we place in the global middle classes, and more importantly, in their younger generations?

Before I engage with this question on the basis of the (hi)stories shared with me, it is necessary to reiterate the limits of this study. It neither claims to offer a generalisable diagnosis of the global middle classes nor to predict their political or transformative potential. Rather, it explores selected aspects of their lived realities through an empirical, translocal study of middle-class childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin. In doing so, it contributes to a further dismantling of the modernisation myth that continues to underpin the hope invested in the so-called global middle classes.

Drawing on the analytical lens of childhood as developed in this study, the question of how to name or frame our present appears less as a matter of identifying a singular epoch than of grappling with a deeply fractured temporal landscape. Across the diverse socio-economic positions, racialised locations, and generational experiences encountered in Nairobi and Berlin, what becomes visible is not one shared historical moment but an entangled assemblage of temporalities. Futures imagined, deferred, or foreclosed coexist with inherited pasts that remain materially and affectively present. In this sense, the empirical material points towards a condition that may be described as an era of permanent aftermath: a post-progress temporality in which the promises of modernity continue to structure expectations, even as their fulfilment has become increasingly implausible – a condition that was already aptly expressed in the 1990s by the cultural historian Robert Hewison:

We are not living in a New Age, but in the aftershock, the aftermath, possibly even the afterthought of one. Whatever it is, we are living in the AFTER. The 'after' is a difficult place to describe, since it is defined by what it is not, hence that sense of living in a void. (Hewison 1993: 250)

This temporal condition can also be understood as a non-synchronous present (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) – a temporal dissonance in which different historical times are lived simultaneously, yet unevenly distributed. While middle-class childhoods in both Nairobi and Berlin remain oriented towards ideals of stability, self-realisation, and upward mobility, these orientations are increasingly accompanied by experiences of insecurity, moral pressure, and anticipatory loss. Childhood, as a prism, renders these contradictions particularly visible. It is here that shortened horizons of expectation, blocked or conditional futures, and the accumulation of inherited damage – ecological, economic, and social – become tangible, long before they are articulated in political or economic terms.

Read through this prism, the sense of living in the "AFTER" cannot be reduced to a crisis of the nation-state alone. Rather, it points to the exhaustion of a broader set of modern institutional arrangements through which belonging, reproduction, and futurity have historically been organised: the nation-state, the family, and racialised regimes of inclusion and exclusion. These structures remain powerful in shaping life chances in Nairobi and Berlin alike, yet they increasingly appear as contradictory dispositifs. They continue to demand attachment, loyalty, and reproduction, while simultaneously producing unequal vulnerability and failing to secure the futures they once promised – most visibly for children.

For the global middle classes and their younger generations, this results less in a straightforward loss of hope than in a condition of profound ambivalence. Many are positioned as both beneficiaries and managers of these exhausted arrangements: expected to stabilise family life, compensate for failing welfare infrastructures, and navigate racialised and national hierarchies, even as the limits and violences of these structures become harder to ignore. The empirical accounts gathered in this study suggest that hope, under these conditions, is increasingly detached from narratives of progress or transformation. Instead, it emerges as a fragile, unevenly distributed practice of adaptation, care, and endurance – an effort to live on within a non-synchronous present shaped by the ruins of promises that were never universally accessible. In this sense, the spatial relations of middle-class childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin do not signal the advent of a new epoch. Rather, they illuminate how the present is negotiated from within an ongoing aftermath – one in which the future is neither simply lost nor fully imaginable, but persistently contested, deferred, and unevenly foreclosed.

And it is this loss of orientation, of ability to trust, which paradoxically again exaggerates the problem of bourgeois cold – as in times of insecurity the tension between having a status and losing it rises. This condition also leads to an increased need for control, where more and more people get to understand and to know that most prosperity today is based on exploitation of some kind. Overall, the findings confirm that status work in the form of future investment can be seen as a global pattern of middle classness and connects to the social spatio-temporal order of middle-class childhoods in particular. This investment includes several practices of securing – from securing children's development through various forms of education to establishing a safe home through social and technological security practices, technologies, and infrastructures to safety-centred mobility practices characterised by the *avoidance* of certain parts or dimensions of the city.

Although in the past these middle-classed securing practices could relate to a wider community of solidarity or the extended family, throughout time they are increasingly characterised by the nuclear family model, in which children already grow up with references to Lanthimos's parable. It may be assumed that these analogies will not disappear, as currently the core family model is booming again – propagated by a wide political spectrum, including right-wing politics. This core family-centred figuration forges an increased inward relation and renders middle-classed spatial practices and their spatial relations highly exclusive. Such middle-class childhood and family-related practices (re)produce social topologies that promote the development of spatial figures like territories, fluid spaces, and voids, which all have the spatial quality of closing space and restricting spatial relations – often legitimised by (in)security discourses, which (re)produce stigmas of the feared (classed, gendered, or racialised) other, which is why it is so easy to imagine the stranger out there as bloodthirsty and vengeful. This imagination also creates imaginary abysses that are so boundless that mistrust of everyone seems justified.

This legitimises both the actions of individuals in their everyday lives and those of global security regimes and industries. Therefore, to extend my speculation, I again relate to Paul Virilio (2012), who frames the period we entered at the turn of the last century as the administration of fear – a time in which fear has become an environment, an

omnipresent substance of our everyday social and psychological life – regularly instilled into us through our technological extensions ('smart' devices). Ever since, this fear has left voids or made them become tangible, and it seems that we have arrived at a point where the emotion, which, as Virillo claimed, had shifted to an environment, has now again transformed existing (and Euclidian) environments and is forging new environments where fear as an emotion and fear as a virtual or material reality constantly mirror each other in some sort of 'echo-chamber of fear' – where fear itself can no longer escape. So, from administering the fear, we are transitioning into an era in which we are largely managing the voids. And because these voids are so scary, we are compelled to administer something else, which is hope, and this hope has always been but is now more than ever attached to children and pinned to the need for the coming generations to significantly differ from those before.

If we now look at the spatial figuration of childhoods in Nairobi and Berlin, we can note that, against the background of the proliferation of spatial figures that close space, the world, as I elaborated before, becomes hyperreal for those who can afford it, as we can see in the emergence of specialised topologies for children. But the hyperreal also relates to the time-space dissonance that comes with the prominent spatial practice of *avoiding*, because it is connected to precaution. Although no one can escape completely from their body – an inevitable space – it is possible to manipulate that location via time. This manipulation is, as the findings showed, a common practice within middle-class milieus and can be grasped by the metaphor of *scale jumping by time travelling*. People do this when they have the power to estimate and assess the future and secure themselves accordingly in the present. This applies to all kinds of future investments, from insurances to savings, that allow me spatial mobility, for example if the rivers in my city and the water in the taps become polluted and I want to move to a better place. However, this only works for those who can afford spatio-temporal dissonance and *avoid* being in the world, by staying aloof of the world. For the rest, who cannot afford prevention (for example, investing in insurance) and precaution (for example, keeping their children off the streets), the world stays real. This is why Yorgos Lanthimos's dogtooth parable cannot be told outside an upper-class residential homestead where the world can be *avoided*. This amplifies why class *matters* quite literally.

The findings of fluids, territories and voids signal that middle-class milieus tend to rather close space and that figures such as places and networks – which open space – are rather scarce in their social topologies. This makes it necessary to critically engage with the role of middle classness within the Anthropocene, which, on the one hand, draws on the potential that lies within the middle classes, connected to their relatively high amount of mobility (prominence of fluid space), which could be directed towards action to build sustainable futures and collectively 'invest' in education that fosters planetary responsibility and care. On the other hand, the findings show how deeply middle-class milieus are affected by instabilities and insecurities, easily promoting withdrawal into the private, which again closes space (for example, fortification and emotionalisation of home).

Children of middle- and high-income groups are no longer only, as Michel Foucault prognosed for the 18th century, situated in 'an unreal, abstract, archaic environment that had no relation to the adult world' (Foucault 1987: 81), but are today increasingly situated in environments without reference to the world itself. This becomes evident in environ-

mental programmes such as 'Love the Ocean' at the Village Market Shopping Mall's play space Under the Sea, where children receive environmental education while surrounded by a hyperreal ecological site completely tamed by humans. Stimulated in a jolly simulacrum of nature, octopuses are exploited as slides, fragile corals are chairs, seashells are modified into lampshades, and plankton serves as a climbing scaffold. While this scene is promoted as an environmental educational space, it could be interpreted as the nightmare of anthropocentrism, where the ocean that children are taught to 'love' is introduced to them as a toy to be obsessed with. In such a plastic hyperreal and, most of all, tame environment, education remains a metaphor, forging children's environmental awareness more as a status symbol than as activism.

While children, especially those from middle-class milieus, become commercialized discursive figures of bearers of hope for a better future, by playing at the air conditioned basements of malls – other children are already tackling the increased heat. From this perspective, it is important to once again to remember Latour's Titanic metaphor and to point out the social as well as temporal difference between the classed decks of the ship: The ship did not sink at the same time to all passengers. After all, the middle classes still have the privilege of discussing the devastating effects of anthropocentrism in speculative terms, whereas for others it has long been tangible in their weak lungs and visible on their metamorphosed skins. As such, doomsday can also not be understood as a speculative event which comes true for everyone at the same time and in the future but as an ongoing process – a void that has long started to build up – and that has already soaked up some, while privileged others have managed to stay away from it.

I want to close with a remark that is very important to me. All the effort to deconstruct and dismantle the hope invested in the (coming generations of) global middle classes should not evoke the impression that I want to position myself against cultivating hope in children per se. On the contrary, I acknowledge children as highly capable of taking responsibility for themselves and human as well as non-human others – something that was just recently highlighted by the work of Iris Därmann, who engaged with the solidarity practices among children subjected to the most inhumane conditions (2025).

So although I generally believe revolutionary practice can be brought about by children, the lived worlds of the middle-class children I have been allowed access to are sadly structurally organised in ways that deprive them of any 'place' to assemble and to unite. While the internet has to some extent proven to be a place for resistance organized by young people even globally (for example, Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN), Jóvenes por el Clima, Green Africa Youth Organization, Arab Youth Climate Movement or Fridays for Future), abundant access to information via the internet alone rarely equips them to resist social inequalities or environmental destruction. As the findings show, middle-class children today often grow up in highly protected environments, moving between private homes, gated schools, and carefully supervised extracurricular spaces, while their encounters with public life are tightly managed.

Knowledge gained online tends to be abstract and risk-free, divorced from the bodily, emotional, sensory and collective experiences that shape political agency. Even with abundant access to information via the internet, this sheltering insulates them from the material realities of social inequalities and environmental degradation, which are rarely experienced through screens alone. Knowledge without exposure leaves political

and ecological crises abstract, while real-world engagement requires confronting discomfort, risk, and collective negotiation. Public spaces – streets, parks, or community centers – offer arenas where children can test their capacity for action, solidarity, and resistance, learning through their bodies and social interactions that change is possible. Consequently, digital connectivity may inform and inspire, but the cultivation of durable awareness and agency depends on breaking the seal around their worlds and encountering life beyond curated, secure spaces.

It seems to me that only children themselves can shake up the infantilising notion of childhood, but to do so they must be allowed to gather, beyond their classed contexts. So instead of portraying middle-class children as irresponsible and/or privileged, on the contrary, my aim is to critically question the oppression of privileged children, their spatial and temporal governance, and the sometimes hyperreal world compensation addressed to them as ‘life behind glass’ (children’s room windowpane, windscreen, screen). From this perspective, middle-class children are not only privileged but also disempowered, disempowered in a different way. However, this disempowerment is also opaque, precisely because it is so strongly compensated for.

Against the background of this criticism and on the basis of deep engagement with the spatial figurations of childhoods in geographically distant cities, I argue that it is important to make ourselves aware of how much the world is out of scale for ALL children. By stressing a critical decolonial discourse about the Anthropocene as a *white adultocene* (Mock 2025), this rescaling must happen in collaboration beyond local political lobbies for children on a global scale. If then, for example, cities worldwide engage with the discourse on the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1996) from the perspective of childhood, this might also synchronise clocks, because it would identify problems, such as that of increased traffic and fortification of private housing (which overshadows the creation of more communal and affordable housing), from a much more urgent social perspective. If we denaturalise childhood as a spatial order in connection with a childhood historical (re)reading of the Anthropocene regarding its creation of a ‘child/human binary’ (Rollo 2018), we will shape alliances between it and other urgent political topics. Generally, rethinking the difference between illusion and hope can foster transformations when we pin the expectation of a just future on those who, in societies worldwide, are held in unjust relations of spatial and temporal subjugation. In critical sociology, we could advance the project of liberating children from their structural position by de-centring adults and by acknowledging children as reproductive societal agents and caregivers, not just as recipients, in sociological theory. We could achieve this by placing another companion alongside feminist and Black Marxism (Robinson 2021 [1983]), namely a child-centred or even childish (as part of an intersectional) Marxism, one in which the very notion of ‘childish’ would be able to blossom.

Figure 71: Topologies of hope. Sailing children on the Indian Ocean in Lamu, Kenya.



Source: Photograph by the author, 2019.

Attachment

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