Conclusion to Part I

In the four chapters that form Part I 'Diasporic Generations', I examine the importance that one's generation plays in the process of coming of age as a person of African descent in Germany.

What does it mean to migrate to, live in or grow up in Germany as a racialised person in different times? Part I has examined various modalities in the history of migration and diaspora. Large numbers of Africans first came to Germany during the colonial period; the historical and practical circumstances meant that becoming politically active at that time was a very different matter for a person of African descent compared to today – but Afrodiasporic political organisations nonetheless emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an early pan-African and socialist/communist paradigm inspired by the movements of their times. How forms of political engagement have changed and developed in line with macro- and particularly micro-circumstances is taken up in the ethnographic chapters following the life of Lamine Camara and his daughter Aminata and two of her peers in Germany since the 1970s, a time when the country was strongly influenced by the US Civil Rights movement, had its own 1968 revolution, and when many African students came from recently decolonised countries. I interrogate how issues of class and race affect different generations who grew up in very different historical contexts in Germany. One thing that is true of racism in every historical period is that it was always resisted by those affected: From the 1880s to today, there have been political and community organisations who resisted discrimination and fought for their rights by building coalitions.

Another aspect that I focus on in Part I is the importance of the local level for forming diasporic identities and for diasporic practice. Nassy Brown (2005) has stressed the importance of focusing on the role of local places in the forging of Black identities, taking the example of Liverpool. My work takes the experiences of Aminata, her friend Maya and Lafia at its core and shows how growing up in Frankfurt influenced their lives in broadly similar ways. The lives of Maya, Lafia and Aminata demonstrate what Robert Smith has claimed for his ethnography of Mexican-American families: that 'forms of transnational involvement change with the life course, attenuating and intensifying at different stages' (2006, p. 205). Their

diasporic attachments were first of all dependent on their family networks. Having grown up with their West African fathers, Maya and Aminata had a binational self-understanding (as Sierra Leonean-German and Guinean-German, respectively) very early on. West African cultural practice and kin was included in their everyday life, whereas Lafia grew up more distanced from her Senegalese father, in a white liberal milieu; she started to deal more with her Senegalese origins as an adult, sensitised through her psychoanalytical study and work environment. What mattered locally and historically for Maya and Lafia, especially for relating to Blackness as teenagers, was the presence of Black American culture and GI entertainment infrastructures that were of particular importance in forging a positive racialised and gendered self-understanding in their teens.

How race and class intersect is subject to change and depends on historical circumstances, such as transformations in the forms of racism. The first Africans in Germany came when scientific racism was flourishing throughout Europe and the USA at the end of the nineteenth century (Wieviorka 1998). Race theories were produced in order to justify the domination and exploitation of one group by another. The spread of scientific racism, which taught that biological features had a direct impact on psychological characteristics, had a direct impact on how Afrodescendant people were received in Germany, on their rights and on the dangers they faced (including even the possibility of sterilisation after 1933) (Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, Michael 2015). As the biologistic paradigm lost its scientific validity following World War II, racism changed, and so did the social and economic possibilities for Afrodescendant people in Germany. Downward mobility and open racist discrimination was less of an issue for African migrant students who arrived in Germany from the 1950s onwards. Scientific racism had been proven wrong and Germany needed to rebuild itself after the horrors of the Nazi regime. East Germany included anti-racism in its constitution, and West Germany wanted to build an open and tolerant nation. Racism was by no means gone, but it was not as accepted as before and was stripped of its biologistic base.

Instead, racism was now defined in terms of culture, and differences between white Germans and People of Colour were constructed in terms of an essentialising view of culture and the supposed impossibility that non-white foreigners could integrate successfully due to differences in culture – a phenomenon called cultural or differentialist racism (Taguieff 1985, Balibar & Wallerstein 1991, Fassin & Fassin 2009). The case of Lamine Camara shows how he was able to ensure middle-class status for himself and his family, but not without facing certain constraints as a Guinean migrant. He did not suffer downward mobility, but nor was he able to achieve the level he strived for, which was to access education up to doctorate level.

Aminata faces different problems related to racism and racialisation, the most persistent being the *migrantisation* of Black people and People of Colour in Germany, regardless of how long they or their families have lived there. This process links racial

with classist othering: People who are of non-European descent are not only constructed as eternal newcomers but are also automatically associated with the working class and all the stereotypes attached to it.

Discrimination based on physical features lingers on, and having a darker skin tone and curly hair continues to be an excuse for othering and exoticising. But Aminata does not feel that these experiences have harmed her economic or social opportunities. She sees a strong intersection of racism and classism affecting working class People of Colour and recently migrated non-white people. But she recognises that this does not significantly affect her material conditions; she and her family are well off today in socioeconomic terms and in comparison with the wider international situation. In terms of personal experience, racism has affected her family: her husband has had experiences of being discriminated against at his job and their children have already experienced racist discrimination at school. These are experiences that weigh psychologically and induce fear of possible status loss as racialised middle class.

Another phenomenon that Part I of this book sheds light on is diasporic identities across family generations. Whereas attachment to the homeland remains strong for a primomigrant like Lamine Camara, whose high level of education and political awareness led him into Guinean politics from the diaspora, the situation is different for his children. Aminata's Afrodiasporic identity and practice is very much influenced by her being a millennial – the generation who grew up as the first digital natives – and she takes her influences from all over the world, although her generation in Germany is still very much influenced by Black culture from the USA. For Aminata, although Guinea interests her because the knows that her father grew up there and she even lived there too, this diasporic attachment is not the most important factor in her diasporic practice, which has become multicentred and reaches from Germany and France, via the USA to West Africa. Aminata's relationship to her Afrodescendant heritage has been a process – a process of building a positive racial(ised) identity as Black: associating with Black American culture, finding community with other young people of African descent in Germany to fight racist stigma, becoming active herself in Black German and anti-racist activism, and then identifying more and more as West African as an adult woman with a family of her own. Today she is also practising what Herbert Gans called 'symbolic ethnicity' (Gans 1979). He defined this as 'a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior' (1979, p. 9). It is an identification which is taken up at specific moments in life, for festivities (celebrating Christmas with German and West African dishes) and such like. But it can also be incorporated in everyday behaviour by, for example, wearing African garments or earrings in the shape of the African continent.

A crucial factor in the desire to (re)connect – or not – with a place of ancestral origin is the relationship with family. This is a part of the story that will be continued in the following chapters.