7. Lafia T.: The long journey to her father's land

Figure 6: Two women, a baby and a pirogue in Dakar, Senegal, 2018 © Lafia T.

Lafia's relationship with her father and the concomitant relationship with her Senegalese origins have been complicated ever since she was a child, as we saw in Chapter 3. Things began to change for her as an adult, and she started to develop a considerable interest in Senegal. A few years ago, when I had already started fieldwork in Frankfurt, Lafia's wish came true: She, her husband and her father travelled to Senegal. For her, this was a truly existential journey. She got to know her grandmother and her aunts and uncles, and the possibility of family relations with her Senegalese kin suddenly became an option, something she had not envisaged so far in her life. Until her trip, she had an unclear picture of Senegal and thus of where her father came from and who he had been. By means of this trip, during which

Lafia spent a lot of time with her father, she was able to see where he grew up. She also found out more about the social and economic backgrounds of her extended kin and gained a picture of the complexities of life in Senegal. Many aspects of a positive diasporic identification were created for Lafia during this short trip.

In this chapter I explore Lafia's experience in Senegal – a journey she made as a tourist in 2018. I analyse how holidays can reveal themselves as a catalyst for developing diasporic belonging. In particular, the themes I focus on in Lafia's account are class, kinship and care. How does Lafia understand and build kinship with her relatives whom she met for the first time, and how are the relations influenced by class or national context? But before considering the trip itself, I want to explore what led to the change in how she dealt with her Senegalese heritage – her relationship shifted from rejection as a child and teenager to a wish to explore her origins as an adult. What motivated Lafia to travel to Senegal in her thirties?

Awakening interest in Senegal as a young adult

In describing how she came to be interested in Senegal and the story of her father's migration, Lafia stresses that her educational journey was of considerable importance. Her interest grew gradually, and was stimulated by various encounters with people (positive and negative), books and digital media. Furthermore, because she was of African descent, migration became an important topic during her studies. In the same way that Aminata once explained that her being seen as a person with 'migration background' or a Person of Colour could have a positive outcome for her job in certain instances, this was also the case for Lafia. Although her father's migration history had not played an important role in her personal life up to that point, people often *assumed* it would. For example, there was her student job where she worked in a migration-related project – it was by chance that a colleague told her about an open position and that they were looking for researchers who themselves had migration history in their families. And after a while Lafia herself became really interested in the topic of migration. Another important aspect was the self-analysis she had to do as part of her psychotherapy training where she began to deal with her family history:

> I've been doing this continuing education [as a psychotherapist] since 2015, and […] I mean at the latest when you start with this education, it is about dealing with yourself. And then, that might be worth telling you, I worked in a research project about migration histories from 2012 to 2016, and now my dissertation is also about motherhood in the context of migration. And in that context, I read texts and dealt in detail with these migration destinies, and I noticed more and more how absurd it was, and that I could not justify any longer that I was deny-

> ing the migration history of my father. That I somehow blanked it out? I don't know how you could describe it, but sometimes you have these clear moments where you realise 'Yes sure, he also must be homesick from time to time.' I had to go through a whole intellectual loop and study so long before I was able to acknowledge that for my father. And then I also had a, what do you call it, like a job interview, entrance interview at a training institute, which I decided not to take, but he [they guy there] said like, and I think he himself had Persian roots, anyway he said 'Ah interesting, your husband Irish and you Senegal, how interesting, well travelling there that would be something, especially in light of personal experience [*Selbsterfahrung* – experience of self].' […] But that he – and I was not particularly fond of this man – that he just throws that at me made me think this is always going to be something, and rightly so, even for people that you don't know well, that leads to irritations at first. That you haven't been there, that you know so little about it; that you are so far away from it.

Lafia points to various factors that caused her to start to deal more with her family history: Her training in psychotherapy, where one also has to deal a lot with oneself, was one. It made her realise how little she had dealt with the history of her father. If she wanted to continue in psychotherapy, she had to deal with her family and precisely with her feelings towards and relations with family members. Thus, the relationship with her father became a somewhat central theme during her training. Another aspect was working on a project with recently arrived migrant women. Through the interviews with them and the destinies she encountered, Lafia first became intellectually interested in the topic of migration and individual migration histories. This concern with the stories of others led her back to herself and her father and gave her a strong incentive to also deal with her personal story. Another encounter that was important in her process to actively engage with her Senegalese origins was an unpleasant encounter with a job interviewer who was of Iranian origin. In a job interview he told her that it would certainly be interesting for her to travel to Senegal. This comment from someone who had a migration history themselves confirmed a feeling in her that had already been growing for a while: that it was in fact important to deal with one's origins. Trémon describes the interiorised claim to 'have to know your roots' that persists for descendants of migrants as a 'moral imperative' (2019, p. 5). The fact that this demand exists also for descendants of migrants who were born in a different country than the primomigrant parent indicates the essentialised nature of the claim. Roots in this claim are not something that a person can build throughout their life everywhere, but rather something that is already there in the person and which they must explore in order to know who they truly are. The interviewer's remark annoyed Lafia, because she also believes this is important and something she has to do – his remark was hurtful and irritating because it hit a nerve, and she felt it was justified. It was thus through dealing with others that she began to deal with herself and her own history. This shows the intersubjectiv-

ity of the self; it is through dialogue and interaction with others that a person constructs their own identity. The perception of self is very much influenced by the look of others, as Jean-Paul Sartre describes in his work on existential anthropology *Being and Nothingness* (1943). He illustrates this intersubjectivity by analysing the feeling of shame that emerges because someone else is looking at you. One becomes conscious of one's own existence through the eyes of the other, which in a way objectifies the self. This is what Sartre qualified as 'being for the other' (*être-pour-l'autre*, p. 455ff). It is only by the *being for other* that the *being in itself* (*être en soi*) is transformed to the *being for oneself* (*être pour soi*). In Lafia's case, the fact that the question came from a person in Germany who had their own migration history and whose Iranian origins were already integrated in their daily life reflects back to her that she is missing (out on) something: 'This is always going to be something, and rightly so, […] that leads to discomfort at first. That you haven't been there…'. The 'rightly so' surprised me. It meant that she agreed with the claim that she should know her roots. So, as an adult she began to interiorise in her vision of self something that she rejected as a child and teenager.

Besides this ambivalent last encounter, it was mostly positive experiences and incidents which created Lafia's self-interest in Senegal. One of her colleagues at the University recommended *Americanah* by the Nigerian-born author Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, which was very important in her initial efforts to deal with her Senegalese roots in a positive way. Lafia explains that it was through role-models like Adichie or Taiye Selasi (author of *Ghana Must Go* [2013]), who both write and lecture extensively about the normality of belonging to diverse cultures and living in different countries and who both stress their cosmopolitanism as well as Africanness, that Lafia gradually felt more excited about getting to know her personal African roots.

Americanah also brought her closer to Black and feminist discourses. This novel is about the coming of age of a young woman from Lagos who goes to the USA to study. There she experiences for the first time what it means to be Black – the notion not being of importance in her home country Nigeria. Ifemelu, the main character, finishes writing an important book on race in America and decides to return to Lagos as an adult, where she encounters her ex-boyfriend from school. Adichie describes life in Lagos so well that one really gets a feeling for it without ever having been there. Personally, I cannot remember that hair was an important topic in the book, but for Lafia it was something she took from it. After reading it, she braided her hair for the first time. She did it herself by watching a few tutorials online:

> *Americanah* inspired me, but I think that *Americanah* plays a role in the whole process, that I am doing the travel now and about defining positively your roots, that this book played an important role. Because that was a voice, in contrast to Marie Ndiaye, a Senegalese author who always writes horrible and depress-

> ing stuff, like 'fathers are assholes' novels. Not my cup of tea. And that was so sad because it would have been a chance for me to discover Senegal differently, but not with her. And then there is Adichie and Taiye Selasi, whom I admire so much […] And with Adichie everything is, she is just sooo great. She has such an easiness, even if – yes she is my role model, she is smart but also funny, she has this easiness even if she mediates very difficult things and very political things, and never gets too grim, and then she is also – d'you know 'The power of a single story?' (a TED talk of hers) She is political on such a level that I find great. She is like a sociologist really, right? (Interview, 22 November 2017)

Lafia needed a positive external impetus to make her curious to discover Senegal for herself. Unlike other women in my research, she was not politicised by being active in Black German organisations or via American authors but by different sources. Interestingly, she refers to the French novelist and playwright Marie Ndiaye as being Senegalese, although she was born in France to a Senegalese father with whom she did not grow up. In this moment, Lafia is not aware that she is essentialising someone's identity – something she has known to happen to her as well. As she was looking for something Senegalese or African to help in her identification process, it makes more sense to identify Ndiaye as Senegalese rather than French. In Adichie, she could find a role-model, someone Lafia could identify with – and in terms of social class, she also identifies with the characters Adichie describes, especially the female ones who have a university education and aspirations to be writers or social scientists. It was not one event but a chain of events and encounters, a web of different inputs and experiences that brought her closer to wanting to go to Senegal herself and getting to know the country and her kin there. And of wanting to engage more with her father. So finally, at the end of her twenties, Lafia began to reconsider the idea of travelling with her father. Many things had happened in her life and more importantly during her professional journey. A number of events and thoughts made her become really concrete about her travel plans to Senegal by 2015, but the actual journey took place in 2018. She had finished her studies and was about to get married and they were thinking about having another child (this would be her first child with her husband, and her second overall). Lafia knew that something had come between her and going to Senegal many times already and she was very anxious in case she might never make it. Moreover, Lafia was not the only one who had to be ready for a trip to Senegal: When she proposed the trip to her father, it was he who found excuses for not going in 2015. 'It rained a lot', he said. It took time to convince him and a few unforeseen incidents before Lafia made it to Senegal for the first time in 2018.

Frankfurt, Café Basaglia and a car journey

I meet Lafia for lunch, and we talk about her job and the #metoo debate, which is the hot topic of the season. After a while, we get to talk about Senegal again. Her father never told her much about Senegal, only bits and pieces, but for a while now, as he recently went back there after many years, he has started sending her pictures and telling her what he is up to in Dakar. He is sending her pictures of friends, family and artists. She shows me a few. I ask her why she thinks that he is more open to it now – Lafia is not sure. She remembers that her aunt (her mother's sister), who is a traveller, was at her wedding. This aunt told her father at the wedding that she had been to Senegal and had travelled around the country a lot. 'Maybe that gave him a taste of wanting to become a tourist in his country as well?' When Lafia was younger, her father did try to teach her a few things, for example djembe, making music together, but her mother, she feels today, kept Senegal quite out of their life all together. 'Only after many years did he tell me, as an aside, that my name means "princess",' Lafia tells me, while she tries to convey to me what her father is like. Today is the first time that she really feels she is open to getting to know the country; she is curious. Maybe this is also why her father is more open about it? (Fieldnote, 24 January 2018)

Roots travel to Senegal – May 2018

Lafia tells me that she and her husband are in the mood for travelling and that they have decided to really take the trip to Senegal soon. 'So who knows', she tells me 'Maybe next time we see each other, it will be about the trip.' (Fieldnote, 31 January 2018, after phone call)

Indeed, this was the case: After our encounter in January 2018, I saw Lafia again following her trip to Senegal. She had come to Vienna for a PhD workshop in June and stayed at our house. Her trip had taken place about a month before, and I can see how happy she still was to have been there. She tells me about the family they stayed with, how well they got along and how much she would love to return soon. As we do not have much time together in Vienna, we schedule an interview about her trip to Senegal for later.

Phone call Lausanne–Frankfurt

I am happy to be on the phone with Lafia, and she immediately asks how I envision the interview about her journey to Senegal, which took place exactly one year ago. I am in Lausanne and Lafia is in Frankfurt. Lafia has just completed her final exams in psychotherapy and is now trying to have a bit more

> free time. After our call she will go to her grandmother's house in the Swabian Jura mountains in southwest Germany with some friends. I say that I would be pleased if she were to tell me in detail about the Senegal trip she took last year with her husband. When they travelled there in 2018, her father had already been there for a few months. Lafia was very apprehensive prior to the trip. The initial plan was to go there with her father and younger half-brother, but there were many work-related problems for Lafia – plus she had not been on a trip alone with her father for many years, and in the end her husband David also came along. The main motivation for Lafia was to get to know Senegal and most of all her relatives, especially her grandmother, whom she had never met. (Fieldnote, 3 May 2019)

In many ways, Lafia's trip to Senegal was a confrontation between imagination and reality. Not that she had constructed a powerful image of Senegal already, but she had anticipated that moment for a long time and was very excited. What she did expect was that the trip would be an opportunity to reconnect with her father, to get to know him better by getting to know where he comes from – which is something that did happen, but brought a lot of disillusionment with it as well. For Lafia, this is diasporic travel in so far as it is a journey to the origins of her father and an attempt to make these origins her own as well.

Lafia wanted to discover Senegal to create an attachment, an identification – she wanted to create her own memories and affinities with the place and its people, and find out what she thought and felt about everything. Overall, as she sums up her trip during our interview, it was a wonderful experience, and the year that has passed since also seems enough time to see the more negative experiences with more distance. 'If I am honest I would like to be there right now', is how Lafia starts our conversation. Whenever Lafia moves a bit too quickly in her account, I try to slow her down with questions about her daily or weekly schedules, trying to give her more time to develop her experiences. The interview took place on 3 May 2019.

The role of family in roots travel

Right from the beginning, our interview orbits a lot around family. The first aspect was meeting her father at the airport in Dakar, as he had already been in Senegal for a few months.

> Lafia: I don't remember in detail what happened at the airport, but there was my father waving, he was totally excited that I had come there for the first time. He was behind some kind of barrier and climbed onto something and waved wildly.
> Silvia: So you could really see how emotional he was?

> Lafia: Yes, totally excited. And he was with someone – I think the son of his landlord – so he had somehow employed someone for a few days, to drive us around. He came to get us with the car and we drove around in this old Mercedes and he took us to a cousin of my father, where we stayed […] Ouakam, is the name of the neighbourhood, and then we met everyone. (Interview, 3 May 2019)

This memory of her father being excited and waiting at the airport is an important one, because it is purely positive. She remembers how happy he was. Things got a bit more complicated after a few days together, but this memory reminds her of the joy and excitement around the whole trip. One thing that Lafia often stresses in her account is that she was overwhelmed by the care that people showed and the relaxed manner of communication among people. She explains this in more detail in the next extract, which carries a lot of the meaning that the trip had for her – the care she received from relatives she had never met. This was the cxase, for instance, at her host family, where the woman of the house was a matrilateral cousin of her father, Madame Bintu F. She is the daughter of Lafia's grandmother's sister. Lafia's father Aliou referred to Bintu as a sister and to Bintu's mother as a mother. Bintu F. (who is in her forties) is about ten years younger than Aliou (who is fiftysomething) and the two families grew up very close. So people communicated with Lafia as if she were family – no matter whether they were actually genealogical relatives. This is why Lafia felt so welcome there and another reason that this journey was of existential value:

> It was such a profound and existential enrichment, to get to know them, and also such a connection between many […] for the women there was one sentence that is really telling for me, you often encountered such a tenderness in the sentence '*C'est pas grave*' [she accentuates the easygoingness in her voice], that means 'It's no problem', and like, 'Oh don't worry'. And no matter what the thing was, we'll work it out somehow. And my French got better, but I also understood a little bit of Wolof. […] There was something about the communication, something about spending time together, like oh well let's first cook something and eat and then – you usually eat all together from big plates. When you are visiting it is all about 'Come sit down, I will prepare some food,' and then there is always this incredibly tasty food – a dream! Like, 'Everything is fine no matter what happened so far or what your plans are, first we will eat together.' And with the men that was very pronounced – in Saint Louis we also stayed with an old schoolmate of my father, a different one, and he greeted us with a 'Aah ma fille', like 'Come here my daughter'. And many people greeted me like that, and I feel that stands for something that I experienced in this place: that there is such an incredible relaxedness and connection and no matter if someone brings their

> daughter, sister, cousin, when she comes here to visit she will be my daughter. It is more the tone that was very touching, it was more about that.

The importance of spending time and sharing food with each other in the way Lafia describes has been remarked upon by kinship scholars for many years. Mary Weismantel (1995), Janet Carsten (2004) and Marshall Sahlins (2011a) all stress the overall importance of sharing substances and caring for the practice of making kinship.

The themes Lafia speaks about here came up many times during our conversation about her trip; she talked repeatedly about how people cared for her and her husband, especially in her host family – the family of the matrilineal cousin of her father who grew up closely with him.

Lafia associates the cooking and eating habits with a certain relaxedness, with something that made her feel at ease in these completely unknown surroundings. It helped her quickly feel included in everyday family life. Yet it was not this aspect alone that contributed to making kinship. Up until then, her references to Senegal had orbited around her father, with whom it was difficult to identify, but in Senegal she met relatives with whom she could connect easily. This made identification with being Senegalese easier. Another aspect that Lafia mentioned was resemblances, especially in terms of lifestyle but also of character, between her and her relatives. When she talks about her host family, she particularly points to the resemblances in character. Lafia felt a special connection with her aunt and uncle's family, with whom they stayed: 'I can imagine just meeting them once a week here in Frankfurt and talking about anything and everything; it would be nice.' With other relatives she did not have the same feeling, such as in the case of an uncle who was often in her grandmother's house. He was a teacher, and Lafia mentioned that with him, too, communication was very good and in terms of lifestyle their lives were not so different, but she simply did not feel the same connection as with her host family.

Taken together, the practices of caring for her and her husband, and the resemblances that Lafia felt with some of these relatives contributed to a kin-making process. This was also supported by the symbolic practice of using kin terms for people who are not actually biological kin. This is not a custom found in Germany, and it surprised Lafia in a positive way. The use of kinship terms by friends of her father and more distant relatives, and the behaviour that went with it made her feel welcome in Senegal – it caused her to feel part of a family and not a stranger anymore. Lafia also remembered a weekend family reunion where she quickly felt herself to be part of the group. Significant in this feeling was that no one made a big deal out of her presence; she and her husband could blend into the family crowd without people paying particular attention. Their presence was not called into question – she was the daughter of Aliou, and that was enough.

Lafia: On Fridays, there was a cousin's place in another neighbourhood where everyone would meet and there everyone would eat together. It was like the lady of the house together with about three others would have to cook for about two days, and then in the living room they would put a big blanket on the floor and in the middle one big plate and then you would eat there half together, half spread out. This was in the neighbourhood of Joff, at this cousin's place – there were really about twenty or twenty-five people, who came there with all the kids [...] they were all there and spent some time together.
Silvia: And did they all know you? Because I'm sure that is not so easy, to just meet twenty people you don't know, and plus kids and so on...
Lafia: Yes, but it was not such a big deal, it was like 'Oh how nice that they are here with us', and of course the first meeting was like 'Oh well, that is Aliou's daughter' but I think it actually happens a lot that someone brings along someone and then they just think, 'Ah right you are also another cousin of mine.' But it doesn't draw so much attention, like it would be here [in Germany] when you bring someone, for example if I brought someone for Christmas, that would be more intense. And there because there are always so many people it is not a [big deal].

Figure 7: Lafia at a family gathering hanging out with the children and having fun, 2018 © Lafia T.

Lafia also felt it was easy to be part of the large family because people did not make a big deal of her presence there. This made it easier to blend in and participate in the gathering. Again, Lafia points to the importance of sharing food for the feeling of togetherness and community. It is an aspect that she liked and admired, something she would like to include in her everyday, too. She also grew very fond of the children in the family. At family gatherings she attended, Lafia enjoyed hanging out with the children and, when looking at the picture shown in Figure 13, Lafia told me recently that it was one of her favourite moments of all time. It connected her with her carefree childhood in Heidelberg, where she was more a part of West African circles and had many friends of mixed heritage before moving to Frankfurt with her mother. 'I know I should have been hanging out with the adults in the other room, but the kids were so much fun' (Phone call, 30 November 2020).

This trip was also about figuring out things and people, about learning how life is in Senegal. And one crucial thing was comparing her life and her relatives' lives in terms of socioeconomic status, so our conversation turned around class and status, too. Lafia knew very little about the family's circumstances so far, only what her father had told her:

> The people we stayed with are a couple in their forties [a lawyer and a project developer], who have three kids, two still live at home, and they have plenty of domestic workers. This is how it is there for the middle class, so people like you and me would have many people who cook for them and do the household chores. […] And the house was crowded all the time because of the domestic workers, there was always someone cooking […] and you would say that is middle-class life […] most of the family I would say are middle class, but you need some time to understand that first. It's a funny mix, and I only really knew that from my family in a fragmented way; I knew that my grandparents had been at the post office and many members of the family had worked at the post office – so I imagined something more petty bourgeois/lower middle class (*kleinbürgerlich*), but actually they had positions that seemed more middle class.

All Lafia had known was that some members of the family had worked at the post office, but there were no details about their particular positions there. Thinking about what that job would mean in terms of status and economic wealth in Germany, she situated her family in a lower middle-class milieu before going there, and was surprised to find that their lifestyle was more fitting of an upper middle-class milieu. The upper middle class in Senegal differs from the same status in Germany though: In Senegal, it would entail having house staff for cleaning and cooking, which is not very common in Germany. Nevertheless, Lafia concluded that her Senegalese family's lifestyle was more or less comparable with how she lived in Germany. If Lafia lived in Senegal, their lifestyles would probably be comparable. That is different from

what Aminata experiences in Ghana (which we will see in the next chapter), where she is confronted with a different socioeconomic milieu from that of her family at home. By being there and spending time and living with her aunt's family, Lafia was able to get a feeling for who they were and their positions in Senegalese society. This helped her to create understanding and points of identification with family members.

Motivation and experience with her father

In terms of memories with her extended family, Lafia only has joyous ones. The experiences with her father were more ambivalent. One place Lafia, her husband David and her father Aliou went to was Saint Louis, the city where her father grew up. In general, Lafia loved Saint Louis, and she was able to describe things and atmospheres from a point of view closer to that of a tourist and sightseer, but on a personal level it was more difficult. Explaining that part of her trip reveals many personal motivations and how expectations clashed with what she experienced. During our interview, when she talks about her time in Saint Louis, at first Lafia only talks about her impressions of the city. It is actually me who brings up her father:

> Silvia: You were there with your father, right?
> Lafia: Right […] in itself I also found it was really great and I also loved it – yes to see where my father is from, like really in detail, which house, which street, where he hung out as a child and as a teenager… but actually already the journey to Saint Louis was overshadowed by an atmosphere, because my father […] in general, the whole holiday was supposed to be a sort of quest/search for traces [*Spurensuche*] and a turning toward my father in a different way; [but it] resulted, in relation to him, in a total – well a very big disappointment actually [her voice sounds a bit broken here, but it could be the bad connection]. I just realised, the way I had wished to experience that with him or at least experience that partly with him was simply not possible, and that was something… now I am thirty, so that was like a final experience of what I wished for as a child, what I dreamed of did not happen. So it was confirmed that it is simply not possible that he just takes two weeks to plan and do something together and that he says I will take care of this, or I will be reliable or, hmm…, or I will take on the role – and that was always an issue – I will take on the role of an adult, as a father. That did not happen. Rather, it was turned around, so I noticed that actually it is my partner who takes care of stability and solidity, who plans things. And us two together also do this more than my father.

This seems revealing of many aspects of Lafia's relationship with her father, most of all that one big challenge throughout her life was that he did not act as a father figure to her, especially in relation to care tasks. As the interview takes place a year after the trip, she is able to analyse the situation from a distance. And her psycho-

logical training also helps her make sense of her feelings as she is able to analyse father–child relations on a more general and abstract academic level. Lafia wished for stability and solidity instead of unreliability and thought that maybe when he was in his environment of origin this could be different, that their relation could be different – at least for a little while. The aspect of caring was an important matter for Lafia throughout the whole time in Senegal: She was taken care of by the relatives she did not know before, which made feeling part of the family easier. Yet she was not able to get the care she had hoped for from her father. Lafia had wanted to discover that, after all, her father was a different person in the surroundings of his place of origin.

> Silvia: But in the beginning you said that he welcomed you at the airport and organised someone to drive around with you?
> Lafia: And this encounter was real, he really stood there like an excited wind-up doll [*Aufziehmännchen*] and waved and was so happy, so that does stay a happy memory, but a lot happened in the following days, where I realised, eieieiei, that he really is a very scatty [*schusselig*], unreliable, neurotic person. And when we came back [from Saint Louis] at first I was not sure how the rest of the family saw this matter, do they see it like… like my father, that it is actually on us to pay for everything and to be grateful and have to respect him just because he is the older one? Or do they see it more like us?
> Anyway, we never talked about that, but I did experience that, in comparison to all the other relatives that I got along very well with, my father was an exceptional phenomenon. And that his unreliability really had nothing to do with culture or a somehow 'African mentality', and that all other relatives were more comparable to me or all my other relatives [laughs, she means her German relatives], so…

The last part of what Lafia says here is interesting because she mentions the idea of a connection between her father and Senegal. She had never been sure whether many things that she did not fully understood or even disliked in her father were due to his socialisation in Senegal and that was the reason why it was difficult for him to adapt in Germany, or whether he was just a complicated man. As a result of the trip to Senegal with her father, Lafia began to sense that it was not so much due to any cultural difference per se but her father's personality that made their relationship tense. This reflection of hers about his unreliability also brings another thing to the surface: the stereotypes and assumptions that exist in Germany about 'Africans' and that she was probably confronted with a lot because she has an African parent. Very quickly in Germany the reason for someone's irrational or complicated behaviour will be classified as 'cultural difference' if that person is not German. In a sense, by way of the trip, Lafia was able to deconstruct racialised prejudices she knew from German socialisation against 'Africans' as a whole. She no longer attributed her fa-

ther's behaviour to his cultural background, especially because as Lafia got to know other family members she was able to put into context and expand what 'Senegalese' meant to her. It began to be easier to identify herself as Senegalese as well, because she met so many relatives with whom she was glad to identify. It was this lived experience that gave her the tools to make sense of her own Senegalese heritage and to demystify it – she was able to relate. This took an existential weight off her shoulders. Lafia's time in Senegal opened a door for her to be in contact with her family and deal positively with her origins.

After Lafia had come back, I met her in Frankfurt in the summer of 2018. She had cooked a Senegalese meal, and stated that she wanted to become the 'ambassador' of *thiéboudienne*, a Senegalese dish. While she was in Senegal, she had associated food and cooking with care and the generally pleasant atmosphere, and cooking the dishes in Germany today works like a reconnection to her father and to her journey to Senegal.

> Silvia: And then you came back in mid-May. And do you still cook this one, this meal?
> Lafia: Yes I tried out a few things, my brother just recently told me 'What, you don't know *riz gras*????' It's a red rice dish […] Well, that is something I still need to learn. Besides that I cook *thiéboudienne*, fish with rice, and then you add meat, mostly beef, it is meat with three different vegetables and a tomato sauce base, and then rice. And then you can try different varieties. My father also sometimes did – ah yes, and then there is this dish with peanut sauce, *mafé*, he cooked that a lot.

Her trip to Senegal in 2018 has forged a pathway for Lafia to make kinship in Senegal. How it will evolve is still uncertain, but at least her wish came true: to be in Senegal, to discover the country of her father, with her father. Now she knows her relatives there and is able to engage in ongoing relations. For more than thirty years that had seemed improbable and now through a short visit the door has opened to renew these diasporic relations.

Filling the void of an interrupted transmission

A rupture in the cultural transmission of a country of origin can happen due to a silence in the family. This can come about because of difficult circumstances in the country of destination, painful relations or memories in the country of origin or due to structural circumstances that make contact difficult. 'Filling the voids' is key in all kinds of roots or existential travel (Basu 2007, Cohen 1979, Kim 2010, Lee 2007, Ueda 2009). It is a central motif for the participants of my research who have one parent, mostly the father, who migrated to Germany in the 1970s – often on student schol-

arships from West Germany – from countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana and Senegal. Maya and Aminata, having grown up with their fathers, were a bit more in contact with people from the small Guinean or Sierra Leonian communities in Frankfurt. But Lafia, who did not grow up with her father, who lived in Heidelberg, was not very well exposed to her Senegalese 'roots'. The French filmmaker Alice Diop talks about this kind of rupture of transmission in her film *Les Sénégalaises et la Sénégauloise* (2007).[1] The fact that her Senegalese parents did not focus on cultural transmission because everything related to the African continent was stigmatised in their country of residence – France – made her feel rather distant from it as well, although both parents were primomigrants from Senegal.

Lafia started to develop an interest in Senegal as an adult and it was twofold: There was the wish to 'occupy' her origins positively – as she says, using a vocabulary of psychology that fits her professional background – and the desire for independence from her father. This meant creating associations with Senegal that were positive reference points she could draw from for herself. But dealing with Senegal also became a way to deal with her father's migration history and to try to rebuild her relationship with him. Indeed, expressing an interest in the country of a parent can be translated into showing an interest in the parent. Zahouia, the student interviewed by sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad in the 1970s, explains how her interest in Algeria made her father, who had migrated from Algeria to France, very happy. Lafia informed me that comments like 'Where are your origins?' and people being surprised when she told them she had never been to the country of origin of her father, made her not want to go to Senegal at all for a long time. As an adult. things changed for many different reasons – Lafia began to interiorise the claim to 'have to know her roots', her Senegalese origins. She thought that maybe it was necessary to get to know Senegal after all, and to understand the story of her father who took that difficult step of leaving his home and coming to Germany.

'You have to know where you come from'. Following a group of Tahitian roots tourists in China, the anthropologist Anne-Christine Trémon (2019) writes that a major motivation for the Tahitians of Chinese descent is this 'moral imperative' (p. 5) that many have interiorised (in this case stemming from Confucianism). But it is not only pressure from outside that Lafia has interiorised and that sparked her interest. She has dealt intellectually with topics such as migration or othering and perceiving how others have dealt with the same problems, and has been able to apply this knowledge to her own story. Trémon (2019) argues that diasporic relations between people and places can be interrupted due to different events and developments (personal, political or historical), but they can also be taken up again at another time – they have to be seen as a process in time and place, and always depending on the

1 For a summary of the film, see: https://www.worldcat.org/title/senegalaises-et-la-senegauloise/oclc/818985004 (accessed 15 September 2020).

motivations of the people and places in question. In Trémon's example, she shows how the Chinese state at times favoured contact with its overseas citizens and at other times frowned upon it. Opportunities for travel and maintaining diasporic relations depend on institutional and legal frameworks. In the case of China, maintaining contact with overseas relatives could, in certain historical circumstances, be subject to sanction, rendering diasporic relations almost impossible. Relations were then taken up again once the legal and institutional frame allowed it. Another level is the individual: Diasporic relations can only exist if there are people on multiple sides who want to maintain them. Nazia Ali and Andrew Holden (2006), in their research on second-generation British Pakistani youth, found that a trip to Pakistan was often undertaken as a kind of fulfilment of duty to the migrant parents. In Lafia's case, it is less about the duty she feels towards her father than a duty to society at large, where people would ask about her Senegalese roots that she felt she had to fulfil.