Woher kommst du wirklich?
Exploring identity, strategy and belonging in Afro-German narratives of everyday life in and outside of Germany
Acknowledgements

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the category of Afro-German, towards gaining a better understanding of how individuals interpret their position within and outside of this category. Their narratives can help us understand how they perceive of themselves and society at large- how they frame and interpret their relationship with their environment and what implications this might have for dominant, normative identity categories such as ‘German’, ‘African’, ‘Black’, ‘White, within/across which they mediate their lives.

Eight qualitative interviews with individuals of both African and German parentage provide the empirical basis for this study. Themes were analysed after a process of both open coding and followed by thematic coding Participants’ experiences outside and inside of Germany highlight the complexities of dislocation, identity formation in liminal spaces, the ambiguity of analytical delineations between liminal and encircling spaces, assumptions of normal and different and dualisms such as Black/White, German/African or German/Black. In addition, it becomes clear, that interrogating the category of Afro-German reinvigorates the discussion on contemporary notions of German national identity today.

German ethnic identity and historical amnesia (Müller, 2011; Tißberger, 2005; Schneider, 2001), identity construction and negotiation (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1967), narratives as frames for identity (May, 2002; Martin, 2010; Lyng and Franks, 2002), cultural/historical/social dislocation (Asante, 2009), Others-from-Within and Others-from-Without (Wright, 2003) and textured identities (Campt, 1993) are the central theoretical underpinnings facilitating the analysis and interpretation of interview data towards giving the reader an insight into the richness and complexity of how these eight individuals perceive identity, challenge dislocation, strategize between identities and change the meanings of categories in everyday interactions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Placing Afro-German into context: Previous research and background</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Afro-German as a category (Post WWII period)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Afro-German history (pre WWII period)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 German national identity and racelessness</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Introducing concepts and frameworks on identity construction, textured identities and the negotiation of identity in interaction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 On identity construction: the social as identity, narratives as identity and subjectivity as objectively real</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Deconstructing Afro-German identity: Questions of normalcy, textured identities and dislocation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Strategies and negotiation in interaction: Goffman on face-work</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Research Questions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Participants and interviews</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Empirical Chapter 1: Constructing the textured Self: harmonising difference, heterogeneity and dislocation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introductions and realising difference</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Dealing with categories</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Embodied/Internal/lived dualities</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Being mixed: how participants evaluate their in-between position</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Escaping assumption of skin colour: feeling normal and invisible</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Empirical Chapter 2: Strategizing between external and internal identities: passing, challenging expectancies, controlling information and humour</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Passing</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Controlling information</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 (En)Countering discrimination in interaction</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Empirical Chapter 3: Constructing the outer world: participants views on history, politics, media, social spaces and the Black Man’s Nod</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Making sense of the past: Historical amnesia and racelessness in Germany</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Silent racism</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Media misrepresentation and the perpetuation of stereotypes</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Spaces and identity: nooks of changing normativity</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5 The Black Man’s Nod: an exclusive gesture of Black recognition</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Everyday mixedness in the lives of participants</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Mixedness as harmonising and redefining categories; Mixedness as strategy</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Being German and being Black: challenging notions of Germanness</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3 Being Afro-German in contemporary Germany: contemplating dislocation through the eyes of participants</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rethinking dislocation</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You’re Afro-German?
... oh, I see: African and German.
An interesting mixture, huh?
You know: there are people that still think
Mulattos won’t get
as far in life
as whites
I don’t believe that.
I mean: given the same type of education...
You’re pretty lucky you grew up here.
With German parents even. Think of that!
D’you want to go back some day, hm?
What? You’ve never been in your Dad’s home country?
That’s so sad... Listen, if you ask me:
A person’s origin, see, really leaves quite a Mark
Take me, I’m from Westphalia,
and I feel
that’s where I belong...
Oh boy! All the misery there is in the world!
Be glad
You didn’t stay in the bush.
You wouldn’t be where you are today!
I mean, you’re really an intelligent girl, you know.
If you work hard at your studies,
you can help your people in Africa, see:
That’s
What you’re predestined to do,
I’m sure they’ll listen to you,
while people like us –
there’s such a difference in cultural levels...
What do you mean, do something here? What
On earth would you want to do here?
Okay, okay, so it’s not all sunshine and roses.
But I think everybody should put their own house in order first!

(Translation by Ilse Müller)
1. Introduction

Identities resonate in all walks of life. Communities as well as conflicts find foothold in narratives of identities; politics and ideologies find leverage in identities; economic differences have too been spun around identities. On an everyday basis we are constantly playing certain roles, negotiating and managing our repertoire of characters and their scripts across interactions. This study participates in discussions on identity. Specifically identity as perceived, done and experienced by individuals of both African and German parentage.

May Ayim’s “Afro-German I” rings surprisingly familiar in contemporary Germany, despite its publication dating back almost 30 years. The experience of being German, but not quite German enough is something a lot of people of African/German parentage, myself included, can relate to. Speaking German, having a German passport and growing up with all the cultural traditions and clichés in baggage does, until today, not seem to eliminate the regular questioning of how it might be possible that someone of a ‘different complexion’ could possibly be German. Hence the endeavour of this study: I interrogate the category of Afro-German through eight interviews with individuals of both African and German parentage, towards finding out how people see themselves and others, how they experience their everyday lives outside and inside of Germany and what their perceptions can tell us about the relationship between the categories of Afro-German and German. “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (Hall, 1990, p.225). Finding out how these eight individuals position themselves in society and how they perceive that they are positioned by others and how this plays out in interaction can illuminate some underlying notions of what being Afro-German in Germany potentially entails today and what factors contribute to this relationship. This thesis is about getting an idea of how a group of individuals of both German and African parentage negotiate between their self-perceptions and perceptions of others, how they strategize between imposed and self-ascribed identity categories, the complex web of meanings and associations those categories hold for them and the consequences these have for interaction. Their perspectives, interpretations and explanations are central in helping us gain an insight into how identity construction and negotiation is experienced, interpreted and understood- connecting theoretical articulations on identity construction with the richness of real life situations. With the help of these eight interviews, I interrogate how identities are formed and transformed, taking a look at how history, personal experience, external influences and internal processes interact towards creating meanings, interpretations and understandings of individuals and their environments. This thesis engages in a discussion on identities of individuals who experience the complexities of national, social and cultural belonging, from an in-between
social/cultural/national position that is insufficiently represented in established social categories and excluded from the narratives of history and culture in Germany. These categories will also be studied: their ambiguities and implications deconstructed and discussed. We will be looking at what inferences participants’ in-between position might hold for established social categories. How their constructs of Self are imbuing established social identity categories with new meanings. Or put differently: what the category of Afro-German tells us not only about identity within this particular group, but what this category can illuminate about the category of German. The focus will mainly be on the German context, seeing as this is a unifying environment among participants. However sections relating to other geographical/national context (e.g. Kenya, Tanzania, UK) will also be included. The aim of this thesis is to look at identity formation and transformation in liminal spaces and what implications this might have for established, dominant social categories, with a focus on Afro-German as a liminal identity category in the interrogation of German as a dominant and established category. All this from the perspectives of the eight participants of this study, whose narratives and articulations can facilitate the theoretical frames of this thesis with substance from actual experiences.

Why talk about Afro-Germans? Afro-German scholarship is fairly young. The term Afro-German was introduced in the mid-1980s by May Ayim with the publication of 'Farbe Bekennen Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte' (1986). May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Dagmar Schultz and Ika Hügel-Marschall among others spearheaded the Afro-German movement, for the first time introducing this topic to academia and the German public, determined to call attention to the lack of awareness and discussion about ‘Other’ Germans. Germans that but for their skin colour were indistinguishable from their peers- Germans, who could not be categorised into a particular national category such as, for example, Turkish, Greek, Polish or Italians in Germany (Schneider, 2001). May Ayim and others aimed to define themselves and other people who might be identified as Afro-Germans, thus actively rejecting the imposition and perpetuation of marginalising and discriminating categorisation within German society, as well as reclaim their place in German history and mainstream society. These scholars viewed Afro-German as a category of emancipation for people with German/African parentage (as well as Africans who grew up in Germany), contesting categories such as ‘Besatzungskinder’2, ‘Neger’3, ‘Mischling’4, ‘Mulatte’5 and a whole range of terms that served to describe this small group of German citizens, who somehow did not quite fit the “German mould”, despite their linguistic,

1 English publication title: “Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out”
2 Besatzungskinder = occupation babies/children
3 Neger = Negros
4 Mischling = mongrel
5 Mulatte = mulatto
national and cultural affinity to Germany (Alba et al., 2003; Asante, 2009). A mould which, despite Germany's history and the consequent distancing from race politics, remained embedded in the perpetuation of racial, ethnic normative notions of belonging (i.e. being White) (Campt, 1993; Müller, 2011; Wright, 2003; Hopkins, 1999). The inescapable fact of skin colour (or as Tjßberger, 2005, puts it: the ‘regime of visibility’) makes Afro-Germans an interesting group within both the African and German contexts, as these individuals carry their difference ‘on the outside’. Their visibility places them outside of the norm and can often times present an interesting juncture of identity negotiation in interaction- this even despite being immersed in German culture, politics, social life and so forth. The discussion on people of African/German parentage- namely those who might be identified as Afro-Germans- continues to be a relevant topic in contemporary Germany, as well as other Afro-European contexts. Since the 1980s people of African/German parentage have increasingly become noticeable in all walks of life across Germany. Academia, media, politics, athletics, medicine, social work, law, television, art, music and so forth have become areas where Black Germans are involved and succeed in Germany. In 2013 Karamba Diaby and Charles Mohamed Huber won seats in Germany’s Federal Parliament. Yared Dibaba, Ron Williams, Mola Adebisi, Cherno Jobatey are just some names of individuals who could be identified with the category of Afro-German who are known through media (Awoniyi, 2014). An ongoing project in Germany to change street names that were initially created to commend colonial endeavours (e.g. using the name of colonial generals, conquered territories or particular trade items) exemplifies one of many ongoing social projects. This project however, has come with some resistance from (white) Germans, who see these sites more as historical heirlooms that should not to be interpreted as offensive. Despite the rapid changes Germany has undergone since WWII, Afro-Germans continue to experience delineation from mainstream society, due to their historical and cultural dislocation from the narration of German identity, which seems to continue to carry consequences for everyday interaction and Afro-Germans becoming interpreted as foreigners, rather than citizens. One recent (2014) example that points at the ambiguous embedding of Afro-Germans as Germans is a mock shooting booth at the Octoberfest in Munich, where toy African heads from the German colonial era were the targets to be shot down for a prize. The booth owner was not reprimanded for this, due to the city interpreting his shooting booth as a historical display, rather than an insensitive gesture towards not only Africans,
but (Afro-) Germans as well\(^9\). Another example is the maintenance of the Sarotti logo (see Appendix 3) despite the company being sued for depicting a figure that was felt to be racist and a reproduction of colonial stereotypes (Oguntoyе, 2010). The Sarotti-Mohr was only replaced by the ‘‘Sarotti-Magier der Sinne’’ (= Sarotti-Magician of the Senses) in 2004. The controversy surrounding the Sarotti-Mohr is particularly interesting, as the company’s (as well as larger public’s) reaction to claims of racism were rather blunted, seeing as many Germans did not see any implications of colonialism, slavery or racism in the image. The company at first refused to change the mascot, due to the apparent lack of proof linking it to any colonial or racist symbolism. It was not until the company entered US markets, which reacted negatively to the mascot (and thus negatively affecting profits), that they settled for the new mascot- this time with golden skin and juggling stars inside of a half-moon (Lewis et. al, 2008). They however continue to promote and use their old mascot across a whole range of nostalgic special edition products, even relaying the proud story of the formation of this mascot on their website\(^10\). Discrimination, both in a direct sense as well as a more ‘subtle’ symbolic sense, remains a challenge. But also increasing attention to immigration politics across Europe has had an effect on Black Europeans, who might find themselves placed within the context of being foreigners, despite being citizens of European countries due to a refurbishing of political and ideological European identities (Betz 2009; Hine, 2009; Müller, 2011; Wright, 2003). There remains a necessity to see how European countries, or in our case: Germany, accommodate changing demographics that too have implications for stagnant, yet dominating of ‘nation’ and ‘culture’.

In general this thesis should not be understood as a political agenda, even if the topic at hand holds points that ring true of contemporary experiences in Europe that remain relevant to political discourses on citizenship, immigration, discrimination and integration. More so this study wishes to contribute to the variety of literature on Afro-German identity and lives. Literature has been a central medium for the communication and deconstruction of Afro-German life since the 1980s, assisting in building an imagined community and fostering a common identity for a group of Germans who are dispersed across the globe and not as spatially close as, for example, African Americans (Awoniyi, 2014\(^11\)). This is a discussion on identities and their formation, contestation and reproduction through the eyes of eight individuals who personify a liminal social space. Furthermore this study is about understanding how history and present interaction contribute to the changing and

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\(^10\) see: http://www.sarotti.de/

reformulating of social identity categories and their meanings. These narratives highlight the difficulty of working with academic delineations of majorities and minorities, dualities as well as the problems of using (insufficient) social identity categories to communicate a world that is perceived and experienced as so much more complex. However their narratives also point at an interesting juncture in the (re)formulation of identities through a moulding of different identity categories, towards recreating normative notions and category associations.

Throughout this thesis Goffman’s “Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity” (1963), “Interaction Ritual” (1967) as well as “The presentation of self in everyday life” (1959) are central towards placing narratives into a theoretical context and understanding the connections of identity construction and interaction. I will also be borrowing from Afro-German academia towards analysing narratives. Wright (2003), Tajfel (1982), Müller (2011), Götsche (2013) are just some of the authors that are incorporated into this thesis. Social, cultural and historical dislocation (Asante, 2009), notions of textured identities and Othering (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003), history as well as structures of dominance and hegemony (Müller 2011; Alba et al, 2003; Hopkins, 1999) are among the topics that will be borrowed from Afro-German academia. Bhabha’s (1994) “Location of Culture” will furthermore help elaborate on in-between or liminal spaces of identity production, linking closely with Wright’s (2003) and Campt’s (1993) publications. May (2000), Ross (2007) and Lyng and Franks (2001) will facilitate the discussion on narratives as frameworks for identity (de)construction. Within the analytical section these concepts and frameworks will facilitate the interpretation and arrangement of data extracted from interviews to finally answering the research questions about how Afro-Germans construct and negotiate their identities, how they construct institutional, political and social structures and finally, how these constructs relate to each other.

I will foremost give the reader a very brief insight into Afro-German history, in order to contextualise the history and developments of Afro-German academia and the Afro-German movement. Following this, main concepts and frameworks, as well as the empirical study are introduced, followed by the research questions. The three empirical chapters deal with foremost constructions of the Self, as described by participants, followed by strategies of identity negotiation and finally institutional, political and social structures that emerged from interviews. The findings will then be discussed, followed by some closing statements, suggestions and open questions.
2. Placing Afro-German into context: Previous research and background

2.1 Afro-German as a category (Post WWII period)

Afro-German women scholars who for the first time introduced the German readership to this issue of Afro-German marginalisation in the mid-1980s, ushered in a dialogue about the lives of Germans who remained side-lined in history, culture and at times even from fully participating in society. A discussion that also reached diaspora communities in Austria and Switzerland (Göttsche, 2013). As a concept, Afro-German is understood as an act of self-definition, emancipation and resistance to ascribed (racialized and gendered) categories and terms embedded in post-colonial, post-war and racist discourses (e.g. Neger/negro, Mischling/mongrel, Besatzungskind/occupation child) (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003). The term Afro-German became an act of political and personal self-assertion and emancipation, for a marginalised group of Germans who struggled for recognition and acceptance from the very society they felt they were a part of (Göttsche, 2013). The concept remains a label with a clear notion to it: the notion of being German and African/Black at the same time. The notion of different and at times ambiguous cultural identities embodied by one person. And the notion of struggle both in the sense of resistance to being labelled, but also in the sense of occupying an ‘in between’ space that cannot fully be captured by ‘conventional’ categories (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003; Odukoya, 2010). The Afro-German ‘movement’ reaches from academia, into poetry, theatre, music, a range of (political) organisation and community initiatives that are increasingly connecting Afro-Germans both across Germany, Europe and the world. It is also noteworthy that Audrey Lorde collaborated closely with May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, Dagmar Schultz and others in bringing forth a discourse in Germany on racism, identity and issues relating to the ‘Afro-German situation’, thus also creating a strong link between African-American scholarship on race, identity and gender, and scholarship on Black Germans in Germany and the Black diaspora across Europe. Afro-German as a social category can be understood as an umbrella term for Germans with an African (migrant) background, who often also see themselves as being part of the German mainstream society (Odukoya, 2010). This definition varies and carries a certain amount of flexibility due to the variation within this category itself. Afro-German can refer to Africans/African-Americans with at least one German parent and who have the German nationality, including African/African-American children that have been adopted. It can also refer to Africans, who have attained the German nationality through naturalisation. Some also include African migrants who have lived in Germany for longer periods and are familiar with the culture and language spoken. But, as Ayim (1986, p.10) argues, the self-definition of Afro-German was less about excluding particular individuals from

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the group, but more about escaping negative definitions attributed to this minority, making people aware that there are others with similar experiences and backgrounds as well as creating a sense of community and belonging for Black Germans.

I use the term Afro-German as a category- an academic concept- in order to place my own research within the body of contemporary research on the subject. I do not wish to sweep every Afro-German under the same rug, especially considering the sheer diversity of socio-economic, cultural, historical differences between experiences encapsulated across this category. Simply having a German and an African parent or being African, but happening to have grown up in German culture, does not mean that individuals will share the same concerns of belonging or identity. Nor will it mean that individuals will identify as Afro-German. The experience of growing up ‘between two cultures’ does not necessarily carry the same significance for everybody, if any at all. Some might even argue that pertaining to any label whatsoever intrinsically carries with it the consequence of more concretely delineating groups from one another, underlining thinking of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This essentially being the other side of the coin to Afro-German functioning as a category of self-definition (This point will be elaborated on in Chapter 6.2, in my analysis of the use of categories in interviews). Thus approaching this topic through these eight narratives offers itself as a tactic towards understanding differences and similarities in experiences and understandings. This point in particular became evident during my interviews, during which on only two occasions the term Afro-German was used as a self-describing category- mainly for lack of a better word. Most participants rejected this term or any other categorisations, rather advocating their personality/profession/social status as a point of reference.

2.2 Afro-German history (pre WWII period)

The exclusion of Afro-German history from mainstream curricula and historical documentation could be said to point at the perpetuation of historical dislocation of Afro-Germans in the narration of Germany and German identity, contributing to the social and cultural dislocation discussed within Afro-German academia today (Asante, 2009; Hopkins, 1999). This point will be elaborated on in chapter 3, on concepts and frameworks. Within this section, I will give a very brief overview of the historical interaction of Africans and Germans, so as to give readers an idea of the historical embedding of the overall thesis topic.

As such, it remains difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of German/African interaction, mainly due to this being a rather young line of research within Germany and thus information varying. However since the eighteenth century there has been a recorded presence of Africans in Germany (Hopkins, 1999), with Anton Wilhelm Amo, being a popular example- having been
a professor at Halle and Wittenberg- and with that the first known ‘highly educated African’ in
Germany. For Hopkins (1999), Amo’s story “exemplifies the continuation of the practice of
adorning the Renaissance courts with exotic plants, animals and people.” (p.2). Amo, like
others before and after him, finally left Germany for his home country, Ghana, in an attempt to
escape the discrimination that accompanied his life and academic endeavours in Germany.
During the eighteenth century, contact with Africans was mainly within the context of acting as Hofmohren (African servants and musicians employed within aristocratic and royal
households as status symbols/accessories. Götsche, 2013, p.237), as Monrovian converts and
trainees for the colonies (Hopkins, 1999; Götsche, 2013). The nineteenth century brought with
it increased interaction between Africans and Germans, through increased movement to and
from colonial territories that involved settlement, missionary work and trade. During this
period some selected Africans, mainly sons of tribal leaders, were sent to be educated in
Germany so as to later return to the colonial territories, functioning as middle men for the
colonial apparatus (Hopkins, 1999, p.3). This being framed as the assumed duty of Germany
(and other colonial powers) to ‘civilise’ the African and seeing if he/she was capable of “literacy
in the European sense” (Hopkins, 1999, p.3). The display of Africans (and other none-
Europeans) in zoos, culture shows and fairgrounds contributed to the perpetuation of the
negative image of the uncivilized Other that pervaded colonial ideology and which too
permeated stigmatisation of Africans living in Germany well into post-colonial times. It was not
until 1918 that the first organisation by Africans in Germany emerged in an attempt to
ameliorate the situation of displaced Africans in Germany, who were isolated from their home
countries, but through this organisation had a link to each other: The Afrikanischer Hilfsverein
organisation also included a small group of Africans from Weimar Germany who wished to
remain in Germany, rather than return to the colonial territories. Situated in Hamburg, this
organisation acted as a network for African enclaves in nearby cities (e.g. Berlin). Towards the
beginning of the First World War approximately 128 Staatenlose (= stateless persons, Africans
who were stranded in Germany or wished to remain in Germany) were found to be residing in
Germany (Hopkins, 1999). This number however is merely an estimate, in the light of lacking
historical documentation and research.
The Weimar era and Nazi Germany were a continuity of the already difficult situation of
Africans in Germany. During the French occupation of the Rhineland (1923-1930) several
French-Senegalese soldiers settled in Germany, working mostly as actors and musicians, but
also with railway companies and postal services. Some married German women and started
families- their offspring becoming marked as Rheinlandbastarde (Götsche, 2013; Oguntoyin in
Odukoya, 2010). Their situation remained precarious throughout WWII. World War II brought
with it the same consequences for Afro-Germans as it did for several other minorities. Mass sterilisations of Africans/Afro-German grown-ups and children were undertaken with the aim of avoiding mixing of German and African blood. Medical experiments and concentration camps cost the lives of about 30,000 Afro-Germans (Oguntoye in Odukoya, 2010). These figures are, however, just an estimate in the light of lacking documentation and academic work on the subject. However, Hopkins (1999) points at an ironic twist after 1933 (relaying some of Katharina Oguntoye’s findings): in some cases the National Socialists attempted to ameliorate the situation of Africans, even providing financial aid and assisting in the acquisition of employment (e.g. as actors for propaganda films) in order to redeem their image in favour of maintaining necessary commercial ties with Africa (Hopkins, 1999, p.6).

2.3 German national identity and racelessness

"Germany is a sort of discursive schizophrenia" (Schneider, 2001, p.359). This quote from Schneider (2001) captures the complicated and sometimes even contradictory nature of the narrative of German national identity. For Schneider (2001) there seems to be a gap between the national discourse which hangs on to a static definition of Germanness, revelled in notions of cultural homogeneity- and the demographic reality of increasing numbers of multicultural German individuals. Deconstructing the narrative construction of German national identity is a marked juncture from which to understand the in-between position of Afro-Germans within German society. Afro-Germans are a group of Germans who, unlike many of their white peers, remain in a position where they often have to justify their national and cultural belonging, due to the maintenance and circulation of stagnant notions of German national identity (Müller, 2011; Tifßberger, 2005; Campt, 1993). They remain dislocated from the narrative of Germany and German identity. However they also represent one of several groups of Germans (i.e.: Turks, Greek, Italians, Polish) that symbolise a counter-discourse to these static notions of a culturally homogeneous German national identity, to which they have a claim. More unique however is their ‘visible incompatibility’ with dominant notions of German as White (Müller, 2011). Müller (2011), Tifßberger (2005) as well as Schneider (2001) provide interesting insights into the narrative of German identity, highlighting historical and contemporary aspects that can help explain some facets of the conceptualisation of German national identity. Müller (2011), Tifßberger (2005) and Schneider (2001) describe the difficulty, defensiveness and reluctance of white German study participants in answering questions about what they thought ‘being German’ meant, due to this question being linked to notions of racism and right-wing sympathies. Germany’s past with racism offers itself as one explanation for the insecurity in defining national identity in Müller’s (2011) and Schneider’s (2001) studies. However both authors also relate this aspect to the trend of ‘racelessness’ in Europe and the practice of
eliminating race from public discourse and discarding it to the margins of right wing groups and radical ideologies. Racism is seen as something overt and not recognised in its subtle forms (Tißberger, 2005, p.316). Müller (2011, p.622) argues that “although dropping Rasse from public discourse may seem to be a well-meant act, it reinforces the “historical amnesia” of Germany’s history of colonialism that is already well in place. Banning the term erases not only the word but also the historical reality that is connected to it.”. Tißberger (2005) also refers to this practice of historical amnesia and how it contributes to silencing discussions on racialized discourses and thus also discussions on the role of Whiteness in perpetuating power structures and constructed prejudices in Germany. Replacing discourses of race is the “innocent language of culture” (Müller, 2011; Tißberger, 2005), where the exclusion and inclusion of individuals becomes articulated through a language of ‘cultural belonging/not belonging’, embedded in an imaginary definition of nation as a unified, culturally homogeneous, white unit (Müller, 2011, p.623). Müller (2011), Tißberger (2005), Wright (2003), Campt (1993), Asante (2009) and other scholars discuss this point in particular and how it contributes to masking a history of a racialized narration of German national identity that did not simply disappear, but become cloaked behind a more ‘comfortable’ articulation through culture: “nation is in the foreground and not race; whiteness disappears behind German and is, thus, unnamed, but nonetheless taken for granted” (Müller, 2011, p.623). This point in particular becomes clearer throughout the empirical data: the salience of circulating (/perpetuated) assumptions of ‘normal’, have a profound effect on the behaviour of people towards others, this also despite legal or formal structures that do not confirm or articulate these assumptions. More so, this unspoken norm continues to play a role in the delineation of Afro-Germans today. Their dislocation becomes underlined in interaction that continuously requires a justification of their belonging. However their dislocation also opens up possibilities for contestation and reformulation of normative categories that otherwise exclude them. This too is discussed in the empirical chapters.

The ethnic narration of German national identity permeates the experiences of Afro-Germans, placing them at the social/political/cultural margins. The concepts of ‘Black’ and ‘German’ are implied in the term Afro- German and marks everyday experiences and interaction. Both concepts carry with them a whole range of connotations that seem to create ambivalence, often placing Afro-Germans into the category of Ausländer (=foreigner) (Tißberger, 2005; Müller, 2011; Séphode in Hopkins, 1999). The absence of a notion of Black and German is an issue ignored in public discourse, simply because any mention of ‘race’ or ‘racialization’ represents a taboo, despite the reality of racialized notions of national belonging remaining active in social and cultural practices (Wright, 2003; Campt, 1993). However this does not mean that Afro-Germans are the only group that ‘find themselves’ embroiled in the discourse of Ausländer or immigrants (Alba et al., 2003). Alba et al., (2003) discuss the difficulties of incorporating
'cultural diversity' in Germany and France, pointing out the problems of already in place perceptions of what comprises the cultural and social mainstream (Alba et al, 2003, p.4). Their study, "Germans or Foreigners", once again points out the contemporary (and not at all long forgotten) notion of Germany as an ethnic nation: “Throughout the immigration era associated with late twentieth-century globalization, Germany has figured as the archetype of the jus sanguine, or blood principle in attributing citizenship at birth, fortifying its status as the ethnic nation” (Alba et al, 2003; Müller, 2011; Göttche, 2013), despite changes within German Basic Law (the most recent being in 2002).

The above section relates to chapters 6 and 7. These chapters deal with how participants construct institutional structures and how their identity constructs relate to these structures. In other words, these chapters aim to give an insight into how participants understand their social position, institutional structures, social norms, values and power structures towards illuminating just how present the above issues of 'racelessness', 'jus sanguine', discourses of Ausländer, immigration, exclusion, inclusion, citizenship and so forth reverberate in narratives of everyday life. How do they experience these structures? How do they live these structures? How do they interpret these structures in relation to themselves and their narration?
3. Introducing concepts and frameworks on identity construction, textured identities and the negotiation of identity in interaction

The following chapter introduces some theoretical underpinnings both from previous literature on Afro-Germans as well as from the discipline of sociology towards facilitating analysis and framing of the empirical data and answering the research questions. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part deals with identity construction, borrowing aspects from Goffman's (1959, 1963, 1967) literature on stigma, interaction and the presentation of the Self. This part furthermore deals with narratives as frames of identity (May, 2002; Martin, 2010) as well as highlights the potential of ‘perspectives’ towards understanding identity construction (Lyng and Franks, 2002). The second part delves deeper into identity construction, elaborating on the relativity of assumptions of normalcy and difference, hybrid constructions of identity and dislocation, introducing authors from Afro-German literature such as Wright (2003), Asante (2009) and Campt (1993). Finally strategies and identity negotiation are discussed, relying mainly on Goffman’s (1967) conceptualisation of face-work.

3.1 On identity construction: the social as identity, narratives as identity and subjectivity as objectively real

Identity as social and the social as identity

Borrowing from Goffman (1963), this thesis treats ‘the Self’ or identity as a social self. Social self in the sense that the individual and social structures are not understood as separate, but rather mutually constituting entities that are constantly (re) produced and sustained in interaction. Similar to Stuart Hall (1990), Goffman (1963) describes identities as constantly in formation, rather than pre-existing facts that then determine cultural and social habits. The individual is a social product and interaction is, for Goffman (1963), the juncture at which the social self as well as social structures are (re)produced and sustained by the commitment of individuals to certain commonly shared rules of conduct as well as assumed roles within interaction contexts. Whatever our assumption of our Selves might be, it is in moments of interaction when we are met with limitations or advantages that depend on the circumstances a particular setting might have to offer (Goffman, 1959, 1967). These circumstances being, for example, conventions, norms, expectations, values, environmental factors, maybe even the time of day- all these factors and more flow into the framing of an interaction scene, within which we play our role. Both relying on mastered familiarity- meaning that which we have learnt from previous experience- as well as having to improvise in instances when convention and learnings might fail or prove insufficient in facilitating effective interaction. Our identities are sustained throughout these scenes that require our navigation through different settings-
delineating, (re)formulating and constantly shaping our identities. We play different roles in
different social situations, but can only forge our characters when confronted with constraints
within interaction- when confronted with limitations and enabling scenes to our characters.
These limitations sometimes lying within the power of those we interact with, whose
attachment of meaning to our actions might not necessarily coincide with our self-
assumptions. On our own, our characters are merely hypothetical assumptions that are yet to
be tested in interaction. Our assumptions of our Selves cannot stand alone, but must exist in
some sort of context, which is what occurs in interaction. Interaction places our assumptions
of Self and others into a performance. A performance with particular settings and props that
enable a particular way of enacting our role. Likewise social structures do not exist without the
very individuals that sustain; change and (re)produce those structures by interacting with each
other and thusly perpetuating particular ways of being and doing (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1967).
“While the character performed is a product of each interaction, the performer is a product of
many interactions” (Goffman, 1959).

**Social identity and ego-identity**

Having established the Self as social, Goffman (1963) distinguishes between social identity,
personal identity and ego-identity. “The concept of social identity allowed us to consider
stigmatization. The concept of personal identity allowed us to consider the role of information
control in stigma management. The idea of ego identity allows us to consider what the
individual may feel about stigma and its management.” (Goffman, 1963, p. 106). Social identity
relates to assumptions drawn from socially established norms, structures, categories and
expectations onto a person; Signs and symbols that are imbued with particular meanings and
which are read onto a person. Cues and symbols are circulating notions and assumptions that
change over time/context/location and which help us arrange and predict, but which are also
subject to error. Having a particular English accent, for example, might be read as signifying a
certain class, educational background of geographical heritage and so forth. This is, for
example, where personal identity becomes interesting. Personal identity can be said to deal
with social identity and information control. With personal identity, Goffman (1963) is relating
to personal information such as biography that plays a role in controlling information and
calibrating the gap between social identity and personal identity. Coming back to accents, let
us assume a hypothetical person, John, with a British accent who is the son of a middle class
farming family in Zimbabwe. John has lived in the UK for less than a year and his accent is
naught but the result of two highly educated parents, whose accents he simply picked up,
rather than an Oxford education. This information would diffuse our primary reading and
categorising of John on the sole basis of his accent, however we would only be confused, if he
entrusts us with his biographical information, thus diffusing the symbolism we bestow upon him. This pointing at the power inherent in information control, which too becomes relevant towards analysing the empirical data. Ego identity is the subjective, reflexive assumption of Self by the individual in question (Goffman, 1963, p.105-106). Once again relating this back to our example, John might think of himself as an African, despite his accent, British passport and appearance. Despite this analytical distinction however, the Self and structures remain mutually imbued “Of course individual constructs his image of himself out of the same materials from which others first construct a social and personal identification of him, but he exercises important liberties in regard to what he fashions” (Goffman, 1963, p. 106). Jenkin’s (1994) makes similar analytical distinctions between internal definition and external definition of identity comparable to Goffman’s (1963) distinction between social- and ego-identity. Internal definition refers to a person’s belonging (or not belonging) to a particular social group by his or her own definition. External definition refers to processes external to the individual that define the individual- be this through another individuals or a collective. This could be, for example, the imposition of a category onto a person, resulting in either the confirmation of such imposition through group affiliation or for example resistance to imposed categorisation (Jenkins, 1994). As also mentioned by Goffman (1963), Jenkins (1994) also sees these distinctions as merely analytical with reality being more of a mutual constitution of the social and the individual.

Another distinction within social identity, namely between actual social identity and virtual social identity, will also play a role in the empirical data. Virtual social identity refers to the imputed character we place on people, drawing on our repertoire of categories and connections that lend us a map with predictable parameters in everyday interaction (Goffman, 1963; Ancona, 2012). Our experiences, our social/political/ideological/etc. embedding provide us with a repertoire- or a map- that allows us to categorise our social and physical world in a manner that enables us to determine and evaluate effective action therein. This map provides predictability- we have expectations of what’s ordinary and what’s not ordinary based on our experience: “we lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands” (Goffman, 1963, p. 2). Once again drawing on our example, assuming we grew up in the UK, particular accents would be imbued with particular content. Content resulting from the assumed normativity in the classification of accents and thus attribution therein made. Most of the time, we are not even aware of the expectations we place on our surroundings. In interaction, this can sometimes result in presumptions about the person(s) one is encountering. This ‘first impression’ is a short visual (maybe even verbally based) evaluation, that draws on our repertoire (norms, symbols, ideology, history, etc), making us anticipate something of the person in front of us,
whom we have placed into a category box based on our accumulated assumptions. Actual social identity refers to what the person “could in fact be proved to possess” (Goffman, 1963). For Goffman (1963) it is the gap between virtual and actual social identity where stereotyping and stigmatising become salient. The gap between social and personal identity is where we shall be locating strategies of identity negotiation through different manners of information control. It is these gaps that Goffman (1963) terms as spoiled identity.

The focus on Afro-Germans was clear to interviewees upon participation and thus might have contributed to the more conscious deconstruction of imposed and internal identity categories along the lines of national/cultural/ethnic/racial understanding. However, this could also be a matter of rehearsal of engaging in the topic of their background (this will be picked up in 6.1 on rehearsed introductions of Self). This does not eliminate the above notions of the Self as social, interaction as a central platform of identity formation and maintenance, nor the distinction between imposed and self-ascribed identities. These remain relevant frameworks for this discussion. The reader should simply remain aware that social identity, ego-identity and so forth will most likely be relating ethnic/national/racial identity categories, due to the contextual and topical setting of interviews. This in and of itself already presenting the observation of identity as social, as participants refer to established categories towards narrating themselves. However it becomes clear that these constructs imbue changing meanings to established categories. In addition strategies of negotiating the gap between imposed and self-ascribed identities- or external and internal identities, as Jenkins (1994) calls them- are mentioned in the empirical data. Notably the form of inquiry gives us an insight into the subjective experience, hence ego identity, making the framing of social identity one, that relies on the reflexivity, selectivity and discretion of the participants.

Narratives as identity and identities as narratives

“People create stories create people; or rather stories create people create stories”

Chinua Achebe (Things fall Apart, p.96)

Narratives are the empirical core of this thesis. The open question construction of interviews allows participants to tell their stories and include aspects they deem important towards creating a picture of themselves and their lives. It might at this point also be noteworthy that poetry and music have played a central role in the articulation of Afro-German life stories. These too can be seen as forms of narration, which can be analysed. Narratives are not merely stories that people tell of their lives. They encapsulate people’s interpretations and selective

13 see Appendix 2 for an example: “borderless and brazen: a poem against the German “u-not y.”(May Ayim)
cues of their experiences, society, norms, values, knowledge, other people and so forth (Martin, 2010). Narratives thus cannot ‘stand on their own’, but are a result of and a window into a person’s interaction with the social and physical world, the relation between these and the resulting understandings derived from these relations (May, 2002). This relation however, is transmitted selectively: the rehearsal of telling a story over and over again makes certain points of a past event more salient than others that might too have played a role in said event. Same as the situation in which a story is being told might suddenly make yet other points more salient than others. Martin’s (2010) points on memory and recollection make this point clearer. Rather than seeing memory as complex web of records of events, it is rather a set of connections that are rehearsed (be it through ritual or ‘remembering’). A set of records consisting of simplified conceptualisations that are somehow connected into what we might finally call an ‘explanation’. For Martin (2010) our cognitive complexity lies not in our heads, but rather in our capability to manage interaction: to read various signals and symbols and coordinate these with our repertoire of conceptualisations towards effective interaction in our social and physical worlds. Linking this back to narratives, these can help us gain insight into selected salient cues and connections of events.

Tim May’s (2002) conceptualisation of narratives can be compared to Ross’ (2007) concept of psychocultural interpretations as deeply rooted world views that help make sense of daily life and underlying histories, that need not necessarily be ‘the truth’, but nevertheless point at the interpretations and resulting understandings of events that guide people’s behaviour (Ross, 2007, p. 24-25). The social world is constantly being narrated as well: norms, values, knowledge, institutions are examples of social narratives that individuals are embedded in and which circulate constantly (as we saw in the example of the narration of Germanness) to the extent of becoming normative structures we take for granted (e.g. laws, not simply cutting a queue, table manners, conduct in academic writing, etc.). Central to May’s (2002) theorisation of narratives is the aspect of narratives as a means of constructing personal identities. The conceptualisations we draw on in relaying our stories is a result of our embedding in social narratives, our interpretation of our position therein as well as our interpretation of events and experiences that contribute to the construct of our identities. This aspect in particular reminds of Goffman’s (1963) framing of social, personal and ego-identity. Furthermore these narrations can be seen as rituals in the sense that they are rehearsed interactions. Rehearsed interaction once again bringing us to Martin (2010) and his point on the rehearsal of memory—the rehearsal of sets of connections in the recollection of what once happened. Narrating my identity means drawing on my frame of knowledge of the world, which are essentially these interpretations of myself, the social world and the relation between these. (May, 2002). Once again even this point brings us back to Goffman (1963) and interaction as the juncture at which
identity is maintained and sustained, by constantly being presented with limitations and advantages of the social and physical contexts that (re)produce them. Hence narratives can be understood as a way of making sense of the world. A tool towards organising the data, interpretations and experiences that permeate our relationship with our environments and ourselves (Ancona, 2012). This insight does not mean having to grasp the ‘truth’ of social reality or identities (if such is at all even possible), but rather help understand how structures, the Self and the relations therein are interpreted, experienced, practiced and embodied by individuals (May, 2002; Ross, 2007).

**Subjectivity as objectively real: validating perspectives**

One aspect that might be argued at this point is, that narratives are naught but subjective insights of individuals that are merely bias. However Lyng and Franks (2001) provide an interesting explanation towards balancing out such a black and white approach towards subjectivity. Lyng and Franks (2001) suggest we understand the subjective as objectively real for the subject. Yes, our perceptions (and thus resulting conclusions and interpretations drawn thereof) are limited by our physical and social capabilities, however in order to function effectively in our physical and social surroundings it is precisely the understandings based on these perceptions that provide the framework of reference for our effective behaviour and choices in everyday interaction with the social and physical world. Perception in and of itself is subjective, simply because what we perceive is limited by our physical capacity allowing only for a certain scope, range and depth of perception (we don’t see infrared, for example). Likewise our perception is inhibited by social limitations that emphasize particular stimuli over others. Sometimes making certain aspects in our vision oblivious due to conditioned attention to particular details (Lyng and Franks, 2001). However we cannot discard this as simply bias, but the objective truth within which we function- a truth delineated by physical and social limitations that we experience in action, leading to the continuous adaptation to situational limitations (Lyng and Franks, 2001). The subjective and the objective need to be understood as mutually exclusive or competing concepts. The subjective as objectively real relates to the notion that the objective ‘lies’ in the experience of limitations in our interaction with the social and physical world. These limitations are not hypothetical, but have consequences for our actions. Social norms provide guidelines and thus also limitations to ‘acceptable’ behaviour. Our physical composition does not allow us to breathe under water without the help of some sort of contraption. Thus the subjective, as described by Lyng and Franks (2001) is not merely a bias insight, but one that can help understand the objective structures experienced by individuals.
3.2 Deconstructing Afro-German identity: Questions of normalcy, textured identities and dislocation

This section elaborates on some frameworks that aid towards understanding how participants frame themselves, but also the world around them and how they interpret this relationship. As mentioned, identity is social, the social structures and the individual mutually constitute and sustain each other. Thus it will also be challenging toward delineating 'construction of Self', from 'constructions of the Other', because essentially, this delineation is more of a relation than a division of separate entities. Thus distinctions are mainly analytical, rather than a purposeful oversight of the mutual constitution of the social and the individual.

Everyday normalcy and everyday difference

How to understand difference and the underlying assumptions of normativity that somehow perpetuate the difference of some, rather than others? Goffman (1963) makes an interesting point about normativity in society that too plays a role for the context of Afro-Germans in both of their parental countries of origin. Goffman's (1963) basic premise, as discussed above, is that within society, people hold certain values, expectations, modes of conduct and so forth-basically repertoires that enable them to function effectively in everyday encounters. Routines that underline social intercourse and allow for prediction of situations, behaviour and people (Goffman, 1963, p.2). It is at this juncture where the notion of 'normal' becomes more salient. Social norms are central to Goffman's (1963) understanding of 'deviation', or as I will call it 'difference'. The expectation of the ordinary underlines the noticing of the extraordinary. The ordinary, or 'normal', relating to that, which does not deviate from socially embedded norms and expectation. With regard to identity, Goffman makes the point that “identity norms breed deviations as well as conformance” (Goffman, 1963, p. 129). Even though identity-values might not be officially established social agreements solidly entrenched anywhere in particular, they can nevertheless hover over everyday encounters and permeate behaviour (128-129). Body image is an example also used by Goffman (1963) and one that holds true in contemporary society. Living up to the ideal of tall, skinny, white, silky haired, perfect skin, cellulite resistant woman or tall, six-pack imbued, 3-day-beard wearing, white, lean male- just to sum up some extremes from your everyday fashion magazine- is something only very few will (perceived themselves as having) achieve(d). Despite the rather small amount of people who will accurately live up to this image, it nevertheless breeds a standard from which people measure deviation- be this their own or other’s. A standard that does not necessarily represent a medical or demographic average, but rather a narrated and perpetuated ‘average’. Taking Goffman’s (1963) depiction further, identity norms become entrenched in different contexts over time- political and national identity being an interesting and contested example across
Europe today. One important aspect of the notion of normal is that both the extraordinary and the ordinary constitute each other (Goffman, 1963, p. 135). We all, at some junctures fall within the social norm and at others fall outside of it. Be this by imposition or self-positioning. Context, time and places breed different social norms and thus different assumptions are made about deviation and normativity. We can actively present ourselves in a particular way, mask some manner that would otherwise mark us as different, and pass for the norm. Of course, the extent to which this is possible is highly reliant on the stigma that places one outside the norm, in how far it might hinder interaction, in how far it is can be concealed and so forth. Something like skin colour, for example, becomes somewhat difficult to accommodate into a norm of whiteness. It is something one cannot simply cover up like a disagreeable personality trait, but it is something that is quite literally worn on the outside (Goffman, 1963; Gergen, 1967; Müller, 2011). As a consequence “routinely available information about him is the base from which he must begin when deciding what track to take in regard to whatever stigma he possesses”, which is where strategy and negotiation become vital (Goffman, 1963, p.48).

Difference is relative and relies on our assumptions of the ordinary. More so, difference is contextual- also over time- making thresholds between the ordinary and not so ordinary anything but static. Being ‘normal’ and being ‘different’ (to use a different word than stigmatised) is something that everyone at some juncture experiences. Rather than defining these junctures in terms of people, Goffman thus prefers to locate normalcy and deviance in perspective (Goffman, 1963). Perspectives that mutually constitute and sustain each other, relying on some notion of social normativity that sets the bar for assumptions of difference. The relativity of these perspectives becomes all the more evident in the empirical data, where normativity and difference permeate the experiences of individuals. Within the data, the notion of ‘passing’ will also be discussed as a strategy towards actively ‘creating’ belonging to social norms.

A mixed whole: Textured Identities

The concept of textured identities is derived from Campt’s (1993) examination of discussions between May Opitz (more often known under the name May Ayim), Katharina Oguntoye and Laura Baum in “Showing our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out”14. In her article, Campt (1993) looks at the effects of dominant conceptions of German cultural identity on Afro-German women. She looks at how these women construct their own identities and how resistance to assigned cultural and ideological assumptions of ethnic identity in Germany might be evident in these constructs (Campt, 1993). At the heart of Campt’s (1993)

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conceptualisation of textured identities is the context of struggle that underlines Afro-German experiences of belonging in Germany: “The situation of Afro-Germans in contemporary Germany is one site where the struggle for the redefinition of cultural identity is currently waged” (Campt, 1993, p.110). This so-called ‘struggle’ is important in understanding Afro-German identity in the sense that it encompasses the performance of resistance to assigned categorisations that result from hegemonic cultural and ideological assumptions of what it entails to be German (and African) (i.e. incompatibility of ‘Black’ and ‘German’) (Campt, 1993; Müller, 2011; Tißberger, 2005).

Campt (1993) further talks of “multiplicity and plurality without fragmentation” (Campt, 1993, p.117): Textured identities account for continuity, flexibility and versatility of identity configurations, as contradictory and conflicting identifications are incorporated into the ‘texture’ of ‘a plural whole’, that shifts and changes in relation to different subject positions and locations. The claim to both heritages is the incorporation of multiple (sometimes even contradictory) identities. The process of self-definition through a process of combining (ambivalent) categories is important towards understanding participants’ self-placement within, in-between or outside of (assigned) categories in their narratives. Furthermore this framework helps to identify instances of resisting categories that destabilise ascribed categories and might function towards destabilising or reformulating dominant preconception both in Germany and respective African countries.

*Others-from-Within, Others-from-Without*

*Others-from-Without* relates to the post-colonial discourse and historical processes of Othering, in this case specifically related to the process of Othering of Africans derived from colonial and post-colonial racist discourses and the juxtaposing of the ‘uncivilised African’ and the ‘white European’. Wright’s (2003) concepts draw on Hegel’s Philosophy of History (1925-1926) which describes theoretical antithesis of the African Other to the white European. This antithesis being somewhat of a ‘necessity’ in order for the norm to affirm itself: without the African Other, the white European has no reference point from whence to derive a more ‘superior’ position (Wright, 2003), much like the dialectic of Master and Slave, as discussed by Hegel. *Others-from-Within* relates to a national and cultural marginalisation. In other words, Afro-Germans, despite their cultural and national belonging, do not seem to quite fit the mould of ‘German’ (or ‘African’) enough to entirely belong. Their visibility (for one) marks their difference, whereas their cultural and national embedding places them within the norm.

The interesting factor when interrogating the Afro-German position is, that they are placed both within the discourse of Ausländer (hence: Others-from-Without), while at the same time being Others-from-Within. What this means is, that there is technically no anti-Afro-German
discourse as such, but rather an anti-African or anti-Ausländer discourse, within which Afro-Germans become categorised. This making it all the more challenging to see how Afro-Germans, as Others-from-Within, negotiate the discourse of Others-from-Without that is imposed upon them (Wright, 2003, p.298). We are, so to say, at a juncture where we can clearly see the complex process that takes place between liminal spaces and their borders (Bhabha, 1994). More so, Wright’s (2003) framework shows the interplay of liminal spaces with circumventing border spaces and how this plays into the (re)formulation of identities. Wright’s (2003) concepts, apply in-group and out-group notions to the specific social status of Afro-Germans. Similar as with Goffman (1963), Wright’s (2003) concept points at the relativity of normal and deviant and resulting understandings of belonging and not belonging. Furthermore, this relativity is underlined by changes over time, which establish new contexts.

Campt’s (1993) concept of textured identities and Wright’s (2003) conceptualisation of Others-from-Within and Others-from-Without reverberate some aspects discussed by Bhabha in “The Location of Culture” (1994). Campt (1993) and Wright (2003) examine how individuals try to harmonise (established) categories by claiming them, redefining them and establishing their own position within these categories. For Campt (1993) and Wright (2003) stagnant identity categories fail to give due to how identity is performed and experienced by those who find themselves in ambivalent positions of belonging and not belonging- at social margins. Afro-Germans as a category present a contestation to understandings of (national/ethnic) identity in terms of categorical templates, hence hybrid concepts such as textured identities and Others-from-Within/Others-from-Without facilitate the articulation of this in-between/liminal space. Identity categories are points of interpretation and transformation that are performed and gain meaning only in interaction, despite their relation to established (normative) categories. More so, these interpretations and transformations that take place in liminal spaces are exactly those, which Bhabha (1994) sees as central towards understanding normative, established categories and what they actually mean in everyday performance of identity. Afro-German as a category is defined through some reference to particular established categories (African/German/Black/White). This not only encapsulating the struggle of somehow defining an in-between space without reference to the norm, but also the potential of challenging the meaning of bordering categories that in effect are the reference points towards defining these liminal spaces. In other words, these in-between spaces reflect a hybridity of apparently clear cut categories such as Black/White, African/German, as they are embedded in the performance and definition of identity within these in-between spaces (Bhabha 1994). Textured identities, so to say, are not merely a performance of minority identity, but also point at performances of ‘normative identity categories’. The ambivalence of identity categories (Wright, 2003; Campt, 1993), belonging, normalcy and difference (Goffman,
1963) - all these point at in-between social spaces as focal points for identity construction (in interaction) and contestation. Dislocated spaces. Juncures at which it becomes clear that established identity categories are anything but concluded; they are also defined through their ‘borders’ or Others. For our case established identity categories becomes contested by a group of Germans, who in their narratives are redefining what the category of German entails.

**Cultural, historical and social dislocation**

Dislocation presents a central topic within critical Afro-German literature. Cultural, historical and social dislocation relate to the conceptualisation of Afro-German subject positioning in wider German (and African) society. Both Asante (2009) and Wright (2003) conceptualise this dislocation in similar ways. Both take into consideration the perpetuation of the rhetoric of ‘white European identity’ and the historical construction of German national and cultural identity along the norm of whiteness (Asante, 2009; Wright, 2003; Müller, 2011; Séphocle in Hopkins, 1999; Tißberger, 2005). Within the scope of this thesis Asante’s (2009) framework delineating cultural, historical and social dislocation will provide one of the bases for analysis.

Foremost, the concept of dislocation refers to a psychological and cultural dissonance between being defined by others and one’s own self-definition (Asante, 2009). Asante (2009) goes on to describe dislocation as the experience of being denied full measure of being German and/or African. **Cultural dislocation** refers to the discord of the assumed and taken-for-granted (but yet invisible) normativity of ‘white as German’, that marginalises the notion of visibly different groups and individuals from the construct of ‘German’. A similar observation is made by Müller (2011) in her research: "White Germanness gains a taken-for-granted character. It is so normal that there is no need to explain (...) whiteness is sustained and reproduced not by overt rhetoric but rather by its everydayness." (Müller, 2011, p.630). Asante (2009) also describes this as living life on someone else’s terms, rather than one’s own terms. **Historical dislocation** refers to the historical marginalisation of Afro-German history from mainstream representations of German history. The construction of German history is one that does not include Other German history, which further perpetuates the differentiation of visibly different Germans from ‘mainstream Germans’. More so, it reflects the selectivity of historical narratives and how these contribute to underlining dominant structures and ‘forgetting’ uncomfortable histories such as imperialism, providing the comfort of historical amnesia. It might thus not be surprising, that rewriting German history towards including Black German history is a central project within Afro-German academia. **Social dislocation** refers to the visible difference of Afro-Germans in everyday life in Germany. Basically social dislocation refers to the regime of

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15 comparable to Yuval-Davis’ (2010) concepts of ‘Social location’ and ‘normative values’
visibility (Tißberger, 2005) experienced by Afro-Germans both in Germany and Africa. Skin colour becomes an indicator of difference or ‘not-belonging’, of being placed into the category of Ausländer and as a denial of full participation in German society (Campt, 1993; Müller, 2011; Tißberger, 2005; Asante, 2009). Wright’s (2003) concepts can also be read as drawing on similar premises as Asante (2009), theorising dislocation through two modes of Othering.

3.3 Strategies and negotiation in interaction: Goffman on face-work

As mentioned above, Goffman (1963) discusses the gap between actual and virtual social identity as well as the gap between social and personal identity. These gaps are where negotiation and strategy become relevant towards establishing and (re)producing identity in interaction. Goffman’s (1967) elaboration on face-work provides a reference point from whence to begin looking at ways in which individuals manage Spoiled identity. To link this to dislocation: Goffman (1967) provides us with a framework from which we can begin to understand how individuals negotiate their liminal position - how participants deal with dislocation in interaction.

“In general, then, a person determines how he ought to conduct himself during an occasion of talk by testing the potentially symbolic meaning of his acts against the self-images that are being sustained.” (Goffmann, 1967, p.38-39)

Goffman’s "Interaction Ritual" (1967), provides us with a basis towards understanding interactions as well as strategies of identity negotiation as described in participants’ stories. One such example is the case of experiencing discrimination, which is discussed in the empirical chapters. Thus one key part of Goffman’s (1967) work that is relevant within the scope of this thesis is the notion of face-work. A particular focus is on moments within the narrations where participants describe ‘failed’ interaction- moments when face is threatened and requires an improvisation within the interaction scene. This improvisation often pointing at a certain strategy that will be discussed later.

Goffman (1967) describes face as a positive self-image that people assume or claim by the line others anticipate or expect of him in interaction. Line here referring to speech and behaviour a person adopts in interaction in order to place himself within a particular situation and present himself in a particular manner (this manner also being somewhat within what this person thinks the others expect of him). For Goffman (1967), this can also take on an institutional character (p.5). What this means is, that face- the positive self-image- can at times also be delineated along the lines of social attributes that might or might not be shared by others. This can, for example be, a profession, religion or achievement that a person adopts in their line towards underlining their self-image as well as the image they think others might
(have come to) expect of them (Goffman, 1967, p5). In other words, we can understand face as some sort of idea we have of ourselves - who we ‘think’ we are and who we think others think we are - not only in our lived social, environmental, physical contexts, but also in our interaction contexts, that place us within a range of roles others might have of us or expect of us. The notion of face entails the assumption of a certain self-image that is sustained, maintained and even defended in interaction (Goffman, 1967; 1963). We act differently with our parents, than with our school chums. Same as we act differently with work colleagues than with an intimate friend. We act differently when we are playing the role of a doctor with her patient, than when we are a mother with our child. We assume a particular character somehow aligned to what our experience and repertoires ‘inform’ us is expected of us in a particular situation. Thus face is not merely to be understood as the embodiment of different social roles and positions, but it is also exposed to the elements of interaction - the props to the setting, so to say (Goffman, 1959) - where it is constantly constructed, tested and (re)negotiated with others. Importantly though, Goffman remarks that saving face is a “condition of interaction, not its objective” (Goffman, 1967, p. 12). “Approved attributes and their relation to face make of every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell” (Goffman, 1967, p.10). We do not enter interaction with the assumption of having to save face. We assume a certain face depending on the context we are entering. The show, so to say, must go on, despite any hic ups and at times requires improvisation to incorporate or tackle events that render expected or rehearsed interactions suddenly ‘different’.

Goffman’s (1967) concept of face reminds of Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus. Similar as face, habitus is not necessarily something we are constantly aware of, but something that might become salient when we are faced with a situation that makes us conscious thereof (i.e. moments in interaction when face is suddenly threatened; moments where we find ourselves in an unfamiliar cultural setting might make us more aware of our habitual dispositions). Face relates to a positive self-image that is formed through interaction with others and our environment. Likewise habitus can be understood as dispositions to act, think and feel that are learned and (re)produced through experience and interaction. Both notions relate to the embodiment of socialised behaviour, norms, tendencies, dispositions, capacities and so forth that are, so to say, the bedrock of our repertoire from whence we derive ideas about ourselves and the world (and finally our actions). Even though Goffman (1967) described face as entailing only the positive self-image a person has within a certain context, this positive self-image is nevertheless an embodiment of social status as assumed by the actor, as has come to be learnt and experienced by the actor. Habitus as well as face is not an unchanging notion, but one that is associated and derived from various social groups and contexts, that accumulate into a variety of routines over time and space. We live and we learn and adjust our repertoire
according to what allows us to function effectively in our surroundings as well as according to what we think helps us explain and understand those surroundings sufficiently (Lyng and Franks, 2002). Both these notions, so to say, entail the idea of action as fallible. This not being intended as equating face with habitus but rather to draw some parallels across academia. According to Goffman (1967), to be in, have or maintain face is when the line taken by a person in interaction makes for a harmonised and uncomplicated exchange. The person’s self-image as well as the image others have of him/her are compatible, this compatibility being confirmed by the effectiveness and ease of interaction that does not require the defence or justification of the person’s self (Goffman, 1967, p. 6-7). In face however also relates to instances where interaction runs a less harmonious course, but when a person nevertheless manages to maintain face by being confident and witty in his/her response, thus saving face. At times, a person must negotiate his/her face or even defend it, if contested or if the compatibility of others’ expectations clash with her/her self-image in a situation. Goffman (1967) describes these instances as being in wrong face, out of face. To be in wrong face relates to moments when “information is brought forth that in some way cannot be integrated into the line that is being sustained for a person” (Goffman, 1967, p.8). To be out of face relates to situations where circumstances cause a person embarrassment and little, if any leeway at all to absolve themselves of a situation and regain face. Linking this back to the empirical data, face-work can help us understand not only how the participants construct their own identity in particular interactions, but also how they negotiate their identities- their self-images- in moments when face is threatened, in moments when interaction requires an improvisation of repertoire beyond the routine, due to differences in meaning attached to people’s identities/roles.
4. Research Questions

As mentioned, this thesis aims to interrogate the category of Afro-German by delving into the life stories of individuals, towards locating the manner in which they frame themselves, the world around them as well as how they articulate the relationship between these structures. The manner in which individuals narrate their surroundings, their perceptions of their relationship with those surroundings and their Selves all contributes towards discussing the complexity of in-between social/cultural locations as well as the role of majority populations that surround these positions. At this juncture it also becomes important to remind the reader that by referring to participants as Afro-Germans, I do not wish to claim any universal truths or generalisations across this category. The term Afro-German here serves as an umbrella category, notwithstanding the multitude and diversity that pervades the individuals that might be seen as members of this category.

This study focuses on the three following questions:

1) *How do Afro-Germans construct and negotiate their identities in everyday life?*
2) *What social, institutional and political constructs emerge from the narrations of research participants?*
3) *How do research participants perceive and describe the relationship between identity and social/institutional/political constructs?*
5. Participants and interviews

The empirical data is qualitative in nature and could be understood as following a moderate social constructivist approach (Halkier, 2011). This means that not only identity, but this study as such is understood as a social practice - a relational accomplishment of participants and researcher. Interviews and derived data are understood as a practice emerging from multiple relations and configurations, rather than fixed entities (i.e. contextual setting that surrounds the interview both temporally as well as literally. Halkier, 2011). Interviews were designed around open-ended questions, manually transcribed and arranged into codes marked by hashtags that were then merged into themes. Interviews were conducted via Skype during the second half of 2013. Participants were contacted via Facebook and invited to participate on a voluntary basis. The following sections provide an overview of this research.

Recruitment, introducing the participants and anonymity

Research participants were contacted via Facebook. A short e-mail introduced potential participants to my study focus and invited them both to participate in my study, as well as invite others they think might fit the profile (namely: people of African and German parentage between the ages of 18 and 30). After initial contact, further communication was conducted on a more personalised level. Of the initial 25 contacted, 15 conveyed interest in participating in this study. Eventually only 8 individuals committed to an interview. The focus on young adults as potential research subjects is motivated by aiming at including individual who have experience outside of the parental household. Young adults who have experienced shifts in social, geographical, political, professional and maybe even educational localities in their lives and are thus likely to engage in thinking about their identity and their relationship to different environments.

Participants of this research have both German as well as African parentage. Parentage in this case is defined by national citizenship of the parents being located in Germany and an African country respectively. This furthermore includes one adopted participant. Participants were between 20 and 30 years of age at the point of interviewing. With one exception participants are not married and do not have children. Everyone participated voluntarily with the guarantee of anonymity. Of the 8 individuals that were interviewed, four were male and four female. African parentage covers four different countries, namely Kenya, Kenya/India, Tanzania, Ghana and Cape Verde. The selection criteria of participants are somewhat more lose than previous research on Afro-Germans, a lot of which concentrates on individuals being located in Germany and having grown up there. This is entirely intentional and meant to accommodate the very dispersion that is inherent to this category. Afro-German as a category holds a transnational character and a larger variety of individuals across different
cultural/political/socio-economic contexts and experiences also located outside of German borders. If we are to interrogate identity construction in in-between spaces, we need to take into account that locations of such marginal spaces are increasingly complex and geographically dispersed in a world of increased mobility, and where nationhood and citizenship is no longer bound to being physically within a certain territory. Thus the selection of participants did not aim at creating a conclusively representative sample of Afro-Germans as a whole. Rather this study aims to give a small insight into complexities and multitudes in experiences that permeate the category of Afro-German, towards facilitating social and academic discussion on a topic that has implication not only for the German context, but also for a wider European context. Only three of the eight participants (all female) are born in Germany, with only two having remained within German territory throughout adolescence and the conclusion of high school (i.e. German Abitur). All other participants were born in either Kenya or Tanzania and spent most of their adolescence there. It is noteworthy that participants residing in African countries have all had private school education (American and/or German), as opposed to those who grew up in Germany and visited public schools. This further pointing at a certain socio-economic position within this sample: one that allowed a private school education with relatively high school fees. It also points at a certain cultural/educational embedding in participants’ lives. This aspect is also raised by several participants during the interviews: the reflexive insight into their social/cultural/economic position within the African context, but also the subsequent change of said status on arrival in Europe or the US due to more equal society structures and them having exited the parental household. Those participants who grew up in Germany however, have no socio-economic particularities that made them stand out. All participants have a university education. This point in particular becomes evident throughout the data. Participants are familiar with the content at hand and at several junctures use vocabulary from within academia towards narrating their lives. Participants’ university education is/was located either in the US or Europe (or both). Within Europe, this at times includes multiple countries of education. One participant has a university education from an African university, but later continued their studies at a European university. In summary, it becomes evident, that not only are we dealing with a highly educated group of individuals, but also a group of varying experiences of socio-economic statuses that have also changed for these individuals over time. However different these socio-economic experiences are, all individuals reflect great geographical mobility, pointing at a generation of individuals who have the means to travel, settle and relocate. This not meant to make individuals seem ‘rich’ or over-privileged, but to make the reader aware that mobility is not merely to be seen in a cultural or linguistic sense, but also has socio-economic connotations. Furthermore mobility enhances the chances that participants have experience shifts in
economic, cultural, political and social circles and thus also the contemplation of their own position across these different contexts.

Before the interviews participants received a consent form, guaranteeing their anonymity and their right to request transcripts or a copy of my thesis. It is within the scope of this agreement that I have excluded data that might compromise the anonymity of participants. Even though several participants expressed that their real names could be used and their origins be revealed, I have chosen to opt for an overall anonymous depiction of participants in order to avoid any misunderstandings or recognition. Upon request, participants will receive a copy of the final thesis. Within the analysis participants have been assigned random numbers from 1 to 8 in no particular order. Quotes will thus be referenced with a participants number (e.g. ‘P5’). In case it should be relevant to the quote an ‘f’ or ‘m’ is be used to indicate gender. Any other details remain omitted.

**Designing the interviews**

Preceding the interviews, participants were asked to write a short biographical narrative about their experiences as people of African and German parentage. This of course being purely voluntary. I provided guiding questions (Appendix 1), but also left it mainly to participants to include the information they felt was important, necessary or interesting. The purpose of guiding questions was to evoke participants to think about particular aspects of their bicultural backgrounds, their experiences, their history, and see which topics and themes emerge as they put their stories down on paper. This step enabled an inclusion of participants in the formulation of my research from an early point, also allowing me to build on topics raised by participants and construct interviews. It facilitated the reflexive process of the research, informing me about focal points and points I might have otherwise missed (Riach, 2009). Furthermore these short biographies had the effect that participants remained curious about the research and often expressed that the interview enabled more elaboration than a short biography that not only requires more work on their part, but also limits expression, lest someone is willing to write a novel. Despite me remaining in contact with individuals who did not write a short biography in the hope of nevertheless involving them in interviews, only those individuals who wrote biographies eventually committed to an interview.

Interviews were designed around open-ended questions, some of which were motivated by the material that had emerged from previously collected mini-biographies as well as academic readings (Rapley in Seal et al., 2004). The purpose of using open-ended questions is mainly to allow participants to narrate their stories without too much interference from the researcher. Rather than guide the interview I attempted to sometimes facilitate the direction of narration, if it diverged dramatically from the research focus (e.g. when the topic had shifted to football.
results) or if it stagnated (Rapley in Seal et al., 2004). During interviews, prepared questions shifted and changed in accordance with the situation and the person I was interviewing. My questions were, so to say guidelines, which followed the script set by interviewees’ narrative (Rapley in Seal et al., 2004). The main purpose of these interviews was to allow participants to tell their stories. To see how they narrate themselves, their surroundings, their experiences and basically their frame of the world. Of course, both the construction of questions as well as the conduction of interviews cannot be entirely divorced from the theoretical preconceptions and ideas that preceded interviews, nor can it be ignored that the interview situation as such creates a particular context within which narration takes place (Rapley in Seal et al., 2004; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, Halkier, 2011). Interviews are at best artefacts: a joint product of both interviewee and interviewer and thus a narration taking place in a particular context and setting. Interviews are a version of a narrative specific to the interaction within which it is being recalled (Rapley in Seal et al., 2004; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). As suggested by Rapley (in Seal et al., 2004) as well as Mauthner and Doucet (2003), analytical attention needs to be paid in treating interview-talk as a joint production taking place in the interview context, rather than a conclusive representation of ‘truths’.

At the time of interviewing, participants were located in five different countries, making Skype central as a tool, even though the pros and cons and adequacy of Skype as a research tool remains debated (Further readings are listed in the footnote\textsuperscript{16}). However my resources made Skype a necessary tool towards making interviews across different countries possible and has, for the purpose of this thesis, enabled the collection of data from participants. With two exception, a mutual video presence was possible. Mainly though, this study looks at the interview-talk, rather than video transmitted gestures and expressions. However, laughter or significant emotional changes noticeable during recordings were duly marked during transcription and later incorporated into thematic considerations. The time frame of interviews differed from person to person. On average an interview took up about one and a half hours. In general interview times ranges between thirty minutes to two and a half hours.

**Transcription, coding and category zooming**

Interviews were transcribed manually to allow for a continued engagement with the material as well as enable the correct transcription of passages that were often a combination of

German/English/Swahili, which might have been corrupted by a more automated approach to transcription. A process of open coding was followed by a process of thematic coding, combining aspects from Grounded Theory as well as aspects from traditions of thematic coding and analysis. Reoccurring topics, significances, word usage, outstanding information and unclear sections were coded with hashtags (#) during several readings and finally placed within a summary grid, arranging hashtags into overarching themes. Hashtags were labelled with terms used either by participants or borrowed from academic literature. #Black Man’s Nod, #mixed, #sides and #feeling invisible are, for example, codes with labels derived from interview-talk. #taxonomies, #historical amnesia and #exoticising are labels derived from academic literature. #Black, #White, #Pointi, #mixed and so forth are codes that are merged under the theme of categories and were subdivided into contextual units, such as, for example, when used in combination with #sides. #Gender and #exoticism, for example, are codes that are merged as one theme towards analysis. Thus overarching themes can be understood as zooming in on particular aspects within and across the data. Halkier (2011) describes this method as category zooming. By developing codes both relying on labels derived from transcripts as well as academic research, I attempted to allow for the emergence of themes I might have otherwise missed, if relying solely on prepared theoretical frameworks. Thus, for example, #Black Man’s Nod emerged as an unplanned theme in the data that was not anticipated on the basis of previous literature. This is not to say that I was entirely free of any pre-conceptions or theoretical bias, but to emphasize the attempt to approach the data openly and reflexively. Hashtags are at times assigned to multiple umbrella themes, depending on their use within the interview context and thus differing meanings they might carry.

The following empirical chapters give an overview of the results of analysis. The first empirical chapter deals with the ways in which individuals construct their identities. Dealing with categories, Afro-German as a construct in narratives, skin colour, introductions, ‘being mixed’, realising difference, gender and exoticism and discussions on ‘normalcy’ are included in this chapter. The second chapter focuses on strategies- the way in which individuals describe negotiating their identities in interaction. Passing, self-justification, control of information, confrontation and humour are among the topics discussed in the second empirical chapter. The third chapter locates instances across interviews, where individuals describe political, social, cultural and even spatial structures that perpetuate difference in their lives. Historical amnesia, silent racism, media misrepresentation and ‘safe spaces’ being the topics included chapter three. Finally, a significant topic, namely the ‘Black Man’s Nod’ is discussed, followed by a discussion of the findings and the conclusion.
6. Empirical Chapter 1
Constructing the textured Self: harmonising difference, heterogeneity and dislocation

(P5): “what I never understand with other mixed people...I see that they are not bothered so much by it. Like it’s not affecting them so much. But for me it’s everything that I am. My identity is everything I do. Because it has accompanied me so much in my life and always been the explainer for everything”

The above quote initialises this first empirical chapter, by introducing the notions of embodied duality, identity as ‘doing’ and the salience of embodied duality in the experiences of this (and other) participant. These notions are picked up throughout this chapter towards helping us understand how participants construct their Selves and Others, as well as gaining an insight into strategies of identity negotiation in everyday life. I begin by introducing the way participants introduce themselves and moments when difference first became salient for participants. Hereafter the issue of categories is discussed, followed by an overview of how participants use categories in narration. These categories are then placed into the context of embodied dualities. The final sections of this chapter deals with the evaluation of what “being mixed” means for participants. Descriptions are linked to the theoretical frameworks introduced above towards understanding how identity construction is experienced and done by participants. Only a few exemplifying quotes are maintained in the text. Otherwise a summary of overall findings is (descriptively) provided and placed within the theoretical context.

6.1 Introductions and realising difference

“Yes, I am German”: rehearsed introductions of the Self

All participants, with two exceptions, proceeded to introduce themselves foremost through the national/cultural/ethnic background of their parents, followed by the location of their birth. The two exceptions proceeded to introduce themselves through their current professions. This point in particular was the first noticeable regularity across interviews. The rehearsal of introduction later picked up again with the question of ‘how they introduce themselves to people’. One reason for this can, of course, be the context the thesis creates: participants are aware of the topic at hand, thus setting the stage for a particular kind of role play. However, I would argue that there is more to this regularity and especially the outstanding examples, where participants chose to introduce themselves through their profession. The outstanding examples point at there being the possibility for participants to answer differently- to choose a different track of introduction beyond the clarification or deconstruction of their bicultural
background. These examples can also point at a manner of resisting the introduction of Self through ethnic background. One participant who chose profession as an introductory track also vehemently rejected the categorisation as Afro-German as well as any other ethnic/national category. The introduction through clarification of parental background might also point at a routinized, practiced ritual of introduction that participants are familiar with. This further crystallises within some interviews in later sections, when participants mention the continued encounter with having to clarify their background in interaction, due to the confusion arising from other actors’ expectations derived from some visual reading of the participants. Introducing oneself is embedded in one’s repertoire. It is a ritual we engage in over and over again. For these individuals, it is a ritual all too familiar and one that continuously requires the measuring of a situation and in how far their appearance is going to be salient to their positioning and role in an interaction. Often times this salience is marked by a question such as ‘where are you really from’.

(P3): “no no, they want to know where I am really from! (laughter) Well, the question is of course a nuisance, but you can also tell if the person is actually interested of if it’s just downright curiosity. And when you give them something, they’ll be quiet. Yea, and I guess I would just say where my parents are from. Because that’s how it is. I don’t know, at least that’s how it is for me.”

(P7): “just from my perspective as being a German person- in Germany people would say that I’m not really German. So it’s like ‘ah, but you’re…’- when I say I’m German of course, I mean that I grew up in Hannover, my mother is German, my father has lived in Germany for 40 years.” So people would still say ‘but where are you really from- where are your roots from”

These individuals carry their difference on the outside and are thusly more used to having to introduce themselves in terms of their background to clarify their appearance, both in Germany as well as their respective African countries of origin. Their liminal position baring a lack of a (accepted/internalised) descriptive category that would satisfy interaction contexts without begging a justification. In both cases their appearance makes them stick out from the majority, often begging the justification of belonging in interaction (also see section 7.1 on visually based expectancies and justifying oneself). Across the interviews participants express being familiar with having to explain themselves, although it is sometimes negatively connotated with having to ‘justify’ themselves. On five occasions participants express empathy for situations like these, understanding the curiosity or assumption that comes with ‘first encounters’ and postulations made at first glance. Once again we are reminded of Goffman’s (1963) introduction in stigma and our tendency to categorise in order to effectively function in interaction- this categorisation setting the tone for what’s normal and what not normal.

17 emphasis marked by non-italic formatting
Furthermore the necessity to weigh the relevance of their appearance (or as Goffman would put it: ‘they stigma’) from one interaction to another also points at a repertoire of strategies, that will be discussed more closely in section 2.1 in my analysis of identity negotiation. Finally, the empathy expressed by several participants with respect to others’ need to question their origins is an observation also made by Goffman (1963) and even entailed in his ‘tips’ for dealing with stigma. The relativity of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ is in this case emphasised by the geographical, linguistic and social mobility of participants. The constant interchangeability of belonging, not belonging, ‘normal’, ‘not normal’, is essentially their life story. Their history is embedded in the experience of ‘normal’ and ‘not normal’, contributing to their empathy for those, who might not quite understand this relativity, due to not realising that they too experience this (as discussed above: only very few live up to the normative ideals we measure up to, Goffman, 1963). Dislocation is a familiar state of being for participant and deeply embedded in their practice of identity. This too becomes clearer throughout the empirical chapters.

Another cue we are reminded of is Martin’s (2010) point on memory. Martin (2010) makes a point about memory and recollection that reminds of the pattern in the interviews. Rather than see our cognitive abilities of memory as something indecipherably complex, he understands memory as something consisting of the connections of simplified and selective conceptions of past events that we do not necessarily remember as such, but simply re-engage with in narration/recollection. Once again altering these connections between concepts according to the narration context. The context of the interview, in this case, could be interpreted as one such ritual of recollection, in which the participant is re-engaged with the same question he or she has encountered several times before and answered in a similar manner. The question of telling someone about themselves in the context of their mixed background is a practiced and familiar interaction that seems to invoke the pattern evident across most of the interviews.

**Realising difference: changes in socialisation**

A notable aspect discussed in the interviews (both initiated as well as brought up by the interviewees), was the realization of looking different at a juncture in their lives. Looking different does not inherently mean, that you are endowed with the knowledge of socially/culturally/political circulating notions of ascribed statuses (Gergen, 1967). More so a change in socialisation means a change in social space that is underlined by different norms and assumptions that might require individuals to adapt their behavioural repertoires, especially when their identity becomes embedded in formerly unfamiliar contexts. In both cases the realisation of being different from the others is felt to have been socially imposed by a change in social context (i.e. Kindergarten, school). A similar point is made by Goffman (1963)
about the cocoon of safeness that family and neighbourhood can provide, which can be broken by the entry into schools or other social circles within which difference can become more salient.

(P7): “I think when I was really really young, I wasn’t conscious about the fact that my parents are supposed to be different, also to each other. And I think also when I grew up a bit, I really realised it’s something. I didn’t realise myself, but because society more less imposed it on me—so when people would ask me, ‘what do you think, are you German or are you Black’. Whatever that’s supposed to be, that you’re Black, or whatever. So when people ask you stupid questions and you experience the first racism in Kindergarten and such things—so this is something that I then started to think about. But just from my upbringing or my family I never thought about this.”

(P5): “I always thought I was White and German and yea... And then in B*18 I went to a school where there were a lot of migrants’ kids. And I think there I also realised that I am also a migrant (laughter). A migrant’s kid. Because people would always say ‘This is P5, f*19 and she also has an exotic background, where are you from?’ So you always start to explain where you’re from, even though you’re not from there.”

Differences in social norms across spaces, alongside differences in decoding capabilities/repertoires of audiences contributed to the realisation of difference of these participants (Goffman, 1963). It is through the questioning of participants’ correspondence to established notions of ‘normal’ that the participants are made aware of their difference or their ‘deviance’. In other words, with new social spaces come different assumptions of normal than might have been present in former social spaces within which participants’ were active. The discrepancy of virtual social identity and actual social identity was only met when faced with a sudden change in environment. Interaction within these contexts, so to say, made difference salient, due to imposed social identity and resulting new requirements placed onto the individuals with regard to their interaction repertoire. Interestingly P5 also explains how she had to adapt to explaining herself in a new manner in order to facilitate interaction in a new environment (located outside of Germany) that labelled her as a migrant, rather than White and German.

(P5): “But you know here in this neighbourhood. It’s funny, because the Cape Verdeans they all come from Praia, which is all the Badiu people and my mother comes from Saint Vincent, which is Sampadjuda20. So here, you know in Cape Verde I am the German, but here, I’m the Sampadjuda. So I’m always called here Sampadjuda, so it’s funny, because I would never be called that in Cape Verde. You are always the other. It’s funny to get new identities.”

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18 The participant is referring to a German city. The city name has however been omitted.
19 participant name has been replaced with assigned number (P5) and gender marker (f)
20 similar as with Msungu and Pointi, Sampadjuda is a term specific to the Cape Verdian/Portugese context, referring to particular ethnic group (identities). Sampadjuda mostly relating to Cape Verdians of European/Portugese descent as opposed to Bados, who are Cape Verdians with West African heritage.
This final example served to underline what was previously said about different decoding capabilities and difference in social norms. Sampadjudo relates to ethnic identity distinctions in Cape Verde (and the Cape Verdean diaspora) rooted in (post-) colonial identity categories. For some, the difference between Sampadjudo and Badiu is merely a geographical one, rather than a cultural/ethnic difference. However Sampadjudo is also associated with higher social status as well as lighter skin colour (most likely due to people described within this group being of mixed Portuguese/European and Cape Verdean) heritage. Badiu is more associated to working class and a darker complexion (Batalha, 2004). The German, as well as African contexts place these individuals outside of social norms and impose a variety of social identities onto individuals - some of which would not even apply in a local African context, but suddenly do apply in a ‘diaspora’- context. Difference gains relevance for participants as they shift from one social circle to the next and encounter different identities imbued derived from a variety of assumptions of what is perceived to constitute normal across these social circles. The necessity to master navigation between different imposed social identities and notions of normativity might thus be all the more understandable- especially in the context of individuals who carry their difference on their sleeve. More so this quote exemplifies Goffman's (1963) emphasis on 'normal' as relative as well as Bhabha's (1994) concept of liminal spaces as arenas of identity formation. These individuals find themselves within several liminal spaces.

6.2 Dealing with categories

The use of categories across interviews varies greatly, as does the level of comfort with these terms. Categories present an important juncture within this thesis, as they present the practice of having to place people within a particular shelf in order to talk about them at all, however categorising our social and physical world is anything but unusual- it simply enables effective action, it enables us to arrange our surroundings into graspable compartments that inform our behaviour and which are constantly exposed to changes, depending on the effectiveness of these compartments in interaction (Goffman, 1963; Martin, 2010; Lyng and Franks, 2002). Afro-German in this case being one such category term that I use throughout the thesis in order to somehow talk about a group that- as it turns out- does not even necessarily embrace this term as a category. This same struggle with categories became evident across interviews. Struggle in the sense of participants not being sure what categories to place themselves in, to discomfort in using categories about themselves and ‘Similars’ at all, to rejecting categories and recognising the necessity of categories- despite the discomfort they might sometimes evoke. ‘Similars’ is a term is borrowed from P2, who refers to people of similar background as Similars. Similars struck me as a particularly interesting choice of category, as it points at the almost improvisatory nature of self-categorisation beyond given categories that some individuals try
to avoid or escape. Narration in particular places a certain necessity to describe and distinguish in order to understand the context the participant is trying to create or recollect (Martin, 2010). It is the connections, the linkages of concepts, frameworks and categories that we are gaining an insight into- the selections made by the participants in telling their stories- the connections between concepts that they have interpreted as a necessary towards articulating their experiences. If we connect this back to Martin (2010) the data, so to say, provides a map of the conceptual connections selectively installed into narration of participants- those concepts and connections that are somehow meaningful to this context and help them make sense of the world around them (Martin, 2010; Ancona, 2012).

Establishing categories for themselves as well as Similars presented a challenge for participants, despite the overall sentiment of being in some sort of in-group, of being part of some sort of ‘we’ that shares a predicament and a set of experiences. I being included in this ‘we’ at several points throughout interviews. This ‘we’ however also shares the predicament of not being adequately articulated in terms of available social identity categories or terms (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003). Quite similar to Goffman’s (1967) notion of stigma that gains salience in its deviation from circulating social assumptions of normativity that pervade categories. This is not to be understood as participants being insecure of themselves or their identities. Rather social identity at this juncture is mainly meant in the context of imposed and self-ascribed ethnic/racial/national identity, rather than professional, political, religious, etc. identities. The issue being the difficulty throughout narratives in finding a category/categories that would somehow harmonise the gap between imposed identities (virtual social identity) and self-ascribed identities of participants (actual social identity) (Goffman, 1963) - which in and of themselves present the challenge of harmonising the duality experienced in the associations drawn from embodied duality (see section 6.3 on the construction of Self around ‘sides’). Differences in history and setting have provided them with different repertoires of self-categorisation as well as a variety of imposed, external categorisations, but across interviews there is not one racial/national/ethnic identity that can be said to satisfy the expression of self-ascribed identity sufficiently or entirely, nor a socially embedded category that would provide sufficient content to the perspective of participants. The closest thing to an overall category, seems to be the notion of ‘we’ (see section 6.4 on the evaluation of participants’ in-between position, on ‘being mixed’). ‘We’ as a category holds taxonomies, but also has borders- as is the case with any category. Taxonomies mostly arising from differences in background of individuals, such as, for example, those who grew up in Germany versus those who grew up in African countries; those who are embedded in both parental cultures and those who are only embedded in one culture. With regard to inclusion, ‘we’ is further related to a particular perspective and experience only possible from a betwixt social/cultural position. It is an
experience particular to a liminal position. This perspective is discussed further in point 6.3 on embodied dualities.

**Afro-German as a category of Self?**

One significant consistency across interviews is the lack of usage of the term Afro-German. One question specifically aimed at asking participants what they related to the term Afro-German, evoking reactions ranging from ‘being able to decipher what it means’, to familiarity and finally also to rejection of any category terms whatsoever. In one case Afro-German is rejected as a euphemism (one of many) for terms such as ‘Halbpigmentiert’, Halbschwarzer and Halbweißer (P2). To be noted is that these three terms are used in the German context. In two other cases Afro-German, alongside other ethnic/national/racial categories, are rejected on a more general note, with preference for being categorised by profession or simply by one’s name.

(P6) “People are so concerned with politically correct terms. Can I just be called who I am: P6, instead of being called this mixed race guy, this Msungu, this Mwafrika this (laughter) whatever..., this mixed race, this Pointi.”

In overall then, it was interesting to see that Afro-German as a category seems to be rather weakly embedded in the experiences and narrations of participants, underlining the lack of colloquial usage of this term outside of academia or outside of Germany. Maybe we could go as far as interpreting this as pointing to the young nature of this movement in Germany underlined by the marginal contact in education, media and the public with Afro-German history and present (Asante, 2009). Afro-German as a category, despite the establishment thereof in order to counter imposed categories (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003), remains marginal in the repertoires for self-categorisation among participants. It would be interesting to establish if this might somehow relate to the somewhat different scope of participants chosen for this thesis and their embedding within a wider geographical frame, that might somehow make the term Afro-German somewhat diffuse from their experiences. However, all participants, be it within Germany or abroad, have experience within the German school system. At no juncture, within this educational system is Afro-German or Black German history discussed. As discussed by Asante (2009) historical dislocation is perpetuated by an educational system that does not articulate the hybridity of German national identity. The lack of embedding Black German history within your ‘everyday history curriculum’ only contributes to the perpetuation of dislocation of Black as German and thus Afro-German as

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21 Halbpigmentiert= half pigmented
22 Halbschwarzer/ Halbweißer = half-black person/half-white person
German. This further contributing to cultural and social dislocation in Germany but also respective African countries (Asante, 2009).

Reading skin colour: perceived symbolisms and meanings of melanin

Terms used while narrating and constructing their Selves were Point-Five/Pointi, Msungu, Mwafrika, Black, White, migrant, biracial, bicultural, mixed, German, African. Often times these terms are used in the context of either an in-group (‘we’), or in the description of embodied dualities or in the construction of Self by relating to others or external/ascribed identity. Pointi, Mwafrika and Msungu are used within an East African context, all words borrowing linguistically from the Swahili language. Thus all but two participants were familiar with these terms. Point-Five/Pointi (pronounced “poin-tí”) are colloquial slang words referring to a person with parents to from two national backgrounds- mostly one African and one European. Mwafrika is the Swahili word for an African. Msungu is a word used across East Africa referring to people of lighter (European) complexion, but also outsiders or foreigners, much comparable to the Japanese word ‘gaijin’. Within interviews, Msungu is usually experienced a negative imposition of social identity. The following sections will delve deeper into this. Black, White migrant, biracial, mixed, German and African were used in variable contexts and situations, with the exception of ‘migrant’, which was used by the participant to describe herself in a German context. Evidently, the context creates the narration- in this case the context of the interview creates the necessity of ethnic/national/racial categories of identity, making these the prevalent focus of the interviews. In all cases, skin colour can be understood as a symbol or cue, signifying some sort of social category to others, which is then imposed onto the participants and in some cases assumed to differing extents. Skin colour becomes imbued with different meanings that have consequences for interaction and thus: identity (Goffman, 1963; Tißberger, 2005; Gergen, 1967). To be noted is however the intersection of skin colour with language and history, that at times plays a role in the imposition of a category onto participants, such as, for example, speaking fluent Swahili acting as a leverage against being classified as ‘Msungu’. Of course, this is also highly dependent on the decoding capabilities of people the participants might interact with.

Reading skin colour: Point-Five/Pointi, mixed, bicultural, biracial

Within the interviews, Pointi is used to describe Similars as well as refer to one Self and at times situations where participants have been identified as such. The term is confined within a limited context, making it difficult to use this term in a social/cultural context within which Pointi is not an established or familiar category (e.g. in Germany towards German/Africans who are embedded in cultural/social/historical contexts outside of East Africa). We might go
so far as to interpret this term as an even stronger delineator of Similars, seeing as familiarity with “Pointi” implies a shared experience and knowledge that is localised. Pointi presents us with an example of a category within the category of Afro-German that in and of itself holds geographical, historical and cultural specificities. On top of this, Pointi could also be interpreted as one of many taxonomies within the category of Afro-German, delineated by geography, experience and maybe even language. It would be interesting to see if similar terms have emerged among ‘other’ Similars (e.g. individuals with German/Congolese or German/Senegalese parentage who grew up in Congo or Senegal).

Furthermore, deconstructing the category of Point-Five/Pointi, becomes an interesting exercise towards introducing the following chapter on embodied dualities and one that underlines the necessity of understanding liminal positions in relation to the majority/the norm. The category of Pointi in some way necessitates the relation to two norms towards the application of this term. Entailing the notion of being ‘half of two wholes’, thus drawing on the assumption of there being two standards from which Pointi is derived. Two norms that are the reference ‘ideals’ for the emergence of the term- ‘Black’ and ‘White’ for instance. It is relational and could not as such exist without the reference to some notion of a norm (or in this case two norms), from which the individual deviates, necessitating an articulation thereof. In this case being Pointi is not the same as being proper Black. It evokes different assumptions, which again can lead to different treatment. The following quote points at Pointi as more than just an assumption drawn from skin colour, but one that seems to intersect with other factors, resulting in different treatment. Similar to Hunter’s (2007) notion of ‘colorism’, different shades of skin colour seem to evoke different assumptions of class or social status or as this participants puts it: people think differently of a person than if they were proper Black people:

(P2): “…because in Kenya now for instance, obviously due to the fact that we’re a bit Pointi, we’re also going to stand out a bit and people are going to think of us differently than if we were like proper Black people.”

Participants use Pointi to refer to themselves, as well as other Similars. The extent to which this term is embraced as a positive varies across participants. It remains an external, socially imposed category, that some have integrated into their self-ascription (ego-identity) more than others. The geographical specificity of the term however only allows for a limited application thereof that depends on a contextual setting where the category would be familiar. Comparable categories that entail the notion of harmonising ‘different categories’ would be bicultural, biracial or mixed. These ‘in-between’ or hybrid categories seem to be more positively embedded in the experiences and narrations of participants, with biracial, probably being the least so, mainly due to the rejection of racial categories in self-ascription. However all of these
remain categories that- despite any self-ascription and affiliation to these categories- are embedded in social contexts, that (re)produce these categories (e.g. academic contexts).

Reading skin colour: Msungu, Mwafrika, Black, White, Migrant, African

Msungu is too an example of a geographically localised term, but a more negative one. Msungu is a word used for foreigners, particularly those of lighter complexion and is encountered by participants across East Africa. Msungu does not merely stigmatise different skin colour, but also places individuals into an upper class context: attributing a better socio-economic status to lighter skin tone, often causing discomfort and disassociation to this term in individuals who do not see themselves as upper class white foreigners. In one case the participant uses Msungu to refer to Europeans- turning a term experienced on the Self onto others, thus distancing himself from association both to Msungu as well as Europeans. This instance becomes an interesting moment of resistance to being categorised both in an African as well as a German context. It is a sort of confirmation of the hybrid position held by the individual and one that is asserted in narration. The term can furthermore be said to underline the social and cultural dislocation of participants, not only in the European context, but also within an African context (Asante, 2009) - a dislocation that is notably derived from assumption drawn by an optical evaluation of a person.

(P6): “I mean, in Kenya many times I’ve been called a ‘bloody Msungu’, ‘fucking white man’ many times. I’m like ‘I’m not White’, you know. But I guess I wasn’t dark enough for them to be as Kenyan or Tanzanian. Kind of sad in many ways, because I can’t be accepted as one of them. The same case in Germany.”

Once again we can observe Hunter’s (2007) colorism in the intersection of skin colour with class/social status as well as some sort of taxonomy of difference (Campt, 1993). Being Pointi or “not dark enough” points at some sort of spectrum within which belonging to the norm is either possible or not possible. This did not merely appear in an imposed experience of participants, but was at in one interview also actively part of the narration itself. The participant actively categorised along taxonomies, using terms such as ‘Oreo’, for example, to differentiate between Afro-Germans who are familiar with their African parentage and those, who only grew up in a German context.

‘Black’ and ‘Migrant’, in other interviews, are described in a similar manner, only in the context of being an “Ausländer”- a foreigner- in Germany. Skin colour, in these instances, becomes imbued with the meaning of something foreign to the social norm and something disassociated from the concept of German. When used by participants, Black, African and Migrant appear in the context of retelling an instant of (negative) imposed categorisation in Germany, rather than
self-ascription—this despite language and history placing these participants well within German culture. They describe the experience of incompatibilities of being German, but Black; Being German, but a migrant; Being German, but African. African and Mwafrika however, are at times connoted more positively, when imposed onto individuals in an ‘African context’—meaning either by members of the African diaspora of within respective African countries—thus granting access to belonging to a ‘norm’, rather than being at the social margins. ‘German’ usually appears in a positive context, both when self-ascribed—this being often times a strategic choice by participants—as well as imposed by others. Interestingly both ‘African’ and ‘German’ as categories appear in more intentional contexts, meaning that participants actively ascribe to these labels in interaction, in order to establish themselves within either of these categories (see Empirical Chapter 2 on strategies and identity negotiation).

The above examples show the imposition of a social ethnic/racial virtual identity that place the individual within a norm they do not entirely affiliate themselves with, solely derived from the symbolic evaluation of their skin colour. Some of these categories are more embraced than others: textured identity categories seem less threatening than those that require a choice between embodied sides (see section 6.3 on embodied dualities). However textured identities also point at the problematic of an emancipated category that does not rely on the relation to ‘normative. These categories present an interesting aspect also mentioned by Goffman (1963). Identity only becomes salient in interaction, when we are faced with limitations of our environment and having to navigate our identity (and others’ identities) through and with others. The variety of ways participants describe being categorised only exposes a fraction of the complexity of strategizing across and between these categories and in some way harmonising or challenging these in relation to one’s self-image. The challenge of textured identities further points at the complexities of liminal spaces as arena of identity formation (Bhabha, 1994): these spaces are intrinsically intertwined with the very majority they are marginalised from. More so, their definition borrows from said majority. However the majority also becomes redefined by textured categories that acclaim aspects of the majority and reinvigorate these with new meanings. The challenge of categories might not be a constant concern, but one that arises when interaction evokes a gap between self-ascribed identity and imposed identity—between internal and external categories (Jenkins, 1994)—necessitating strategy (see Empirical Chapter 2).

The ‘typical German’—changing categories

What constitutes being German was a question discussed across several interviews. On two occasions being German was met with the confirmation of stereotypes such as drinking beer,
having a nice car, being punctual and being somewhat stern. One interesting segment related to being German to a perpetuation of ‘bloodline politics’.

(P7): “In Germany your nationhood is based on your bloodline, more or less. (...) Whereas here, if you conform to the ideals of the state you’re British or French or whatever. However in Germany, it’s not possible. Even if you’re the most conformist (laughter) immigrant in the world it’s still like ‘ah common, you’re not German, you have a Migrationshintergrund’

In this case nationhood is described as still being embedded in the notion of bloodline-meaning having two German parents-as the main determinant of belonging. Germany is delineated from France and the UK, in that belonging is based on the ideal of blood, rather than conformity to state ideology. Thus for the participant, belonging becomes impossible when visibility attracts the categorisation as a migrant. Conformity to social norms and culture, knowledge of the language and so forth seem to fade behind the obvious baring of skin that begs the questioning of belonging, despite an otherwise absolute conformity to normativity. This is only one example from several throughout the interviews, where belonging becomes challenged by visible difference despite overall conformity to social norms. However it is only in this example that nationhood and bloodline are mentioned explicitly. In a manner this points at the challenge of changing the symbolic attributions that skin colour still carries in Germany. This challenge being an institutional one, perpetuated by the focus on ‘appearance’, rather than cultural belonging.

Taking a further step back however and taking the entire data into account, it becomes clear that the construct of German, as well as the construct of African differ from person to person. What draws these constructs together though is the self-ascertaining of participants as Germans. The assertion of ‘German’ as part of their framing of themselves. Participants do this not only by saying so directly, but by using ‘German’ as a category towards describing themselves, delineating ‘embodied categories’ and characteristics. This aspect underlines just why Bhabha (1994) sees betwixt social positions as such central arenas of identity construction: We are finding out not only how individuals frame themselves, but in doing so, we realise that apparent established categories such as ‘German’, are also being constantly reformulated through changes in time and context, that change the meanings and attributions of ‘German’. Descriptions of what participants see as ‘typically German’, presents us with a viewpoint of the majority from the margins as well as from within. However it is a viewpoint from a group of participants who see themselves as part of the majority, however contested their belonging might prove in interaction. The incongruity here being in (static) majority notions of belonging not facilitating notions of cultural hybridity as the norm towards enabling uncontested belonging of participants. In other words, participants feel that the majority of
Germans have not yet come to the realisation that “German” is a hybrid and changing term (this will be further discussed in my analysis of institutional structures in the empirical chapter). More so, all but one participant explain that the continued experience of having to justify themselves as Germans points at a lack of acceptance of the reality of “German” being a constantly changing category that now holds notions of hybrid ethnic identities (however optimism is also expressed as to this too slowly changing across Germany, particularly in larger cities; the third empirical chapter elaborates on this point).

6.3 Embodied/Internal/lived dualities

This section will highlight the narration of Self through embodied dualities. Whereas the previous section introduced some terms used throughout narratives by individuals, this section looks at how terms are placed in relation to each other. How participants so to say, make sense of established categories in the description of themselves. White and Black, German and African, German and Black, us and they, minority and majority become a manner of expressing embodied duality individuals feel constituted them. Embodied dualities reminds of Campt's (1993) textured identities and the incorporation of sometimes even ambivalent categories into a ‘whole’, as opposed to having to choose between socially imposed categories. Textured identities, for Campt (1993), result from the struggle of trying to incorporate different categories into the Self- it is an attempt to emancipate the Self from being defined solely through circulating categories that do not satisfy the complexities of a person’s identity (Campt, 1993). Within the data it becomes interesting to notice that textured constructions are more easily incorporated into constructions of the Self, even despite the deconstruction of that Self into ‘sides’. Textured constructions enable the incorporation of categories the individual feels are inherently necessary in communicating themselves without having to choose or compromise between one ‘side’ over another. These textured constructions further carry implication for established social identities, in the sense that they are being redefined and changed by individuals who experience and understand these categories differently.

Deconstruction of Self into national/cultural/racial sides

The use of ‘sides’ to deconstruct the Self appears across all interviews. These sides remind of Weber's ideal types in that they are used as reference points or shelves that help arrange experiences and attributions to particular sides of the Self. Even though individuals express that they are ‘both’ or ‘mixed’ and (not) merely one side and (or) the other, this construct nevertheless remains across narrations in delineating certain attributes and characteristics, and at times even sympathies along their embodied (parental) categories. Even the very
concept of Mixed or as mentioned above Pointi somehow depend on there being a norm from
which to derive these terms.

(P2): "Well, the Kenyan side has definitely given me a bit of a laid back side on life to like
not hurry into things and everything and like take your time and think about it one more
time and go slow on it. But the whole German side obviously helped me structure things a
lot as well. Especially things like timing and you know,...”

(P4): “I still have the German side, where I can always still, komm klar damit23. I feel like I
have a huge Vorteil24 to people who didn’t have this. I really feel like I do. Because I’m not
really White and I’m not really Black, I feel I can understand both sides of life, you know. ”

(P7): "Really, I feel half half, completely and literally, hälfte hälfte, like a zebra. There’s no
grey zone in this shit. I feel like there’s this and this. I mean, you know how it feels.
Everybody who’s a mixture knows how it feels not to be Black and not to be White. “

(P5) "you get so confronted with your whiteness and your Germanness (laughter). In the
streets in (...) everybody would scream ‘White white’, you know. And then also, German
habits, but then you realize what is all African. You feel at home, but you are also German.
(...) You can be the black girl, you can be the white girl, you can be the coloured girl. In SA
I was always the coloured girl. But it’s nice not to be- to feel it all, you know. (...) I could
never take so much sides on ‘Black Pride’ or defending White or something, because I kind
of have an understanding of both, because I am both”

There is the mention of not falling within these ideal norms. Not really being one of the other
and being able to understand both ‘sides of life’. Black and White carry connotations of life
styles or experiences that the individual feel they can relate to, due to their belonging, but not
really belonging to these sides. These ‘sides’- German side/Kenyan side, Black/White- are
categories imbued with particular meanings and which in the first example can even be said to
be stereotypes. In two other interviews the attributes and meanings of sides were associated
with/coincided with personal affiliation to one side over the other. In these cases the
individuals equated more negative connotations to one side and positive connotations to the
other, with both mentioning that they feel more like one side, rather than the other, due to the
negative experience that permeated the framing of one side.

Once again we come back to Goffman (1963). Foremost, categorisation and the linkage to
attributes (/stereotypes) is self-evidently used to establish a construct of the Self. Secondly, the
mutual constitution of the social and the individual becomes all the more apparent in the self-
categorisation along the lines of social/political/cultural categories that become established
reference points in the articulation of the Self- in the articulation of ego-identity (Goffman,
1963). However these social/cultural/political categories are also insufficient. They do not
entirely place the individual anywhere in particular, apart from at an in-between strait of these

23 = “komm klar damit” = to cope with something
24 = “Vorteil” = advantage
‘ideal’ categories. Thus we have reached a point where normativity does not offer these individuals a ‘clear cut’ category into which to place themselves. Rather constructing this in-between position necessitates the articulation of constituting social norms towards framing the in-between that these individuals occupy (Wright, 2003) - a textured articulation of identity (Campt, 1993). Or, if we refer to Bhabha (1994) we are observing a border situation—we are observing the construction of identity from a marginalised space, but at the same time also seeing how established categories are being reformulated within and through said border spaces. Participants might rely on established social identity categories to articulate their own position within society. In doing so they are also reframing what these established categories entail by contesting and diffusing notions of inclusion and exclusion these categories might hold. Bhabha’s (1994) and Goffman’s (1963) persistence on identity formation in interaction becomes all the more concrete when we are looking at examples of participants who are at social/cultural junctures where belonging and not belonging are blurred- at junctures of dislocation. And this merely because in some way they try to articulate and do their identity and place themselves somewhere within society- and this very action demanding the reference to and consequent reshaping of established categories.

An interesting example within this theme is when a participant constructs her sides using music as a supporting metaphor towards explaining her embodiment of both sides and how she accommodates these.

(P4): “I think music is definitely a good way of understanding how complex it is to be a mixture you know. At least for me, that was the only way really. I liked rock music somehow, I don’t know where it came from- just like I like blue cheese. You just like these things...because you like these things, then you like these things...and then you find a way to have them both. And it’s hard to have two things that are completely different from each other on the one hand. But I think in music it’s easier, you know. Music was really the key of everything and for me to kind of combine what I am as a person. Because I am a combination, you are a combination of two completely different cultures. I mean these are two different ways of life and ideas and thought” (...) “I started to discover my white side more and more, because when you’re surrounded by white people, there is no way to stop listening to some of the punk bands and these things, then I started wearing Chucks as well...but then I was trying to mix it! I tried to mix hip hop with the punk scene. Because I felt like if I only chose one, I felt like it wouldn’t work for me. Because I like hip hop, but I also like rock music! I’m not going to lie! There’s nothing wrong with rock music! I enjoy it! I also listen to a lot of alternative music. But on the other hand I also listen to hip hop as well...so I was trying to mix it. Wearing Chucks, wearing R. earrings, wearing A.belt* and A. scarf**25, I was trying to find a middle way for both sides and that of course through music”

The complex position of being a ‘mixture’ and the process of harmonizing two ‘entirely different sides’ within this person became entrenched in the meaning attached to particular

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25 *brand names have been omitted
kinds of music. However this metaphor is also entrenched in similar category-attribute/stereotype delineation as national or cultural sides mentioned above. Hip hop being affiliated to her Black side and rock music being affiliated to her White side. The discovery of rock music being equated to the discovery of her White side. “Multiplicity and plurality without fragmentation” (Campt, 1993, p.117) and the incorporation of contradictory and conflicting identification into a ‘plural whole’ once again ring familiar in this section, that exemplifies Campt’s (1993) notion of textured identities. Mixing up clothing from brands affiliated to either ‘side’ and attributions therein made it yet another action towards outwardly underlining her self-ascribed social identity over imposed social identities. Hip hop, rock music, Chucks and so forth become symbols both of embodied sides, but also of the amalgamation of those sides by combining those symbols. These symbols not only underline the process of ego-identity formation, but also function towards influencing- maybe even facilitating a particular (display of) social identity (Goffman, 1963). The projected Self is intentionally wrapped in symbols that for herself signify her ego-identity and which too signal specific things to others who impose social identity in interaction. However from this section we cannot know in if these symbols are read in a similar manner as ‘meant’ by the participant. But we nevertheless have another example of the Self as a social product in the (re)arrangement of (social) symbols towards facilitating the emancipation from imposed identity categories, through an outward display of ego-identity through the medium of symbols. Possibly another point to be taken from this section is the manner in which the construction of sides, but also the construction of the Self as textured imply a change in the use of established social identity categories. ‘Contesting’ notions (Black/White, African/German) are used in a textured context. They are articulated as mutually constituting parts of a whole, thus also challenging the very assumption of these notions as contesting dualities. Rather German/African, Black/White become defined through hybridity as a result of marginalisation and dislocation requiring the change and adaption of identity categories. However the challenge remains, that these changes occur on the periphery of the majority culture, often causing confusion in interaction, where established social identity categories continue to define the norm. This section could also be read in the context of strategy, in that outer appearance becomes a tool towards facilitating identity construction. Strategies are introduced in the second empirical chapter, at which it remains at the discretion of the reader to return to the above quote.

6.4 Being mixed: how participants evaluate their in-between position

Carrying on with Campt’s (1993) textured identities, there are several instances when Campt’s (1993) concept comes into play across interviews. The theme ‘we mixed’, for example, marks instances in interviews when participants talked about themselves in terms of a textured
whole. In following sections I also use the word mixedness to refer to this theme. Of course, the use of dualities continues to play a role, but more so the advantages and disadvantages of being such a textured whole were salient. Advantages sometimes relating to being able to adapt easily to different geographical and social locations, being able to 'switch' in interaction and having a different perspective on things. In other words, whereas the previous section highlighted the affiliation of 'sides' to particular category attributes, stereotypes of symbolic meanings, this section looks at how being mixed is evaluated by participants.

*Chameleons of Identity: mixedness and easy adaption*

Despite the experience of having to navigate imposed social identities (Goffman, 1963), the interviews are permeated with a positive outlook regarding the advantages their appearance and resulting confusion for some interaction might bring with it. The degree to which assumptions based on visible difference interfere with interaction ("Obtrusiveness", Goffman, 1963) depends on the decoding capacity of the audience (Goffman, 1963), as well as the strategic wit of our participants. Given the positive tone of these interviews, it would seem that the management of strategy has been generally mastered over time, especially helped by the experience of 'difference' across different geographical and thus social/socio-political contexts. Thus in overall obtrusiveness of appearance remains an issue at times, but not insofar as it continuously hinders interaction.

The ability to adapt easily to one's environment, due to the constant exposure to geographical and social change that requires adaptive resilience here serves as an example.

(P8): "I think if there's anything, we can do is really adapt to our environment easily."

(P6): "...guess you know both by living in Europe and Africa, how like we've gotten used to living on both continents, accepting both realities where I mean...I guess we kind of get strong."

Participants express that their experience with 'both realities', with having lived in different setting provides them with the advantage of being able to adapt to new circumstances more easily. This is not merely related to geographical mobility, but by the exposure to different cultures, for lack of a better word, in their upbringing. Their social and cultural dislocation-their liminal position (Bhabha, 1994)- becomes their advantage, due to their capability of navigating between social/cultural boundaries.

The exposure to a wider variety of contextual circumstances also means the navigation between different social frames of normativity, making for an interesting array of experiences with regard to strategy and the interplay of 'normal' and 'difference'.

52
Switching between sides- playing with external identities

Closely linked to adaption is the aspect of switching. Switching can almost be understood as the capability of playing with roles of passing (see section 7.1). All but one participant have a bilingual upbringing, making language a powerful tool of so called switching, as participants can vary their presentation between (at least) two native tongues. At these junctures participants navigate and actively toy with the expectations of people around them, who might have categorised them as ‘foreign’, only to be faced with their linguistic capabilities that confusingly place them in a more ‘local box’. Switching is, so to say, the active use of one’s own knowledge/capabilities towards diffusing imposed expectations of others by actively evoking cues that confuse coding capabilities of others in a particular situation.

(P8): “A lot of instances- and we always do this for fun- we’re talking English and at some point we just switch and we see peoples’ reactions.”

Mixedness as perspective

Another advantage of being ‘mixed’, which was mentioned by all participants, is perspective. Perspective being related to having a better understanding of difference and thus different cultures and people, but also perspective in the sense of a shared group mentality or sentiment, familiar to people with dual parentage. This empathy for different perspectives also relates to Goffman’s (1963) notion of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ as mutually constituting perspectives in society. The experience of being ‘normal’ as well as ‘different’ is inherent in the narrations of participants. However Goffman (1963) argues that this experience is inherent in any person’s life, only that some are more aware of this than others. We cannot live up to every social norm or ideal that permeates the world we live in, so depending on where we stand, we are more normal in some aspects than others. Being ‘normal’ is too a matter of perspective, rather than some official measurement we adhere to. In the case of our participants, the relativity of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ is not necessarily something special or outstanding, but pretty much the norm of how things are. Which too is a point Goffman (1963) is trying to make. Their perspectives, so to say, entails this relativity of perspectives in society as described by Goffman (1963).

The participants describe their perspective as an advantage, something enriching to their Selves and which it adds to their repertoire of interacting with their environments. This perspective is often times also described as something unique- something that others could not really understand. Something people who ‘are one thing or grew up in one place’ cannot quite understand in the same manner.

(P2): “It think definitely that the dual background definitely makes a difference, because you’ve seen a lot of different things, also from a different perspective”
(P4): “It’s very different to being one thing or to growing up in one place. And I think I’m actually really blessed by that. Because I had an opportunity to see things from two ways...from two Blickwinkel, from two worlds - completely different worlds. And I feel like through that I’m given a huge advantage towards other people. It gives me the advantage, I can be more open. Towards people from other places and toward new and different things. I feel like I have the advantage of not being so judgmental when it comes to many things. And being open to different cultures - to different people. Mostly to different people.”

(P6): “I think we’re like our own little thing. I think we’re like an own. Because if you have a group of mixtures, there’s Denglish that’s the number one thing, there’s a certain way of speaking and also a completely different mentality between people who are mixed - for me personally.”

(P5): “But I think that my parents met and made me and coming from different cultures...I always saw it as very enriching”

Can we link this back to the section on ‘sides’, in the sense that it is these ‘sides’ that enable or grant this different perspective? A perspective granted, so to say, by the particular social location held by individuals of ‘dual backgrounds’, of ‘two ways’, ‘two Blickwinkel’, ‘two worlds’, ‘mixtures’, ‘different cultures’, which places them outside of the norm of both embodied ‘sides’ (Müller, 2011; Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003) and thus in an in-between position that requires its own repertoire derived from the experience of social and cultural dislocation (Asante, 2009), but also the experience of the relativity of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ (Goffman, 1963). In a way Campt’s (1993) textured identities becomes a social location of its own, as these not only combining (ambivalent) categories, but also require a different perspective from whence to build a repertoire for interaction. A perspective that entails the experience of ‘normal perspective’ and ‘deviant perspective’, as described by Goffman (1963), as something usual and everyday.

**Taxonomies of mixedness**

Despite the in-group feeling maintained throughout most interviews, there is a taxonomy of inclusion that occurs in two interviews. Taxonomy in the sense that the participants do feel an overall affiliation with people with similar backgrounds, but perceive a difference within the group, derived from differences in experience and resulting attitudes towards their Self. One interview in particular pointed at the use of taxonomies by referring to a person of mixed background as an Oreo: “Black on the outside, White on the inside”. This person is seen as similar only by appearance, but “White” on the inside. Her character is equated to the category of ‘White’, due to her lack of experience with both parental cultural/linguistic sides. Even

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26 “Blickwinkel” = perspectives / views
27 “Denglish” = language mix of English and German
though the participant mentions sharing a social position of being different with said “Oreo”, there is also mention of a lack of grasping the participant’s position entirely, due to a more one-sided experience of parental heritage. 28

Mixedness as struggle: Lucky, yet unlucky

(P6): “We’re so lucky, if we think about it. But also, on the other hand, we’re so unlucky, because we’ll never have the feeling of really belonging, because we don’t. I think it’s also a positive thing somehow, but also it’s a lonely state. For me for a very long time it was a lonely state.”

This segment on ‘being mixed’ stood out in that it entails the struggle Wright (2003) and Campt (1993) talk about in their publications. There remains a feeling of struggle between embodied sides- a feeling of not really belonging. There is the knowledge of two embodied ‘sides’, however sides that continuously place the individual outside of the social norm and into a place of deviation. Bluntly put, the individual holds no place within ‘normal’, despite constructing and understanding themselves as entailing ‘two normals’. This above quote articulates dislocation and exemplifies the complexity of dislocation as an internal struggle, but also something, that entails advantages.

In the following example the struggle seem to be in the entailment of two ‘sides’ that are appreciated and give the participant a perspective “that might not be possible for other people”, but there is also the acknowledgement that she is embedded socially and culturally in only one of her ‘embodied sides’. She is an Other-from-Within (Wright, 2003), but often understood as an Other-from-Without (Wright, 2003), which is something that has permeated her experiences and is deeply embedded in her interaction repertoire. The participants accepts the position of ‘German’, but is also aware, that she represents more to others as well as herself.

(P7): “I mean I don’t see the point in saying that I’m not German. I see myself as German as anything else. I mean I’m not neglecting that I also have a *AfricanCountry* family, I’m really proud of it and I appreciate it. And I think also it makes me capable of looking at things in a different perspective that might not be possible for other people so I appreciate this a lot, but I mean, I myself would find it ridiculous to pretend I’m *AfricanCountry*. Because I never lived there, I don’t speak any indigenous language, I was there to visit my family and that’s it. I mean, how can I say I’m from there, I’m not from there. I mean, I lived 23 years in Germany, half of my family is German.”

The above quotes also point at the ambiguity experienced in dislocation. Dislocation might at times be an advantage and something unique to the position held by participants, however it is also experienced as a struggle.

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28 At this juncture the quote has been withheld, so as not to point at the participant
Gender and exoticism

Two outstanding examples relate to the intersection of gender and skin colour, that are described as entailing different meanings across participants. In one case, being female and ‘mixed’ invokes imposition of ‘exotic’ and sometimes sexualised categories. This applying not only to the German, but also to the African context.

(P7): "They see what they want to see. They don’t see what I actually am. For the longest time at my university everybody was saying I am Brazilian. They just decide and then you’re that to them. And somebody asks ‘hey you’re Brazilian’ and I’m like ‘I’m German/Kenyan’. And they’re like ‘oh really’. Because they want to have these exciting things. Especially guys always think Brazilian women are like uuuuuuh, you know, they’re so exciting. This whole thing of being exotic in this country is just nervig\(^\text{29}\) - it’s so annoying."

(P5): "Depending on the environments, like if you go to reggae festivals or if you go to hip hop clubs or something, you see you have a certain value in there, you know. There are like five black guys in there and five mixed girls and three black girls and they have a value there... because this is culture of the colour- people are attracted to it. And you know everybody is going to hit on you. It’s going to be crazy for you if you’re mixed. But if you would go to an electro party, you know, you’d just be invisible."

Gender in this case becomes a stigma in the sense that it is attributed with sexualised notions, or notions of exoticism. However the salience of gender depends on the context, it depends on the crowd decoding it. In some cases, the social ‘value’ or skin colour intersecting with gender renders the imposition of certain attributes, whereas in other cases it is rendered unseen.

In another case the participant wonders if being female and looking ‘fremdländisch\(^\text{30}\)’ might be somewhat easier than being male and fremdländisch, due to the images evoked by a male being of a somewhat more threatening nature than that of a female.

(P3): ‘I think sometimes one is- I have the feeling that when someone looks more fremdländisch and is a man, then people might at times be afraid of that person. They might think ‘he might pose a threat’ or ‘maybe he wants to do something to be, maybe he wants to pillage something’ or something of the sort. I don’t know. But I mean, I am really slight, I have a round face, I look harmless. And I guess sometimes people render judgement with a certain image in mind. One might also have certain expectations...’"

This passage in particular would beg more research on the intersection of gender and skin colour in different social contexts (with heed for differences between genders) among Afro-Germans across Europe and elsewhere today. Ethnicity, sexuality and exoticism are not novel within sociology. Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks being only two examples of authors who critically discuss forms of sexual objectification of racialized women, historically embedded in..."
race and colonial theories and which continue to circulate within society via, for example, advertisements (see, “An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives”, 2005, Abbott et. al.). Interestingly this also reminds of Wright’s (2003) discussion on the African Other as the necessary antithesis to the White European. This line of Othering being underlined by the (re)production of (colonial/racialized) stereotypes and images that perpetuate this relationship, which Asante (2009) discusses as well.

6.5 Momentary escapes from skin colour: feeling normal and invisible

One interesting theme that reoccurred in some interviews was invisibility and the comfort of invisibility. Feeling normal and feeling invisible have been placed under the same theme within this thesis, because participants frame both these instances in a similar manner: as being in a social, cultural and geographical space that allows them to fade into the crowd and places them within a context where either difference is the norm or they are placed within the social norm. In other words, a space where individuals do not feel dislocated. This feeling of invisibility or feeling normal is mentioned in the context of being in big, multicultural cities, in familiar social circles (in one case institutions of higher education) or particular settings within which skin colour, for example, is an irrelevant symbol. Invisibility seems to provide a comfort and as a possibility to put down one’s guard- to ignore being aware of the visibility one is usually conscious about. Invisibility seems to give the participants a sense of comfort and confidence, as interaction- or even the expectancy of interaction- no longer holds the necessity to prepare for defence of face (Goffman, 1967), nor entail the constant reminder of being dislocated from culture, society and history.

(P7): “Whereas in Germany sometimes I go on the street and people look at me still. Whereas here, no one gives a shit about me (laughter). I’m not like something people are interested to stare at. I really enjoy this kind of being a normal person on the street. No one pays attention to your because of your skin colour or your hair.” (...) “because it really makes me genuinely happy. It’s one of the first times in your life when you’re not when you can be normal. No one says ‘oh my god, you’re so different, your Black, your skin is different, and your hair is different”(...)” So it’s really free. Then you feel like you can be just- a really normal individual, focus on our character, on your things that you want to achieve. You can just concentrate on yourself and now don’t have to defend yourself for the way you look like or- your skin colour and have to fight all the time. So it’s a comfort.”

Being invisible or feeling normal seems possible only in certain contexts, in which the participants feel like they are just one of many different people and are thus not some exotic beacon in a crowd. In contexts where difference, so to say, pervades the norm. Being able to not think about this difference is felt as relief. Surely every person is self-conscious about some
aspect of themselves in everyday life that they at least perceive as falling short of (Goffman, 1963). Be it the issue of body image, career choice, gender, religion or other signifiers that symbolise particular deviations to social norms, everyone at some juncture falls short of these apparent normative frameworks (Goffman, 1963). However everyone at some juncture also experiences being within the social norm (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore the above examples remind us of the mutual constitution of normal and deviant and how they perpetuate or sustain each other. Social norms perpetuate both conforming as well as deviation (Goffman, 1963).

One interview in particular sticks out from the rest. The participant is entirely immersed in one ‘side’ and despite expressing the knowledge that they do not entirely fall into the ‘ideal’ or ‘norm’ of that side, this participant nevertheless identifies entirely with that side. In this case the participant feels entirely normal, despite sometimes encountered impositions of difference in interaction. The participant describes ego-identity as well as actual social identity almost entirely through one ‘side’, deflecting any problematic instance with visibly not fitting the norm as a hindrance or obstacle in interaction. This interview in particular stands out, because visual difference is mentioned, but at not juncture problematized or placed within a narration of struggle, as was more evident in other interviews.

Finally, the only time invisibility was mentioned in a negative context was when a participant was discussing an acquaintance of German/African parentage. This acquaintance continuously passes as being German, but never as being African. The experience of being accepted into the German norm however, was something this person resisted, because she sees herself as both, as African and German. She insisted on being visible- being a part of both ‘sides’. In this case the participant described this acquaintance as struggling with feeling outside of the norm, but being frustrated with continuously being recognised as being White and German. Passing is usually understood as an active engagement on the part of participants (Goffman, 1963), however in the case of the acquaintance, passing seems more involuntary and is resisted (Passing will be discussed in the second empirical chapter on strategies). Despite this being a recollection of someone else’s story, the participant nevertheless chose to include this within their narration towards underlining the complexity of visibility and its meanings as well as the complexities of notions of belonging. The same participants goes on to explain that yes, feeling normal and invisible can be comforting, but being questioned and having to justify oneself also means that others see you and recognise you, which too can be seen as a comfort.32 This comfort mainly being the feeling of people noticing you in some way.

This chapter gives an overview of the richness of themes that emerge when analysing the manner in which participants go about constructing their identities in interviews. What

32 the quote has been omitted on request of the participant in question
becomes especially evident throughout this chapter is the interplay of external and internal factors in the formulation of constructions of Self for participants. The symbolic reading of skin colour is perceived as still holding a central role as a cue in the imposition of categories by others onto participants. A cue, which takes on a variety of forms across different localised contexts. This also accounting for the variety of normative categories through which participants construct textured identities. There seems a lack of an overarching category across all participants that would in some way encapsulate their experience as a whole- as a group. Participants use ‘sides’ to articulate their textured identities, sometimes even pointing out the contradiction of these sides that they harmonise into their Self-constructions and challenge by rearticulating them into textured definitions. The articulation of liminal positions, so to say, borrows from bordering normative categories, but in so doing also redefines these normative categories through their incorporation in the definition of liminal positions. Black and White, German and African are not understood as antipodes, but as mutually constituting sides of a whole, introducing a hybridity to these categories that challenge imposed assumptions of being one or the other. Dislocation is the rule and not the exception and something that continuously changes across different social settings that participants find themselves in. However it seems that (social and cultural) dislocation is perceived both as a struggle as well as an advantage. A struggle in the sense of sometimes not feeling like one belongs anywhere in particular, and an advantage in the sense that disseminated readings of participants’ identities gives leeway for shifting and improvising identity within and across normative categories. This leeway is also reflected in differing self-ascriptions of identities that change according to context and are often adapted to learnings made within particular contexts. This experience is interpreted as positive and unique. This leeway links to the following chapter on strategies and how participant negotiate between imposed and self-ascribed identities in everyday interaction.
7. Empirical Chapter 2
Strategizing between external and internal identities: passing, challenging expectancies, controlling information and humour

One rubric of negotiating identity has here been placed under the heading 'strategies'. With negotiating I mean the manner in which participants describe mediating imposed social identities and their ego-identities or actual social identities in interaction. How do individuals try to negotiate the gap between virtual social identity and actual social identity? How do individuals tackle dislocation in interactions?

7.1 Passing

Visually based expectancies and individual strategy

Tißberger (2005) as well as Goffman (1963) and Müller (2011) discuss the inescapability of visible difference. "Unlike a uniform or group affiliation, skin color cannot be donned or doffed as the situation may demand" (Gergen, 1967). Skin colour is ineluctable, but must not be understood as signalling the same notions across contexts. Skin colour in a symbolic sense carries different notions embedded in different historical, political, cultural, ideological and social contexts. Having brown skin in the US evokes different assumptions from having brown skin in South Africa. This must be kept in mind also for other physical, social and personal traits that evoke different assumptions in different contexts and are thus liable to varying interpretations (of normalcy or deviance) (Goffman, 1963, p.402).

The visual expectancy of others is something mentioned by almost all participants of this study. What does one's appearance signal to others? Participants discuss passing as nationals from all sorts of places, ranging from Brazil to Bali, Italy, Thailand, Indonesia, France, Bogota and so forth, but rarely as the 'mixture' that they identify as. At times imposed identities are felt to take over participants' identities in interactions due to the unwillingness of other actors to accept something other than what their assumptions dictate. At other times imposed national identity categories are simply enacted by participants, in order to avoid otherwise having to justify themselves. However more often, participants actively participate or shape their social identity in an interaction- be this in the sense of correcting another actor or actively assuming a certain role, either for the fun of it, to fit in, or to avoid the process of having to be answerable to their 'deviance from the norm'. This goes for imposed political/social/cultural identities alike. In a manner, this is what Goffman (1963) calls passing. For Goffman (1963) passing is an active action and not one passively assumed. For our case, this can be either through the adoption of a particular accent, switching to a local language or dialect or simply proving one's embedding in a language or culture, eliminating the necessity (or almost embarrassing the potential question) of a justification. The goal of passing can be said to actively assert and place
oneself within a social norm successfully. Goffman (1963) underlines the importance of the success in passing. A failed attempt at passing has the consequence of losing face and thus, passing will have been unsuccessful. If I assume a Bavarian accent in order to pass as a Bavarian, my passing relies on others reading this accent accordingly and thus validating my assumed role. If however, my accent is exposed as fake, becomes questionable and invalidated, I lose face- my attempt at passing has failed and becomes a source of embarrassment.

(P5): Like sometimes I’m the German, sometimes I’m the foreigner, in my village next to B*. They would like to ask me where I’m from and stuff. But I respond so German- like so determined and I speak better German than them and at that moment it’s like ‘pffft’…"

Passing should not be understood as a covering up of actual social identity out of shame. Examples from the interviews make passing more of a strategic choice, rather than a choice borne out of embarrassment for one self. This being the main difference to Goffman’s (1963) discussion on passing, where passing is discussed more in the context of covering up features, group membership or particular identities that the individuals deems undesirable or embarrassing. A stigma, that the individual him- or herself also perceives as a hindrance to being ’normal’. Passing in our case becomes a strategy towards self-determining one’s position in an interaction. Participants display a reflexivity with regard to how aspects of their person are perceived by others, what those perceptions mean to them and how they perceive themselves. Other than described by Goffman (1963), participants do not perceive of their background or appearance as a stigma, nor is this stigma the constant focus on their existence. As has and becomes more apparent, participants often self-determine the direction interaction will take with regard to imposed identity categories. They are not merely reacting to interaction, but also create and direct interaction. Information control is not merely reactionary, but at times directed by participants in interaction. This too being a major difference to Goffman’s (1963) description of stigma and strategy (Riessman, 2000). This could furthermore be seen as intentionally challenging (foreseen) obtrusiveness that might occur. Passing and visual expectancy as well as control of information are further discussed in the section on strategy.

*Woher kommst du wirklich?* Justifying visual deviance

Passing requires other interacting entities to accept such passing, which is not always the case. Participants’ appearance somehow disrupts normative assumptions and a challenge of those assumptions (virtual social identity) begs an explanation as to why these otherwise effective assumptions might be false. Gergen (1967) puts it as follows: “He must discriminate between reactions to his skin color as opposed to those relevant to him as a person. He cannot be certain,
in effect, whether a warm smile or a cold remark is a reaction to his racial category or to his more individual personage.” (p. 402)

(P6): “oh you’re German? It’s kind of like maybe they thought all Germans are white and dunno, maybe blonde, blue eyed or something (laughter). But maybe, because they kind of can’t imagine the idea of mixed race people being German or something.”

Justifying oneself is a reoccurring theme throughout interviews and described by most participants as a routine experience. To justify, in this case, relates to the notion of having to ‘prove’ one’s face in interaction. It relates to how participants represent themselves in order to prove their face in a situation- especially when this face is questioned, threatened or taken for granted under a certain rubric of assumptions. Hence justifying oneself has been arranged under strategies, as it presents a juncture within interaction described by participants, where the range of possibilities of passing become available to participants. This strategy also gives an insight into identity construction: It points at the versatility of the ‘in between position’, but also at the vulnerability of this versatility, due to its dependence on the comprehension of the participants’ face during interaction by others- which, as we have seen- is not always given. Furthermore the practice of justifying oneself can be seen as yet another example of the ambiguity of dislocation: on the one hand justifying oneself points at the social and cultural dislocation of participants in narratives of ‘normalcy’, while on the other dislocation from said narratives opens up strategic loopholes. As far as identity construction is concerned, justifying oneself is an action throughout interviews that calls for a calibration of the context and proving one’s face therein. One could also say that it calls for a calibration of virtual social identity, actual social identity and the context this creates for the salience of outer appearance. It requires the participants to contextualise themselves in accordance with the position they are trying to place themselves into in interaction (and in accordance with the possibilities offered by interacting others and their assumptions).

The ‘classical’ question of “Woher kommst du wirklich?” or “Where are you really from?” is one such juncture in interaction that calls for justification. Reactions varied between frustration, boredom from having to reply in a rehearsed manner over and over again, to openness, to feeling ‘seen’ and recognised, to discomfort. The questions- even described as a ‘classic’ by one participant- begs the justification of an introduction that has already been made. It questions the category already chosen by the participant in interaction and begs for the participant to more clearly categorise him or herself- maybe even in order to fit the web of constructions of the other actor(s). Most participants show empathy with this reaction, realising that their appearance evokes this question and that they would likely ask someone else a similar question. However frustration is mentioned in the context of this question being asked in a more ‘rude’ and obtrusive context. Humour, sarcasm or openness/empathy and
curiosity seem to be standard reactions to this question. Humour and sarcasm are picked up under section 7.3. However every participant mentioned the dependency of reaction on the context and person—but more importantly the answer provided, meaning the identity provided in a reply, depends on the context and person being asked. Identity becomes constructed around the situation at hand and the emotional evaluation made by the participant with said situation. Participants have to reassess an interaction that calls into question their already assumed identity and renegotiate their face. Once again we come back to Goffman’s (1963) basic notion of identity as embedded in interaction.

Playing with social assumptions

As mentioned, passing as a strategy is discussed by participants, with this example standing out in particular. In this case the entire family is involved in creating a particular image of themselves, by strategically placing one of them onto the interaction stage. That one being the father, who falls within social norms and is thus less prone to assumptive attribution by others, which might be the case if the mother were to be placed onto the stage. The reflexive awareness of imposed social identity (probably embedded in a repertoire of learning based on several experiences, or simply assumptions), makes for a knowledge of social decoding capabilities in this context that the participants’ family has strategized to their advantage. This again, guiding preparation for interaction in a manner that wittily takes advantage of social norms and decoding repertoire towards producing a particular image of the family.

(P5): “for example for teachers on these Elternabende33 or something, (...) my mother would say 'I'm not coming with you, your Dad is coming, because I don't want to show that you have an African mother. They'll think you are more stupid then'. So we would even think strategically like that, you know. My father would be like 'huh?' (...) Yea, you have to convince them that you're German.”

Creating and adapting symbols and cues: Changing outer appearance and dialect

One interesting strategy mentioned only by two participants is the change of outer appearance in order to fit in more with their surroundings—in this case German surroundings. This might entail the preference of particular clothing brands of straightening of hair—making differences in appearance to the norm minimal and trying not to stand out more than they already do.

(P4): “You have to get used to it, you're the one who is not involved in all the cool things and all the happenings of the school. And who wants to be alienated?”

33“Elternabende” = evenings at schools when parents meet teachers, mostly receiving feedback on their child(ren)’s progress
A less intentional form of adaption is mentioned only once is the acquisition of a local dialect. This surprised not only the subject, but also interacting actors, who would not associate her appearance to her strong local dialect.

7.2 Controlling information

(P2): “If you underestimate your opponent you might go in very over confident and cocky and then you get your ass handed to you, sorry for my language, it’s the same way in a conversation. If I start a conversation with a friend and somebody else joins us and they look at me and they’ve already put into their mind ‘ok this is this kinda guy’ and everything, then they will already underestimate me and I might surprise them, you know, and it might even lead to something embarrassing.”

This section links back to control of information in interaction where imposed expectancies of others give participants the upper hand or at least some space to strategize. Control of information relates to the notion of being able to strategize imposed identities, due to other actors not having all the information on one’s biography and history. In other words: categorisation might be a handy tool in everyday interaction, but it neglects the fact that we at times do not have full knowledge of the other’s biography. Making assumptive categorisation of others at sometimes erroneous due to a gap in the information available to us and giving the other actor the upper hand due to the information available to him/her (Goffman, 1963; Gergen, 1967). In the first quote, the participant makes use of the paternal side as leverage towards validating a particular role in interaction. In the second quote, the participants’ embedding in local humour validates belonging in this interaction. Passing in interaction relies on information control, whereas information control also varies from context and the possibilities therein available to the participant (Goffman, 1963; Gergen, 1967). In another interview the participant mentions not being entirely fluent in Swahili, which in this case, might have disrupted the role of ‘belonging’, had the other actor not rested their case, thus avoiding a loss of face at the cost of the participant. Thus passing and the control of information in interaction are strategies that must be balanced and well calculated, maybe even practiced and tested by participants. A process that might even involve the experience of errors at the cost of the individual’s face (Goffman, 1963).

(P2): “Of course, in a shop or a market where there is bargaining they will try to get a better price out of you, but once you explain to them that you’re not a tourist here and that you’ve lived here all your life and your dad’s from here then they’ll understand and they’ll obviously come back to a reasonable agreement.”

(P5): “But for me in Cape Verde, they will approach me and I will directly make a Cape Verdean joke or something, they will directly see they can’t mess with me with the prices or something. They know ‘ok, she knows it’.”
Outwitting assumptiveness: knowledge as power

Knowledge as an example of information control was mentioned during two interviews. By proving oneself knowledgeable beyond the assumptions of a virtual social identity and the expectations therein entailed, the participants are able to challenge presumptuous categorisation. In the first case even proving the assumption of ‘belonging and thus knowledgeable’ as downright wrong.

(P6): “Not all the Africans themselves know about African geography. I mean, couple of times- this is where I blow my vuvuzela, show arrogance and pride- a couple of times at university we had to do- I took this class called African international relations. It was a bit pan-African blabla...but a couple of times you had these random quizzes where you had to write down all the countries on the map of Africa. I used to get like 99 percent on that test, because I like geography, you know. But then I see like quite a few guys from Nigeria or even Kenya wouldn’t know where some of the countries are in Africa.”

(P2): “I dunno, he might say, he might refer to something with Africa, or I don’t know...or a job or something and I can talk to him in a very sophisticated English or German for that matter and explain to him that it’s actually something completely different than what he thinks it is...”

7.3 (En)Countering discrimination in interaction

(P8): “…it comes back to this thing of culture. How do you approach it? What is it that you actually want from this situation? If you want hostility, you can treat it as hostile. But if you want a resolution, or you want to educate other people about it then you can engage them differently. So I think it really comes down to what you chose to make a situation. (…) I think it is also a learning curve. It’s not always like ‘hey let me think through it first’. You might react with anger of frustration or disappointment or whatever, but I think all in all you have the ability to respond to a situation and determine the outcome- how you want it to be.”

At least at one juncture during the interview interviewees were either invited to speak about discrimination or brought this point up independently. Discrimination, presents an interesting juncture of interaction breakage, because it represents a threat to an actor’s face, but can also entail a physical threat to the actor. Moments of discrimination can also be read as moments where ascribed statuses become challenged, as the individual struggles to eject themselves from an ascribed status (Allport, 1954). Taking Goffman (1967) into account, discrimination in interaction interrupts the show. The participant’s face (underlined by their line: their positive self-image, projected in interaction) is challenged or threatened, breaking the otherwise versed ritual of interaction. The script is interrupted and begs improvisation if it is to continue and the actor regain his or her confidence/face. Notable at this point is also that Goffman (1967) does not merely describe the maintenance of face as an individual project, but something that is inherent in interaction. Hence the metaphor of a ‘show’, as participants in interaction subscribe to a certain set of rules and behaviour, so as to maintain not only their own face, but also allow
others to maintain their face. Narrations varied with regard to ‘discrimination stories’, ranging from being denied entrance to clubs, to being physically and verbally abused as well as being confronted with less overt forms of discrimination. Likewise reactions differed from ‘ignoring what had happened’, to ‘attempting to inform the public’, to ‘confronting the offender’, to ‘physically engaging the offender’ and most commonly warding the offense off with humour-this also relating back to the advantages of an in-between position and the control of information, which becomes a tool at this point. Physically engaging the offender was mentioned only once as having occurred, with the participants also expressing regret to such a reaction, as it granted neither satisfaction nor closure nor clarity, but rather made the participants feel like his/her face had been rendered incredulous. With two exceptions, participants also describe a learning curve in their reactionary repertoire. In all cases humour stands out as the strategy that grants participants the most satisfaction in a wrapped up interaction. Humour seems to not merely challenge other actors in an interaction, but also allows to soften the blow to a person's face, without having to disrupt interaction. Interestingly humour is also mentioned by Goffman (1963) as a strategy towards approaching stigmatisation.

**Confronting the culprit**

Confronting a person in interaction is only mentioned once during the interviews. In this case the participant described a situation in which she attempts to explain the wrongdoing to face to the other actor. However the success of this strategy, according to the participants, also varies. Foremost the ability of the Other to recognise a wrongdoing differs from one situation to another (Goffman, 1963). In one case, for example, the participant was reprimanded for confronting an actor, who acclaimed immunity to being able to discriminate at all, since he ‘had a Black friend’- this making it, to him, somehow impossible for him to be classified as a racist. The attempt to save face can fail simply due to no wrongdoing being detected by the ‘culprit’, making a reconciliation of interaction either impossible or a one-sided affair (in favour of the ‘blind offender’, Goffman, 1963). Secondly, a problem rests in the possibilities a context provides and inhowfar the participant can engage other people in a defence of face without being stamped as ‘oversensitive’ or herself ‘obtrusive’. This point in particular is interesting, in that it highlights a limitation to strategies of saving face. Direct confrontation in an attempt to save face can carry the consequence of oneself becoming at fault for interrupting the show- for breaking interaction. This, of course, relies on a situation where wrongdoing is not recognised, leaving the participant somewhat at odds with the overall script the others are adhering to. Their possibilities to save face are hindered, because such an attempt would render them ‘oversensitive’ and obtrusive to interaction. This oversensitivity was mentioned across several
interviews, however only in the German context. It becomes interesting to consider this feature in the context of historical amnesia and social muteness with regard to issues of colour and discrimination in Germany.

“Humour is the best way” (P5)

Throughout the interviews humour as a strategy remained central. Even May Ayim, one of the forerunners of the Afro-German movement, humour was vital to coping with her ambiguous situation in Germany (Gerlind, 2012). Humour seems to provide a manner in which to deal with hurtful or annoyingly ‘silly’ statements directed at individuals’ face in interaction and allows for a reaction that does not entirely break interaction, but also does not require a retraction and acceptance of insult.

(P1): “oh my goodness, you went to school in Africa, do you have clothes there?"- and I was like ’yea, I just ran around with my banana skirt or ’I just taught myself German- I’m just intelligent like that.” (laughter)

(P6): “I had a couple of Germans who asked me if I get offended if they call me Neger. I’m just like really? (laughter) I was like ’have you guys ever seen a kid from the Sudan or something (laughter)”

However humour is not merely a strategy within the immediate context of interaction, but also in the processing of past events. Seeing as participants are relating past events throughout the interviews, main insight we are getting is how past events become contextualised as ‘funny’ in the recollection of stories. As such, we might not have in insight into the actual moment of interaction (even though some participants also describe the discrepancy of feelings then and now, see P8 below), but we get to see how humour becomes a construction in recollection, once again bringing us to Martin (2010) and his discussion on recollection as a set of selective connections between concepts that we rehearse and adapt to the moment of narration. It also reminds us of Ross (2007) and his discussion of psychocultural dramas as configurations of criteria from particular events towards creating a coherent picture of ‘what happened’ (from the perspective of the individual/group), that does not necessarily need to be ‘truthful’, but sufficiently accurate for the individual. Could we thus see humour as a defensive mechanism of ego-identity of sorts, as it deflates danger and threat and the loss of control into something more fathomable and interpretable for the participant? Another interpretation of humour could be that it serves as a method to reassert power in a situation. Rather than lose face, participants take control of a situation by framing it in a manner than renders the offender insecure, as the attempted attack on face is rendered powerless- a mere joke at the cost of the offender, whose own face thus becomes questionable. It must be noted by the reader that in no

34 see FLANC Newsletter, Spring 2012: May Ayim’s Legacy in World Language Study
way is this segment deflating the seriousness of discrimination. As mentioned, we are simply
gaining an insight into how discrimination has become narrated by participants and
contextualised. Humour herein being a strategy towards handling discrimination, rather than
painting it harmless or insignificant.

(P4): “Do you know when you are in trouble in Germany?...When you realise the NPD
posters are hanging on eye level and nobody has made the effort of ripping them down”
(laughter)

Offensive, hurtful experiences become framed as learnings and wrapped into a ‘funny’
narrative, despite the seriousness of a situation. It is almost as if humour helps alleviate or ease
the discomfort that comes with interactions that threaten face. It seems to help sort
experiences into more ‘productive’ frames of reference for future interaction. It thus becomes
somewhat confusing as to how to categorise humour in Goffman’s (1967) framework at least,
because it can be said to be both defensive as well as protective.

Humour as a strategy is sometimes tied to control of information, as discussed above. The
visual expectancy of others towards the participants (not that participants deny having
assumptions of others), can lead to interactions that too are strategically tackled with humour.

(P8): “One time I was with my cousin and we were on the bus and this woman, she started
pissed off like ‘diese Ausländer’ blablabla’. And so for us we were just sitting in the back
talking and when the bus stopped, we just walked by and said in German ‘have a good
day’. She just kind of stared at us like ‘oops’ (laughter).”

In some cases a ‘learning curve’ is mentioned as resulting in humour as the best way to handle
uncomfortable situations, or more precisely- situations in which communication breaks down
due to the participant’s face being questioned or threatened, thus making it necessary for the
participant to improvise ways to save face. This learning curve usually entailing empathy based
on a reflexive approach to the behaviour of others.

(P5): “The best is to just joke around it. And see that you are higher than that. It’s just like
the entrance point. But I mean, it’s just natural. I also try to not see what the other looks
like or something, but it’s natural to have a certain idea of someone, then you get proof...”

(P8) “it’s not really a matter of responding how they want you to, but maybe
understanding why they’re going through that or...you know? ...It’s a learning curve. But
of course over time you learn how to deal with it. Nowadays you just laugh it off. But
maybe back in the day you might be more likely to respond irrationally or stupid or do or
say something that’s not really acceptable.”

35 = “these foreigners”
Don't touch my hair!

One outstanding example that was brought up is hair. In other words, stereotyping that is felt to be offensive and discriminate against the person in this case. I have chosen this example, due to the elaboration on the difficulty of reacting to something felt to be a threat to face. The participant describes her perspective as well as the development of her reactions and strategies over time and her interpretation of others' perspectives. Over time the reactions seem to become more strategic, moving from anger, to attempts to explain the situation and finally a challenge of normative thinking of other actors in interaction.

Hair presents an example that is not merely a verbal break down in interaction, but also a physical encroachment on the participant. A gesture that is interpreted as alright by one actor and is an encroachment on physical space and an offense to the other. Especially under the assumption that such an encroachment is justified due to the ‘special nature’ of the participant’s hair- making this gesture all the more questionable, if underlined by an assumption that otherwise normal repertoires of acting towards others (i.e.: not touching people’s hair at random) does not apply to the participant! The act of touching a person’s hair is here understood as not only a trespass of personal space, but also as an act symbolising the placement of the participant outside of the norm, by declaring her ‘special’- by exoticising her. The participant is placed outside of the social norm, which to the ‘culprit’ seems to justify different standards of treatment (Goffman, 1963; Gergen, 1967). It becomes an act that underlines her as an Other and not part of the norm, despite her self-placement within each one and both at the same time (a textured whole). More so, this act also points at a lack of awareness within ‘normal’ or the very relativity of ‘normal’. We are looking at an interesting border situation (Bhabha, 1994), that entails a physical encroachment that in and of itself relies on there being an assumption of ‘normal’ and ‘other/different’- a delineation which even has implications for physical interaction with the participant.

(P7): “I think like especially for girls, when you’re kind of mixed or even- when you don’t have a mixed background, but when you’re Black or whatever, I think the first thing people pay attention to is your hair. So the children were always like more or less fascinated- not fascinated by my hair, but some of them started to think that my hair was somehow weird, then they always wanted to touch my hair, because it’s so fluffy, so this was the first thing that really annoyed me.”(…)

“when I was really young, I just got angry, I think. So when I was in school of whatever I was just really annoyed by it. Then when I got older, like 12 or 13 it was like ‘what do you think, that I’m a poodle and you can just touch my hair’. (laughter) I mean I started to explain it better. Then I was like ‘I’m also not asking you to touch your spaghetti hair’ or whatever. So I tried to find words to explain that the other hair could be strange for me as well, but I’m not exoticising it in the same way as well, I’m not asking people to touch their hair because it’s different from mine, and that this is kind of offensive. So the older I got the better rhetoric I had to explain it. But when I was young, I used to get really angry (laughter) didn’t want people to touch me, because I was super
annoyed by it. But then the older I got, the better I could explain it, I think. And I mean now I’m just like- I just tell people it’s really rude to ask someone to touch your hair – most of the time people who ask you they don’t know you at all or don’t know you really well- so it’s even more offensive. It’s not your friends who ask you can I touch your hair or I dunno, you cuddle with your friends and they touch your hair or your boyfriend or whatever. Someone you don’t know at all. And they start to ask you to touch you in a really personal way. So it’s something... yea. It’s like they attack you in a personal space. But then it’s really hard to explain to people you don’t know why it’s really offensive. If you explain it to your friends, they kind of have a feeling for it, and they can understand why it’s annoying. But sometimes people ask when you explain it to them ‘but yea, I’m not touching your hair’ and they say ‘yea, but your hair is special’. (laughter) You know what I mean? Because they go like ‘you’re hair is special, my hair is not special. I just have normal hair’, it’s like ‘yea, my hair is also normal’, but you know, so... (laughter). It’s just hard to explain it to a certain group sometimes, to explain where the issue is, because they’ve never thought about it, I think. Very ignorant I think, but yea...”

This chapter has summarised the strategies the emerged from the interviews. This has shown how participants navigate between imposed and self-ascribed identities in interaction. Participants exist in a variety of liminal positions across different social and geographical contexts. This mostly occurring in the imposition of certain categories onto participants derived from the reading of their skin colour. Visually based assumptions and expectancies that are imposed onto individuals are seen as sometimes obtrusive to interaction, but at other times as strategic loopholes that allow participants to assert and mould their position in interaction. The imposition of assumptions without knowledge of personal identity gives participants leeway in positioning themselves and maintaining face in interactions where others might have too quickly placed participants into a particular box. However this section also highlights instances of failed interaction- where the maintenance of face becomes difficult in the light of others not perceiving any harm having occurred to participants’ face. ‘Hair’ exemplifying the extent of such failed interaction through a physical encroachment on the person. Humour stands out as a strategy in the (en)countering of discrimination and saving of face. This aspect in particular could possibly be considered for further research in better understanding the exact reasons and mechanisms that make humour such a prominent tool amongst participants in framing past interaction.
8. Empirical Chapter 3
Constructing the outer world: participants views on history, politics, media, social spaces and the Black Man’s Nod

The aim of this section is to understand how participants describe institutional, social, political and cultural structures that surround them. In other words, how participants perceive of “the bigger picture”. How are these structures interpreted and integrated into understandings of these participants. As mentioned, it becomes difficult to delineate between constructions of self and construction of others (including institutions), when understanding identity as social-as something that is mutually constituted of both the social and the individual and sustained and (re)produced through interaction. Historical amnesia, silent racism, media misrepresentation and safe spaces are the main structural topics picked up from narratives.

8.1 Making sense of the past: Historical amnesia and racelessness in Germany

Interestingly one participant picks up a topic discussed at the beginning of this thesis: The issue of racelessness in Europe and historical amnesia, as discussed by Müller (2011) and Tißberger (2005). Even if these words in particular are not used, the participant nevertheless addresses the problems of historical amnesia and racelessness in her own words. She also elaborates on the resulting lack of recognition of ‘silent racism’ and ambiguous understandings of racism that result from the lack of discussion on racism in Germany/Europe.

(P7): “Racism is something of the past, something from the second World War, we developed so well blablabla, and it’s not happening anymore. ‘People are really afraid also to admit that they are racist or have racist thoughts or that there is racism in the country. It’s something that people are really sensitive about, I think. People would call someone a Nazi, I think they would be completely shocked by it, because it’s such a bad thing. But they still don’t realise that racism is something of everyday life. And I actually know people who say that ‘yea but racism is only when something physically happens to you’, because…I dunno. Like when a group of Neonazis comes and beats you up. Just this is racism, the rest is not racism, you know. So there are these kind of people as well, quite a lot existing, who think that racism is something that is directly against your body. But they don’t see that racism is much more problematic on many scales.”

To place this quote into context, ‘people’ and ‘they’ relates to the German context. ‘People’ and ‘they’ could be understood as relating both to society as well as (political) institutions. This quote presents an interesting contextualisation by the participant of social and historical structures that permeate contemporary misunderstandings of what racism might entail. Historical amnesia (Müller, 2011) alongside the assumption of racism as something bound to radical right wing tendencies- rather than everyday behaviour-, is here the framework through which the participant explains her experience of society and institutions, as well as everyday encounters. Racism as such, according to the participant, is placed into a context of radicalism and (historical) taboo, conveniently distancing it from everyday ‘normal’ thought and conduct,
where it is seen as holding no relevance any more. This points at two different manners of making sense of the past and the present that might have consequences for the fluency of interaction. Retrospection in this quote has the participant interpreting current events by extracting cues from the past. Cues which present the participant with a plausible explanation for current social structures and behaviour. However the participant describes the same process by ‘people’, as being underlined by a different interpretation of the very same cues. An interpretation that delineates the past from the present (Ancona, 2012; Mills et. al, 2010). Or as Ross (2001) would put it, the misunderstanding crystallises in the different interpretations that unfold from different perspectives. Cues are infused with different interpretations and narrations that can only become clearer by taking into account the explanatory frames that groups/people incorporate into their understandings and thus expectations, judgements and readings of the present (Ross, 2001). In this case, the participant’s deconstruction of history towards making sense of contemporary structures helps understand discrepancy in understandings of racism. What more, this quote underlines Asante’s (2009) description of historical and social dislocation. There remains a lack of disclosure, discourse and transparency in the discussion on racism in Germany to enable the linkage between past and present experiences and how these might affect everyday life, but also institutional structures.

8.2 Silent racism

(P6): “I mean I don’t really experience racism as such, I’d call it more silent racism in a way, I mean, not that it’s bad, ...you know small things you notice: I’m walking into a restaurant then I see a woman clutching on to her handbag as soon as I stepped in. You know it is like, what the fuck. Really? Why? I mean, do I look that dangerous? (laughter).”

In overall, ‘silent racism’ seems to be more problematic to counter than overt racism, mainly due to the inconsistency in it being detected as harmful by all actors in an interaction, leaving our interview participants somewhat at odds with appropriate reactions to a situation that is clearly only unsecured on one end. ‘Inconsistency’ here relates to the problem of not having a list, so to say, of gestures, words or behaviour that conclusively sums up what could be understood as silent racism by the participants, as well as the discrepancy in sensemaking as discussed above. Several participants expressed their worry that silent racism presents a critical point where interaction falls apart for the sheer fact that the interacting party does not see the hurt or wrong that he or she has caused the participant. One such reply being that the perceived offender expressed ‘having a Black friend’ as sound evidence of the impossibility of even being able to act in a discriminatory manner. Leaving the participant at odds as to how to react in a moment when his or her face has been threatened without the acknowledgement of the harm inflicted by the other actor.
These instances are contextual, depending on a person's history, as well as the societal/political/cultural context that suggests certain behaviour and perpetuates particular expectations. In addition, a person's perspective plays a role in the detection of silent racism. Sensitivities depend on a person's history, as well as the interpretation of a situation at hand. This does not mean, however, that silent racism is subjective and thus not really justifiably insulting. More so silent racism can give us an insight into the relationship of minorities and majorities. It points at the gap between majorities and minorities (the border!) where notion of identity categories become contested, reformulated and (re)produced (Bhabha, 1994). In this case a gap persists in the understanding of what constitutes the construct of German (the majority). Afro-Germans feel as much part of Germany as they do part of their other heritage. They consider themselves a part of the majority-as Germans but also Africans. The concept of German is one of textured identity and hybridity. However this interpretation of the conceptualisation of German-still remains somewhat alien to the majority. This has become evident throughout the empirical data: the continued Othering of Afro-Germans, despite their conceptualisation of Self as textured wholes. Thus it becomes interesting to observe behaviour that excludes a fraction of Germans, but is not read as such, but rather read as excluding an Other not included in the majority established notion of 'German'. Silent racism, so to say, points at the continued reading of Afro-Germans as Others-from-Within or Others-from-Without, rather than textured wholes. Textured wholes who interpret this textured identity as part of the conceptualisation of German and African. Silent racism presents a juncture of ambivalence. Ambivalence in the sense that individuals are versed and embedded in the social norm, but are constantly reminded that they are not quite 'normal'. It is not merely a social problem, but one that is perceived as being institutionally embedded and thus larger than the mere context of everyday encounters. Closely related to this section are media misrepresentation and the perpetuation of stereotypes mentioned by participants during interviews.

8.3 Media misrepresentation and the perpetuation of stereotypes

One aspect discussed without being evoked was media misrepresentation and the reproduction of stereotypes as contributing factors to marginalisation, different treatment and 'images' that are felt to permeate behaviour of others towards participants. This links to the above section on historical amnesia and silent racism in the sense that it presents us with an example of structures that perpetuate conformity to 'blindness' by (re)producing images and discourses that (re)create impressions and assumptions of the Other. Once again we are looking closely at the gap-a border situation-where the notion of 'German' is contested. In one case the media is criticised for not being interested in a case of discrimination directly brought
forward by a participant. The participant tried to inform the media about discrimination when entering clubs, but was met with a lack of interest. A similar lack of interest of the media in 'everyday discrimination' or 'racism' is also mentioned in two other interviews, where this is elaborated as a general lack of interest within the German population to face the reality of racism beyond physical abuse and racism beyond the context of Neo-Nazis.

(P2): "you always have very little power. Because clubs have the right to let you in or not, depending on- whatever! Unless they really say something like 'nigger' or I dunno- any insult or something like that- I don't think you have very good cards"

Other media representation linked to the everyday experience of participants (and 'Black Germans') is the perpetuation of brutal images of Africa, continuously relating topics of war, famine, suffering and so forth. Two participants discuss this issue and the problem of how it continues to perpetuate a post-colonial understanding of the suffering, incapable Other and furthermore how this too perpetuates the fear and mistrust created towards people affiliated or imposed with African identities.

Finally, media misrepresentation should not merely be understood as a European or German problem. One participant makes a valid point in the media misrepresentation within African countries, when it comes to Europe. Assumptions of wealth, privilege and class belonging imposed on the participant are much aligned to the utopian, sanitary images of Europe perpetuated on African television. For this participant the treatment afforded ‘in between’ people is underlined by stereotyping perpetuated by media images and misrepresentation resulting in the imposition of class assumptions.

Media influence on circulating notions in society, especially in the contemporary age of internet, smart phones and widely available technology, cannot simply be discarded and need to be taken into measure in their role in the perpetuation or even disruption of social normative ideas. This sections highlights potential for further research on the German media’s role in the discourse on Blackness in Germany.

8.3 Spaces and identity: nooks of changing normativity

Spaces present a theme towards understanding how participants frame their social/physical/political environment. What makes spaces significant is that interaction within particular spaces entails different power structures and notions of normativity that limit and enable interaction in certain ways as well as differ in social decoding capabilities that play into interaction. So far we have mostly discussed spaces that require a negotiation of identity around normative assumptions that somehow delineate participants from the norm in

36 also see “Remembering Africa: The Rediscovery of Colonialism in Contemporary German Literature” (Göttsche,2013)
interaction. Spaces that call for a justification of belonging, a choice of particular identity and a proving thereof (e.g. speaking German, speaking Swahili, being versed in particular knowledge), in order for them to be ‘safe’ for the individual. Passing and feeling invisible being instances where this delineation becomes void. However in this section spaces as social, cultural and political nooks are mentioned. Nooks in the sense that these spaces are described as existing within Germany, but provide a nook within which dislocation and hybridity are shared and thus the norm. These ‘safe spaces’ are described as creating a context of sameness, where participants do not feel they need to expect being singled out. Safe spaces mentioned are, for example, institutes of higher education, big cities, and city areas of particular ethnic groups. These are spaces where participants do not have to justify their belonging, but feel that they are accepted as part of the in-group without much ado—meaning without having to make the active effort of passing. Safe spaces are those, where hybridity presents the norm and a shared predicament.

One unique example is a ‘Schutzraum’\(^{37}\) offered by an activist group, which, as it turned out, could not function as a safe space for the participant due to her placement of Self in an in-between position and refusing to acknowledge only one constituting ‘side’. In this case, the safe place presented an extreme to the participant, as it too required a choice between the constructions that permeate her construct of Self around a textured whole. Yet the participants understands the exclusion and polarisation away from German as something embedded in the continuous experience of being likewise excluded from a claim to belonging in Germany. This example remains unique in the sense that it depicts the almost artificial creation of a space in Germany within which different notions of ‘normal’ persist to the extent that the otherwise existing norm is entirely excluded. Unfortunately it also creates the same ambivalence for those who exist at the borders of these extremes and whose concept of identity entails a re-interpretation of established normative categories.

\(^{37}\)”Schutzraum” = protective space/safe space

(P5): “there’s this: Schwarze Deutsche, Brauner Mop, very active in Berlin, very activist. They do some very good things, like they rename colonial streets in Berlin, like from the people who committed the genocides in Africa- there’s still street names in Berlin. And they change street names and fight for the change. So I like them. But they put very much emphasis on Blackness and no White people are allowed in their spaces. So like once I went there...I mean, it’s good sometimes to be in just Black groups, so you can express-they call it Schutzraum, you know, so people can talk freely about their things. But at the same time they’re very exclusive. So I went once to this thing about Black fighters in the 80s or something, and I wanted to invite some other friends who are white. So I ask at the entrance, what am I going to do with the white people if they can’t come in?’, ‘yea, you throw them out, they can’t come in here’. So I felt so attacked by this, because I’m both, you know. And, they’re so rough, they’re so extreme. And they make every white person guilty for everything. “

“So these are the Black groups in Germany that I totally don’t feel. But they have
different realities, you know. Like my house mate, her parents are from Brazil. She’s Black, she grew up in a white family. And she’s just German. She has no contact to her Brazilian culture, but she’s Black, she’s German. But she’s not perceived as a German. It’s very hurtful. You can’t explain why you’re Black, you can’t explain anything. So I see their point of being so hurt and being so rough.”

The participant recognises the advantage of a Schutzraum, in that it allows for a different mode of communication, unrestricted by the social norm that requires constant reconfiguration of Self and strategizing. The Schutzraum can be understood as a space that inverts otherwise pertaining structures of normativity. Black being the norm and White being deviant. Black setting the tone of conformity and White being placed in at a juncture of stigma. A space within which the social norms of the outside are inverted towards emphasising a different normativity. This space aimed at granting a comfort from the otherwise overly expectant and imposing social space visibly different individuals find themselves in otherwise in Germany. However, as mentioned by Goffmann (1963) and Gergen (1967), identity norms breed conformity as well as deviance. There is a discomfort expressed with the exclusiveness of these groups and the perceived requirement to detach herself from an integral ‘side’ of her Self. The participant is faced with the same problem of in-group normativity on the inside as she is on the outside. Both the Schutzraum as well as the ‘outside world’ present her with normative ideals, both of which she refuses to (and is perceived as not adhering) adhere to entirely, ‘because she is both’. If we come back to Wright’s (2003) notion of Others-from-Without and Others-from-Within, this example highlights that this notion applies not only to the White German context, but also to inverted situations that are meant to grant comfort from the feeling of not quite belonging. The requirement of ‘choosing a side’ becomes a conflict for individuals who identity as ‘both’.

8.5 The Black Man’s Nod: an exclusive gesture of Black recognition

One outstanding theme that emerged at the end of an interview, when the participant was asked if anything had been left out. The topic was raised in two other interviews as well. (Once evoked by a question, the other time, it came up in narration). The Black man’s nod can be understood as a gesture of recognition, be it in the form of a nod, a wave, a ‘hello’, or a smile. It is a brief moment between at least two people who recognise each other as belonging to the same in-group, without having to know each other or having established any explanatory conversation. This meaning of such a small and brief moment should not be underestimated. An in-group membership is assumed simply by having weighed a person’s belonging from a short visual evaluation. This practice is similar to Goffman’s (1963) discussion on civil inattention and the act of recognising others without imposing upon them. However as the following section will clarify, the Black Man’s Nod is perceived as entailing some notion of
imposing external identity. Reactions to the Black Man's nod vary. More specifically, reaction to being recognised as a co-member of a group by a stranger is received differently by different participants. Despite different reactions though, this brief moment of gesturing is felt to be a positive and kind gesture and in no way offensive or aggressive. The Black man's nod is an exclusive gesture: one not accessible to all. Inclusion in this exchange is not merely a recognition of one's skin colour, but somehow seems to be a recognition of a shared predicament: a shared social position underlined by skin colour and the socio-economic/political structures that account for the assumption of a similar experience in German society. The shared experience of dislocation and exclusion makes this gesture one that White Germans cannot access or participate in successfully.

The Black man's nod is an interesting example of a type of social recognition that not only relies on the detection of similar people by visual means, but also entails the imposition of the assumption of similarity of experience/predicament.

(P2): “Well there’s one thing I really love here in Germany. And that, is something you don’t find in Africa at the same time. And I don’t’ know if you’ve heard about this, but it’s the black man’s nod. That thing is amazing. You won’t see two white people in Kenya greeting in passing. But here, when I see a black guy you get either a ‘hi’ or a black man’s nod. And it’s so amazing when it happens. There’s this one story where I was also walking along the road and there was this guy who came along, a black guy and a white guy, then there was a black man’s nod, then the white guy was like-okaay- in a funny style, not in a serious style. But he’s like ‘you know, you guys are kind of racist- you greet each other but you don’t greet the white guy’, you know, so I found it a bit funny, but I really liked it, because it’s kind of like. When you see the problems in that there are in Kenya especially with tribalism and so... and here, they’re not going to look at you like ‘is this a Kikuyu or is this a …’ or whatever, they see a black guy and there’s a ‘hello’. Really like that”

Interestingly, the Black Man's Nod is not only restricted to certain groups, but also to certain contexts. One participant explains that a similar gesture would be out of the question in an African country: namely two White people engaging in a similar ritual. Such a context, according to the participant, would somehow be uncomfortable and wrong, due to there not being the same context of social experience and history involved.

The Black Man's nod relies on the regime of visibility (Tißberger, 2005), however not in the sense of hindering belonging, but more so, towards establishing belonging. Visibility guides the attribution of a social identity to an in-group. An in-group that in this case is entirely anonymous, but somehow linked by this gesture of recognition of similarity, without much knowledge of personal identity or ego-identity for that matter. It is this imposition of similarity that also creates discomfort for some participants. Despite the gesture being generally understood as positive, it nevertheless begs compliance to being categorised. In one instance the participant mentions looking away, in order to avoid having to partake in the situation, due to the discomfort of being recognised as a group member, when in fact the person might
otherwise feel differently. More so, this discomfort comes from once again being categorised on the basis of skin colour - something familiar to participants in everyday interaction and something that participants also recognise in this gesture (however in a positive manner).

(P3) “Well, usually I think of it as a really kind gesture. I mean, it is something from the heart and something that comes from inside. But I’ve also realised that sometimes it makes me uncomfortable: just because I look a certain way, I am simply reduced to the way that I look. And I noticed, that sometimes, I will intentionally look away... I mean, it is silly, but I think that just because I look different I find it somewhat awkward that all of a sudden there is a connection between two people, despite us not knowing one single thing about each other and although on the inside, I might be exactly the same as the person standing next to me who is not greeted because he doesn’t look different. But in overall I do think it’s a kind gesture.”

It would require further research to determine what exactly makes people initiate this gesture. What attributes lead to the assumption that this gesture is valid or not. It would also be interesting to see if there are gendered patterns to this gesture and differences across different locations and contexts.

In closing, the Black Man’s Nod in a manner crystallises Goffman’s (1963) attempt to get rid of the distinction of normal and deviant. The ambiguity of the distinction between belonging and not belonging becomes evident in a brief moment of interaction based on inclusion due to the recognition of being similarly excluded. It is an instant where ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ become enmeshed in a context where a clear delineation becomes rather difficult in everyday life, where different encounters deliver different stages to which we more or less might or might not belong to. According to Goffman (1963), we are always involved in one of the other: what we call normal is simply a ‘slight’ deviation from whichever unattainable ideal that normal rests on (e.g. body shape, educational status, career status, family status). ‘Normals’ themselves don’t ever quite fit the mould of these ideals and nor do ‘deviants’ or stigmatised people. More so, the context provides the frame of reference for conformity and deviance: there is no one single social norm and thus we are constantly engaged in being both ‘stigmatised’ as well as ‘normals’ (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore, as ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’ as we might see ourselves as being, we cannot entirely control those identities imposed upon us in interaction. We cannot control the limitation such impositions might have on us. We can attempt to strategize and negotiate our roles in interaction, but we cannot always be fully prepared for a sudden change in script. We can improvise and thus enlarge our repertoire for future reference.

Furthermore institutional structures described by participants relay material similar to points mentioned by Müller (2011), Tißberger (2005), Campt (1993), Wright (2003) and others. German identity remains categorised through notions of ethnicity and Whiteness. However historical amnesia and a convenient lack of public discussion on race in Germany makes it difficult to discuss, let alone challenge thinking still embedded in outdated understandings of
Germanness. Even though social and institutional structures are not perceived as obtrusive to everyday life, participants do mention the presence of silent racism as a result and the problems involved in challenging a discourse that is not recognised as existing amongst average Germans, but one which is reduced to radical right wing groups. Participants remain critical of social and institutional structures in Germany, but some also think that changing demographics are also changing traditional notions of what it means to be German. Some participants also express empathy for Afro-Germans who might feel more strongly about institutional and social exclusion, due to experiences differing widely across this group. Thus, for example, the formation of the Schutzraum was perceived by a participant as something not befitting her self-positioning in an in-between space, but understandably creating a safe space for Black Germans who might have other experiences of exclusion in mainstream German society.
9. Everyday mixedness in the lives of participants

This closing chapter brings together the findings in answering the research questions. The first section tackles the first research question: *How do Afro-Germans construct and negotiate their identities in everyday life?* Within this section I will discuss the use and changing of categories in the construction of textured identities as well as being mixed as holding potential for strategy in interaction.

The second section deals with the second research question: *What social, institutional and political constructs emerge from the narrations of research participants?* Underlying notions of Germanness and the implications these have for participants are discussed.

Finally the third research questions is answered: *How do research participants perceive and describe the relationship between identity and social/institutional/political constructs?* Dislocation is discussed as a unifying concept that crystallizes the relationship between constructs of the Self and social/institutional structures.

9.1 Mixedness as harmonising and redefining categories; Mixedness as strategy

Participants’ narrations of themselves and their environments are intrinsically intertwined. Descriptions of the Self, necessitate a relation to normative categories, towards creating hybrid and textured formulations that participants feel encapsulate their experiences, due to a lack of historical, social and cultural embedding of Afro-German as a German category and even more so a lack of any established category that participants collectively feel would suffice in describing them (Asante, 2009; Müller, 2011). The category of Afro-German being surprisingly rejected, for lack of affiliation- at times even suspicion- felt by participants towards this term and other categories. However what was also highlighted was that even within these textured identities- within the category of Afro-German- there are taxonomies perceived by some participants. Taxonomies based on differences in background as well as cultural embedding in parental culture(s). Constructions of the Self point at the mutual constitution of the social and the individual (Goffman, 1959, 1963)- liminal spaces and their borders (Bhabha, 1994) as well as the normal and the deviant (Goffman, 1963). Across narrations analytical distinctions between categories become enmeshed in each other and (re)formulated in interaction. The category of Afro-German cannot be communicated without reference to both German and African. The category of German is used and perceived as something hybrid, something changing, despite appearing as White and stagnant in assumptions made by others in interaction. In interaction, we have come to see that Afro-German as a category also changes the manner in which German/African/Black and White are used and defined: in interaction impositions based on ‘outdated’ notions of whiteness are contested by perceived (and self-ascribed) changing notions of what German constitutes. Participants identify as German and
African, Black and White, German and Black; their construction of Self entailing a tilting of the delineations these categories might entail. Self-construction as textured means that not only are we observing the formulation of new identity categories, highly dependent on history and experience, but we are also seeing a reformulation of established identity categories that ‘traditionally’ exclude each other in definition, but become suddenly hybrid and more complex. Normative categories become contested (be this intentionally or unintentionally) by incorporating notions of hybridity through participants who see these normative categories are insufficiency encapsulating the totality of their meaning (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003). Identity formation and transformation results in the contestation and affirmation of identity in interactions that take place on the borders- where the norm and the deviant meet- of liminal spaces and encircling spaces (Bhabha, 1994). The liminal and the border are intertwined in framing and defining each other, making a delineation of the two all the more ambiguous and somewhat unnecessary, considering it seems to be a fact of contemporary interaction (Bhabha, 1994; Goffman, 1963).

German is not seen as merely White, African is not seen as merely Black, Black is not seen as a polar to White. For participants, these categories are insufficient, too straightforward to relay complexity and not at all representative of a reality they describe as diverse.

What becomes confusing though is, that these normative categories and their underlying notions continue to intrude on interaction- that normative categories somehow seem to continue to hold (power and thus) relevancy for people who impose them onto participants in interaction by, for example, assuming they don’t speak German on the basis of their skin colour. Beyond these challenges participants feel they hold a unique position. Participants see themselves as part of a liminal space as well as part of encircling spaces. They see themselves as part of mainstream society, as well as part of something different. Being Pointi doesn’t exclude the possibility of also identifying as German or Kenyan, American or Ghanaian, Black or White or several of these for that matter. Their unique position is seen as granting them capabilities of switching between normative categories, passing for different (ethnic/national) identity categories when necessary or practical, but also a position that is felt to grant a different perspective and understanding of themselves and their environments. This perspective is framed as positive and unique- an advantage that others without their experience do not have, but one that also at times carries notions of struggle and questions of belonging (Campt, 1993; Wright, 2003). Put differently, dislocation pervades not only external identities, but internal identity (Jenkins, 1994) for participants. Dislocation is part of their internalised and expressed constructs of Self. Participants build their ego-identity from a state of dislocation. Ego-identity, which Goffman (1963) described as a positive self-image. Thus it becomes vital to realise that participants’ identity constructs imbue dislocation itself with new
nuances: namely the internalising and recreating of dislocation into a positive in their lives. Of course we all navigate between and across different social identity categories (Goffman, 1963, 1967). We all play our roles in our everyday lives, negotiating our self-perceptions with others’ expectations as well as situational cues. However we are not all faced with the same symbolic implications of our skin colour. This point in particular - the visible difference of participants - being important to understand as a contributing factor in interaction. Participants experience being imbued with certain meaning and placed into certain boxes on the basis of their skin colour. This being both in Germany as well as their respective African countries of origin (and at times elsewhere). Their skin colour gives away their deviation from norms such as Black or White, German or African - it becomes readily available information in interaction that participants’ at some times more and at some times less need to strategize with (Goffman, 1963; Gergen, 1967). More in cases where participants’ appearance deviates from the dominating norm of White or Black and less in spaces where deviation or difference presents the norm (places where individuals feel invisible). Skin colour remains embedded in particular meanings and assumptions across different societies experienced by participants. It is contextual and thus differs in the manner in affects interaction. The Black Man’s Nod being is an interesting example of a fleeting interaction moment, where the symbol of skin colour becomes imbued with an entirely different meaning than ‘normal’ interaction in Germany; participants are suddenly included on the basis of their skin colour, they become part of a gesture that places them within an imagined community that shares the experience of living at the borders of society. A simple, wordless gesture functions towards categorising them - something that evoked differing reactions from participants. Despite any evaluation made by participants with regard to skin colour, there is not one narration where skin colour does not factor in in interaction. At times, the intersection of skin colour and gender is even seen as holding a particular symbolic value embedded in (post-) colonial thinking of sexualised others. This in particular could hold an interesting sphere of further research both within Afro-German scholarship, but also within a broader Afro-European context. Finally, skin colour can become obtrusive in interaction; however it can also give people an advantage in an interaction, where erroneous assumptions are made on the basis of skin colour without heed to additional information that might prove said assumptions rash or wrong. Skin colour should thus not merely be understood as a stigma that participants interpret in the same manner as mainstream society. Other than discussed by Goffman (1963), participants are reflexive regarding the impositions, reactions and connotations of their skin colour. Interaction on their part is not simply reactionary, but active. They position themselves, control information to their advantage and negotiate their role, not with the aim of disappearing behind a smoke
screen and thus be accepted, but with the aim of asserting their self-image or self-chosen role in interaction.

The experience of occupying a liminal position not only in Germany has necessitated the development of a variety of strategies in interaction. Development being a key word in the sense that participants describe their learnings as progressive, rather than an immediate awareness—something that become necessary at changing junctures in their lives that confronted them with impositions of identity they had previously not encountered. Thus requiring new ways in which to maintain face (Goffman, 1963), but also new ways in which to assert face. The need to articulate and formulate their identity—thus the need to reaffirm their identity in interaction (Goffman, 1963, 1967)—has made strategy a key aspect of identity formation for Afro-Germans. Participants describe negotiating their identities through passing, controlling information and verbally confronting others in interaction. Passing and the control of information are made possible by the ambiguity of participants' belonging and often times by the erroneous imposition of identity onto participants by others. Their linguistic, cultural and social embedding (their personal identity, Goffman, 1963), as well as their experience then serving as leverage in the attesting of their identity in interaction and the deflecting of threats to face. With regard to discrimination—a particularly outstanding interaction within which face becomes threatened, verbal confrontation and humour seem prevalent strategies. Humour presents an interesting juncture that could be further researched, towards properly understanding why it is perceived as a coping or strategic method in explaining and narrating moments of discrimination or failed interaction. Could humour be read as an attempt to regain power and leverage in a hurtful situation by deflating an offense and thus also deflating the attempt on face? Verbal confrontation on the other hand seems at times problematic, due to harm not having been perceived as having occurred by the offending party. Saving face thus becomes challenging, when there is no harm to face detected. Even more so, a defence of face in these instances can lead to a loss of face of participants, rather than the offending party, due to their defensiveness being read as being based in error.

9.2 Being German and being Black: challenging notions of Germanness

The aspect of losing face when defending face in interaction points at the irony of the situation of Afro-Germans in Germany. Despite the taboo of race and racism—let alone the thought that German identity could in any ways still be enclosed in ethnic notions—, the narrations point at there still being some general notion of German as White (Müller, 2011; Tißberger, 2005; Schneider, 2001). If there weren’t some perpetuated assumption of German as White, then strategizing and saving face due to imposed assumptions based on skin colour would not be as necessary, nor would participants express feeling visible or invisible—feeling like they belong
or don’t belong. However the sheer fact of visible difference still holding relevance for participants in narrating themselves and their experiences points at contemporary Germany still being somewhat embedded in stagnant notions of what constitutes German identity and belonging. This facet became salient in critical narrations of media, politics and society in Germany. Historical amnesia and the resulting social and political convenience of not having to talk about race, the lack of a political discussion on discrimination and the lack of historical, cultural and social embedding of Afro-Germans in the narration of German identity are seen as some factors contributing to the perpetuation of stagnant notions of Germanness. Let us not forget that we are treating these narrations as empirical data that gives us an insight into how objective structures are perceived, interpreted and thus lived (by) (Lyng and Franks, 2002; Martin, 2010; May, 2002).

9.3 Being Afro-German in contemporary Germany: contemplating dislocation through the eyes of participants

Interestingly this line of research came to accentuate one point in particular that marks almost every juncture of this research: dislocation. Asante’s (2009) concepts of dislocation reverberate across junctures in this research. Constructs of the Self are pervaded by historical and social dislocation: participants often struggle to escape ethnic/political categories both socially, but also in the description of their Selves. The lack of a category to describe their betwixt position being the result of a historical displacement of Afro-German within both the German and respective African narratives of identity. However what needs to be taken into account is that the wide dispersion of this group also makes it more difficult to maintain a common identity, as histories and experiences differ widely. A placement within the majority culture, be it Germany or a respective African country, are marked by cultural, social and historical dislocation. Language and appearance often calling for self-justification in interaction and the refurbishing of identity with new strategies and negotiation methods towards facilitating interaction and enabling individuals to ascertain their perceptions of Self and negotiate their position in mainstream society. On the other hand, dislocation also needs to be read with care. Within this study, it has become clear that participants also see some positives in dislocation. The difficulty others experience in categorising participants in interaction, gives them the upper hand and a strategic advantage. Their embedding across different historical, national, social and cultural contexts has made them wary of categories, leading to a pronounced layering and texturing of identity across several categories at once, which to many participants seems a more adequate and truthful manner of describing themselves. This also being perceived as an advantage toward being able to adapt to different contexts and being able to understand both their liminal as well as normative/dominant
positions. Most importantly: Their liminal position is not a stigma or a deviation, nor is it perceived as one! Something that comes forth in these narratives and the active role of participants in shaping interaction and thus shaping identity categories. Their strategies might result from reactionary learnings over time. However their strategies also point at a reflexivity of their self-image, the manner in which others perceive them as well as how these relate in interaction. This reflexivity resulting in empathy as well as participants actively shaping their role in interaction and contributing to the re-articulation of identities through interaction, rather than attempting to place themselves within and understand themselves solely through given frameworks that insufficiently reflect their experiences.
10. Rethinking dislocation

This study has interrogated the category of Afro-German, towards understanding not only identity construction from a liminal position, but also the implications this might have for encircling normative categories. All this through the perspective of participants. Constructions of the Self, strategies of identity negotiation in interaction and finally institutional, social and political structures have been analysed and discussed towards giving the reader an overview of the intricacies of Afro-German identity as well as notions of Germanness today.

This study could have been extended by including more participants and preferably conducting interviews face to face, rather than via Skype. Also, a more detailed inquiry could be made into topics such as humour, gender and skin colour as well as the topic of hair and the Black Man’s Nod. These topics in particular could yield interesting contributions to Afro-German (/Afro-European) studies, if interrogated individually. Finally, my position as a researcher of similar background as my participants might call into question the validity of my interpretations. However, my position has also facilitated more open discussions with participants, due to shared aspects of background and experiences as well as being acquainted with participants.

Within the German context, this thesis poses a potential for future qualitative research into Afro-German identity as well as German national identity in general. As suggested, the incorporation of a wider variety of Afro-Germans can highlight the diversity within this category, but might also highlight the difficulty of Afro-German as a unifying concept for Afro-Germans outside of Germany. This study has furthermore put into question the assumed racelessness in the narration and continued use of German identity. It underlines Müller’s (2011) and Tißberger’s (2005) points that simply not talking about the role of race or ethnicity in contemporary Germany does not erase these notions from society. It simply makes it more difficult to confront and handle a discourse discarded as taboo, even when this discourse continues to play a role in interaction. Thus it also seems necessary for inquiries to (re-)engage with the topic of Germanness in the light of ethnic/racial notions still playing a (subtle) role.

An interesting point that I take from these narrations is the optimism with which these individuals narrate their position. Their narratives lend context to terms such as dislocation, textured identities, passing and so forth: bringing forth the complexity that permeates theoretical understandings of identity formation and negotiation. Thus, for example, the notion of dislocation seems to become embellished with both negative as well as positive interpretations. Throughout the interviews- despite harsh experiences and moments of sadness and struggle- participants insist that their position holds a uniqueness they embrace. They understand the mainstream as well as the borders, they are versed in what it means to belong and not to belong. For some participants, this is an experience they even wish onto
others, as they perceive it as granting a perspective with regard to the relativity of what society considers normal and different, odd and conventional. Several also advocate that their social position is one that is and will be increasingly normal across Germany. Dislocation might be a pervading factor in their lives as described by Asante, (2009), however it also holds the potential of giving them the upper hand and feeling like they can belong to several places, rather than one place. A flexibility of belonging that is not perceived as accessible to everyone. Dislocation, for this group of individuals, is a constant state of being- both regarding external as well as internal identity. Dislocation is not an exception, but the rule. It is a factor that necessitates the constant negotiation of identity in everyday life. The manner in which participants have strategized dislocation, also requires a consideration of dislocation as perspective. Dislocation as a concept, when done highlights the complexities involved when applying academic concepts to real life situations. This point in particular also highlights the potential that lies in involving narratives in research: academic concepts, frameworks, meanings and interpretations sometimes reverberate somewhat differently when performed and interpreted by those we study.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview of guiding questions for participants narratives preceding interviews

**Formal Information**

Gender:
Age:
Occupation:
Nationality:
Which languages do you speak? 
(Language/1: native, 2: fluent, 3: sufficient, 4: barely)
Nationality of mother:
Nationality of father:
Years spent in Germany (xxxx-xxxx)
Years spent elsewhere (xxxx-xxxx in City/County):
Schools/Universities attended (Name of School/Uni, xxxx-xxxx):

**And now, for your story...**

The idea is for you to write a page (or more) about your experiences. You don't have to answer all of these questions; they are simply to get your grey cells running. Don't forget: this is about you, so feel free to write anything. There is no good or bad, right or wrong, smart or silly!

- Tell me a bit about growing up...
- How do you feel about your mixed background? What do you say when people ask you about where you come from? Does this change sometimes? Why? Have you encountered problems or confusions about this? Why? How did you handle these?
- How did your parents meet?
- What or where is home for you? Why?
- What were your impressions in Germany? In other places you have lived?
Appendix 2

"borderless and brazen: a poem against the German “u-not y.”"  

i will be African  
even if you want me to be german  
and i will be german  
even if my blackness does not suit you  
i will go  
yet another step further  
to the farthest edge  
where my sisters – where my brothers stand  
where  
our  
FREEDOM  
begins  
i will go  
yet another step further and another step and  
will return  
when i want  
and remain  
borderless and brazen  

1990  

for Jaqueline and Katharina (Translation by May Ayim)

Appendix 3: Sarotti Mohr

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38 retrieved from http://afroeurope.blogspot.fi/2012/05/download-afro-german-may-ayims-writings.html on 24.06.2014

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