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**TROPES OF POLARITY: VISUAL REPRESENTATION AND  
AFRODIASPORIC IDENTITIES**

Thesis submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to  
obtain a PhD Degree in Culture Studies

By

Dzifa Peters

Faculty of Human Science

September 2023



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Under the supervision of Prof. Isabel Capelo Gil,

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## ABSTRACT

The research project *Tropes of Polarity: Visual Representation and Afrodiasporic Identities* analyzes colonial, postcolonial, diasporic, and contemporary identities through the medium of photography and its tropes, to investigate phenomena of West African and Afro diasporic identity constructions that indicate alternations of coexisting cultural identities and perspectives. The articulation of identity in relation to postcolonial circumstances, postmigration and intercultural polarities are central to the project. The research focuses specifically on the context of West Africa and its diaspora in Europe, particularly on the context of Ghana. The research goals are dedicated to discussing notions of a transcultural form of code switching within the photographic context. Arguing that alternating switches between different cultural perspectives have enabled the formation of contemporary *spectral identities* throughout time, thus proposing an interpolation to the notion of hybridity. The doctoral thesis identifies a resultant resistance, subversion, and agency that finds itself reflected in the potentiality of transnational migrant knowledge, multiplicity, and friction, while being negotiated under the premise of intersectionality, and within a postmigrant condition. The thesis finally claims that all the manifestations above are embedded in photographs as a mnemotechnique.

Key words: Photography, African diaspora, postcolonialism, decoloniality, code switching, mnemotechnique, transformed representation, transcultural entanglements.

## RESUMO

O projeto de investigação *Tropos de Polaridade: Representação Visual e identidades Afrodiaspóricas* analisa as identidades coloniais, pós-coloniais, diaspóricas e contemporâneas através da fotografia e dos seus tropos, para investigar fenómenos de construções identitárias da África Ocidental e Afrodiaspóricas que indicam alternâncias de identidades e perspectivas culturais coexistentes. A articulação da identidade em relação às circunstâncias pós-coloniais, pós-migratórias e às polaridades interculturais é central para o projeto. A investigação centra-se especificamente no contexto da África Ocidental e da sua diáspora na Europa, em particular no contexto do Gana. Os objectivos da investigação são dedicados à discussão de noções de uma forma transcultural de alternância de códigos no contexto fotográfico. Argumentando que a alternância entre diferentes perspectivas culturais permitiu a formação de *identidades espectrais* contemporâneas ao longo do tempo, o projecto de investigação propõe uma interpolação para a noção de hibridismo. A tese de doutoramento identifica uma resistência, subversão e agência resultantes que se reflectem na potencialidade do conhecimento migrante transnacional, na multiplicidade e na fricção, sendo negociadas sob a premissa da interseccionalidade e numa condição pós-migrante. A tese afirma, finalmente, que todas as manifestações acima referidas estão incorporadas nas fotografias como uma mnemotécnica.

Palavras-chave: Fotografia, diáspora africana, pós-colonialismo, descolonialidade, mudança de código, mnemotécnica, representação transformada, emaranhados transculturais.

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## 1. PREFACE

The point of departure for this doctoral thesis was rooted in reflections on the phenomenon of code switching. Code switching finds its origins in the linguistic field but is also reflected in psychology and has been appropriated in popular Black discourses. But how was this phenomenon to be detected in cultural objects? As a visual artist it felt logical to focus on visual culture, particularly on the realm of photography. I considered investigating the phenomenon in the fields of culture studies, namely in relation to postcolonial discourse, through the concept of hybridity, and in the field of visual culture. The contextualization of art as a form of language within culture, history, and society became essential to understand the phenomenon and indicated the importance of transdisciplinary approach. By expanding it within different types of articulations in photography: facial expressions, gestures, body language, ways of behaving, cultural customs, traditions, and habits evolved into semiotic road signs on the way that constitute in many ways how different communities live together and aided to develop my understanding of Afro diasporic representation.

Meanwhile, the initial idea of a visual-cultural form of code-switching in the photographic realm continued to expand in my research. The idea of tropes as established metaphors in the photographic context appeared to be worth paying attention to, as did the dichotomy of intercultural polarities as a narrative derived from a colonial background towards modernity. In what followed, this project became a journey through centuries, time, places, and spaces. And although it seemed at times logical to follow certain chronologies, it soon became clear that the interconnection between different case studies was rather non-linear and ephemeral. Various forms and oscillations of identities, as well as re-coding mechanisms of representation in Afro cultures, and, finally, the possibility of coexistence and alternations within different temporalities through the mnemonic photographic medium, were discovered along the way. I found the useful term of the spectral for this mnemonic afterimage, which to me exemplified a spectrum of identity, but also being haunted by specters of the past. I found that in times of a globalization encompassing various continuous and new forms of (post)migration in contemporary polycultures this spectrality in identity-making has become a daily practice of many of



## 2. INTRODUCTION

*Political “distortions”, economic divisions and ethical dilemmas define our times because we live in an age of global transition (rather than transformation) in which extremes exist in a relation of antagonistic – and agonistic – proximity (not polarity).*

(Bhabha, 2007: 14).

*Tropes of Polarity: Visual Representation and Afrodiasporic Identities* analyzes historical and contemporary forms of visual representation in postcolonial and diasporic identities. The construction of identity in relation to postcolonial circumstances, migration, and intercultural polarities will be of major interest throughout the project. The research focuses specifically on visual representations articulated through art and photography, with the main objectives being drawn from the West Africa context and its diaspora in Europe, particularly focusing on the Ghanaian context. The research goals articulate the ways in which notions of postmemory, potential history, and countervisuality within the photographic context, as well as a transcultural form of code switching in the visual reflect and inscribe the complex subjectivities in the context of migration.

In my artistic work, which entails photography, photomontage, video, text, and installation, I have been exploring forms of cultural identity and their visual representations for the last decade, incorporating aspects of territory, globalization, migration, and postcolonial discourse. As an artist who grew up in two different cultures (Germany and Ghana), I have encountered many contradictions, prejudices, and misunderstandings regarding the view of the Other on both sides of my background. As a consequence, I have increasingly been using autobiographical material in an autofictional manner in my artistic practice.

This has led me to the additional approach of examining such phenomena as transitory switches between different cultural perspectives in the theoretical sphere. Perspective in this context is a visual ontology. Hence, I considered the following visual fields as areas of my research: objects of visual culture and photography, artworks, including my own, and visual material from historical archives. Finally, my main motivation lies in the search to find new terms and articulations as means to speak about contemporary phenomena of identity, representation, and perspective in our globalized context.

*Tropes of Polarity: Visual Representation and Afrodiasporic Identities* investigates the development of visual representation and diasporic identities from historical, and colonial contexts to the contemporary. The project aims to understand how the construction of postcolonial and diasporic visual identities articulate themselves in historical and contemporary artistic, and documentary photography, as well as photographic family collections.

The research focuses on comparatively analyzing qualitative photographic documents from the beginnings of the medium in the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. Key objectives entail the

juxtaposition of polarities and potentialities within the portrayed identities in a productive way, while contextualizing photographic tropes that have been established over time, as well as identifying phenomena of performative agency and countervisuality. It is of interest to this project to examine the potential of photographic materials as a tool of mnemotechnique in post- and multidirectional memory. This project considers investigating the visual objects with a focus on the attributes that provide sources and perspectives of identity, tracing the phenomenon of a transcultural form of code switching in the visual, meaning the act of intrinsically switching between different visual-cultural contexts, and coexisting cultural identities. In doing so, it follows different forms and articulations of the phenomenon throughout time, claiming that postcolonial circumstances, migration, and transcultural contact are the main reason for its occurrence.

In times of globalization encompassing various and continuous forms of migration, as a result of battles on territories, postcolonial conditions, economic circumstances, conflicts of gender, ethnicity or religion, questions of identity have become a major focus in Arts and Humanities. In the context of polycultural societies today, the encountering of different cultural identities and their representations does take place on a daily basis. polyculture hereby focuses on the interconnectedness and cross-cultural mutual influences in contemporary societies of plurality and politicization (cf. Schwarz and West-Pavlov, 2007 et al.). Not only do we find a dense mixture of cultural heritage in the communities as a result of first generation migration, but meanwhile also within the characteristics of second, third or fourth generation multiethnic identities. On the other hand, we subliminally lack a vocabulary that encompasses the very notion of complexity we actually live in. This dissertation proposes tools to understand much underestimated qualities of polycultural contexts in contemporary society, considering an examination of questions of identity in the fields of culture studies, predominantly in relation to postcolonial discourse, memory studies and the field of visual culture. Furthermore, the thesis distinctly contributes to a development of transdisciplinarity within the fields.

## 2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The topicality of the thesis is articulated through the methodological approach that comparatively investigates the connection of visual representation to concepts of identity in postcolonial studies and Black studies; incorporating ideas from the following research fields in a transdisciplinary manner: diaspora studies, media studies, memory studies, anthropology, performativity studies, semiology, visual culture studies, linguistics, qualitative research and arts-based research. Following a comparative approach in cross-cultural studies, this dissertation compares cultural phenomena across different countries, by means of examining and contrasting social structures and processes across countries and regions to identify recurring patterns. Here, the focus lies on the context of Ghana and West Africa and its diaspora in Europe, juxtaposing photographic material from public and vernacular archives, and modern and contemporary Afro diasporic artwork.

Within the theoretical framework the dissertation references a concept of diaspora studies that discusses Africa intertwined in close relation with its diaspora and in a process of “African diasporization” as a “result of continuous migration and return” (Quayson, 2013a), as well as the idea of a “deterritorialized” or “cultural diaspora” (Cohen, 2008). The research also focuses on articulating recent conceptualizations of the African diaspora such as “creative links of relation, affiliation and affirmation” (Camp, 2019). These ideas are juxtaposed to anthropological discourses of working at “multiple scales and among discrepant histories, engaging with multiplicity” (Clifford, 2013) and “heterogeneous and unequal encounters” of “friction” (Tsing, 2005), within a global discourse of migration.

Postcolonialism is associated with taking the turn from modern imperialism, eurocentrism, and colonial rule, while entailing forces of decolonisation. In the course of time, various theories and ideas have been developed, while not remaining free from critical debate of oppositional approaches negotiating the localisation of theory and complexities of a progressing globalisation. Such notions can be found in the postcolony (Mbembe, 2001), neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965) and discourses within decolonial theory (Mignolo, 2011), which criticise “the normalisation of the abnormalities of the colonial system” in postcolonial societies (Ngugi, 2017).

Furthermore, this dissertation compares the ideas of the project to postcolonial references such as the concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, and transnational

migrant knowledge (Bhabha, 1994), the idea of new ethnicities (Hall, 1996) and the concept of double consciousness (Dubois, 1903; Gilroy, 1993) in postcolonial and Black studies. In this relation also stands the challenge of intersectionality, creating different forms of “discrimination” and “privilege” (Crenshaw, 1989). Connecting to the ideas of countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011), to the civil contract of photography and potential history (Azoulay, 2008, 2019; cf. Agamben, 1995, 1999) in visual culture studies will be another focus. This countervisuality performs as a way of “looking back” (Mirzoeff, 2011) towards colonial visibility and colonial unevenness, while creating counter-narratives and counter-archives. For a profound analysis, it then becomes crucial to develop the practice exemplified in *Reading the image in the other context* (Jenkins, 2011).

Circulating around the idea of the photographic trope and performative notions within the photographic realm the dissertation incorporates the idea of camouflage in photography (Levin, 2014). Also discussed are the concepts of postmemory (Hirsch 1997, 2012) and multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), as well as touching on the idea of a prosthetic culture (Lury, 1998) in memory studies. Historians have also started looking at the Holocaust in relationship to colonial genocide, by means of a mode of multiperspectivity in history (e.g., the Herero genocide, where the Germans were involved but had not been widely discussed before). Here, the Holocaust has evolved from its singular mode of representation to become a conceptual template for the understanding of other violent events and regimes such as colonialism and slavery.<sup>1</sup> A multiperspectivity in narratology similarly describes a narration or representation from several different points of view. It is due to differing and subjective standpoints by various narrative perspectives, that a heterogeneous presentation of events and a high level of ambiguity can be achieved. Here, a sonic friction can be found in photographic objects and their narratives by means of *Listening to Images* (Campt, 2017). Finally, linguistic references are integrated to draw from the concept of code switching (Stroud, 2004; Nilep, 2006), and to interpolate the idea to the visual field. Tracing phenomena of a cultural form of code switching in the visual, or visual-cultural code switching, is thus used to detect different forms of the phenomenon throughout time in various forms of representation (Hall, 1997), utilizing semiology as a conceptual approach.

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<sup>1</sup> From Historikerstreit, the debate about the singularity of the Holocaust to new applications of the Holocaust see Huyssen (2014).

The methodology follows a comparative approach in cross-cultural studies, that compares cultural phenomena embedded in photographic objects and artworks across different countries and cultures, by means of examining, and contrasting social structures and processes across the countries and regions in order to identify recurring patterns. However, the main focus lies on the context of Ghana and West Africa and its diaspora in Europe. Additionally, my own artistic practice will be discussed by means of a hybrid methodology, where the artistic work serves as a tool for knowledge production and becomes part of a scholarly endeavor within arts-based research (Leavy, 2015). Here, photography both as object and medium addresses performative aspects of representation in a self-reflexive manner, while my artistic work similarly fosters methods of auto-ethnography, auto-fictionality and self-reflexivity. My approach also pertains to Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject (Rothberg, 2019), as one that "will illuminate convergences – as well as contradictions – between different dilemmas: namely, the entanglement of the diachronic and synchronic, the impure positionings that render subjects fundamentally complex, and the way different forms of power interact and build on each other" (17). In this context, the embedding of my personal history in my artistic practice and scholarly research is bound up in a recognized history and fosters a productive dialogue between the personal and the collective, and between the artistic and the scholarly.

Offering tools to analyze and understand postcolonial conditions and decolonial endeavors in the contemporary, this dissertation introduces new terminologies to discuss contemporary cultures of identity and representation in the photographic realm, as well as to develop a transdisciplinary framework that fosters exchange between different fields. The choice of objects is situated within the premise of the specific visual details in the photographic material, such as questions of authenticity, posing, staging, background, surrounding, as well as questions of production, authorship and other details that contribute to the analysis that can be contextually situated outside of the frame.

Throughout the negotiation of the notion of hybridity, and an interpolation of the term towards contemporary complexities of identity, the thesis establishes the concepts of the alternation of coexisting cultural identities and perspectives, visual-cultural forms of code switching in the photographic realm, and oscillating forms within *spectral identities*. Here, the notion of the spectral is understood in a twofold manner: as a prismatic notion of the concept of identity, where identities are articulated within the scope of a spectrum rather

than a hybrid blend, as is already the practice in the discourses of the gender spectrum or the autism spectrum. Secondly, the spectral entails the notion of the specter, which expands the spectrum of identity even further towards haunting, where ghosts of the pasts metaphorically haunt identities of the present. As such, the notion of the spectral is multifaceted, which is discussed throughout this thesis in recurring sections in each chapter of the corpus, that establishes a connection to each particular chapter.

### **2.1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND GOALS**

1. How far can the photographic medium tell stories of cultural polarities, potential histories, and a transnational migrant knowledge?
2. Is there a form of transcultural code switching in the visual realm, or, in other words a coexistence and alternation of cultural identities and perspectives to be recognized?
3. How are these photographic tropes transmitted across generations and transferred from the private to the public and the collective, how do they serve as tools for mnemotechnique?
4. How can we develop new terminologies to work comparatively with different contexts, overlapping histories, memories and images, with regards to our digital age?

### 2.1.2 INTRODUCTION TO OBJECTS OF STUDY

The objects of study of this thesis follow a coherent narrative of colonial or postcolonial references and a narrative of diasporic movement in these contexts. The fields of the objects of study are situated in the photographic context, exemplifying archival, artistic, documentary and studio photography. The object selection includes colonial photographs from missionary archives, family photographs from private archives, photography from African modernist artist photographers, as well as contemporary artist photographers from West Africa and their diaspora in Europe.

Ranging from colonialism to the contemporary and from different diasporic localities, the research attempts to comparatively examine the photographic material under the premise of contemporary politics of identity. The analysis reflects on beginnings and origins of colonial, postcolonial and diasporic identities. Here, it is of interest to dismantle the different operations of photographic representation in the various eras, whereas this also relates to the interplay of individual narratives that connect to collective memories. In the context of postcolonial and visual culture studies, the thesis examines the photographic objects in reference to ideas of agency and resistance. In doing so, the performativity of the photographic material is also considered and connected to the idea of subversion in linguistic code switching (Stroud, 2004; Nilep, 2006). This transdisciplinary fusion of thoughts finally provides exemplifications of visual-cultural code switching as a coexistence and alternation of cultural perspectives.

Starting in **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness**, the research illuminates the history of early photography in West Africa, and particularly focuses on archival photographic material from The Basel Mission Archive in Ghana, and The Basel Mission Archive in Cameroon, in reference to the research of historian Paul Jenkins. Beginning by laying out the colonial context of Ghana, this first chapter focuses on the specific details of colonialism in Ghana and West Africa and their contextualization within the visual sphere. In the photographic objects of study, the thesis analyzes the characteristics of colonial interference into questions of cultural identity and representation. Here, colonial photography embodies the intrinsic notions of discontinuity executed by colonial forces, creating the notion of a colonial unevenness that constitutes the title for this chapter and exposes the colonial battle with indigenous culture as well as subverts the visuality of its scope. The early tropes of the Basel Mission Archives formulate forms of resistance that have for long been unidentified. This

thesis also aims to introduce the concept of multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009) to the analysis, with focus on the different interconnected histories and narratives created in colonial times, also pointing to the potential histories, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay has talked about (2019). In Interlude 1, which discusses an excerpt of my artistic practice in *Being a guest* (2015-present), transcultural entanglements are examined within the collaborative artistic research project.

**4. Independence and the Postcolonial Invention of Self** subsequently deals with cultural leaps into postcolonial independence, again exemplified by the context of Ghana and West Africa. The chapter encompasses the independence movement led in Ghana by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, and, as a result, the reinvention of cultural identity in Ghana, the idea of Pan-Africanism, as well as West African postcolonialism and how it is articulated in the visual medium of photography. Here, the dissertation juxtaposes family photographs from private archives (such as a private family archive of my own family and artistic work) of the independence, and postcolonial period to the work of West African artists such as James Barnor, Felicia Abban, Malick Sidibé, and Seydou Keïta, examining developments in relation to representation and countervisuality as well as postcolonial agency, resistance and ambivalence articulated in the photographic material. This also marks the beginnings of migration and diaspora within a postcolonial context. Generating agency in postcolonial circumstances, the role of countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) in African independence movements serves as an articulation of a visual-cultural code switching, attempting to dismantle Europe as the global center. This countervisuality followed, as described above, the approach of creating the myth of a new African identity, that would, paired with modern elements of development and progress, become encapsulated in photographic objects, and still holds postmemories for a younger generation today (Hirsch, 2012). Interlude 2 revisits the collaborative artistic project *Being a guest* (2015-present) and introduces a part of the project that negotiates the West African independence era in the notion of the vernacular family archive.

**5. Articulations of Memory: The. Reinvented Diaspora** continues to explore this postmemorial line of thought, transferring the postcolonial to the diasporic condition. This third chapter marks the introduction to concepts of diaspora and migration that the research project considers within postcolonial discourse. Today, in the globalized context of the world we are more than ever urged to understand and dismantle postcolonial relations, in order to

reflect on their resulting new ethnicities in Hall (1989) or their constructed identities in Appiah (2018). An active acknowledgment of these identities helps deal with the complexities that come in line with the aftermaths of a postcolonial African entropy. This chapter embodies the crucial process of identity formation that follows the aftermaths of the colonial and the postcolonial up until the contemporary. Most importantly, it unravels the postcolonial migrants' and their descendants' identities that have been exposed to and transformed by processes of diasporic movements. While memories, histories, and narratives were being passed on to these generations in diasporic settings, it is the transmission of those memories themselves that articulate their new diasporic identities for the most part. Here, the research project will again refer to the innovative concept of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997; 2012), as well as including other contemporary reflections on the photographic medium such as performative aspects (Levin, 2009; 2014) and prosthetic culture (Lury, 1998) in photography. Here, the objects of study exemplify contemporary artistic practices that reveal the diasporic circumstances indicated above and the various postcolonial identities they entail. Artists such as James Barnor, Philip Kwame Apagya, and Liz Johnson Artur, follow an artistic practice that embraces these reflections on contemporary diasporic representation and identity. Nevertheless, we will still be dealing with questions of representation (Hall, 1997) and countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) at this point, as well as the agency as it is described in the civil contract of photography (Azoulay, 2008). Expressions of pose, staging and self-staging are some of the tools utilized in these works, that negotiate and investigate the particular postcolonial and diasporic identities. The practice of switching various visual codes supports the identitarian negotiation that these works display. It slowly unfolds, that their identifications are connected to transmission of memories that narrate postcolonial search or at times decay of cultural identity. Interlude 3 presents an excerpt of my artistic project *You and We* (2014), which talks about my mother's anecdotes of emigrating from Ghana to Germany in the 1970's, that became my postmemories.

In **6. Transcultural Code Switching and Contemporary Visual Culture** visual-cultural codes in contemporary subcultures become visible in the work of artists, like Liz Johnson Artur, Omar Victor Diop, and Carolina Arantes, the diasporic anti-heroes portrayed in this section meet in urban and public spaces, anonymous architectures or natural environmental surroundings, where scenes of everyday places that seem familiar are echoed and at the same time transformed into postmodern cinematographic stages. Since the

protagonists portrayed are used to their surroundings – enacting their daily lives, meeting friends etc. – they appear to be acting in an autofictional manner, without taking on different roles but themselves. They are in fact representing themselves, and as a result are literally playing themselves. The gestures, postures, and facial expressions of their social interactions, as well as their clothing are informed by the prior postcolonial narratives, postmemory, and a global contemporary lifestyle, that sees photographically, as reflected in the prosthetic culture by Lury (1998). By means of these subversive performative codes, they are showing themselves as they want to be seen, trying to reconfigure that visual reality in a form of contemporary indiscernibility, as fiction and real life come together in a common daily practice on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The choice of objects which entail supposed tropes of polarities as well as potentialities of postcolonialism will be the premise for this investigation of the specific visual details in the photographic material, such as questions of authenticity, posing, staging, background, surrounding, as well as questions of production, authorship and other details that contribute to the analysis and that can be contextually situated outside of the frame. Finally, the case studies are considered to be relevant within the details of the theoretical framework discussed above. Interlude 4 talks about *Perspicere: The Invention of Self* (2017/2021).

By means of using a hybrid methodology in the four Interludes, I integrate analysis of my own artistic practice as part of a knowledge production that builds on my take of the method of arts-based research, and with reference to Rothberg's idea of the implicated subject (2019). This is organized throughout the thesis as Interludes 1-4 that appear towards the end of each chapter, serving as a “break” that demonstrates what arts-based research can bring to an academic discussion, as well as giving a context as to why I came to engage in scholarly reflections on Afro diasporic identities and representations beyond my artistic practice. The artistic projects discussed are *Being a guest* (2015-present) in **3.** and **4.**, *You and We* (2014) in **5.** and *Perspicere: The Invention of Self* (2017/2021) in **6.** This break from the main body of analysis hopes to enrich the thesis by providing an interlude from a different research angle, similar to what Rebecca Walker identifies in the notion of the break:

The break in African diaspora music and cultural expression is a transformative technology that mirrors the vitality, dissonances, and underlying coherence of diasporic cultural processes. As a metaphor – and in performance, insofar as it represents a step out of the familiar structure of a song or dance into another consciousness that is different from but still part of the narrative arc – the break is a kind of possession that intervenes on, but does not invalidate, the communal links on which it depends. The

break, the crossroads, and the void signify the potency that haunts the space between forms (as hidden genealogy). Rebecca Walker, *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness*, 2012.

## **2.2 STATE OF THE ART IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES**

Postcolonial studies refer to the discourse initiated by the idea of former colonized countries and the procedures of bringing their independence into realization. The theory is associated with, and often involves, the political movements for independence, which entail forces of decolonization, but also refer to the conditions that follow the independence in form of a continuous discourse.

Here, the *post* in postcolonial does not necessarily imply an *after* in the strict chronological sense but indicates a certain field of study of the anti-colonial that still carries its aftermath in many of today's discourses. Postcolonialism serves as a theoretical framework for taking the turn from imperialism, eurocentrism, and colonial rule, and the accompanying consequences that have constituted much of the systems of the world we live in, with an extended population suffering from these systems up until now.

Starting in the 1980s, postcolonial studies emerged with a major impact in cultural studies and marked their importance in the 1990s. In this course of time, various theories and ideas have developed, accompanied by critical debate of oppositional approaches. The aspect of different localities of postcolonialism, for instance, each with its own specific context and history, as well as facing the complexities of progressing globalization are some of the crucial factors to consider, that have been identified in discussions along the way. Also, certain disciplines have been linked intrinsically to postcolonial studies such as race and ethnicity studies, gender studies and feminism as well as diaspora studies. Along with postcolonialism bringing the marginalized from the periphery to the center of attention, postcolonial studies have been widening their scope ranging from the fight for human rights to environmentalism, which find themselves articulated in forces of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011), fostering disconnection from a colonial power matrix.

Postcolonial theory remains one of the key areas of thought relevant today. In the following chapters, I will investigate its major components and recent developments, in order to identify the studies' state of the art in five major sections (Society/ Identity/ Visual

Culture/ Memory/ Linguistics), before I will introduce the relevance of the field for my thesis.

### 2.2.1 POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND SOCIETY

Modern imperialism, as it dates back to early voyages of discovery ((15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century) and finds itself linked to the tools of overpowering military control in order to gain political domination and economic advantage has been at the forefront of colonization, which can be understood as “one form of practice” of imperial ideology (McLeod, 2010: 18).<sup>2</sup> The ideology that underlies these developments regards the colonized people as exotic and inferior, which was coined by Edward Said as orientalism (Said, 1994). Orientalism describes the western attitude of exoticization of other cultures that continuously subordinates these societies, in order to justify and conduct the various operations of violence and exploitation that were interpreted as necessary to gain profit. Edward Said uses imperialism in this general sense that means “the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (Said 1993: 8), a process distinct from colonialism, which is “the implanting of settlements on a distant territory” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2013: 139).

Colonialism and its colonial desires internalize a form of cultural exploitation (Young, 1994). Postcolonialism finds itself embedded in the idea of anti-colonial political struggle, to liberate the affected people from political, cultural, and economic ties and from the ideologies that colonial powers impose. These quests for liberty are articulated in forms of resistance towards colonial powers and in the efforts of politically and culturally regaining local control, which is expressed in processes of decolonization, as a “process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2013: 77). This challenging concept has been most intrinsically discussed by Ngugi wa Tiong’o in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1984), where he particularly stresses the colonial after effect of “the normalization of the abnormalities of the colonial system” in postcolonial societies and the severe notion of the colonial force as a destruction of knowledge production, which is related to the misconception of knowledge as being implied from an exterior source induced by the colonial intervention (Ngugi, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> Imperialism as such dates back as far as to the Greek and Roman Empire.

Although the political struggle for independence later succeeded in most cases, ties in the form of economic dependency and inequality remain to this day. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, which gained independence from Britain in 1957, identified this development as neocolonialism, meaning a new form of colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965), that was “more insidious and more difficult to detect and resist than the direct control exercised by classic colonialism” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2013, 178), also referring to Lenin’s definition of imperialism as the last stage of capitalism, which exemplifies the interconnection between capitalism and colonialism. The phenomenon of neocolonialism leaves contemporary perspectives with a feeling of desperation and pessimism towards decoloniality (Cf. Mignolo, 2011), due to the entropic state of many former colonized countries today, particularly in Africa.

Nevertheless, Achille Mbembe provides a complex interpretation of contemporary African circumstances in his postcolony, suggesting a specific view on the continent that informs its identity in a heterogeneous as well as challenging way (Mbembe, 2001). Mbembe deviates from the binary perspective of the colonizer against the colonized and pleads for the idea of an interconnectedness that leaves the African subject in a fairly autonomous position, while incorporating complex notions of its identity. Mbembe concludes: “Hence, it would seem wrong to continue to interpret postcolonial relations in terms of absolute resistance or absolute domination, or, as a function of the binary oppositions usually adduced in conventional analyses of movements of indiscipline and revolt (e.g., counter-discourse, counter-society, counter-hegemony)” (105). Instead, he argues that “the [analytical] emphasis should be on the logic of ‘conviviality’, on the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, inscribing the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme” (110). Hence, the colonially fragmented African identity would have the chance to gain back its dignity and agency for the attempted political and economic transformations ahead, while maintaining its complex heterogeneity. Mbembe writes:

What this means is that the “post” in “postcolony” does not refer at all to the idea of a regulated transition from one form to another form or duration. We cannot think in terms of a mechanical succession of ages. But in our attempt to create an impression of continuity, we cannot refer to the present and to its actors as simply shadow puppets of something or of somebody else. In my mind, the notion of the “postcolony” refers to a timescape which is simultaneously in the process of being formed and of being dissolved through a movement that brings both the “being formed” and the “being dissolved” into collision. The term “postcolony” indicates my desire to take very

seriously the intrinsic qualities and power of “contemporaneity” while firmly keeping in mind the fact that the present itself is a concatenation of multiple temporalities. Because of the entanglement of these multiple temporalities, Africa is evolving in multiple and overlapping directions simultaneously (Mbembe in Höller, 2002).

In his chapter contribution “Africa and its Diaspora” to *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, Ghanaian scholar Ato Quayson (2013a) emphasizes the importance of Africa’s “relationship to its variant diasporas and the implications this has for understanding the socio-cultural and economic changes taking place in the continent itself” (628). Furthermore, Quayson defines the concept of diaspora:

For a diaspora to emerge out of the dispersal of a given population a number of conditions have to be met. These include the time depth of dispersal and settlement in other locations; the development of a myth of the homeland (note the emphasis on myth here); the attendant diversification of responses to homeland and host nation; the evolution of class segmentation and conflict within a given diaspora; and the ways in which contradictions among the different class segments end up reinforcing different forms of material and emotional investment in a utopian ideal of the homeland [...] It is the utopian idealization that gives the homeland ultimate salience within diasporic consciousness, whether this ensues in a return-to-homeland movement or not ( 631).

In this sense, Quayson points out that considering processes of “diasporization” (734) holistically, also within the inner African context, will give a contemporary perspective to the idea of the concept of diaspora and postcolonialism, claiming that “the dimensions of nation and citizenship; the significance of both intrinsic and extrinsic migration ebbs and flows that have served to structure African society over the past four centuries; the relation of these to transnationalism and globalization”, reveal major insights to the research on African diasporas today (628), and reiterate Mbembe’s idea of an entanglement of multiple temporalities in the postcolony (Mbembe in Höller, 2002) . Quayson identifies key diasporic conditions and “Africa’s shifting relation to its diasporas” that declared its diaspora the “sixth region” of the continent, which can be equally linked to Robin Cohen’s idea of cultural diaspora or deterritorialized diaspora (Cohen, 2008), with contemporary discourse on concepts of diaspora often considering the idea of cultural places instead of cultural territories. This is underlined by the fact that there have been more African-born Africans migrating to the United States annually since 1970 than were sent there each year throughout the 400-year period of slavery and that the World Bank estimates that in 2010 there were 30.6 million Africans living outside their homelands (Quayson, 2013a: 629).

In her introduction to the panel discussion *African Diasporic Countervisualities* at Barnard Center for Research on Women in New York, on February 2019, Tina M. Campt states that “African diasporic for many means the forced and voluntary migrations and displacements of Africans from the Middle Passage through the present. I would add to that that it is also the creative links of relation, affiliation and affirmation forged by racialized communities in and between their multiple sites of dwelling” (Campt, 2019, n.d.). This marks the bridge between a territorialized and a cultural diaspora, as we will further see below within transdisciplinary approaches. In an attempt to reconceptualize postcolonial discourses in the contemporary, Homi Bhabha’s contribution to the volume *The Urgency of Theory* (2007), talks about a contemporary form of anxiety that “is at once the ‘recall’ of a situation – its memorial – and its performative anticipation or expectation” accentuating the “danger of a loss of perception” attached to images, situation, and representations. He implies that postcolonial nations are in danger of failing to identify their own past and presence.

In Bhabha’s *The Commitment to Theory* (1994) he had presented theory as a powerful tool that refuses authorities and injects its own autonomy into cultural discourses. However, it seems that theory has come to a point of transit, where its role is constantly being reevaluated in terms of impact. The urgency that Bhabha highlights lies in the search for a “transnational, migrant knowledge” (Bhabha, 1994), a creation of new forms of knowledge, that go hand in hand with what he calls “the right to narrate” (Bhabha, 2007): “Theoretical writing is suspended in a moment of transition, but the theorists discussed here perceive a urgency in their quest for a new form of theory able to attend to notions of difference and alterity in the recent context of postcoloniality and global capitalism” (Hiddleston, 2010). In this context, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing furthermore unravels her proposed concept of “friction as ‘a metaphorical image,’ [friction] reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (Tsing, 2005: 5). An idea that can cross the borders of postcolonial studies and can be interpolated within various areas of cultural studies today. This also relates to the concept of postmigration, which is a versatile concept that describes a state where migration has become an integral part of society (cf. Schramm, Pultz Moslund, and Ring Petersen, 2019).

### 2.2.2 POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND IDENTITY

Although the postcolonial concept of alterity might seem similar to that of otherness, it makes sense to distinguish between the two terms. Otherness describes a state of difference of an individual or group that is constructed on the basis of power relations, in which the dominant subordinates an “other” on the basis of difference. Alterity, literally meaning other in terms of the self being different from an Other (from Latin *alter*), has been established and is commonly used in the context of philosophical discussion. In the context of the postcolonial, the imperial identification of the self is closely interlinked to the alterity of the colonized subject by means of othering through marginalization (Spivak, 1985a). *Worlding*, as a subsequent postcolonial concept, expands on the spatial notion of othering, where the imperial Eurocentric perspective of the colonizer takes formation in the creation and mapping of inferior and superior worlds, a ranking of first (Europe), second (Soviet Union) and third (all colonized) world (Spivak, 1985a). Spivak further develops and critiques Antonio Gramsci’s idea of the subaltern within postcolonial studies. For Spivak, the subaltern describes an inferior group in hegemonic settings and lacks self-determination, as the subaltern’s identity and inferiority are defined by its difference from the superior imperialist (Spivak, 1985b).

As another form of articulation of otherness, the concept of hybridity can be summarized as a critical term: initiated throughout the 18th/19th centuries by evolutionary theory – namely Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution – a hybrid would be two different animals or plants producing something new together. Around the same time the term became negatively connoted in colonial power relations and racial theory (Young, 1994). In relation to racial mixing, the colonizer would be regarded as pure in race, hence the impure races were to be degraded. Later in 1994, Homi Bhabha introduced hybridity as a postcolonial concept: a critique of the concept of pure culture and an examination of how colonized cultures perform in a colonial situation, by creating new hybrid cultural forms in an act of resistance, where creative and subversive means face colonial power as a political force of identity. Hybridity here becomes a complex idea, where new spaces and new identities are being created. Robert Young argues that the idea of hybridity has been transformed by Bhabha into an active moment of “challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power [...] a counter-authority, a Third Space” (Young, 1994: 21) and “a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms” (Young: 24). Young

also compares hybridity in Bhabha to Derrida's term *brisure*, a "breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity" (Young: 25). The concept of Bhabha's hybridity was however contested by Glissant's critique, who contested the calculable notion of Bhabha's idea, and coined the term *creolization*, which he understood as "hybridization with an added value which is unpredictability" (Céry, 2015, cf. Glissant 1996).

In this context the concept of ambivalence describes a moment or state of uncertainty, a coexistence of "attraction and repulsion" (Young 1994: 161). The term was introduced to postcolonial studies by Bhabha as a characteristic connection between colonizer and colonized. This interrelation problematizes the alternating position of the colonized between resistance and compliance, which he also refers to as an affective "sly civility" towards the colonial authority, which again generates symptoms of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994: 132). Subsequently, the colonial power, which depends on an orderly power relation is disturbed and weakened in its authority due to the uncertainty that the ambivalence of the colonized produces, which in turn subverts the colonial plan (*ibid.*). Here, the concept of mimicry becomes crucial in Homi Bhabha's view of the ambivalence of colonial discourse, where the colonizer's mimicry of the colonizer's culture and behavior articulates itself as "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1994: 86). The idea of mimicry has become a major concept for postcolonial studies. It entails a two-sided characteristic, where mimicry can evolve into mockery, a "double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (88).

Within the cross-cultural field of Black studies, which developed mainly in the US, the concept of double consciousness had been developed by W. E. B. Du Bois. It describes an inner conflict arising from the African American perspective of being degraded to inferiority in opposition to a dominant white culture. In this perspective, the double-conscious black individual finds themselves always looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist white society, and "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903: xxiii), or as Fanon had noted before, "by the visibility of their perceived difference" (Fanon, 1952). The term additionally refers to Du Bois' experiences and sufferings as an African American in a white context upbringing. Du Bois understood his work as part of the movement of Black Studies in the US of the 1960s, which was in turn partially influenced by the francophone movement of *négritude*. Black Studies

intellectuals embraced many of the ideas developed by Fanonist thinkers in the form of the black consciousness movement. Paul Gilroy later introduces an innovative concept in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), where he talks about a black Atlantic music culture that incorporated elements from African, American, British, and Caribbean cultures, in a hybrid mix of cultural identity. Interpreting the idea of double consciousness by W. E. B. Du Bois as a forceful multiracial perspective, Gilroy effectively subverts modernity, eurocentrism, and capitalism by identifying a cultural project beyond the imperialistic projects of slavery and colonialism: a counterculture of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

In Stuart Hall's *New Ethnicities* (1989), he introduces black minorities in Britain as a new generation of postcolonial identity. This collective identity is based on the notion of color, as in people of color, and unifies multi-ethnic backgrounds and religions. Standing in opposition to white domination and oppression within the British system at the time, it inspired many to political action in the struggle for access to social and economic resources. Later, in his influential essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996), Hall recognizes that "as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened—'what we have become'" (37). Here, he describes cultural identities as unfixed entities that "undergo constant transformation", while the formation of identity articulates itself in "not an essence but a positioning" (37). As he specifically turns to his own Caribbean, European, and American identity, he takes up Bhabha's ideas in a "conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994) and Glissant's idea of creolization (1990), a process of intermixing and cultural exchange. What Stuart encourages is the ability to be "able to speak from all three identities" (37).

While acknowledging the multiplicity of the various hybrid diasporic identities, Hall emphasizes the importance of claiming one's cultural-political representation at all times. Homi Bhabha has also written on Hall that he had been interested in speaking from "in-between," in the ways one might "position oneself in the place of, interlocution, meaning not identity" (Bhabha, 2015). An idea that has been pursued and taken to another level by Kwame Anthony Appiah, who engages with the idea of *cosmopolitanism* as a form of being a citizen of the world (2006). In *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (2018), he further explores the nature and history of the identities that define and challenges our assumptions

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Latour, 1991, 1993; Bauman, 2000; Lyotard, 1979, et al.

about how identity works. In fact, Appiah demonstrates how identities are effectively constructed as “mistaken identities” (234) which leads to conflicts being provoked and triggered.

Further components that contribute to the described urgency of our time in the context of postcolonial studies are discussions related to affect studies, which negotiate collective structures of feelings, the emergence of digital humanities as a mass communication with new and to a certain extent unpredictable consequences, and the interrelation between postcolonialism and the environmental crisis, which have been noted to be “impossible to analyze [modern imperialism and colonialism] without engaging with the massive scale of environmental devastation that they entail “ (Huggan, 2004: 702).

### **2.2.3 VISUAL CULTURE STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSES**

Visual culture is a cross-cultural field that is able to mediate between the world of seeing and questions that emerge as we try to understand sociocultural situations and its contexts. Such as the postcolonial context, which has been identified as part of a broader context of imperialism, which in turn is essential in understanding the conditions of today’s world systems (Azoulay, 2019). All things visual constitute an interface that serves as a carrier of elements that help us negotiate the world, as far as we are able to connect to what we see. Visual culture, to utilize Nicholas Mirzoeff definition, is perhaps best understood as a “tactic for studying the functions of a world addressed through pictures, images, and visualizations, rather than through texts and words [...] the visual culture approach acknowledges the reality of living in a world of cross-mediation. Our experience of culturally meaningful visual content appears in multiple forms, and visual content and codes migrate from one form to another” (Mirzoeff, 2002).

As visual culture studies encompass an examination of all visual forms of media and communication, merges “popular” and “low” cultural forms, and the study of “high” cultural forms such as fine art, design, and architecture, defining visual culture studies as a study of semiotic signs as a system. Here, “The experience of everyday life can be described as code-switching or hacking the visual codes around us to navigate and negotiate meaning” (Irvine, 2004). However, we are challenged to accept ourselves as co-creators of cultural codes of many kinds: “Exploring semiotic perspectives, we may come to realize that information or

‘meaning’ is not ‘contained’ in the world or in books, computers or audio-visual media. Meaning is not ‘transmitted’ to us – we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions of which we are normally unaware” (Mirzoeff, 2002).

In this context of semiology and visual culture studies, Stuart Hall (1997) analyzes the role of *representation* in media images and the public sphere, according to cultural-political stand points. Starting out from the mere interpretation of representation in the sense of *re-representation* as something which already holds meaning in the commonplace. In a second meaning of the commonplace, representation also means: to stand in for, as in political representation. Hall argues subversively that fixed meaning in representation, which he understands as “visual text” does not in fact exist. Instead, we interpret and modify meaning, depending on our cultural imprints and backgrounds, our identities and identifications, and the cultural and historical contexts we are surrounded by.

However, the notion of representation entails the notion of giving meaning, by means of the way in which images are depicted in their representations. Representation as a meaning-making operation does in fact place culture in a centralized position as a primary force. However, since there are no fixed meanings, but only interpretations, representation does not refer to something that existed as fixed meaning before: in fact, there is no meaning until something is represented, as representation is constitutive of the event. Hall also states that the conceptual maps that we use individually are deeply connected to language as communication that externalizes, legitimizes, and naturalizes meaning for the conceptual maps of the collective. To create new forms and new possibilities of meaning requires a temporary fix within languages and signs in a framework of discourse.

In his conception of countervisuality, Nicholas Mirzoeff refers to representation and the dominance of hegemony in the visual field. Visuality, as redefined by Mirzoeff, while drawn from the concept coined by Thomas Carlyle in the nineteenth-century, expresses the authority of a hegemonic system, as it refers to making history, mapping, and making tactics of war visible. Visuality is a regime that entails the norms and the processes whereby power makes visible and thereby also denies appearance. Countervisuality then becomes “the attempt to reconfigure visuality as a whole” (Mirzoeff, 2011). *The right to look* derives from a countervisual strategy indicating the importance of infiltrating the normative dynamisms of visuality by means of proclaiming the right to look and the right to look back: “the right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to political

subjectivity and collectivity [...] the opposite of the right to look is not censorship, then, but visibility” (Mirzoeff, 2011). In that sense, visual culture studies are more than simply the study of how images have become predominant in our times. Particularly in relation to the postcolonial, the discourse has evolved to become a crucial tool in understanding and deconstructing imperial power relations, as images bear the paradigmatic components, mechanisms and ideologies that build and organize our worlds up until today. Images of visibility, like myths, naturalize their underlying power structures. Hence, countervisuality denaturalizes normative images in an uncomfortable way. For Roland Barthes, mythology executes a fabricated replacement of history with nature:

In the case of the soldier-Negro, for instance, what is got rid of is certainly not French imperialism (on the contrary, since what must be actualized is its presence); it is the contingent, historical, in one word: fabricated, quality of colonialism. Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. If I state the fact of French imperialism without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and goes without saying: I am reassured (Barthes, 1957).

Mirzoeff discusses his concept of countervisuality along slave plantations “monitored by the surveillance of the overseer” (Mirzoeff, 2011: 2), British imperialism “organized by an army missionaries bringing light to darkness by means of the word, actively imagining themselves to be heroic subjects” and contemporary military counterinsurgency (Mirzoeff, 2011: 9). Such visibility names, categorizes, and defines, separates groups and finally naturalizes and aestheticizes these classifications: “Classifying, separating, and aestheticizing together form what I shall call a complex of visibility,” (3-4) but we should “move on, there is nothing to see here” (2), as implicated by authorities, which represents a violent transformation of the real: “The right to look is, then, the claim to a right to the real. It is the boundary of visibility, the place where such codes of separation encounter a grammar of non-violence – meaning the refusal to segregate – as a collective form” (26). In relation to Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, Mirzoeff sees that “countervisuality’s realism is not necessarily mimetic” (ibid.). It expresses the subversive moment of simultaneous display of representation and disruption of its authority.

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) Ariella Azoulay’s argument for the capability of photography to enable individuals to conduct political agency has become

another key concept of reference in visual culture and postcolonial studies. Here, the civil contract consists of the possibility for literally anyone, even a person without citizenship in a specific place, to enact a form of agency or resistance by means of utilizing the photographic medium as a political tool. As an example, Azoulay refers to the Palestinian non-citizens of Israel. Photography, as a medium that is fundamentally integrated into communication about important events and catastrophes in our time, can simultaneously serve as a tool against forms of political oppression, injustice, and censorship. Azoulay insists that the meaning of photography inheres not in the photograph itself as an autonomous object, but rather in the performative reconstruction of the photograph as an “event” (Levin, 2009). Through it Azoulay explores the visual field of suffering in our time, how its victims have been represented in visual culture and in turn reacted within the photographic medium. Additionally, Azoulay also discusses the reciprocal relationship between the photographer and the photographed in her argument, as photographic authorship and its intentions will always be visible in the image itself.

Azoulay has also been focusing on the notion of imperialism in the photographic medium in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019). This can be traced back to the philosophical thought of Agamben (cf. 1993; 1995; 1999), who builds his notion of potentiality on Aristotle, and, as a response to two of his major influences, namely Heidegger and Benjamin.<sup>4</sup> Here, potentiality (*dynamis*) is understood as opposed to actuality (*energeia*) and at the same time connected to it. The relationship between potentiality and actuality can be articulated in two ways: The first of these is easy to grasp: the potentiality to be. In order for a thing to be, it must logically have first been possible (for if it had been impossible, it could never have come into being). The second way in which potentiality exists, and which Agamben again follows Aristotle is a “potentiality of non-being” (*dynamis me einai*) or “impotence” (*adynamia*) (ibid.). This is not to be understood as deprivation, as actual weakness or incapacity, as it merely denotes the possibility that a thing does not come into existence and thus remains on the level of pure form of potentiality.

For Azoulay, imperial dominance as a mode of thinking has crucially shaped our world and still constitutes much of the cultural-political structures in our societies. The forces of capitalism and its never-ending strive for progress lie deeply rooted in imperialist origins,

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Agamben and the notion of potentiality see **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness** and **6. Transcultural Code Switching and Contemporary Visual Culture**.

and have inflected democratic systems, those “imperial democracies”, that have found themselves being maintained and reflected in different technologies, among them the technological medium of photography and computer programming. These technologies support the reproduction of imperial structures and need to be utilized and examined according to their political power, as Azoulay argues.

Azoulay calls for a potential history that rethinks historical settings and developments from different angles within those histories as a form of historical reconstruction. Here, she takes on possibilities of potential incidents and inventions that have already appeared at source as forms of communication and dialogue between individuals and communities (as an example she gives the occurrence of civil contracts between Israelis and Palestinians before the 1940s). She focuses on “unlearning our imperial rights”, that have in parts also constituted our human rights, and engages in the idea of refusing the normative violence that lies within them, that have destroyed and segmented communities and legacies. Her approach contributes a challenging proposal to the field of visual culture studies and postcolonial studies as it addresses possibilities of overcoming some of the entropic historical impasses that imperialism and colonialism have established.

Photographic gestures, facial expressions, acting and reacting in a certain way, are closely connected to identity and representation, and “as numerous scholars of visual culture have shown, photography plays a critical role in articulating black people’s complex relationship to cultural identity and national belonging” (Camp, 2012: 5), while communicating “transnational circulation as tactile and affective objects and as performative enactments of postcolonial, diasporic subjects” (140). In the concept of performativity, derived from J.L. Austin’s concept of the performative related to speech acts (Austin, 1962), he postulates a theory that comprises the idea of an act of speech as a performative act. He elaborates on his concept with the help of examples of speech acts that embody a performative impact on reality, with the consequence of actually changing reality and not to possibly be taken back. Such speech-acts as saying “yes” to getting married or to making an oath. Subsequently, the concept can be transferred to the performativity of speech as such, interpolating the linguistic notion towards a performativity of culture. Judith Butler’s concept of performativity (1990) is, in relation, connected to reiteration: it is core; thus the repetition would never be done in the same way – as something else would happen or change: “theorists of performativity like Derrida and Judith Butler deconstruct the distinction

between “constative” and “performative”; for them, all language is performative in its citationality and insofar as it brings the world into being (Levin, 2009). Butler’s speech-act is not governed by the subject (contrary to Austin), since the illusion derives from the consumption of the citational nature of the act. Her theory of performativity is not only marginal, transgressive, and resistant, but also a dominant and punitive form of power, one that both generates and constrains human subjects. Butler’s subversiveness lies in her theory of performative normativity.

However, the presence of the camera plays its part in provoking these performative utterances. In fact, we are all actors, when we are – like the camera apparatus indicates– accustomed to watching ourselves through the eyes of the Other, or, in this relation the camera lens. In this context, Laura Levin points out in her review essay *The Performative Force of Photography* (2009), that “the ontology of photography is intrinsically linked to performance”, while also referring to Roland Barthes who said, in his milestone book on photography *Camera Lucida*: “what founds the nature of photography is the pose” (Barthes 1981: 78). Levin further elaborates on the performative encounter between spectator and image, which she sees in connection to the “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences: “these authors privilege the doing aspects of photography, asking how images exceed their frames and directly affect their viewers. In this respect, these works attempt to present a “history of looking” in the tradition of *Camera Lucida*, offering an account of the emotional experience of the spectator encountering the photograph, the individual that, according to Barthes, becomes “the measure of photographic knowledge” (1981: 9). Levin also includes Azoulay’s work on defining photographs as acts of communication. Implicitly gesturing towards speech act theory, she writes that “photographs are constructed like statements (énoncés), the photographic image gains its meaning through mutual (mis)recognition [...] citizenship likewise is gained through recognition” (Azoulay 2008: 25). Levin later discusses the idea of photography and performativity in relation to camouflage (2014), where she situates identity and mimesis along with performance. Central to the idea is the political potential of camouflage as an empowering photographic tool that the bodies of women, people of color, and other marginalized persons are often proximate to backgrounds and intentionally connected to the properties of space.

## 2.2.4 MEMORY STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSES

Memory studies have evolved to become a major field in the Humanities, related to issues ranging from culture, media, and communications to history. Postcolonialism is closely connected to questions within memory studies, whether addressing the role of memory in postcolonial societies, migrant memory, or issues of memory transmission from the individual to the collective and finally the cultural memory of decolonization processes.

In the current zeitgeist of rapidly shifting communication technologies, transnational, transcultural and multidirectional memory have made the attempt to provide tools for understanding cultural memory over space and time and how it is able to shape personal and collective identities. The transcultural turn and the transnational turn describe movements which analyze cultural memory beyond national or cultural boundaries and negotiate spatial and temporal differences on a level of comparability and correlation (cf. Welsch, 2005).<sup>5</sup>

Theoretical discussions in postcolonial memory focus on diasporic memory, traumatic memory, postmemory (Hirsch), multidirectional memory (Rothberg) which practically entails a postcolonial perspective. Comparative postcolonial studies are means of creating more integrated frames of reference for research between memory and postcolonialism.

The concept of postmemory, as coined by Marianne Hirsch (2012) describes a generational structure of memory and how it is transmitted to subsequent generations across time and space. The experiences that have not been made by individuals themselves but have undergone a process of transmission to second or subsequent generations by means of stories, images, and behaviors which have been communicated to them while growing up. These memories have had such a strong impact on those individuals, that they seem to construct a structure of remembrance similar or even stronger to direct experiences and can possibly transform into the internalization of traumatic narratives. The inherited memories might then affect how individuals are being shaped until the present. Hirsch was initially inspired for the concept by Art Spiegelman's Comic *Maus* (1980), where the artist was trying to tell a story of the Holocaust that had marked his life but that was not his own story: he didn't remember it, but he was profoundly shaped by it through his parents. Finding certain

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<sup>5</sup> In contrast to a separatist concept of culture, which is based on intercultural delimitation, W. Welsch has developed the concept of transculturality; thus Welsch argues that the "separative idea of culture is in fact rendered obsolete by the external interconnectedness of cultures" (Welsch, 2005: 323).

parallels to her own childhood stories about the war as told by her parents, Hirsch found they had a powerful place in her memory. Hirsch had previously started working on the idea of postmemory in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997), discussing its impact within family photographs and the construction of relationships, identities, and representations, which subversive contemporary artistic strategies are able to dismantle, as Hirsch argues. These relations become particularly crucial when looking at the constitutive shaping of personal cultural memory and the link from private memory to collective history in photography. *Family Frames* analyzes the place of photography and specifically imaginaries of family, within personal and collective postmemory:

Photographs, as the only material traces of an irrecoverable past, derive their power and their important cultural role from their embeddedness in the fundamental rites of family life. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals. Because the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records, it has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics. As photography immobilizes the flow of family life into a series of snapshots, it perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history (Hirsch, 1997: 7).

The concept combines the idea of personal and collective memory with a Barthian notion of normalizing myths, by discussing how subsequent family generations receive histories: through family stories, through private communications, public photographs, museums, memorials, media and other documents, history books, other people's stories, and multiple kinds of transmission, where family photography "functions as an expressive practice that creates the linkages and attachments it depicts by visually and affectively suturing individuals to one another" (Campt, 2012: 48). Here, Hirsch does not hierarchize between individuals, but rather distinguishes between familial postmemory from descendants of survivors and people with affiliative post memory, who have gained their memories through other means. However, notions of memory, representation and performativity meet in the format of family photography, because "as a critical medium through which diasporic relationality is constituted, family photography is, in this way, far more than a documentary reproduction of its subject; it is a performative practice that enacts complicated forms of social and cultural relationships [...] of these complex dynamics of projection, desire, performance, and affiliation" (Campt, 2012: 48). The study of memory centered on the

Holocaust for a long time and other memory scholars have turned to Holocaust studies, in order to find helpful concepts. As we have arrived at the understanding of a more exportable, globalized memory culture, we understand that histories speak to each other, are connected and we can connect them (Hirsch, 2012).

The concept of multidirectional memory by Michael Rothberg (2009), which brings together Holocaust studies and postcolonial studies, had two sources of inspiration: the Holocaust representation and simultaneously the return of the question of genocide and extreme violence: to think about the Holocaust, in new moments of violence. Secondly, when talking about the Holocaust, other histories and memories tended to be excluded, the Holocaust was crowding out other histories from the public sphere and also to a certain extent in scholarly discourse. Multidirectionality presents a non-competitive form of comparison of different histories and traditions across the globe, where the competitive is neglected in favor of the connective nature of memories. Rothberg's first argument is to think about this comparative context in non-competitive terms: to think of the interaction of different historical memories, enabling us to talk about Holocaust and slavery at the same time and vice versa. This important development in memory studies signifies a turn against 'competitive memory', as Rothberg calls it, towards multidirectional memories interacting productively. He adds that even memory conflict and tension between different memories produces more memory and not less. For him, collective or public memory works in a cross-referencing way in which more memories are produced from the interactions of different memories in a comparative production.

The second argument introduces the context of decolonization and movements for civil rights in the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, the United States to Holocaust studies. Once established that memory works productively, one has to consider two implications of that: Firstly, to write a history of memory, we cannot just focus on a particular tradition, we have to go beyond the Holocaust, as it has interacted with other histories, for example and in particular between with movements of decolonization (French-Algerian War, Algerian war of independence), where Nazi occupation echoed and made connections to the situation in France. Secondly, Rothberg stresses a methodological flexibility: to think dialogically and be open to unexpected conjunctions in this comparative dimension in memory studies, as particular histories of memory can only be written comparatively. This development can be seen as a part of a broader trend in memory studies. Simultaneously, historians have started

looking at the Holocaust in relationship to colonial genocide and colonial violence in general in modes of multiperspectivity in history (e.g., the Herero genocide, where Germany's involvement has been undermined), and focused on a multidirectionality in history that embraces the concept of the indigenous by means of new approaches (cf. Clifford, 2013). The discourse returned to Hannah Arendt's thesis that colonial history is connected to totalitarianism, Nazi camps, and genocide (Arendt, 1951, cf. Rothberg 2009). Simultaneously memory studies have been starting to look at cultural memory more comparatively since the transnational and transcultural turn in memory studies. However, memories might be structurally multidirectional, but not all memories are represented equally in the public sphere, as the inequities and representations of different histories are controlled by specific power relations.

In her mentionable concept of prosthetic culture (1998), Celia Lury analyzes how technology is altering our consciousness and shows how the manipulation of photographic images and ways of seeing can redefine the relation between consciousness, the body and memory as to create a prosthetic culture whose capacities both extend and threaten our humanity. We live in a society in which some memories can be falsely implanted in the individual. The phenomenon of a *false memory syndrome* made available by contemporary visual technologies involves specific ways of seeing and also ways of life. Hence, what happens to identity in an age of digital imaging?

Key to Lury's notion of seeing photographically as a mnemonic technique is the idea that contemporary subjectivity is constituted in the afterlife of the photographic act, "as the subject-effect of, the counter-memory of the photograph" (86). Hence, a prosthetic culture takes form when "the subject as individual passes beyond the mirror stage of self-knowledge, of reflection of the self, into that of self-extension" (3), what Barthes calls "the advent of myself as other" (Barthes, 1981: 12). Lury's study addresses "contemporary understandings of agency, responsibility, the allocation of guilt, blame and virtue, the ascription of rights to the individual (and the exclusion of some people from this identity), and for recognitions of belonging, collective identification and exclusion" (2). The second part of the book addresses the ways in which ideas of consciousness, memory, and embodiment have been conceptually reconfigured for a prosthetic world. In this instance, false memory syndrome is understood as the construction of a false biography through a pastiche of mediated

representations, hence, is taken to be an example of the implications of seeing photographically for understandings of the individual and self-identity” (106).

### **2.2.5 CODE SWITCHING AND POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSES**

Relevant examples of linguistic code switching, meaning the alternating use of two languages, can often be found where people speak different languages due to reasons of a mixed origin or a linguistic heritage of migration. It is very frequent within bilingual speaking communities with differing ethnic backgrounds due to mixed partnerships and as a result of postcolonial migration. However, the reasons for code switching are most often grounded in a sociocultural context. In every case, language is an expression of what underlies social structures within society, hence, this marks the bridge between the sociolinguistic and the sociocultural of the topic.

Christopher Stroud, Professor of linguistics in Stockholm and Johannesburg, has done an analysis on code switching as a tool of resistance and subversion (2004), drawing a comparison to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity (Butler, 1990), which, as he argues, proposes a “possibility of opposition and resistance through language, and that emphasizes processes of signification and the potentially formative and transformative role of language” (Stroud, 2004). He refers to an analysis of a recording of women in postcolonial Mozambique, discussing the struggles of their lives in society and the politics of the country, while switching between local language (Ronga) and Portuguese continuously. The situation in Mozambique is described as one of “a community characterized by weak state organization, a plenitude of informal markets and divisive social conflicts manifested in heteroglossic speech practices” (ibid.) In the context of Mozambique, Stroud encounters linguistic code switching as a “powerful symbolic response to a situation of economic scarcity and political contest for individuals and groups, by mediating conflict, competition and change in a highly fluctuating socioeconomic and political environment” (147). He argues that their “identities are multiple and variable” and that “such multilingual speech practices provide the means for these women to transform their everyday realities in highly agentive acts of resistance [...] ultimately, at the heart of code switching in Mozambique lies the linguistic mediation of agency and empowerment” (ibid.). In Butler’s theory, this is achieved by means of “repetition and re-inscription in every meaningful performance” As

the Sociolinguist Penelope Gardner-Chloros is proposing in her essay *Code-switching in art: from Semiotics to Sociolinguistics* (2012), a more transdisciplinary approach between linguistics and the cultural field could be of great impact, claiming that:

By seeking instances of code switching in art and in other modes of behavior, we will not only strike a blow for interdisciplinarity, but will very likely improve our understanding of its linguistic uses at the same time [...] As psycho and neurolinguistics have indicated that code switching should be seen as a subset of switching behavior more generally, it seems likely however that there is a widely applicable code-switching principle (Gardner-Chloros, 2012).

The concept of code switching has also been reflected in psychology studies, where cross-cultural code-switching is the act of purposefully modifying one's behavior in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior. Also, in the psychological concept of cultural frame switching, the change from one cultural mindset to another is described. For example, biculturals shift their interpretive frames based on which of their cultural mindset was most recently activated, possibly by language or iconic images or symbols of that cultural identity.

## **2.2.6 TROPES OF POLARITY IN RELATION TO POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES**

*The material legacy of this repressed history is inscribed in the return of post-colonial peoples to the metropolis. Their very presence there changes the politics of the metropolis, its cultural ideologies and its intellectual traditions, because they – as a people who have been recipients of a colonial cultural experience – displace some of the great metropolitan narratives of progress and law and order, and question the authority and authenticity of those narratives.*

(Bhabha in Rutherford, 1990: 218)

*Tropes of Polarity: Visual Representation and Afrodiasporic Identities* finds itself embedded in the postcolonial discourse, as its key research questions circulate around topics in the context of postcolonialism, migration, and diaspora. The topicality of the project is articulated through the predominant methodological approach, which is to comparatively investigate the connection of visual representation to concepts of identity in postcolonial

studies, as well as to utilize semiology as a bridge between the linguistic and the visual field. The attempted visual case studies of the project discuss several aspects of the postcolonial discourse described above, such as colonial histories, political movements for independence, forces of decolonization, political and economic conditions, as well as sociocultural circumstances and aesthetic phenomena.

In reference to a concept of diaspora that discusses Africa intertwined in close relation with its diaspora and in a process of “African diasporization” as a result of continuous migration and return (Quayson, 2013a), as well as the idea of a deterritorialized or cultural diaspora (Cohen, 2008), the research focuses on articulating recent diasporic developments while comparing the ideas of the project to established references of postcolonial identity such as the concepts of hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry (Bhabha), the idea of new ethnicities (Hall, 1989) and the concept of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) in postcolonial and Black studies. The references are juxtaposed to the project’s idea of coexisting cultural identities and alternating perspectives of cultural identity. Alternating between different cultural perspectives in a performative manner, speaking from in-between, but at best transcending from a place of interlocution (cf. Bhabha, 2015), unraveling and embracing the polarities and potentialities of cultural identities, while there may occur elements of productive friction (Tsing, 2005). Tracing this phenomenon of a cultural form of code switching in the visual, it will be of interest to detect different forms of the phenomenon throughout time in forms of representation (Hall, 1997), as an act of seeing and being seen:

Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world. If we accept that we can see that hill over there, we propose that from that hill we can be seen. The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue. And often dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this - an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally, “you see things”, and an attempt to discover how “he sees things” (Berger, 1972).

Considering John Berger’s essential statement about the dialogical constitution of the visual, the project is going to focus on visual components that transport the idea of a countervisual agency, as a method of not simply a different way of seeing or a different way of looking at images, but “the attempt to reconfigure visibility as a whole” (Mirzoeff, 2011). This countervisuality performs as a way of “looking back” (ibid.) at colonial visibility and unevenness, while creating counter-narratives and counter-archives.

A visual-cultural form of code switching, which the project claims to be a major component in contemporary formations of diasporic and postcolonial identities, confronts and disrupts the gaze of the normative comfort of visibility. In this sense, the objects also entail the agency and performativity (Levin, 2009; 2014) needed to embrace other potentialities of history (Azoulay, 2019; Agamben, 1999). Drawing from the concepts of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997; 2012) and multidirectional memory (Rothberg, 2009), these approaches of memory transmission form the ground for a new transcultural migrant knowledge to be explored, while the idea of a prosthetic culture (Lury, 1998) exemplifies the additional contemporary challenge of the digital age and mass media in “seeing photographically” as a mnemonic technique and a “false memory syndrome”. Photography depicts the gestures, facial expressions, body language and ideologies expressed in customs, traditions, habits, clothing etc., as well the intentions of the photographer – that embody culture – and will help examine these socio cultural elements in the field of visual culture. Underlying the research is the idea of the photographic medium (and the photographic archive) as a visual medium of mnemotechnique that entails cultural information and encoded memories that can be transferred, transmitted, and passed on to next generations.

### 2.2.7 ON THE NOTION OF THE SPECTRAL

As a means to describe operational procedures of oscillation in cultural memory and its mnemotechnical means, this thesis proposes the notion of the *spectral*. Here, the notion of spectral, and with it the concept of *spectral identity*<sup>6</sup> is used in a twofold sense. Firstly, I consider spectral in the sense of a spectrum, such as in a prism or in spectral colors on the one hand, and secondly, spectral as in specter or haunting on the other hand. The Etymology of spectrum in latin designates “image” or apparition”. In this relation, the word “spectrum” [Spektrum] was strictly used to designate a ghostly optical afterimage by Goethe in his *Theory of Colors* and Schopenhauer in *On Vision and Colors*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of “spectral identities” exists in relation to film studies (Kröger and Anderson, 2015), and is predominantly focused on the notion of the specter, whereas I want to compound the notion of specter with the idea of an identity spectrum, as described below.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. On photography and spirits; Marien, 2021 and Harvey, 2007.

Thus, the notion of the spectrum consolidates contemporary characteristics of fluctuating identities and diversity (such as gender spectrum or autism spectrum), and offers an interpolation to the concept of hybridity, as this thesis claims. This interpolation towards an identity spectrum lies in the schematic nature of the term, which offers a potential to understand different notions within the umbrella of hybridity. Where hybridity describes a conglomerate of cultures evolving into something new (cf. Young, 2016 Bhabha, 1994), and further subdivides into notions like ambivalence and mimicry (ibid.), the spectral offers a framework that demonstrates variations within a spectrum. On the other hand, the notion of the specter and with it the idea of the spectral finds itself related to the photographic object itself, as Roland Barthes has stipulated (1981), which I consider a baseline for the understanding of hauntological spectrality in the photographic realm:

At the very beginning of *La Chambre Claire*, Barthes speaks of photography's spectral dimension when he points to three vectors of the photographic operation: the *operator*, the *spectator* and the *spectrum: spectre* "because this word conserves, in its root, a relationship with performance", but also because all photography allows for the "return of the dead" (Barthes, quoted in Bértolo and Medeiros, 2020).

Interestingly, Barthes opens up the notion of the spectrum, the supernatural idea of the spectral as "ghost," as well as the notion of performativity as in the spectacle. In the African context of photography, the ghostly notion is perpetually implied, where the camera apparatus supposedly catches shadows and even the negative carries the designation "ghost" in the Akan languages (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 47).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, most African studio photography is later taken in the context of death and funerals (Wendl and du Plessis, 1998). The notion of performativity finally becomes crucial when thinking about the performance of the photographic archive as such, where the specter derives from the mnemotechnical quality of the photograph and its complex negotiation of memory and temporality, as Tobias Wendl further concludes: "the relationships between photography and memory remain complex: both reveal the past to us from the perspective of the present, but also, conversely, the present from the past" (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 42, my translation).<sup>9</sup> Thus, it remains a relevant question of how we remember photographs, with a particular attention towards the sonic and haptic, and affective notions of images as objects (cf. Camp 2017, Wendl,

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<sup>8</sup> "In our language we refer to negatives as 'saman' - meaning ghosts" (Wendl and du Plessis, 1998); 'nwali' in the Ewe language (Wendl, 1998)

<sup>9</sup> See also **5. Articulations of Memory: The Reinvented Diaspora.**

1998; Edwards, 2006; Edwards and Hart, 2004). Photographs in Afro cultures remain related to the context of spirits and technology (cf. Behrend, Dreschke and Zillinger, 2015), but also to a haunting notion of colonialism, as we will see further below.

In this sense, and within the photographic context this thesis seeks to establish, the idea of the specter versus the spectrum again comes into play: The proximity of West African independence struggle to the left and with it to former soviet ideas (cf. Blakeley, 1986 et al.) give an insight into what Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993) later demystified as the ghosts of socialism that haunt the present, and reinvigorate a,

Learning to live – remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death alone [...] So it would be necessary to learn spirits [...] To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But with them [...] And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations (Derrida, 2012: xvii).<sup>10</sup>

Fisher, who refers to Derrida contends that human beings are “haunted by events that had not actually happened, futures that failed to materialize and remained spectral” (Fisher 2014: 59), it becomes apparent, that Derrida’s post-Marx reflections move beyond a European context in the postcolonial era. It remains to say that both the notion of the spectrum as articulated within alternations of African and Western identities and fashions, as well as the specter of utopian visions in West African independence movements, shape memories of the era and an understanding of what remains in the contemporary. However, the twofold notion of the idea of the spectral also underlies identities of the postcolonial realm, as will be described below. This notion of the spectral moreover presents a transculturalism embedded in the notion of hybridity, but rather describes operational switches than constituting hybrid fluidities. Considering Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* retroactively in the context of independence movement and beginning postcolonialism, it contributes to the baseline of

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<sup>10</sup> See below in 5. Articulations of Memory: The Reinvented Diaspora, Avery Gordon’s idea of the ghost/specter as a social figure. On the concept of “spectral humans” Butler and Spivak (2010): “These spectral humans, deprived of ontological weight and failing the tests of social intelligibility required for minimal recognition include those whose age, gender, race, nationality, and labor status not only disqualify them for citizenship but actively “qualify” them for statelessness. This last notion may well be significant, since the stateless are not just stripped of status but accorded a status and prepared for their dispossession and displacement; they become stateless precisely through complying with certain normative categories. As such, they are produced as the stateless at the same time that they are jettisoned from juridical modes of belonging. This is one way of understanding how one can be stateless within the state, as seems clear for those who are incarcerated, enslaved, or residing and laboring illegally. In different ways, they are, significantly, contained within the polis as its interiorized outside” (15-16). On state borders and mobility see also Achille Mbembe’s lecture “A World without Borders”, Culturgest, Lisbon, 2018.

Barthes' idea of the spectrum in photography, and the spectral as a notion of nuances (1981), but also to the complexity of a concatenation of time in the aftermaths of the postcolony, as Mbembe described (Mbembe in Höller, 2002).

Returning to the notion of the spectral, the uncanny does unfold when considering the legacies of colonialism that, despite diasporic movements beyond personal crises and cosmopolitan transculturality, exist on the African continent in form of neoliberal precarities that define the term neocolonialism (Nkrumah, 1965). A sophisticated account of the complexities of mobility between the two continents Africa and Europe, lies in T.J. Demos reflections of *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (2013). Here, Demos returns to Mbembe's conception of the postcolony as a site of heterogeneity, but also of "chaotic pluralism, regimes of violence, broken infrastructures, mythologies of power, mass poverty, and economy of death" (Demos, 2013: 144). Mbembe himself, has defined a notion of a sinister "spectralization" with which he criticizes the ongoing debt policy towards the African continent and the hostile consequences for its economies (Mbembe in Höller, 2002). Demos writes:

My running hypothesis is that the colonial past still haunts us because it is a past that has not really past. When Mbembe points out how "postcolonial state forms have inherited [...] the regime of impunity" of "colonial sovereignty," and when Harrison observes that "neoliberalism is one more project in a programme of Western imposition that commenced with colonisation," it becomes clear that the postcolony is not strictly *post*, but is in fact in many ways *neo*. Indeed, one might say that it has been *neo* ever since Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah coined the term in 1965 with his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* – if for different reasons in the neoliberal present than during the beginnings of so-called independence (Demos, 2013: 12).<sup>11</sup>

This also builds on Derrida's specter<sup>12</sup> and his reference to the haunting of Europe by the ghost of communism after the fall of the Soviet Union, and to a politics of memory that urges us to learn to live with these ghosts more justly (Derrida, 1994: xviii). Herein, Demos focusses on the notion of the return to Africa in the postcolonial era. In reference to predominantly European artists<sup>13</sup> who revisit the African continent in a contemporary state of the postcolonial. They pursue various different artistic projects to magnify the

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Harrison, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> See **4. Independence and the Postcolonial Invention of Self**. (See also **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness** on the notion of the spectral in Barthes' photographic realm).

<sup>13</sup> Pieter Hugo is a South African artist; the rest are European artists.

complexities of global capitalism, environment and identity crises that hold their historical but undermined ties with the former colonial projects, addressing the “transgenerational haunting for the injustices of the past that continue to inform the present. In this context, the idea of the spectral has been discussed extensively by Avery Gordon as a moment of social life with the ghost as a “social figure” (2008), which has also been incorporated into film studies by Kröger and Anderson:

A ghost does not have to be the specter of someone already dead: a ghost can be any person, living or dead, who figuratively haunts a culture or society in which they participate marginally. Sociologist Avery F. Gordon’s formulation of the concept of a haunting centers on marginal individuals and groups. In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), Gordon describes the concept of a haunting as a social moment (Kröger and Anderson, 2015: 8).

Gordon argues for a study of social life that confronts the ghostly aspects of it (2008: 7). Calling for a new form of sociology that negotiates the “complexities of everyday life” (viii) beyond epistemological agendas, she opts for the recognition of indicators of haunting and “ghostly matters” as a means of knowing what has happened or is happening (63). Gordon writes:

Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in linear time, alters the way we normally separate and sequence the past, the present and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. As I understand it, the ghost is not the invisible or the unknown or the constitutively unknowable, in the Derridean sense. To my mind, the whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, demands your attention. Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way, I tried to suggest, we’re notified that what’s been suppressed or concealed is very much alive and present, messing or interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed towards us (Gordon, 2001: 2).

Within the context of Demos’ dark notion of the spectral, we are reminded that despite the emergence of Black representation in European politics, social life, and in European visuality, the ongoing struggle and challenges of Afro cultures remain unsolved, as “globalization remains haunted by the undead existence of Europe’s imperial past” (Demos, 2013: 16). In this manner, the notion of the spectral, and with it the idea of spectral identities that this thesis follows, reinserts a two-sided approach, thus a prism into the discourse of the medium of photography, the simultaneous haunting of the colonial past and the potentiality

(cf. Agamben, 1999) of the multiplicity and alternation of coexisting cultural identities. Or, as Demos argues drawing on Deleuze, a crystal-image, “one that multiplies distinct temporalities, mixing past and present, as well as joining virtual and actual aspects of the images historical, mnemonic subjectives, and imaginative values” (88). This resonates with Gordon’s idea of ghosts social figures and builds the ground for my understanding of spectrality as a metaphor for the mnemonic as such.



### 3. UNFOLDING COLONIAL UNEVENNESS

*An entire nation, without any preparation, finds itself forced to adapt or perish. This situation is bound to lead to a moral and physical disequilibrium, the barrenness of which is not far from total disintegration." The nature of colonialism depicted here is true not only of French colonialism in Algeria but of European colonialism throughout Africa; the difference being one of degree not of kind, one of style not of substance. In other words, then, during the period 1880 to 1935, Africa did face a very serious challenge, the challenge of colonialism.*

(Boahen, 1985: 3).

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter lays out the realm of photography in Africa contextualizing the medium during the colonial era in Ghana and West Africa. The subsidizing case studies analyze the characteristics of colonial interference in questions of cultural identity. Here, colonial photography embodies the intrinsic notions of discontinuity executed by colonial forces and demonstrates a notion of colonial unevenness<sup>14</sup> that is intertwined with a “denial of coevalness” (Fabian, 1983).<sup>15</sup> Thus, this first concentrates on the colonial period in West Africa and case studies of photographic articulations of the time. The focus lies on the photographic holdings of the Basel Mission Archive, including photographic objects from Ghana and Cameroon. Crucial in the context of the Basel Mission Archive is the research work of British historian Paul Jenkins, who was the archivist on site for many years. He has pursued intensive research on the archive and its “representation, cultural context, and historical meaning” (Jenkins, 2011), which culminate in the photo essay *Reading an Image in the Other Context: A Visual Essay*, which this dissertation takes as a starting point for further scrutinizing his findings. Expanding the discussion towards transcultural entanglements in the colonial era, the dissertation juxtaposes the following photographic objects in **3**. From the Basel Mission Archive/ Ghana, *The black pastor and his wife* (c.a. 1908), from the Basel Mission Archive/ Cameroon, *School girls knitting/ Schülerinnen beim Stricken*, Anna Wuhrmann (1915).

Furthermore, the dissertation utilizes embedded interludes that discuss my own artistic practice of the contemporary. By incorporating this outlook, exemplified by the project *Being a guest* (2015-ongoing), **3**. seeks to generate an analysis that traces the role of photography in relation to Afro diasporic representation and identity-making through the means of photography as a mnemotechnique. The format of the interlude as a hybrid methodology and as a mode of intervening in chronological linearity will be visiting several of my own artistic projects in each of the four chapters of the corpus, provoking a dialogue

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<sup>14</sup> My gratitude goes to my supervisor Prof. Isabel Capeloa Gil for initiating my thinking around the term “colonial unevenness”, which she mentioned in our first ever doctoral supervision meeting in Lisbon, 2018 (cf. Adjei, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> The denial of coevalness goes back to when Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) claimed that Africa was in the waiting room of history.

with the case studies which are organized along the sections: colonial, postcolonial, diasporic, and contemporary.

### 3.2 PHOTOGRAPHY IN AFRICA

*Considering that photography, beginning with the daguerreotype in 1839, virtually accompanied the exploration of the interior regions of Africa, the failure to exploit photographs systematically as source materials seems rather astonishing. One explanation for this neglect may lie in the fact that historians have traditionally been preoccupied with the written word.*

(Geary, 1986: 89).

For many, the history of photography in Africa begins in the colonial era. Unfortunately, one might say. Relatedly, contemporary scholars have become more critical about the ignorance of academia towards precolonial African image making, as Drew Thompson notes: “Initially, scholars interested in photography in Africa traced the medium’s technological history on the continent, which became synonymous with colonization. This strategy attached a specific date to the invention and introduction of photographic technologies, and in turn overshadowed longstanding practices and notions of image viewing that were under way before the camera’s supposed arrival” (Thompson, 2014).

The formation of an idea of Africa had for long been an endeavor with a mystical approach on the European side of the globe, which observed the African as a cultural Other (Wendl and Behrend, 1998)<sup>16</sup>, since the details of pre and colonial history have often not been sufficiently discussed. This notion of polarity, and its label of the so-called “dark continent” referred both to the unknown vastness of the place and the missionary attempts of the colonizers (Conrad, 1899; Doane, 1991). The colonized were assigned to an “imaginary waiting room of history [...] not yet civilized enough to rule themselves” (Chakrabarty, 2000: 8). Due to “the construction of colonial subjects as others, photographs

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<sup>16</sup> “Und obwohl Afrika geografisch für Europa so nahe liegt, wurde es doch zum Inbegriff des unbekanntem Anderen, auch und gerade des Anderen in uns selbst: Afrika, die Leitmetapher des Fremden überhaupt“ (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 8). “And although Africa is geographically so close for Europe, it became the epitome of the unknown Other, also and especially of the Other in ourselves: Africa, the guiding metaphor of the stranger par excellence” (my translation).

played an integral role in situating African bodies as subjects of technology rather than as producers” (Bowles, 2016: 57, cf. also Gbadegesin, 2014). As this research is predominantly concerned with transcultural entanglements in visual history-making in photography<sup>17</sup>, the starting point in the colonial era remains crucial to the notion of unevenness in identity constructions of Afro cultures. Beginning by laying out the colonial context of Ghana and West Africa, the first part of this dissertation focuses on specific details of colonialism in Ghana and West Africa and their contextualization within the visual sphere.

Ghana, which had been named Gold Coast in the colonial period and was a British colony in the Gulf of Guinea, West Africa from 1867 until its independence as the Republic of Ghana in 1957. Previously, the Ashanti people had controlled much of the territory of Ghana before the Europeans arrived and were often in conflict with them, until “the formation of the southern Gold Coast as a crown colony in 1874, following the Asante war, was a recognition of the British orientation of much of the commercial life of the territory” (Oliver and Sanderson, 2008: 40). By 1901, Britain had established a colony incorporating all territory of the Gold Coast, with its different kingdoms considered to be a single unit.<sup>18</sup>

Speaking of this period in Africa, and specifically for West Africa, it has been noted that:

Never in the history of Africa did so many changes occur and with such speed as they did between 1880 and 1935. Indeed, the most fundamental and dramatic—though tragic—of these changes took place in the much shorter period from 1890 to 1910, the period that saw the conquest and occupation of virtually the whole continent of Africa by the imperial powers and the establishment of the colonial system” (Boahen, 1985).

In turn, speaking of the colonization of the continent as such “it was a veritable revolution, overthrowing a whole ancient world of beliefs and ideas and an immemorial way of life. It confronts a whole people with sudden change” (ibid). Colonial West Africa as a whole, was not only an object of multinational exploitive interests but offers an insight into the notion of how the heterogeneity of its cultures and languages faced a similar threat of hegemonic equalization. An instance that would later become a counternarrative by becoming the premise for Pan-African thought, that attempted to connect Afro cultures as such.

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<sup>17</sup> See also Tobias Wendl’s discussion on *Entangled Traditions: Photography and the history of media in southern Ghana* in **4. The Postcolonial Invention of Self** in this dissertation.

<sup>18</sup> “It must be emphasized, however, that these European-owned businesses on the Gold Coast were largely concerned with local exchange; the Gold Coast had still not succeeded in finding a viable legitimate export trade as an alternative to the trade in slaves. These differences in the economic relationship between African producers and merchants and the European traders reflected the political diversity of the southern zone” (Oliver and Sanderson, 2008).

Photography served as a crucial tool in the colonial era to the colonizers, as a means to communicate the awaited progress to the homelands in Europe, as well as showcase the exotic Other that had been conquered and brought to heel. As Paul Jenkins notes: “following up the findings and suggestions made by Vera Viditz-Ward after her investigation of early photography in Sierra Leone (Viditz-Ward, 1987), it is worth arguing that in principle it is possible that a camera was part of the European presence anywhere in Africa from the 1850s on” (Jenkins, 1993). Vera Viditz-Ward offers evidence of African studio photography, where different clothing of African, but also European fashion is portrayed (Figure 1-2). Although photography in Africa has been given more attention by scholars since the time Christaud M. Geary expressed her critique on the lack of consideration of photography and visual material as a key disclosure towards the colonial era of Africa (1986, see quotation above), it remains a broad field to explore, as lack of contextualization of photographic images often challenges opportunities for academic research.

Geary, who is a cultural and visual anthropologist has been at the forefront with scholars such as Vera Viditz-Ward engaging in the reflection and (re)contextualization of colonial imagery beyond Western missionary agendas and embedding photographic objects in their indigenous African context. Her work started in a time when research on photography in Africa was still in its “infancy” (ibid.). Geary notes: “When the first photographers came to the region, many of the kings embraced being photographed very early on. They were very composed; they never allow you to photograph them in a candid way for instance. So that holds true to this very day” (Geary, 2015). This observation indicates the particular agency an African king had over being photographed. The conclusion towards this agency derives from the interpretation of the image in its indigenous context. Although Western photographers incorporated their colonial gaze into the pictures, the indigenous gaze holds power and would be recognized by its people as articulations of agency which the photograph serves as a medium for<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, Geary points out that “this ultimately raises a very real concern about historical photographs taken in Africa. We should be well aware of the fact that all these images were created in a power relationship predicated on the colonial situation: the photographer/colonialist could impose and enforce his will if he so

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<sup>19</sup> Geary also elaborates on the notion of royal sitting and seating that would be recognizable to anyone familiar with the respective culture.

desired” (Geary, 1991), which leaves academic research with the continuous challenge of fine reassessments of visuality in the context of Afro cultures.

Geary later overviews the different roles and formats of research on African photography since 1967 and in over 40 years through the lens of the *African Arts Journal* (Geary, 2017). This overview culminates in her exemplification of postmodern critique of otherness and its “colonial visual record in archives [...] which it reflected and enacted the creators’ and viewers’ stereotypes and invention of Africa” (24, 25). In this “invention of Africa”, which references Mudimbe’s momentous 1988 reflections, “the idea of Africa was therefore first invented by non-Africans, serving as a prism through which Europeans refracted images of exotic others and of themselves” (Parker and Reid, 2013: 5). Mudimbe demonstrates the idea of the infiltration of Western philosophy into the African contexts and its subsequent appropriation by African intellectuals, incorporating its thoughts into an African spiritual knowledge, which Mudimbe refers to as “gnosis” (Mudimbe, 1988: 9), a term he borrows from Fabian (1969). Recognizing the ongoing development of research on African photography in the contemporary, Geary finally points towards the inclusion of African image makers and investigations of “subjects’ agency in the encounters with image makers and performative aspects of photography, as well as the nature of the African archive” (25), highlighting the scholarly work of Vera Viditz-Ward on creole photography from Sierra Leone (1987).

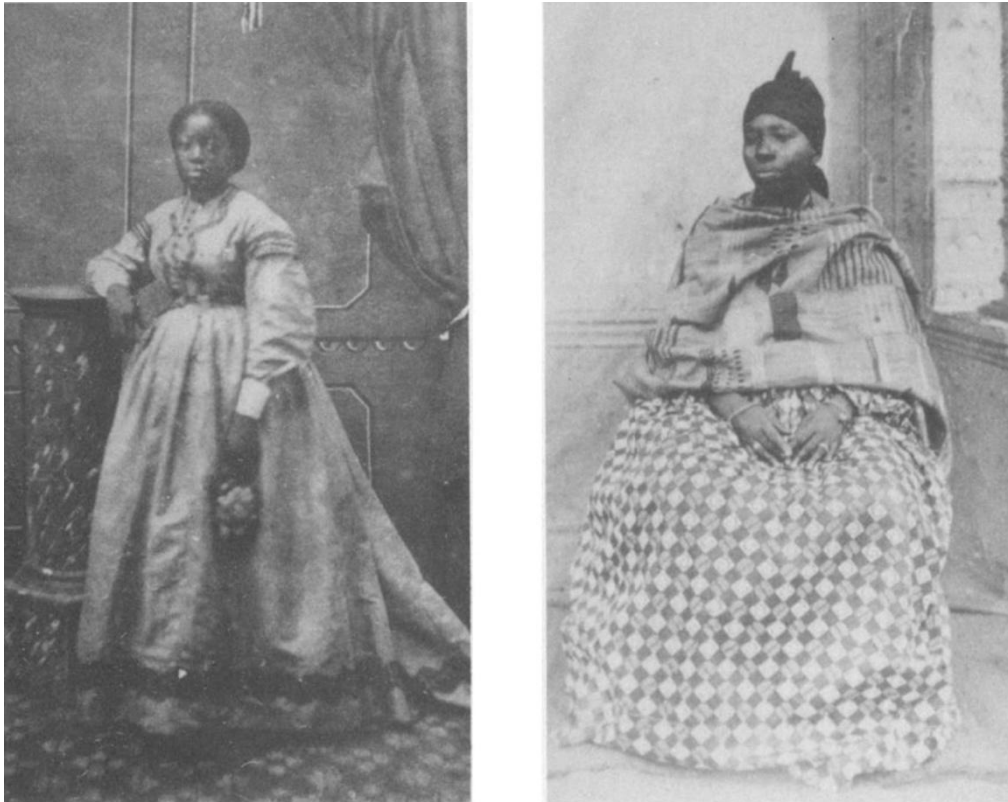


Figure 1-2. Vera Viditz-Ward (1) Studio portrait of woman in European dress, Freetown, 1850-60. (2) Studio portrait of woman in Kaba slot, head tie and Aku country cloth, Sierra Leone, c. 1860.<sup>20</sup>

Erin Haney (2010, 2013) has offered a perspective that engages once more with African image-making in the colonial era. Opposed to the idea of the colonizer projecting the only gaze into the photographic realm, Haney demonstrates along the Lutterodt collection, which represents one of the Gold Coast's most renowned photographers alongside Bright Davies and J.A.C. Holm, how African photographers took agency over the photographic medium:

Haney's work on the Lutterodts (ca. 1860-1900) delves into migration and work as both the subjectivities and processes for the photographic dynasty. Accra's migration of newly free laborers and entrepreneurs as they became subjects and patrons along the west and central African coast is reflected in the Lutterodt family's own migrations. As such, they are inextricably linked to the social and political dimensions of slavery's abolition, and the portrayal of citizen and non-citizen along the Atlantic coast (Haney and Schneider, 2014).

Heike Behrend has also been an influential scholar alongside Tobias Wendl in analyzing African Photography. Behrend primarily refers to photographs made by Africans,

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<sup>20</sup> A Kaba is a traditional apparel, a country cloth a thick fabric woven out of locally grown cotton.

introducing the medium of photography as an early occurrence in African culture, just shortly after its technological invention. Here, Behrend emphasizes the heterogeneity and diversity of “African photographs” (Behrend and Werner, 2001). While stressing that photography was embedded into already existing traditions of sculptural image-making, she further points to the fact that the medium of photography “shaped and transformed African discourses, especially those in relation to memory and the construction of personhood” (ibid.). These photographic articulations in African visual cultures of the mid 20<sup>th</sup>. century play a crucial role in the formation of African modernity:

As a modern technique of reproduction, photographers used the new medium extensively to establish various visions of modernity. They created their own myths and critiques of modernity, sometimes by inventing traditions which should not be seen as pre-modern but as an essential part of the construction of modernity in Africa. Thus photographic visions of modernity in Africa oscillate between the construction of bounded local traditions and globalizing, cosmopolitan views that transcend local identities, ethnicity and even the nation-state (Behrend and Werner, 2001).

In the example of the *African Wedding Party* (Figure 3), Erin Haney displays a modern Ghana fused with traditionalism. The image of “A wedding party group”, as it is noted on the margin of the photograph, displays an African bride and her bride groom sitting amongst their relatives and guests. The organization lays bare a much alike structure of typical European family portrait pose, which is imposed into the African context, and showcases the interference of the colonial realm. This is moreover accompanied by the comment: “The man is a scholar (!), but a “heathen”, which exemplifies the colonial (visual) regime, creating a narrative of unevenness for this photograph. On the other hand, this photograph exemplifies an alternation of African and European lifestyle throughout the image and a certain ability to blend with both styles accordingly, as Haney suggests:

It is a sophisticated interpretation of local tradition alongside more recent West African developments like the debut portrait: it is an entirely modern image. But what is considered “modern” is always changing, and what is considered up to date implies a politically charged cultural stance [...] Comprehensive research, and the serendipitous insertion of these anonymous portraits into an English colonial album, allow us to see the complexity of cultural politics surrounding historical images today (Haney, 2013).

Here, the notion of change implies a transition that embodies the emphasis on operational processes. The construction of family legacies through photographic recollections, which

Haney also points to, is revisited here at a later stage, where the transmission of memory through the photograph as a mnemonic object plays again a crucial role (see 5.).



Figure 3. Unidentified Cape Coast studios, photograph album page with debut portrait and wedding portrait, albumen prints, ca. 1885-1910. Ghana Photograph Album, EEPA 1995-180041 and 180042. Courtesy of the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Considering Mudimbe's entropic idea of the invention of Africa and juxtaposing it to the evolution of photography in Africa, one can identify a notion of unevenness of the colonial versus the colonized, as a complex (and ongoing) construction of alterity in the context of African identity politics. Johannes Fabian (1983) earlier negotiates a perception of temporality that distorts the anthropological Other in space and time. What Fabian, who was influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), discussed as a critique of anthropology and specifically ethnographic fieldwork, finds itself at the center of critical reflections on anthropological othering. As such it produces a spatial and temporal discrepancy, that was coined by Fabian as the "denial of coevalness" (Fabian, 1983)<sup>21</sup>, which

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also Wendl and Behrend, 1998: „Doch tut sich der Westen schwer, die Gleichzeitigkeit seines Afrikanischen Anderen anzuerkennen (vgl. Fabian, 1983)“ (8). „Yet the West finds it difficult to acknowledge the coevalness of its African other“ (my translation).

also creates the dichotomy of culture versus nature and tradition versus modernity (Mignolo, 2011), and the claim of “first Europe and then elsewhere” (Chakrabarty, 2000). In the photographic context, the anthropological observation of the Other is expressed through the lens of the camera, as the photograph captures the gaze of the observer. This “politics of time” (Fabian, 1983: 97), which Fabian locates in his critique of taxonomic classifications of indigenous subjects in the colonial era, relates to what Ariella Azoulay later describes as a “political principal of differentiability”, (2019). It situates the Other in the prison of primal and temporal epistemological difference, or as Fabian perceives that “exotic otherness may be not so much the result as the prerequisite of anthropological inquiry” (Fabian, 1983: 121). What Fabian calls “visualism” (106, 107) or “visualist epistemology” (124), would then have to become a common practice based on repetition of tropes of colonial visibility, a method that finds itself at the heart of the structures of colonial power. Fabian concludes:

Such a theory in turn encourages quantification and diagrammatic representation so that the ability to "visualize" a culture or society almost becomes synonymous for understanding it. I shall call this tendency visualism and because visualism will play a role in our argument comparable to that of denial of coevalness or temporalization, some sort of descriptive statement is in order. The term is to connote a cultural, ideological bias toward vision as the "noblest sense" and toward geometry qua graphic-spatial conceptualization as the most "exact" way of communicating knowledge. (Fabian, 1983: 106).

In this relation, photography particularly in colonial Africa related to the idea of representing reality, and with it the idea of being “able to take a piece of reality home with a photograph” (Theye, 1989: 15, my translation), also with a particular emphasis on the concept of “taking a picture” as a form of extracting reality:<sup>22</sup>

The “realism” of colonial photography was itself colored by the *practice* of photography, which changed from something that happens in a studio to something that happens “instantly” at the hands of the shooter. Instant “capture” furthermore reinforced

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<sup>22</sup> “Die “unnachahmliche Treue” und der mechanische Charakter des neuen Mediums Fotografie nährten von Beginn an die Hoffnung, die Fotografie werde zu einer unverfälschten Darstellung der Wirklichkeit verhelfen. Die Wirklichkeit komme gleichsam selbst und ohne Einwirkung des Menschen “zu Wort”. Die Beobachtung, daß die auf einer Fotografie abgebildeten Gegenstände selbst bei starker Vergrößerung, wie es schon im oben erwähnten Dekret heißt, “mathematisch genau ihre Formen bis in die kleinsten Details behalten”, beruht nach Heinz Buddemeier darauf, daß Fotografien im Gegensatz zu Gemälden, die sich in Pinselstriche und Farbpartikel auflösen, selbst durch die Lupe besehen keine Spuren ihres Herstellungsprozesses aufweisen. “Wie man die Fotografien auch betrachtet, sie präsentieren immer nur die dargestellte Sache. Genau dies gab den Zeitgenossen das Gefühl, der Wirklichkeit endlich habhaft geworden zu sein” (Theye, *Der geraubte Schatten*, 1989).

the indexical character of the chemical reaction that froze the visible world on film and vouchsafed its reality. The indexical nature of photography can itself even become a trope for verification (Landau and Kaspin, 2002).

Nevertheless, the medium developed its own dynamics at the intersection of transcultural entanglements in African modernity. In subsequent analysis and within decolonial approaches, these photographic objects reveal a dichotomy, which I would like to call a photographic reversion of othering, where the colonial power and the unevenness it bears is unraveled by the indigenous gaze.

The idea of colonial tropes that proceed in line with the colonial plan of “exoticism” and “estrangement” on the one hand (Gil, 2014), and the fulfillment of the expansion of Western civilization on the other, is subverted by recontextualization offer by various scholars of the possibility of a re-coding of the photographic images (Mirzoeff, Azoulay et al.). Here, the photographic objects become witnesses to a past that had not been written. The unevenness of the colonial unfolds when transcultural entanglements display a multiplicity of perspectives embedded in photographic tropes of potentiality (Azoulay, 2019). In what follows, this dissertation turns towards interpretations of photographic material from the Basel Mission archives and attempts to renegotiate the complexities of hybridity with a particular interest in the operation of alternating cultural perspectives and switching cultural gazes that simultaneously coexist.

Hence, the notion of coevalness precedes the idea of colonial unevenness and describes how the element of time plays a role in constituting tropes of otherness. As such the concept of the trope bears a twofold epistemology for the context of early photography in Africa. A trope in the metaphorical sense, as it refers to the replacement of one expression by another, which, however, is not synonymous as it belongs to a different field of meaning. Tropes as tropics on the other hand define a geographical region, which is also characterized by a specific type of southern climate, however, tropics are more than a climatic category, they also became a cultural classification. This engenders an analogy that situates tropes (as tropics) in the vicinity of a signifying trope in the metaphorical sense.<sup>23</sup> A photographic trope as an established metaphorical expression that conveys a “politics of truth” (Steyerl, 2003)

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on the relation between tropes and truth see *Tropical Truth(s): The Epistemology of Metaphor and other Tropes*, Edited by: Armin Burkhardt and Brigitte Nerlich, De Gruyter, 2010.

by means of creating iterations of visual analogies. Photographic tropes represent manifestations of cultural memory. Or, as Marta Zarzycka puts it: “photographic tropes, circulated as evidence of a common perspective or ideal shared by many, may force certain associations and prohibit others, neutralizing the local and the particular into the global” (2013). It is this neutralization that revolves around imperialism as a concept in critique. The mnemotechnical characteristic of photography and its archives finally embeds photographic tropes in our cultural memory. This becomes visible in constructed analogies such as the analogy between the female body and racial darkness and the connotation of Africa in Mary Ann Doane’s examination of *The dark continent as trope* (1999), or as Henry Louis Jr. Gates puts it, in the “ensuing alteration or derivation of meaning makes Signifyin(g) the black trope for all other tropes, the trope of tropes, the figure of figures” (Gates, 1988).

In the context of photographic objects in relation to cultural memory, Jens Ruchatz offers a helpful distinction between peculiarity of the medium’s “externalization” and “trace” (Ruchatz, 2008). He proposes that “private photographs tend to be used as traces, that is, read indexically, whereas collective memory favors photographs that support a symbolical reading and thus can be appropriated as externalization” (ibid). In this sense, Ruchatz considers photography as a technology that stands in for memorization as externalization: “In their function of enhancing memory’s capacity, technologies of externalization follow and supplement the internal techniques of mnemonics” (367) and reiterates the photograph as a mnemonic object that can provide a backtracking of memory. Considering Ruchatz’ approach this dissertation will further scrutinize in the following, how photographic reversion influences the idea of private traces versus public externalizations of photography. This also plays a role in the encapsulation of indigenous cultural memory in photographic tropes which the research seeks to unravel in this first chapter.

### 3.3 THE BASEL MISSION ARCHIVE

*Let us consider the Foreign Missions' activities on our soil, whose habit of punctually recording and preserving for onward transmission to their home base provide the core series of images of our "Modern History". The Basel Missionaries were the first protagonists, whose Diaries or Journals (of events and scenery "from among natives in exotic and strange lands") are at our disposal today.*

(Pelletier & Nkrumah, 2007: 10)<sup>24</sup>

The quote by Prof. Joe Nkrumah reveals the notion of recognition of the Mission Archives for Ghanaian scholars and around the globe, but also a peculiar form of "self-othering". The role with which mission photography has shaped the visuality of colonial West Africa cannot be underestimated. However, the transfer of images and the dispersal of their visuality in the colonizers' homelands have been critically put into question by various scholars of visual culture (Mirzoeff, 2011, Azoulay, 2008; 2019, Camp, 2009; 2012; 2017 et al.) Because the photographs were a "means of depicting the conditions encountered in foreign lands and were added to the annual mission station reports to illustrate the growth of the stations, the schools, and the congregations" (Jenkins and Geary, 1985: 56), they followed a colonial agenda and did not consider indigenous interests. The visualization of the colonial era thus constitutes a distorted "modern history" that incorporates the medium of photography at its core.

The Basel Mission archive, such as many other missionary archives in West Africa was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century upon establishment of European missionaries along the coast of West Africa, starting in 1815, and pursuing its activities in the regions of today's Ghana and bordering Togo from 1828, and in Cameroon from 1886 (Jenkins and Geary, 1985). The British historian and lecturer at the University of Basel Paul Jenkins was head of the Basel Mission Archive from 1973. He cataloged and analyzed numerous images and documents of the archive's 50000 images in storage. In the case studies of the first chapter, I undertake a rereading of Jenkins' reflections on the characteristics of colonial interference in questions of cultural identity, in which the colonial photography of the Basel Mission archive embodies intrinsic notions of unevenness executed by colonial forces.

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<sup>24</sup> "From among natives in exotic strange lands" Viditz-Ward, "Photography in Sierra Leone, 1850-1918", *Africa* 57, 4 (1987), 510.

### 3.4 PHOTOGRAPHIC REVERSION: THE BLACK PASTOR AND HIS FAMILY



Figure 4. *N...pfarrer Koranteng mit Familie*,<sup>25</sup> photographer: Rudolf Fisch (1885-1908). Basel Mission Archives BMA D-30.11.018. In: “Reading the image in the other context: A visual essay by Paul Jenkins”, (Jenkins, 2011), *USC Libraries, USC Dornseife, Center for Religion and Civic Culture*, University of Southern California.

The historian Paul Jenkins has explored questions of representation and cultural meaning in a Basel Mission Archive photograph taken by mission doctor Rudolf Fisch (c.a.1908; cf. Jenkins, 2011): This photograph, which is a family portrait, was taken at the beginning of the 20th century in Akuapem, a traditional Akan Kingdom in Ghana. The image depicts “the black pastor and his family”, as its title suggests (Figure 4). Jenkins describes that his intention was to detect examples fostering a change in cultural perspective in the archive:

If you look at one of the old photographs in the Mission Archive and your background is from the West, you are more or less bound to look at the scene with Western eyes, to tack things you see and understand in a Western way. But in principle someone from the other side, someone indigenous to the other culture visible in the picture will tack

<sup>25</sup> *The African/black pastor Koranteng and his family* (Paul Jenkins’ translation, 2011). Apparently, there is an ethical issue with the use and translation of the original title *Der N...pastor mit Familie*.

things which speak to them. They will see other things and evaluate the image differently. Since a group of us realized that the Basel Mission Archive contains many old photographs, I have spent a lot of time trying to spot images which actually offer us with a Western background the experience of changing our point of view from a Western to an indigenous mode, and here is one of them (Jenkins, 2011, my transcript).

While the photograph presents the pastor to be successfully obliged to his role as a pastor, indicated by his Western way of dressing and humble facial expression, he is nevertheless not the center of the image: his wife, Emilia Koranteng, flagged by her granddaughters, is dressed in traditional clothing, and shows a strong expression on her face looking right back into the camera from the center of the image. The researcher will be surprised, when he later finds out that this lady was the Queen Mother of her tribe, which practices matrilineal descent. A culture where, as Michelle Gilbert outlines, the display of traditional clothing is a common and recognizable feature for anyone familiar with the Akan:

In the Akwapim kingdom of southeastern Ghana, clothing is used as a form of communication to make statements about personhood and status; to conceal or reveal identity; to express desires and impulses. It may do so directly or indirectly, conventionally, or rebelliously. Clothing is owned, bestowed and gives identity. The clothed body expresses the person of the wearer and society's image of that person. As a result, clothing absorbs the particular times in which it has been worn and becomes like a relic of these past events. (Gilbert, 2009: 226)<sup>26</sup>

Queen mothers have had a long tradition in the West African, the Ghanaian, and specifically the Akan context, where they were part of an indigenous political system. Queen Mothers were appointed along with chiefs and had agency over selecting new chiefs (Goldsmith, Lovett, Menon, Greene Brown, Savarese, Anderson, et al., 2021). The Queen Mother, as the “spiritual head” (ibid.) becomes mother of the community and enables “harmony and consensus” in the Akan culture (Gilbert, 1993), which is embedded in a matrilineal system. Although limited in direct political influence, they serve upon questions of socio-communal value, as well as a reference in important juridical decisions. The significance of the role of the Queen Mother also becomes evident, when looking at contemporary forms of implementing Queen Mothers in a more non-traditional way, where candidates can be elected beyond the blood line upon their qualification to serve their community. This has led to several hundred elections of Queen Mothers in contemporary Ghana in the last decade,

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. also Pinther (1998) on the role of textiles in West African cultures.

and helps balance various issues that appear to be beyond governmental competence: “In effect, the institution of the Mother Queen continues to function within the modern political and legal system, meeting the needs of local and individual constituents, especially those affected by marginalization and neglect, including women and children” (Goldsmith, Lovett, Menon, Greene Brown, Savarese, Anderson, et al., 2021: 88).

The double identity of Queen Mother Nana Akua Oye and the pastor’s wife Emilia Koranteng, as exemplified by the two different names, exposes the colonial battle with indigenous culture as well as subverts the visuality of its scope. Here, the family photograph envisioned by the colonial eye embodies the intrinsic notions of discontinuity executed by colonial forces, which is the disruption of the significant role of the Queen Mother in the Akan culture. Moreover, the colonial unevenness is encapsulated in the photographic tropes of colonial imagery. Although the persona of Nana Akua Oye/ Emilia Koranteng is to be characterized as an unusual and very particular historical figure due to her high standing as Queen Mother of the Akwapim, her example can serve as a model for various socio-cultural peculiarities and inequities within colonial identity politics: her double identity leaves her impelled to undertake a responsibility of agency that provokes a countervisual reading of the photograph (cf. Mirzoeff, 2011). Nana Akua Oye looks directly into the eye of the camera. The right to look as a first articulation of countervisuality indicates the importance of infiltrating the normative dynamisms of visuality by means of proclaiming the right to look and the right to look back: “the right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to political subjectivity and collectivity [...] the opposite of the right to look is not censorship, then, but visuality” (ibid.). Images of colonial visuality, like myths, naturalize their underlying power structures. Hence, countervisuality denaturalizes normative images in an uncomfortable way, which is what brought Jenkins to the assumption of something striking about the image in the first place. In relation to Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, Mirzoeff sees that “countervisuality’s realism is not necessarily mimetic” (Mirzoeff, 2011). It expresses the subversive moment of simultaneous display of representation and disruption of its authority.

Imperial dominance as a mode of thinking has crucially shaped our world and still constitutes much of the cultural-political structures in our societies. The forces of capitalism and its never-ending strive for progress lie deeply rooted in imperialist origins, and have inflected democratic systems, those “imperial democracies” (Azoulay, 2019), that have

found themselves being maintained and reflected in different technologies, among them the technological medium of photography and computer programming. These technologies support the reproduction of imperial structures and need to be utilized and examined according to their political power, as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues<sup>27</sup>. Azoulay, following Agamben, calls for a potential history that rethinks historical settings and developments from different angles within those histories in a form of historical reconstruction. Agamben says:

I think, I'm convinced that as the potentiality which the act of creation unlooses, frees, must be internal to the act in the same way also the resistance must be internal to the act of creation. But according to Aristotle, the man who has potentiality, can both exert it, realise it in the act, but also not to exert it. Potentiality, this is the genial thesis, discovery of Aristoteles, is essentially defined by its possibility of not being exerted. So, the architect has a potentiality, because he can build but also cannot built (Agamben, Resistance in Art. 2014) my transcript of the lecture excerpt).

In Agamben's reference to Aristotle it was postulated that "a thing is said to be potential if, when the act of which it is said to be potential is realized, there will be nothing impotential" (Aristotle quoted in Agamben 1999: 181), which leaves Agamben concluding: "It can be nothing other than adynamia, which, as we have seen, belongs to all dynamis: the potentiality to not-be" (ibid.), manifesting the concept of potentiality by incorporating its simultaneous notion of impotentiality.

In this context, Azoulay takes on possibilities of potential incidents - which Agamben also stipulates under the notion of contingency in reference to Duns Scotus, as "something whose opposite could have happened in the very moment in which it happened" (Agamben, 1999: 254). Azoulay's interventions have already appeared at source in forms of communication and dialogue between individuals and communities. She focuses on "unlearning our imperial rights", that have in parts also constituted our human rights, and engages in the idea of refusing the normative violence that lies within them and that have destroyed and segmented communities and legacies. Her approach is a challenging proposal to the field of visual culture studies (Irvine, 2004; Mirzoeff, 2002, 2008; Mitchell, 1994, 2008 et al.) and postcolonial studies (Hall, 1994; Bhabha, 1994; Young, 1994; Loomba, 1998), as it addresses possibilities of overcoming some of the entropic historical impasses

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<sup>27</sup> The idea of "unlearning imperialism" is self-reflexively exemplified by Azoulay in the (re)recognition of her Arabic middle name Aïsha, which the Israeli scholar pursued in the course of the publication *Potential Histories: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019: 46-47).

that imperialism and colonialism have established. As such, the photographic object *The black pastor and his wife* demonstrates how imperialism was embedded in the colonial visuality, which followed a colonial gaze at first stance. The visibility of the photograph's author in every photographic image, in this case personified by Dr. Fisch, had been previously addressed by Azoulay (2008). However, a potential re-reading of the image fosters a re-coding, where the role of Nana Akua Oye is addressed as a protagonist of indigenous agency. Jenkins, Geary and Gilbert have accredited Oye of being Christian and conscious in Ghanaian tradition, which was not to remain without conflict with the traditional customs of being a Queen Mother (cf. Gilbert, 1993: 2). Not only did she formally embody the transcultural notions of a new world but was an active executor of negotiations between the different challenges that occurred as traditionalism faced Christianity. As such, her example serves as an articulation for the possibilities of potential histories, where dialogical interpersonal contact of different cultures can foster new articulations of transculturality.

Simultaneously memory studies have been starting to look at cultural memory even more comparatively since the transnational and transcultural turn in memory studies. Multidirectionality presents a non-competitive form of comparison of different histories and traditions across the globe, where the competitive is neglected in favor of the connective nature of memories. Multidirectional memory in the context of indigenous studies with a decolonial approach, serves as a concept that reminds us about the scope of historiography, and the creation of cultural memory as such. While the colonial visuality translates the medium of photography into memories of colonial predecessors, the indigenous history of the Akwapim has its own dynamics where colonizers were deemed to the position of observers. Multidirectionality occurs then as a dynamic that provokes a reading from several different cultural perspectives.

To identify different forms of hybridity, also with a multidirectional perspective that undoes-hierarchies in dominant historical narratives over others, and to further understand the operational procedures that take place in hybrid identity-making, the notion of the spectral is here proposed as a helpful tool. In understanding that hybridity performs as a transcultural alternation of perspective, as a code switch between coexisting cultural identities and in the visual realm specifically in form of a reversion of othering, spectral identity as a concept demonstrates complex negotiation of African and Afro diasporic

identity up until the contemporary. In addition, the notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and intersecting social identities in related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination which particularly in relation to women of color contribute to an understanding of how various sections of personhood, particularly womanhood as in the case of Nana Akua Oye and the phenomenon of Queen Mothers play a role in apparent conflicts of identity making in African cultures and might rule out potentialities that help establish cultural exchange on socio-political levels. In this sense, her case serves as an early precedent of intersectionality, in which the multiple facets of her persona are competing with one another. As Kimberlé Crenshaw writes:

I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating "women's experience" or "the Black experience" into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast (Crenshaw, 1989: 140).

The account of Nana Akua Oye's endeavor to communicate between traditional culture and her adopted Christian religion, between her multiple roles as woman of color, exemplify early occurrences of intersectionality, which were described in the chapter's title as a form of colonial unevenness. However, Oye's accounts also negotiate the possibility of a potential history, as well as multidirectionality in the memories of colonial encounters in Ghana and West Africa.

### 3.5 UNFORESEEN ENTANGLEMENTS: SCHOOLGIRLS KNITTING



Figure 5. *Schülerinnen beim Stricken*<sup>28</sup>, photographer: Anna Wuhrmann (1915-16). Basel Mission Archives BMA, E-30.28.048. In: Symposium *Getting pictures right*, held in Basel at the Mission 21, in August 2003 on Paul Jenkins' retirement.

Returning to Paul Jenkins and his research on reading images in their indigenous contexts, or, as this thesis suggests, the act of switching the cultural gaze that encapsulates a photographic reversion. Focusing on another image from the Basel Mission Archive, this image depicts a group of young women at the Basel Mission Cameroon (Figure 5).

What Jenkins describes here, is again a transformation in the perception of the image, meaning his perception of the image. Jenkins subtitles: “knitting and flirting and mission history?” (Jenkins, 2004: 122), which firstly draws attention towards the women’s activity in the picture: they are knitting socks, which is postulated by Jenkins as a somewhat strange

<sup>28</sup> *Schoolgirls knitting* (Paul Jenkins' translation)

activity<sup>29</sup>. Jenkins notes that the picture had been taken in Fumban, the capital of the Cameroonian Grasslands kingdom of Bamum, and determines the time of the photograph to be shortly before the outbreak of the First World War. Anna Wuhrmann, whom he identifies as the furtively smiling missionary lady in the picture was already known to scholars due to the quantity of pictures, she took in Bamum<sup>30</sup>. Jenkins later refers to Wuhrmann's notes as the key element that brought him to his "experience of transformation" of the picture (119).

It is, of course, at first sight a hilarious photograph. On the one side it seems to reflect an amazingly narrow application of Western pedagogical principles to girls' education in Africa, whether appropriate or not. Learning to knit socks – and darn them – was, until recently, one climax in the general education all Swiss girls were expected to complete. Here it seems to be being applied with no care for context at all (Jenkins, 2004: 122)

The constitution of a missionary picture that prevails a somewhat unusual display of nudity, was a notable circumstance to Jenkins, although he misses the point of addressing the showcasing of nakedness as a visuality that played into the hands of othering. Thus, the notable fact that the women seem to conceal their nakedness, and Jenkins notices the "flirting both with what she understood as the European reaction to her naked breasts, and with the virtuoso use of socks for a purpose no teacher of girls' handwork in Europe in her right mind could have conceived" (122-123) concerning the young woman on the left who exposes a lapidary fashion of wearing her knitted pair of socks over her shoulders and naked breasts, bring a turn into the discussion. Jenkins explains the transformation of his reading of the image with his discovery of Anna Wuhrmann's notes on the image, that testify the photograph to be taken in the early months of 1915, when the Bamum territory in Cameroon was still under German colonial military rule, whose forces had been cut off by British and French forces, resulting in an appeal to "German women to knit *cotton* socks for the German troops" (123). Jenkins finally concludes that the occupation of the German colonizer incited a transcultural presupposition, where the Fumban woman, as peoples of Bamum, which

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<sup>29</sup> Jenkins however acknowledges that the custom of the craft of knitting for costumes in Cameroon as prevalent.

<sup>30</sup> "Whether she should be regarded as the author of this photograph is not clear there were other Basel missionaries taking photographs in Fumban at this time. She certainly, however, identified herself with the image - she showed every sign of wanting to use it in her deputation work when she returned to Europe" (Jenkins, 2004).

Regarded itself as an ally of Germany when the First World War broke out. African women have always seen themselves as involved in special ways appropriate to their gender in the wars which their men fight – preparing special forms of transportable food, engaging in special rites and liturgies. If the young women were self-motivated to knit socks this will have meant that they understood this was a serious female role in wartime in the German culture to which their honor and self-respect had attached them (Jenkins, 2004: 124).

*Schoolgirls knitting* offers a striking account of transcultural entanglements that seem to be again beyond the agenda of mainstream historiography and call for multidirectional approach that incorporate multiple perspectives, which the protagonists of the image engender. In refraining from normative visual narratives, they demonstrate an unconventional form of visibility in the colonial era.

As described above, the notion of the specter and with it the idea of the spectral finds itself related to the photographic object itself, as Roland Barthes has stipulated (1981), which I consider a baseline for the understanding of hauntological spectrality in the photographic realm. Interestingly, Barthes opens up the notion of the spectrum, the supernatural idea of the spectral as “ghost,” as well as the notion of performativity as in the spectacle. In the African context of photography, the ghostly notion is perpetually implied, where the camera apparatus supposedly catches shadows and even the negative carries the designation “ghost” in the Akan languages (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 47).<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, most African studio photography is later taken in the context of death and funerals (Wendl and du Plessis, 1998). The notion of performativity finally becomes crucial when thinking about the performance of the photographic archive as such, where the specter derives from the mnemotechnical quality of the photograph and its complex negotiation of memory and temporality, as Tobias Wendl further concludes: “the relationships between photography and memory remain complex: both reveal the past to us from the perspective of the present, but also, conversely, the present from the past” (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 42, my translation).<sup>32</sup> Thus, it remains a relevant question of how we remember photographs, with a particular attention towards the sonic and haptic, and affective notions of images as objects (cf. Campt 2017, Wendl, 1998; Edwards, 2006; Edwards and Hart, 2004). Photographs in Afro cultures remain related to the context of spirits and technology (cf.

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<sup>31</sup> “In our language we refer to negatives as ‘saman’ - meaning ghosts” (Wendl and du Plessis, 1998); ‘nwali’ in the Ewe language (Wendl, 1998)

<sup>32</sup> See also **3. Articulations of Memory: The Reinvented Diaspora.**

Behrend, Dreschke and Zillinger, 2015), but also to a haunting notion of colonialism, as we will see further below.

### **3.6 INTERLUDE 1. BEING A GUEST (2015-PRESENT), DZIFA PETERS IN COLLABORATION WITH JOSEF ZKY**

*To be a guest, you need a host. I am a guest, this is not who I am, but what I am. I have a role, I usually don't play. Where am I? In this uncertainty, it is my humbleness that I discover. Suddenly, my world gets bigger. Leaving myself – in the end – everybody is a guest, on this planet.*

Dzifa Peters and Josef Zky  
“How to be a guest”, 2015.

The project *Being a guest* (2015-present) initially goes back to the offer by my Ghanaian family side to artistically explore a family-owned, unused clay deposit in the Volta Region, Ghana. Based on several research trips to Ghana, the project was developed as a conceptual, processual, and transdisciplinary work through the medium of photography, while also incorporating film, text, sound and installation works. Created by myself in collaboration with the German artist Josef Zky, it interweaves the hypothetical use of the clay deposit with questions of cultural identity, postcolonialism, heritage, society, and migration in our time, as well as artistic perspectives that reflect different cultural concepts of art. Research trips to Ghana in 2015 and 2016 with the purpose of examining the country's cultural and political history were carried out, where we, the artists, photographed and filmed little everyday observations and engaged with various people from different fields, artists, writers, architects, scholars, friends and family members. The question of who a guest is, when and where we refer to the state of being a guest became an essential discourse of the project. For the subsequent exhibitions, we were concerned with complex transfers; movements of images, ideas and goods between two countries, but they also reflect the perspective of the recipient: the visitor to the exhibition is also a guest and can use the texts provided to reflect on exactly this state. The exhibitions thus examine themselves; they are also models of an exhibition. Ideas and images are negotiated as limited and contextualized representations. This is also reflected in the exhibition design: the materials wood and cardboard are cheap

temporary on the one hand and connoted as materials of transfer and transport in global trade on the other. Being a guest, even in these exhibitions – as a situation between uncertainty, curiosity, and trust – may seem simple at first, but it is a complex negotiation of perspective, understanding, rapprochement, and identity. This is where its political dimension unfolds, which resonates with Agamben’s early critique of aesthetics towards a lack of content in art (Agamben, 1994).

For instance, the traditional Ghanaian seating group *The Conversation tree* (2016) (Figure 6, 8, 9), which was transposed to Dusseldorf Oberkassel as a sculpture, pavilion, and performative forum, with a surprising and countervisual effect in the space. The initial encounter which developed into the idea of *The Conversation tree* derived from the context of our arrival in Hohoe, the hometown of my family in the Volta Region. On this occasion, a traditional family greeting was arranged, which consists of various strict procedures, according to the elders of the family: the guests are to supply the group with a bottle of gin, as well as sodas. The meeting is held, as it has been done for decades (Figure 7), under a specific huge mango tree in the family district. The dress code ranges from traditional clothing to Western casual wear, which demonstrates the practice of switching cultural codes. Ordinary but specific plastic chairs are arranged in a circle and every single member of the family that is available must join the greeting, followed by an introduction of all individuals and an explanation of their relational status within the family. The oldest men sit next to each other accordingly and will open the meeting by means of drinking the gin, dropping a few glasses on the bare ground to greet the ghosts of the ancestors who are believed to be present as spirits.

This encounter is comparable to the idea of the “tree” in reference to Barthes: “A tree is a tree. Yes, of course. But a tree as expressed by Minou Drouet is no longer quite a tree, it is a tree which decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self-indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social usage which is added to pure matter” (Barthes, 1972). The mango tree and the circle of chairs signify a very specific custom of the Ewe people in the Ghanaian context. We as artists took the chance to experiment with the mythological aspect of the encounter, by means of distorting the architectural setting of an exhibition space in a European context. Provided for the exhibition were simply a circle of chairs and an olive tree in the middle. Visitors were motivated to join

the circle naturally in a participatory performance. Additionally, a sound installation (with headphones) gave poetic guidance on *How to be a guest* (2016).

In another exhibition, our family photo hangs on the wall in a photographed African frame, depicting a family group picture (shortly taken after the original greeting for *The Conversation Tree*), the photo has been framed in a classical Ghanaian wooden frame and re-photographed, while the final product again is a c-print mounted on the above-mentioned cardboard (again regular cardboard for packaging). So to say, it is a dummy, an image of an image, of relations, represented by different layers of materialization: The framed photo as a whole serves as an object, that is being quoted in a dummy-like object. As part of the visual language, many of the elements in the exhibitions introduce a form of countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) and photographic agency (Azoulay, 2008).

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) Ariella Azoulay's argument for the agency of photography to enable individuals to conduct political agency has become another key concept of reference in visual culture and postcolonial studies. This approach of agency through the photographic medium was integrated into the project, where the photograph at times became both object of and medium for artistic intervention and investigation of transcultural entanglements. In relation, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing unravels her proposed concept of "friction as 'a metaphorical image,' [friction] reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" (Tsing, 2005: 5). An idea that can cross the borders of anthropological studies and can be interpolated within various areas of cultural studies in society today.

Herein, James Clifford relatedly invokes to "become indigenous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (2013): "We need to work at multiple scales and among discrepant histories, engaging with multiplicity and contradiction, inhabiting paradox [...] There is no longer a place from which to tell the whole story (there never was)" (ibid.). As a processual project developed from 2015, the project *Being a guest* engages with (trans)cultural myths, identities, and their representations on such multiple scales and discrepant histories.. Making little everyday observations in the course of the project, by means of capturing (in)significant moments, reveals the process of migration and transfer of images, and embraces their photographic agency as well as their countervisuality. From cultural perspectives of the country to the role of being a guest: sociocultural imprints are connected to the creation and formation of cultural identities, whereas migration and globalization provoke cultural transfers of codes.



Figure 6. Family portrait. From the project *Being a guest* (2015-ongoing), Dzifa Peters in collaboration with Josef Zky



Figure 7. Picture of ‘The Village Street in Akpafu’, from *The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo*, Jakob Spieth 2011 (1906): “Houses are usually clustered together along a wide village street, with a big shade tree in the middle. This is the center where the villagers have their entertainment, meetings, and games” (34).



Figure 8. Installation as part of the project *Being a guest* (2015-ongoing), Dzifa Peters in collaboration with Josef Zky, Artspace Container, Duesseldorf, 2016.



Figure 9.

### 3.7 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

The photographic case studies in **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness** have demonstrated how mission archives provide first accounts of early photography in West Africa. Although contemporary approaches engage with the consideration of precolonial visualities and image-making in the realm of photography, the mission archives have contributed extensively to the visibility of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Africa and are considered here towards the discussion of an establishment of photographic tropes in the West African context. However, under the premise of reevaluation by means of switching the cultural gaze and embedding a photographic reversion they generate new findings into previous analyses.

Examining the photographic material under the premise of the unevenness of the colonial encounter, the research offers to unravel temporality of the colonial agenda, referring to the notion of coevalness (Fabian, 1983) or “visualism” (106, 107). Here, the photographic image becomes an externalization and trace (Ruchatz, 2008) of what would be conceived within ethnographic mediation in cultural memory studies. However, the colonial project that implements notions of exotification and othering, calls for what Paul Jenkins introduced as a method of *Reading the Image in the other Context* (2011). While identifying the embeddedness of the countervisual (Mirzoeff, 2011), the photographic archives represent the foundation of a key point of this research project, the encapsulation of transcultural entanglements within photographic tropes of Afro Cultures. In this sense, the photographic trope is consistent with an interpolation of photography in West Africa, from Europeans and Africans. Following Ruchatz, the images of the mission archive become an articulation of externalization of the missionary colonial agenda, but rightfully form evidence of trace that encapsulates the personal story of Nana Akua Oye as an exemplification of photographic reversion. Subsequently, this potentially feeds into public knowledge and offers to classify a switch of cultural perspectives.

The title of the dissertation, namely *Tropes of Polarity* has been a challenge, a key indicator when it came to the choice of photographic objects. By asking whether the respective photograph can be seen as a trope of polarity, it left behind questions of authorship and perspective, and offered a critical demonstration, of how a rereading of scholarly work can initiate a conversation between different theoretical concepts and contemporary critical framework that have emerged more recently in visual culture, memory studies, and anthropology.

Finally, the colonial unevenness derives from the uncertainty connected to the disregard of coevalness in temporality, the bewilderment caused by a double-conscious ordeals, and the entropic state of otherness and subsequent “self-othering”. Focusing here on operational tools within the identarian notion of hybridity, the dissertation establishes a new vocabulary based on the twofold idea of the spectral: the spectrum as in the prismatic, and the specter that relates to the idea of haunting. Such spectral identities embody transcultural entanglements that oscillate, as the thesis demonstrates in the following chapters culminating in the contemporary. By introducing the concept of the spectral in relation to the specter in photography, **3.** interpolates the notion of hybridity what will further below be identified as a procedure of cultural oscillation, and an alternation of different coexisting cultural identities and perspectives. This embodies both the idea of a spectrum of identity, as well as aspects of the spectral and haunting articulated in the photographic objects, as will be continuously discussed in the following.

Interlude 1, which attends to my own artistic practice will also be continued in the following chapters. In **3.** the negotiation of the traditional custom revolving around the mango tree in the Ewe culture of Ghana, proliferated a juxtaposition of a photograph in the colonial era with a contemporary decolonial approach of image-making as part of the artistic project *Being a guest* (2015-present). Here, a trope of rural African life is interlaced with a performative photographic reversion by transplanting the setting into a European art context. The early tropes of the Basel Mission Archive formulate forms of colonial resistance by the persona of the Queen Mother. Also introduced were the concept of multidirectional memory to the analysis, with focus on the different interconnected histories and narratives created in colonial times, also pointing to the potential histories, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay has talked about. The idea of tropes (and tropes as tropics) of polarity that entail the coexistence of the polar and potential aspects were also introduced in this first chapter. Finally, the rupture of the historical, personal, and collective identity and memory, was identified along the case studies as forms of colonial unevenness. The performativity of transcultural entanglements inaugurates the encapsulation within the mnemotechnical quality of the photographic and serves as the foundation for the analysis of photographic tropes of the “other” within colonial unevenness. In **4. Independence and the Postcolonial Invention of Self** we will see how a new era of tropicality embraces the emergence of a reinvention and intermingling of cultural identities in African modernism.



#### 4. INDEPENDENCE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL INVENTION OF SELF

*'Colonialism' is not just something that happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates with the collusion of forces inside, but a version of it can be duplicated from within. So that 'postcolonialism', far from being a term that can be indiscriminately applied, appears to be riddled with contradictions and qualifications. It has been suggested that it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism.*

(Loomba, 1998: 32-33).

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter negotiates the struggle for independence and towards postcolonial Ghana and West Africa, and a resultant formation of cultural identity, subversion, and resistance, reflected in photographic objects of the time. This chapter deals with the historical cultural leap into postcolonial independence, which also incorporates the notion of self-fashioning and inventions in image and identity making. The chapter encompasses the independence movement led in Ghana by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, and, as a result, the reinvention of cultural identity in Ghana, the idea of PanAfricanism, as well as West African postcolonialism and how it is articulated in the visual medium of photography.

Herein, the dissertation introduces the work of West African photographers such as J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije from the Deo Gratias Photo Studio, Accra Ghanaian female studio photographer Felicia Abban, and James Barnor whose first ever studio photograph, taken in his *Ever Young studio* in Accra of the 1950s, will be in a closer visual analysis in this chapter. This thesis examines the developments of photography in West Africa in relation to representation and countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) as well as postcolonial photographic agency (Azoulay, 2009), resistance and ambivalence (Bhabha 1994) articulated in the photographic material. In Interlude 2, family photography of the independence and postcolonial period (which include private photographs by my family, and material from my artistic research project *Being a guest* 2015-present) will again incorporate my take on arts-based research and demonstrate how it can contribute to a wider analysis in culture studies.

Generating agency in postcolonial circumstances, the role of countervisuality in African independence movements, which disrupts the colonial gaze by implementing a traditionalist visual vocabulary attempting to dismantle Europe as the global center, serves as an example of a form of visual-cultural code switching. It followed, as described below, the approach of creating the myth of a new African identity (Barthes, 1972). This emerging counternarrative and representation which was paired with modern elements of development and progress, became the utopian hope in African modernity, but also left many aspirations unfulfilled.

#### 4.2 TOWARDS POSTCOLONIAL WEST AFRICA: INDEPENDENCE IN GHANA

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said writes: “postcolonial independence involves not only the recovery of geographical territory but also reclamation of the culture”. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president was quite aware of this circumstance. His strong vision for a new Ghanaian cultural identity towards the struggle for independence in 1957 did not only culminate in the channeling of a nationalist publicity, but also claimed to reincarnate the suppressed traditional Ghanaian culture into the postcolonial era.

Kwame Nkrumah was born in 1909 in Nkroful in the south-western Gold Coast. The Gold Coast constitution with a wider range of possibilities for the later to become Ghanaians led to the establishment of the first political party under colonial powers, but with African personnel in 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). Later, Nkrumah, who was already the leading figure of the UGCC, was urged to form his own party and consequently formed the socialist Convention People's Party (CPP) in 1949. After a long struggle in the fight for freedom of the country, including the imprisonment of Nkrumah by the British colonial leaders, his party won most of the votes in Ghana’s first election. Hence, Nkrumah won the election from prison as Prime Minister and was finally released to form a government, as the colonial authorities had started to come to terms with an independent Gold Coast, due to continuous anti-colonial struggle. The Republic of Ghana became independent on 6 March 1957 as the first Sub-Saharan country to gain independence. In the night of the 5th of March, Nkrumah announced that “Ghana will be free forever” (Rooney, David 1988: 5). Nkrumah was named *Osagyefo*, which means “redeemer” in the Akan language and later became Ghana’s first President in 1960.

During the struggle for independence, Nkrumah mediated his idea of non-violent and non-cooperative protest (Presbey, 2006: 05) which strategically withdrew from supplying goods and trade in public life, and fostered a resistance to colonial powers, which already had had a prehistory in colonial Ghana and was further inspired by a Ghandian strategy from India<sup>33</sup>. Under the label of “positive action,” alliances were formed between political leaders and the people resulting in continuous debate, protest, boycott, and strike. In the end, the colonial authorities were morally forced to come to terms with an independent Gold Coast,

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Presbey’s reflections on the later abandonment of non-violent strategies in the African context.

because of Ghanaians boycotting European goods, keeping their facilities closed and protesting non-violently on the streets of the capital Accra.

Nkrumah did not distinguish between politics, culture, and economics and, consequently, arts and crafts were utilized in a search of a new national identity. Nkrumah used “such semiotic mediums as Ghanaian money, postage stamps, museum exhibits, monuments, Akan *Adinkra*<sup>34</sup> symbols, the national anthem, emblems, the national flag, and political party flags,” to serve his idea of a new Ghanaian national identity (Fuller, 2014: 16). Nkrumah's portrait was soon to be utilized as a “central symbol of the soon-to-be nation state” (Lentz, 2017: 554). This replaced the portrait of the Queen as head of state on stamps and coins, which was first overwritten by the Independence date: “because many of my people cannot read or write” and have to be “shown that they are now really independent. And they can only be shown by signs” (Kwame Nkrumah quoted in Fuller, 2014: 76-77).<sup>35</sup>

The opening of the Ghana National Museum and the National Archive also played important roles and were issued along with independence (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005). Nkrumah included traditional ethnic art and chieftaincy symbols in his appearance and political as well as his educational program, very aware of the fact that cultural policies are embedded in the peoples' everyday lives. According to George Hagan, “one matter which issued out of Nkrumah's nationalist propaganda and lifestyle was whether independence should lead Ghanaians to throw away European attire and wear the traditional cloth to church, school, factory c wherever. Clothing has a great symbolic value in African cultures. Any accession to new status, power or privilege tends to be marked in change of costumes” (Hagan, 1991: 14). In enhancing African traditions and symbolic language, he established a “cultural renaissance (that) was consistent with Nkrumah's political project of Africanizing all Western forms of state organization [...] Cultural nationalism, therefore, had to be the springboard for the struggle for freedom from colonial domination” (Yorke et. al, 2017). Nkrumah considered to wear Kente fabrics, embraced traditional horn-blowers for ceremonies and held the State Sword for the presidential oath, instructing television programming, book and newspaper publishing, logo creation, interior decoration, and advertising as well as the imagery on the nation's currency notes and coins.

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<sup>34</sup> Adinkrah symbols are symbols from Ghana by the Akan that represent folk wisdoms and are often found on objects and fabrics of daily use and in architecture.

<sup>35</sup> Kwame Nkrumah “Why the Queen's Head is coming off our Coins”, *Daily Sketch*, 20 June 1957.

However, history aptly indicates the challenges that emerging Ghana faced, and was tempted to leave soon behind approaches of a joyfully embraced traditionalism, which was in the interpretation of some a rather narrow focus.<sup>36</sup> Whereas Nkrumah succeeded in incorporating a non-violent strategy of resistance to achieve independence for Ghana in the first place, he paradoxically later became increasingly criticized for his dictatorial style of governance, and protest was turned against him.<sup>37</sup> Of course, many challenges that West Africa faced at the time emerged out of a complexity in an era that Nkrumah himself coined as tainted by “neocolonialism” (1965), where a rotating capitalist machine gave rise to new forms of economic and cultural exploitation of the Global South by the West (cf. Harrison, 2010, Demos, 2013).

At one point, the formation of Nkrumah’s opponents rose increasingly, as the dominant notion of his agenda was taking on a dictatorial nature in the eyes of some until a coup d’état in 1966 forced him out of office, due to a climax in the power struggle. This controversy has been fought about until this day and marks a constant conflict in the political identity and cultural memory of Ghana.<sup>38</sup> Kwame Nkrumah would remain in power until a coup d’état in 1966 forced his flight to Guinea. He would never return to Ghana, fleeing to Guinea and dying in exile in 1972 in Bucharest, Romania.

Following the production of myth, borrowed from Barthes (1972) in a postcolonial countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011), the role of visuality itself in African independence movements, cannot be overestimated. This (counter)visuality serves as an example of the

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<sup>36</sup> For other accounts of Nkrumaists representation, in this case monumental, see Carolina Lentz’s work on anti-Nkrumaists and the be-headed Nkrumah statue. From the end of 1958 on, Nkrumah became an almost regular target of bomb attacks and other assassination attempts. The statue had been severely damaged by a bomb attack, shortly before the arrival of Queen Elizabeth, who had planned to visit Ghana. The second iconoclastic attack was a result of the 1966 coup d’état, as the Nkrumah regime was overthrown and the statue had a specific symbolic importance, that was attacked in rage over his supposed dictatorial concerns. The statue “disappeared” from the public eye, but only for a little more than a decade. It was not until Nkrumah died in April 1972 that his image was to reappear in the public sphere in Ghana. (Lentz, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Presbey, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Later, the damaged statue was re-installed in the garden of the National Museum, after having been hidden by Nkrumah’s followers for preservation. However, subsequently in 2007, the “anti-Nkrumaist” government erected the original damaged Nkrumah statue just behind the mausoleum, which many Nkrumaists regarded as “an outright attack on the dignity of their hero”. Especially, “Dr. Arthur felt that exhibiting the decapitated head, instead of mounting it on the mutilated body, was a political statement that supported the cause of Nkrumah’s detractors” (Lentz, 2017).

mythical deconstruction of Europe as the global center. It followed, as described above, the approach of creating the myth of an African traditional identity, that would become paired with modern elements of development and progress, visual tropes that still hold a convincing power today. I argue that these procedures are also reflected in an aesthetics of resistance that was appropriated by the people of Ghana themselves by means of incorporating early forms of alternations of coexisting cultural identities articulated in expressions of fashion, attitudes and lifestyles, an invention of self, profoundly represented in the medium of photography. This leaves two narratives throughout this chapter: one related to Nkrumah, who represents the state, official, national approach to postcolonial Ghana (namely with national symbols and a fashion of resistance which appeared to be enriched with elegance, class, tranquility, and steadiness, and infused with the force of commitment as a positive action); and the narrative of everyday people, concerning the construction of a new self-identity in postcolonial Ghana, embodied in everyday practices such as clothing, and represented and encapsulated in the medium of photography, namely portraits.

#### 4.3 WEST AFRICAN STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY

*Outgoing colonial states, incoming post-colonial governments, and all manner of political parties, civil society organisations and ordinary citizens, sought to use photography both to picture departing colonial administrations and, more importantly, to develop their own iconographies of independence.*

(Vokes & Newbury, 2018: 2-3).

As introduced in 3., colonial West Africa as a whole, was not only object of multinational exploitive interests, but offers an insight into the notion of how the heterogeneity of its cultures and languages faced a similar threat of hegemonic equalization. An instance that would later become a counternarrative by becoming the premise for Pan African thought (cf.

Campbell, 2018, Parker and Reid, 2013, et al.).<sup>39</sup> Herein, Vokes and Newbury note that “European explorers’ attempts to use the camera as a tool for surveying African traditions were often shaped by the demands of their interlocutors, and especially by their interactions with African kings, chiefs and other elites, who had a vested interest in staging their traditions in particular kinds of ways” (2002, 81-102; cf. also Geary 1988). This notion of photographic agency is best captured in Tobias Wendl and Heike Behrend’s German publication *Snap me one! Studiofotografien in Afrika* (1998) (Snap me one! Studio photographs in Africa, my translation), where Fabian’s critique of the Western denial of coevalness<sup>40</sup> is interrogated by the focus on the history of vernacular professional photography that has been produced for over 100 years.

In this context, Stephen Sprague’s earlier work on *How I see the Yorubas see themselves* (1978) ignited a scholarly perspective on West African image-making, self-fashioning, and self-representation, in which Sprague analyzed photographic objects from 10 photo studios from Yoruba town Ila-Orangun, Nigeria in 1975. Sprague finds that the large number and quality available in the context of these archives are “coded Yoruba” (59) and can potentially give an extraordinary insight into the Yoruba’s cultural values and self-perception.<sup>41</sup>

A crucial consideration in early modern African photography lies in an archive that covers a vast timeframe (1922-present), exemplifying the colonial/ Western eye on the one hand, and the gaze of Ghanaian photographer J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije on the other. Vanderpuije was born in Accra in 1898 into an upper-class family whose name goes back to James Vanderpuije, a Dutch governor stationed at Elmina Fort in the 18th century (Wendl, 1998). The Deo Gratias Photo Studio, which Vanderpuije founded in 1922, and its archive

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<sup>39</sup> in the view of these pioneering pan-Africanist thinkers, Africa was the homeland of a distinctive people, ‘the Negro race’, in need of urgent redemption from the evils of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic. For some, that redemption would come principally through Christianity; for others, through freedom and full citizenship in the Americas and self-determination in Africa. Aspirations to racial unity, dignity, and self-determination, however, were swept aside by the rising tide of European imperialism at the end of the century. The ideology of pan-Africanism would survive as a tool of resistance to racial domination across the black Atlantic, but it would be the shared experience of colonial rule that consolidated for many the idea of Africa and of being African” (Parker and Reid, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> “Doch tut sich der Westen auch heute noch schwer, die Gleichzeitigkeit seines Afrikanischen Anderen anzuerkennen (vgl. Fabian, 1983) – und damit auch die von ihm selbst mit modernen Medien erzeugten Bilder“ (Yet even today, the West finds it difficult to acknowledge the coevalness of its African Other (cf. Fabian, 1983) – and thus also the images it creates itself with modern media. (Wendl and Behrend, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Sprague also connects photographic image-making in West Africa to that in African sculpture.

encompasses about 50.000 images and present “documentary and artistic quality of the colonial period with no equivalent in West Africa” (Pelletier et al., 2007). Vanderpuije and thus his studio encouraged the photographic fashion of European lifestyle, by displaying Western wardrobe and posing, and subtly integrated African features in an alternation of coexisting cultural identities in different styles and postures (Figures 10-11).

Kate Tamakloe-Vanderpuije who is the granddaughter of J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije took over the studio after her grandfather had handed it to her father who had studied at the Academy of Fine Arts *Leipzig* (HGB). Her account of the family’s photographic collection speaks of the high value of the archive in the history of Ghana and West Africa, and the importance of heritage studies, while illustrating the unusual path of herself as a female archivist (Engmann, 2021). As Vokes and Newbury suggest, the Deo Gratias Photo Studio, which was one of the early Ghanaian photo studios, serves as an identifier of transitions in photographic conventions that trace<sup>42</sup> an “Africanization” of the photographic medium as various scholars suggest (Vokes and Newbury, Wendl, et al.). Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann, author of a recent interview with Tamakloe-Vanderpuije points out that “early African photography in colonial settings drew from and reproduced or refashioned existing tropes elucidated in European studio photographic portraiture, namely, Victorian aesthetics recognizable by way of posture, backdrops, posing and props, which were in themselves influenced by portrait painting conventions” (Engmann, 2020: 93). She further elaborates on the occurrence of an “Africanization” of photography that was grounded in political struggle for independence and its accompanying “nationalist political and socio-cultural consciousness” (ibid.). Although already prevalent in such photographic practice such as that of the Deo Gratias Photo Studio, the transition from European influences on African photography found its peak within Ghana much later, towards the country’s independence movement, as Tobias Wendl equally notes:

By the turn of the century, studios had been set up in all major coastal towns. Photography was developing into a distinct profession with its own formal apprenticeship and work ethics. The images produced were significantly different from the missionary and ethnographic images of Africans that circulated in Europe, but they were not so different from the images that Europeans ordered and collected of themselves. The early Ghanaian photographic practitioners were part of the colonial elite milieu and mimicked Victorian aesthetic norms. The studios with their painted backdrops of aristocratic interiors were like theatre sets, and standing figures often leaned against pillars or pediments on which books or other objects were placed (Wendl,

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<sup>42</sup> On the notion of photography as trace cf. Ruchatz (2008) as discussed in **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness**.

2001: 80, 81) [...] It would take some decades, approximately until the late 1940s and early 1950s, before we witness signs of "Africanization" and finally the emergence of truly original photographic practices and imagery (81) [...] Yet the 1940s were not only a decade of technological transition. They were also marked by a deep change in politics. European occupation was increasingly contested and slowly slipping into decline. Nationalism was spreading and the struggle for independence, under the leadership of Nkrumah and Danquah, was making headway. It was within this context of an emerging new political and intellectual consciousness that the older forms of colonially inherited photographic self-representations were no longer satisfying and new ones could be introduced and eventually be enjoyed (81).

This transformation of representation encompasses the period of awakening nationalism, then the period of euphoria culminating in independence in 1957, and finally that of the period of first disenchantments thereafter (Wendl, 1998). However, Engmann figures that "colonial photography was employed to define and document life in the colony as well as to classify its subject populations. Yet, as this and other collections demonstrate, studio and street photography reveal a rich and complex African engagement with, and self-representation through, photography during the colonial period and beyond" (Engmann, 2020: 88), because studio and street photography were not necessarily in the hand of the colonial powers, but in those of Ghanaians. In this light, Kate Tamakloe-Vanderpuije herself figures:

Photographs that I like are those of women wearing the Odoku, which is a kind of formal head-dress. Artificial hair is saturated with oils and creams, which are then dried and after doing that several times, it hardens, and becomes rather like a cap in shape that women wear during special, often traditional occasions. This photograph sheds light on the ways in women dressed in the past, and is of note, because the Odoku is no longer worn today. Some women are also wearing beads, around their necks, wrists, hips and just below the knee. These ladies are dressed up for a studio photograph in very European clothing. Of course, during the colonial era, many Ghanaian women wore what their colonial masters' wives wore (Tamakloe-Vanderpuije in Engmann, 2020) (Figure 10).

This combination of different styles and cultures that the archivist Tamakloe-Vanderpuije describes in the representation of the Odoku hair accessory, encompasses the notions of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), as they compound the West African tradition of Odoku with European fashion as a means for the individual to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (56). However, the visual-cultural switches taking place in the images themselves, as well as the oscillations or alternations of coexistence cannot be not articulated sufficiently, without often missing information embedded in the photographs, and

is in this case best described in the juxtaposition of the various photographic representations which the scope and versatility of this archive presents.

A queen mother of Jamestown (Figure 12) for instance serves as an intriguing juxtaposition to the mission archive's *Black pastor and his family* (3.), since it depicts a queen mother in her vernacular context in Jamestown, (which became a vibrant cosmopolitan scene due to its port location), revealing an idea of "Ghanaian women's power in the political realm" (Engmann, 2020: 90). This time however, the author of the image is Vanderpuije, an African photographer. Since the Deo Gratias Photo Studio and its archive are still operating, they give insight on a historical and contemporary level into the relevance and potentials of a living archive. The reception of the postcolonial era up until today, in which Ghanaian Afro cultures "continue to be, shaped by a number of historical, political, economic and socio-cultural events, actors, ideas and imaginations" (99), would be a challenging endeavor without the visual representations offered by Deo Gratias Photo Studio.



Figure 10-11. From Deo Gratias Photo Studio (around 1930).



Figure 12. From Deo Gratias Photo Studio (around 1930).

A subsequent notable account of the transition of change in the photographic realm in the 1950s and 1960s, is interestingly a female photographer (Figure 13-15). Felicia Abban was taught photographic developing techniques and photographing by her father. Abban opened her studio not far from the prestigious Deo Gratias Photo Studio by J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije in 1953, when she was just 18 years old (Bowles, 2016). She maintains an archive that encompasses self-portraits, which she pursued besides commissions for ordinary and high-profile clients such as Kwame Nkrumah himself, for whom she served as his first private photographer after independence. Laurian R. Bowles gives a thoughtful and rich insight into this unique—and unusual for the time – female photographer and her self-portraits. For Bowles Abban “uses clothing to visibly articulate a feminine identity that plays with the traditional and contemporary in an artful hybridity that is urbane and trans-Atlantic. The collection posits Abban within transnational publics and as part of an exhilarating period where fashioning identity was a cultural imperative” (Bowles, 2016). Bowles further argues with Behrend and Wendl, who postulate that “self-portraits are gendered embodiments of modernity through dress politics” (Behrend 2002), towards a “intentionality of creating memory made by the choices of clothing in photography portraiture” and dress culture that

“reinforces and illustrates social integration” (Wendl 2001: 85). The idea of “Afro-Beauty” by Liam Buckley (2006) and the notion of “Black cool” by Rebecca Walker (2012), also connect to Abban’s self-portraits in Bowles’ reflections. Afro-Beauty describes the notion that revolved around the eponymous 1960/70s photo studio in Gambia by Ghanaian photographer Peter Kwesi Adjei. This notion came to be known as a local scene of elegance that was heterogenous and resembled a “hipster discourse traveling from across the Atlantic merged with a nationalism posited on the potential of each individual to feel elegant” (Buckley, 2006: 69). Aligned with the notion of heterogeneity, the idea of Black cool similarly negotiates the multiplicity of Blackness in contemporary subcultures (Walker, 2012). I argue that the photographic agency (Azoulay, 2008) that lies in Abban’s control of the camera apparatus presents itself through the capability of her being able to pursue her own self-representation and self-fashioning. This creates a photographic event, as described by Azoulay, which invites Abban’s fellows and sitters to become joyful imitators of that agency of self-chosen representation. As such, Abban’s practice also subverts hints of intersectional marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989), being a woman of color in a predominantly male profession. While the photographer advocates for and represents a “vernacular cosmopolitanism” as described by Bhabha (1994), in which she is “moving in-between cultural traditions, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language” (xiii) she engenders a West African form femininity that ties together Black beauty and coolness, as Bowles suggests:

This doubling effect, of Abban as both subject and photographer, expands the presentation of the self-portrait as a prototypical visual currency, a memento of a studio experience that invited prospective clients to step inside, dress up, and pose for their own portraits. The looming studio entry sign, the self-referential display of portraits, nearby dressing room, and curtained backdrop filled with props are replete with Abban’s vision of respectable femininity that is professional, photogenic, and stylized through affirmations that are urban, middle-class, and cool (Bowles, 2016: 51).

Acknowledging that Abban certainly met her male colleagues on the same level in terms of professionalism, Newbury, Rizzo, and Thomas articulate a critique of the belated recognition of the photographer, and the invisibility of West African female photographers as such

(2021: xiii)<sup>43</sup>. Nevertheless, Abban demonstrates a striking example of women photographers in the spirit of the independence era. Her photographs showcase an intriguing account of self-representation of the Ghanaian woman before, during and after the independence of a country in the making. Her self-fashioning of traditional clothing that combines and/ or alternates Western dress cultures, are always accompanied by a subtle smile that demonstrates her calm control over the image capturing. The alternations of different fashion identities between white pearls, silky European style garments, Kente and Angelina fabrics and traditional wrapped dresses vis-à-vis opulent tailored skirts<sup>44</sup> were rather typical for the Ghanaian cosmopolitan of the time and speak of a confidence that seems to come with ease. Just as Helen Jennings argues in the recent publication *Fashion and Postcolonial Critique* (2020), the formation of the new Ghanaian identity was as most West African countries a story informed by notions of invention and resistance:

As European colonialism in Africa faltered in the mid-twentieth century, fashion became an expression of a renewed sense of cultural identity and the concept of contemporary fashion took off [...] As a Pan-Africanist, Nkrumah urged his people to reject Western clothing in favor of national dress. Yet members of Africa's young urban elite were keen to define their own image. Inspired by the resistance music and sartorial style of iconic musicians, such as Fela Kuti and Hugh Masekela, and fueled by their university education from abroad, young people mixed and matched clothing from European fashion with more traditional African items made by tailors (Jennings, 2019: 105).

That notion of coolness and tranquility infused with a vibrant freedom of creative expression stands for a consistent and continuous feature of West African studio portraiture around independence.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Felicia Abban was introduced in the Ghanaian edition of *Drum* magazine in 1966 (cf. Newbury, Rizzo, and Thomas, 2020).

<sup>44</sup> Kente fabric is a popular traditional, originally handwoven Ghanaian textile, which is also mass-produced in a printed version. Another fabric which is called Angelina or Dashiki: “has many globally recognised names. Perhaps the most literal is the name “dashiki”, which originated in Ghana and is derived from the words “danshiki” or “dan ciki”, meaning “shirt” in West African languages. But the fabric has music in it too. It was introduced to the market in the 70s, in the same year that the song “Angelina”, by Ghanaian band Sweet Talks, was released. The pattern became unexpectedly associated with the song, and has gone by the name Angelina ever since. More recently, the same fabric was associated with another song: “Mascara (Ya Mado)” by Congolese singer Fabregas. In the 2014 music video, you can see dancers wearing shirts in the so-called Ya Mado print in various color combinations. This pattern is connected to one more prominent music figure: the late singer and activist Miriam Makeba, who was an important advocate for civil rights and black feminism. She wore many African prints in her lifetime, and was often seen in this one”. <https://maakola.com/fabric/angelina/>

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also Pinther (1998) on the idea of “memorial textiles” (my translation) and textiles as metaphors of the social (38).

The struggles for independence of different West African nation states, although shifting in dates and times, and although postulating forces of decolonization, change and political battle, assimilated this notion of tranquility that derives through curiosity and hope, but incorporates agency and resistance towards the unwanted continuous colonial domination. In proposing that “Abban uses photographs to envision a feminine subjectivity in conversation with sentiments of Ghanaian nationalism alongside transnational aesthetics popularized through magazine and transnational tropes of urban chic” (49), Bowles demystifies the concept of trope in identity-making towards a transcultural approach that integrates notions of Afro-Beauty in African modernity. Based on that I argue that the notion of the pose (Barthes, 1980) forms a collective cultural identity, based on the invention of a “shape shifting Black woman, capable of maintaining the narrative of herself [...] while traveling multiple paths through multiple personas, roles and circumstances” (Thomas, 2012: 53). I argue that this notion of shape shifting, which is crucial to hybrid identities deserves a pointed terminology, which is again reflected in the notion of the spectrum/spectral. This notion of the spectral encapsulates the idea of hybridity but offers a potential differentiation between various forms and nuances of hybridity. In incorporating multiple personas, the hybrid individual is embedded within a spectrum of identities.



Figure 13. Felicia Abban, self-portrait Western garment Accra c. 1955; Figure 14. Felicia Abban, self-portrait wearing kente cloth and lace, Accra c. 1960; Figure 15. Felicia Abban, self-portrait in dress made from Angelina fabric, Accra c. 1965.

The tranquility and invention are also reflected in photographs of the post-independence era by Ghanaian photographer James Barnor (see below). Also, Rachidi Bissiriou's portraits of local families, the inhabitants of a village in Benin (1968 to 1985) carry this notion: In identifying a certain simplicity and casual attitude in their everyday clothing, we are enabled to acknowledge the sophistication of ordinary people. Whereas Seydou Keïta's (b. 1921 in Mali) and Sanlé Sory's (b. 1943 in Burkina Faso) work often entails props and gadgets are often integrated in a symbiotic manner of vibrancy with their protagonists (Figure 16)<sup>46</sup>, Malick Sidibé (b. 1935 in Mali) transported the vibrant agency of the time through his staging of Black bodies of the 1960's in movement, dance, and fashion culture (Figure 17). As a master of textile image composition, Francis K. Honny (b. Ghana 1914) earlier compounded the notion of tranquility with the notion of abundance and camouflage in West African culture, whereas Samuel Fosso (b. 1962 in Cameroon to Nigerian parents) takes the idea of the "Black cool" to a whole other level, by means of role play, queerness, camouflage, and visual-cultural code switching (see both artists in 5.).



Figure 16. Seydou Keïta, Portrait (Wolove women), c. 1949-63.



Figure 17. Malick Sidibé, *Soiree Mariage*, 1968.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bajorek (2020) for an in-depth discussion on props and specifically radios in West African studio photography.

#### 4.4 JAMES BARNOR: A CHRONICLER OF CHANGE

*Through the medium of portraiture, his photographs brilliantly document societies in transition: Ghana moving towards its independence in the 1950s and London becoming a cosmopolitan, multicultural metropolis in the 1960s [...] Although not immediately apparent, underneath the surface lies something intrinsically revolutionary, something inherently transient in the evolution of Barnor's multifaceted practice: something quietly rebellious, surprising and wonderfully 'different'.*

(Mussai, 2015: 12).

Renée Mussai (2016) opens her reflections on James Barnor's work with a quote by Frantz Fanon: "In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (Fanon, 1952). Similarly, filmmaker and scholar Manthia Diawara has noted: "The leading philosophers of African modern identity like Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon or Thomas Sankara, they all believe that identity is tied to the invention of yourself" (2017), which justly contextualizes Barnor's work in the spirit of West African identity-making in the independence era.

Born in 1929 in Accra, in what was then the Gold Coast, James Barnor has been in many ways an observer and documenter of the creation and invention of identity in Afro cultures. An apprenticeship with his cousin J.P.D. Dadoo,<sup>47</sup> encouraged to step outside the studio to pursue reportage and street photography, enabled him to work for the *Daily Graphic* and later to represent independence for *British Telegraph*. This was at a time when only English white men came to these positions (Obrist, 2021: 13).

As Ghana's first ever photojournalist, working for the *Daily Graphic* Newspaper in Accra in Ghana's pre-independence era, he developed a practice that combined authentic rural street photography (Figure 20) in alternation with studio work (Figure 21). He came to be both witness and affiliated kindred spirit of the independence movement by Kwame Nkrumah and the Ghanaian political and cultural elite at the time (Figure 18)<sup>48</sup>. Later he captured postcolonial Ghana of the late 1950s and 1960 in its making, documenting the free spirit of hope early after the country's independence (Figure 19), followed by rearticulations of identity with the beginnings of diasporic movement to Europe, particularly to the UK in the 1960s (Figure 25) , where Barnor also took photographs as an editorial fashion for the

<sup>47</sup> Barnor later also worked with a photographer named Julius Aikins.

<sup>48</sup> Roy Ankrah was a Ghanaian featherweight boxing contender during the 1950s.

South African magazine *Drum* (Figure 28). Barnor documented “societies in transition and transformation” (Obrist and Korek, 2021). After returning to Ghana in 1970s he introduced color photography in the country by opening the first African color photo lab (Figure 26)<sup>49</sup>. In the mid 1990s Barnor relocated to London.

His first studio however has been the Ever Young studio, which he opened in 1953. It was located in the Jamestown district of the capital Accra, a port scenery, which had the perfect spot to witness transcultural exchanges, and major events in the city, such as demonstrations in the peaceful non-violent movement as described above, but also active and vigorous day and nightlife. Visitors to the studio, a young generation who was eager and full of excitement for the future found a platform for exchange around photography, politics, and around life itself provided in Barnor’s open door and halls. This found the Ever Young studio resembling a community center with parties and discussions. The spirit of the time was accompanied by the idea fashion and style expressing sophisticated taste, and creating new cultural identities, where people would come to the studio, which was located close to the upscale Seaview Hotel nearby, to have their picture taken. The name of the studio was given by Barnor in reference to the story of the magical refill of a casket full of apples<sup>50</sup> in creating a sense of everlasting renewal and youth. Barnor aligned the story with the work of retouching as rejuvenating his sitters as the essence of his studio work (Obrist, 2021: 14). Certainly, street photography opposed to studio photography required and obtained different notions in the production, as well as reception of the images (Figure 19 and 20). The exterior informality and spontaneity of street photography have crucially informed Barnor’s practice also in terms of his studio photography. By catching the vibe on the streets and in the markets of Accra, Barnor easily transposed the public atmosphere that revolved around independence into his studio photography.

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<sup>49</sup> For the analysis of Barnor’s work in the context of diasporic movement see 5. of this dissertation.

<sup>50</sup> The story of Iduna’s Grove: “Iduna, the beautiful young goddess of thee Norseman, lived in a pretty grove called Ever Young. She had a golden casket full of the most wonderful apples. A hero might come, tired and weary, like me, to Iduna’s Grove feeling he was growing old. Then Iduna would give him an apple. As soon as he’d eaten it, he’d feel fresh and young again. It wasn’t surprising that Iduna’s Grove was never lonely, always full. But what was surprising was that the fruit basket was never empty. As soon as the last fruit was given away, the basket was filled again by an invisible hand. That’s where Ever Young came from” (Barnor in Obrist, 2021: 14).



Figure 18. James Barnor, *Self Portrait with Nkrumah, Roy Ankráh and his Wife, Rebecca, Accra*, Courtesy Autograph, London, c. 1951.



Figure 19. Nigerian Superman. Old Polo Ground, Mantse Agbona Park, Accra 1958. James Barnor courtesy of Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière.



Figure 20. Market women in Accra, Ghana 1950s by James Barnor.

The first picture ever taken in the Ever Young studio, equally titled *The first photograph taken at the Ever Young studio, Accra, 1953* shows a young woman (Figure 21). An undergraduate student exposing an articulation of forward-looking youth at its best, showcases the pioneering spirit of the time, when national pride towards the struggle for independence was on the rise. Her elegant titled and upright posture simultaneously induces a certain tranquility, casuality, and nonchalance that communicates a gallant belief in herself. With an unconcerned, carefree attitude and lightfulness, she presents a model-like, sophisticated articulation of the vernacular. This lighthearted and cheerful easiness, which was also grounded in a particular form of innocence, serves as a pointed portrayal for the soon to become nation of Ghana at the time. Her smile proclaims the forceful but tender notion of resistance that was soon to come.

The image consists of a multi-layered room perspective. Whilst the foreground finds the sitter standing in the midst of the studio space on a fake tile-patterned floor, and a table and/or canvas cut at the left edge of the image, the background showcases an area separated by a large curtain. The curtain has been open in the center left, revealing another interior space with another cut table on the left edge, but this time in form of a backdrop painting, which demonstrates a classic West African modernist craft. The painting proceeds in exhibiting an outlook to the segment of a garden and a white picket fence. The image of the picket fence itself embodies a trope that links to prosperity and wealth and is particularly connected to Western culture of residing in affluence. The layers in space that the photograph unveils, connote the perspective of future aspirations that are captured in the present moment. In this relation, an outlook or perspective becomes an articulation of temporality that constricts coevalness in the respective present. Barnor's equally to the sitter's appearance nonchalant way of exposing the cut frame edges, as well as the disclosed backdrop roll of fabric and its construction at the top of the frame articulates an informal make-shift manner of image-making that moves beyond constraints of formally commissioned studio photography and places the articulation of the image at the center of a "reality in the making" and the photographer at the heart of agency of artistic autonomy. In this manner, Barnor's and other photographers' contributions added to the production of tropes of commencing postcolonialism in the West African, and particularly in the Ghanaian context. In this relation, every backdrop was described by Barnor as a kind of signature look to every individual photographer (Reilly, 2021). They would be ordered from a catalogue and

displayed outside for shoots in the beginnings of his studio: “no two photographers would use the same backdrop”, however, “the painters didn’t know what African homes were supposed to look like!” (ibid.), so the backdrop’s design displayed a European interior. Addressing a “multifaceted and complex transposition of colonial backdrops” as described in Jennifer Bajorek’s reflections (2021), Bajorek turns towards the conception of Arjun Appadurai’s *The Colonial Backdrop* (1997), in which modernity is signified by means of the insertion of technological attributes into the imagery. Bajorek elaborates on Tobias Wendl’s implication of “modern potential” in depictions of “painted backdrops featuring skyscrapers, freeway exchanges, passenger jets, and airports” (Bajorek, 2021: 105), but point towards more complex “African genealogies” (ibid.) by scrutinizing the trope of the radio in West African contexts. Her reflections bypass the common bias of colonial versus the colonized in a “modern imagination” (108) and, as I would argue, subvert Fabian’s construction of a denial of coevalness (1983) by pointing towards a potential coexistence of temporalities, which “forces us to acknowledge the coexistence, in a single image, of plural histories of a given media technology and, therefore, a multiplicity of backdrops” (Bajorek, 2021: 108).

The Western figurine which accompanied the young lady in the photograph was also a recurring signature element in Barnor’s work. An accompanying, recurring little friend in many of Barnor’s early studio photographs, which he used to establish the focus and contribute to the genuine identity of the photograph, as Margaux Lavernhe describes:

One specific object accompanied his work between 1949 and 1954: a statuette representing a child wearing an umbrella, made of porcelain, a few tens of centimeters high, which he explained he had bought at an auction and named "baby". This statuette played an important role in the construction of an interaction between the photographer and his clients. "Baby", if it has to be named, is on the one hand a kind of signature for Barnor, who refers to it as his "trademark", and on the other hand it provides a metonymic contribution to the offbeat, spontaneous, light atmosphere that makes up the identity of the Ever Young studio. It thus acts almost as a marker of Barnor’s DNA by integrating an element of visual identification into the highly standardized framework of the studio commission. In many images and even before the opening of the studio, it appears in a corner, placed on the floor, next to the photographed subjects who are themselves seated in an attitude mixing relaxation and fixity (Lavernhe, 2019).

Lavernhe sees the recurring appearance of the figurine as a reversion of the figures of Black pages as decorative counterpoint in Western 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings,<sup>51</sup> but also as a marker of

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. for example Rosenthal, 2004; Wolf, 2004.

the model's humanity "beyond their role and skin color" (Lavernhe, 2019, my translation). I would argue that the sheer availability of the figurine in the West African context, indicates the colonial project as such and serves as a marker for the counterintuitive practice of racialized modes of production, that renders the white figurine as a norm, which is a product of colonial hegemony. In this context, the clothing of the sitter indicates a European style, with a neat and embroidered, belted plaid dress and simple leather handbag and heeled shoes. Her jewelry is decent and her hairdo neat and tamed. Of course, education was initially held to be acquainted with Western culture and standards and would not be typically accompanied by traditional clothing. Yet, through the articulation of so-called "mixing and matching" that Barnor and others documented over time, the prevalence of transculturality and hybrid modes of fashion and style became a state of the art.

As a consequence in the Nkrumah period, photographic representation changed from a rigid understanding of modernism to a certain informality (Obrist, 2021: 18), which is articulated through Barnor's observations in the streets of Accra (Figures 12 and 13), but also by a reviving approach towards studio photography that fosters a collaboration between photographer and protagonists in a convivial we-being setting of Ghana at the time, where "the way in which he watches the world never separates him from it (Barthe, 2021: 30). In this context, Kobena Mercer suggests a "share(d) control over the apparatus of representation" by both the photographer and his protagonists (Mercer, 2010), and in the case of Barnor's studio photography, Mercer addresses the insight into the playful staging of new identities as participation in more global endeavors:

Whether outfitted in a three-piece suit or kente cloth, it is the theatricality of Barnor's studio setting that highlights the fact that his subjects were choosing what they wanted Afro-Modernity to be. Set up with parted curtains, painted balcony backdrops and a lino-covered dais, the Ever Young studio was literally a stage upon which social actors tried out different roles. The seemingly incongruous props – china figurines, plastic toys, even 'Red Indian' costumes – hint at Ghana's place in global circuits of commodities characteristic of modernity, and the desire of Barnor's subjects to participate in this modern world (Mercer, 2010).

Against this backdrop, Bianca Manu points out the "Pan African iconography that resonated across the continent and internationally, especially in America" (Manu, 2022: 44). Similarly, David Adjaye argues that Du Bois inspired Nkrumah (Adjaye, 2021: 43). And Helen Jennings affirms in the context of fashion that through 1960s civil rights movements in the U.S. "the legacy of slavery coupled with the fight for political and social equality was

channeled into the politics of dressing the body as a symbol of racial consciousness” (2020). Additionally, the postcolonial trope of the “Black Star Monument became a symbol of Pan Africanism and anti-colonialism” (Manu, 2022: 46), which in turn relates to Marcus Garvey whose articulations can be traced towards the invention of the Ghanaian flag and its Black Star.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, “Ghana gradually moved from a socialist image to a country adopting global trends in its search for modernity without Nkrumah” (Manu, 2022: 47).

The notion in Barnor’s work of being part of the world, and simultaneously being part of one another’s world constitutes a humaneness that thrives from compassion for the African people and points towards some of the extraordinary achievements after independence, such as state organization, infrastructure, health, and education. However, with proceeding challenges of globalization, Ghana as well as other African countries failed to conclude many of their economic and socio-political aspirations, and many Nkrumah supporters cherish nostalgia over their former president who seemed to take things into his hands with a plan in mind.

In capturing the visuality of a departing pre-colonial Ghana and in documenting independence and postcolonial spirit of the emerging country through the enactment of studio photography, but also in catching the mood of the public life in his more informal street photography, James Barnor articulates countervisual phenomena of resistance (Mirzoeff, 2011), that disrupt a gaze that outreaches the denial of coevalness as articulated by Fabian (1983)<sup>53</sup>. By presenting Ghana and its people in their vigorous, and cosmopolitan nature that is driven by a utopian hope towards modernism, Barnor captures a striving towards coeval, but also speaks of a certain innocence as articulated in Barnor’s sitters.

Here, the notion of hybridity presents itself not only as a conglomerate of European and Afro cultures, but as a form of heterogeneity that is translated through the ability to alternate between different cultural identities. The notion of the spectral which this thesis interpolates from the concept of hybridity, thus exemplifies this spectrum of identities with the embedded entropic complexities in African nation building. As Bhabha argues, “I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement – that confounds any profound or ‘authentic’ sense of a ‘national’ culture or an ‘organic’ intellectual – and ask

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<sup>52</sup> The often underestimated connection across West Africa and the Black Atlantic finds itself best reflected in Paul Gilroy’s notion of double consciousness (1993).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Vokes and Newbury for the juxtaposition of African “pastness” versus European “modernity”, but with a focus on the idea of African futures, 2018.

what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure” (1994: 31), which calls for a derivate of classic postcolonial reflections (cf. also Bhabha, 2015).



Figure 21. James Barnor, *The first photograph taken at the Ever Young studio, Accra, 1953*. Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière.

In this sense, and within the photographic context this thesis seeks to establish, the idea of the specter versus the spectrum again comes into play: The proximity of West African independence struggle to the left and with it to former soviet ideas (cf. Blakeley, 1986 et al.) give an insight into what Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993) later demystified as the ghosts of socialism that haunt the present, and reinvigorate a,

Learning to live – remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death alone [...] So it would be necessary to learn spirits [...] To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But with them [...] And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations (Derrida, 2012: xvii).<sup>54</sup>

Fisher, who refers to Derrida contends that human beings are “haunted by events that had not actually happened, futures that failed to materialize and remained spectral” (Fisher 2014: 59), it becomes apparent, that Derrida’s post-Marx reflections move beyond a European context in the postcolonial era. It remains to say that both the notion of the spectrum as articulated within alternations of African and Western identities and fashions, as well as the specter of utopian visions in West African independence movements, shape memories of the era and an understanding of what remains in the contemporary. However, the twofold notion of the idea of the spectral also underlies identities of the postcolonial realm, as described below. This notion of the spectral moreover presents a transculturalism embedded in the notion of hybridity, but rather describes operational switches than constituting hybrid fluidities. Considering Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* retroactively in the context of independence movement and beginning postcolonialism, it contributes to the baseline of Barthes’ idea of the spectrum in photography, and the spectral as a notion of nuances (1981), but also to the complexity of a concatenation of time in the aftermaths of the postcolony, as Mbembe described (Mbembe in Höller, 2002).

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<sup>54</sup> See below in **5**. Avery Gordon’s idea of the ghost/specter as a social figure. On the concept of “spectral humans” Butler and Spivak (2010): “These spectral humans, deprived of ontological weight and failing the tests of social intelligibility required for minimal recognition include those whose age, gender, race, nationality, and labor status not only disqualify them for citizenship but actively “qualify” them for statelessness. This last notion may well be significant, since the stateless are not just stripped of status but accorded a status and prepared for their dispossession and displacement; they become stateless precisely through complying with certain normative categories. As such, they are produced as the stateless at the same time that they are jettisoned from juridical modes of belonging. This is one way of understanding how one can be stateless within the state, as seems clear for those who are incarcerated, enslaved, or residing and laboring illegally. In different ways, they are, significantly, contained within the polis as its interiorized outside” (15-16). On state borders and mobility see also Achille Mbembe’s lecture “A World without Borders”, Culturgest, Lisbon, 2018.

#### 4.5 INTERLUDE 2. BEING A GUEST (2015-PRESENT), DZIFA PETERS IN COLLABORATION WITH JOSEF ZKY

*Representation then becomes a kind of post-representation: instead of mere translation, the anthropologist creates a new reality, setting out with the same structuring principles as the reality s/he wants to represent, but wherein s/he actively engages other forms of (re)presentation, that can grow into artistic acts of (re)creation.*

(Cassiman, 2009)

This archival photograph (Figure 22) depicts my grandmother Alice Tsaku around the time of Ghana's independence movement in the 1950's. She was born in 1929 in today's Volta Region of Ghana, which is home to the Ewe people amongst other ethnic groups. Growing up, she received training of how to become a modern woman under a woman from Togo, a former teacher of domestic science, where she learnt cookery, etiquette, and European culture. Later in her life, the campaign on leadership and independence begins and Alice is an activist, which was also the beginning of Frank and Alice, my grandparents<sup>55</sup>.

In this image, we can sense a modern Ghanaian and traditional style in an alternation of African and Western lifestyle throughout, and a certain ability to camouflage with both styles accordingly. In front of a typical African window-slide setting in the background, the Western classics of 1950's furniture embed her figure which is dressed in a tailored garment in equally classic African wax print. Her posture seated on the sofa is quite casual and relaxed, accentuated by her loosely crossed legs and feet in airy sandals. Her jewelry of typical Ghanaian gold is subtle but luxuriant. Her smile is bright. Despite the vibrance of these cultural alternations, the image communicates a certain gracefulness, a tranquility that seems locate her to be in the right place and at the right time, as if in a realm of fulfilled coevalness.

The last project phase of *Being a guest* (2015-present) builds on previous exhibitions and highlights both personal connections and historical contextualization of the project. A clay deposit had been owned by my Ghanaian grandfather, who had leased it from the local chiefs of the Volta Region for 99 years. He had planned to build a brick factory on the floor.

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<sup>55</sup> Information documented from exchange with my mother Ama Peters, 2018.

Affiliated with the Kwame Nkrumah government, which was the first Ghanaian government after independence in 1957, his property was destroyed after a military coup in 1966. As a result, the clay deposit was abandoned for the time being. After my mother emigrated from Germany back to Ghana in 2005, she offered the depot for an artistic project and has since reflected on the idea of rebuilding the factory. My status as a guest from the diaspora and simultaneous homecoming were subtly negotiated throughout the project. This selection of photos, accompanied by texts and interviews, brings together various aspects, intertwines relationships and juxtaposes events: both the personal history of four generations in the postcolonial context of Ghana, the question of the country's cultural identity and its independence, also in connection with the figure of its first President Kwame Nkrumah and the preservation of contemporary witness in the form of photographic material from the period of the independence movement. In this context, clay also plays another important role as a traditional cultural asset of an entropic national history.

Within the project, the task of encountering and recollecting photographic objects became a predominant and recurring topic. These photographs, that we saw as witnesses of the independence movement, travelled to be archived, which reflected on the challenges of preservation of these historical photographs in private hands and vernacular archives. As a processual project developed between 2015 and the present day, the project *Being a guest* engages with cultural myths, identities, and their representations. The craft of making little everyday observations, by means of capturing (in)significant moments, reveals the process of migration and transfer of images, and embraces their photographic agency as well as their potential for countervisuality. From cultural perspectives of the country to the role of being a guest: cultural societal imprints are connected to the creation and formation of cultural identities, whereas migration and globalization provoke cultural transfers of codes, where the idea of a multidirectional memory provides tools for reconfiguring past potential histories.

As mnemonic witnesses of the independence movement, the portraits of my grandparents from the Tsaku family were being packed for their travels by my mother to be archived during our research stay in Ghana (Figure 23-24). They spoke of an era that was loaded with the embracement for Afro culture, and the idea of a Pan African endeavor. They also incorporate crucial notions of transculturalism, in which different cultures would inspire and nourish each other. This cosmopolitan self-understanding and self-fashioning also

became a crucial exchange across the Atlantic where civil rights movements were imbued by the ventures of a new kind of African people in vernacular cosmopolitanism (Bhabha, 1994). Photographic objects of the West African independence era engrain individual narratives that connect to the collective cultural memory. This demonstrates their role in mnemotechnique of externalizations and traces of cultural memory as such (Ruchatz, 2008). Finally, they serve as historic exemplifications of the alternation of coexisting cultural identities and perspectives in West Africa for the field of visual culture.



Figure 22. Alice Tsaku from private family archive. My grandmother Alice Tsaku at the time of independence movement in the 1950's. Modern Ghana and traditional style: an alternation of African and western lifestyle throughout the image and a certain ability to camouflage with both styles accordingly.



Figure 23-24. From the project *Being a guest*, 2015-present, Dzifa Peters in Collaboration with Josef Zky. Witnesses of the independence movement: The portraits of my grandparents from the Tsaku family are being packed by the mother in order to be archived.

#### 4.6 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

In the context of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of many West African countries' independency, the 2020 New York Times article *A Continent Remade – Reflections on 1960* asked: What does independence look like? And a related BBC article spoke of *Stunning images of elegance and strength* (2020). These images followed, as described above, the approach of creating a modern African identity. Addressing the production of a postcolonial visuality, the notion of countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) in African independence movements is crucial since this visuality serves as an example of a mythical deconstruction of Europe as the global center.

West Africa had already been connected to the world prior independence, exemplified by the figure of Kwame Nkrumah and the independence movement. The potentiality of a "transnational migrant knowledge" (Bhabha, 1994: 306) becomes evident in Nkrumah's own biography, which included his doctoral degree from abroad. Nkrumah understood the colonial opponent and was determined to defeat him in his own game. He proved to develop a sophisticated non-violent approach in winning independence subversively from prison. This fashion of resistance appeared to be enriched with elegance, class, tranquility, and steadiness, and infused with the force of commitment as a positive action, which made the claim of political agency and the will for change, generating resistance in non-violent African independence movement. In addition, this notion of tranquility in Nkrumah's governance echoes in the tranquility and coolness of self-fashioning in the African studio photography introduced in this chapter. The postulation of an aesthetics of resistance merges with the account of being in the world and making that connection, that claim to enrich a global discourse. It followed the approach of creating the myth (Barthes, 1972) of a new African identity, that would, paired with modern elements of development and progress, become equalized and still holds those memories for a younger generation today, as we will see in **5. Articulations of Memory: The Reinvented Diaspora.**

However, the quintessence of postcolonial representation lies in the twofold nature of the spectral that this doctoral thesis pursues, and which presents two sides of the same coin of the spectral on equal footing. On the one hand, the spectral evolves into an oscillation within postcolonial identities, resulting in a vibration that becomes constitutional for the alternating switches between different cultural identities. Here, the concept of hybridity, although crucial and pointedly developed, often becomes a stand-alone umbrella term, a one

size fits all, that lacks the potential to help establish discernability between various cultural hybridities that exist. What differentiates when Felicia Abban switches between clothing in her self-portraits or the sitters of James Barnor match envisions of modernity in heterogeneous ways, exemplifies a spectrum that finds itself embedded in the notion of hybridity itself, and thus describes the actual multifaceted nature of the concept as such: a spectrum of hybridities and nuances. On the other hand, the notion of the spectral describes the haunted endeavor of the past, which remains unfinished business, and which has been a utopian vision of West African developments that were articulated by Nkrumah and find themselves linked to an idea of socialism. Both Nkrumah's downfall questions these endeavors and remain within the haunted notion of *Specters of Marx* in the context of globalization in late capitalism, as formulated by Derrida (1993). This aspect becomes also relevant when the notion where everything seemed to fall into place and time in African modernism, subverting the denial of coevalness (Fabian, 1983), the dichotomy of culture versus nature and tradition versus modernity (Mignolo, 2011), and the Western attitude of first Europe and then elsewhere (Chakrabarty, 2000). However, this became unfulfilled in the postmodern world (cf. Latour, 1991).

The notion of spectrality is related to the medium of photography as such, as we have seen in **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness**. Here the idea of reviving and manifesting the dead through the camera apparatus also finds itself reflected in the notion of the archival. An archive is to be stored in a cool, dry place, preserved, and hidden, then excavated and circulated. This morbid idea of death and the photographic archive (Barthes, 1981; Mbembe, 2002) anticipates the intrinsic notion of the archive: our need to remember. Revolutionizing the archive, in this regard, means to excavate and uncover its archival knowledge, is what Achille Mbembe refers to as the “resuscitation of life [...] bringing the dead back to life by reintegrating them in the cycle of time, in such a way that they find, in a text, in an artefact or in a monument, a place to inhabit, from where they may continue to express themselves” (Mbembe, 2002: 25). Excavating the archives inevitably reinvigorates past hopes, aspirations, and agencies, but also unfinished businesses, tumbles, and falls.

The notion of the spectral in the photographic realm also stands in relation to the disembodied quality of medium as such, as we have seen with Barthes in **3**. In this sense, the photographic practice of Barnor demonstrates once more the twofold notion of spectral as an interpolation of hybridity on the one hand, and the idea of photographs as mnemonic

objects that embody a haunting notion of the past and its unfinished business<sup>56</sup>. The notion of distinguished paranoia that surrounds the reflections on neocolonialism of Kwame Nkrumah himself (1965), speaks to the crucial fact that many of Nkrumah's endeavors remain unresolved up until today. Many West African countries are bound to their debt to their European former colonizers, and financial sales regulations (Harrison, 2010).

Despite the vibrant positivity and hope for the future that Barnor's images transport, which resonates significantly with subsequent generations, as their memory is transmitted upon, (see 5.), they also capture hints of unfulfilled idealism within this photographic realm of pre- to postcolonial West Africa. The complications of power struggle within the country as well as a political style that served a narrow idea of nationalism without a template to succeed, in which some see the initials that led to Nkrumah's downfall (cf. Hagan, 1991; Rooney, 2007).

This dissertation proposes an aesthetics of resistance, as a way of looking at the mnemotechnique of photographic tropes in African modernity. This aesthetic subsequently serves as an example of the beginnings of Afro diasporic phenomena that can be found in many of today's postmigratory diasporic contexts. Hence the photographic material of the West-African independence era marks the beginnings of migration and diaspora within a global postcolonial context, it mnemonically holds postmemories of resistance for a younger postmigratory generation in both Africa and the world today. Here, the notion of *postmemory*, as coined by Marianne Hirsch (2012), plays a crucial role in the articulation of diasporic identity, as we will see in 5. It describes the heritage of memories that are not one's own, but as having been brought up with them, one internalizes these memories as if they have been lived through. These relations become particularly crucial when looking at the constitutive shaping of personal cultural memory and the link from private memory to a collective history as heritage. Hence, the relation of diasporic movement and migration prerequisites indicates a transmission of complex memories onto subsequent postmigratory generations.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Avery Gordon's notion of "something-to-be-done" (2011).



## 5. ARTICULATIONS OF MEMORY: THE REINVENTED DIASPORA

*The imagined communities of home, however, live on in shards of memory, stories, narratives and fragments of nostalgia [...] It is a 'different' kind of connection that diaspora migrants develop. The intangible relationship with home is one that haunts; sometimes as spectre, sometimes as a dream. The cultural and philosophical values of 'home' thus need to be figured through non-Western notions of 'dwelling' and 'habitus' to include postcolonial experiences, and diasporic cultural values which offer different starting points, timescales and relationships between individuals and a sense of belonging, home and heritage.*

(Cohen & Fischer, 2019: 217).

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces concepts of diaspora and migration within postcolonial discourses<sup>57</sup>. Today, in the globalized context of the world we are more than ever urged to understand and dismantle postcolonial relations, in order to reflect on their resulting “new ethnicities,” to borrow from Hall (1996) or socially constructed identities in reference to Appiah (2018: 143). An active acknowledgment of these identities helps deal with the complexities that come in line with the aftermaths of a postcolonial African entropy, which is grounded in the legacies of colonialism.

The chapter embodies the crucial process of identity formation that follows the aftermaths of the colonial and the postcolonial up until the contemporary. Most importantly, it unravels the postcolonial migrants’ and their descendants’ identities that have been exposed to and transformed by processes of diasporic movements. While memories, histories and narratives were being passed on to these further generations in diasporic settings, it is the transmission of those memories themselves that articulate new diasporic identities for the most part.

The case studies focus on contemporary artistic practices that reveal the diasporic circumstances indicated above and the various postcolonial identities they entail. Artists such as James Barnor, Philip Kwame Apagya and Liz Arthur Johnson, follow an artistic practice that embraces these reflections on contemporary diasporic representation and identity. Herein, a contemporary approach to the African diaspora as such (Quayson, 2013a), as well as the complexities of Mbembe’s postcolony (2001), and T.J. Demos’ take on a return to it facing specters of colonialism (2013), are embedded in questions of representation (Hall, 1997) and nostalgia, within societies of postmigration. Moreover, the thesis points towards the role of the archive in the context of Black representation as a place of sanctuary. The integrated Interlude 2 at the end of this chapter, once more caters to the possibilities of my take on arts-based research by showcasing excerpts from my artistic project *You and We* (2014) and what its findings can potentially contribute to the field of culture studies.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Cohen, 2008; Cohen & Fisher, 2019, Quayson, 2013a, 2013b, et al.

## 5.2 WEST AFRICA AND ITS EUROPEAN DIASPORA

In his chapter contribution *Africa and its Diasporas* to the volume *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (Quayson, 2013a), Ghanaian scholar Ato Quayson emphasizes the importance of Africa's "relationship to its variant diasporas and the implications this has for understanding the socio-cultural and economic changes taking place in the continent itself" (628). Furthermore, Quayson defines the concept of diaspora:

For a diaspora to emerge out of the dispersal of a given population a number of conditions have to be met. These include the time depth of dispersal and settlement in other locations; the development of a myth of the homeland (note the emphasis on myth here); the attendant diversification of responses to homeland and host nation; the evolution of class segmentation and conflict within a given diaspora; and the ways in which contradictions among the different class segments end up reinforcing different forms of material and emotional investment in a utopian ideal of the homeland [...] It is the utopian idealization that gives the homeland ultimate salience within diasporic consciousness, whether this ensues in a return-to-homeland movement or not (631).

Quayson points out that considering processes of *diasporization* holistically, also within the inner African context, will give a contemporary perspective to the idea of the concept of diaspora as such, claiming that "the dimensions of nation and citizenship; the significance of both intrinsic and extrinsic migration ebbs and flows that have served to structure African society over the past four centuries; the relation of these to transnationalism and globalization" (628) will reveal relevant insights to the research on African diasporas today.

As he refers to the early Greek etymological roots of the term *diaspora* – scattering over (2013b: 146), Quayson identifies key diasporic conditions and "Africa's shifting relation to its diasporas" (2013a: 629) that declared its diaspora the "sixth region" of the continent, which can be equally linked to Robin Cohen's idea of cultural diaspora or deterritorialized diaspora (Cohen, 2008), in which discourses on concepts of diaspora consider the idea of cultural places instead of cultural territories. This is underlined by the fact that there have for instance been more African-born Africans migrating to the United States annually since 1970 than were sent there each year throughout the 400-year period of slavery and that the World Bank estimates that in 2010 there were 30.6 million Africans living outside their homelands (Quayson, 2013a: 629). Following Quayson and his approach to diaspora studies that discusses Africa intertwined in close relation with its diaspora and in a process of "African diasporization" as a result of continuous migration and return, I

argue for a further extension of that thought by understanding the African continent itself continent as part of this African diaspora.

In her introduction to the panel discussion *African Diasporic Countervisualities* at Barnard Center for Research on Women New York, in February 2019, Tina M. Campt states that “African diasporic for many means the forced and voluntary migrations and displacements of Africans from the Middle Passage through the present. I would add to that that it is also the creative links of relation, affiliation and affirmation forged by racialized communities in and between their multiple sites of dwelling”. This marks the bridge between a territorialized and a cultural diaspora, as we will further see below within the comparative approach of this doctoral thesis and its transdisciplinary take on scholarship on Afro cultures.

In this context, Achille Mbembe (2001) provides a complex interpretation of contemporary African circumstances in his postcolony, suggesting a specific view on the continent that informs its identity in a heterogeneous as well as challenging way. Mbembe deviates from the binary perspective of the colonizer against the colonized and pleads for the idea of an interconnectedness that leaves the African subject in a fairly autonomous position, while incorporating complex notions of its identity. Mbembe concludes: “Hence, it would seem wrong to continue to interpret postcolonial relations in terms of absolute resistance or absolute domination, or, as a function of the binary oppositions usually adduced in conventional analyses of movements of indiscipline and revolt (e.g. counter-discourse, counter-society, counter-hegemony)” (105). Instead, he argues that “the [analytical] emphasis should be on the logic of ‘conviviality’, on the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, inscribing the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme” (110). Hence, the colonially fragmented African identity would have the chance to gain back its dignity and agency for the attempted political and economic transformations ahead, while maintaining its complex heterogeneity.

The postcolonial in connection to the diasporic (cf. Mussai, 2016; Quayson, 2013b) also introduces the intertwinement of a “diasporic imaginary,” which, in relation to the overcoming of the concept of the nation-state, induces transnational and transcultural approaches to the aftermaths of individual struggles for postcolonialism.

### 5.3 PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

*For historically marginalized people, photographs, when presented with care, can help locate our missing chapters. Images keep people in life; when curated with dignity, they can resurrect cultures that have been denied visibility or made silent. They help us understand by holding up the making of our lives; they pause us, offering respite from the velocity of our existence. Photographs tease us with questions like, “Was I there?” or “Is that us?” “Is it real?” or “Did I witness this event or simply imagine it?”*

*Though photographs never provide the complete answers, they might, at times, adjust or reset our sense of reality. Most important, they can help us frame new questions, uncouple and delink us from harmful dominant narratives, and allow us to feel the presence of a past moment in the now of our time.*

(Sealy, 2021: 8).

In the context of the African diaspora, the medium of photography has been essentially discussed in different localities<sup>58</sup>. For instance, Stuart Hall has written on an artist like British-Caribbean Vanley-Burke, who portrayed an authentic Black British experience in various intriguing ways (Figure 27). Here, the complexities of Afro diasporic identities as well as the interplay between different temporalities in time, are brought to the surface in the photographic discourse. As Mark Sealy reflects: “Photographs are vehicles that transport us both to known and unknown places in our minds. They hold our multiple identities and are essential to our cognitive world. They function as visas for our future journeys because what we see in the past helps formulate our future (Sealy, 2021: 10). These leaves the photographic objects burdened as chroniclers of the politics of time.

When looking at the development of studio and street photography, James Barnor is an outstanding example of the African photographic context, as demonstrated in **4. Independence and the Postcolonial Invention of Self**. Here, Barnor’s role in contributing to a pre- and postcolonial photographic realm and visual-cultural identity in Ghana were discussed. As such, Barnor provides another layer of insight, because the 1960s saw him emigrating to London in 1959 and were followed by his return to Ghana in 1969. As a result of this migration process, he did not only document an emerging African diaspora in the UK,

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<sup>58</sup> See for instance Stuart Hall’s *Writings on Media*, 2021; Paul Gilroy’s *Black Britain: A Photographic History*, 2011; Cheryl Finley, Deborah Willis’ *Black Portraiture[s] The Black Body in the West*, 2016, Richard J. Powell’s *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*, 2008 et al.

but also brought the technical means to produce color photography back with him to Ghana (cf. Lavernhe, 2021). As Renée Mussai writes:

Whether in Ghana or England, Barnor documented cultures in transformation, new identities coming into being – the fragmented experience of modernity and diaspora; the shaping of cosmopolitan societies and selves; and the changing representation of blackness, desire, and beauty across time and space. His archive thus not only constitutes a rare document of the black experience in postwar Britain during the Swinging Sixties, but also provides an important frame of reference, overlapping and suturing questions of the postcolonial in relation to diasporic perspectives in twentieth-century photography (Mussai, 2016: 155-156).

Barnor’s archive, which was rediscovered in 2009 by the UK-based art organization *Autograph* with a stunning number of 5000 negatives<sup>59</sup>, photographs, and documents, giving Barnor the 80-year old his flowers at a late stage of his life, had followed a clear ethical mission for Black representation in the realm of photography: “Autograph ABP’s Archive and Research Centre initiative, established to redress a series of gaps in the visual representation of Britain’s different postmigrant communities” (156). Within this context, Barnor played a crucial role in the generation of visibility of European Blackness, the dissemination of African and Black beauty against normative beauty standards of Whiteness, and the African diaspora as such.

In London of the 1960s, Barnor was commissioned by *Drum* magazine, for which he shot manifold Black amateur cover models (Figure 28). The *Drum* magazine, with its South African origin, grew out of anti-apartheid movements, into distributing a quarter million copies on the African continent alone, but also in Europe, presenting new perspectives on Black beauty and fashion, while also giving a voice to “younger and socially conscious writers and photographers” (Ibreck, 2021: 47) featuring many articles of “political and social consequence” (ibid.), and echoing “an emergent Black global citizen, a new and sophisticated audience with class, taste and resources. Barnor’s photographs represented both their real and imagined lifestyle” (Hartt, 2021: 61). Barnor also engaged with the documentation of numerous Black community gatherings and events, such as weddings and other festivities (Figure 25).

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<sup>59</sup> For detailed reflections on Barnor’s archive see Lavernhe, *Behind the Images: James Barnor’s Archive World*, 2021.

Later, Barnor used the opportunity to collaborate with the distributor Sick-Hagemeyer and Agfa-Gevart to develop the technical skills for developing color photography and upon his return to Ghana in 1969, opened the first color processing lab of Africa in Accra (Figure 26). Despite the ambition of this project, which was embedded in a shared return with other contemporaries from the African diaspora of the time, the business did not succeed and Barnor and Sick-Hagemeyer later went separate ways.

However, this process was infused with the transcultural entanglements between Africans and Europeans, as David Hartt writes: “The effects of their temporary diaspora are far reaching, layered and complex and it’s important to emphasize that the history of their experience abroad is now entangled in the identity of their former host country” (63-64). Barnor’s take on Black representation in the realm of photography during the 1960s and 1970s offers a striking shift from Western hegemony and polarizing dichotomies of global north against global south, or a center versus periphery conception of the world (cf. Chakrabarty, 2000), and integrates an empowering notion of photographic agency (cf. Azoulay, 2008) into the sphere of diasporic visualities, where “photography served as a perfect medium to satisfy the desire to become a modern subject” (Mussai, 2016: 158). However, Barnor’s photographic works show once more the embedded ambiguity of Afro diasporic representation, by bypassing racial tensions of 1960’s UK and presenting Black sitters in the UK. As Mussai concludes, “Barnor’s photographs trouble the dominant narrative associated with 1960s Britain as a hotbed for racial tension; they depict no signs of displacement, marginality, or sense of diasporic desperation” (160), but they thus offer insights into the reinvention of transitory cultural selves in diasporic Afro cultures.



Figure 25. James Barnor, *Wedding Guests*, 1960s. *Hagemeyer shop assistant*, Accra, 1971.



Figure 26. James Barnor, *Untitled #4, Sick-*



Figure 27. Vanley Burke, *Boy with a Flag Wilfred in Handsworth Park*, 1970s.

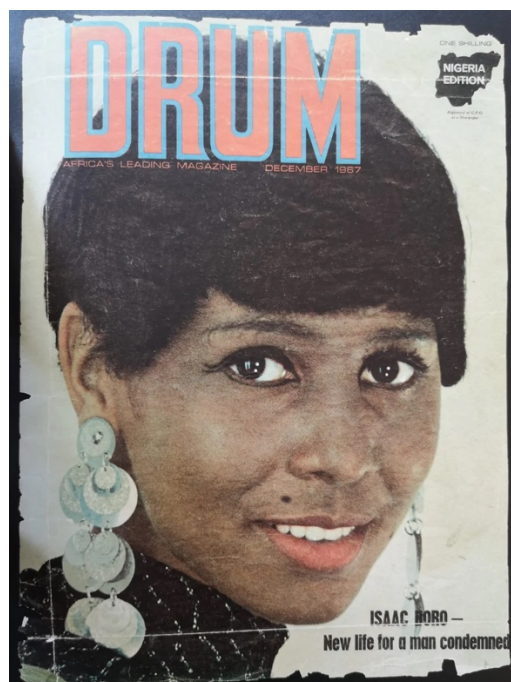


Figure 28. James Barnor for *Drum* magazine, 1967.

#### 5.4 PHILIP KWAME APAGYA: IMAGINARY NORMALCY



Figure 29. Philip Kwame Apagya, 1990s.

When speaking about the African continent and its diaspora in Europe, it is worth taking a step back to the continent, to grasp notions and understandings of the preliminaries for an such an African diaspora. Following the development of street and studio photography in postcolonial West Africa, the widespread popularity of image-making significantly rose throughout post-independence. Although the tradition of portrait painting was almost non-existent, opposed to the tradition of sculptural image-making, scholars have identified the beginning of portrait paintings as a result of the photographic medium, where studios were widespread, and painters started using photographs as templates for paintings (cf. Wendl and Behrend, 1998).

A notable figure among photographers in the 1990s is Phillip Kwame Apagya, who hosted his commissary photo studio after being his father's apprentice in the port city of Shama in the Western Region of Ghana. Apagya's studio photographs, just as many of other photographers at the time, foster aspirations of economic prosperity, self-fashioning, and self-representation, as well as playing with fictionalized imaginations of cultural identities in postcolonial Ghana, "navigating between reality and illusion" (Wendl and Prussat, 1998:

34). The photographer Apagya himself emphasizes the normalcy of his craft: ““The normality comes from how we work. We work so normally! We can’t say we’re the best. But we try to normalize everything! [...] Make as if you are posing in front of your own house” (Wendl and du Plessis, 1998). The painted backdrops he integrates into his work, consolidate notions of aspired self-representations of wealth, prosperity, and a cosmopolitanism that deeply connects with the common Ghanaian way of life. Apagya’s work marks the beginning of a new era in West African studio photography that experiments with backdrop paintings and “plays with the fractures and interpenetration processes of reality and illusion” (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 15, my translation)<sup>60</sup>.

The end of the 1980s saw color photography gaining popularity in Ghana, with Indian and Chinese color labs taking over the market (52). While Apagya was seeking for inspiration to stimulate his slow business, he was reminded of the black and white painted backdrops in his father’s studio photographs. This style of image-making was considered “colo”, as in colonial, meaning old-fashioned (ibid.). With a modernized version of the painted backdrops for color photography, Apagya’s craft soon became quickly in demand, showcasing motives of modern living interiors, very popular room dividers, urban landscapes full of skyscrapers and airports, sunny holiday beaches and beautiful avenues. Props of interiors such as furniture and TVs, refrigerators, groceries etc. were painted in detail in these studio photographs “between hyperrealism and surrealism,” which has been identified as a West African articulation of pop art (Miessgang, 2001: 121). The craft of backdrop paintings in Ghana emphasizes again the unusual influence photography as a medium has had in turn on figurative painting and portraiture.

Figure 29 shows a young woman posing in front of a painted backdrop that displays an airport runway and a Ghana Airways airplane in the forefront, with stairs driven out, the plane is awaiting the lady to enter, who has already placed a first heeled shoe on the stairs. Her body posture is in profile, while her head is turned back towards the camera with a smile on her face. Her clothing is a mix of elegance and casualty, with an African wax print wrap skirt and an airy light blouse. Her facial expression speaks of elegance and strength (BBC, 2020), infused with a hint of optimism and pride, but also eager excitement at the sight of this photographic moment, that obviously and playfully engrains the desired cosmopolitics

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<sup>60</sup> “mit den Brüchen und Durchdringungsprozessen von Wirklichkeit und Illusion spielt“ (Wendl and Behrend, 1998: 15).

into the real. This induction of reality can be traced along a photographic tradition, that finds many occasions in vernacular culture that seek to be fixated onto the photograph. One example is the accessibility of consumer goods and a life in comfort, exemplified in the open fridge (Figure 30), on which Apagya notes that “you will think it is real!” (Apagya in Wendl and du Plessis, 1998). Another example is the tradition of the inauguration through photographic documentation of womanhood called, where “the photograph proves you as a woman” (ibid.). Or the so-called “victory over birth” in which a mother after having been strictly neglecting to be captured in a photograph to avoid evil eyes and spells—poses like a queen in a white dress (Wendl and Behrend, 1998). The reality-illusion entanglement is maxed out to the point when the backdrop painting grows into space in form of haptic and tactile elements, like a Fanta (Figure 30), or flowers (Figure 31), which could be seen as early notions of augmented reality in a photographic moment. It is one that highlights the connection of the sitter to the background, expressed in the haptic touch and desire to fuse the real with the imaginary, where “studio portraits full of wit and irony, subtle lifestyle stagings in hyper-realistic, interactive environments” (Wendl, 1998: 52), come into being.

The West African studio photographer is also a chronicler of customs and traditions of the vernacular, as he is often invited to take photographs at events and festivities, such as for example weddings or religious festivities. What stands out as an intriguing example of local inner-African transcultural entanglements are the photographs of the Muslim population, who represent only a small minority in the region, but is being photographed and celebrated by the Christians in town at the end of the Ramadan in front of custom-made backdrops with Islamic motifs (Figure 33). Apagya also notes that a large amount of his commissioned work outside the studio takes place at funerals, since Ghanaians have developed an extensive tradition of decorating the venue of their deceased and celebrate the person’s life at the actual funeral (Figure 32). The “saman”, which are the negatives in the Akan language as noted in 4., also connote towards the notion of a spirit or ghost. As such, and in the context of the notion of transience in West African cultures, these negatives also “celebrate the illusion of reality as well as the reality of illusion” (52). Or, in other words, in West African notions of transience, reality and living with ghosts lie close to each other.

Embracing the idea of *Listening to Images* (Campt, 2017) becomes apparent in Apagya’s quote from Tobias Wendl’s and Nancy du Plessis’ film *Future Remembrance* (1998): “In our language we say: Pictures talk in silence. They don’t make noise, but they

talk a lot!” and “pictures of this type take the place of letters” (Wendl, 1998). Campt’s appeal to listen intensely to images, equally compounds different “modalities of perception,” that may be “counterintuitive” (6), especially for the Western eye.<sup>61</sup> Her, Campt particularly focuses on the quiet, quotidian notion of the sonic image, that emits “the future *now* in everyday imaging practices of black communities past, present, and future” (17), but also shows how visual archives play their part in constituting Black vulnerabilities. As Campt recounts:

I’ve been listening to images for years now. In *Image Matters*, listening to images meant attending to the musical patterns, rhythms, and registers enacted in vernacular photographs of black European communities. My listening practices focused on the affective registers of black family photography; on how and why such photos touch and move people both physically and affectively; and on excavating the gendered narratives of diaspora captured in images of communities, often overlooked in many scholarly accounts (Campt, 2017: 23).

Similarly, Gordon seeks “a new way of knowing, then, a knowing that is more a listening than a seeing, a practice of being attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present among us in the form of intimations, hints, suggestions, and portents” (2008: x). Here, “ghostly matters” fall in line with “conjur[ing] up the appearances of something that [is] absent” (Berger 1972: 10). In this relation, photographs not only document generations, but encourage the transmission of haunting memories to subsequent generations in a multimodal or multisensorial way, as Campt has described. In the context of the postcolonial and its entanglements with the diasporic, postmigrant individuals and groups inherit photographic moments from their ancestors, but also their migrant parents in Europe, before creating their own visualities. The postcolonial invention of self that comes lingers in Apagya’s photographic practice, which is brutally honest in its imaginative approach, not only reveals West African aspirations of modernism, but also unpacks projections of the diasporic into the West African cultural realm. As such, the “photo itself is a remembrance thing. It tells us more about the past. Even your grandson is able to know you. From what? Picture that you took!” (Wendl and du Plessis, 1998).

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Edwards on the materiality of photographic objects (2004).



Figure 30 and 31. Philip Kwame Apagya, 1990s.



Figure 32. Philip Kwame Apagya, 1990s.



Figure 33. Philip Kwame Apagya, Muslims before the Kaaba scenery, 1996.

### 5.5 LIZ JOHNSON ARTUR: PLACES OF SANCTUARY

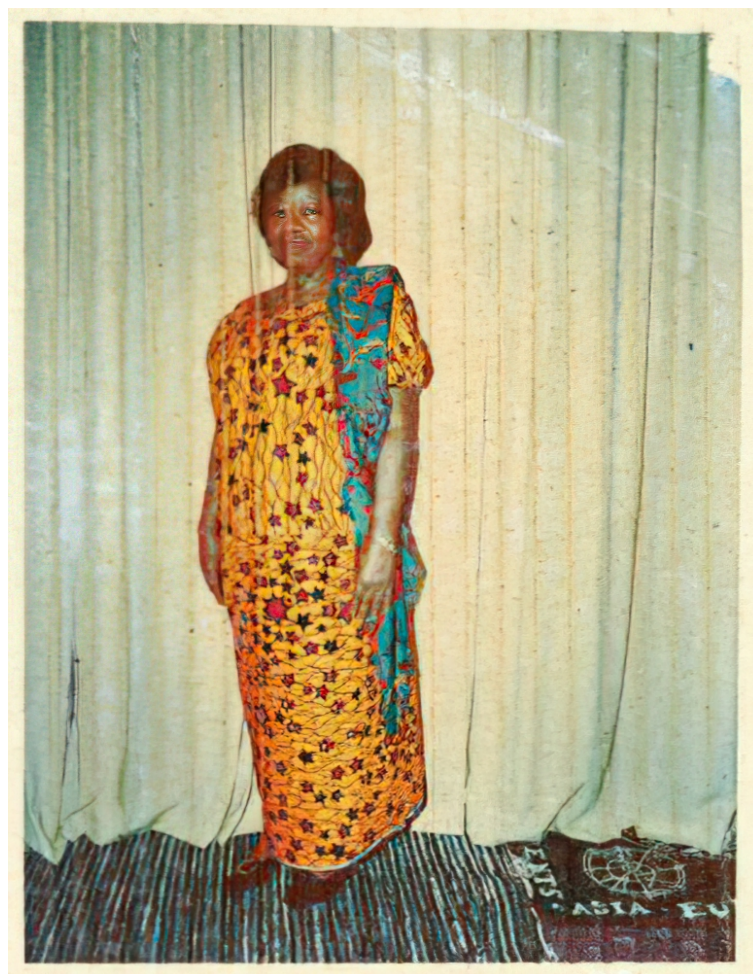


Figure 34. From Liz Johnson Artur, *Black Balloon Archive*, 1970-present.

The impression of a family album is what puzzles Teju Cole upon the publication of the *Wedge Collection* (2021), in which Liz Johnson Artur's work has also been presented: "I hear something: the word album" (Cole, 2021: 6). This sonic notion towards the photographic medium also refers to Campt's idea of listening to images (2017) and congregates an idea of kinship similarly in Johnson Artur's archive of Afro diasporic identities, which she pursues in black and white as well as in color. Marianne Hirsch has argued that family photographs as such play a constitutive role on formation of cultural identity (Hirsch, 1997). Tina Campt has presented extensive reflections on the role of images in the vernacular of Afro diasporic cultures (Campt, 2012, 2017). Here, Campt tries to:

understand the complex relationship between how black people image and how they imagine themselves. It asks when and how an image of a black European emerges as part of, rather than as deviant or distinct from, her or his national cultures. [Campt] argue[s] that we find the visual emergence of such black European subjects in the frames of what are seemingly the most mundane examples of historical photography: family photo (Campt, 2012: 5).

Born 1964 in Bulgaria and growing up in Eastern Europe and Germany, Liz Johnson Artur calls herself a “product of migration” (Rosen, 2020), with her mother being a Russian and her father a Ghanaian emigrant to Bulgaria, where they met at university. Apparently, Johnson Artur’s father was forced to return to Ghana after an unspecified political conflict in Bulgaria, and Liz was raised by her mother, henceforth facing the difficulties of an unstable life due to lack of citizenship after emigrating to Western Germany. Growing up in predominantly white social milieus, Johnson Artur came in contact with communities of color only once she traveled to New York in 1986. It was in this period that her interest in taking photographs emerged (Starling, 2016), an orientation which was also informed by the absence of her father. As she explains in an interview:

I’m going to be 52 this year and for half my life, I had barely had any contact with black communities or black culture, because I only grew up with my mom, who’s white. But, growing up, I did have this one picture of me, my mom, and my dad. And, looking at this photo of my dad, I realized that through photography you can access different cultures and places. So, pictures were important in terms of discovering things about myself, and about other people (McIntyre, 2016).

Besides working as a photojournalist and an editorial fashion photographer, Russian-Ghanian photographer Liz Johnson Artur has developed an autonomous artistic practice. The photographs she has been taking for her *Black Balloon Archive* for over 30 years<sup>62</sup> while travelling to the US, Russia, Europe, and Africa portray individual characters and groups who belong to Black communities, thereby revealing cultures of local and diasporic Blackness and contributing to the idea of a continuous archive of Black representation (Figure 34).

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<sup>62</sup> The title *Black Balloon Archive* is a reference to the 1969 song *Black Balloons* by Syl Johnson.

This section introduces Johnson Artur's *Black Balloon Archive* as a place of sanctuary that fosters conditional shelters for Black and Afro diasporic identities and their representation. This continuously growing archive is bound up with the idea of a sanctuary as a placeholder for a home, a home that welcomes, provides safety and hospitality. This hospitality derives from Johnson Artur's intimate encounters with the subjects she portrays. In addition to presenting individual stories, these moments of intimacy and interpersonal contact incorporate basic human comfort. Johnson Artur's photographic practice provides and exchanges a moment of shelter with people during their live encounter, culminating in giving their image a place of refuge in her archive. In an interview, Johnson Artur connects the practical task of building a photographic archive with the broader question of representing diasporic identities.

One of the things [you have to think of] as a photographer is how to preserve the negatives. That's a big issue. I scan my work but at the same time, it's the negatives that are really the base of my work. I think it's great that there are people who try to build something that will actually last. When [a body of work] lasts it also gains a different stature, it doesn't just become, "Oh yeah, we have a little bit of Black representation in that part of the collection" (Pasipanodya, 2018).

Johnson Artur revels in the physicality of her photographs, which is part of the reason why she continues shooting on film. She also engages with notions of value and responsibility, envisioning the archive as an architecture that preserves and "keeps things safe from misuse" (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis 2020). This organic, non-linear architecture is a living archive that grows, and that the artist lives with and forms into artistic reflections in numerous boxes of prints and sketchbooks. De-hierarchizing individual photographs by refraining from labelling them with title, time, date, or place, which in her understanding do not "say anything about the human being" (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis 2020), she instead "keeps everyone on the same level" (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2020) and embraces personal conversations with her audience contextualizing her work.

Her articulation of conditional shelters on the one hand and demarcation of diasporic identities on the other visualize and humbly command complex negotiations of diasporic, postcolonial identities and embrace an idea of the archive itself as a place of sanctuary.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The meaning of archive comes from the Greek *arkheion*: a house, a domicile, an address; the residence of the superiormagistrates, the archons, those who commanded (Derrida, 1995).

Within the photographic realm, Johnson Artur contextualizes the diasporization of cultural identities by providing their representation a place in time and space in her archive. Here, her interview reflections about gentrified neighborhoods in London indicate what kind of gap she seeks to fill with her archive:

There's a cafe that I really like in the market here. I've been going there for 20 years. And you can eat well, and drink, chill out and watch TV, all for five pounds. That must sound really simple but it's very important to have these places in a city like London, in a community like Brixton. Places like that are getting eaten up (McIntyre, 2016).

Since most of Johnson Artur's photographs were taken in London, which has been home to her and her studio for years, her artistic practice involves negotiating urban space in order to showcase how neighborhoods have been developed into places of shelter for diasporic communities. This is emphasized once more by the fact that Johnson Artur often selects site-specific images for exhibitions, occasionally creating actual sanctuaries as exhibitions both tactilely and spatially as well as metaphorically. Johnson Artur's work fosters a particular form of intimacy with the subjects portrayed. Starting out with an approach that meets her protagonists on equal footing, her initial endeavor before taking the photograph is to actually encounter others. She says,

I want to meet people and see different things—taking a photograph allows me to do that. I try to get inside the cultures and moments that I capture, I want to look people in the eye and take the picture in the way they would like to be seen. All I hope is that I catch as much as I can and that one of these pictures touches someone (Alemoru, 2019).

This initial touch, the first contact with her subjects, becomes visible in the aura of the photograph and conveys a great deal of intimacy in the sense of personal experience and interpersonal exchange. Being a woman of color who did not grow up in a Black community allows Johnson Artur to enter an intimate dialogue with her protagonists as counterparts who share similar experiences. In capturing moments of their everyday lives, she enables an authentic dialogue between herself and these people. This dialogical situation is particularly relevant in the context of people of color because it addresses the ordeal of double-consciousness as articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903). His concept describes an inner conflict arising from the African American perspective of being degraded as inferior, as opposed to the dominant white culture. In this perspective, the double-conscious Black

individual looks at themselves through the eyes of a white society, “measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1903: 5).

To combat double-consciousness, Johnson Artur uses what I call a Black lens: a mode of constructive disagreement throughout her project that “strip[s] away the unbalanced power dynamics of the authorial gaze and instead create[s] a humanizing subject-photographer encounter” (Pasipanodya, 2018). In Johnson Artur’s own words, “representation is really important in this struggle. You have to stand up and do something—and people *are* fighting what’s happening” (McIntyre, 2016). This activist attitude towards representation was again emphasized in the group exhibition in 2016 at Lothringer13 Halle in Munich titled *A thousand and x little actions*, which was a reference to Du Bois.<sup>64</sup>

Johnson Artur’s project can be understood as an iteration of the cultural projects that go beyond imperialism, slavery, and colonialism called for by Paul Gilroy in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In this work, Gilroy talks about a Black Atlantic musical culture that incorporated elements from African, American, British, and Caribbean cultures in a hybrid mix of cultural identity: a counterculture of modernity (Gilroy, 1993)<sup>65</sup>. Johnson Artur’s own counterculture originates in creating bonds with her protagonists, many of whom also come from emerging cosmopolitan diasporic environments. As such, her photographs constitute a visual record of what Tina M. Campt describes as “the creative links of relation, affiliation and affirmation forged by racialized communities in and between their multiple sites of dwelling” (2019). This notion of affiliation marks the bridge between the biographical – even if not in the literal sense, as Johnson Artur’s work is not autobiographical – and the dialogical.

While rarely providing detailed background information about the people these photographic portraits introduce, Johnson Artur produces an imaginative sentiment that affirms their real-life stories. Hers is a form of photographic storytelling grounded in collaborative exchange since genuine self-representation is a concern on both sides of the camera. “I’m not trying to find anything that is exceptional; my needs are to see Black people represented on a purely everyday level”, she says (Pasipanodya, 2018). Here, it is of outmost

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<sup>64</sup> “It is, in fine, the atmosphere of the land, the thought and feeling, the thousand and one little actions which go to make up life. In any community or nation it is these little things which are most elusive to the grasp and yet most essential to any clear conception of the group life taken as a whole” (Du Bois, 1903: 136).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Appadurai, 1996; Latour; 1991; Azoulay, 2019; Chakrabarty, 2000; Mignolo, 2011; Bauman, 2000; Lyotard, 1979 et al.

importance to the artist to restrain from any form of generic or homogenizing classification of her subjects. She is thereby contributing to a broader undoing of stereotypical representation of Black subjects and Black identity, which has most recently been reinvigorated by the Black Lives Matter movement.<sup>66</sup> Her respect for photographic subjects and investment in what I would call a curious form of sobriety are encapsulated in Johnson Artur's description of her protagonists as "a lot of different people" (Sinclair Scott, 2021). While originally it was a perceived lack of representation of Black people in public media and art that drove her to produce an archive of Black culture, the crucial effort of her work lies in representing a broad range of images that chart a visual terrain of diversity and multiplicity, but also of mediocracy.

In what follows, I will discuss three photographs taken by Liz Johnson Artur for her *Black Balloon Archive*, all of which feature elderly women of color. I chose elderly women of color from her body of work because they provide unconventional examples of multiplicity, difference, heterogeneity, and intersectionality in urban contexts, especially when juxtaposed with one another. They also speak to Johnson Artur's own persona, being a Black woman of color herself. Scrutinizing Black representation is crucial to understanding Afro diasporic identities since Black bodies have historically been underrepresented in Western visual culture. According to Hall (1997), who analyzed the socio-political role of representation in media images and the public sphere, representation gives meaning through the way in which subjects and objects are represented. In fact, in Hall's reasoning, there is no meaning until something is represented, as representation is constitutive of the event.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, Johnson Artur fills a gap and gives meaning by providing counter-representations of equalized Black bodies in contemporary urban spaces of the photographic realm.

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<sup>66</sup> The Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013 with the use of the hashtag #blacklivesmatter by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African American teen Trayvon Martin 17 months earlier in February 2012. It gained worldwide attention in 2020 following the protests around the police killing of George Floyd.

<sup>67</sup> Hall also states that the conceptual tools that we use individually are deeply connected to language as communication that externalizes, legitimizes, and naturalizes meaning as a conceptual tool of the collective. In this sense, to create new forms and new possibilities of meaning requires a temporary fix within language and signs that becomes constitutive of discourse.



Figure 35. From Liz Johnson Artur, *Black Balloon Archive*, 1970-present.

Figure 35 shows an older woman of color in front of a store window presumably in London or New York. The portrait is half-sized, in color, and in horizontal format. The lady is centered in the image. She leans against a windowpane behind which we recognize *Prada* and *Burberry* advertisements. She wears a bright red knitted sweater over a light collared shirt and a headband in her afro-textured hair. Her sweater is bright in color but, upon closer inspection, very used in texture, just as her face is warm and round but sprinkled with wrinkles. Her face is turned away from the camera; her gaze is pensive and stern, thinking about or observing something. A poetic melancholy and a subtle bitterness are reflected in the woman's gaze and the overall setting. Her body language fluctuates between tranquility and discomfort.

These ambiguities echo Bhabha's (1994) concept of ambivalence, which describes a moment or state of uncertainty, a coexistence of "attraction and repulsion" (Young 1994: 161) between colonizer and colonized. The way the colonized alternate between resistance and compliance disturbs and weakens colonial authority, which depends on an orderly power relation (Bhabha 1994). In an interview, Bhabha draws a connection from colonial history via the diaspora of migrants to today's metropolises:

The material legacy of this repressed history is inscribed in the return of post-colonial peoples to the metropolis. Their very presence there changes the politics of the metropolis, its cultural ideologies and its intellectual traditions, because they – as a

people who have been recipients of a colonial cultural experience – displace some of the great metropolitan narratives of progress and law and order and question the authority and authenticity of those narratives (Rutherford, 1990: 218).

The backdrop of the high-end fashion model with her sleek but cozy winter looks and wavy blond hair strands echoes the longstanding lack of representation of Black beauty in Westernized beauty standards. The lack of representation of the Black body in global visibility then becomes a call for self-presentation in Johnson Artur's photographs. "What I do is people [...] But it's those people who are my neighbors. And it's those people who I don't see anywhere represented", she says (*Liz Johnson Artur*, 2019). Johnson Artur allows for the externalization of self-representation by providing an archive as a stage for the underrepresented—those whose social identities are subject to the overlapping or intersecting systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination that Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) spoke about. Johnson Artur incorporates the intersectionality of her subject's multiple identities as a woman, a migrant, and a citizen and gives meaning to her presence by elevating her representation in color against a pale background.

The existence of the Black diaspora is often attributed to the scattering of people by colonialism (and slavery), which has largely informed its representation – including stereotyping—and the representation of Black people in general. As an underlying heritage, the colonial past is embedded in many of today's Afro diasporic narratives. This leaves Black subjects in a continuous and challenging position of otherness.<sup>68</sup> One relevant conception of otherness was articulated by Homi Bhabha with his 1994 concept of hybridity: a critique of the concept of pure race and culture and an examination of how colonized cultures perform in a colonial situation, hybridity describes how the colonized create new cultural forms in an act of resistance, where creative and subversive means face the colonial power as a political force of identity. Hybridity has since been criticized for its vagueness, just as Bhabha himself criticized multiculturalism for flattening and disguising power relations: "Multiculturalism

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<sup>68</sup> Otherness describes a state of difference of an individual or group that is constructed on the basis of power relations, in which the dominant subordinates another on the basis of difference. In the context of the postcolonial, the imperial identification of the self is closely interlinked to the alterity of the colonized subject by means of othering in terms of a marginalization (Spivak 1985a). In this context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiques and develops Antonio Gramsci's idea of the subaltern within postcolonial studies. For Spivak, the subaltern describes a presumably inferior group in hegemonic settings that lacks self-determination, as the subaltern's identity and inferiority is defined by its difference from the superior imperialist (Spivak 1985b).

represented an attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference administering a *consensus* based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity” (Bhabha in Rutherford 1990: 208-209).

Returning to Johnson Artur’s photograph in Figure 35, the notions of hybridity and ambivalence are already indicated by means of the relocation of the subject to the Western metropolis. Not only does the notion of the Afro diaspora imply hybridizations in various forms in Johnson Artur’s work: it also encourages her in a practice that “explores black British identity in all its aspects, also showing the evolving hybridity, attuned to those points where cultures clash and overlap” (Simpson, 2019). The legacies of hybridity are reconfigured and enacted in the photographic encounter by juxtaposing different cultural identities in postcolonial realms today. Nevertheless, there is a lack of terminology for identifying the specific characteristics of hybrid identities that we must address. It is apparent that ambivalence itself implies oscillations of identity over time, just as hybrid identities encompass a million different and diverging stories, faces, and identities that seek to be identified.



Figure 36. From Liz Johnson Artur, *Black Balloon Archive*, 1970-present.

Figure 36 depicts a woman of color standing in the middle of a public street. An online post by Johnson Artur locates it on Rye Lane Peckham, London, and explains her personal connection to the photograph: “It’s been my high street for the last 20 years. On a sunny day

its full of colors, lots of soul and plenty of bargains. Don't go by what you hear, come and check it out for yourself" (Johnson Artur n.d.). The lady is centered in the image. She is portrayed almost full-length and her posture and gaze, though frontal, are slightly tilted away from the camera. She is standing still and seems to pause, holding a grocery bag with her left arm. Her right arm is angled and holding onto a small handbag on her shoulder. She wears a garment with an African pattern that indicates an Islamic background. It covers her full body and serves as a headwrap that is additionally supported by a veil scarf around her head. In her immediate surroundings, we can see various small shops and two other people to her left, a younger woman and a man of color who seem to be heading home after grocery shopping just like the protagonist and who indicate a culturally diverse Black community in the area. Her gaze is thoughtful and sober, her body language between possibly fatigued and determined to move along. How has cultural discourse negotiated the relationship of diasporic Black minorities to ethnicity?

In Stuart Hall's *New Ethnicities* (1989), he introduces black minorities in Britain as a new generation with postcolonial identities. This collective identity is based on the notion of color – being people of color – and unifies multiple ethnic backgrounds and religions. Standing in opposition to white domination and oppression in the British system at the time, this identity inspired many to political action in the struggle for access to social and economic resources. Later, in his influential essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall (1996) describes cultural identities as unfixed entities that “undergo constant transformation”, while the formation of identity articulates itself as “not an essence but a positioning” (37). As he specifically turns to his own Caribbean, European, and American identity, he takes up Bhabha's (1994) ideas in a “conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (Hall, 1994: 235) as a process of intermixing and cultural exchange. What Hall (1996) encourages in his own case is to be “able to speak from all three identities” (37).<sup>69</sup> While acknowledging the multiplicity of hybrid diasporic identities, Hall emphasizes the importance of always claiming one's cultural-political representation. Figure 36 reveals an act of resistance to European norms and representation

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. also Glissant's (1990) idea of creolization.

of Afro diasporic cultural identity that is first and foremost embedded in her clothing of Islamic African tradition, which is interpolated into European urbanity.<sup>70</sup>

Johnson Artur, who also has substantial experience as an editorial fashion photographer and appreciates the element of “style” in her work (Les Rencontres d’Arles, 2021), makes visible the visual-cultural codes of contemporary subcultures. The diasporic anti-heroes portrayed in her world meet in urban and public spaces, anonymous architectures, or natural environmental surroundings that suggest scenes of everyday familiarity. These works use pose, staging, and self-staging to negotiate and investigate postcolonial and diasporic identities. Since the protagonists portrayed are used to their surroundings – enacting their daily lives, meeting friends – they appear to be acting in an autofictional manner, taking on no role but their own. They are in fact representing themselves and thus literally playing themselves. The gestures, postures, and facial expressions of their social interactions as well as their clothing are informed by prior postcolonial narratives, diasporic memories, and a global contemporary lifestyle that imposes equal consumerism onto diverging contexts. Figure 36 exemplifies Stuart Hall’s discussion on ethnicities and cultural identities of the 1990s, hybridity as a form of cultural difference, and contemporary specificities of auto-fictional acts and performative codes. By means of these subversive performative codes, the subject is showing themselves as they want to be seen, reconfiguring a new visual reality that is embraced by the artist. In a mode of hospitality, Johnson Artur provides them with a place of refuge in her photographic archive.

As was discussed in the studies of photographic objects in this chapter, photography plays a major role in the articulation of Afro diasporic identities. As Marianne Hirsch and Tina Campt have argued, the medium of photography presents an object of interconnection within kinships. Because “image matters” in diasporic perspectives to borrow from Campt (2012) it is also constitutive of articulations of memory as a mnemonic object, while oscillating between the documentary and the imaginary. Images are constitutive of articulations of memory, as they capture visualizations of memories mimicking how we visualize memories in our mind. In this relation, they can function as “externalizations” in the public or “traces” in the private sphere of memory as described by Ruchatz (2008). The

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<sup>70</sup> Muslim culture has been identified as the new cultural Other within Europe in postmigration studies (Römhild, 2021).

diasporic subject uses images in this sense as a vehicle of remembering against the separation and dislocation of the diaspora.

What Renée Mussai defines as “visual evidence” (2016: 159) for “another London” (158) referring to the 2012 Tate Britain exhibition<sup>71</sup>, and specifically James Barnor’s works of the UK in the 1960s, also relates to visual evidence and photographic tropes that are mediated to subsequent postmigrant generations like Apagya or Johnson Artur, endowing inter-generational and cross-cultural transmissions of memory. Here, the notion of the documentary naturally blurs the line between private and public memory, since memory encapsulated in visual information often transgresses from mediated to internalized memory, through our relationship with images (as evidence) as such. Catherine Keenan has also claimed that memory is inherently connected to human relation with photography, since we not only memorize with the help of photographs but through them (Keenan, 1998, cf. Wendl, 1998). As Elizabeth Edwards argues,

Photographs have a relational quality, occupying the spaces between people and people and people and things. They are socially salient objects and tactile, sensorially engaged objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience. As such, they operate not only at a visual level but become absorbed into other ways of telling history. Photographs become not simply visual history but crucially, oral history, linked to sound, gesture and relationships (Edwards, 2006: 27).

This resonates again with Camp’s take on the role of photography in the African diaspora (2012), as a matter in a twofold sense as I would like to claim. Similarly, private vernacular photo archives and family albums contain postmemories, that are not one’s own, but were integrated into personal narratives and family histories, that become adopted into the contingent of memories (Hirsch, 2012). In this context, the notion of nostalgia plays a crucial role in accentuating transposed diasporic postmigrant identities that have been demarcated from their so-called original culture, and their internalized memories by their parents and grandparents. Here, the nostalgic moment occurs in a classic way as “not the return of past memory: it is the return of memory to the past. Nostalgia is déjà vu without the uncanny” (Abbas, 1999: 162).

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<sup>71</sup> Mussai comments: “*Another London: International Photographers Capture City Life 1930-1980* was the title of a blockbuster exhibition held at Tate Britain, July 27-September 16, 2012; its catalogue featured James Barnor’s portrait of Mike Eghan as the cover image” (2016: 161).

### 5.6 INTERLUDE 3. YOU AND WE (2014), DZIFA PETERS

*How does one pass from the first image to the second – from ignorance to certainty, from weakness to strength, from inferiority in the face of the world to the domination of the world by the human eye?*

(Latour, 1999: 30).

*You and we* (2014) is a three-channel multimedia installation of mine, including objects, photographic images, photomontages, moving images and sound. It works as a spatially organized installation that deals with questions of cultural identity. The work ironically addresses notions of the exotic, the everyday, hybrid identities, as well as aspects of prejudice and self-image. The work consists of various parts exemplified by myself and both my parents but focus in this excerpt here are the stories and anecdotes of my mother's migration from Ghana to Germany at 19 years of age in 1973, which became my postmemories.

The story of my mother and her first job in pineapple promotion in Germany in the 1970s was at a time when most Germans knew pineapple from tins and not as a fresh fruit. According to my mother's anecdote, many people came up to her – some of which were seeing a Black person in real life for the first time—and confessed they had been thinking that this was some fruit to be cooked with lots of sugar to be eatable; they were very surprised by the taste of the fresh exotic fruit as well as the exotic person serving them. Another story had been the arrival of my mother at Duesseldorf airport in November 1973. She, as an upper-class, cosmopolitan African woman with a sense of style wore an elegant pink dress matched by a giant and sophisticated hat, accompanied by her *Raybean* Sunglasses and a *Samsonite* Suitcase. To her surprise, the place was all grey as well as the people she saw in the airport.

As an artist, I had concluded, after hearing my mother's stories many times, that her narratives had shaped my idea of Germany in the 1970s immensely; a time when I was yet to be born. This notion of postmemory, as coined by Marianne Hirsch (2012), plays a crucial role in the articulation of diasporic identity. It describes the heritage of memories that are not one's own, but as having been brought up with them, one internalizes these memories as if they had been lived through. Hirsch specifically works in the context of her Jewish identity and trauma related to Holocaust Studies, but clearly transcends the concept of postmemory

to other areas of identity construction by incorporating the field of family photography and archives. Hirsch writes:

The “post” in “postmemory” signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. It is not a concession simply to linear temporality or sequential logic. Think of the many different “posts” that continue to dominate our intellectual landscape. “Postmodernism” and “poststructuralism,” for example, inscribe both a critical distance and a profound interrelation with modernism and structuralism; “postcolonial” does not mean the end of the colonial but its troubling continuity, though, in contrast, “postfeminist” has been used to mark a sequel to feminism. We certainly are, still, in the era of “posts,” which for better or worse--continue to proliferate: “posttraumatic,” of course, but also “postsecular,” “posthuman,” “postcolony,” “postracial” (Hirsch, 2012: 5).

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997), Hirsch discusses the impact within family photographs on the construction of relationships, identities, and representations. These relations become particularly crucial when looking at the constitutive shaping of personal cultural memory and the link from private memory to collective history in photography. *Family Frames* analyses the place of photography and specific imaginaries of family within personal and collective postmemory.

Here, family photography “functions as an expressive practice that creates the linkages and attachments it depicts by visually and affectively suturing individuals to one another” (Campt, 2012: 48), which subversive contemporary artistic strategies are able to dismantle, as Hirsch argues. My mother’s photographs from the family archive, served as tools for mnemotechnique as they particularly link to her anecdotes of migration and encounter with the German culture in this specific time. Hence, the relation of diasporic movement and migration pre-requisites indicates a transmission of memories on to subsequent generations of migration like me.

For my project, archival photographs from the family (Figure 37-38) were then worked on with digital photomontage: I dressed her in the particular outfits I had imagined in the stories that articulate a certain stereotypic violence (Figure 39-40)<sup>72</sup>, based on tropes of the exotic Other, and of a polarity and denial of coevalness that has been artificially established over time (cf. Fabian 1983). This also leaves the notion of a “prosthetic culture” as described by Celia Lury (1998) at play: in her concept, Lury analyses how technology is altering our

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<sup>72</sup> My gratitude to my dear colleague Brenda Bikoko for introducing me to her idea of *reparation through violence* in this context.

consciousness and shows how the manipulation of photographic images and ways of seeing can redefine the relation between consciousness, the body and memory as to create a prosthetic culture whose capacities both extend and threaten our humanity. We live in a society in which some memories can be falsely implanted in the individual. The phenomenon of a false memory syndrome made available by contemporary visual technologies involves specific ways of seeing. Key to Lury's notion of seeing photographically and the photographic medium as a mnemotechnique addresses the ways in which ideas of consciousness, memory and embodiment have been conceptually reconfigured for a prosthetic world. In this instance, "false memory syndrome" is understood as the construction of a false biography through a pastiche of mediated representations (106).

As a result, the outcome of the manipulation of the photographic artefacts from the family's archive narrate the process of a postmemorial storytelling of my mother's experiences that initiate the formation of my conception of her identity, a notion that also finds itself in the idea of postmemory, which "has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics" (Hirsch, 1997: 7). Also, the artistic process incorporates the intrinsic notion of double consciousness the event had caused in my mother, as coined by Du Bois in 1903, which describes the Black experience of viewing oneself from one's own perspective and through the eye of a white majority's eye. However, the performative agency and countervisuality of the photomontages lies in their ability to exemplify these juxtapositions and what Barthes calls "the advent of myself as other" (Barthes, 1981: 12), a display of an alternation of coexisting cultural perspectives, which is the concept that has been introduced throughout this thesis. The artistic project *You and We* (2014) talks about private and collective memories that constitute cultural identities. It exemplifies and juxtaposes the idea of both postmemory and prosthetic culture in the diasporic subject and highlights the role of the photographic image that acts as a tool for mnemotechnique in these contexts.



Figures 37-40. From the Project *You and We*, Dzifa Peters, 2014.

## 5.7 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

The photographic objects of study in **5. Articulations of Memory: The Reinvented Diaspora** have revealed various transcultural entanglements of the African diaspora with the European context. While the work of James Barnor gave insight to the Afro diaspora in the UK of the 1960s and 1970s, his body of work also incorporates the shift from black and white photography to color, as it is exemplified upon his relocation to Ghana in 1969.

Phillip Kwame Apagya's practice as a Ghanaian studio photographer in the 1990s, showed what postcolonial Ghana articulated in terms of image-making, self-fashioning, and aspirations for economic prosperities. In contrast, the artistic practice of Liz Johnson Artur serves as a complex negotiation of prerequisites in postcolonial discourses, such as hybridity and ambivalence, but opens up a realm of the encounter of Afro diasporic identities as counterparts, and the archive as a place of sanctuary. Speaking of the power of the image, the various case studies rearticulate in different ways, why images matter in reference to Tina Campt's discussion of photography and its role in Afro diasporic cultures (2012).

Here, this thesis also referred to the esteemed concept of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997, 2012), and connected the concept to Tina Campt's reflections on the relevance of photography in the African diaspora (2012, 2017), as well as an outlook on a "prosthetic culture" by Celia Lury (1998). Moreover, a transmission of memories through photography and particularly photographic family archive, engage with the idea of postmemory as coined by Marianne Hirsch, which exemplifies memories that are passed on to subsequent generations of postmigrants (2012). The concept of an African Diasporization plays a crucial role here because it understands the African continent, and with it its diaspora as a place of constant migration and return (Quayson, 2013a).

A sophisticated account of the complexities of mobility between the two continents Africa and Europe, lies in T.J. Demos reflections of *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (2013). Here, Demos returns to Mbembe's conception of the postcolony as a site of heterogeneity, but also of "chaotic pluralism, regimes of violence, broken infrastructures, mythologies of power, mass poverty, and economy of death" (Demos, 2013: 144). Mbembe himself, has defined a notion of a sinister "spectralization" with which he criticizes the ongoing debt policy towards the African continent and the hostile consequences for its economies (Mbembe in Höller, 2002).

This also builds on Derrida's specter<sup>73</sup> and his reference to the haunting of Europe by the ghost of communism after the fall of the Soviet Union, and to a politics of memory that urges us to learn to live with these ghosts more justly (Derrida, 1994: xviii). In this context, the idea of the spectral has been discussed extensively by Avery Gordon as a moment of social life with the ghost as a "social figure" (2008), which has also been incorporated into film studies by Kröger and Anderson. Gordon argues for a study of social life that confronts the ghostly aspects of it (2008: 7). Calling for a new form of sociology that negotiates the "complexities of everyday life" (viii) beyond epistemological agendas, she opts for the recognition of indicators of haunting and "ghostly matters" as a means of knowing what has happened or is happening (63).

Within the context of Demos' dark notion of the spectral, we are reminded that despite the emergence of Black representation in European politics, social life, and in European visibility, the ongoing struggle and challenges of Afro cultures remain unsolved, as "globalization remains haunted by the undead existence of Europe's imperial past" (Demos, 2013: 16). In this manner, the notion of the spectral, and with it the idea of spectral identities that this thesis follows, reinserts a two-sided approach, thus a prism into the discourse of the medium of photography, the simultaneous haunting of the colonial past and the potentiality (cf. Agamben, 1999) of the multiplicity and alternation of coexisting cultural identities. Or, as Demos argues drawing on Deleuze, a crystal-image, "one that multiplies distinct temporalities, mixing past and present, as well as joining virtual and actual aspects of the images historical, mnemonic subjectives, and imaginative values" (88). This resonates with Gordon's idea of ghosts social figures and builds the ground for my understanding of spectrality as a metaphor for the mnemonic as such. Another outlook is offered in this chapter by Interlude 3 that covered excerpts of my artistic project *You and We* (2014), within the context of my mother's narrative upon her emigration from Ghana to Germany in the 1970s, that have become my postmemories (Hirsch, 2012), but infused with the distortions of a prosthetic culture in the digital age (Lury, 1998). the interplay of pose and nostalgia, and the condition of postmigration, specifically in the context of what I call postmigrant Black studies will continue to be relevant topics in **6. Transcultural Code Switching and Contemporary Visual Culture.**

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<sup>73</sup> See **4. The Postcolonial Invention of Self.** (See also **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness** on the notion of the spectral in Barthes' photographic realm).



## **6. TRANSCULTURAL CODE SWITCHING AND CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE**

*This new age is characterized by the intensification of migrations and the establishment of new African diasporas in the world. With the emergence of these new diasporas, Africa no longer constitutes a center in itself. It is now made up of poles between which there is constant passage, circulation, and trailblazing. These poles connect to and prolong each other. They form so many regions, layers, and cultural deposits from which African creation draws constantly.*

(Mbembe, 2021: 211-212).

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, the interrelations between global migration politics, national state affairs and the heterogeneity of the postcolony<sup>74</sup> challenge conviviality's extend as such (cf. Gilroy, 2004, Illich, 1975, Mbembe, 2001). Since many European and African metropolises have emerged into sites of increased mobility of polyculture (cf. Schwarz and West-Pavlov, 2007 et al.), it appears that diversity is in a process of reconfiguration, after multicultural projects that promoted the idea of intercultural tolerance instead of conviviality, had been in rightful critique (cf. Gilroy, 2004 et al.). Polyculture hereby focuses on the interconnectedness and cross-cultural mutual influences in contemporary societies of plurality and politization (cf. Schwarz and West-Pavlov, 2007 et al.). In anthropological discourses, this relates to concepts revolving around multiplicity and friction (cf. Clifford, 2013; Tsing, 2005), which places the pluralities of societies at the center of human advancement beyond economic agendas and global capitalism.

Contemporary identity politics and discourses on the Black European have thereby enriched various modes and terminologies that negotiate complex notions of Black representation, African and Afro diasporic subcultures.<sup>75</sup> The idea of the Afro European<sup>76</sup> has gained recent acceptance, as a notion that counteracts the idea of the Afro diasporic as a scattered subject that somewhat does never really belong. The concept of the Afropean,<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Here, I want return to Mbembe's concept of the postcolony in order to apply it with a decolonial and holistic approach to the African as well as the European context, since a contemporary postcolonial world invigorates that all places can be understood as places of postcoloniality.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Hall, 1994; 1996; Gilroy, 1993, Appiah, 1972; 2006; 2018, Campt, 2012; 2017 et al.

<sup>76</sup> "On terminology: We understand AfroEuropeans or Black Europeans as referring to people of African descent living in Europe, "black people born or raised in Europe or with an EU citizenship" (ENAR European Network Against Racism. 2013. General Policy Paper on People of African Descent and Black Europeans, p. 8), and people racialised as black in Europe. We equally subscribe to the definition of the UN Working group on people of African descent: 'People of African descent may be defined as descendants of the African victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, [...] Africans and their descendants who, after their countries' independence, emigrated to or went to work in Europe, Canada and the Middle East (UN Working Group on People of African Descent. Identification and Definition of People of African Descent and How Racial Discrimination Against them is Manifested in Various Regions, E/CN.4/2003/WG.20/WP.3.), AfroEuropeans Conference 2022.

<sup>77</sup> "Winner of the Jhalak Prize Winner of the Bread & Roses Award for Radical Publishing [...] Afropean seizes the blur of contradictions that have obscured Europe's relationship with blackness and paints it into something new, confident and lyrical' Afua Hirsch A Guardian, New Statesman and BBC History Magazine Best Book of 2019 Afropean. Here was a space where blackness was taking part in shaping European identity [...] A continent of Algerian flea markets, Surinamese shamanism, German Reggae and Moorish castles. Yes, all this was part of Europe too [...] With my brown skin and my British passport – still a ticket into mainland Europe at the time of writing – I set out in search of the Afropeans, on a cold October morning. Afropean is an on-the-

which was coined by Johny Pitts blends the idea of being Afro and European in the contemporary once and for all as a new articulation of European Blackness (Pitts, 2019). In addition, the notion of Afropolitanism has also recently become a catch basin for hopes and aspirations towards the definition of global Black cultures and their relation to the world. Achille Mbembe has discussed Afropolitanism as a body in motion for an “African-world-to-come” (Mbembe, 2021). Here, Afropolitanism rises to the occasion of “something capable of opening onto an infinite, extensive, and heterogeneous universe, a wide-open universe of multiplicities and pluralities (ibid.) beyond sterile extraction modes of decolonization” (ibid.; cf. Deleuze, 1990).

Moreover, this framework relates not only to contemporary sites of polyculture, but they connect to a condition that has become known as the condition of postmigration. The concept of postmigration, which is a versatile concept that describes a state where migration has manifested as an integral part of society (cf. Schramm, Pultz Moslund, and Ring Petersen, 2019), and has become a prominent concept within the Humanities. Here, the recent volume *Postmigration: Art, Culture, and Politics in Contemporary Europe* (Gaonkar, Hansen, Post, and Schramm, 2021) clarifies many of the questions circulating around the source of its ideas. It’s editors use the introduction to map out why exactly the concept of postmigration has become a prominent tool of “addressing the social transformations and cultural struggles that are unfolding in contemporary European societies” (11). As various scholars that are referenced throughout the text have noted, the concept of postmigration serves as an important marker of contemporary societal complexities, that are often but not solely connected to postcolonial studies. From indicating a “voice of migration” (Yildiz and Hill, 2018: 7), to “post-migratory postcolonial minorities” (Kleppinger and Reeck, 2018: 3), such analogies also offer room for critique of the preceding discourse of postcolonialism. Postmigration studies then are anticipated to contribute productively to the field in terms of accommodating an expansion of the postcolonial beyond “national identities and ideas of

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ground documentary of areas where Europeans of African descent are juggling their multiple allegiances and forging new identities. Here is an alternative map of the continent, taking the reader to places like Cova Da Moura, the Cape Verdean shantytown on the outskirts of Lisbon with its own underground economy, and Rinkeby, the area of Stockholm that is eighty per cent Muslim. Johny Pitts visits the former Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, where West African students are still making the most of Cold War ties with the USSR, and Clichy Sous Bois in Paris, which gave birth to the 2005 riots, all the while presenting Afropeans as lead actors in their own story” In: Pitts, Johny. *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe*, Penguin, 2019.

stable cultures and ethnicities” *Europe* (Gaonkar, Hansen, Post, and Schramm, 2021: 13). Giving the floor to these different voices on postmigration, these scholars emphasize their attempt to foster a dialogical juxtaposition of theories and point out: “the multiplicity of usages of the concept is a methodological and empirical strength, rather than a disadvantage” in their view (ibid.). In this manner, I want to use the concept of postmigration to focus on the context of Afro cultures, in a context of postmigrant Black studies.

## 6.2 PHOTOGRAPHY AND CONTEMPORARY AFRO CULTURES

*[...] and that photography, when used as a tool for making the internal human condition visible, becomes a rich source of infinite possibilities regarding constructions of the self and those we identify with through real or imagined codes, signs, or languages. It's here that the magic of desire, different cultures, and emotional states can be brought into visibility, laid bare, demystified, or recoded.<sup>78</sup>*

(Sealy, 2021:10).

Visual-cultural codes in contemporary subcultures become visible in the work of artists, fashion, and popular culture in this chapter. The diasporic anti-heroes portrayed in this section meet in urban and public spaces, anonymous architectures, or natural environmental surroundings, where scenes of everyday places that seem familiar are echoed and at the same time transformed into cinematographic stages.

Since the protagonists portrayed are used to their surroundings – enacting their daily lives, meeting friends etc. – they appear to be acting in an autofictional manner, without taking on different roles but themselves. They are in fact representing themselves and as a result are literally playing themselves. The gestures, postures, and facial expressions of their social interactions, as well as their clothing are informed by the prior postcolonial narratives, postmemory (Hirsch, 2012), as well as a global contemporary lifestyle that sees photographically, as reflected in the prosthetic culture by Lury (1998) and introduced in 5. By means of subversive performative codes, they are showing themselves as they want to be seen, trying to reconfigure that visual reality in a form of contemporary indiscernibility, in a time when fiction and real life come together in a common daily practice on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

Realness as a subcultural term, for instance, can be interpreted in relation to the field of visual-cultural code switching in contemporary subcultures. This exemplifies a semiotic interpolation of the linguistic phenomenon of code switching (cf. Stroud, 2004; Nilep, 2006), towards various forms of expression such as gestures, facial expressions, body language and

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Hall, 1999.

pose.<sup>79</sup> Significantly, the winner of a 2016 amateurs' fashion contest for *Adidas*, was chosen by the brand for staging himself in alliance with his urban surrounding and in the brand's clothing, documenting himself in a suburb neighborhood that alternates between the tristesse of migrant suburb life and the fashionability of being authentic and "real" (Figure 41).<sup>80</sup> Other contemporary reflections on the photographic medium such as performative aspects (Levin, 2009, 2014) and expressions of pose, staging and self-staging are some of the tools utilized in these works, that negotiate and investigate the particular postcolonial and diasporic identities. The practice of switching various visual codes supports the identitarian negotiation that these works display. It slowly unfolds, that their identifications are connected to transmission of memories that narrate postcolonial search or at times decay of cultural identity.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Stroud, 2004 et al. for the idea of linguistic code switching in postcolonial contexts, cf. for example Toliver-Weddington, 1973 for code switching in Black African American discourses.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. realness as a term is predominantly affiliated with Hip-hop culture <https://calebcatlina12.medium.com/what-is-realness-in-hip-hop-b948511359d7>, but has also been redefined in the ballroom drag seen of the 1980s <https://www.documentary.org/feature/burning-voices-redefining-realness-paris-burning>



Figure 41. A. Moubesen. winner of an amateurs' fashion contest for Adidas, 2016.



Figure 42. From Liz Johnson Artur, *Black Balloon Archive*, 1970-present.

In the case of Johnson Artur's work, the hybridity and new ethnicities of her subjects are perpetually implied. However, the complexity of a contemporary politics of identity requires substantial distinctions between the various forms of hybridity and otherness that her work displays. Johnson Artur says:

It's important for human beings to show variety. It is very important to not see people as just one group. There is no one group: there are people migrating and setting roots in places [everywhere] and you have to see them as individual stories (Pasipanodya, 2018).

The proposal of this doctoral thesis lies in introducing new terminologies within a spectrum of identity that represent oscillating forms within the notion of hybridity. These spectral identities therefore include cultural identities that fluctuate, coexist, and alternate. Postmigrant subjects seize multiple coexisting cultural perspectives, skillful means of empowerment that counteract the humiliation of double-consciousness. In Johnson Artur's photographic practice, a combination of both the diasporic and the postmigrant identities can

be found. Hence, the postmigrant condition is an inconclusive one. On the one hand, the term helps to understand and differentiate between migratory individuals and their descendants; on the other hand, the *post* prefix indicates the notion of an afterlife of the migratory condition itself, which could apply to first generation emigrants as well as literally everyone living in a society with a history of migration. In this relation, the postmigrant condition “means acknowledging that we have already reached a point where migration experiences shape society as a whole, not just some individuals with an immigrant background” (Espahangizi, 2015). A postmigrant herself, Johnson Artur acknowledges this notion of a postmigrant society by means of equalizing her subjects and humanizing their otherness. Looking at Johnson Artur’s work overall, her series on mixed-race Afro-Russians might stand out as closest to her personal sanctuary. She decided to document other Russians of color after her first contact with her father in 2010:

Most black Russians I met in Moscow and St Petersburg had also grown up without their fathers. Some had been fostered or grown up in children’s homes and had never met their mothers. But we all agreed that we felt Russian as well as African (*Afro-Russian photographer*, 2016).

Despite having grown up in different contexts and having different relationships with their African heritage, the artist and her subjects share a “struggle against a commonly encountered resistance [...] Those who grew up and live in Russia still have to justify on a daily basis the fact that they are Russians too” (*Black in the USSR*, 2016), which neither acknowledges nor differentiates their Afro diasporic and postmigrant identities. In contemporary conditions of postmigration, multitudes of identities call for a renegotiation of postcolonial heritage and diasporic memories in a contemporary globalized culture. Hybridity and ambivalence are still prominent terms in postcolonial discourse but require a reconfiguration and specification of different characteristics: oscillating forms of identity within a spectrum of identity, i.e. spectral identities, which incorporate coexisting and alternating cultural identities and perspectives of today’s societies of polyculture. Johnson Artur herself is a postmigrant in various contexts. Her specific situation of Blackness while growing up is best reflected in her imposed label as “a white negro” (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2020), to which she adds that she grew up thinking that “I don’t have what it takes to call myself Black” (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2020). In contrast, the cosmopolitanism and ephemeral transcultural entanglements present in her work

incorporate the coexistence of cultural identities that move beyond the colonial legacies of colorism.

One of Johnson Artur's works (Figure 42) is a black-and-white full-body vertical portrait of an older black woman posing on a street in front of a wall. She is in the middle of the photograph, and the focus is solely on her, without giving much information about her surroundings, apart from a slightly tilted display of a paved and patinated sidewalk sprinkled with cigarette ends and hints of overpainted square fields on the back wall. The lady wears a fancy hooded and belted street parka over patterned leggings with platform sneakers and knee-high socks. A cap over a hood covers her ears; of her two pairs of sunglasses, one covers her eyes while the other rests on her cap. An ornamented scarf loosely hangs around her neck and a spacious handbag from her shoulder. She wears a ring on almost every finger. In her right hand, she coolly holds a lit cigarette. In her other hand rests a bouquet of fake flowers and a closed transparent umbrella. This lady seems prepared for any type of uncomfortable and rainy weather. Soldierly, almost androgynous, she seems to wear her kit to protect herself while moving freely through the city. Her sense of style is creative, fancy, and individualistic, almost juvenily not-giving-a-damn; while she looks right back into the camera lens, in a countervisual manner (Mirzoeff, 2011). Everything from her flower-power patterns and athleisure wear to her ornate accessories and facial expression, including her mouth, says, "Capture me in my coolness; I do what I want".

The idea of representation in Johnson Artur's work is intrinsically connected to the concept of agency and performativity within a socio-cultural and photographic context. *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay's (2008) argument for photography's power to endow individuals with political agency, has become a key reference for visual culture and postcolonial studies. Here, the civil contract consists in the possibility for anyone, even those without citizenship in a given place, to enact a form of agency or resistance by utilizing the photographic medium as a political tool.<sup>81</sup> Azoulay insists that the meaning of photography is inherent not in the photograph itself as an autonomous object, but rather in the *performative* reconstruction of the photograph as an event. She also discusses the

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<sup>81</sup> As an example, Azoulay refers to the Palestinian non-citizens of Israel and their utilization of photography as a medium of agency.

reciprocal relationship between the photographer and the photographed, claiming that photographic authorship and its intentions will always be visible in the image itself.

At the same time, the presence of the camera plays its part in provoking performative utterances. In fact, we are all actors, when we are – like the camera apparatus prescribes – accustomed to watching ourselves through the eye of the Other, or, in this relation, the camera lens. In the same vein, Laura Levin (2009) points out in her review essay “The Performative Force of Photography” that “the ontology of photography is intrinsically linked to performance” (328), while also referring to Roland Barthes (1981), who, in his milestone *Camera Lucida*, claimed that “what founds the nature of photography is the pose” (78).<sup>82</sup> In a later work, Levin (2014) discusses the idea of photography and performativity in relation to her concept of camouflage, where she situates identity and mimesis along with performance. Levin argues for the political potential of camouflage as an empowering photographic tool, noting that the bodies of women, people of color, and other marginalized persons are often proximate to backgrounds and intentionally connected to properties of space. In Johnson Artur’s portrait, there is a visual synchronicity between the background wall with its overpainted color fields and the woman’s parka pattern, an equally generous square design. Adaptability to a street environment is conveyed here. The symbiosis of the woman and the asphalt jungle appears quirky and odd, yet authentic. The agency that emerges from this photographic event enables Johnson Artur to pull together her remaining archive as an act of resistance towards stereotyping and in favor of freedom of expression within a spectrum of Black identities.

Returning to the idea of the archive as a sanctuary, Johnson Artur’s show *Dusha* (the Russian word for “soul”) was her first ever solo museum exhibition. It premiered at the Brooklyn Museum in 2019 and featured photographs, videos, and sketchbooks selected from the ongoing *Black Balloon Archive*. While the notion of the sanctuary is incorporated in the photographic objects themselves, it also echoes in some of Johnson Artur’s other exhibition

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<sup>82</sup> Levin further elaborates on the performative encounter between spectator and image, which she sees in connection to the affective turn in the humanities and the social sciences: “These authors privilege the doing aspects of photography, asking how images exceed their frames and directly affect their viewers. In this respect, these works attempt to present a ‘history of looking’ in the tradition of *Camera Lucida*, offering an account of the emotional experience of the spectator encountering the photograph, the individual that, according to Barthes, becomes ‘the measure of photographic knowledge’” (Levin 2009: 329).

designs, such as her show *If you know the beginning, the end is no trouble* at South London Gallery in 2019. Her first UK solo exhibition (surprising, given that Johnson Artur has built up her archive for over 30 years), it features a great number of unframed, medium-size works presented on wooden and bamboo display structures (Figure 44-45). While the display structures and their natural materials embody the aesthetics of a tropical island refuge, the idea of a sanctuary is further reinforced by the arrangement and architecture of a womb/cave-like center where photographs are accumulated.

Johnson Artur's affection for the physicality of photographs is again revealed in the materiality and phenomenology of her exhibition, where bamboo, leather, wood, and hair are incorporated into sculptural displays. She also prints on these materials and on different types of paper and textiles, which highlights the photograph as a cultural material object that has a physical presence: "I want to touch things. I believe there is a textile, visual appreciation that I have" (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis 2020). This goes back to her initial approach while taking her photographs – often shooting only one of each subject – where she claims to "not just use my eyes when I take photographs, I engage with people. I use my hands and my ears. It is very much tactile" (Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis 2020).

Much as Johnson Artur's work follows different people, articulating the notion of a spectrum and hybridity as difference, she uses heterogeneity in the design of her exhibitions, hybrid spaces comprising several different sanctuaries. Here, Johnson Artur frames the show as a book with different chapters, each with a different section in the exhibition: a Peckham Lane chapter, a community chapter, an LGBTQ chapter (Figure 43), etc. The photographer uses bamboo as a sanctuary construction element, or, in her own words, "a building stone for creating my own space in a space" (South London Gallery, 2019). The artist's work recreates important spaces of community in the Afrodiaspora such as churches and social gatherings, reenacting their collectivity in a live program that included performances and concerts.

In the examples of Liz Johnson Artur's *Black Balloon Archive* (1970-present), the postmigrant subject remains a multifaceted one and the postmigrant society negotiates ephemeral transcultural entanglements. While Homi Bhabha's hybridity and ambivalence are still prominent in postcolonial discourse, they must be reconfigured to adequately specify today's identities fluctuating between postcolonial heritage, diasporic memories, and a

contemporary globalized culture. I have introduced the terminology of spectral identities, i.e., oscillating forms within a spectrum of identity, to capture coexisting and alternating cultural identities of today's societies of polyculture. While superficial concepts of "multiculturalism" have been rightfully critiqued (cf. Gilroy, 2004, Bhabha, 1994), the dispersed notion of the polyculture demands new ways to discuss contemporary culture.

Johnson Artur creates a stage for her subjects' auto-fictional acts and performative codes, enabling forms of agency and resistance while embracing their heterogeneity, difference, intersectionality, and multiplicity in the humanizing act of elevating the Other. Johnson Artur, whose monograph with Bierke Verlag was named one of the *New York Times*'s "Best Photo Books 2016," combines all these aspects with authenticity and a great sense of intimacy. Finally, a photograph always reveals the photographer behind the camera: travelling through different countries, lifestyles, and classes, Liz Johnson Artur herself emerges as a postmigrant artist who finds a place of sanctuary in her *Black Balloon Archive*.



Figure 43. From Liz Johnson Artur, *Black Balloon Archive*, 1970-present.



Figures 44 and 45. Installation views of Liz Johnson Artur's *If you know the beginning, the end is no trouble* at the South London Gallery, 2019.

### 6.3 OMAR VICTOR DIOP: TRANSCULTURAL OSCILLATIONS

*In the Photograph, something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling).*

(Barthes, 1981:78)

Blackness in the diaspora is embedded in today's era of globalized juxtaposition of cultures as well as the ever-circulating notion of networked images in the age of digital and social media. When raising awareness of minorities based on skin color and discussing racial normativity today, it is important to keep in mind that skin color hides or marks crucial privileges or inferiorities in society. This fact has recently become an important discussion, especially in the context of Blackness.

Black is not a color. Black is also not (only) a shade. The color black has a socio-political meaning to it. It is used to categorize and identify a certain group of people, whose skin color is in fact not black but a whole range of different tones. Blackness serves here as a socio-political visual marker, which was harshly demonstrated in the killing of George Floyd, in which the police acted upon their identification of Floyd as a Black subject.

Blackness in the world also stands for migration and diaspora from the African continent, as discussed in 5. Encountering agency within artistic interventions in the archives, Omar Victor Diop started his photographic series *Project Diaspora*, 2014 more or less by coincidence: while attending an artist residency in the south of Spain, he started researching on black skin color in paintings, as he was initially interested in the technique of representing Blackness. He discovered Juan de Pareja, the assistant of Diego Velasquez, whom the artist had painted and who was in fact a very unusual Black figure of history (Figure 6); Juan de Pareja, who was also named *El Esclavo* (Spanish: "The slave"), was born around 1606 in Antequera, Spain. He was also a painter and a student of Diego Velázquez, he was the artist's enslaved colleague, so to speak. He was born with a mixed migrant parentage into slavery in Antequera near Málaga, Spain and later became a household member and assisted in the workshop of Velázquez. At the time of the portrait, he was working as an assistant in Velázquez's studio in 1650. Six months after Velázquez painted Pareja's portrait, he freed him, although Pareja had to remain working for him and his family

until his death. After 1650, however, he had a parallel career as an independent painter. Juan de Pareja died in 1670 in Madrid.



Figure 46. Omar Victor Diop. *Juan de Pareja (1606-1670)*, *Project Diaspora*, 2014.



Figure 47. Diego Velázquez, *Juan de Pareja*, 1650.

Upon his encounter, Diop decided to re-enact the Velázquez portrait of Pareja by means of a photographic self-portrait, predominantly to pay tribute to the unusual figure and his story in the context of Black identity and representation (Figure 46).

In comparison, both the Velázquez painting and Diop's photograph depict a young man representing Juan de Pareja. However, upon inquiry, differences between the two artworks become apparent. Taking a closer look at Diego Velázquez's *Juan de Pareja* from 1650, which was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the 17th Century Spanish Art Gallery in 1970, it depicts a man not typically seen in portraiture tradition, a person who did not have ordinary citizen rights to himself, while the liveliness of his portrayed figure and the vibrant expression on his face clearly stands out.

Velázquez painted Juan de Pareja on a trip to Italy from 1649 to 1651. He had been painting realistic portraits for King Phillip IV and the royal family and had been given permission to portrait Pope Innocent X in Rome. Since he was going to have only a short time with the Pope, he prepared by painting the Pareja portrait to practice.

He painted Pareja in a silent, toned-down space placed in a typical portraiture length and a slightly left-tilted body posture. The brown-greyish background resembles his humble clothing in tonality, except for a white falling collar, which had probably been placed on his shoulders by Velázquez for the purpose of the picture. Pareja does not have any attributes to describe him like you would normally see in royal portraiture, but his radiant face draws all attention to itself. His eyes are looking back into the eyes of the viewer. His gaze speaks of honour and dignity and simultaneously shies away in form of a humble doubt, almost a sadness: His breath seems to be held, given the extraordinary notion of the event of someone like him being immortalized in such a royal way, an incident which sadly stands alone: “The subject of the portrait *Juan de Pareja* is exceptional in early-modern Spain, where the scarce visual representation of Black slaves is symptomatic of the position they occupied in the imperial social order. *Juan de Pareja* is the only known portrait of a Black slave in early modern Spain” (Fracchia, 2013: 153). The interpretation by his master Velázquez engages with Pareja’s humanness in a deep and truthful way, a likeness to truth that incorporates the sorrow of Pareja simultaneously to his elevation in the most complex manner. This verisimilitude was genuinely recognized upon the exhibition of the painting in the Pantheon in Rome on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1650.

Pareja was also a painter, but by no societal means equal to Velázquez, not even when he was freed later in his life which was quite common at the time and was able to attempt his own career as a painter. Taking a closer look while comparing the original Velázquez painting from 1650 with Diop’s restaging of the figure Juan de Pareja in 2014, various noticeable differences emerge: While the painted background of the Velázquez painting falls into a dimmed notion of muted shades, the background in Diop’s photograph appears green and bright and more so resembles a painted backdrop that mimics a painterly feature in the photograph. This adds a contemporary luminosity to the image, a feature which finds itself again in the detail and sharpness of the falling band collar on his shoulders.

The posture of Diop appears not as tilted as in the Velázquez painting, he is posing more confidently upright, with his head held up high, while simultaneously resting securely in a laid-back position. Fully displaying the hands suddenly seems something Velázquez avoided in his image, conceivably due to their reference to labor, whereas Diop’s hands are holding a pair of very particular football shoes in full display and in a very elegant manner. Paying closer attention to this striking pair of shoes: they seem to be made not for playing

but more of a collector's set designer football shoe, with their elegant patent tips and floral pattern on the side. Diop's haircut is short and edgy compared to Pareja's voluminous mane and his skin color is much darker than Pareja's is interpreted in the Velázquez painting. However, the solidarity of Black identity that is embedded in the idea of 'people of color' comes across and is nevertheless convincing, if not enhanced by Diop's darker tone.

Diop looks straight into the camera, with a determination that surpasses the direct gaze in the Velázquez painting. His presence says: *I have been here for a while and will remain forever*, in the manner of a prototype, which Roland Barthes identified as the generic *pose*, and a potential quality in the medium of photography as such (Barthes, 1981). This persistence is underpinned by the fact that this photograph, in difference to the Velázquez painting is a self-shot portrait, which characteristically entails a notion of photographic agency: Diop not only owns the photographic space, but "comes to life out of the picture, makes demands, activates, tries to pull strings, hovers in the air, commands, seduces, repels, troubles, and irritates" (Azoulay, 2008: 327).

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) Ariella Azoulay's argument for the capability of photography to enable individuals to conduct political agency has become a key concept of reference in visual culture and postcolonial studies. Here, the civil contract consists of the possibility for literally anyone, even a person without citizenship in a specific place to enact a form of agency or resistance by means of utilizing the photographic medium as a form of political tool. In an imaginary mind game, we are triggered by Diop's intervention to envision him taking up this agency for Pareja:

Anyone who addresses others through photographs or takes the position of a photograph's addressee, even if she is a stateless person who has lost her "right to have rights," as in Arendt's formulation, is nevertheless a citizen – a member in the citizenry of photography. The civil space of photography is open to her, as well. That space is configured by what I call the civil contract of photography (Azoulay, 2008: 81).

Photography, as a medium that is fundamentally integrated into communicating or even constructing important events and catastrophes today, can simultaneously serve as a tool against forms of political oppression, injustice, and censorship. Azoulay insists that the meaning of photography inheres not in the photograph itself as an autonomous object, but rather in the performative reconstruction of the photograph as a collective event. Azoulay explores the visual field of suffering in our time, how its victims of oppression have been

represented in visual culture and in turn reacted within the photographic medium, as did Diop by means of a reenactment infused with positivity. In this relation, the relevance of the medium of photography in the context of Africa certainly lies in the circumstance of the medium revealing the colonial entwinement of the West with Africa as a predominant medium of ethnographic documentation on the one hand, and the intervention of photography as a tool of resistance in the process of African image-making particularly towards independence on the other hand. This is an undeniable circumstance that lies deeply embedded in this transcultural artistic project.

In Diop's *Project Diaspora*, the photographic agency is profoundly linked to Azoulay's ideas and is implied by the freedom of the photographers' choice, who has a deeper connection to the photography of African modernity than the mere setting and format: Diop's project, along with re-enacting a figure of history resembles and reinitiates the experimental and playful search for identity of African modernist studio photographers like Seydou Keïta, Malick Sidibé and Samuel Fosso, who laid the groundwork for the visual language and embodiment of an African modernity by articulating and negotiating various expressions of style, gender and culture. Their artistic practice finally became integrated into a global canon of art, as did Pareja's own artwork with many years of delay. Pareja, a person who did not have any rights to himself for a major part of his life, has been elevated again by Diop from the position of a non-citizen to a place of heroic endeavor.

Diop also provides a powerful tool of connection to the personal identitarian vulnerabilities of his own background in West Africa, that often deal with the act of alternating between different cultural identities and places. Here, the postmigrant as a figure oscillating between marginalization and cosmopolitanism reveals the true challenge of a transcultural endeavor and holds potential for that agency to be articulated. The photographic agency also pairs with a countervisual notion, as described by Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011). The discomfort of African diasporic counternarratives lies in their countervisuality as such and the resistance towards visual normativity many of these images engender. In his conception of countervisuality, Nicholas Mirzoeff refers to representation and the dominance of hegemony in the visual field. Countervisuality then becomes "the attempt to reconfigure visuality as a whole" (24). The right to look as a first articulation of countervisuality indicates the importance of infiltrating normative dynamisms of visuality by means of proclaiming the right to look and the right to look back: "the right to look claims

autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to political subjectivity and collectivity [...] the opposite of the right to look is not censorship, then, but visibility” (1-2). Images of visibility in Mirzoeff, like myths in Barthes, naturalize their underlying power structures. Hence, countervisuality denaturalizes normative images in an uncomfortable way. In relation to Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, Mirzoeff sees that “countervisuality’s realism is not necessarily mimetic” (26), but it expresses the subversive moment of simultaneous display of representation and disruption of its authority.

Apparently, the way Diop looks back into the eyes of the viewer as the figure of Pareja essentially indicates this countervisual approach, communicating a determination in the right to look back, entailed in Barthes’ concept of the pose. However, the true sense of its countervisuality lies embedded in a simple but profound thought experiment: if one places the Diop photograph facing the Velázquez painting in a mirror-like manner, the two artworks would start speaking to one another: While Pareja in the Velázquez painting is already the solitary symbol for an early countervisual endeavor in 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain as we have seen before, Diop multiplies the infiltration of the normative visual hegemony once more. As a negotiation of the countervisual of the countervisual so to speak, he marks an era of a so-called African Renaissance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He embodies the disruption of visibility itself, since “visibility and its visualizing of history are part of how the “West” historicizes and distinguishes itself from its others” (Mirzoeff, 2011: XIV). This introduces a transcultural entanglement that goes beyond a binary perspective of the colonizer against the colonized and pleads for the idea of an interconnectedness that leaves the African subject in an autonomous position, while incorporating complex notions of its identity (Mbembe, 2001).

The mirror effect makes us understand that the challenge of counternarratives in visibility lies amongst ourselves in creating narratives that reflect the constitutions of their eras. Within the obvious and subtle differences to the Velázquez painting, it translates that Diop’s approach becomes more than a mere restaging of the historic figure Juan de Pareja: his excavation of the archive itself indicates a re-coding of the relevance of this character, ultimately due to Diop’s personal connection to the identity of Blackness. This recoding falls in line with the principles of a *potential history* by Ariella Azoulay (2019), which induces a contextualization that recognizes the imperial foundations of knowledge and refuses its violent structures. By means of undermining these Black figures of history, the impact and relevance they had and the role they played, imperialist ideas have sought to influence time,

space and politics, as a “phenomenon intentionally removed from history textbooks and from Europe's collective memory” (De los Santos, 2014, my translation).

The embedded potentialities of the re-enacted stories by Diop are what constitutes their archival quality. Potentialities and a *potential history* are what Ariella Azoulay calls for to rethink historical settings and developments from different angles within those histories in a form of a historical reconstruction. Here, she takes on possibilities of potential incidents and inventions that have already appeared at the roots of transcultural encounters in forms of communication and dialogue between individuals and communities. She focuses on “unlearning our imperial rights”, that have in parts also constituted our human rights, and engages in the idea of refusing the normative violence that lies within them and that have destroyed and segmented communities and legacies. Her approach contributes a challenging proposal to the field of visual culture studies and postcolonial studies as it addresses possibilities of overcoming some of the entropic historical impasses that imperialism and colonialism have established. In that sense, the archives’ order can and should be reversed and revolutionized so archives can become a claim on the present as well as on the past, unravelling a potential history.

Potential histories remain individual histories that ask questions about what if a repressed history had gained the chance to be acknowledged. Diop’s intervention sheds light on these circumstances: When was Pareja ever acknowledged for his exceptional achievements in his lifetime? One might ask then: What more do we know about the Juan de Pareja as a subject? Pareja himself was the son of an enslaved African woman and a Spanish man. He learned how to read and write, which was not very common for a slave and contributed to the special relationship with Velázquez who often asked him to sign documents as a legal witness. When Juan de Pareja later became a painter himself, he succeeded in pursuing an independent artistic career, which was at the time a privilege reserved for those who were free.

However, when painting himself in a self-portrait as part of the large-scale painting *The Calling of Saint Matthew* in 1661, he depicts himself with a lighter complexion and European facial features: “In the most surprising way Pareja chooses to conceal his ethnic difference by constructing himself as a European nobleman [...] Pareja chose to Europeanize his own features” (Fracchia, 2013: 151). In this relation, Carmen Fracchia also validly asks:

“Could the color of the skin of the Afro-Hispanic painter signify freedom from slavery?”<sup>83</sup> This is a circumstance which echoes retroactively in the portrait by Velázquez and unravels more of the extend of Diop’s re-enactment.

Thereupon, one might consider paying closer attention to Pareja’s and Velázquez individual narratives, instead of focusing on the predominant narrative of artist and object that the Velázquez painting implies. In this relation, Diop’s excavation, and recoding of Juan de Pareja’s background and his potentialities hints at what has been introduced as a multidirectional approach in memory studies by Michael Rothberg. The concept of *multidirectional memory* counteracts the dominance of certain cultural memories and neglects the idea of a competitive memory in favor of a productive one, as it demonstrates the overlap between postcolonial and memory studies.

In this case, the dominant narrative of Pareja as a Black man being portrayed in the Velázquez painting distracts from other correlative events: Pareja’s self-depiction in lighter skin tone stands in a juxtaposition to the fact that Velázquez himself often faced accusations of being of foreign descent and in that sense being in parts of African heritage, due to his physical appearance; Pareja and Velázquez both have a similar hair texture and Velázquez himself has a slightly darker skin complexion undertone than the average Spanish: “In a society obsessed with the policy of “purity of blood” it is perhaps not surprising that the perception of Velázquez’s ethnic origin had been questioned” (Fracchia, 2013: 154).

These circumstances also fall in line with that fact that Velázquez had also not been acknowledged as an artist by society. The standing of a painter in 17th century Spain, under the influence of the caste that was created due to the idea of a “purity of blood” did not allow Velázquez to fully pursue a professional rank (cf. Fracchia, 2013). The self-fashioning in Spanish self-portraiture paid a major contribution to the identity construction of these painters like Velázquez and Pareja, who shared this reality. They were able to elevate their social position in their paintings to become gentlemen and noblemen, whereas their identity constructions indicated alternations of their coexisting cultural perspectives.

As we have arrived at the understanding of a more exportable, globalized memory culture, we understand that histories speak to each other, they are interconnected, and we can connect them even retroactively. Here, the concept of *multidirectional memory* by Michael Rothberg (2009), presents a tool for comparison of different, non-competitive

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Hobbs, 2014; Ginsberg, 1996; Bennet, 1996 et al. on “racial passing “, in African American studies.

histories and traditions across the globe, where the competitive is neglected in favor of the connective nature of memories. Rothberg's argument is to think about this comparative context in non-competitive terms, to think of the interaction of different historical memories. This important development in memory studies signifies a turn against "competitive memory" (1), towards multidirectional memories interacting productively. He adds that even memory conflict and tension between different memories produces more memory and not less. For him, collective or public memory works in a cross-referencing way in which more memories are produced from the interactions of different memories in a comparative production. Diop is Pareja, and Diop also becomes Velazquez, since he technically is the subject and object, the photographer and the photographed in his self-portrait as Pareja. He challenges the power relations implied in multidirectional memory, by means of personifying the inherent struggles of both personas.

Diop went on excavating archives, particularly inspired by the publication *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, four books on the representation of Africans in art over a period of five thousand years, originally published in the 1960s by John and Dominique de Menil. The long-term research, with a later added fifth volume for the twentieth century, directly motivated Diop's series. He found that there had been several interesting Black characters in history in various times (15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century) and places (Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East), that he found to be not sufficiently acknowledged in the public sphere. These characters range from the world of trade to diplomacy and slavery. As the stories of these figures renegotiate the narratives of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism, Diop decided to re-enact 18 personas by himself in a photo studio setting and the photographic series of *Project Diaspora* was born. Transferring their narratives into our present world of networked images by the addition of contemporary props from the world of football such as balls, shoes, gloves, or whistles, he hints at still unresolved issues of representation and Black identity today, where football players of color repeatedly face forms of discrimination, exclusion, and alienation in the western countries they play for.

*Project Diaspora* series have travelled to fairs and festivals in Arles and Evora, London and Lagos. In the historical figures of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries that the pictures represent, Diop uses his photographic work as a form of mnemotechnique by means of embedding the re-enacted portraits of widely unknown Black diasporic figures of history in the canon of visual culture and the artistic sphere. The wide success of his project and

their acquisition by several art collections, amongst them the Louis Vuitton Fondation, Paris, evolves into the contribution to a counter archive that elevates the awareness towards these unprecedented biographies. He reintroduces their counternarratives by means of embodying their stories, clothing, gestures, and facial expressions, that reproduce and reinvigorate the relevance of the individual personas on the one hand and contextualizes their tropes in the contemporary on the other hand.

The work on Dom Nicolau from Angola (Figure 48-49) showcases a prince of Kongo who was perhaps the earliest African leader publicly facing and protesting colonial powers. Nicolau protested Portuguese commercial and political activity and military expansion by publishing a letter in a Portuguese newspaper in Lisbon. Diop exercises agency over representation that many other subjects of such historic portraiture might have been denied. Here, Diop's countervisual photographic agency is characterized as a reinforcement of the determination in Nicolau's way of looking back to the viewer. Diop's posture is supported by an earthy colored wall and a curtain with golden pattern on the left, contrary to Nicolau who is depicted in front of a blank background standing on a carpet and close to a precious seat cushion. However, the most striking difference lies in the replacement of the headgear and amulet, where Nicolau is accompanied by these attributes in reference to Europe, Diop chooses to utilize symbols and attributes related to the canon of an African visual culture. His left foot casually rests on a football, which is a clear intervention into the honorable posture by Nicolau: a circumstance which indicates the problematics of identity with contemporary football players today:

I wanted to draw a comparison between these early forced migrants and migrants today, because their destinies are quite similar, it is just the stakes that are different. The so-called levels of freedom are different too, but it is sort of the same paradox, you are respected but you are not so respected, you are influential, but you don't belong, you are adored, but at the same time, rejected (Diop quoted in Buggenhagen, 2017).

Transferred to the complex matters of Afro-European identity today, Diop provokes the idea of individuals finding a voice in mediated formats such as writing and art, for which Nicolau serves as a model, and embodies a potential history he is able to create.



Figure 48. Omar Victor Diop. *Dom Nicolau* (Circa.1830-1860), *Project Diaspora*, 2014.



Figure 49. Engraving of Dom Nicolau by a Lisbon artist, ca. 1845.

Another work on the figure of Jean-Baptiste Belley (1746-1805) was even more intensified when Diop's own French-Senegalese nephew in Paris was astonished by the unusual figure of his heritage upon visiting his uncle's exhibition (Figure 50). Belley was Senegalese, was born on the island of Gorée and was a former slave of Saint-Domingue, in the French West Indies, who bought his freedom with his own savings. During the French Revolution, he became a member of the National Convention and the Council of Five Hundred France. He became the first Black parliamentarian to occupy an elected seat in the French Convention, and, in 1794, delivered the passionate speech that generated the unanimous decision to abolish slavery.

When the French painter Anne-Louis Girodet painted Belley in 1797 (Figure 51), he established a strong reference to French aristocracy in posture, uniform costume, and a background, which resembles tropical nature, but still does not break with a sexualization of black male identity, overly visible in the sitter's exaggerated genital. It appears that Diop's interpretive potential lies in the football props, which he uses as a visual metaphor for the role of Black athleticism in the context of global contemporary capitalist sports markets, and

the ambivalences this produces for Black athletes themselves, who are hypervisible and “owned” by this capitalist endeavor but also use it politically and become icons of Black pride and agency. In Diop’s interpretation of Belley a de-exoticization in the background and a rationalization of the re-enacted figure takes place that also leaves room for a noble form of ambiguity in his gender display. It introduces the idea of a distorted historical narrative that serves as the base for a multidirectional critique following Rothberg. He argues that memory, as a constructed history, appears to be a crucial field to think about representation, whereas artists like Diop take on a notion of agency that allows them to bend cultural memory, as they are themselves creators of new historical archives of the contemporary. As Rothberg figures:

Making memory the focus of this work allows me to synthesize concerns about history, representation, biography, memorialization, and politics that motivate many scholars working in cultural studies [...] strictly separable from either history or representation, memory nonetheless captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side *and* the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past (Rothberg, 2009).



Figure 50. Omar Victor Diop. *Jean-Baptiste Belley (1746 –1805), Project Diaspora*, 2014.



Figure 51. Anne-Louis Girodet. *Jean-Baptiste Belley*, ca. 1797.

Today, memory studies have been starting to look at cultural memory more comparatively since the transnational and transcultural turn. Memories might be structurally understood as multidirectional, but not all memories are represented equally in the public sphere, as the inequities and representations of different histories are controlled by specific power relations. In contemporary visual culture, these power relations certainly are particularly whirled around, “as the digital image proliferates online and becomes increasingly delivered via networks, numerous practices emerge surrounding the image’s transmission, encoding, ordering and reception” (Sluis and Rubensberg, 2008). In times of the revelation of the intimate moment for the camera stage, image manipulation, fake identities and performative personas become daily encounters. It is significant to consider that those whom Diop playfully investigates makes him performatively become their persona in a digital age. Their memories become part of him as well as he matures into parts of their archival legacy.

Photography depicts the gestures, facial expressions and body language, the ideologies expressed in customs, traditions, habits, clothing etc., as well the intentions of the photographer that embody culture and help examine semiotic elements of visibility in the field of visual culture studies. In this regard, visual archives entailing African migrant identities can transport the idea of a cultural diaspora and a transnational migrant knowledge that undermines the constituencies of a hegemonic visibility. Visual Culture Studies then become more than simply the study of how images have become predominant in our time. Particularly in relation to the postcolonial, the discourse has evolved to become a crucial tool in understanding and deconstructing imperial power relations, as images bear the paradigmatic components, mechanisms and ideologies that build and organize our worlds up until today.

Underlying the body of work in *Project Diaspora* is the idea of the photographic medium and photographic archive as visual formats of mnemotechnique. They entail cultural information and encoded memories that have been transferred, transmitted, and passed on to next generations. Acknowledging the major impact of visual phenomena today, it is crucial to identify the visual tropes that contribute to the socio-cultural complexities and polarities which we have been living in. The globalized visual juxtapositions that we face today are in that sense complicated tropes of polarity.

Black people are up until today confronted with absurd questions such as: how Black is acceptable and what is too Black in European and African contexts (cf. Pierre, 2013) As in

the perspective of a double-conscious Black individual who finds itself always looking at oneself through the eyes of a white society (Du Bois, 1903), and “measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt [...] by the visibility of their perceived difference” (Fanon, 1952), we still live amongst unresolved issues of representation and Black identity today.

An archive is to be stored in a cool, dry place, preserved, and hidden, then excavated and circulated. This morbid idea of death and the (photographic) archive (Barthes, 1981; Mbembe, 2002) anticipates the intrinsic notion of the archive: our need to remember. Revolutionizing the archive, in this regard, means to excavate and uncover its archival knowledge, which is what Diop achieves with his intervention in the archives. It is what Achille Mbembe refers to as the “resuscitation of life [...] bringing the dead back to life by reintegrating them in the cycle of time, in such a way that they find, in a text, in an artefact or in a monument, a place to inhabit, from where they may continue to express themselves” (Mbembe, 2002: 25).

Instead of focusing on a new future, Ariella Azoulay provokes us to rewind history under a hidden imperial social order and unlearn our imperial rights, to continue to refuse imperial violence by making present what was invented as past, while disrupting the authority of the archive subversively. Potential histories can serve as vehicles for this resuscitation of life, for agency and empowerment. In that sense the archives are whose order can and should be reversed and revolutionized so archives can become a claim on the present as well as on the past, unravelling a potential history. However, the potentiality of these tropes lies in their constituency of being able to create new countervisual meaning, especially when examined under the premise of a multidirectional approach. As we have arrived at the understanding of a more exportable, globalized memory culture and we understand that histories speak to each other, are connected and we can connect them.

The narratives of his re-enacted figures renegotiate the narratives of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism, since we do need more images that are challenging other images, that are looking back and talking back to previous images, while disrupting the gaze of the archive itself. With the medium of photography and its *genius* (Barthes, 1981), which through the *pose* in this case legitimately “could compel me to believe its referent had really existed” (77), Omar Victor Diop’s *Project Diaspora* inaugurates a pose of pride which will be remembered.

African modern studio photographers often utilized the aesthetic element of camouflage as modus of performativity that intrinsically plays with the patterns and fabrics of the protagonists' clothing in dialogue with their backdrops: "As Walter Benjamin recounts in 'A Short History of Photography,' the backdrop played a key role in early photographic portraiture" (Levin, 2014: 14). First and foremost, geometric patterns as such have a long customary tradition in African history:

Art is part of the moving continuum of daily and ritual existence in Africa; it is widely diffused throughout society and the life of the individual. The African does not distinguish between fine and applied art. In religious ceremonies, elaborate costumes and carved wood masks and figures are combined with music and dance to involve the whole community in a unified artistic expression [...] The articles of everyday life – woven cloth, calabashes, ordinary cooking spoons – all are decorated, usually with patterns having symbolic meaning. Among many peoples, the graphic arts play a role similar to that of writing in conveying ideas and recording history (Zaslavsky, 1973: 172).

Due to the "tendency to distort natural forms for the purpose of stressing certain characteristics, and the wide application of symbolic motifs in decoration, lead to emphasis on the geometric aspect in African art" (Zaslavsky, 1973: 173), there are endless motifs and forms in everyday life recalling patterned principles of camouflage from nature as such. Additionally, the craft of accumulating various patterns upon and aside one another, echoes the idea of abundance, wealth, and prosperity in many African cultures and visualities: "In Nigerian society, excess in all its ramifications is the hallmark of wealth. It is a society where the idea of class values and social status are always enacted by visible emblems of affluence in social gatherings: moneys exchanging hands and textile materials being displayed" (Nwafor, 2019: 240).

In postcolonialism, artists like Seydou Keïta, Malick Sidibé and Samuel Fosso, were compelling in laying the groundwork for the visual language and embodiment of an African modernity by articulating and negotiating various expressions of style, gender, and culture. Omar Victor Diop's contemporary artistic project *The Studio of Vanities* (2012-present) reinitiates the experimental and playful search for identity of African modernist studio photographers, while documenting a new generation of contemporary African creatives (Figure 52). Diop negotiates this heritage in a contemporary fashion by presenting an emerging creative generation proud of their arts and crafts heritage:

These are the fresh faces of the continent's urban culture. They are black, arabs, caucasian, asian [...] it doesn't matter. They are creative and ambitious, but most importantly, they dedicate their everyday lives to making their dreams a reality. In this series, the objective is to portray a generation which endeavors to showcase the African urban universe and its blossoming art production and exchanges (Diop, n.d.).

Using his artistic forefather's methods, such as Samuel Fosso (Figure 53-54) of morphing patterns and fabrics of the protagonists' clothing into dialogues with their backgrounds or affirms their unity of each other (Figure 55), which caters to a culture of abundance, social connections and humor and/or queerness (cf. Wendl and Behrend, 1998, Pinther, 1998), Diop transports the wake of independency into contemporary urban cultures (Figure 52; see also below Figure 56 by Carolina Arantes). Showcasing traditional, as well as modern West African styles, and alternations of African and western lifestyle throughout the images, Diop also presents protagonists with a certain ability to camouflage with both styles accordingly. Adding to the vibrance of these cultural alternations, the images communicate a certain gracefulness, a tranquility that seems to be in the right place and at the right time. Diop also provides a powerful tool of connection to the personal identarian vulnerabilities of his own background in West Africa and Europe, that often deal with the act of alternating between different cultural identities and places, due to their postcolonial realm. In this context, Achille Mbembe has noted on Afropolitanism:

As the twenty-first century unfolds, it is gradually seeping into the minds of many that to a large extent our planet's destiny might be played out in Africa. From a philosophical and cultural point of view, this *planetary turn of the African predicament* takes us far away from the Hegelian myths, which, for too long, have colonized Africa's imagination of the world and the world's imagination of Africa (Mbembe, 2021, cf. Hegel, 1807).<sup>84</sup>

Here, the postmigrant as a figure oscillating between marginalization and cosmopolitanism reveals the true challenge of a transcultural endeavor and holds potential for that agency to be articulated. By means of the artistic work of Diop, this thesis discusses the concept of camouflage as aesthetic which acts supporting, strengthening, backing, and empowering.

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Guyer (2007) "Africa Has Never Been 'Traditional,'" *African Studies Review* 50, no. 2: 183–202; cf. Latour, 1991, Mignolo, 2011.



Figure 52. Omar Victor Diop. *The Studio of Vanities* (2012-present).



Figure 53. Samuel Fosso. *Autoportrait*. From the Series 'Tati', *la femme américaine liebrée des années*, 1997.

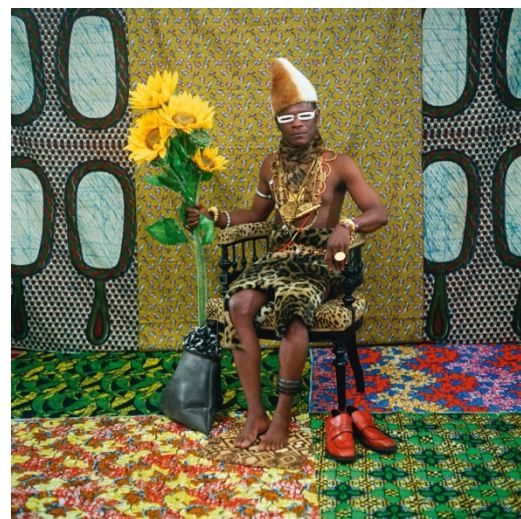


Figure 54. Samuel Fosso. *Autoportrait*. From the Series 'Tati', *Le Chef (ce lui que vendue l'Afrique aux colons)*, 1997.



Figure 55. Francis K. Honny, c.a. 1975.

#### 6.4 CAROLINA ARANTES: MODES OF CAMOUFLAGE

*Camouflage is the blending of the animal into the pattern, the environment; it is a search for invisibility. To attain this objective, it is essential for the animal to lose its identity, that is to say to efface its outline, to assume one even color or, on the contrary, to have a gaudy pattern, without which adaptation would be conspicuous.*

(Caillouis, 1964: 78)



Figure 56. Carolina Arantes. From the project *First Generation* (2013-present).

In African immigration's history of France, familiar reunifications happened between 1975 and 1980, making contemporary young African descendants born in the country, the first Afro-French generation. The project *First Generation* by artist photographer Carolina Arantes wants to reveal these women's search for identity entangled in questions of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Arantes portrays women, struggling with the perception and acceptance of their identity within the spectrum of Afro and European. The project also aims to break with normative understanding of the French culture that is laced with transcultural entanglements. It's protagonists seek to transcend conflicts inherited from their parents between European liberal culture and traditional African education, between colonialism and cosmopolitanism, between a feeling of non-belonging and the legitimacy of

their mixed nationality. They seek a place in society that could legitimize their dual culture of ambiguity.

Although some have never been to Africa, many of Arantes' protagonists in France might refer to themselves as African women (Figures 56-61). Public visual representations and policies for Afro diasporic cultures are very few and women often do not feel recognized as French, as one of Arantes sitters recounts:

I have always felt myself French, but they have reminded me so much that I'm not French that I feel not French. I've said to myself, 'I'm Ivorian,' but I had never set a foot on the Ivory Coast before. There is a lot of schizophrenia having these double cultures. And there are clashes, it will not set. We do everything to have it together, but it is not easy. We all have a moment that we deny France. I have denied France for a while (Fatou Meité, 32 years).<sup>85</sup>

Having lived abroad in Europe and sometimes having been born there, Arantes' protagonists are often not perceived as African in African countries either, a situation that brings upon real confusion amongst some individuals: "I am French at the moment, but I want to defend all the history of Africa, I want to move forward within this African history and also to engage in the memory of our past history" (Dala, 28 years). Carolina Arantes herself is a Brazilian independent photographer, naturalized and based in France. *First Generation* (2013-present) is her ongoing project about the first generation of Afro-French women of France.

Embedded into urban settings, visual-cultural codes in contemporary subcultures become visible in the portrayal of these women. Portrayed as Afro diasporic anti-heroines, they meet in urban and public spaces, anonymous architectures, or natural environmental surroundings, where scenes of everyday places that seem familiar are echoed. By means of subversive performative codes, they are showing themselves as they want to be seen. Taking on different roles none other than but themselves, they are in fact representing themselves and as a result are literally playing themselves. The gestures, postures, and facial expressions of their social interactions, as well as their clothing are informed by transmitted memories and a global consumer culture. Reconfiguring visibility in a form of contemporary indiscernibility, as fiction and real life come together in a common daily practice on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, also influenced by transmission of Afro diasporic memories and nostalgia towards African countries of origin.

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.carolinaarantes.com/firstgeneration>

Figure 56 shows a festive gathering of a Black community, exemplified by a group of Black women that is occupying the main part and center of the image. The event of the photograph takes place on a sunny day and is located outside on a veranda lined with green. Most of the women are captured from the back forming a celebratory circle, while others are joining walking into the scene. We can see the celebrations in full course, as some of the women are chanting and smiling. However, the upper edge of image is cropped, which leaves the focus on the middle part of the bodies, i.e. the clothing of the guests of the festivities. Standing out here are several dresses in the same material of an African wax print<sup>86</sup> made in different wrap dresses, skirts, and costumes, which unify the women as a group. This demonstrates a form camouflage, as described above, that references African notions of abundance and social connections. At times, the hidden meanings of the fabrics, which are predominantly produced outside the African continent, invite humor and irony onto the body as a carrier of sociocultural negotiations.<sup>87</sup> In Abrantes' photograph, the pattern of African culture of abundance, effortlessly transposed into Afro European contexts. In some of Arantes works, these patterns, forms and colors are aligned to the background (Figure 58), which acts then as a background of support in a twofold manner, integrating the cultural background into the background of the image composition (cf. Levin, 2014).

Nevertheless, this picture which captures the women and bodies in physical and emotive motion illustrates again a mixing and matching of style, since traditional dress alternate with modern looks of pencil skirts and leggings. Figure 57 offers a juxtaposition to this, as Arantes captures a festive Muslim group in colorful but uniform look embedded into an urban residential area. On the other hand, some works demonstrates the appropriation of Western styles in Afro diasporic women (Figure 59-61), and with it the principle of camouflage as a tool of disguise. Finally, in the background of Figure 56, and in midst of the circular formation, a male photographer holding a tripod seems ready to capture what could possibly be the bridal couple of the fest stepping out the house, but which are not visible to the viewer. Many of the archival images which Arantes was provided by her sitters and collaborators give hints at how this postmigrant generation alternates between worlds of visibility and transculturality (Figure 62).

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<sup>86</sup> On African wax prints and postcolonialism see Delhay, 2019.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. **4. Independence and the Postcolonial Invention of Self**, Pinther, 1998.

In the context of Arantes' transgenerational artistic project, this last chapter engages with the idea of camouflage in the context of postmigration Black studies in the European context, analyzing politics of representation and discourses on agency through contemporary and artistic photographic objects in a cross-cultural manner. It introduces and juxtaposes different notions of camouflage, to establish a twofold proposition: camouflage as an aesthetic phenomenon of mimesis, and camouflage as a transmitted mimicry, or, as Levin puts it: "a complex process of morphological and environmental mimicry" (Levin, 2014: 6) that engenders "performing ground". Considering the approach of the marginalized as being frequently arranged conforming to their surroundings in the realm of visual culture, this chapter focuses on the idea of camouflage as a recurring principle in Black representation. As a mode of forming political agency by means of "blending into the background" (4) Levin discusses various concepts of camouflage with regards to photography and performativity, where she situates identity and mimesis along with performance. Central to the idea is the political potential of camouflage as an empowering photographic tool where the bodies of women, people of color, and other marginalized persons are often proximate to backgrounds and intentionally connected to properties of space. In this context of agency and resistance, José Esteban Muñoz had previously discussed the concept of "disidentification" within queer Black studies and performance arts (1999), which relates to the notion of camouflage as it is discussed here in its versatility.

Levin's book *Performing Ground: Space, Camouflage, and the Art of Blending In*, "makes an argument for reading camouflage as a *performance strategy*, as a theoretical frame for analyzing contemporary performance practices and the performance of self in everyday life" (5). Here, Levin refers to Heidegger's writings on the "picture-ness of self" in *The Age of the World Picture* (1977), that called out a "setting- in-place-before" with regards to the German term "vorstellen" and Heidegger's preoccupation of a "subjective egoism" within the concept of "perspectival seeing" that emerged in the Renaissance. Levin attempts to "illustrate how humans routinely establish their identities through a complex process of morphological and environmental mimicry" (7), negotiating a "performativity [which] stands in for, on the one hand, the self as a cultural construct, and on the other, for a sense of free will and choice in the way that identity is enacted" (Vaughan, 1999). Following Levin's proposition, this chapter engages with the juxtaposition of the morphological versus the environmental notion of camouflage, proposing the idea of aesthetic mimesis that

empowers versus transmitted mimicry that disguises within postcolonial politics of identity and the photographic realm.

The notion of transmitted memory echoes a concept of camouflage that disguises, hides, and masques, by becoming indiscernible, usually to blend in with the surroundings as so called Afro Europeans. Here, camouflage as an act of disguise, can be understood as a continuum between the visible and the invisible: becoming invisible through something visible, becoming indiscernible from the respective setting. Being a postmigrant herself, Arantes acknowledges the notion of a postmigrant society, but also of post-capitalist precarity:

For the black women of France, conquering their place in society is an individual and persistent movement that constantly met with obstacles on sexism and on prejudice. Although they face the same troubles as all women in modern times, they have also to face the historical opposition force of a recent colonization social mentality and have to overcome economic and lack of education problems that result from their parent's immigration origin (Arantes, n. d.)

In this relation, Levin refers to the “tactical identifications” described by Muñoz, which attempt “to transform a cultural logic from within. Therein, Muñoz also stresses the power of “anonymity” in performance and the notion of “dissociation” as identity-establishing principles. In relation to its natural precedent, camouflage is a mimesis, according to National Geographic “defence mechanism or tactic that organisms use to disguise their appearance, usually to blend in with their surroundings [...] to mask their location, identity, and movement”. Here, camouflage as an act of disguise, can be understood as a continuum between the visible and the invisible. By means of implying certain modes of indiscernibility the camouflaging subject reinforces political agency to subvert and resist humiliation. As Levin concludes:

While the previous chapter invoked a literal understanding of camouflage, foregrounding visual strategies that evoke animal and martial mimicry in their use of background matching and disruptive coloration, this chapter (3) explores camouflage’s applicability to performance practices variously described as “environmental,” “immersive,” “relational,” and “site-specific” (67).

The camouflage principle with reference to the concept of mimicry then becomes a “double vision” (Bhabha, 1994: 126) revolving into mockery and the idea of a subversive disguise of warning. Here, the concept of mimicry also becomes crucial in Bhabha’s view of the ambivalence of colonial discourse, where the colonized’ mimic of the colonizer’s culture

and behavior articulates itself as “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994: 86). The idea of mimicry entails a two-sided characteristic, where mimicry can evolve into mockery, a “double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (88; cf. Du Bois 1903).<sup>88</sup>

The twofold proposition of camouflage as aesthetic mimesis versus transmitted mimicry stresses the idea of an alignment to the culture of the residential culture versus the culture of origin. Both utilize tools of merging and blending in that proclaim a unification with the respective culture in operations of agency. In introducing this as a first step, it will be subsequent to further examine the postmigration subject or group in the potential position of seizing multiple coexisting cultural perspectives and identities. The postmigratory subject is in the position of seizing multiple coexisting cultural perspectives, skillful means of empowerment that counteract humiliation, such as in double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). While constantly re-negotiating a former multicultural endeavor, the idea of postmigration leans towards a polycultural context, where cultural identities don’t vanish in a pool of cultural egalitarianism but find a hearing in the encounter and friction of their various complexities (cf. Tsing, 2005). Hence, the condition of postmigration remains that of an inconclusive one. On the one hand, the term helps to understand and differentiate between migratory individuals and their descendants, on the other hand the post prefix indicates the notion of an afterlife of the migratory condition itself, which could apply to first generation emigrants as well as literally everyone living in a society with a history of migration.

These procedures are reflected in an aesthetics of resistance that was appropriated by the people of the African diaspora themselves by means of incorporating *alternations of coexisting cultural identities* articulated in expressions of fashion, attitudes and lifestyles, an invention of (photographic) selves, profoundly represented in the medium of photography. They followed, as described above, the approach of creating versatile alignments and affiliations by operating under a twofold principle of camouflage; camouflage as an empowering tool of background support, and camouflage as a notion of disguise and mimicry (Bhabha, 1994). Herein, Lacan suggests:

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<sup>88</sup> I also want to mention Suzanne Césaire’s writings *The great camouflage: Writings of Dissent* (1941-1945), which assemble articles she wrote for the cultural journal *Tropiques* and compare the idea of camouflage as a concept of “blindness and imperative for lucidity” (Walker, 2012).

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare” Jacques Lacan, ‘The line and light’, *Of the Gaze*, quoted in Bhabha, 1994: 121).

Arantes artistic project *First Generation* offers a complex negotiation of identity for Afro cultures in the African diaspora of France, which oscillates between the ambiguity of adaptation versus disguise, and marginalization versus cosmopolitanism. It exemplifies postmemories and the transmission of memories from previous family generations, but also points towards complex notions of affiliation, alignment, camouflage and disguise.

This notion had been previously predicted by the term “marginal man,” coined by sociologist Robert Ezra Park in 1926 he relatedly describes an individual influenced by two differing ethnic or racial groups. According to Park: “The marginal man [...] is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures [...] his mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and, either wholly or in part, fuse” (Park, 1928)<sup>89</sup>. This notion had also been reflected upon Georg Simmel’s concept of *The Stranger* in 1908, where the stranger is a member of the group in which he lives and participates and yet remains distant from other – “native” – members of the group.

Following Agamben and his notion of potentiality, which simultaneously describes impotentiality (Agamben, 1999), this thesis pertains to the idea of potentiality as a baseline for a coexistence of cultural identities. As described above, an alternation of coexisting cultural identities and perspectives has been proposed as an interpolation to the concept of hybridity. But how does this coexistence work or look like? In the wake of Agamben who in turn follows Aristoteles, potentiality is intrinsically related to the notion of impotentiality and contingency, as a potentiality not to be: “By contingent”, Agamben quotes from the Scot, “I mean not something that is not necessary or eternal, but something whose opposite could have happened in the very moment in which it has happened” (Agamben, 1999: 262).

Focussing on the idea of coexistence, I will suggest that an alternation between coexisting identities takes place through a lense of potentially of being and a potentially of not being. Hence, coexistence as such describes an alternating between potentiality and impotentiality. In this relation, the alternation towards different cultural identities or

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. also Agamben’s integration of Benjamin’s concept of “bare life” (Agamben, 1995; 1999).

perspectives take place through the notion of impotentiality, i.e., not potentiality, and interpolates the notion of hybridity towards an operation of oscillation, alternation or code switching (and recoding).

In relation to idea of the spectral, and the concept of spectral identities in my take conceive the spectrum as a prismatic approach towards cultural identities, Barthes' reflections on the performative return of the dead in photography, Derrida's initialization of the concept of hauntology, and Europe's specter of the aftermaths of Marxism after the fall of the Soviet Union (Derrida, 1993).<sup>90</sup> However, this often undermines the role of Socialism in the context of West African nation building and approaches towards Pan-Africanist futures (cf. Blakeley, 1986). As a consequence, specters of Marx are still alive in the African context, and a certain nostalgia towards Nkrumaist achievements and state organization (See 4.). The idea of spectral identities as social figure on the margin has been negotiated (cf. Gordon, 2008), and offers a great angle to uncoupling the spectral from a solely morbid approach to understand what the concept can contribute to the understanding of contemporary societies of polyculture (cf. Schwarz and West-Pavlov, 2007 et al.). 5. returns to the postcolony, following Demos' approach in addressing the heterogeneous concept of the postcolony (Mbembe, 2001), and juxtaposing it with the perspective of contemporary European and South African artists in their return to the continent and their negotiation of colonial legacies of economic inequality, environmental and identity crises. I thereby argued for the inclusion of a wider African perspective on the matter, particularly under the premise of an "African diasporization" of the continent (Quayson, 2013a).

Turning towards *Specters of the Atlantic* (Baucom, 2005), where the narrative of the sacrifice of slaves on the *Zong* massacre in 1781, equips Baucom's thoughts on the rise and development of global capitalism as an aftermath of imperialism and colonization. In a section about the company *Nike*, Baucom scrutinizes the parallels between today and the *Zong* incident, which in manifold ways paved the way for the abolition of British slave trade in 1807 (169). As Baucom points at contemporary outsourcing of jobs with *Nike*, he finds striking analogies between then and now and the commodities of cheap human labor (cf. Butler and Spivak, 2007)<sup>91</sup> as a "a flexible, negotiable, transactable form of money" (61-62), in a world of finance capitalism, haunted by the "specter of money" (7):

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism". Karl Marx 1818-83 and Friedrich Engels 1820-95: *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) opening words.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Agamben's integration of Benjamin's concept of "bare life" (Agamben, 1995).

Ultimately Baucom seeks to demonstrate how our current epoch of globalization is a barely veiled, intensified version of the terrorizing finance culture that produced the Zong massacre. As he does so, he niftily connects Nike corporation's advertising relative to its exploitative shoe production operations in Vietnam with the case of the Zong as constitutive developments in "the late-eighteenth to late-twentieth-century development of an Atlantic cycle of capital accumulation" (149) (Moore et al., 2010: 16).

"Theoretical realism" (32) is what Baucom calls the speculative notion of "cross-Atlantic commodity exchange" (53), including a circulative interdependency of contracts, insurances, and labor. This ultimately leads to a "commodity of Blackness" (Johnson, 2003) in a first step. In a second step, the edginess of a Black life on the margins becomes marketable within visual culture today. Here, the ambiguity between cosmopolitanism and marginalization and demarcation finds Black representation paradoxically marketed and reappropriated (Figure 41), as Regina Bendix affirms: "The transformation from felt or experienced authenticity to its textual or material representation harbors a basic paradox. Once a cultural good has been declared authentic, the demand for it rises, and it acquires a market value" (1997: 8).

Photographic gestures, facial expressions, acting and reacting in a certain way, are closely connected to Afro diasporic identity and representation, reclaiming what John Tagg has noted as: "The portrait is [...] a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity" (year: page. However, the presence of the camera plays its part in provoking performative utterances. Or, as R.M. Vaughan has argued: "one bit of business in the ongoing act of self-definition that makes up the larger 'performance' of living our lives. In other words, it's all a kind of drag, a putting-on of costumes and guises" (Vaughan, 1999).

It is within this notion of potentiality of taking on different roles, whether signified as code-switching (cf. Stroud, 2004), shapeshifting (Thomas, 2012), oscillation, coexistence of identities or alternations of perspectives that lies at the heart of potential agency in diasporic Afro cultures, once it is acknowledged, and, in which photographs play a role in contributing to this new storytelling due to their mnemonic qualities. This finally resonates with my understanding of Agamben's love for paradoxical juxtapositions infused with a hope for change, as Elizabeth Balskus elucidates:

This hope for change in the face of darkness explains why Agamben, despite the fact that his analysis of the current political situation is dire (some have even said apocalyptic), is often surprised when he is characterized as being pessimistic (Balskus, 2010).



Figure 57. Carolina Arantes. From the project *First Generation* (2013-present)



Figure 58. Carolina Arantes. From the project *First Generation* (2013-present).



Figure 59. Carolina Arantes. From the project *First Generation* (2013-present)



Figure 60. Carolina Arantes. From the project *First Generation* (2013-present).



Figure 61. Carolina Arantes. From the project *First Generation* (2013-present).



Figure 62. Carolina Arantes. Archival image around 1975 from the project *First Generation* (2013-present).

## 6.5 INTERLUDE 4. PERSPICERE: THE INVENTION OF SELF, 2017, DZIFA PETERS



Figures 63-66. From the project *Perspicere: The Invention of Self*, 2017 (2021).<sup>92</sup>

This last section introduces a cluster of thoughts on the construction of identities in connection to the aspect of *perspective*. The ideas will be discussed along an artistic project by myself (*Perspicere: The Invention of Self*, 2017), following the previous chapter Interludes in integrating arts-based research as a form of knowledge production. Proposing that the project portrays protagonists that exemplify a code switch in cultural identity and perspective, it makes use of an auto-fictional approach, by means of combining documentary

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<sup>92</sup> Online link video essay: *Perspicere: The Invention of Self*, 13 min, 2017 <https://vimeo.com/218451745>

and fictional elements. The project examines the construction of identity of the self and the Other in a globalized world, specifically in the context of postcolonial, diasporic cultural identities.

The project *Perspicere: The Invention of Self* (2017) consists of an essay text, photographic portraits (Figure 63-67), and a video work. I combined these different formats in a spacial multi-media installation. Focus of the project is a young man in Lisbon. Tony, the young man of creole origin has emigrated to Portugal from the former West African Portuguese colony Guinea Bissau and was originally born in the former French colony Guinea Conakry. The project discusses notions of the diasporic self, as a complex form of cultural identity, and elaborates on the aspect of perspective as an identity-establishing principle.

The accompanying essay carries the same title as the project and is organized in seven different chapters – designated as parts – which is outlined in the essay's table of contents. Here it already becomes apparent, that the different parts consist of several subsections, indicated by short subtitles in four differing fonts (e.g., *Going back*, *Semiotics of a love story*, *My father*, *The Invention of Self*). Due to these layers and the contradictory notion of the content, signified by the use of different fonts, a single and dominant author is questioned.

The organization of these four layers is revisited throughout the essay and works as and emphasize for the attempted multi-perspective fragmentation of the photographic narration.<sup>93</sup>

The different perspectives or layers that articulate the essay are a lyrical third person storytelling, that entails a love-story and fictional elements, a first person perspective, that is told from the perspective of the artist/ project maker, transcriptions from interviews with the protagonist Tony and references from secondary literature that had influence on the project. The reader learns that my encounters with the protagonist took place both on a personal and project-related level. Throughout the essay (and the video), the reader/ viewer are urged to make sense of the overall contents, connections, and cross-references between the four layers of narration, whereas the different layers incorporate differing functions: The first layer is mediated through a third person narrative structure. It talks about the encounter between artist and protagonist and includes the development of a personal relationship, embedded

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<sup>93</sup> My idea of a multi-perspective has been inspired by the narratological term multiperspectivity (cf. Lindemann, 1999)

into a semi-fictional and dream-like setting that leaves the authenticity of the story told open at many times. The second layer of narration translates like an inner dialogue with me and myself, reflecting on the protagonist her “object” of study and the overall process of the project: “Later, we started to work together for my project. He understood that I had asked him to become part of the project due to his migration background and his experiences of different cultures and different realities” (4). It becomes apparent here, that my connection to the project simultaneously works on a personal level, with myself having a mixed-race background: “I never met anybody like you before”, I said – “Why, because I'm black?” he asked – “No my family is black too”, I said. “I mean, I never met a person like you before” (20). The third layer of narration entails transcriptions from interviews held with the protagonist. The vocabulary of the English language used in these sections, changes drastically, as Tony is not a fluent English speaker. The reader also learns that we attempted to communicate in different languages at times. Autobiographical notes on his life are accompanied by personal reflections on life, identity, migration, Africa and Europe and often bring together contradictory features of this persona: “In my world, I’m never scared of somebody. This one time with the gun and the shot, it’s like now I have the conscience, I could have lost my life, you know. But I’m never ever scared, you know [...] In this moment, when he shot, maybe I was scared, but before I was not scared. When he shot, I saw there were bullets. I stayed like this. But I am never scared of somebody” (35).

The fourth level of narration introduces a more conceptual side of the project by bringing together different references discussing notions of identity, politics and endeavors towards multiculturalism, specifically in the context of the city of Lisbon:

Are mongrelisation and hybridity a way of disavowing the actual, imposed borders on those whom discourses of ‘difference’ insist on segregating through subtle exclusionary practices? Is citizenship, as a form of providing equal rights to everyone, a way of ensuring effective equality to those who want to belong, but insist on clinging to their (re)invented difference [...] - last but not least, because they feel they are not wanted” (Ribeiro Sanches, 2010).

The large-format photographic prints of the protagonist resemble polaroids in oversized scale. The digital photographic material has been designed in reference to the polaroid and appears as an almost nostalgic quote of that quick picture – in times, when the speed of digital images has become omnipresent, and platforms like Instagram provide the ground for never-ending self-picturization. The photographs have all been taken in Tony’s private

bedroom. By means of switching his clothing and his behavior pattern, different facets of his personality are being revealed. The viewer might discover himself literally trying to get a picture of that person, whose identity could supposedly stand for the “the African in Europe”, that “stranger” (Simmel, 1908), that “marginal man” (Park, 1928), that lives amongst us without being one of us.

In this context, the attribution of certain pre-assumptions often results in specific images and cultural identities, that lead to the re-identification of the diasporic subject with these specific entitlements, embracing these very particular perspectives that were imposed on him priorly. The performed representations of cultural identity (re)enacted by Tony, by means of these perspectives range from: his Muslim identity, his African identity, his European identity, his Rastafarian identity, his fashion culture, his literate identity, his criminal identity, his immigrant identity, his masculine identity, and so on and so forth.

The video work consists mostly of extreme close ups of the protagonist. The camera slowly moves in a macroscopic mode over photographs of his body and his immediate surrounding, while his face is mostly left out. Skin, clothing, and other surfaces are being examined on their role as codes that construct meaning and identity in an almost cartographic manner. The close ups are occasionally interfered by urban recordings and are acoustically supported by excerpts from the essay text in different voices. Fragments of his biography, his memories and his self-image are combined with stories of suburban and urban Lisbon and his perspective on life itself. But also, the artist herself becomes a part of the story: the voice over describes their encounter in a very fragmentary, almost dreamlike manner, which de-centralizes the overall narration while being told through the above mentioned different narrative perspectives.

The filmic work is projected onto a textile canvas, which serves as a white background from the other side for one of the photographs. The installation deliberately moves along a thin line between black box and white cube, or rather tries to generate a hybrid form out of these two models, by means of using dimmed lighting design and the blackout projection textile. The installation of the photographs withdraws from the idea of a fixed image and identity of the protagonist. The exhibition appears almost uncompleted; some of the photographs are “still” leaning against the wall or lying on the floor.

The project focuses on phenomena in relation to postcolonial migration and its resulting complex perspectives on identity, cultural hybridity and transcultural code

switching. It combines a documentary approach with a supposed staging for the camera, as well as the interweaving of a personal and professional connection between artist and protagonist (who later became her husband). The combination of a documentary and a fictional approach examines the construction of identity of the self and the Other in a globalized world, specifically in the context of postcolonial, diasporic cultural identities. The cinematography indicates that the project is about perspective, that turns out to be a voyeuristic one. It is about the perspective of the protagonist on himself, for the sake of – as the title indicates – an invention of himself. It is also about the perspective of the viewer, who is able to observe himself in that process of viewing. The viewer makes connection to things he has heard about, read about or experienced and concludes this for his own personal self and world image. In the end, it turns out to be an interplay between the construction and dissolution of identities, imaginations, and images.

I argue further that in the context of diasporic identities, a multiperspective narration merges into a double or multiple-sided perspective, and, as a consequence, into a simultaneous resistance and identification with the discourse, as relatedly described in W.E.B Du Bois principle of double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) or Franz Fanon's thoughts on appropriation in *Black Skin, white Masks* (1952), that find their subsequence in the idea of *mimicry* as a form of never a achieved re-identification in Homi Bhabha (1994).

However, these different facets and multiple identities result in a cultural phenomenon, often coined as hybridity. In hybridity, the border zones of society are taken as contact making within the concept of hybridity, specifically in the postcolonial context, we have been introduced to the idea of hybridity with the influential approach of Homi Bhabha in the 1990's. It is still to examine, in how far the concept still is contemporarily relevant, what might be the major difficulties within the concept and to what extend it will be helpful to elaborate on further intellectual challenges of the growing complexities in the world today. In the interview *The Third Space* (Rutherford, 1990), Homi Bhabha elaborates on his ideas of translation and hybridity, and in relation firmly distinguishes between the entities of culture diversity and cultural difference. For Bhabha, a certain liminality within cultural difference can be utilized, in order to negotiate what is, in his sense, a conflictual and *incommensurable* state of a (former) multicultural project that supported the idea of cultural diversity: “A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them

within our own grid'. This is what I mean by a creation of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural difference” (Rutherford, 1990: 208).

This claim stands in line with his call for a “notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple and *potentially antagonistic*, political identities” (Rutherford: 208). The *incommensurability* he discusses as “a historical moment in which these multiple identities do actually articulate in challenging ways, either positively or negatively, either in progressive or regressive ways, often conflictually [...] Multiculturalism represented an attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference administering a *consensus* based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity” (208, 209). In Bakhtin’s terms we find two modi of hybridity, as it “once again works simultaneously in two ways: ‘organically’, hegemonizing, creating new spaces, structures, scenes, and ‘intentionally’, diasporizing, intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation” (Young, 2016: 23). Robert Young argues that Bakhtin’s concept has been transformed by Bhabha into an active moment of “challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power [...] a counter- authority, a *Third Space*” (21), and: "Hybridization as ‘raceless chaos’ by contrast, produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha’s restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms” (Young: 23, 24).

Stuart Hall encompasses the idea of a new politics of resistance, homogenization and constructing a counter-hegemony (hybridization as a process of cultural diasporization) (Hall, 1994). In his autobiographical reflections in *Minimal Selves*, we find that Halls self-observation of his identity “has always depended on the fact of being a *migrant*, on the difference from the rest of you (What I’ve thought of as dispersed and fragmented comes, paradoxically, to be the representative modern experience!” (Hall, 1988). He discovers the postcolonial, diasporic, and marginal conditions of his identity to be those same conditions crucial to the postmodern identity as such. Within these new circumstances, he supports new and redefined forms of politics, of “difference” and of “self-reflexivity”. In Amartya Sen's discussion on making choices in diasporic identity, he argues:

There are a great variety of categories to which we simultaneously belong, examples of diverse categories concern: gender, race, religion, education, attitude etc. When they compete for attention and priority over each other [...] the person has to decide on the relative importance to attach to the respective identities” which then depends on context

[...] We do belong to many different groups, in one way or another, and each of these collectivities can give a person a potentially important identity (Sen, 2006: 19-24).

Sen stresses the importance of reasoning and choice, by means of “the need to see the role of choice in a context-specific way”. Two important aspects emerge here: Firstly, identities are plural, and a person has to make choices about what relative importance to consider to the specific identities. Here, identifying with others, in various different ways, can be extremely important for living in a society. We do not “discover” these identities, as if it were a purely natural phenomenon. In fact, we are all constantly making choices, if only implicitly, about priorities to be attached to our different affiliations and association. We could go as far as to say, we always construct identities by making choices, also as means for communicating ourselves to others. Identifying to a great extent with that concept of ourselves, we forget about that constructive notion, and tend to “own” our identities as a consequence. Sen additionally refers to Pierre Bourdieu: in order to mention how a social action can end up “producing a difference when none existed”, and “social magic can transform people by telling them that they are different [...] In other words, the social world constitutes differences by the mere fact of designing them” (Sen, 2006: 27; cf. Bourdieu, 1993).

In my artistic practice, I make use of autobiography as fiction and fiction as complementary to the real, thus examining the indications of multiple diasporic identities. This auto-fictional approach encompasses notions of documentary formats such as fiction films and helps to establish the portrayal of a code switch in the diasporic cultural identities addressed. The idea of cultural code switching encompasses the linguistic principle of code switching and can be transferred to various different ways of communication and expression-like gestures, facial expressions, and body language, as well as attitudes expressed in customs, traditions, habits, clothing etc. that all embody culture – where they transform into a code switch in culture. Looking at cultural code switching as a result of migration, relevant examples can often be found in communities with differing ethnic backgrounds due to mixed partnerships or as a result of migration. However, it becomes plausible that reasons for linguistic code switching (Stroud, 2004; Nilep, 2006), and cultural code switching are most often grounded in sociocultural contexts. This marks the bridge between the sociolinguistic and the sociocultural of the topic.



67. Title image for *Perspicere: The Invention of Self*, 2017

## 6.6 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION

While still pertaining to notions of Afro diasporic memory transmission, postmemory (Hirsch, 2012), and a prosthetic culture of the digital age (Lury, 1998), which were introduced in 5., the last chapter specifically focuses on the performativity in the photographic realm. Here, both Azoulay's photographic agency (2008) and potential history (2019) come again into play, but also the notion of performativity articulated through different modes of camouflage in the diasporic subject find their place (Levin, 2009, 2014). Artistic works by Liz Johnson Artur, Omar Victor Diop, and Carolina Arantes have shown that at issue are the ways in which photography plays a role in promoting exchanges about belonging, contemporary diversity of cultural identity, and the challenges of intersectionality. My research negotiates the identitarian complexities of the present by considering the coexistence of Black identity between the ambivalences of demarcation and marginalization, Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism. Specifically Diop's work reminds us of the potential to think from multidirectional (Rothberg, 2009), perspectives and viewpoints into the archive of Black underrepresented figures and narratives. As the different works have shown above, the examination of identity in connection to the aspect of the *perspective* can be utilized as an effective tool in terms of discussing the self and the Other in a globalized world, specifically in the context of postcolonial, diasporic cultural identities. In the context of many of today's polycultural societies, the encounter of different cultural identities, does take place on a daily basis in various settings and under various circumstances. Not only do we find a dense mixture of cultural heritages in the communities as a result of first generation migration, but also various forms of cultural code switching within the characteristics of second, third or fourth generation multi-national postmigrant identities. The diasporic identity embodies a complex form of alterity within the self. Here, the encounter of the self with the self and the self with the Other, largely have aspects in common. Hinting at the fact that we can also be "that somebody else" that cultural Other, as in the versatile juxtapositions of multiperspectivity, as pointed out by Lindemann, Nünning & Nünning, Hutchinson and Schmid. A code switch in culture exemplifies the idea of a perspective on an otherness situated in us, in form of an estrangement we can observe distinctly from ourselves.

Transgressing towards a transdisciplinary form of multiperspectivity within the photographic realm, my own artistic project *Perspicere – The Invention of Self* (2017) also

hints towards a multimodal dimension of the art (essay/ film/ photographs/ installation), that underline the multiperspective from an angle of format. It is also possible to draw a line from the concept of multiperspectivity to the idea of listening to images (Campt, 2017), and as a counteract to the denial of coevalness (Fabian, 1983), as it allows multiple temporalities, awareness of the plurality of vision (Said, 2001: 148), a concatenation of time (Mbembe in Höller, 2002) and the critique of a neocolonial era that has perpetuated a more complex decipherment and recognition of discourses around a “time-space compression” as introduced by David Harvey as an intrinsic *Condition of Postmodernity* (Harvey, 1989; cf. Lyotard, 1979).<sup>94</sup>

In the realm of performativity, these additional notions of the spectral of commodities leave Afro diasporic identities and representation once more at the crossroad of various ambiguities: between empowering versus disguising and concealing modes of camouflage and mimicry, between prosthetic cultures and friction, between confident poses of multiplicity that try to reconnect with the indigenous, and a multiperspective that fosters a dialectical negotiation of overlapping and contradicting narratives, a listening to the visuality of images between the transmission of postmemories, that may engender inventiveness, but also unfinished businesses of the past. The spectrum of Afro diasporic subjects and Blackness as such is versatile: Herein, transcultural form of code switching in the visual, as an alternation of coexisting cultural identities and perspectives is enriched and also drawn into the concatenation (Mbembe, 2001) of different times, but also their potentialities (cf. Agamben, 1999).

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<sup>94</sup> In postmigration studies, this is exemplified by the shocking encounter with a sweet instead of a familiar salty yogurt of the Arab postmigrant Aymen, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Amr Hatem and Abbas Mroueh (2021) demonstrate what they mean by such a contrapuntal image, that is affective and creates “the possibility of different times coexisting within the same moment, what we call affects time” (287). This also consolidates with the notion of ‘involuntary memory’ by Deleuze and urges the postmigrant to “recalibrate his entire perceptive system based on this affective encounter. To make himself open to a future to come” (288, 289). By including further concepts of an expanded ‘ciné-geography’ (292), the idea of *Listening to images* by Tina Campt that pays attention to elements that you do not see in the image, the authors further elaborate on their idea of the contrapuntal that consists of a “haptic temporality” and “conflated geographies” (293) under postmigrant conditions. Here, they understand Said’s notion of the contrapuntal as an “awareness of the plurality of vision” (285) and interpolate the term with the help of Deleuze’s idea of “movement image” to a “contrapuntal image” that presents itself “quotidian, tacit and transient” (286) (cf. Peters, 2022).



## 5. CONCLUSION

*Cultural studies is concerned with an exploration of culture, as constituted by the meanings and representations generated by human signifying practices, and the context in which they occur. Cultural studies has a particular interest in the relations of power and the political consequences that are inherent in such cultural practices. The prime purposes of cultural studies, which is located in the institutions of universities, publishing houses and bookshops, are the processes of intellectual clarification that could provide useful tools for cultural/political activists and policy makers [...] Most writers in the field would probably agree that the purposes of cultural studies are analytic, pedagogic and political. In particular, cultural studies has sought to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by forms of social agency in the pursuit of change. This engagement with politics is, for Hall (1992), what differentiates cultural studies from other subject areas. Hence, cultural studies can be thought of as a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice.*

(Barker, 2004: xviii-xix).

This doctoral thesis met the challenge of assembling case studies that follow a transdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and comparative approach, combining postcolonial and Black studies with memory studies, anthropological reflections, visual culture analysis, embedded in the discipline of culture studies. Here, the account of the colonial, postcolonial, diasporic, and contemporary era is additionally intervened by the Interludes 1-4 that connect the chapters with one another by employing a non-linear temporality, juxtaposing the main objects of study in the corpus to my own artistic practice by means of a hybrid methodology which incorporates arts-based research as a form of knowledge production.

The research questions that were hereby addressed, negotiated throughout the dissertation and dealt with the many ways in which the photographic medium tells stories of intercultural polarities, potential histories, or a transnational migrant knowledge; whether there is a form of transcultural code switching involved in the visual realm, or, in other words whether a coexistence and alternation of cultural identities and perspectives can be recognized. These photographic tropes transmitted across generations and transferred from the private to the public and the collective, were identified as mnemotechnique. Finally, I addressed working comparatively with different contexts, overlapping histories, with different memories and images, within contemporary discourses of Blackness, also with regards to our digital age.

As the case studies have shown, the medium of photography bears a rich source of cultural, scholarly, and artistic knowledge on African and Afro diasporic identities, because the latter convene articulations of representation, as well as policies that revolve around image-making, thus generating cultural identities through their representation and en- or decoding (cf. Hall, 1997, 1999). The embedding of cultural memory that finds itself at the conjunction of the private and the public, articulates traces versus externalizations of memory (cf. Ruchatz, 2008), leaving the photograph as a mnemonic object which also pertains to its haptic materiality and its embedded sounds of history (cf. Edwards, 2004, 2006) as well as sonic sources of Afro cultural narratives (cf. Campt 2012, 2017). The dissertation convened here methods of recoding in contemporary analysis of products of art in Afro cultures.

Starting out with the notion of temporality and a denial of coevalness with reference to Fabian (1983) in **3. Unfolding Colonial Unevenness**, the dissertation developed the proposal of unfolding colonial unevenness by introducing the history of photography on the

African continent in the colonial era and its historical, sociocultural, and political developments. This was complemented by portraying the Basel Mission archive's photograph, *The black pastor and his wife* (c.a. 1908) in a close reading, and a reexamination of the idea of "reading the image in the other context", as introduced by historian Paul Jenkins (2011). Here, the pastor's wife Emilia Quarateng who is also the Queen Mother Nana Akua Oye exemplifies colonial battle and its disavowal of indigenous culture and practices, which embeds the idea of agency in womanhood along struggles of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in colonial Ghana. This intersectionality also negotiates the idea of a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) in the context of broader Africana studies, as well as the concepts of hybridity and ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994).

Therein, the case studies revealed the notion of transcultural entanglements along the story of the Queen Mother, as well as in the photograph of *Schoolgirls knitting* (1915-16). This transcultural notion of entanglement is supported by what the thesis introduced as a form of photographic reversion, where the so called Other reclaims agency in the form of unfolding potential histories (Azoulay, 2019; cf. Agamben, 1999) of the sitters' sociohistorical contexts and points towards multidirectional readings in visual analysis (cf. Rothberg, 2009). Here, the colonial unevenness is intertwined with the denial of coevalness in temporality (Fabian, 1983) and the construction of the project of modernity as such (cf. Latour, 1991 et al.), which also addresses the framework of Mudimbe's idea of the invention of Africa (1988), as a construct by the West and a reappropriation of this idea in the African context.

The rereading of the photographic missionary archive material generates a countervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2011) and a photographic reversion in the context of contemporary scholarship. This also points towards the research that has been done identifying early and simultaneous use of the photographic medium by African photographers (cf. Behrend and Wendl, 1998 et al.), and, as a consequence the long term Africanization of the medium (cf. Vokes and Newbury, 2018). In the following, the doctoral dissertation turned to photography from the African side in the colonial era, by tracing the evolution of African studio photography along the Deo Gratias Photo Studio and other examples of West African studio photography in Ghana.

The notion of the spectral as a prism of identitarian articulations and an interpolation to Bhabha's concept of hybridity (1994), opened the framework to challenge the

understanding of historical hybridities in the retrospective and contemporary ones in the making. Here, the spectrum in Barthes' conception offered an angle to look at the spectral notions of photography. On the other hand, the spectral as a specter convenes the other side of the term. In reference to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993), and the idea of ghost as a social figure on the margins (Gordon, 2008), was described as spectral identities (Kröger and Anderson, 2015),) or spectral humans (Butler and Spivak, 2007). This dissertation worked with the terminology of spectral identities but interpreted its use in a variation of the term that integrates to notion of a spectrum of identities into the ghostly idea of the spectral. Not only does the notion of the spectral reflect the photographic medium and its spectrum of performativity in the return of the dead (Barthes, 1980), but it also resonates with the idea of a mnemonic afterimage, as well as the West African photographic realm that identifies photographic negatives as ghosts, which is termed the "saman" in Akan in Ghana (Wendl, 1998).

Thus, the idea of the spectral has been discussed in postcolonial and visual culture as shown in the chapters above. What this brings to the table is a specter of the colonial and a disparity and unevenness that has constituted large parts of the organization of a contemporary world, as Azoulay has argued (2008, 2019). Nevertheless, the potential histories (Azoulay, 2019) that are embedded in the sitters' representation in mnemonic photographic objects, can be related to Agamben's reflections on the notion of potentiality as such (1999). Herein, Nana Akua Oye and the knitting schoolgirls from the Kingdom of Bamum exemplify the early transcultural entanglements that call for a multidirectional approach towards cultural memory within the photographic realm. The denial of coevalness (Fabian, 1983) is thus negotiated as well as disclaimed. The factual coeval existence of an African photography since the very beginning of the medium, also constitutes a wider understanding of African image-making retroactively. Finally, the first Interlude in **3.** negotiated my own artistic practice as a base for a scholarly endeavor and served as a contemporary account of transcultural artistic entanglements, proposing a decolonial approach to a German exhibition context by transplanting the setting of a rural clan meeting in the Volta Region of Ghana, *The conversation tree* (2016) to an art space in Dusseldorf.

In **4. Independence and the Postcolonial Invention of Self**, the main objects of study were focused on the work of photographer James Barnor, in particular the first ever picture he took at his Ever Young studio. The era of struggle for independence in Ghana, which acts

as a precedent case to Sub-Saharan West Africa, because it was the first country in the region to gain independence, was a time of tranquil uproar and utopian aspiration. Coming from the colonial premise of unevenness and the denial of coevalness (Fabian, 1983), the dissertation also integrates Mignolo's critique of the ideology of culture versus nature, and tradition versus modernity (2011), as well as Chakrabarty's critical reflections on Europe as a global center, which constitutes the binary of center and periphery (2000). All this left African modernism at the forefront of utopian self-invention on the one hand but tied it also into complex negotiations of Westernized concepts of modernity and ideas of cultural polarities within the center-periphery binary between global north and south.

Here, the notion of the archive in the context of missionary objectives, brought into play the idea of morbidity and resuscitation of life (Mbembe, 2002), but also contrasted recent research that recounts the history of vigorous image-making in the colonial era by Africans in their countries themselves (Geary, 1986, 2017; Vokes and Newburn, 2018; Haney; 2013, Wendl, 1998, et al.). Whereas the notion of the specter related to haunting unfinished business of the past and socialist endeavors constituted a Ghanaian confidence and trust in the future (cf. Blakeley, 1986, Manu, 2021 et al.), the spectrum is embodied by the postcolonial photographic archive as such, where the idea of early self-fashioning in West Africa manifests the transcultural notions within a spectrum of identities. Both ideas were brought together in this doctoral thesis in the twofold notion of spectral identities as an interpolation to the concept of hybridity.

The concept of hybridity fosters agency, resistance, and subversion towards a postcolonial time (cf. Bhabha, 1994), and was articulated in the notions of "Afro-beauty" (Buckley, 2006), "Black cool" (Walker, 2012), or "shape shifting" (Thomas, 2012) in the photographic realm. The temporality of the denial of coevalness was cast aside, following concepts such as Pan Africanism, which thrived within Africa and crossed the Atlantic, just in order to return to the continent in the most affirmative manner.

The invention of new cultural identities in West African modernism and towards struggles for independence, have demonstrated how new concepts of African self-fashioning, beauty, coolness, and a resistance in tranquility were intertwined with an Africanization of the photographic medium, that integrated identifications with traditionalism and concepts of the nation-state. James Barnor's work served here as a case study that offers profound insights into these historical events and the subsiding cultural

memory. Soon, cultural hybridities surpassed a dreary concept of nationalist cultural identity towards mixing and matching, despite honorable aspirations towards a global Pan-Africanism of Nkrumah and his fellows. A glimpse into my artistic practice was demonstrated in Interlude: 2, by revisiting the project *Being a guest* (2015-present), where archival family photographs of my grandparents negotiated Ghanaian identities around independency and its echoes in contemporary cultural memory. Here, the role of the vernacular archive became a site of mnemonic witnesses of West African postcolonial narratives.

**5. Articulations of memory: The Reinvented Diaspora** examined diasporic memory transmission with the help of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. The dissertation exposed the notion of Westernized projections of prosperity and cultural identities in the making in the Ghanaian context in the work of Phillip Kwame Apagya, and also the power of the imaginative within African photographic culture, whereas James Barnor who was followed along his migration to London, where he became a major chronologist of a British society in transition and an advocate for new Black beauty and representation. The sound of a family album (Cole, 2021), related to Tina Campt's idea of *Listening to images* (2017, cf. Edwards, 2004, 2006), followed the reasoning behind sonic and ephemeral transmission of (post)memories and *Family Frames* (Hirsch, 1997, 2012). They demonstrated why diasporic images matter (Campt, 2012), also with regards to the notions of pose and nostalgia, and revealed diasporic affiliations (Campt, 2019) in the context a culture of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1994).

Russian-Ghanaian artist photographer Liz Johnson Artur subsequently demonstrated postmodern accounts of diasporic movement with her project *Black Balloon Archive*, in which postcolonial histories of cultural identity and ethnicity are entailed but exempted from the dichotomy of a black versus white culture in Johnson Artur's approach. To a crucial extend, it has been demonstrated that the notion of a diasporic archive may serve as a place of sanctuary, that hosts dialogical encounters. However, as African migration and return also awakens specters of colonialism, the ghost also transgresses the spirits and becomes a social figure in the context of black communities on the margins (cf. Demos, 2013; Mbembe, 2001; 2021; Quayson, 2013a; Gordon, 2008). As Mbembe notes, the postcolony thrives through its heterogeneity, but also faces complexities in a "concatenation of time" (Mbembe in Höller, 2002), which again relates to postcolonial conditions of unfinished businesses. With

this perspective, the notion of the spectral was linked to the idea of returning to the postcolony (Demos, 2013), in which entropic dichotomies of Afro cultures challenge postcolonial aftermaths. Finally, my artistic project *You and We* (2014) exemplified the idea of what I would call diasporic afterimages, which are captured in the mnemonic quality of photographic archival objects, and the photomontages that were developed from them.

The last chapter **6. Transcultural Code Switching and Contemporary Visual Cultures** turned towards aspects of performativity in the photographic realm. The dissertation looked at a prosthetic culture (Lury, 1998), performativity and camouflage (Levin, 2009, 2014) and the notion of multiperspectivity inspired by narratology and film studies cf. Lindemann et al.).

This final chapter brought together reflections on the contemporary complexities of identities and representation in diasporic Afro cultures. Here, the dissertation revisited the critical framework of the previous chapters to scrutinize their application in contemporary developments in diasporic Afro cultures and identities under the premise of contemporary articulations of complex circumstances such as postmigration (cf. (Gaonkar, Hansen, Post, and Schramm, 2021), Afro European, Afropean (Pitts, 2019), and Afropolitanism (Mbembe, 2021), in today's European metropolises of polyculture politicization (cf. Schwarz and West-Pavlov, 2007 et al.). Photography in postcolonial studies, visual culture studies and memory studies, discussed within the challenges of the contemporary, are what challenged the presented research project. Transcending the borders of visual-cultural spheres is evidently an act of performing membership and difference, which has been constituted in colonial and postcolonial eras. It will be significant to characterize more of these very specific forms of difference in future scholarship. They describe forms of difference that unfold as alterities within a singular identity where it performs as a transcultural alternation of identity.

Constitutions of the past, as in colonial narratives, of which some have been hidden under the premise of colonial unevenness, entail tropes of cultural polarities, but also potential histories that underlie a variety of postcolonial and contemporary identities. As many diasporas potentially embody the connection between their first and second home countries, also, within the notion of postmemory, many examples of transcultural code switching in the visual show that potential histories are able to serve as vehicles for agency and empowerment, while they might be challenged by the false memory syndromes that accompany our time. However, the potential of these tropes lies in the constituency of visual-

cultural code switching, and in being able to create new countervisual meaning, especially when examined under the premise of a multidirectional approach.

In this multidirectional sphere we can observe formations of identity in the numerous fields: from articulations of memory to the sociocultural to the visual world. As a result, visual expression and seeing photographically can be also defined as a form of language. One might also suggest that postcolonial visual phenomena, such as visual-cultural code switching, have the ability to embody forms of subversion, resistance and empowerment, by means of their performativity, enabling them to see and speak from in-between and simultaneously from several perspectives. This includes the characteristic of alternating between various possible visual-cultural codes of identity and representation, and a re-coding of rigid concepts of Blackness, whether within popular culture or in the code switch into the white cube space. Finally, this performative agency finds itself reflected in the transnational migrant knowledge which is embedded in the mnemotechnique of these photographs.

The final part of the thesis initiated contemporary complexities of performativity in the photographic realm in an era of postmigration (cf. Gaonkar, Hansen, Post, and Schramm, 2021), by addressing notions of camouflage (Levin), mimicry (Bhabha, 1994), multiplicity (Clifford, 2013), and friction (Tsing, 2005), as well as a prosthetic culture in the digital age (Lury, 1998) in further works of Liz Johnson Artur. The photographic practice of Senegalese artist Omar Victor Diop reminds of the importance of excavating the archive to consider intriguing figures of Black history, but also reveals a contemporary cosmopolitan artist that is concerned with recurring principles of racial discrimination, as in the world of contemporary sports which he addresses by integrating respective soccer props. In this context, Diop unravels a distinct juxtaposition and ambivalence between cosmopolitanism and marginalization, which also addresses the ambiguity of fashionable consumer culture and the fathoming of a migrant aesthetic, as in the example of the *Adidas* amateur editorial competition (2016). Against this backdrop, the notion of the spectral was revisited and linked to the haunting of global capitalism and *Specters of the Atlantic* (Baucom, 2005).

Carolina Arantes' work once more relates to the idea of postmemories in the Afro diasporic archive, as well as a postmigrant condition, where articulations of camouflage as a complex negotiation of cultural identity may take place within Arantes' sitters, the *First Generation* of Afro French (2013-present).

Arts-based research was used as a methodology throughout the dissertation, which also pertained to Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject (2019), and its entanglements of the private and the collective, and in this case also a dialogue between my artistic practice and academic research. This was again exemplified by my artistic project *Perspicere: The Invention of Self*, 2017 (2021) in the last chapter. In this context, the idea of multiperspectivity in the photographic realm relates again to a narratology of the image, that offers stories that can be listened to (Campt, 2017), but also interpolates the notion of hybridity of photographic sitters towards the idea of coexisting and alternating cultural perspectives and reveals transcultural entanglements, operating in multifunctional ways.

The intend of this dissertation was not to discredit the concept of hybridity entirely, but to provoke a shift towards a more profitable breakdown of identity politics in contemporary Afro cultures. As one of the most classic concepts of identity in postcolonial studies, the idea of hybridity continues to function as useful concept and method to negotiate postcolonial, decolonial, and diasporic identities. Rather, the aim here is to offer an interpolation of notions that are already embedded in the idea of hybridity, and place new focus points on these aspects in the context of contemporary polycultures. These notions were introduced in the thesis as the alternation of coexisting cultural identities and perspectives, as spectral identities, and transcultural code switches, negotiated in the visual realm.

Are these really tropes of polarity? The title *Tropes of Polarity* was understood and utilized as a provocation all along, as transcultural historic entanglements have shown that polarities were often times constructed or politically motivated. An agency can be found, where the alternation of coexisting cultural perspectives and a visual-cultural form of code switching become moments of awareness and recognition towards their subjects own potentialities (cf. Agamben, 1999). It is ultimately within the notion of potentiality of taking on different and new performative roles, whether signified as code-switching (cf. Stroud, 2004), shape shifting (Thomas, 2012), oscillation, coexistence of identities or alternations of perspectives that lies at the heart of potential political agency in diasporic Afro cultures, once it is acknowledged, and, in which photographs play a role in contributing to this pro and retroactive storytelling due to their mnemonic qualities.

This dissertation contributed to the potential of holistic analysis of photographs in postcolonial and Afrodiasporic contexts by bridging the transdisciplinarity between visual

culture, memory, and ethnographic studies and integrating arts-based research as a sophisticated methodology. The principle of transcultural alternation or code-switching within the spectral characteristics of postcolonial subjects led to a new approach in scholarship that negotiated a potentiality that oscillates between the conscience of colonialism and present endeavors of decoloniality in Afro-cultures.

This dissertation contributed to the potential of an extensive analysis of photographs in postcolonial and Afrodiasporic contexts. It bridged the transdisciplinarity between visual culture, memory, and ethnographic studies and integrated art-based research as a sophisticated methodology. The principle of transcultural alternation or code-switching within the spectral characteristics of postcolonial subjects led to a new approach in scholarship that negotiates a potentiality oscillating between the consciousness of colonialism and contemporary efforts at decoloniality in Afro cultures.



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