Cultural and Corporate Belonging in the Course of Transnational Biographies: A Case Study of a Sierra Leonean Immigrant in Germany

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Abstract: How does cultural and corporate affiliation emerge in transnational biographies? How does it develop under the influence of global and national power structures? These questions are addressed in this study that combines epistemological approaches dealing with the interplay of social and individual factors in identity formation with a structural analysis of historical power relations in form of racism and colonialism.

Empirically this paper identifies how immigrants deal with challenges of integration into the host society and incorporate these experiences into their biographical self-construction. It concentrates on African and particularly Sierra Leonean immigrants in Germany. The findings are generated from a reconstructive analysis of selected biographical narrations which were scrutinized from different perspectives.

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1. Introduction

"Yeah and if you look at this, the longest time of my life, I am twenty-nine now. With eight I went back and in 1996 I came back (calculating silently), nine and eight equals seventeen, I have now been in Germany for seventeen years, which is longer than I was in Sierra Leone (laughing), and honestly I feel a strong sense of belonging to Germany. Yes, it is a certain part of my life and I don't know—perhaps that was God's wish, you know ..."

(Mehmet Bankanu, December 2005)

Mehmet is a young man of West-African origin living in Germany, but according to his passport he is a citizen of Sierra Leone. In the quote he deals with his corporate belonging, which he adjusts to different societies. The quote thus expresses the central question of this paper by asking how corporate and cultural belonging develops and transforms in transnational biographies and which social factors influence this process. [1]

Arjun APPADURAI (1996, p.49) circumscribes trans-nationality as reaching beyond or transcending specific territorial or national boundaries. Following this assumption, transnational migration describes people changing their place of residence between different countries, or as Roger ROUSE (1991, p.11) puts it, a movement from one significant social environment to another. In this transition process APPADURAI (1996, p.49) locates a crucial link between space, stability, and social and cultural reproduction of group identity. [2]

There are two everyday notions of defining group or corporate affiliation: According to the first the individual belongs to that group/society into which he or she was born and socialized. The second relates to inherited affiliation—meaning that a person belongs to the same group as his or her ancestors. Furthermore this notion always appears to be a balance between self-attribution and attribution by others. On the one hand, I can define myself by whom and where I belong, but this process is always influenced by others or societal structures. Affiliation or identity is always attached to the relationship between individual and society, and this interdependent relationship will be addressed in order to find answers to the research question at hand. [3]

This study focuses on biographical self- and group-constructions of African immigrants in Germany, in particular from Sierra Leone. It is based on the assumption that Africa and Europe form two significantly different social environments, and migration between these requires strategies of cultural and social reproduction. Furthermore, the relationship between Europe and Africa seems to be still burdened by (post-) colonial power structures which affect such strategies of individual and corporate affiliation. [4]

The following chapter will introduce and examine the relevant theoretical and methodological approaches relating to the above mentioned research question regarding conjunction possibilities. Chapter three empirically traces these

approaches in Mem's biography by reconstructing this biography from different perspectives. Finally, chapter four concludes the findings of the study and specifies theoretical and methodological implications as well as challenges arising from them. [5]

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Discourse, power relations, and belonging

2.1.1 Discourse analysis and postcolonial power relations

The discourse concept has its roots in the work of Michel FOUCAULT (1981, 1989, 2003) and seeks to explain the distribution of power in society and how this distribution affects people's lives. Discourses are abstract ideas that govern how people think, speak, express, produce knowledge, and create symbols about certain subjects in different societal areas or disciplines such as medicine, economy, sexuality, family, government, etc. Some positions within such discourse prevail and form the "truth" concerning the matter at hand and enforce different forms of power—such as economic or social power—over members of society. This means that the discourse assigns and excludes individuals to and from positions of power according to specific criteria. Therefore the theory regards social structures as the driving force after which every individual develops and adjusts his or her personal self or identity. [6]

Whereas FOUCAULT's concept is intended to evaluate the inscription of power into all areas of human life, other theoreticians such as Stuart HALL (1993, 1994, 1995) and Homi BHABHA (1994, 1997) narrowed this approach to focus on the particular discourse formation of postcolonial relations that attempt to describe the consequences of colonization for cultures and societies. They assume that global and—in the era of transnational migration—domestic power structures have been shaped by the colonial relationship to this day. In a centuries-long discursive process—a global structure of establishment and outsiders[1]—has developed which assigns positions to people according to the exclusion criteria of race, class, and gender. This structure places Europe and North America, the so-called Western world, and its culture at the center of modernity and socio-economic development, and this superior position is maintained by means of a sharp demarcation from other places which are then deemed backwards areas that have not yet reached a similar state of development. The discursive ideology materializes in a history of Western imperialism characterized by real exploitation of the world's marginalized areas. The system consisting of center and periphery operates at a global geographical level as well as within the Western societies in which groups of European origin hold the power and immigrant groups are disadvantaged. [7]

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1 Phrase borrowed from Norbert ELIAS and John L. SCOTSON (2001), whereas the explanations refer to another context. In their book ELIAS and SCOTSON investigate corporate inclusion and exclusion processes in human societies.

According to this theory it is the differentiation of center vs. periphery that automatically assigns individuals a cultural identity according to their racial origin. Such a classification is based on a static concept of culture according to which the discourse operates. Culture is defined as a transcendent, stable, and durable reference point that unifies people into corporate groups regardless of the actual transformations they have undergone in history (HALL, 1994). Race serves as indicator of this essential cultural identity or origin as skin color and physical makeup are the visible markers of inclusion or exclusion (STOLER, 2002). [8]

There is a sub-discourse in the (post-) colonial relationship concerning the conception of Africa and Africans. In the center-periphery model, Africa functions as the antagonistic counterpart of cultured, civilized, and developed Europe. For centuries this discursive devaluation has been accompanied by real mechanisms of exploitation which can be divided into three phases. In the first phase—slavery—Africans were violently deported to the Americas and sold as slaves (WALVIN, 2000). This inhuman practice was justified in the form of a racist ideology relating to black people's natural inferiority and subordination. Transatlantic slavery forms the beginning of what is referred to as the African diaspora, a term that attempts to conceptualize the scattering of people of African origin all over the world. The concept can be regarded as an attempt to retain a positive corporate identity despite all historical odds and discursive devaluation (HALL, 1993). The second phase of exploitation took place in form of colonialism—a process in which Europeans conquered and economically and socially drained the African continent. The result was a comprehensive distortion of African social organization and dependence on European structures (RODNEY, 1982). In the postcolonial era—in which African nations function as suppliers of raw materials and consumers of imported processed goods—this relationship of dependence continues to this day and appears to be increasing in strength. [9]

2.1.2 Migration, hybridity, and alternative concepts of cultural affiliation

In the postcolonial era it appears to be impossible to maintain the discursive structure of differentiation outlined here and the clear-cut assignment of positions. An overlapping of cultural spaces has taken place in the course of globalization, transnational migration, and technological innovation. People from the former colonies have become constituent elements of the industrial societies and actively participate in shaping their development. Increased intermixture and networking challenges the concept of static culture as under such circumstances it produces too many contradictions and intermediate spaces. Therefore postcolonial theory intends to identify these contradictions and use them as the starting point in order to develop an alternative culture concept. Following Michel FOUCAULT, Stuart HALL (1993, p.394) suggests conceptualizing identity as flexible points of identification which develop and change in a process over time. Personal or group identity does not mean not "to be" but "to become," it circumscribes "names we give the different conditions through which we are positioned and through which we position ourselves using narrations about the past" (ibid). This quote illustrates how HALL enriches FOUCAULT's concept by adding an individual perspective encompassing biographical agency. [10]

Homi BHABHA (1994, 1997) introduces his refined concept of *hybridity* to the debate. Hybridity is a term borrowed from the field of biology and describes the blending of separate entities. Instead of implying static positions, this concept suggests an embrace of mingling, alteration, vagueness, and ambivalence as the focal point of cultural identity. From these indefinite spaces the hegemonic discourse is challenged and cannot continue to reproduce its structures. [11]

With *mimicry* BHABHA outlines another particular strategy of challenging the discursive structures. This concept circumscribes the reinterpretation of hegemonic categories by ascribing new meanings to words or cultural values. Such a procedure unmasks alleged essentials as context related and intentional constructions. Kien Nghi HA (2004, pp.181ff.) exemplifies this procedure in the context of migrants and minorities by tracing the word "nigger." Previously a vehicle of colonial devaluation, this term has been reclaimed and reloaded by the concerned group. Imbued with a new meaning, the word provides a resource to its users which cannot be tapped by the oppressive system and used to provoke others. [12]

The aforementioned concept of an African diaspora also provides a space for redefining cultural identity. Instead of attempting to retain and reclaim an essential African or black culture, postcolonial writers conceptualize the diaspora as a process characterized by experiences of mixing, cutting, rebuilding, and hybridization (HALL, 1994, p.23). It becomes a decentralized concept with an accent on the benefits of the diaspora experience in a historical process involving creativity, innovation, incorporation, and other achievements (ZIPS, 2003, p.30). Paul GILROY (1993) attempts to describe the same subject using his concept of the *Black Atlantic.* He suggests the African diaspora is characterized by a "double consciousness" circumscribing parallel reference to "roots" and "routes." Roots represent the violent deportation from Africa to America and Europe which was the constituent factor in the development of the idea of an African corporate identity. Routes on the other hand remind us of the completely different life spheres, organization patterns, and affiliations that developed as a result of the journey, uncertainty, and deterritorialization. Thus, the concept of a black corporate belonging must acknowledge the common starting point rooted in the experience of violence and subordination, but at the same time it must accept the different, heterogeneous, and processual character of black culture. [13]

2.2 Social reality, empirical access, and biography

2.2.1 Interpretative sociology and qualitative research

Interactionist or interpretive social sciences are based on the epistemological assumption that there is no static, essential reality in the social world which can be observed and described objectively as one can observe the natural environment. Instead it presumes that social reality is created, shaped, and transformed by individuals' actions and interactions and that it is the product of contact and communication between people. Therefore social reality has to be understood as a constantly changing process whose actual appearance is

determined by the interpretations of the individuals or group of people who profess to hold it. Social reality is generated by people and their interactions in the various life spheres which are shared among its members (GANDER, 2001). However, social reality is subject to the individual interpretation of every single human being. The same principle applies to the concept of identity or affiliation. Within the interpretive paradigm it cannot be regarded as a "transcendent substance which remains identical in the course of biography and independent from external influences" (ibid., p.4). Rather it is constructed through the piling and arrangement of personal experiences which are then embedded into collective social structures and material settings. [14]

The interpretive paradigm is based on the ideas of phenomenologist philosophy which were modified for the applied social sciences in the early twentieth century by German sociologists such as Karl MANNHEIM, who were the first to develop theoretical guidelines for interpretive research. Both were also inspired by Max WEBER's earlier conception of interpretative historical sociology. According to Max WEBER (1994, p.228), sociology "attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects." [15]

These theories also imply that it is also necessary to comprehend the different perspectives of the involved people and to reconstruct how their perception has developed as well as how it is related to larger society structures. The approach employs subjectivity as a key to knowledge rather than seeking an unattainable objectivity. Georg SIMMEL (1992), another German sociologist of that era, investigated the situation of foreigners living in other societies at that time—a work that relates to the question of the affiliation of immigrants in modern European nations. [16]

While the German sociologists were rather focused on theory in the 1920s and 1930s, the concept was transferred to the Chicago School's empirical social research in the United States. Scholars of this tradition—such as William Isaac THOMAS or Robert E. PARK—developed an interdisciplinary, application, and problem-solving oriented research approach for all of the social sciences based on interpretive assumptions. Qualitative studies were published dealing with urbanization, minorities, ethnicity, migration and crime—particularly in the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and education. To this day, qualitative research occupies a major share of the same disciplines evaluating additional fields of research such as work life, sexuality and family, media, social services, health, community development, subcultures, and development studies. [17]

2.2.2 The concept of biography

Since its very beginning, biography has served—alongside other instruments as ethnography or hermeneutics—as one of the predominant methodologies in qualitative research. The assumption that social reality is always related to experiences of individuals implies that it must be reflected in personal biographies. Therefore biographies provide access to individual perspectives on

social phenomena and depict the mutual diffusion of subjective history and collective structures and ideas. Individual experiences are always embedded in corporate frames such as family, workplace, discourses, education, and legal system (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p.171), and these contexts of experience are arranged within the process of a biography. Using a reconstruction of this arrangement, the researcher can draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the corporate frames. [18]

Literature concerning biographical research identifies different social factors that in many cases influence the biographical process. One of these determining factors is childhood socialization, which provides individuals with a general "software" of collective behavior patterns. This implies that migration as a biographical experience implies a disruption of the familiar affiliation strategies and requires the biographer to perform intensified "integration work" (LUTZ, 2000, p.44) in order to affiliate with the new environment. Through this challenge to the familiar, the individual definitions of belonging will be forced to change. [19]

Another assumption of biographical research is that corporate belonging is transported over the course of family history. Classic sociological studies such as Karl MANNHEIM's (1952) addressed concepts of intergenerational "culture transfer" and "social inheritance." Recent biographical studies conceptualize the construction of cultural affiliation as the interplay of socialization in the actual environment and family background orientation. Particularly in migrant biographies this represents a challenge as the two poles do not coincide and sometimes even collide. [20]

Beyond the spheres of learning and inheriting, the process of individual corporate belonging can be determined by incisive biographical experiences—for which Wolf-Dietrich BUKOW (1999) suggests the term "interventions." These experiences include racism, discrimination, war, violent conflict, flight, or displacement—all of which can cause a reconstruction of corporate affiliation. [21]

2.3 Contradictions and useful links

Even though both of the outlined theoretical approaches have their shortcomings, the above remarks illustrate that each of these approaches promises to deliver useful perspectives on the research matter. Be that as it may, combining these approaches poses a challenge to the researcher as they follow contradicting general principles. These contradictions must be considered carefully in order to achieve sound results. [22]

The most important difference between the paradigms is the focus on either structure or the individual. On the one hand, the discourse theory is structure-oriented and explains social development in terms of discursive dynamics. It regards social structures as the results of a process, but the identities they assign to subjects are static. Therefore subjects—especially in FOUCAULT's classic works—are not considered societal actors. FOUCAULT even rejects the notion of an autonomous subject, as in his work this notion is conceptualized as a product

of discursive power structures (PETERMANN, 2004, p.1015). This implies FOUCAULT's further rejection of biography as methodological approach, which he regards as a forced assignment of individuality and means of control over people (SCHÄFER & VÖLTER, 2005, p.165). Applied to the study at hand, the researcher must ask whether or not this approach reproduces immigrants' weak positions of power by giving them a biography. Generally, power within the discourse concept appears as an over-determining factor which, albeit important, alone seemingly cannot fully explain the development of corporate belonging. [23]

Biographical research of the other places individual agency on the frontline of social scientific inquiry. Society and individual affiliation interact and complement each other to form reality. [24]

Theory formation also has a different orientation in the outlined paradigms. Discourse analysis primarily utilizes documents from history, arts, literature, etc. which represent fragments of creation in their era. Biographical research, on the other hand, is based on raising empirical data which are closely oriented towards individual experience. [25]

Despite all these contradictions, a closer look at the paradigms reveals useful conceptual commonalities. The first is anti-essentialism and process orientation as the fundamental policies. While interpretive social science does not regard identity as at all essential, in Foucault's work it is the discourse which is in a permanent process of modification. It is the dominant power positions within the discourse that operate to maintain their power by producing allegedly static identities. But beyond observation of the mode of power operation, postcolonial theory attempts to develop alternative concepts of identity and society based on a hybrid, de-centered, and processual idea of culture. Such a concept coincides with the assumptions of biographical research. [26]

In their paper (2005) Thomas SCHÄFER and Bettina VÖLTER discuss the question of whether biographical research should be conceptualized as a vehicle of discourse analysis, as the effectiveness of discourses becomes evident and accessible especially in biographies. Used as such, the reconstructive analysis of African immigrant biographies in Germany cannot only identify the influence of relevant discourses on their affiliations, but also reveal the weakness of essential ascriptions and sketch out new, unascertained ones. [27]

3. Transnational Biography Reconstructed—the Case of Mehmet Bankanu

3.1 Mem's family history and the history of Sierra Leone

3.1.1 The family background—between rootage, mixing, and dispersal

In the interview transcript, Mem provides hints about his family reaching back to his grandparents' generation on the father's side. According to his account, his grandfather was a Muslim patriarch from the indigenous Temne ethnic group in

the interior of Sierra Leone. The fact that he owned a fruit plantation and had seven wives allows us to conclude that he held a privileged social and financial position in the region. [28]

Mem introduces his grandfather as an authority figure whom he admired and respected. This is possibly because the grandfather represents a deep-rooted ethnic and territorial belonging, a piece of home and identity. [29]

The secure structures become uprooted in the life story of Mem's grandmother. As one of the patriarch's last wives she apparently was dissatisfied with the financial and social care her husband provided. She therefore decided to leave the region and her husband and moved to the capital of Freetown with her young son (Mem's father) where she opened a clothing business.

> "At a certain point my grandma said 'no, now it's enough,' she would go somewhere else to settle down and raise her child, and so she came to the capital with my father, and she was a very competent business woman ..." [30]

In Freetown the grandmother sent Mem's father to a Catholic school. This marks a turning away from Islam under whose influence she herself grew up. This step probably was justified by practical considerations concerning her son's future prospects. At the time in the 1950s Sierra Leone was British protectorate and due to the situation in the colonial administration, a Christian orientation in education promised better perspectives (KARGBO, 2006). [31]

As a Crio, Mem's mother has a very different family background from that of his father. The Crio are a group that was originally formed and modeled by liberated slaves from the Americas and various African countries who settled on the coastline and founded the capital of Freetown at the end of the eighteenth century (KÜVER, 2008).

> "... and Crio actually is a little bit a foreign language, because it was from the slaves who came back, or were brought back to Africa to the coast there and settled there. That's why the city is called Freetown, and the people who came there called it Crio." [32]

Thus, the Crio can be considered an immigrant group in Sierra Leone without a traditional inhabited territory who do not relate their collective identity to static socio-cultural attributes. As a group they instead refer to a shared experience of migration and dispersal—their culture is dominated by notions of overlapping, melting, and plurality. The historical events which they encountered that facilitated this hybrid cultural concept included enslavement and transatlantic procrastination, life in the diaspora, liberation from bondage, and return to and settlement of a symbolic homeland (WYSE, 1991). The Crio self-image contains references to different African cultures, their interpretation and transformation in the transatlantic diaspora, and to the socio-cultural organizational structures of the slave holder societies. One of these references is a strong Christian faith— the Crio were the first major agent of Christianity in Sierra Leone who paved the way for a Christian mission.

> "Because if you hear Crio you will see that it is very much similar to English you know, some people speak it also in Jamaica or in the Caribbean, and in some countries in West Africa, but the people from indigenous tribes in Sierra Leone they are proud and say 'we have our own language, why shall we learn a foreign language like that,' and therefore it comes to conflict ..." [33]

Mem's assessment of the relationship between indigenous and Crio bears significant conflict potential in Sierra Leonean society and is supported by literary sources. According to the Research Group for Integration and Conflict in the Upper Guinea Coast (MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY, 2009), another important attribute of the Crio is that they have held a privileged position in the Sierra Leonean society since settling in the region, as they were politically and economically supported by the British in colonial times. Firstly, this included the development of Freetown as political and economic center that enforced its rule over the hinterland. As a result the Crio seemed to separate themselves from the indigenous people, whom they disqualified as less civilized, as "natives," "provincials," or "country people" (ibid.). This illustrates the colonial discourse as outlined in chapter two. In Sierra Leone the Crio apparently took on the position of the colonizer and therefore also claimed historical representation of the country. With the arrival of the Crio, Sierra Leone obtained a written form of historical significance that had previously been limited to the coastal observations of Portuguese or English traders and military forces. On the other hand, the indigenous population developed objections towards another group of intruders embodied by the slave traders who came and changed their ways of life. [34]

In Freetown, Mem's parents probably met in the 1960s while at the Catholic school—the wedding date is not revealed in the transcript. Be that as it may, the marriage represents an intermixture of different historical and socio-cultural backgrounds and discourses, whereby the father's stable socio-spatial identity stands in marked contrast and competition with the mother's identification with historical transformation, plurality, and dispersal. [35]

3.1.2 The question of faith and religion

The integration of different religious value sets and systems into Mem's family history and personal biography also appears to be remarkable. His family reflects the distribution of religious orientations found in Sierra Leone where Islam and Christianity play influential roles. The number of followers of these religions varies according to the source (AUSWAERTIGES AMT, 2006). Both of these religions were introduced to the country by external forces—Islam via the Sahara in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Christianity via the coast following the settlement of the Crio (KARGBO, 2006). Even though both compete in order to increase their number of followers, a religious divide does not appear to exist between the two groups and religion has not contributed to the country's severe conflicts. [36]

In Mem's family background we find precisely these two positions—Muslim grandfather in the hinterland and a Catholic Crio mother. Furthermore, Mem does not imply that the combination is problematic. The only challenge which arises is the matter of his belonging, as his religious affiliation remains uncertain. It appears as something undefined and open for alteration:

"I was lucky that my parents gave us the free decision which faith to choose, and I came to the conclusion that there is one god, and when I say I am Mehmet everyone thinks I am Muslim, but I think I am rather Catholic, because when I pray I do it more in the Christian way ..." [37]

In addition to the major monotheistic religions, traditional belief systems also have a significant influence in Sierra Leone (FUEST, 1999; SHAW, 1997). More importantly, it seems it is not the clash between Islam and Christianity that causes social conflicts in Sierra Leone, but the contradiction between formal religions and indigenous beliefs (MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY, 2009).

"For Europeans these things do not exist, it is called voodoo or something here. In Sierra Leone they use this voodoo-stuff to confuse people's minds, or people can be killed through it, and it has become everyday practice now ..." [38]

Mem also regards traditional beliefs or magic (he calls it voodoo) as an important element of the Sierra Leonean society which must be critically evaluated. While describing the phenomenon, he seems to not be sure whether or not he himself believes in the effectiveness of this kind of magic. Apparently his own experiences with indigenous beliefs are limited and he struggles to explain it in detail, mentioning superficially sacrificial rituals with animal blood, old men as implementing agents, good and bad magic, and bedevilment. More elaborated is the connection he draws to the monotheistic religions, which in his opinion many people supplement with these practices because they promise more direct and less self-responsible solutions to everyday problems.

"It can be a Christian, it can be a Muslim, on Sunday they all go to church: 'Oh yes I believe in God and so on,' or on Friday to the mosque, 'Oh yeah the world must be healed, we must follow the Prophet,' but afterwards at home faith is defined different, then all that voodoo-stuff comes into play and is used for different purposes ... and if you ask for my opinion I think this voodoo is one of the main reasons for the war to come up." [39]

Mem has a purely negative opinion concerning traditional beliefs and magic. He regards them as dangerous superstitions which acquit people from personal responsibility and lead to a fissure in the society that leads to brutal war. Previous works concerning this phenomenon (SHAW, 1997; MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY, 2009) identify a particular type of traditional magical practices in the whole region of upper Guinea including Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. As a part of traditional cultural and societal knowledge these practices are conducted by powerful "secret societies" which strictly control

access. MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY (2009) believes these secret societies perform rituals and strategies of dealing with foreigners in the region which dramatically gained in importance in the times of the slave trade and the raids into the interior undertaken by traders. Later the Crio and British colonial administration took the place of intruders against which a wall of secrecy was cultivated. In this interpretation we find another parallel to postcolonial theory, as we can see a form of organized indigenous resistance against colonial powers and the hegemonic structures of modernity. The upper Guinea "culture of secrecy" (ibid.) can be compared to Homi BHABHA's concept of mimicry (BHABHA, 1994)—as an invisible strategy of challenging hegemonic discourses. While outwardly adapting world religions which transport global values of civilization, the people on the other hand secretly oppose these values as intangible formal authorities. [40]

MAX-PLANCK-INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY (2009) posits the war as a vehicle for these secret forms of magic to gain in significance—again due to different reasons. The first is that since its beginning the war has produced a stream of displaced persons—either refugees or marauding militia—who are now scattered all over the country. They are the new foreigners, who pose a threat to the stability of local communities, and therefore the old mechanism again takes hold. The second supporting argument is that in the course of war, formerly established modern organizational structures of nation state and civil society disintegrated and traditional structures gained in momentum to replace them. All of these arguments coincide with Mem's belief that there is a genuine cause and effect relationship between traditional forms of knowledge and belief and the country's violent conflict.

> "And if I hear all these things I have to make my mind that I should not endanger my life with that stuff ..." [41]

Furthermore, it is not surprising that Mem himself is excluded from the traditional knowledge he himself tries to access. As Crio culture does not truly represent the indigenous but rather a colonizing agent in the society, he could even be target of such practices. Additionally, Crio culture and self-image is not based on traditionally fixed points as outlined above, and thus neither is Mem's. Instead he regards such beliefs as backwards and provincial. [42]

3.1.3 Migration to Germany and re-migration to Sierra Leone—the postcolonial setup

Around the early 1970s, Mem's parents migrated to Germany where the father began academic studies in medicine and psychology. The mother accompanied him and underwent training as a laboratory technician. After a transition phase of supervised decolonization beginning in the 1950s, the parents' home country of Sierra Leone declared independence in 1961—first as a constitutional monarchy under the umbrella of the British Commonwealth with the queen of England as symbolic head of state. The first years after independence were characterized by political instability. There were attempted military coups and occasional changes

in state leadership (KÜVER, 2008). Finally Siaka Stevens successfully established permanent power and declared Sierra Leone a republic in 1971. [43]

The interview transcript does not clarify whether or not political turbulence in the 1960s had an influence on the parents' decision to migrate to Europe. Their life stories indicate that they might have been a part of the efforts to construct the postcolonial state. After the withdrawal of colonial powers, a domestic administrative elite was put in place which had to be educated abroad in order to take on the task of running a country (FAGE, 1995). The interview text reveals several hints that Mem's parents planned to return to top positions in their home country after all their years in Germany and maintain connections to influential persons. With his employment in a British military hospital in 1984, the father possibly prepared for his integration into the Sierra Leonean military establishment. The parents' efforts to become part of Stevens' elite network can be interpreted as identification with his authoritarian regime. [44]

In the meantime Sierra Leone encountered all the challenges facing young postcolonial African states. The newly formed political and administrative elite failed to act responsibly in terms of developing the country and instead established a system geared exclusively towards their own profit and preservation of power (JUNG, n.d.). While the leading network generated more and more wealth by means of corruption and oppression of potential oppositional forces, the situation for the majority of the population worsened and economic tensions increased. This whole system was backed by continuing state militarization. As outlined in the previous chapter, neo-colonialism describes a continuation of the colonial power structure with altered general conditions such as formal political self-reliance and a free global market. Of course the postcolonial states continued to serve the economic and strategic interests of the former colonial powers, which in this case might have helped enable such a hazardous policy of militarization. Mem supports this view in the transcript:

> "... there are some international companies who have a strong interest and supply arms for certain information or natural resources as diamonds, gold, or rubber ..." [45]

In 1984 the family re-migrated to Freetown in Sierra Leone. After a difficult phase of acclimatization to the new environment, Mem describes the country in the 1980s as a miniature paradise with no indications of violent conflict on the horizon. This assessment stands in sharp contrast to the aggravating social and economic problems the society faced. This might be due to the fact that he speaks from the point of view of a person remembering his childhood, and, because of his family's privileged position, he probably really was not affected by these problems. The stated hypothesis that his parents belong to the country's elite, which was associated with the authoritarian leaders, is supported in this part when Mem talks about the dictator from neighboring Liberia:

> "Our president at that time was Siaka Stevens, who was a good friend of the president of Liberia, Samuel K. Doe ... and my mother often went to Liberia, and she

was in functions with K. Doe himself. She actually knew him by sight and spoke to him a couple of times." [46]

We can state that before the war began, Mem and his family were privileged members of their society who benefited from the country's postcolonial and neo-colonial structures at a time in which tensions were increasing in the country. [47]

3.1 4 Years of war

In 1989 the regional tensions first escalated into violent conflict in the neighboring country of Liberia. Rebel leader Charles Taylor and his associates conquered large parts of the country and were just short of invading the capital Monrovia. The situation increasingly spiraled out of control, and in August 1990 the Economic Union of West African States (ECOWAS) sent in troops (ECOMOG—ECOWAS Monitoring Group) to restore peace in the city (HERRMANN, 1999).

"... and my father was selected by the government and had to go with them." [48]

At this point Mem's family was confronted with and involved in the conflict for the first time, as they feared the father would participate in the war and also receive first hand information about the frontline situation and its brutality. [49]

A couple of months after this incident, the ECOMOG troops succeeded in chasing the rebels out of Monrovia. The mission was then concluded and the troops were pulled out. Taylor however still controlled large parts of the country, and he extended his rebellion into Sierra Leone in order to gain access to diamonds and finance his campaign. It was possibly his support that enabled the formation of the RUF (Revolutionary United Front)—the rebel army in Sierra Leone. In 1991 the RUF declared war on the government and began a guerrilla campaign based in the east of the country (JUNG, n.d.). The long Sierra Leonean civil war had begun and continued to influence Mem and his family over the course of the following years. [50]

In 1992 parts of the army staged a successful coup and took power in Freetown, where Mem's family was living. The rebels entered the city while Mem was at school. He described how he and his siblings were evacuated and the situation in the country after the political changeover (KÜVER, 2008). Even though the new military government was first viewed positively by the population and was approved by the international community, in the following years the conflict continued to smolder and eventually deteriorated. In 1996 a democratic elected government was reinstalled to meet the demands of the United Nations (JUNG, n.d.), but this measure did nothing to improve the situation. In the same year Mem was directly confronted with the brutal violence taking place in the country after accidentally driving over a massacred corpse while returning from an upcountry family visit one night. [51]

All these incidents concentrated the family's doubts concerning their personal security in Freetown and Sierra Leone as a whole. [52]

3.1.5 Dispersed transnational migrations—diversification of routes

Later in 1996 Mem finished high school in Freetown. Now he was free to do what he wanted, and, following the advice of his parents, he decided to leave the country. His destination was at the same time both old and new, for in the same year he moved to Germany.

> "... it was shortly after finishing my high school there that I got admitted by the language school. The time fitted perfectly, so I came to Germany and began my language course at the end of 1996." [53]

The re-migration to Germany can be assessed from two different perspectives; in fact, the reasons for it can be found in both. The first of these is the family's transnational migration tradition facilitated by their privileged position. The Bankanus had the resources and experience to send their children to study in Europe. The second is the unstable situation in Sierra Leone—studying in Europe is the best opportunity for Mem to flee to safety. In this respect the move reinstates a recurrent pattern within the family of using migration as a problem resolution strategy. [54]

At any rate, at this point Mem was separated from his family, which remained in the unstable environment of Freetown. In such a situation, this is a distinct step for both sides that was likely to result in permanent disassociation. [55]

In May 1997 the RUF rebels launched a major attack on Freetown and overthrew the government armed forces. During their offensive the RUF carried out massive human-rights violations and committed atrocities against the civilian population (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 1998). This ignited a mass exodus from Freetown and other parts of the country in different directions either by boat or by land. [56]

During the attack, Mem's mother was in Germany to visit her son. The rest of the family in Freetown was in a dangerous situation as they had lost their privileged position in Sierra Leonean society because of the rebel takeover. Mem's siblings decided to flee together with an aunt on a boat to Gambia, a more or less stable country to the northeast, where they had relatives. After passing the rebel checkpoints, they arrived in Gambia a few days later.

> "... and my father knew that if he were caught on the boat it would be dangerous, not only for him but also for the children, so he decided to let the kids go alone with my aunt, and he would try to get out of the country on another way ..." [57]

Mem's father could not take the water route as the departure port was under rebel control. As a high ranking military official, he was an opponent of the RUF and his name was apparently on a death list. Instead he fled into the interior in order to reach the border to neighboring Guinea to the north. During his escape the family lost contact with him for several months, but in late 1997 he crossed the border and fled to Gambia to be reunited with the others.

> "You know, when I imagine their story I think yes my experiences were bad as well, but not as bad as theirs ..." [58]

The escalation of the war in Sierra Leone complicated Mem's social and emotional relationship to his family. After the initial disassociation had taken place when he had migrated to Germany on his own, now his next of kin were potential victims and had to flee Freetown. This facilitated another feeling: guilt. Even though he himself had experienced the brutality of the conflict, from that point on he considered himself "on the lucky side," because he had emigrated from Freetown before the escalation. He felt as if he had deserted his family in a deadly situation in which they were faced with traumatic incidents. As a result of the distance, he was not even able to assist them in dealing with their trauma.

> "... and my parents had connections to a charity organization in the USA, in Memphis, which was looking for educated people. I mean people who could easily adapt to US society. They wanted to help people who were willing to do something with their life, so my parents applied there and were accepted ..." [59]

After fleeing from Sierra Leone, for the first time the family no longer had a future in its home country. Thus, they looked for an alternative to deal with this critical situation, and again they followed the same recurrent pattern that has been reconstructed above—the family again decides to migrate. They again can rely on their privileged status as well as their international experiences and connections. After an unspecified time in Gambia in 1998, the other members of the family move to Memphis in the United States in order to begin a new life.

> "... even I applied with them, but my school here in Germany was waiting for me. I had to take some serious examinations, so I could not go ..." [60]

After the direct crisis was over and all family members were out of the danger zone, Mem's advanced separation from his family as a result of these occurrences became evident. As he did not share the experiences of escape and refuge, he was now even more outsider in the family than before. When the others moved to the United States to begin a new life, Mem had the chance to join them, yet he did not take the chance and instead returned to Germany to continue his studies.

> "In the US now, my parents, my father have really settled in it is like their home, and when I look at my younger brother and sister, they are pure Americans now ..." [61]

In this statement Mem evaluates the national and cultural belonging of the members of his family. Again it reflects his flexible, indefinite idea of affiliation—as embracing them as Americans or as becoming Americans. For Mem it is normal that they belong to the place where they actually live and which they can relate to, even though it is very far away. The quote implies that he accepts that his belonging has diverged from that of his family in the course of their varied migration routes. Such an acceptance is concordant with the postcolonial concepts of Stuart HALL (1993) and Paul GILROY (1993), which state that socio-

cultural affiliation is not corrupted by diverse migration routes and incorporation of elements from multiple life spheres. [62]

Nevertheless he still acknowledges Sierra Leone as a central reference point that he shares with his family and which must be incorporated into new home places. This also applies to his family's efforts to integrate into US society:

> "... and I also talked with my sister about it. She said why should she go back to Sierra Leone ... why should she bother. ... She always had bad dreams about what happened since she came to America. After suppressing all those bad things in Gambia, when the situation normalized, she had to handle that trauma through counseling and so on, so why should she risk having experiences like those again ..." [63]

In this citation we find Mem's contention with becoming an American while at the same time retaining a Sierra Leonean identity. Mem's sister strongly relates to Sierra Leone as her country of origin, as she apparently needs to justify her not wanting to return. This can be interpreted as necessary biographical effort to balance this piece of her history with her new life—an integrating of *roots* and *routes* (see GILROY, 1993). [64]

3.2 Mehmet—a German life story

3.2.1 Mem's parents' immigration to Germany—temporary adjustment to a foreign setup

In the early 1970s Mem's parents came to Germany where the father began his studies to become a physician and psychologist. The mother accompanied him and underwent training as a laboratory technician. [65]

Due to historical reasons, in the 1970s the number of people of African origin in Germany was still very small. Germany was almost completely uninvolved in the transatlantic slavery system and became an agent of global imperialism in the course of industrialization in the nineteenth century—much later than other European nations such as France and England. Prior to that time, no significant immigration to Germany from overseas has been documented. Nevertheless, Germany was also a part of the discursive development of European modernity, and German enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Hegel contributed significant ideas on the topics of cultural inequality, civilization, slavery, and racism (WACHENDORFER, 2004). Yet it was with the acquisition of colonies that the country engaged in direct political, economic, and social relationships with Africa. One of these relationships resulted in African immigration to Germany. Africans were employed by German authorities as linguistic and cultural experts at colonial societies and in ethnological institutes in order to, for example, teach Swahili and other languages spoken in the colonies (HUMBOLDT, 2006, pp.50f.). Others came as servants, mistresses, or wives of colonial officers, or were hired for the extremely popular ethnic exhibitions of the day in which focused on various ethnic characteristics (pp.48ff.). These exhibitions were often similar to

zoos in which visitors could view "primitive" and "wild" humans. Some of these Africans remained in Germany and founded families (p.49). [66]

Germany lost its colonies after the First World War and thus did not have to deal with the independence struggles which began after the Second World War and finally led to the independence of the overseas territories. What followed was significant economic migration to the former mother countries, which were faced with the responsibility of accommodating large numbers of people (FAGE, 1995). However, in Germany this was not the case. African immigration to Germany took place to a limited extent in order to educate a qualified administrative leadership for the former colonies. Mem's parents were also members of this immigrant group, and we can assume that they were aware that they would stay for a number of years but would eventually return to Sierra Leone after accomplishing their educations. [67]

As the Bankanus were among a very small number of black people living in Germany at that time, they attracted attention everywhere they went and were strongly perceived as strangers. At that time the colonial history with its racist ideology had not yet been addressed critically. In Germany the attached stereotypes such as primitive, threatening, exotic, and cheerful were still in use by an unreflecting population (ARNDT, 2004). Mem's parents had to deal with these attributes in which they probably faced rejection and curiosity at the same time. [68]

3.2.2 Childhood in Germany—early contentions of national belonging

Mem was born in 1976 in Malschede, a small town in a conservative Catholic in the west of Germany. In this environment the African family attracted significant attention. The atmosphere generally seems to have been hospitable as Mem relates very positive memories of that time.

> "... in the town where I was born, my parents often didn't have time to take care of us because of their jobs, so they often left us with these neighbors, who are like family for me until today. I mean I even continue to call that woman aunt ..." [69]

Mem's quest for a belonging began after the family moved to Münster. He felt that he was different from the other children because of the language they used in the family.

> "... and it was like that I had to speak English in school. When I was playing with my little friends we were speaking German, and at home I always spoke this strange language called Crio ..." [70]

Through his relationships to other children and their parents in this phase, Mem began to develop a sense of belonging to German society. Particularly because of his difference experienced through language, he tries to adjust and become even more like the others, and in the citation he even considers his parents' language as strange. [71]

Yet while he pursued integration into his environment, his parents were already preparing for re-migration to Sierra Leone by sending him to a British military primary school. Mem found this measure confusing him.

"... and after kindergarten my parents insisted that I had to go to a school where English was spoken ..." [72]

The preparatory measures for their return to Sierra Leone apparently did not have a positive connotation for Mem. It appears as if his parents wished to make him different from his German friends, and he felt as if his strong relationship with the environment was under threat.

"... of course I asked questions and my parents tried to explain it to me somehow, that it is their home and that everything would be alright ..." [73]

When they told him that they would return to Sierra Leone, Mem sees the threat was coming true and reacted with rejection and insecurity. It is significant that he designates Sierra Leone as his parents' home in the quote and not as his own. Apparently the incident even led to a breach between Mem and his parents. He felt betrayed and deserted because they did not share their plans with him. The boy had to deal with a conflict between family and societal affiliation, as his efforts of integrating to the German environment were undermined by his parents' expectations. As a result they could serve as the focal point in his life, and Mem distanced himself from them to a certain extent. From that point onwards he perceives himself different and excluded even within the family. [74]

In 1984 the family moved to Freetown in Sierra Leone where Mem lived for the next twelve years. [75]

3.2.3 Return to Germany and moving east—coming home and expanding boundaries

Soon after independence another reason for African migration to Europe was added to those of economic and educational—war refugee. After individual cases of asylum seekers in the 1960s from Ethiopia and Eritrea, the number of refugees entering Germany grew in the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time Germany became an established destination for labor migrants from countries such as Ghana (HUMBOLDT, 2006). It is during this time that what are probably the first African communities with national organizational structure were formed. In the 1990s immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa continued to increase—and the numbers are still rising. [76]

Parallel to the escalation of the war in the 1990s, the number of immigrants from Sierra Leone to Germany increased drastically and most of them sought asylum as refugees. While the figures for both granted and rejected asylum applications differ according to the source (BUNDESAMT FÜR DIE ANERKENNUNG AUSLÄNDISCHER FLÜCHTLINGE, 2000; INFORMATIONSVERBUND ASYL, n.d.), a general deportation stop enacted during the war years prevented even

the rejected applicants from being sent back. Nevertheless, today there are a significant number of Sierra Leoneans as well as Liberians in Germany, even though their number remains small compared to the number of immigrants from other West African countries as Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo (HUMBOLDT, 2006, p.276). [77]

Furthermore, Mem graduated from high school in 1996 and applied for a language course in Germany. A few months later he moved to Germany and attended the required course modules for university access in Bocholt and Essen —both cities in the region where he lived as a child. Both the decision as well as the selection of the language school were most likely strongly influenced by his parents. In this period Mem followed the familiar steps his parents had taken in the past which somehow would provide him security. His motivation for the migration can be seen as a mixture of educational purposes and his search for a refuge. He did not feel safe in Sierra Leone and he had already had traumatic experiences of violence and war. Even though he was not threatened directly at that time, his migration can be seen a preventive measure. However, he also opted for an educational career, after graduating from high school and applying for university in Germany possibly would have been an option in any case regardless of the war. Thus, the war made a secure academic education in Sierra Leone more unrealistic, so going to Germany became the most reasonable option. A third aspect of the move also represented something of a coming home for Mem, as he had developed strong ties to Germany during his childhood. [78]

His family's privileged financial position facilitated the acquisition of a residency permit for study purposes. In order to obtain this permit the applicant must prove his or her ability to support him- or herself while at university and is also obliged to undertake measures to raise his or her German language skills to an academic level (for detailed explanations see DAAD, n.d.). Mem's language courses were therefore a preparatory step towards his university studies. [79]

All told, Mem's migration to Germany marks another crucial step in his disassociation from his family. While they remained in the war zone, he was sent alone to a more or less foreign country where he encountered an entirely different set of experiences. This diversification in their biographies has possibly resulted in a gap between Mem and his family which can never again be closed. [80]

After passing his language exam to qualify for university studies, Mem applied for a medical technology program at a college near Cottbus in East Germany. A short time later he was admitted and he began his studies in autumn 1997. With his selection of the study program, Mem was following in his parents' footsteps— most likely they have influenced his decision to choose a field that was closely related to their professions.

> "... and before people had told me, 'Hey bro, it could be dangerous in the East you know. You better be careful' ..." [81]

As reconstructed above, Mem's disassociation from his family at this time was both driven and at the same time halted by a feeling of guilt he developed towards the members of his family. Whereas he enjoyed security in a fairly developed society, the situation for his family in Sierra Leone steadily worsened. In reaction, he also put himself in a dangerous situation by moving to a region known for racist discrimination and persecution. The citation indicates that he was well aware of these dangers and deliberately opted to endure them. This act can be regarded as a symbolic move in order to show solidarity with the family. He hoped to reduce his guilt towards his relatives by inflecting suffering upon himself. [82]

In Cottbus he fell in love with a German girl and they started a relationship which has lasted up until the time of the interview. This can be interpreted as an effort to build ties of affiliation to Germany as his country of reference and an attempt to permanently settle in Germany. A further reason for his actions might have been his desire to find a substitute for his faraway family and establish other close human ties to people with whom he can affiliate. [83]

3.2.4 Experiencing racism

As time went by Mem no longer felt comfortable in East Germany, as he faced massive racial discrimination in Cottbus and these experiences dominated his account of his time there.

> "First of all there were very strange remarks like, 'They are here to steal our jobs. I mean this is not against you personally, but all in all foreigners are one of the reasons why the Germans have a hard time in Germany nowadays.' " [84]

Mem was confronted with recurrent reproaches inherent to the general German immigration discourse. From this point of view, foreigners represent a group which competes with Germans for scarce resources such as employment and social services. Furthermore, these resources are distributed according to collective claims. Out of fear of being left behind, a hierarchy between the groups is constructed whereby the indigenous group believes it deserves the first claim to these resources. In this context we can also interpret Mem's experiences of not being admitted to a nightclub or being refused service in a bar as a denial of access to socio-economic resources. [85]

In light of these assumptions, it is not surprising that the public debate in Germany is dominated by positions promoting deterrence and immigration prevention. Immigration is debated as something that can give rise to conflict and as a threat to the German social balance. In public discourse, foreigners and people with a migration background generally appear within the contexts of crime, alienation, and the clash of cultures (SPINDLER, 2006, p.63). Even though immigration has become an integral part of Germany's social reality, large parts of the indigenous population still seem to disapprove of it. This disapproval also manifests itself institutionally in the form of an immigration act according to which immigration is regulated. Immigration is considered as something that only happens in exceptional cases which should be kept to a minimum (ibid.). This

practice reflects ongoing colonial inclusion and exclusion patterns postulated by postcolonial writers: "Despite the formation of a new Europe, processes of demarcation between inside and outside, affiliation and differentiation are at work" (HALL, 2005, p.803, in SPINDLER, 2006, p.64). [86]

This demarcation in Europe appears to be based in the old colonial dualisms, whereby, particularly in Germany, inclusion and exclusion is determined by attributes such as skin color and mother tongue (WACHENDORFER, 2004). These "hardware" attributes are supplemented by "softer" cultural values according to which, in comparison to native German culture, immigrants are depicted as backwards, traditional, and uncontemporary. These cultural attributes hinder immigrants in integrating into modern German society. Again we find a static concept of incompatible cultures that are seemingly genetically determined and passed on from one generation to the next, which cannot be integrated into a hybrid cultural norm.

> "Most of the time it is 'the N-word,' you know ... for example when I wanted to go to the supermarket it was like I had to get prepared. I had to assemble all my courage because I knew I would be confronted with people staring and stupid remarks like when they would say, 'Hey look! There's a Neger[2]' or something like that and it would really piss me off." [87]

In this quote Mem describes the mental stress he faced in public spaces as a result of racial difference. He firmly rejects the word "*Neger*" for black people and considers it a racist insult. The use of the word and its rejection reflect the discursive formations elaborated in chapter two. The term reproduces centuries of oppression and devaluation of black people in theory and practice and reassigns Mem the colonial position of the slave (KILOMBO FERREIRA, 2004, p.175). Additionally, in the German context this term communicates exclusion from an imagined German normality which black people cannot attain (ibid, p.176). In reference to debates concerning similar terms in English and French, the word was widely omitted from public and official use, but it remains common in everyday settings (ARNDT, 2004, p.107). On the other hand, the fact that the word represents the potential for positive representation is also indicated by the citation through Mem's use of the alternative term "N-word" (KILOMBO FERREIRA, 2004), which is an indication of the biographer's high educational background. While acknowledging the necessity of naming it, Mem supports attempts to unmask its insulting character—a strategy Homi BHABHA (1994) would call *mimicry*. [88]

The N-word discussion refers to a particular form of racism that is directed solely towards black people. Even though representation in Germany's population share is rather small compared to other immigrant groups, people of African origin seem to play an important role in the discourse concerning foreigners. This is due to their significant physical difference compared to indigenous Germans—they

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2   I have decided not to translate the term into English because neither "nigger" nor "negro" actually connote the same meaning, even though the words are related to some extent.

are always clearly visible as foreigners and therefore serve as targets for projections of fear and racial prejudices. [89]

In his paper "An Image of Africans" (2003), Chibo ONYEJI traces sexual stereotypes which are ascribed to Africans in the German speaking world. According to ONYEJI, the black man appears as a sexual threat for the white women and the white man's sexual competitor. The black woman in turn appears as seductress and prostitute. These are the same constructions Ann Laura STOLER (2002) and Frantz FANON (1967) determined in African and American colonial societies.

> "... and me and my girlfriend we were at a party. I think it was the first time that that many people saw that we were together. They were staring at us, so we went home and parked her car outside, and somewhere there was a group of Nazis who saw us, and the next morning we saw that someone had scratched 'Ausländer raus' (foreigners out) into the front panel of the car." [90]

This incident illustrates a fear of a loss of sexual resources that are subjected to the same collective claims. According to STOLER (2002), sexual appropriation was one of the central strategies for establishing control over societies and subjects under the colonial system. However, this also led to a permanent fear on the part of the colonialists that they could lose power by ceding their own sexual resources, and measures were enacted to ensure that this did not come to pass. Africans played a distinct role in this concept of sexual challenge posed by the colonized. Referring to their supposed inability to control their passions, they were ascribed a superior sexual strength and capacity, which, particularly in its male form, posed a serious threat to ruling group of white men (FANON, 1967). FANON interprets this over-sexualization of the colonized other as a projection of its own suppressed desires. These models fit Mem's recalled incident in which the perpetrators might have been driven fears of losing their ethnic group solidarity as well as their power over women and immigrants. It also most likely represented feelings of inferiority and envy on the part of the perpetrators. [91]

All in all it is a subtle form of racism which leads to Mem's dissatisfaction with the situation. He says that often he had to mentally prepare himself to deal with people's glances in the street, he permanently "feels people staring with suspicion" at him. Furthermore, in social encounters he is under a diffuse "pressure to prove that he is a normal human being," which leads to "depression and bad moods." [92]

3.2.5 Return to West Germany for a new study program—conciliation and emancipation

It was probably in 2000 when Mem quit his studies in East Germany and applied for a different course—economic engineering—in Marburg. While waiting for admission to the new college, he spent some months in Frankfurt and then moved to Marburg to begin his new studies.

> "... and somehow all these things came together and at a certain point I was really sick of it ..." [93]

We can follow his argument and assume that racial discrimination was the main reason for his decision to change his place of residence. This decision was facilitated by his family's new situation. By that time the rest of the family had already settled in to the US and was now living in security. For Mem this meant that he no longer needed to compensate for their suffering and was free to leave the hostile environment in East Germany. This move marks the final step in Mem's disassociation from his family. He does not continue his medical technology studies in Marburg and instead begins a new course in economic engineering. It seems as if he is finally cutting the cord to his parents. While the decision to study medical technology was probably influenced by them, he was now living his own life and choosing his own career. His relationship to his girlfriend also survived this critical situation and matured into a serious commitment. As reconstructed above, this indicates Mem's advanced independence from his family and concentration on his own life based in Germany. [94]

Marburg promises a cosmopolitan, academic atmosphere. Mem was also attracted to the presence of an organized Sierra Leone Union. His experiences with racism discouraged him with regard to his identification with Germany to a certain extent. He did not feel fully accepted and felt he was being pushed to the margin. At this point his affiliation to Africa and Sierra Leone again gained in relevance, and he activated his African resources of identity and became involved in African and Sierra Leonean networks in Germany. Carmen HUMBOLDT (2006) observes how the collective affiliation among African immigrants forms a reaction to exclusionary mechanisms and, in particular, discrimination based on skin color. Being ascribed a foreigner poses an obstacle to their feeling at home in Germany, whereby feeling at home is defined as "not being regarded as foreigners" (p.207). Thus, ethnic and expatriate communities offer them a home because they temporarily take away the sense of "otherness." Mem also uses the Sierra Leone Union Marburg to compensate his marginalization experiences to a certain degree.

> "... and so I always address and work out those war memories when we meet. Sometimes we talk about it and somehow it really helps ..." [95]

This citation refers to the community's second major function. The union provides a space for members to share the experiences of violence, war, and displacement which many Sierra Leoneans share. Many of them have to deal with traumatic incidents that either they themselves of their relatives encountered. Sharing these experiences with understanding people can have a curative effect.

> "I mean most people I know here in Marburg all have their own stories, and my story in comparison is a trifle. I mean, it's nothing ..." [96]

This statement indicates that his involvement in the union also serves as a strategy to overcome his feelings of guilt associated with his family. Mem also believes he was lucky in comparison to his fellow members because unlike them he neither experienced the reality of the provincial war nor the large-scale attacks on Freetown. Through his engagement in the union again he struggles to compensate for these feelings and at the same time reinstates his role of outsider. [97]

3.2.6 Prospects for the future

At the time of the interview, Mem was just short of finishing his studies. He had spent more years in Germany than in Sierra Leone. Deliberations about his future made up another significant share in the transcript. Even though he was considering later returning to Sierra Leone, such a move was unlikely to be realized. The country is war torn and still instills him with fear, his family no longer lives there and his privileged social position has been challenged.

> "... and because we already have these European ideas in our minds—I mean here I can walk around town at three or four o'clock in the morning, and I know nothing will happen ..." [98]

Mem has identified himself with the circumstances in Germany, and he particularly cherishes security and reliability. However, he constructs Sierra Leone as a negative counterpart.

> "The younger generation there is unmotivated, even though they now know that if they don't achieve anything in their life then the country will never develop ... the government officials, too, act completely irresponsibly. Everybody is doing his thing, there is no transparency, it is labeled democracy but democracy is defined differently in Sierra Leone and Africa in general." [99]

Mem believes in the principle of individual responsibility and liability as the foundation of social development and progress and is skeptical about its implementation in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, he displays his deep identification with European political ideology as an ideal to follow. [100]

Despite all experiences of marginalization, Mem defines himself as a part of German society and in many respects is strongly assimilated. We can assume that his future will be in Germany and he will pursue a professional career here. In this sense his integration can be viewed as successful. Nevertheless, Sierra Leone will remain a part of his life and belonging upon which he has turned his back, but this does not mean that he neglects this aspect of himself. [101]

4. Conclusions, Implications, and Challenges

The paper has outlined, how discourses are reflected and can be made visible in individual biographies. It also illustrates how biographical reconstruction serves to identify discursive mechanisms. Particular emphasis was placed on depicting the interplay of individual agency and corporate structures in the construction of personal self without excluding either of the perspectives. [102]

The family history and, in particular, Mem's biography can be described as transnational, as they are characterized by multiple movements from one place to the other as well as displacement, emigration, and repatriation. [103]

The biographical analysis demonstrated that the personal self develops as a result of combining individual and group experiences. The varying perspectives of attention have shown that, within the context of transnational biographies, we cannot refer to a single cultural or societal reference point. Instead we must abandon the notion of separated and clearly distinguishable life-worlds. In the reconstructed case, migration instead facilitated an overlapping of societal entities, through which social structures are complemented and modified. Instead of a clear reference point the biographer relates to different identity resources, which he develops from of multiple spheres of life and activity.

- Among these resources we find the national frames of Germany and Sierra Leone as well as Africa as a larger collective entity, each of which is a part of his corporate identity. The biographer acknowledges all of these while trying to determine which one he prefers in a given situation.
- Additionally, Mem's affiliation relates to personal experience fields of family, violent conflict, and migration. In this case family constellations in particular and dynamics spanning several generations play an outstanding role as the biographer permanently seems to be in conflict over his family ties and disassociation from them.
- Religious affiliation also appears to be a burning issue. Mem talks about Christianity, Islam, and traditional magic and asks himself, which is most important for him as a child of parents with different religions.
- Another crucial aspect of his identity is his racial background. He discusses being black in relation to slavery and within the context of racial discrimination in Germany.
- Ethnic belonging appears in the family history and sets the backdrop for another recurrent scheme of the case, as his father's ethnic background (the indigenous Temne group), representing fixed roots of identity, stands in sharp contrast to the mother's background (mixed immigrant group of Crio) with its foundation in migration and dispersal. [104]

His personal resources of affiliation are interspersed by power discourses which influence his societal position and agency. These power relationships are related to historical events and discourses such as the war, slavery, colonialism, and racism. The reconstructed biography supported the assumptions of postcolonial

theory, which states that internal (natives/foreigners) as well as global (colonizers/colonized) power structures operate by implementing race and class as exclusion criteria. These power structures maintain boundaries between imagined corporate spheres and their attached material resources. Thus, individuals with migration background do not only have to refer to multiple experience pools to construct their selves, but also to rigid discursive ascriptions. In the process of balancing these aspects in their biography, they also develop their cultural and corporate belonging. [105]

Through reference to multiple life spheres and adjustment to the stated power structures, an indeterminate status has become a constitutional aspect of Mem's identity.

> "I am Mem, short for Mehmet, actually I had changed it, because in school in Sierra Leone there were many people in class who were called Mehmet, so we got confused all the time. I was the first one who came up with the idea of calling himself Mem." [106]

This quotation from the very beginning of Mem's biographical self presentation[3] illustrates his tendency to present himself as an outsider. The first resource Mem uses to define himself is his difference from others. This combined with the emphasis on being something special has been reconstructed as a recurrent pattern of his biography. We have seen, that he pictures the Crio as a somewhat foreign group in Sierra Leone, that he was an outsider in the discriminative environment in Cottbus, and that he and his family had experiences with the war that were not as horrible as those of his fellow Sierra Leone Union members. Particularly within his family, Mem always sets himself apart from the others beginning with his allegedly more difficult adjustment to life in Freetown, and includes his early emigration from the country, his security while the others were fleeing, up until he indicates that he has become the only "German" whereas the others had become "Americans." [107]

Mem's principal role as outsider can be interpreted as a reaction to the imperatives of the mainstream identity discourse. This enforces an obligation which states that individuals must subscribe to fixed imaginary cultural, national, racial, religious, ethnic, and social belongings. Flexible adaptations such as those displayed by Mem are neglected, and such people are designated outsiders. At this point we can again draw a connection to the outlined postcolonial theories which try to conceptualize alternative identity constructions and support the struggle for their acceptance. In this context, Mem can be viewed as a role model for transnational migrants as he claims the space in-between, the indefinite affiliation. According to Mem's interpretation, belonging does not depend on a fixed set of commonalities, but is steadily transformed and reinforced by

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3   The biographical self-presentation marks the second phase of the biographical narrative interview as outlined by Gabriele ROSENTHAL (2003, 2006). After the opening or "narration-generating" question, which ask for the biographer's whole life history, the biographer spoke for about fifty minutes before concluding the self presentation.

experience and adaptation. Such an interpretation is purely hybrid as it allows the cutting, reconfiguration, modification, and mixing of self-selected elements. [108]

Mem recognizes several elements from different aspects of his life—he relates to his personal *roots.* But he balances these roots, arranging and rearranging them according to the experiences he adds to the equation—the *routes* he is taking through life. We have seen, that there are roots and routes in his family background, which he has to balance, that he has arranged different sets of religious roots to his own route, that he has understated racial and national ascriptions in order to lay claim to personal definitions, and that his cultural affiliation is a blend of the several pools encountered along the journey. [109]

What remains is FOUCAULT's concern relating to the justification of applying biographical research to evaluate power structures. His belief in the reproduction of power resulting from the use of biography as scientific instrument has not been resolved in this study. During the course of this study, I also had some doubts about my role. Do I not produce knowledge about people which makes them controllable by recording their biography? Does this not speak against my self-concept as a critical scientist concerned with exploitation and discrimination? Do I not reproduce discursive positions by identifying black people as victims of discrimination who have to permanently defend themselves against a subordinate ascription? These doubts remain, but I will nevertheless carry on using biographies to address power relations as they can exemplify these relations on both the individual and collective level. [110]

Appendix: Mehmet Bankanu—Biographical Data

Family history before Mem's birth

About 1945–1950	Mem's grandmother leaves her husband in the Sierra Leonean interior and moves with her son (Mem's father) to the capital city Freetown. The country at this time is British protectorate.
1961	Sierra Leone becomes an independent country as member of the British Commonwealth.
About 1965–1970	Mem's father and mother meet and are married in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
About 1970–1972	Mem's parents migrate to the Sauerland in Western Germany in order for the father to study medicine.
About 1975	Mem's father begins working as a doctor in Malschede in the same region while his mother begins training as a laboratory technician.

Biographical data of Mem's life

1976	Mem is born in Malschede, Sauerland, as his parents' first child.
1977–1980	Mem's first brother is born in Malschede.
About 1980	The family moves to Muenster, a major town in Western Germany, where the father takes up a new job for a British military hospital. Mem visits a German kindergarten and the first years of a British military primary school.
1980–1984	Mem's second brother is born in Muenster.
1984	The family moves to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where the father works as psychological superintendent in the government army.
1984–1990	Mem's third brother and sister are born in Freetown.
1990	Mem's father is sent to war-torn neighboring Liberia for several months as part of the ECOMOG (Economic Union of West African States Monitoring Group) peace mission.
1991	From Liberia the war swaps over to Sierra Leone's Eastern Provinces.
1992	Parts of the Sierra Leonean government army stage a coup and seize power in Freetown.
1996	Mem accidentally drives over a massacred body at night while returning from an upcountry family visit.
1996	Mem graduates high school and applies for a language course in Germany.
1996–1997	Mem re-migrates to the western part of Germany and attends the required German courses in Bocholt and Essen.
Spring 1997	Mem applies for a program in medical technology at a college near Cottbus in East Germany.
May 1997	While his mother is visiting Mem in Germany, the Sierra Leonean rebels launch a major campaign and seize power in Freetown in late May. Mem's siblings flee together with their aunt on a boat to Gambia and are there reunited with the mother. Mem`s father flees alone through the hinterland. There he gets lost and the family loses contact with him for several months.
October 1997	Mem begins to study medical technology in Cottbus.
End of 1997	Mem's father crosses the border to Guinea and is reunited with the family in Gambia. Mem also attends the reunion.
1998	In 1998 the other family members migrate to the United States. Mem decides to stay in Germany to continue with his studies.
1998	Mem falls in love with a German girl from Cottbus and begins a relationship with her.

2000	Mem breaks off his studies in East Germany and applies for a different course— economic engineering—in Marburg.
2000	Mem spends some months in Frankfurt while waiting for admission to the new college.
October 2000	Mem begins his new studies in Marburg.
December 2005 (time of interview)	Mem expects to finish his studies in Marburg. He still maintains a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend from Cottbus.

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