Navigating Afropeanness: Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation and Belonging Among People of African Descent in Europe

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Abstract

This research investigates the construction of ethnic-racial identities (ERI) among people of African descent (PAD) in Europe, examining how such identities are conceptualized and their implications for belonging and collective group definitions, such as Afropean. Despite Europe's reluctance to engage in discourse on race, PAD navigate complex identity formation processes influenced by external categorization, socialization, and community ties. Employing photo-elicitation narrative interviews with PAD in eight different countrues to explore these dynamics, results reveal that PAD across Europe develop similar ERI but favor non-ethnic-racial and intersectional group definitions.

This research contributes to understanding the interplay of race, identity, and belonging in a European context, suggesting that while a pan-European Black identity remains contested, similar ERIs and experiences of exclusion exist. These insights can inform civil society and political efforts to enhance transnational engagement and solidarity in social justice issues, expanding the academic discourse beyond the Anglophone context.

Keywords: identity, collective, ethnicity, race, African, Europe, Black

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Navigating Afropeanness: Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation and Belonging Among People of African Descent in Europe

Europe regardless of how we define it—historical, political, geographical, or sentimental — must be studied more closely to understand its boundaries. Especially within the European Union (EU) borders are no longer necessarily physical features but symbolic representations. Exclusionary practices of defining legitimate membership are not limited to legislation; they also inform the theoretical construction of Europe. Rather than disappearing, borders are being replaced by a number of internal, invisible borders that demarcate new boundaries between groups based on linguistic, racial, ethnic, and religious distinctions (Balibar, 2009). Some individuals are thus categorized as not truly European, regardless of their citizenship which affects their identities as well as the conceptualization of Europe (El-Tayeb, 2011). Among those considered as non-European despite their presence for centuries are Roma, Jews, Muslims, and Black[1] people. The latter are mostly of African descent and due to the lack of continental European discourse on race their experiences and identifications are very little studied even though they are arguably among the most visible minorities (El-Tayeb, 2011; Goldberg, 2006). The available limited academic work builds on research conducted in North America and occasionally in the United Kingdom and thus (sometimes hastily) adapts definitions and processes from the African American context (Brown, 2009). However, the interplay of external categorization as non-belonging, an individual's biographical (incl. socialization) and socio-cultural background, the presence of an ethnic-racial community, and transnational ties on people of African descent (PAD) in Europe's identity and group formation remains little understood.

[1] The term "Black" is capitalized throughout the paper to indicate that it does not refer to a color but a socially constructed category of people. Capitalizing "Black" recognizes the political and social significance of Black identity and the collective experiences and histories of Black people around the world.

Research on ethnic or racial minority groups stresses the centrality of transnational ties to a perceived place of origin as a place of belonging in identity formation processes (for a review see Sanders, 2002). However, racialized migrant descendant individuals often report feeling a sense of non-belonging in both, the country in which they were socialized in and the country of their ancestors' origin due to various forms of external categorization (Waite & Cook, 2011). In some contexts, dual identities can mitigate this struggle of inbetweenness by indicating hybrid belonging. Many EU states are however not receptive to hyphenated identities due to essentialist conceptions of national identities (Baldassar & Raffaetà, 2018, p. 738). For a positively evaluated collective identity migrant descendant people thus often turn to other levels of identification, such as sub- or transnational (Agirdag et al., 2016; Medugno, 2023).

While European states each have their own particularities and societal structures, many of them share partially similar histories (especially of colonialism) and the ongoing integration of states into a supranational European Union may affect how states collectively define and (re)structure their societies. It is therefore interesting to compare the experience of PAD in European countries to understand if and how ethnic-racial identity development occurs in a Europe that refuses to talk about race and in how far PAD living in these different contexts might self-define as a distinct group within and across national borders based on perceived commonalities or shared struggles.

Research Aim

In this research project, I thus aim to understand how PAD in Europe construct potential ethnic-racial identities (ERI) through processes of self-identification, external categorizations, and connections with others and how they employ such to relate to and construct relevant collective self-definitions. This will be done through the investigation of the following question using photo-elicitated narrative interviews: *Do people of African descent in Europe*

construct ethnic-racial identities, and if so, how are these identities conceptualized and what are the implications for their sense of belonging and potential collective self-definition within and across European borders?

Striking similarities exist in the societal positioning of Black people and increasing community organization and Black consciousness indicates the need to study the experiences of PAD across different European states (Blakely, 2009; Small, 2018) To indicate a sense of shared struggles and identities terms like 'Afropean', 'Black European', 'Afro-European', and 'African Diaspora in Europe' have thus been invented but remain the subject of discussion (Hogarth, 2022; Medugno, 2023; Pitts, 2020). These terms additionally offer a possibility for individuals to distance themselves from being associated with the nation-state that discursively does not include them in their racialized idea of the national polity (Medugno, 2023). Throughout the literature, the proposition that a collective Afropean identity can emerge at the intersection of African and European cultural influences, shaped by social dynamics is substantiated. Afropeanness is understood as a way in which PAD navigate and negotiate their identities within different European societies, resist exclusion, build cross-border networks, and assert their right to belong (Landvreugd, 2016).

However, understanding whether a transcontinental (opposed to transnational) identity and/or group self-definition based on shared ethnic-racial categorization (e.g., Afropeanness) carries meaning for PAD in Europe has not been explored sufficiently and will be investigated in this project through an analysis of the complexities of identity development, experiences of categorization, and group self-definition. Exploratively I also aims to understand whether the construction of a collective identity is rooted first and foremost in pan-African ideologies or whether the central binding factor is shared experiences of discrimination.

After proceeding with a brief review of the presence of PAD in Europe and the term identity, literature on different influences on PAD identity is synthesized before theories of individual ethnic-racial identity development, belonging, and collective self-definition are outlined. Subsequently, the methods of data collection and analysis are described. In this section concerns of research ethics and positionality are addressed. The process and results of the analysis are provided in the following chapter before engaging in a discussion on the limitations and implications of the project at hand which is followed by a brief conclusion.

Objectives

Insights into minority individual and identity development and group self-definition can help civil society and political actors to create incentives for further transnational engagement, mobilization, and solidarity in issues of social justice across borders. Minority community organizations might find more effective ways to connect to potential members and with each other. Understanding whether PAD's ethnic-racial identities are encased in nation-states or whether a shared self-definition exists across Europe can add to existing research on ethnicity, race, and its societal implications that is so far mainly focused on the Anglophone context (Foner, 2018).

Afro Descendant life in Europe

The numbers of PAD in the EU are estimated by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to be around 15 million. Due to the lack of official data on racial or ethnic origin in almost all EU member states this estimate relies on proxies such as country of birth or country of (grand)parents' birth. Thus not all people who potentially identify as PAD are included (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023). In their report "Being Black in the EU" the FRA collected data in 15 EU member states[2] to shed light on the experiences of

[2] Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden

PAD in Europe. It shows that almost half of the respondents report experiences of racial discrimination in the last five years, with the prevalence being higher for young and highly educated people, those with disabilities, or wearers of traditional or religious clothing (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023). Even if there are similar reports across countries it is important to stress that the consulted population in each country is comprised of distinct national, ethnic, and religious origins, came through different migration channels, faces different historical narratives, and has more or less native-born PAD in proportion to immigrants (Small, 2018, p. 1883).

While recent migration movements from Africa to Europe have created an unprecedented increase in number and visibility of PAD all over Europe, African people lived in many European states since antiquity. However, most studies on PAD presence in specific European states focus on the time frame since the 1970s (Small, 2018). PAD presence in Western Europe throughout centuries is mostly attributed to (former) colonial ties which facilitate linguistic and administrative integration to some extent. Refugees, African students, and those who migrated in search of employment and their descendants make up a majority of the PAD population, also in countries that were not direct colonial powers. (Blakely, 2009). However, PAD all over Europe face marginalization, regardless of their reason for migration, and are exposed to similar circumstances of "ambiguous visibility and endemic vulnerability", experiences of racialization, and "the formation and importance of black (and black-led) organizations for social justice, and the creation of knowledge production" (Small, 2018, p. 1883).

Overall, PAD all over Europe are similarly hyper-visible in the lower ranks of all country's societal hierarchies, in highly stereotypical fields, such as sports and entertainment, and urban centers. Additionally, Small (2018) establishes that PAD in the 12 EU member states with the largest African descendant populations are mobilized around racial identity for social justice

issues outside of academic settings where they are mostly underrepresented. However, well-founded claims are difficult to make as academic research on PAD in Europe is very limited and usually only looks at PAD as immigrants, refugees, or victims of human trafficking in selected countries, thus rendering the experiences of citizens and established communities largely invisible. In doing so, the limited research on PAD presence in Europe circumvents discussions about structural racism and the colonial legacies that shape current European societies to this day and fits into the narrative of a raceless post-WWII-Europe (Small, 2018).

'Identity' as a concept

The concept of identity has been subject to scrutinous criticism within the social sciences for decades for being too blurry and expansive to be useful. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue for a distinction between using the concept of identity as a category of practice versus a category of analysis. As a category of practice, individuals and political actors might thus use identity language to make sense of themselves and draw group boundaries. However, in the social sciences identity should not be considered as a naturally occurring categorization that can offer a base for analyses. Rather identity should be understood as a socially constructed process that arises with and through human interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The aim should thus be to scientifically explain these processes that lead to the development of certain concepts that people use as categories of practice, such as identity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). In this research project, the focus thus lies in understanding how people create a sense of self and their relation to social surroundings by focusing on the processes underlying and prompted by ethnic-racial identity formation. Thus, no identity is considered as given and the term identity is only used as an umbrella term for processes of making sense of the self on the individual level. In contrast, the individual's connection to the group is understood as and termed sense of belonging while on a collective level, I speak of group self-definition instead of collective identity.

Literature Review

Terminology: PAD, Black, or Afro-Diasporic?

The blurriness of the target group of this research project poses a challenge not only in terms of sampling but also regarding terminology. Speaking of PAD, Afro-diasporans, African diasporans, or Black people each conveys specific associations and hence appeals to some potential respondents more than others. The consulted literature uses all of these terms, sometimes in combination, and only rarely delineates who is talked about. It is thus indispensable to discuss the different terminologies, their advantages and disadvantages, and potential (context-dependent) associations and to outline how the choice of terms influences the research. This is a non-exhaustive overview of potential terms that could have been employed in the research project and does not aim to limit the participants' choices of identification. Additionally, it is important to note that the different European countries employ different politics of naming with varying emphasis on race and the extent of accepting hyphenated identities (Blackshire-Belay, 2001).

To keep the target group as large as possible I opted to use the term PAD and specified that the level of generational distance to the African ancestor(s) was unimportant. The term is used by several internationally active institutions to refer to descendants of victims of the transatlantic and Mediterranean slave trade and of African migrants, avoids categorizing by race through a focus on racial discrimination, and is not usually associated strongly with notions of community (UN Working Group on People of African Descent, 2003). Thus, the topics of interest, ethnic-racial identity construction, and group self-definition formation are not influenced directly by the chosen terminology, and country-specific interpretations are kept minimal. However, the term is often understood as including only those who either migrated themselves or who have generationally close ancestral and exclusive ties (i.e., parents or grandparents) to the African continent. Individuals with distant or partially

unknown ties to the African continent (e.g., African Americans) and those with racially or ethnically mixed ancestry might be more hesitant to identify with this term.

Afro-diasporan or African diasporan both make use of diaspora language and are thus associated with a clear community appeal, come with the association of a wide, mostly forced, dispersal and a focus on shared history and ancestry. However, diaspora language runs the risk of excluding the lived realities of those who have left the African continent more recently and perhaps voluntarily. While they overall share experiences of discrimination with more established diasporic communities, legal status differences, linguistic barriers, and strong ties and responsibilities to communities in their countries of origin put these newer migrants into a position that differs largely from those of established diaspora communities (Bernal, 2020). Thus, these terms are value-laden and already convey a sense of positioning and are thus less useful when defining the target group for this research project. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that both versions are increasingly and widely used in different European countries and thus are interesting to study as categories of practice elsewhere. The use of Afro or African in these compound terms is a small but important distinction. While Afro refers to cultural connections to Africa and conveys a notion of identity, African diaspora is understood as a more analytical term that encompasses all people of African descent regardless of cultural identification. Nonetheless, diaspora language carries certain sentiments of identification which I aim to avoid within this research project.

Overall, Black European has been used in academia and advocacy to include Black people in Europe regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. However, Black as a term requires definitional scrutiny as it encompasses multiple levels of identification, is inherently ambiguous, and definitions are largely context-dependent. The term aims to refer to shared experiences of racialization and ascriptions of inferiority in a societal hierarchy shaped by

white[3] supremacy. However, the conceptualization of Blackness and race overall cannot be considered independent from its invention in European imperialist thought that required a construction of "others" as non- *white*. Thus, Blackness as non- *white*ness refers to a heterogenous group well beyond pseudo-biological categorizations that would mainly include PAD. While in practice the term Black is mostly used for external categorization and self-definition of PAD as an analytical term it cannot clearly delineate the target group of this research (De Genova, 2018).

Cultural Memory

Studying the collective identity construction of Black people in Belgium through cultural memory Amponsah (2023) defines Black Cultural Memory (BCM) as Black people's identity constructing/maintaining embodied cultural practices. BCM is interrelated with several other processes and practices, such as diaspora literacy and Black consciousness. Acknowledging that the initial external categorization of blackness is racist and that Black people are by the Belgian *white* majority population continuously associated with not belonging "here-and-now" (p. 30), BCM consists of codes and historical connotations that make the self-identification with Black as a group label desirable. By incorporating a wide range of cultural signifiers, events, and historical figures to create an archetype of collective Blackness, BCM allows for the inclusion of individuals across national, ethnic, and linguistic borders. This however does not mean that all people who are racialized as Black automatically are included in this Black collectivity, rather group membership and a corresponding collective identification require a sense of Black consciousness. As a blurrily defined and widely dispersed group, critical consciousness and its mediation is an essential constituent of what

[3] The term "*white*" is italicized to underscore its social construction and to prompt critical reflection on its usage. Unlike "Black," *white* is often treated as the default or normative racial category, which can obscure its role in maintaining systemic inequalities. By italicizing *white*, it is emphasized that it, too, is a racial category with specific social implications and histories, challenging the assumption of *white*ness as a neutral or unmarked identity.

we might call an Afro-diaspora (p.31). South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko (1978) claimed that Black consciousness is what is needed for blackness as a concept to unite people and to respond to *white* supremacy as a cohesive group (p.19). This consciousness can develop through primary and secondary socialization, specific events, and online or offline interactions with others (p.33). Interest in exploring African cultural roots or potential self-definitions around Blackness can be attributed to experiences of racialized othering (Scarabello & De Witte, 2019, p. 320). Especially in the last decades, digital engagement and especially social media increasingly facilitate these endeavors and shape BCM and through that understandings and discourses of collective Blackness and Afro-diasporic identity (p. 31). In this research project, the life stories of people of African descent in different European countries are thus analyzed to understand whether and through which processes a Black consciousness develops. In a second step, the analysis aims to discern whether the identification with a Black collectivity can transcend not only African national, ethnic, and linguistic borders but can also serve as a foundation of a specific Afro-diasporan identity that overcomes European nation-state borders.

Language

The role of language as central to an individual's identity has been researched in various contexts. Regarding migrants and their descendants especially the role of speaking a language from their country of origin or ancestry is often understood as influential to collective identity formation and upkeeping (Ladilova, 2015, p. 177). Auer (2005) for example establishes that, while speaking the language of the majority society is understood as neutral, speaking a language from the country of origin of their ancestors is interpreted as a marker of membership in a specific social (including ethnic) group and differentiation from the majority society (p. 405). As an emotional component identification with such a minority language can

thus be strong even if it plays a marginal role in daily interaction where the majority language has been adopted (Riehl, 2004, p. 153).

Speaking the majority society's language without accent or with "proper diction" can however also be used to claim membership, to truly be part of the European country's society that uses language as a symbolic cultural boundary marker (Alexander et al., 2007). Fanon (2008) describes this as „To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization" (p. 29). A direct link is thus drawn between speaking a language and understanding the background in which it developed. Not speaking a language or speaking it imperfectly is thus associated with a lack of cultural knowledge that is central to a certain group's identity and can therefore be used as strong grounds for exclusion. According to Fanon (2008), this leads to all colonized people, who have been stripped of their language and culture, positioning themselves according to how well they navigate the metropolitan language and culture (p.31). While I do not aim to equate the experiences of colonized people to the situation of PAD in Europe today, it is important to note that one colonial continuity among many is the higher positioning of European language vis-à-vis languages from the so-called Global South. Speaking "proper" (i.e., without an accent and following standard grammar rules) French, German, Portuguese, and so on is considered to be a sign of being assimilated, of approximating *white*ness (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012, pp. 289, 374). Having a recognizable accent, pronouncing words differently, or using a non-standard grammatical variation of the language on the other hand is associated with being less educated, foreign, and not a true member of the European nation-state's society (Keim, 2008; Popova, 2021).

However, as a potential specificity of the target group of this research project, Amponsah (2023) finds that the English language serves as a new approach to belonging to a

community of Black people in the Flemish part of Belgium. English is understood as offering a rich vocabulary and cultural register that facilitates understanding and allows for discourses about race and blackness in a way other languages do not (p. 48). Whether Afropeanness is thus associated with or requires the English language as a medium is an interesting question for future research.

Intracommunity Differences

Amponsah (2023) highlights the importance of the digital sphere which facilitates access to cultural information and provides new opportunities for community building for minority individuals in Europe . Especially social media is central to the extensive distribution of content on meanings and performances of Blackness expressed through, among others, content on music, food, aesthetics, and political statements. Online and offline performances of Blackness and appeals to BCM aim to build confidence and pride around being Black in individuals. However, experiences, visions, and perspectives of what it means to be Black or of African descent vary largely also among those with a sense of Black consciousness. Thus, conflicts often arise within community organizations comprised of individuals with different African origins, migration patterns, and citizenship status about questions of inclusion, identity, and belonging. Creating an overarching group label as African European can take away the opportunity to make different experiences visible as some narratives are marginalized. (Scarabello & De Witte, 2019, p. 320). Colorism, the privileging of individuals with lighter skin and other markers of proximity to *white*ness, class, and citizenship status impact who is considered as a spokesperson for PAD communities (Blakely, 2009).

While an overall intersectional approach is needed to understand intracommunity differences, gender is a fundamental factor in identity construction. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005, pp. 131–132) note that girls, unlike boys, tend to experience gender-specific stressors that shape racial identity development". As an example of such stressors more women than men

were found to identify as mixed race, as *white* identity is unattainable due to phenotype and Black identity is disputed mostly by Black women (Sims & Joseph-Salisbury, 2019)

Racial Europeanization

While national belonging continues to be considered central in making sense of the self for many Europeans, research with individuals with a so-called migration background has shown that national identities of the country they live in are less important to individuals with a migration background compared to their counterparts who have full European ancestry (Agirdag et al., 2016, p. 294). According to Fleischmann et al. (2019), this is not due to an incompatibility of European national identities with immigrant ethnic identities but the lower national identification can be attributed to the experience of discrimination and a corresponding identity threat. Some studies suggest that non-native Europeans might instead value a supranational European identity more to compensate for their lack of identification with the nation-state that excludes them due to their "non-nativeness" (Medugno, 2023, p. 135). At the same time, El-Tayeb (2011, pp. xiv–xv) notes that in the European context *white*ness is usually portrayed as the norm and is used to draw a boundary between insiders and outsiders. Identifying with Europe might thus not be more accessible to ethnicized or racialized individuals who are equally excluded from full symbolic membership as in the individual member states. Especially the European "invisible racialization", defined as the coexistence of a strong discourse of European "colorblindness" with exclusionary practices based on visual markers of non- *white*ness make the idea of a postnational European community hardly accessible for ethnicized or racialized individuals (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xxiv). Nonetheless, the increasing integration of Europe also creates new opportunity structures and can lead to new inclusive collective identities that unite various marginalized groups across the continent (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xx)

In many continental European countries, racial terminology and categorization are portrayed as outdated and illegitimate with the Holocaust being the sole point of reference for conceptions of race, ignoring the colonial legacies in European society (Goldberg, 2006; Roig, 2016). While arguments for the non-use of racial terms are manifold, there is a shared discomfort surrounding the topic across countries and arguments which often influences conversations (Roig, 2016). This is known as racial denial and is explained by the desire to eradicate all conceptions of race following the end of World War II (Goldberg, 2006). A society without racialization does however not result from avoiding discussing race and its effects; rather, the incited racial speechlessness can give rise to injustice, frustration, and violence that is not or cannot be addressed (Goldberg, 2006).

Racism and race are presented as American imports that only affect the European nations that were significant imperial powers (Gilroy, 2016). As a result, the historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism are not discussed in public, which creates an "asymmetry of information" and the aforementioned invisible racialization (Gilroy, 2016, p. xiv). Furthermore, eliminating the terminology required to discuss race also eliminates the ability to imagine racism and its consequences (Goldberg, 2006). This results in the use of other "difference markers" in European societies to identify the "other," such as culture, or religion (Goldberg, 2006; Roig, 2016). Therefore, "raceless racisms" for othered people continue to exist even if race continues to be concealed and unspoken about (Goldberg, 2006, p. 356).

Racism is defined as either a particular form of intentional discrimination against individuals or an older person's practice based on outdated theories of racial science (Lentin, 2008). According to this definition, discrimination based on sociocultural conceptions is seen as less dangerous than discrimination based on (pseudo) biological grounds (Lentin, 2008). Additionally, it minimizes racism as a minority and informal problem while the majority of society overcame it and is now structurally “colorblind” (El-Tayeb, 2011; Lentin, 2008).

Formal and Symbolic exclusion

Several European countries continue to have citizenship laws that follow the *ius sanguinis* principle where citizenship is passed on based on ancestry and not the individual's place of birth. Children born on nation-state territory to non-citizens are thus not automatically citizens and need to go through (sometimes fast-tracked, special) naturalization procedures to obtain citizenship of their country of birth (Vink, 2017). These individuals who were born and socialized in the country and who often hold little to no ties to the country of their parents' origin are, based on their legal status, constantly labeled as foreigners, and are denied access to certain rights and services that are only accessible to citizens. Nonetheless, they often identify, at least partly, as parts of the society that they reside in even if belonging to the national community is defined in cultural-ethnic terms. In the literature this is referred to as the distinction between legal and substantive citizenship where the former refers to the official status and documents while the latter encompasses identification processes, lived experiences, and feelings of belonging. The two types of citizenship are however entangled and cannot always be separated. While in so-called multiculturalist states (i.e., the United Kingdom or Australia) ethnic or racial identities play a central role in migrants' identification and are not directly linked to legal citizenship, in many European countries where ethnic or racial identities are not part of public discourse and national identities remain essentialist, legal citizenship status serves as a central identity marker for migrants. (Baldassar & Raffaetà, 2018) Even if they hold the citizenship of the country that they reside in, some racialized individuals are however still categorized as non-belonging to the citizenry. This holds especially in countries that, on Brubaker's (2009) highly debated continuum between ethnic and civic nationhood, fall onto the former end and categorize their national community in ethnic terms.

At the same time citizenship, whether substantive or merely formal, is not a sufficient indicator for national identification. Migrant descendant individuals who exclusively hold the citizenship of the country that they were born and raised in can identify with the country of their ancestor's origin besides the lack of formal membership in that society, sometimes even more or to the same extent as they identify with their country of birth, residence, and citizenship (Kyei et al., 2022). Nonetheless, upon concrete interaction with society in the country of their parent's origin, many individuals experience a comparable sense of non-belonging. Being categorized as neither from "here" nor "there" creates the need for alternative identification and can prompt transnational or subnational identities.

Looking at PAD in different European countries, citizenship regimes as categorization mechanisms could thus play a role in their identity construction. In countries with an ius sanguinis regime individuals are expected to feel a greater sense of non-belonging to the national community even after potential naturalization as the nation is constructed as not fully accessible to those who do not belong "by blood" (Baldassar & Raffaetà, 2018). Nonetheless, holding the citizenship of such a country can be an additional relevant category for identification for second-generation migrants as they can claim membership in the citizenry if not the nation which sets them apart from other non-citizen migrants or their descendants. Senses of belonging to transnational group self-definitions, such as Afropean, to compensate the lack of belonging "here and there" are likely to be more prevalent among those who cannot access substantive citizenship in an ethnically defined nation than for those who form part of a more civically defined nation (Medugno, 2023).

PAD in Europe navigate a complex terrain of racial categorizations, where their identities are constructed and perceived through the lens of race, regardless of their national or cultural affiliations (Hall, 1992). As Cortland et al. (2017) highlight, shared experiences of discrimination and marginalization foster a sense of solidarity and collective consciousness

among diasporic communities. In the European context, individuals of African descent could find common ground in their struggles against racial categorization and marginalization as "other", leading to the emergence of a collective Afropean identity. In this way, racial categorization, while often exclusionary and divisive, can also catalyze the formation of an inclusive Afropean identity that transcends national boundaries and celebrates cultural diversity.

Afropeanness

At the above-outlined multiple mundane intersections of Blackness, Africanness, and Europeanness new forms of self-making can develop that are neither mixes of or additions to Europeanness nor African at the expense of being European or vice versa. Rather new forms of self-making like Black European or Afropean are in themselves European and thus can be understood as challenging established narratives of Europeanness and claim-making strategies for belonging to a truly diverse Europe (El-Tayeb, 2011; Scarabello & De Witte, 2019). Overall, these concepts should always be understood as categories of practice. Afropean as a neologism was first coined by David Byrne in 1993 referring to the works of the Belgian-Congolese Music Group Zap Mama (Landvreugd, 2016). Afropea for him referred to a virtual constructed continent that is physically located within Europe but encompasses African as well as European hybrid influences and includes only some individuals on the European continent while affecting all (Byrne, 2002). As such the hybrid space of Afropea is more than the sum of its parts and is made up of its contributing factors and the spaces in between. In contrast to the term Black[4] the term Afropean opens up for identification that does not simply borrow terms from North American or British discourse on racialized identities without questioning them (Landvreugd, 2016, p. 43). The terms

[4] Using the term "Black" in a sociopolitical sense talking about racialization rather than phenotypical references to "black" as skin color has not yet reached consensus in continental Europe. Definitions are therefore often borrowed from the anglophone sphere without agreement on its meaning or applicability for members of a continental European African diaspora (Landvreugd, 2016, pp. 41, 43).

"African-European/ African-[nationality]" similarly borrow from what Gilroy (2004, p. xvi) calls "Americo-centric discourse" and transmit the notion of a diasporic form of normative Europeanness. Afropean then offers a new and unhyphenated space for identification where African descendant individuals can reclaim their belonging to Europe without conforming to normative Europeanness (Landvreugd, 2016). Individuals who identify as Afropean are thus located in a multiplicity of which Europeanness and Africanness are inherent qualities and through this identification can overcome their normative self-perception through the Afro-European condition (Landvreugd, 2016).

The delineation as to which individuals are or have the potential to become part of an Afropean group is however somewhat fuzzy with the only agreed-upon criteria being the need for an individual's simultaneous identification with Europeanness and Africanness (Medugno, 2023). Having originated from the cultural sphere the term has often been used in reference to artists, designers, and writers. Pitts (2020) highlights the risk that the term would only include economically successful and appeal to highly educated social theorists while ignoring the realities and self-identification of a majority of PAD in Europe. While Hogarth (2022) concludes that the term Afropean includes all who perceive or show a sense of reciprocal embeddedness in Africa and Europe, van Deventer (2014) distinguishes an Afropean generation from a diasporic generation. Afropean here refers to individuals who were socialized in and potentially hold formal citizenship in Europe but continue to have a sense of non-belonging due to external categorizations as "other" and "not 'real' Europeans" (Scarabello & De Witte, 2019). Nonetheless, these individuals define themselves against the diasporic generation of their parents or grandparents who migrated themselves, and the corresponding nostalgia of return as Afropeanness is shaped by a sense of non-belonging to either locality (van Deventer, 2014, pp. 66-67,77). They use their unique positioning at the intersection of Europeanness, Blackness, and Africanness to assert their right to speak as

insiders in Europe and thereby challenge normative Europeanness which is often equated with simultaneous implicit *white*ness and explicit racelessness (El-Tayeb, 2011; Goldberg, 2006. Due to the inability to identify with either national identities or African American models of self-making Scarabello and De Witte (2019) claim that younger generations of Europeans of African descent increasingly create networks based on shared experiences across nation-state borders to discuss questions of belonging and identity in Europe. These cross-European networks need to reconcile the partially different national context-dependent understandings of Africanness and Blackness in the various localities that they are trying to include. Popular culture, practices, and bodily fashion can be used to shape a sense of collective belonging of Africanness to Europe (Scarabello & De Witte, 2019).

In conceptualizing Afropeanness as the simultaneous embeddedness in Africanness and Europeanness while at the same time not having a sense of diasporic nostalgia, the concept is used in this project as a lens through which to analyze how individuals construct their identities and position themselves towards Africa and Europe.

Theory

Transnational migration, through its decoupling effect of the social from the geographical sphere, contributes to the development of transnational social spaces (Pries, 2001). Different non-overlapping social spaces are now stacked within the same geographical space and at the same time, social spaces expand across territorial borders (Pries, 2001). However, these transnational social spaces are not an extension or replacement of communities of origin but should rather be understood as existing above and beyond national social spaces as additional spaces of social interaction and identity formation (Pries, 2001). While this approach allows for a new understanding of transnational identifications and the inclusion of those who did not migrate themselves in our analyses, it is important to consider the diverse experiences that occur within these transnational social spaces.

This research aims to gain thorough insights into processes that underlie the potential construction of ethnic-racial identities (ERI) of PAD in Europe who navigate within such transnational fields spanning between localities on the African and the European continent. ERI is understood through Jenkins' internal-external dialectic of identification. However, to understand the processes through which external categorization and self-identification affect the development of ERI as well as the implications of ERI for senses of belonging and group self-definition, several theoretical approaches are integrated to provide a comprehensive framework for the subsequent data analysis.

Ethnic-Racial Identity as Social Identity

In line with Jenkins (1994), within this project race is conceptualized as a specific phenomenon of ethnicity that is used by one group to (attempt to) dominate the other. For this purpose, supposedly inherent intergroup differences are constructed based on alleged phenotypical markers that are employed as boundary markers. Thus, race is an especially

powerful process of social categorization that aims to establish hierarchical relationships between groups to justify exploitation and unequal distribution of resources (p.207-209). ERI refers to an individual's sense of self related to their overlapping experiences with ethnic and racial categories (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). It encompasses the conception of and the perceived belonging to particular racial and/or ethnic groups, shaped by both self-definition and external categorization. The concept is crucial for exploring how PAD in Europe perceive and construct their identities within an ethnically and racially diverse society in which they are a minority. Richard Jenkins' approach to ethnic identity and Ethnic-Racial Identity Development Theory are two particularly useful theoretical approaches to conceptualizing the processes of ethnic-racial identity formation and the factors influencing it.

Jenkins' Ethnic Identity

Individual and group ethnic-racial identities, as well as all other social identities, are understood to be formed in a dialectical process of self-identification and external categorization which in daily life are hardly unentangled (Jenkins, 1994, p. 198, 2014, p. 87). However, even the internal processes of self-identification can be considered as a social interaction as self-definition is signaled through the use of already existing external frameworks of meaning-making. External categorization can correspond with the individual's self-identification but can also impose a conflicting ethnic label onto a person (Jenkins, 1994, pp. 198–199). Especially when the external categorizer holds authority and/or power, externally imposed ethnic labels can deeply affect an individual's social life as well as their self-identification over time.

On a collective level, self-identification based on perceived shared cultural traits and practices leads to the formation of an ethnic group while external categorization creates ethnic categories which can be employed as the basis for stigmatization of a whole subsection

of society. All social identities, including ethnic ones, consist of both a nominal and an experiential aspect which can change independently of one another (Jenkins, 1994, p. 202). Thus, who is considered to fall within the category of a certain ethnicity can be determined externally while the experience of being of that ethnicity can at the same time be determined by a social group through self-definition and vice versa.

The self-definition of one group affects the definition of other groups as, to define what binds the group together a boundary needs to be drawn that delineates who does not belong to the group. A strong self-definition can however also arise as resistance or reaction to external categorization and can provide a guard against being deeply affected by external categorization. Being externally categorized as an ethnic category can thus lead to self-identification as an ethnic group, which can then continue to be strengthened through the group's categorization of others as ethnically different (Jenkins, 1994, pp. 202–203). Understanding ethnic identity thus not merely as a process of internal group identification following a Barthian approach, but considering the impact of external categorization helps to consider ethnicity as potentially a resource and a social liability simultaneously (Jenkins, 1994, p. 201). Especially in the European context where ethnicity or race are seldom addressed as an advantageous resource, closely considering the interplay of self-identification and external categorization in the formation of potential ethnic-racial (and other social) identities is a worthwhile endeavor to understand how these social identities affect individuals' and groups' experiences and sense of belongingness to overall society. Here it is important to note that ethnic categorizations can be formal or informal, affect all social settings, and are most of the time stigmatizing. However, categorizations can be drawn based on explicit or non-conscious verbal or non-verbal markers, such as accented language or physical appearance (Jenkins, 1994, p. 210). Responses to external categorizations differ substantially and range from rejection and counter-definition to (partial) internalization.

Rejecting an ethnic categorization can be difficult if the categorizer holds authority and self-claiming a different ethnic identity requires the validation of some outsiders. However, external ethnic categorization is also useless for the categorized if the ethnic identity ascription is not recognized by the concerned group. Thus, internalization to a certain degree is also desired by those who categorize. Jenkins (1994) identifies five processes through which external ethnic categorization is internalized. The least conflictual process occurs when a similar group self-identification already exists which is then reinforced through the overlapping external categorization. Secondly, due to permeable group boundaries, external categorizations can be internalized over time. Alternatively, the authority of the categorizer can pressure others to internalize the categorization. In a more extreme form, the fourth option is the internalization of the external categorization based on the use or threat of force. Lastly, and most interestingly external categorizations can be internalized in the process of defying precisely these. Focusing on the denial of the imposed ethnic category leads to a certain degree of its internalization as a basis for resistance.

For this research project, this means that the external categorization of PAD in Europe as ethnically "African" while at the same time self-defining as being socialized and marginalized in a European country based on an alleged foreignness could lead to a reactionary individual self-image as African and European simultaneously and a collective self-definition as an ethnic group, however, it might be labeled. While opposing the external categorization new terms of self-definition arise which can be understood to mark the transition from category to group. The transformation from an externally created ethnic category to a self-identified ethnic group with a potential for collective action requires a sense of consciousness about what experiences people might share and how these relate to the supposedly shared cultural background. Terms such as Afro-Greek, Afro-Italian, or Afro-German can be understood as examples of such a process of developing ethnic-racial

consciousness, reclaiming external categorization, and providing it with positive meaning on a national level to claim belonging to the nation. Within the post-national European sphere such a response to being categorized as African while being in (and formally belonging to) the shared European sphere could be the self-identification with Afropeanness or African Europeanness. The subsequent categorization of others, such as newer immigrants, as not belonging to this group would strengthen the self-identification of such a pan-European PAD group. Understanding ethnic-racial identity thus as an interplay of internal definition and external categorization allows for an analysis of whether Afropeans can be considered as a group or merely an externally imposed category or, in other words, whether the term has significance as a unit of practice or a potentially a unit of analysis.

Ethnic-Racial Identity Development

Most research on the development of ERI is conducted in the North American context and cannot be transferred directly to Europe due to the importance of context in ERI development and the differences in historical and sociocultural realities between the continents (Juang et al., 2023). Nonetheless, processes of identity formation of ethnic or racial minority individuals should be investigated in European contexts as they can be central to well-being, societal participation, and senses of belonging (Juang et al., 2023). The meta construct of ERI avoids the distinction between racial and ethnic identities as the definitions of either are mostly normative and highly context-dependent (i.e., a group might be considered as a racial category in one society and an ethnic one in another). Moreover, both types of identity are interdependent, and the development of ethnic identity is often impacted by racialized external categorization processes while racial identity development processes are related to the engagement with cultural traditions. ERI thus allows us to understand the impact of an individual's racialized experiences as well as those that are based on their ethnic background which in real life are often deeply entangled. As a vaguely defined group that is comprised of

various ethnic backgrounds, as well as people who have different racialization experiences, the identity development of PAD regarding their ancestry, is best understood through the framework of ERI. However, ERI is not only dependent on self-categorization but is developed in the interplay between individual maturation of identity and context (including external categorization). (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 23) External categorization of an individual into a certain racial category can occur from people outside of this group or from within a group that is "claiming" the individual to belong within the same category and thus considers them a potential group member. Thus, a group's self-definition can lead to the external categorization of an individual.

Therefore, ERI is never fixed and should be understood as processes that lead to a specific self-identification at a given period in life in a specific context rather than a result of self-definition. Developmentally speaking, ERI construction is influenced by the individual's age and the appraisal of previous experiences. While in general developmental steps are similar in all human beings around the world, experiences of "ethnic–racial labeling (self and other), ethnic-racial knowledge (including behaviors), and ethnic-racial constancy" that are central childhood primes for subsequent ERI formation might not occur in the same temporal fashion in contexts where ethnicity and race are not openly talked about, such as most European countries (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 24). During adolescence the process of ERI theoretically consists of the search for information about and exploration of the own race-ethnicity, reflecting on how it affects experiences and chances in one's own life and the life of others within the same group, and internalizing values of the ethnic-racial group (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 25). This is possible only from adolescence onwards as younger individuals do not possess the ability to connect their sense of self to others in a reference group, a prerequisite to developing group consciousness, and disentangle their own understanding of ERI from the meanings taught through socialization. Increased exposure to

different groups of people and discrimination additionally stimulates the exploration and contestation of the own ERI (Phinney, 1990). During this stage, individuals usually initiate conversations with others about ethnicity or race and may participate in activities associated with it to form their own understanding of what a certain ethnicity or race that they have been categorized into externally means to them. This step is understood as typical adolescent internalization of social boundaries which leads to more certainty in the identification with an ethnic-racial group and an increased salience of ERI within an individual's sense of self (Syed et al., 2013; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 26). However, as a process ERI is never complete and Phinney (1990) states that ERI can change over time as people explore the meaningfulness of ethnicity and race in their lives and make corresponding commitments. Thus, in the European context that avoids explicit discussions of race and ethnicity an exploration of ethnicity and race might occur later in an individual's life and be prompted by more informal sources of ethnic-racial categorization than in the American context in which the theory was developed. However, this does not make the development of a sense of ERI impossible or less relevant.

The centrality of ethnicity and race in a person's self-concept is determined by context and the person's tendency to see themselves through an ethnic-racial lens. People might thus express stronger ERI in some contexts while considering their ethnicity or race as unimportant in others and the extent to which individuals express a sense of ERI differs immensely between people (Yip et al., 2013). However, those who consider their ethnicity or race as central to their lives are more motivated to engage in an exploration of their ERI and seek more connection and group identification with those considered to belong to the same ethnic-racial group (Kiang et al., 2010). Such exploration and engagement with others in turn strengthens the own understanding of ERI and strengthens self-identification with a particular ethnic-racial label. To upkeep a positive sense of self, individuals seek to evaluate the group

under such a label positively, and positive affirmation of the ethnic-racial group is a crucial component of ERI. Thus, as described in social identity theory people compare groups on a dimension of choice to obtain a positive evaluation of their group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Individuals who ascribe more importance to ethnicity/race as a social categorizing mechanism therefore are more likely to engage in comparisons between ethnic-racial groups to strengthen their positively evaluated ERI and highlight the existence of their own ethnic-racially defined group. Nonetheless, ERI is also influenced by the perceived public regard of the ethnic-racial group. Positive or negative public images can be internalized leading to stereotype-confirming or contesting behavior and a change in the affective evaluation of the own ERI. At the extremes, the perception of low public regard in combination with low centrality and low personal positive evaluation, or low certainty in the own ERI can lead to identity self-denial where individuals try to hide or minimize ERIs (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 28). High awareness of negative stereotypes and unequal ethnic-racial group dynamics increases the likelihood of ERI self-denial. In the European context where ethnicity or race is almost exclusively addressed through stereotypes and *white*ness is portrayed as the unspoken norm, ERI self-denial might thus be a prevalent choice for ethnic-racial minority individuals (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xiv).

Azmitia et al. (2008) establish that during adulthood increasingly diverse experiences and maturity prompt deeper exploration of, reflection on, and flexibility in ERI leading to more complex positionalities and a perceived relevance of ERI in more domains of life. Additionally, adults reflect on the intersections of their various identifications and thus integrate their ERI in combination with other aspects, such as gender identity and professional identity, into an increasingly coherent sense of self with an associated meaning-making narrative. Such an "achieved identity" has undergone processes of ethnic-racial selection, exploration, and internalization but continues to evolve throughout the lifespan and

even if relatively stable is expressed differently depending on the situational context (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 29). Nonetheless, some individuals experience a drastic and abrupt change in their ERI during adulthood. Especially those ethnic-racial minority individuals who internalized a majority ethnic-racial group's sense of meaning-making about the self and one's ethnic category are likely to lack capacities to make sense of cultural-political challenges that they face due to their ethnic-racial categorization and are thus more likely to experience an abrupt change in ERI when facing a crisis (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 29). However, it is important to note that this is not a normative argument, and while individuals with stronger ERI are more involved in cultural community activities and solidarity actions for shared struggles, there is no difference in well-being or achievement between them and individuals with an assimilationist frame of meaning-making (Yip & Cross, 2004). Developmental aspects thus play a crucial role in ERI throughout the lifespan. Nonetheless, considering the impact of different contexts ranging from family and peer groups to the national and global context on the processes that affect the role ethnicity and race play in a person's construction of self is important. One of the most central contextual aspects in ERI formation is the primary ethnic-racial socialization within the family and a good relationship between the child and the main caregivers. Furthermore, peers and role models or mentors of the same ethnic-racial categorization are deemed to be important factors that encourage ERI especially during adolescence and early adulthood and for individuals who navigate mostly in *white* majority settings. For those who were socialized (partly) in settings where they were part of the ethnic-racial majority society (e.g., in their or their ancestor's country of origin) ethnic-racial categorization was not prompted as frequently, and other social identities are likely to have developed to be awarded more central status in making sense of the self. Here the individual's age at migration and the reasons for migration need to be considered when looking at their ERI formation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, pp. 31–32).

Using an ERI development theory-inspired life story narrative approach to the ERI formation of PAD who were socialized in majority *white* European societies to varying extents is thus an effective strategy to capture both developmental and contextual influences. While the theory does not allow for hypothetical insights into the content of ERI it sheds light on the interactional processes that allow for a better understanding of the potential ways PAD in Europe incorporate ethnic-racial categorizations into making sense of themselves and those around them. However, these processes need always to be considered through an intersectional lens.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a crucial theoretical paradigm for understanding the complex and multiple identities of PAD in Europe. Shaped by different national contexts various overlapping social identities, such as gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship, lead to a wide range of experiences among PAD in Europe which each affect identity formation overall, and ethnic-racial identity formation specifically. The term intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the US-American context of the late 1980s to refer to how social stratification, such as race, gender, and class, intersect to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege, especially within the legal sphere. Rather than different forms of discrimination merely adding up, intersectionality sheds light on the new forms of discrimination that arise when two or more disadvantaged social identities intersect (Crenshaw, 1989). Initially coined as a concept to investigate dynamics of sameness and difference in feminist and anti-racism social movements, intersectionality quickly expanded to be used not only as an analytical tool but a theoretical paradigm and a principle for political intervention design (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). Individuals located at the intersections of social identities are considered to be too similar to the more privileged members within each disadvantaged category to claim special status as a distinct category but are at the same

time too different from the other category members to qualify for the same treatment (Cho et al., 2013, p. 790). The most famous example brought forward by Crenshaw herself is the position of a Black woman who is considered as an average member of each the category of "female" and "Black" but is not considered under neither the affirmative action hiring policies that benefit mostly Black men nor gender equality hiring policies from which the main beneficiaries are *white* women (Crenshaw, 1989). This example illustrates how some individuals at the intersections fall through the cracks at the expense of highlighting selected experiences of marginalization.

Even though this research does not consider discriminatory policy practices, grounding the analysis of life narratives in intersectionality allows for an understanding of experiences and potential corresponding identity constructions that consider more than mere sameness of external ethnic-racial categorizations and can account for intra-category differences. This theory thus helps in explaining how other social identities, at their intersection with potential ethnic-racial identities, shape the diverse experiences of PAD in Europe. While research into ethnic-racial identities lies at the heart of this project, intersectionality is important to avoid ethnic lensing and presenting individuals as unidimensional.

(Non-)Belonging

As outlined above, symbolic boundaries drawn around many European nation-states are at least partly ethnic and often quite impermeable for individuals who are perceived as culturally distinct. While citizenship can be used for claiming formal membership by PAD individuals who have attained that status through *ius soli* or naturalization, many must rely on the redefinition of boundaries for a sense of belonging in the European context. By forming a self-defined collective with other PAD across European borders, groups of PAD in different European states could strengthen their symbolic power and could thus draw a new boundary

of who is legitimately European by introducing a new layer of simultaneous belonging to European and African collectives.

Belonging involves both emotional attachment and (formal) recognition of membership in a collective with a particular self-definition (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011). Investigating how potential ERI relates to senses of belonging among PAD in Europe helps to understand the fluid processes that connect the individual to a collective. Drawing on Jones and Krzyżanowski's (2011) framework of belonging I conceptualize a sense of belonging as being metaphorically located at the overlap of individual intersectional identity (including ERI) and a collective ethnic-racial group self-definition as conceptualized by Jenkins' (1994). The framework thus allows for an analysis of the way in which an individual's processes of identity formation intersect to lead to a specific simultaneous positioning in relation to the community of (their ancestors') origin and the community that they live in. Understanding the link between the individual and a group through the lens of belonging shows the deep entanglement of individual and collective meaning-making of the self (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011). Even though I do not share Jones and Krzyżanowski's (2011) conviction that the fluid, affective, and intersectional nature of individuals' sense of self can only be captured through the concept of belonging, their model is invaluable in understanding what prompts individuals to associate with a particular ethnic-racial group. Belonging is then understood as "a process whereby an individual in some ways feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a personalized identity and a collective one" (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 44). Interestingly thinking of this relationship through the model of belonging allows for the incorporation of definitional differences into the group's self-definition. Additionally, while belonging brings along a similar need to draw boundaries between groups as identity does, belonging makes the conceptualization of simultaneous attachment to more than one (contradicting) collective

possible. In a European context where being of African descent and being European is often portrayed as incompatible, belonging thus opens new possibilities for simultaneous group membership. Moreover, the concept of belonging includes weaker attachments to a group with a shared cause without relying on the external recognition that would be needed to form a stable collective identity (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011).

Another useful takeaway from the theory of belonging as presented by Jones and Krzyżanowski (2011) is the conception of symbolic and formal barriers to the recognition of membership in a collective. While individuals perceive belonging to a collective based on elective attachments, the external recognition of their belonging by the in- and outgroup influences whether they can consider themselves part of and influence the self-definition of the collective (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011). PAD in Europe who claim belonging to a European nation-state society or to being European might thus not be recognized by European natives or other PAD in Europe as such and are thus symbolically or even formally excluded from the collective. Similarly, PAD that were socialized in Europe might face similar recognition barriers when claiming to be African. The denial of membership as a discriminatory experience might not only affect the individual's ERI but also affects how they link themselves to the European (state's) collective (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011). At the same time, belonging can also be imposed or strengthened by authorities through formalizing attachments between individual and collective, such as providing some immigrants with national passports to include them in the polity. Importantly while not all attachments need formal external validation claiming belonging through shared experiences requires the individual to use some of the preexisting meaning-making frames of the collective (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2011). For individuals with a sense of simultaneous belonging to various discursively conflicting collectives, such as PAD in Europe, being recognized as a member in either of the collectives can be a challenge. However, these

complexities of belonging in diverse and fluid contexts can be unpacked through the theories of Double Consciousness and Hybridity as outlined below.

Double Consciousness

Rooted in the US-American context in the early 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois introduced the term double consciousness to refer to the experience of Black people in society. The concept of double consciousness holds that certain national identities cannot be reconciled with specific ethnic or racial categorizations. As a result, individuals who are ethnically or racially categorized as non-nationals are always aware of who they are in the eyes of others but are not necessarily conscious of who they are in their own eyes. To overcome this sense of twoness individuals attempt to combine their two selves into "a better and truer self" without sacrificing any of the two parts. (Du Bois & Marable, 2015, p. 15). For this aim various strategies, such as investing in educational and professional achievement, arise at the intersection of the desire to be recognized by the *white* majority society while at the same time contributing to the status improvement of the Black minority (Du Bois & Marable, 2015). Trying to reconcile these two aims requires the development of a self-consciousness that is grounded in more than external categorization. Shared experiences of hardship and the realization that racism hinders the success of Black people collectively can prompt the beginning of a common consciousness which however needs subsequent discursive elaboration to become a stable group consciousness that incorporates both selves (Du Bois & Marable, 2015).

While the concept of double consciousness has been criticized as oversimplifying the multidimensionality of people's selves by not including other social categorizations, such as gender, as additional lenses through which the self can be perceived, it is useful to analyze how Black people make sense of themselves regarding their ethnic-racial categorizations (Pittman, 2024). Thus, for analytical use, double consciousness needs to be combined with an

intersectional lens to capture individual meaning-making processes as completely as possible. Transferring the concept of double consciousness to 21st-century Europe is not intuitive or straightforward. The challenges faced by relatively recently freed enslaved people in the 20th century USA cannot and should not be equated to the barriers for belonging to a national collective that PAD face in current-day Europe and US-American history of racial systems should not be used as a blueprint to understand societal structures elsewhere (Pittman, 2024). Critics of the concept argue against the understanding of double consciousness as an inherent feature of being Black in a majority- *white* society and mention the protective function of a Black community with limited contact with *white* people. Due to the societal structure of many European countries minority individuals completely living within mono-ethnic-racial communities is more uncommon than in the US-American context and most Black individuals in Europe are in close contact with other ethnic-racial groups from the age that they start formal education at the latest (Hondius, 2014). Additionally, a symbolic incompatibility of being German, Greek, Italian, etc., or European with being non- *white* dominates public discourses and the limited research available shows how PAD in Europe develop various strategies to overcome this divide through cultural contributions and redefinition of what constitutes the nation.

Hybridity

Hybridization occurs when cultural traditions and frames of collective meaning-making interact and mutually influence each other's further development once they come into contact (Ashcroft et al., 1995). Culture in this context is understood as the combined practices and values that a group understands as central to their self-definition. Homi Bhabha's (1995) concept of cultural hybridity refers to the outcomes of so-called third spaces. The third space describes the cultural interactions and negotiations that occur when two or more different cultures come into contact with each other and is thus applicable, among many others, to the

study of 21st-century European societies. The third space is a space of in-betweenness and hybridity that emerges when cultures interact discursively, resulting in a group's or individual's new cultural identity that is neither fully one nor the other, but something entirely new (Bhabha, 1995). The concepts of hybridity and the third space were developed to analyze colonial and post-colonial situations to indicate that the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized impacted each other mutually and as a result, new forms of meaning-making arose that were aligned with neither group's preexisting frames (Mizutani, 2013). Bhabha (1995) rejects the notion of cultural purity as meaning arises through discourse only which automatically introduces new elements into the culture. Claims of protecting or reestablishing an original national culture are thus unattainable as all information about the past is processed through the lens of contemporary thought and discourse that was "dialectically reorganized" through modern technologies, language, and dress (Fanon in Bhabha, 1995, p. 206). The third space is a space of cultural ambiguity, where boundaries between seemingly distinct cultures are blurred, and where new forms of cultural expression can emerge. The third space should however not be understood as a fixed entity, but rather as a dynamic and fluid space that is constantly being (re-)negotiated (Bhabha, 1995). Moreover, the third space is not necessarily a physical location, but can also refer to a metaphorical space that exists within individuals, and within which different and potentially incompatible cultural identities are rearranged constantly to form a sense of self (Bhabha, 1995). Within the third space, individuals and communities can challenge dominant cultural norms, create new forms of cultural expression, and thus engage in resistance against the imposition of one majority culture. By understanding the hybridity of culture, practices of and identifications with a cross-border culture can be recognized at least theoretically (Bhabha, 1995). Conceptualizing current-day Europe as a third space is thus indispensable to understanding the creation and re-creation of PAD ethnic-racial identities. Based on this conceptualization Europeanness should overall be

considered as an expression of a hybrid culture that consists of many native European cultures and multiple cultures that immigrants brought with them. However, discursively the selection of which cultures legitimately contribute to the hybrid European culture is restricted and especially many non- *white* cultural groups' influences are made invisible (El-Tayeb, 2011). Thus, to refer to one of the many hybrid cultures that arise within PAD and Europe as a third space there might be a need for a more specific label, such as Afropeanness. Considering hybridity is thus invaluable to analyze how PAD in Europe incorporate different and sometimes conflicting cultural influences to make sense of their positionality and claims to belonging within Europe and its several nation-states.

Collective self-definition

While a great amount of literature, including the ones consulted in this section, refers to collective self-definition through meaning-making processes as collective identities, I avoid the use of identity due to its ambiguity and dependence on external categorization when referring to the collective and speak of a group's self-definition instead. Collective frames of meaning-making that allow a group to define itself are constructed based on alleged similarities in traits, values, or practices. They always have a specific extension and spread in space as well as a certain dynamic in time (Pries, 2013). Due to their collective nature, the self-definitions that are based on shared meaning-making frames only arise in social fields with several individuals where they serve as "communicative constructs" (Pries, 2013, p. 24). Increasingly large numbers of people who move between different localities affect the formation processes of groups and their self-definitions in both the places of origin and arrival as well as the individual identity formation processes of the people on the move due to the interaction of different experiences and contextual elements. The effected decoupling of the social and the geographical towards a transnational space further contributes to changing dynamics in group self-definition processes. In transnational social spaces the boundaries of

groups do not necessarily coincide with regional or state borders and the processes of collective self-definition are increasingly understood as multi-layered resulting in “as well as” rather than “either/or” identifications that encompass aspects of several localities (Pries, 2013, p. 26).

The theory of symbolic interactionism as developed by Herbert Blumer focuses on how individual actions and interactions contribute to the self-definition of groups. Groups are understood as processes of ongoing activity of several interacting people (Blumer, 1986). In positing that meaning arises and can be derived only in the process of interpersonal interactions concerning the group at hand and subsequent interpretation of the interaction, Blumer (1986) establishes that the continuous negotiation of various individual actions and understandings about the nature of a group is what leads to what we can call a group self-definition. To arrive at a collective self-definition the presence of individuals who are perceived as relevant others is necessary. In the framework for this project, relevance is understood as arising from perceived ethnic-racial similarities and presence can refer to virtual or face-to-face interactions. When deciding on an action and corresponding interpretation, an individual is impacted by the “dual process of indicating to others how to act and interpreting the indications made by others” (Blumer, 1986, p. 10). As a result, the person negotiates a racial identity that is representative of their current surroundings. This identity will be the one that the person most comfortably identifies with, one that they feel most appropriately fits in with and that reflects the common norms and values of that environment(Patel, 2007). Group behavior and the associated self-definition are then understood as the process of individuals piecing their actions together which results in actions and definitions that are neither one of the individual components nor the mere sum of all. Consequently, groups can appear to act and define themselves as independent entities, ignoring the processes of formation that are shaped by each individual member (Blumer,

1986). To conceptualize a potential group of PAD in Europe it is thus important to understand its definition through the interlinkages of individual PAD's actions and definitions without taking any single one as a definite answer.

By employing the above outlined multi-theoretical approach the complex topics of identities, belonging, and group self-definition and the especially sensitive topic of ethnic-racial identities in a context that marginalizes discourse about those can be analyzed in a nuanced and detailed way.

Methodology

Sample

Participants are recruited through community organizations in several European countries and personal networks including a snowball sampling approach. Especially the former channel might lead to a selection bias of people who hold a disproportionally strong collective ethnic-racial identity. However, as the study does not aim for a representative sample and is overall focused on the processes that underlie identity and group formation, the quality of research is not affected by this. All interested individuals are screened with the criteria for inclusion being A) self-identifying as 'of African descent', B) having resided in a European country for at least the last ten years, and C) understanding and speaking English or German. There was no specific age requirement and all individuals older than 18 years could participate if they fit the inclusion criteria. Not limiting participation to those who were born and primarily socialized in Europe or to a specific generation allows for the analysis of the different conceptions of Afropeanness as described above.

Table 1 Overview of the respondents (all information is self-reported)

Gender	female	5
	male	3
Age	18 - 21	3
	22 - 25	2
	28 - 31	2
	32 - 35	1
Born in	Europe	5
	Africa	3
Citizenship	Only European state	4
	Only African state	1
	dual	3
Highest level of education	High school diploma	2
	Apprenticeship or equivalent	1
	University or equivalent	3
	PhD	1
Current profession	Student	2
	Employed	6
Racially “mixed”	yes	2
	no	6

A total of eight interviews were conducted (two in German, six in English) with the participants' ages ranging between 20 and 35 (see Table 1). Three interviewees identified as male, and the five others as female. Citizenship and educational background were heterogenous.Together the interviewees reported lived experience in ten European (9 EU) countries: Portugal, Spain, France (including one overseas territory), Germany, Austria, Poland, Italy, Hungary, Greece, and the United Kingdom (see Figure 1). Correspondingly, seven African countries were mentioned as places of the participants’ ancestry: Cabo Verde, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe, Madagascar, and the Union of the Comoros (see Figure 2).

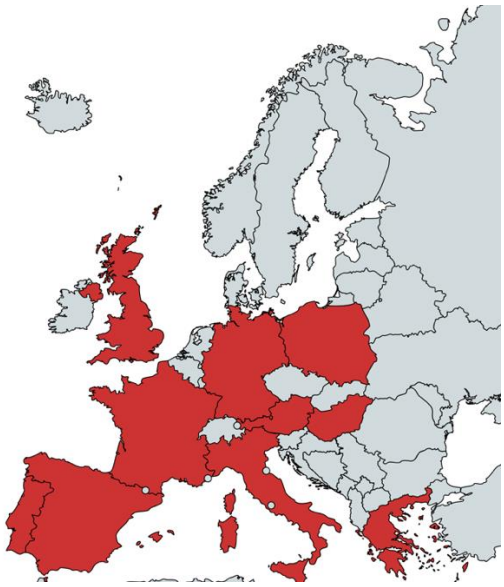

Figure 1 Overview of Respondents' Countries of Lived Experience in Europe

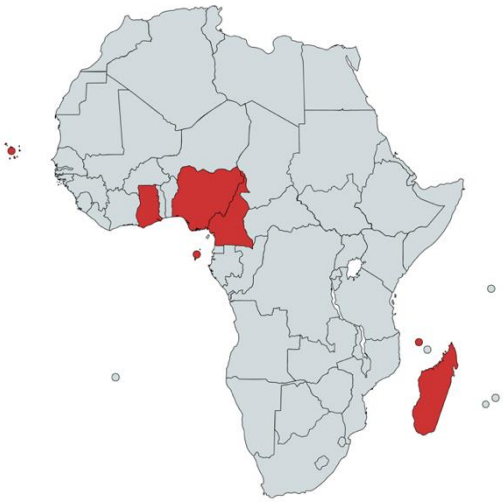

Figure 2 Overview of Respondents' Countries of Ancestry in Africa

Photo-elicitation interviews

Identity is a concept that most people have a hard time describing and life narratives are oftentimes not remembered explicitly (Harrison, 2002). To facilitate the participant's retrieval of their life story narrative an auto-driven photo elicitation interview approach is used where participants are asked to bring pictures related to the research theme. Prompting participants to take pictures based on the research theme has been found to increase the consciousness of and reflection on the participant's own experiences and perceptions which cannot always be articulated verbally when prompted (Plunkett et al., 2013). Interviews that employ photos to elicit certain themes that are central to identity construction allow the participants to 'show' who they are (Croghan et al., 2008). Thus, after agreeing to their participation all interested participants are sent an email with a short description of the research theme and their task of taking or compiling three to eight pictures that for them relate to how they see themselves, their community, and their life story. The limit on the number of pictures was introduced due to the limited time frame of both the picture-taking phase and the interview. Pictures can

include screenshots, photographs taken for this project specifically, or already existing photographs. Each picture should be sent to the researcher accompanied by a short title or keywords before the interview. In case of privacy concerns participants could choose to not share any pictures or to only show them during the interview without handing them over. An interview appointment was made, and participants were asked to give their informed consent (see Appendix A), fill in a short demographic questionnaire, and participants are provided with the researcher's contact information for potential questions that arise during the data collection phase.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and besides two interviews all were conducted online via the Zoom platform. Three of the participants opted to not use pictures and these interviews were thus conducted as narrative interviews without elicitation. During the interview stage, each participant is presented their own pictures and captions and is asked to narrate what the pictures represent, why they took or selected them, and how they relate to their life story and to who they are[5]. Notes were taken during this narration and after the participant was done talking follow-up and clarification questions on themes that arose and are relevant to the research question (e.g., community activities, family links, ethnic self-perception, etc.) were asked. Additional themes that were not brought up by the participant were addressed through extrinsic questions afterward. These include relationships with family and friends, community organization engagement, transcontinental engagement, and the influence of the person's African descent on their self-image. At the end of the interview, all interviewees are asked to talk about their ethnic, racial, or national self-identification which provides insights into explicit self-categorization but might influence responses if asked at the beginning.

[5] Interview opening prompt: "I am studying the experiences and perceptions of people of African descent all over Europe. I would appreciate it if you could tell me more about the pictures you provided and how they relate to your life story and to who you are. Everything you remember. I want to emphasize again that you can take as much time as you need. Start wherever you find it meaningful and tell me everything up to the present day."

Thematic Analysis

While there are different approaches to analyzing photo-elicitation interviews, in this project the verbal interview data is analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. The pictures are used only for elicitation and can be employed in follow-up questions. As identities and belongingness are topics that many people have a hard time verbalizing explicitly, in addition to using photo elicitation, the verbal data is analyzed regarding latent meanings wherever possible.

An inductive thematic analysis approach as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is used to analyze what the interviewees have said. This approach allows for the identification and analysis of patterns within interview data while focusing on the interviewees' subjective viewpoints and acknowledging the diversity of perspectives within externally created categories of people (Flick, 2022, p. 17). Ultimately this methodology can be used to produce descriptions for a specific aspect of a social-psychological phenomenon, in this case, the processes underlying ERI formation, belonging, and group self-definition (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 6–7). While neither the interview method nor the sample size allows for generalization, applying this analysis method allows for the identification of potential patterns across the data set and not just a focus on an individual case. In this research project, thematic analysis is thus used to outline how PAD in Europe make explicit sense of their experiences and describe their identification and belonging.

Each English language interview was transcribed using the Microsoft Word transcription function, while the two interviews that were conducted in German were transcribed manually. For each interview, codes are developed inductively with a focus on three specific interrelated aspects: individual identity construction, group self-definition processes, and feelings of belonging. Due to space and time constraints, the analysis cannot reflect the full content of the obtained dataset beyond this focus. After coding each interview separately, the

obtained codes are sorted into broader themes and potential subthemes, each with a corresponding label (see Appendix B). Themes are considered such if they arise in at least two interviews and are somewhat related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethics and Positionality

To facilitate the analysis, all interviews were audio recorded. These audio files were consequently transcribed manually (for German language interviews) or with the assistance of the Microsoft Word transcription function (for English language interviews). All files were stored on private accounts and devices with personal access. Before the interview, each participant was informed about the topic of the broad research project (i.e., Lived experiences of PAD in Europe), the data protection regulations, and the procedure of the interview through an information letter and accompanying email. All were asked to provide their informed consent in a form only if they did not have any remaining questions. At the beginning of all interviews, I asked for any open questions or concerns and reminded the interviewees that the conversation would be audio-recorded and that they could choose to not answer any questions without providing a reason. However, no one decided to make use of this possibility and all participants talked openly about their and their family's experiences. Nonetheless, I decided to not dig deeper into some sensitive topics that made the participant visibly uncomfortable as life story interviews can, even if sometimes described as therapeutic, also be retraumatizing (Atkinson, 1998).

Being categorized as a PAD in Europe myself, another ethical concern was the clear framing of the interview as part of a research project and not just a casual conversation among members of an (allegedly) shared community. While the collected data always need to be considered in relation to the context and a neutral interview communication is impossible, it would be unethical not to inform the interviewee about the research aim. Nonetheless, considering the topic of this research project, social relationships and especially the

perceivable markers of similarity between interviewee and researcher, need to be understood as social influences and will be addressed in the analysis (Froschauer & Lueger, 2020, p. 102). Letting respondents narrate their life stories freely without prompting elaboration on experiences or perceptions of ethnicity or race is important to understand the centrality of such categorizations for the individual. After the interviews ended, I offered to disclose more information about my research project to my interview partners. This happened to varying extents. However, I always explained that I am overall interested in the way PAD all over Europe perceive themselves and their experiences in relation to the country that they live in and to Europe in general. I told them that my research interest arose from encountering the neologism “Afropean” in academic literature and that I aim to understand whether this concept resonates with the people that it supposedly describes. This prompted interesting elaborations on the respondents’ conceptions and evaluation of ethnic-racial groups. While these statements were prompted by an external introduction of the term and were not brought up by the interviewees themselves, I decided to include them in the analysis. The conversational context in which they arose is indicated.

Analysis

Four key themes that were evident in the data were identified through the thematic analysis process of the interview transcripts. These themes are viewed as essential in determining the identity construction processes of the participants and are labeled as “standing out”, “family networks”, “fitting in”, and “Black signifiers” (see Appendix B).

Before presenting the analysis, all respondents are introduced briefly. Capucine was born and raised in Cameroon and came to Italy to study ten years ago, before moving on to the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria. She currently lives in between Spain, France, and Italy. Oyinbrakemi was born in Nigeria and moved to Germany at the age of twelve before moving to Austria for his graduate studies. Leonora was born and raised in Austria where she currently resides as the daughter of a Ghanaian father and an Austrian mother. John was born in Italy to Ghanaian immigrant parents and currently lives in England. Binour was born and raised in France as the daughter of Comorian immigrants and currently lives in South Africa. Isabel was born in Cameroon and moved to Greece at the age of five where she was raised and currently lives. Sofia was born in Portugal to immigrant parents from Cape Verde and São Tomé und Príncipe and moved to Austria for work before returning to Portugal. Elijah was born in France to a Polish mother and a Madagascan father and grew up between the French mainland and an overseas territory. He currently lives in Poland where he moved for his university studies. Five of the respondents attend or have attended universities and all but one hold a European citizenship with two of them also holding the citizenship of an African country.

Standing Out

Being the only or one of very few PAD in a certain locality or context emerged as a theme in many interviews, especially when the respondents referred to their childhoods. This is in line with the observation that in contrast to some American contexts, in most localities in Europe

PAD are socialized in environments that are dominated by a *white* majority (Hondius, 2014). This was associated with an increased visibility as "other" that made the development of a sense of belonging difficult. John voices these experiences of growing up in Italy when saying:

> When you grow up and you know, you start, to have a crush on someone. Because you are, you're different. You're darker, maybe you think OK, they're not going to like you because you're black, you know, like your classmates. And so, I feel like. Yeah, you just grew up with a lot of insecurity because again, you're the only one. (John, 2024)

Difference here is associated with visible phenotypical characteristics which led him to become insecure. Rather than attributing the sense of not fitting in to his ethnicity, an internalized racialization as Black is the source of his lack of belonging. Like many other respondents, he switches between referring to himself as Ghanaian, Black, or African almost interchangeably during the interview. Conceptualizing the identity construction of PAD in Europe through the concept of ERI does thus appear to be a well-fitting strategy. Conceptualizing experiences and perceptions of difference as an overlap between racialization and ethnic-cultural factors also becomes apparent when Sofia, who was socialized in Portugal, describes her childhood experiences:

> We were the only two black kids in primary school. The rest of the people were all white kids and you know, there's the pressure. The relationship with their moms were different from my relationship with my mom. And I was kind of jealous of that. Not gonna lie. Their relationship with each other was different than their relationship with me. My hair was different. Uh, my color was different. My traditional things were different. My way to speak, it was different and a lot of things like were hard. When I was a kid, didn't felt that much. But when I look back, I'm kind of sad because it's hard. You know, I feel like because I used to say no, my childhood, I never had problems like I never felt outside and outside of the box. But actually, I really did. I was just kind of hiding that. (Sofia, 2024)

For her, in contrast with John's perception, the feeling of difference was not merely a fear but a lived reality of her classmates interacting with her differently based on ethnic-racial differences. Interestingly the interpretation of these differences affecting her sense of belonging only occurred in hindsight while before she ignored these experiences. Comparing the differences in situational appraisal between her younger and current self indicates the development of a sense of consciousness that serves as a frame for making sense of her previous experiences.

Respondents thus voice the absence of other PAD and the experiences of being treated differently based on categorizations due to their African descent or racialization as a formative experience. However, a temporal distinction between their experiences as children or adolescents and their appraisal as adults is drawn that fits with ERI development theory. In line with Sofia's statement, children notice differences between people and show emotional responses but cannot yet attribute these to social categorization. The development of a sense of ethnic-racial consciousness during adolescence and young adulthood can help make sense of these experiences, reflect on the role of ethnicity and race in them, and consequently embed them into an individual's ERI. For John, who refers to his perceptions of difference during adolescence this ethnic-racial consciousness shows to already be more developed. However, his statement also indicates a strong internalization of negative public regard that affected his self-esteem. Without the engagement with others who are categorized into the same ethnic-racial category, discrimination, and external categorization are perceived as such and potentially internalized but do not contribute to a positively evaluated ERI.

Two of the respondents also submitted pictures as elicitation cues that prompted them to talk about feelings of standing out and not being accepted. For Leonora, who was socialized in Austria, the experience of being the only PAD in most settings during her childhood was associated with not having any role models or people she could confide her

experiences of exclusion, leading to her stating that the provided picture shows that she does not have a sense of belonging even though "overall, I am not that different but still I do not fit with the rest" (Leonora, 2024). Elijah, who was socialized in both mainland and overseas France, similarly provided a picture that represents standing out of the collective. Growing up he reports that he felt like "the odd one out" in various settings. However, he stresses that that feeling was not primarily due to ethnic or racial differences but due to a difference in his family's lifestyle which included moving back and forth between two localities every six months (Elijah, 2024). This elaboration shows that standing out and an associated sense of non-belonging in the European context can be highly intersectional with individuals choosing specific foci when making sense of their experiences and constructing their positionality in relation to others.

However, the experience of standing out from the majority also invoked a sense of responsibility in some respondents who are aware that their behavior will be used to form assumptions about other PAD who come after them. Thus, besides their increased visibility leading to a perceived lack of belonging, many also infer the need to be perceived exceptionally well or as a role model. For example, Oyinbrakemi, who was socialized in Nigeria and Germany notes that

> We always categorize people, that's just the way it is, but that's why I make sure that I do my job as well as possible because, I generally do my job well, but still knowing that others will come after me and to give them a chance. Because people don't want to admit it, but if I mess up or if I behave badly […] the next one who comes after me will probably not get the opportunity because people really do think that way. They don't want to admit it, but that's just the way it is. (own translation, Oyinbrakemi, 2024)

Being aware of how his behavior is perceived as representative of all other PAD or Africans indicates an awareness of ethnic-racial criteria as external categorizing mechanisms and a sense of double consciousness. Not only does he want to advance professionally to eventually

contribute his knowledge to the advancement of African societies and economies, but also to improve the perception of PAD by *white* majority society and institutions. However, he states that he identifies mainly in ethnic or national terms, depending on the context, and he considers racial categorizations as merely external European perspective that is irrelevant in constructing his sense of self or understanding of those around him. He attributed this focus on ethnicity as grounds for constructing identity and categorizing others to his primary socialization until early adolescence in Nigeria where racial categorization or identifying as Nigerian does not carry any meaning. Only in the European context does he perceive people that he meets on the street as "fellow people of African descent". Similarly, Capucine explains how growing up in Cameroon she did not consider herself Cameroonian or of African descent and it was only when she moved to Europe that she started reflecting on her positionality in relation to *white* majority society, Europe-born PAD, and biracial people and concluded that she wanted to fit in but also remain different.

In line with ERI development theory Oyinbrakemi's and Capucien's cases illustrate how external categorization interacts with primary childhood socialization during which societal categorizations and labels of relevance for the context are learned and internalized. Being socialized in an African country or within a community that is made up largely of PAD can thus lead to racial identifications being awarded less centrality in favor of ethnic identities. However, all formed identities might be challenged, and individuals may feel like they are standing out when moving between contexts. For many PAD who were socialized in Europe ERI crises can arise when interacting with people in the African country of their ancestors' origin as they perceive to "not belong or fit in here either" (Sofia, 2024). Contact with extended family in the country of their parents' origin is thus non-existent or scarce for all respondents who were born and fully socialized in Europe, due to a perceived lack of commonalities. In contrast, the three respondents who were born in Africa and migrated

between the ages of five and 20 (Isabel, Oyinbrakemi, and Capucine) report regular interaction and having close ties to family members on the African continent. The latter two in Europe also identify first and foremost as Nigerian and Cameroonian respectively. Not fitting in and the associated lack of attachment that is necessary to develop a sense of belonging thus seem to be impacted by childhood primes for identity and relationship formation.

Family networks

The nuclear family as an important and proximal social network that influenced how respondents position themselves between the African and the European localities came up in all interviews and three respondents selected family pictures for elicitation. The centrality of family can be partly attributed to the method of life story narrative interviews where especially in recollections of childhood family members tend to play an important role. Nonetheless, the way respondents talk about their family members and the role these played in their ERI development differs and is important to analyze.

Overall, family was described by many respondents as one of the only places where they could fully be who they are without thinking about their ethnic-racial identities or questioning their belonging. While topics of belonging or identity struggles are seldom discussed within the family sphere, similar experiences among family members led to an unspoken connection. Family is thus associated with feeling "at home" and being understood and accepted. However, the impact respondent ascribed to different family members in shaping self-perception and behavior were multiple.

Siblings were mostly mentioned when referring to them as some of the only other PAD in schools or towns. Some respondents explained that for a long time, they never talked to their siblings about shared experiences related to their ethnic-racial identities. Only when they discussed these topics as adults did they thus learn about their siblings' positionalities.

Prompted by these talks, several respondents highlighted the importance of intersectionality. John, for example, mentioned how his younger sister's experiences differed largely from his own due to gender differences: "I feel like sometimes, not sometimes, unfortunately. They also objectify us sometimes. And I just feel like her being a Pretty Woman. She has a different experience than mine" (John, 2024).

Much younger siblings were also mentioned to illustrate societal developments that respondents observed or are working towards. Fostering a community to make her sister's experiences in school easier due to there being more PAD so she can feel a sense of belonging was expressed by Sofia in saying "Me helping this community now [it's because], when she grows up, when she's like my age, she won't have the same feelings that I had back then.[…] So it's something that motivates me a lot."

However, European-born respondents also acknowledged that they had very different experiences from their parents due to being less "foreign" and carrying part of the local culture within them, alluding to notions of third spaces and cultural hybridity. Definitions of Afropeanness as individuals distancing themselves from the diasporic generation of their parents are thus illustrated by the respondents. Comparing his own experiences to his father's John mentioned that

> For example, I know that my experience in Italy was completely different than my dad's. I know that my dad, for example, had a way more tough experience and. I couldn't even understand when I was little and I used to go to birthdays, for example, the first question that he was always telling, […] he would always ask me "How did they treat you?" You know, because he wanted to understand if I was not made fun of, he wanted to understand if I was comfortable if I was happy. (John, 2024)

Parents were also mentioned as the ones who tried to pass on a sense of pride and belonging to the country of origin through the transmission of language, foods, cultural practices, etc. They thus took an active part in providing cultural knowledge and the tools to

facilitate interaction with others from the same country or region. John remembers: “What my parents tried to do was always to never forget where we were from again by trying to speak to us in Twi, trying to cook us Ghanaian food as well.” Binour refers to her mother as a role model as she was “Comorian without Apologizing herself” and made sure that she and her sister were always surrounded by Comorian culture and understood the language.

However, parents were also understood to actively shape the sense of belonging to the country of residence by making sure that their children integrate well into the school system and form friendships with native-born children. Isabel highlights the role of language and cultural events in this regard as her mother decided to raise her as Cameroonian but only speak to her in Greek and celebrate Greek holidays at home to facilitate school integration. Stressing the role of foods and religion as integrative strategies John stresses that his parents cooked Italian foods, such as pasta, and were active in the local catholic church community. However, food, as transmitted through parents, takes on a special role in the formation of a hybrid identity as he says “I realized, you know how I was lucky to be also black as well. I was lucky to, to not only know about pasta but my jollof rice and other things.” (John, 2024)

For the two respondents who have one parent of African and one of European descent, the role of parents was reported as more complex. While they were both socialized to speak the European parent’s native language, they never acquired language skills in the African parent’s native tongue and neither did identify strongly with the African country of origin. Leonora, a female respondent of Ghanaian and Austrian ancestry who was socialized in Austria without her Ghanaian father being present explained that she never learned much about Ghanaian culture and thus did not feel a sense of belonging to Ghana. However, even though she was born and raised in Austria and says that she “knows the culture due to her mother” she does not identify with being a proud Austrian either (own translation, Leonora, 2024). She explains this difficulty of identifying with the state of Austria with Austrian

culture being "somehow very much against people who are not perceived as autochthonous Austrian", hinting at her being categorized as such and thus experiencing Austrian culture as directed against her. Additionally, she reports that her own mother downplays or denies her experiences with racism which, in combination with not knowing any fellow PAD while growing up, led her to be unable to talk about her experiences. Elijah, a male respondent of Madagascan and Polish ancestry who was socialized in France, in contrast, expressed that identifying as French was a way to stop people from questioning his identity. However, he expressed that he struggled with being torn between a sense of belonging to Poland and France.

Fitting In

When talking about a group where they fit in, such as for example their friend group or a collective that they consider their community, diversity of individual positionalities was a reoccurring theme. Upon further investigation, this diversity mainly referred to the multiplicity of ethnic-racial and national identities within the friend group that made it easier to understand each other's struggles. However, fitting in and being understood was especially highlighted when referring to groups made up of PAD. Additionally, respondents mentioned specific strategies or traits that allowed them to fit in (better) in European societies.

Invisible PAD Bond

(understanding AND common experience)

Similar to the descriptions of family where people could express their full range of identities, friendships with other PAD were described as safe spaces where identities were fully recognized which leads to an empowering experience as described by Leonora:

> I also have more Black friends and it's always very *wholesome* when I'm with them, it gives me so much energy, you can talk about everything, without any… I don't have to act differently or anything, not that I do it on purpose with others, but I think it happens automatically or just another side comes out that I didn't know from myself for a long

> time, but I knew it was there, or I couldn't reveal it, but it was there and it's nice to be able to let that side out. (own translation, Leonora, 2024)

Here two layers are interesting to analyze. First, being recognized with all parts of her identity as a member of the friends group comprised of Black individuals in combination with her emotional ties led to her developing a stronger sense of belonging to a community of PAD in Austria. As she later explains she previously perceived that her membership was occasionally not recognized in "fully" Black circles due to her being socialized in a *white* Austrian household and her skin not being "dark enough". Second, the metaphor of uncovering a previously concealed side of herself illustrates how engagement with others who are perceived as members of the same ethnic-racial category fosters ERI development, as described in ERI development theory. However, as Leonora describes this process as occurring after she graduated high school the need for adapting the theory's age indication for ERI developmental steps to a non-US-American context is indicated too.

Interactions and connections with other PAD in their country of residence and in other European countries were reported as occurring "naturally" and without much effort as some respondents talked of an invisible bond. This bond is mainly considered to be due to similar experiences that make an additional layer of understanding each other possible from the get-go merely due to the fact of being a PAD in Europe. Elijah describes this almost unidentifiable bond when saying:

> You share an experience with like, you know, even if you don't know each other. Like. You have some… You know, you share the fact that you're like from African descent, and it's really like, you share somehow… Like you know that you've experienced, you've not experienced the same thing in life obviously, but like you know, you share this kind of like. Like this like this invisible bond that, you know, like somehow you get some things you, you get like you understand each other in a like very in a particular way. (Elijah, 2024)

For him, experiences are thus what PAD share with each other which can be seen as an individual understanding of the self-definition of a group that is united by an invisible bond made up of shared experiences and automatic understanding. Sofia specifies what makes her friendships with other PAD different from others and implicitly also attributes the shared understanding to similar experiences and struggles. She illustrates:

> The friendship with your black community is different and I felt, I felt it because I always had white friends and not many close black friends. And when I had it in Austria, things were different and I was happy. I had people that understand me when my hair is not how I want to be, and they are not going to tell me "No, but you have so perfect curly hair". They will understand what I'm feeling. (Sofia, 2024)

In addition to understanding each other, this statement shows an emotional attachment based on perceived similarities in racialization. Especially the contrast to friendships with *white* people becomes a powerful statement as it indicates how in these friendships, she felt misunderstood and even the seemingly small commonality of understanding issues with hair styling becomes a symbol of what it means to be Black in a *white* majority society. This statement can thus be seen as her contribution to a group's self-definition of PAD or Black people in Europe.

The united "others"

Intuitively understanding each other's struggles with ethnic-racial othering or hybrid identities was brought up in multiple interviews as the foundation of most close friendships. However, such an understanding was not only attributed to friendships with PAD but expanded to a lesser extent to other racialized individuals or ethnic minorities who understand the feeling of being categorized as "foreign" to the majority society. Ranging from understanding exclusionary categorizations better to laughing about shared struggles Isabel describes her friends group as follows:

> And this point I've reached a point that all my friends are, are second-generation kids. So the difference is with them we understand each other better. We understand each other better. Meaning like, cultural differences, like if someone is looking at you in a particular way, you're like, OK, why is it that we get the hints more? Of our struggles in general, and also the humor is different, like the humor and then the understanding is different. (Isabel, 2024)

Shared frames of meaning-making thus facilitate understanding in these groups that are bound together by being the children of immigrants. Referring to a similar group composition but focusing more on cultural hybridity, Binour characterizes the group that she referred to as her community by saying “It's the fact that we don't fit in boxes” and further elaborating:

> Like just people that understand the nuances of being black and being from the West, it helped me like just having literally the same struggle and the same, being in the same intersection of things because also like when I'm talking about community, I'm thinking immediately about like my female friends, you know, because also being a woman in that setting is really important. (Binour, 2024)

Belonging to and defining a group of people with similar experiences related to ethnic-racial categorization does thus seem central to many PAD in Europe. As predicted by ERI development theory these interpersonal networks seem to strengthen an individual’s ERI. However, these identities do not necessarily follow the boundaries of external categorization where relevant others would refer mainly to other PAD but rather construct identities based on being categorized as foreign to the nation while simultaneously not being fully socialized into another group that could serve as an alternative space of belonging. Rather than being structured around ethnicity or race these groups that individuals sense belonging to are constructed based on shared hybridity and thus constitute third spaces.

Part of the Majority

To successfully navigate in European society where respondents explained being routinely categorized as other, individuals reported certain personal characteristics and strategies that

helped them to claim belonging and membership. None of the respondents mentioned formal membership in the nation-state as a pathway to claim belonging even if all but one held European citizenship. John for example attributes his family's successful integration into Italian society to sharing the same religion with the majority society.

> Italy is such a Christian country, state and everything so the fact that we were not, for example, Pentecost, like a lot of my Ghanaian friends, you know, but we were Christian [i.e., Catholic]. I feel like that kind of helped to integrate with the Community more than my other fellow Ghanaians. (John, 2024)

While still contrasting his position to other Ghanaians and thus indicating that being recognized as a member of Italian society is by no means universally accessible to all, religious adherence is a less individualized and active strategy of claiming belonging and membership. In contrast, both Oyinbrakemi and Sofia explain that their personal actions are the path through which they seek inclusion into the majority society. Oyinbrakemi recognizes that people often initially question why he is present in certain, especially professional, spaces. However, by showing exhaustive knowledge about the topic and dressing professionally he usually is accepted as a legitimate part of the group. Sofia reports a more lasting approach when she recalls how she adapted her speech:

> Like now my tone is OK for Portuguese from Portugal because I worked on that. But you know, when I was presenting works in school or something like people, teachers would say like, look, you shouldn't speak like this. You need to speak more professionally when you go to work. People will ask you why you speak like this and why you speak like that. And you know, I needed to just shake myself and stop talking the way that I did. (Sofia, 2024)

Binour reported similar instances of teachers criticizing the way she spoke French as not proper enough which she relates directly to French national identity in saying "In that school that, like it was the first time that I had the impression that I wasn't. Not that I wasn't French enough, but like that I had to, for example, change the way I'm speaking French". However,

speaking to people who had similar experiences as hers she realized that she does not want or need to adapt her identity. She expresses this as “I can be both, can be Comorian, I can be French, I can be also Muslim. And like if people have a problem with that. It's their problem, not mine”. Her strategy is thus to claim to belong in French society despite all her other identities and not accept further questioning of her Frenchness.

What are PAD in Europe like?

Community is mostly defined as consisting of other individuals who are perceived as Black. However, based on the respondents’ elaborations the group self-definition that they report is not about phenotypes but about shared experiences of racialization and external categorization as foreign based on ethnic-racial characteristics.

However, beyond the criteria of racialization, the interviewees refer to a variety of characteristics that they see as central to being Black or of African descent in a European or multicultural setting. Speaking as insiders these characteristics can thus be understood as partial reflections of a group’s self-definition. As mentioned above uniting over misunderstood struggles with curly hair was for example seen as a central component that constitutes Blackness in a European context. For a group of Black or African-immigrant descendant French Binour elaborates on the importance of rap music:

> French rap is really, a good example of the mix of both cultures. Because rap, especially in, it's my opinion, but in the essence of rap is contestation and it was a way back then, to speak up about our experiences, our lives in a setting, when, for example, in France, we didn't have much representation, we didn't have much black people in the screen. (Binour, 2024)

Capucine considers hospitality and communality as an essentially African trait and states that she perceives more similarity to other African people compared to people from elsewhere but nonetheless perceives strong cultural differences. Isabel concludes that the particularity of Black people as a group then consists of the way (cultural) differences within the group are

respected more. She also states that growing up in a third space, she believes that PAD in Europe are defined by understanding the world around them differently, hinting at a potential sense of double consciousness. Sofia echoes this when stating that being exposed to different cultures and experiencing discrimination encourages more empathy and helpfulness towards others in a community which she considers as a defining characteristic of the PAD community in Portugal. While not presenting language as a characteristic of being of African descent according to her own definition, especially diction and accent, were mentioned as a boundary drawn by other PAD to symbolically refuse recognition of (full) membership in PAD communities to Isabel who was allegedly too assimilated. She recalls:

> They would be like why you speak like that, why so like and then they make some sort of "you're whitewashed" jokes. Like the way you speak is really intelligent or like your accent is different. Meaning like my accent in English wasn't as heavy. Like why do you talk like this? Are you even black? (Isabel, 2024)

Using accents and specific diction as a marker of group self-definition shows a sense of reclaiming stereotypes that are then used to draw group boundaries that clearly define the minority group against the majority (Wood et al., 1996). Such hardened group boundaries might then make it difficult for third spaces to persist and some individuals who navigate at the intersections of majority and minority fall through the cracks with their belonging to either group not being recognized. As most interview partners did not have strong connections with PAD in other European countries and overall did not ascribe much meaning to Europe as a frame of reference, descriptions of a community of PAD either referred to a specific national setting or broad categories such as Africans, Black people, or PAD in general.

Self-definitions

Each respondent's narrative offered insights into the multifaceted ways in which they made sense of ethnicity and race concerning their identity construction and group formation. Interestingly all used a wide variety of terms interchangeably when referring to themselves, hinting at a lack of clear definition and/or language to discuss issues of ethnicity and race in most European settings (see Appendix C for an overview). While there is no space to analyze the implications of the use of the different terms in-depth, I consider it important to mention that all respondents during the interviews referred to themselves as Black without me bringing up the term and many defined a relevant group as African. Both terms were used almost interchangeably. However, when asked explicitly about their identity all but two chose a nationality label. Leonora chose to self-identify as Black Styrian, thus choosing a subnational geographical level of identification while Sofia defined in interpersonal relational terms as "someone that puts other people's feelings and happiness first and is always willing to learn" (Sofia, 2024).

In choosing a national label of self-identification respondents confirmed the claim that the nation-state continues to be the main form of societal organization in Europe. However, the chosen terms (single or double nationality) and the provided explanations differ and are presented in the following. John feels like he is now "a perfect mix. by the two cultures. I identify as both by saying originally from Ghana but born and raised in Italy". In a similar fashion Binour first says she identifies as "a French woman. That was, that comes from…" to then reconsider her response and identify as "a French and Comorian woman, actually". Her doubtful identification could reflect the assimilation she faced in school where a teacher insisted on her and other children saying that they are French and not African, and the role of context is thus important to keep in mind. Mentioning her identity as a woman additionally highlights the importance of intersectionality. Isabel identified as Greek and explained that

she believes that the French approach of inclusive national terminology is more beneficial than a US-American sectarian approach that separates people by ethnic or national origin and puts them in boxes. She thus also does not like the term Afro-Greek which she claims creates more division and is not as exclusive as it appears at first sight. Lastly, Capucine and Oyinbrakemi, the two respondents with the longest socialization experiences on the African continent identified as Cameroonian and Nigerian respectively.

Several respondents expressed that they do not wish to create new group labels as they do not believe that any group will be able to reflect their identity. After being told about the term Afropean in the debriefing Sofia for example states that “I think I don’t. I don’t fit in any box actually” (Sofia, 2024). However, both Isabel and Binour expressed similar notions before being prompted by any specific term in saying:

> So I think my strategy for now is being OK with being different. Like being OK with not belonging in a certain group like we also all are second-generation kids. We know when we go back to Africa or like in our countries of origin, they're like you're European, you're European. But when we are in Europe, they're like you're African, you're African. So there's not, they're you're just. As I say, you're just a citizen of the Seas between the seas, like literally. That's why you believe you belong. You belong in the middle. And I'm trying to. Wrap my head around it and just like be OK with that. Be OK to not be a part of something or something else that a box of, a box of people. (Isabel, 2024)

Binour expands on this when explaining how the intersections of her identity will never fully be represented by any organization:

> I don't really like the idea of organization because I feel like. Sometime tend tends to. Essentialized like for example when it's a focus on a certain identity, being Muslim, being black, being I don't know, being a woman like, I feel like when there is a focus. On a broad term, it's hard to understand the complexity of. Of things, and I feel like my identity is complex, so I don't want to. (Binour, 2024)

Discussion

Most respondents thus use a common term (i.e., Black) to refer to themselves when narrating their experiences but most reject an ethnic-racial explicit identity label. Reporting experiences of external categorization and discrimination, reflections on the role of ethnicity and race in shaping their experiences in intersection with other identities, and the search for information about their own ethnic-racial category, the respondents address most key processes that underlie ERI development. However, access to information about ethnicity and race that is not specific to the US-American context is not always accessible and conversations with others within the family or outside to negotiate understandings of ERI can be difficult where the language for discussing ethnicity and race is lacking or curtailed. Where possible family can however serve as a buffer against exclusion and offer a space in which ERI can developed partially. Additionally, in settings where there are no other PAD present engaging with a community to develop a sense of belonging and group definition is difficult. Social media can offer a partial remedy for this. Most however only engage in a thorough exploration of and engagement with ethnic-racial categories in young adulthood, indicating that ERI development theory in the European context might need to use different age indications.

Regardless individuals interpret their experiences, which they acknowledge to share with others who are racialized similarly within and across state borders, largely through an ethnic-racial lens. However, this does not translate to the desire for a clearly self-defined group which is considered to bring along too many cutbacks on important intersectional parts of their identity. Thus, sticking to an external categorization and a loose notion of similarity seems to be the preferred option for the consulted PAD in Europe. Rather than a closely defined ERI as the main prompting factor for a sense of belonging to a collective, responses indicate that relevant groups that aid individuals in making sense of themselves and to which

they perceive a sense of belonging are inter-ethnic, structured around notions of foreignness to the European nation-state, and based in experiences of not having their claims of belonging to the majority society recognized.

While biracial parentage did not seem to matter for ERI, the place of birth and primary socialization (Europe versus Africa) affected individual identity formation with those who experienced these childhood experiences on the African continent identifying most strongly with the country that they were born in and not considering ethnic-racial categorizations as an important categorization mechanism. Those who transitioned into adolescence while living in Europe seemingly internalized ethnic-racial categorization mechanisms and viewed most of their experiences through this lens. However, their ERI did not supersede their national identification. This fits with observations that national identification continues to be one of the primary identities for most Europeans. Claiming belonging in the nation as the major organizational unit in global society might thus be more important for individuals who report being excluded. While European institutions have so far had little success in fostering a shared European identity, in a future in which people identify mainly as European, excluded individuals might turn to claim to belong to a European group instead (Wodak & Boukala, 2015). However, as the explicit identifications and some elaborations indicate, some might also object to a group self-definition based on African ancestry (e.g., Afropean or Afro-diasporic) as country differences get lost and people are lumped into a perceivably homogenous group. However, one could argue that the label Black is a similar if not more extreme broad term which does not stop people from using it implicitly even when rejecting it as too homogenizing as an explicit identity.

While none of the interviewees identified with the term Afropean, many narratives conveyed aspects of Afropeanness. Namely a sense of non-belonging in neither the European country of residence nor the African country of ancestry and the idea that they can use their specific

positioning of PAD in Europe to instigate change in both the European societies through claiming belonging and in African societies through ideological remittances.

However, rather than creating a strategy to overcome the dual sense of non-belonging some respondents stress the need to accept and embrace the feeling of inbetweenness that allows for new perspectives on social issues. In this endeavor, the role of a community based on shared positionality is named as central as it helps individuals exchange their experiences. While these collectives that are bound by senses of non-belonging would make a good basis for a collective Afropean identity, they mostly do not only include PAD and seldom stretch across European borders even if individuals are aware that experiences are similar.

Limitations

This disconnect between explicit and implicit identity terms used needs to be analyzed and not engaging in further analysis here is one of the limitations of this project. It hints at a larger issue namely that people have a hard time verbalizing identity construction processes and explicit identities are shaped strongly by which identities are available and acceptable according to (national) narratives. While employing a photo-elicitation narrative interview approach was an attempt at mitigating these issues, inferring why individuals use one term instead of the other is not always inferable from the life narrative itself, especially when using a foreign language. Most interviews were conducted in English, a foreign language to all respondents, which is another limitation while at the same time offers advantages. English has been found to be a language that allows for the most elaborate discussion of ethnic-racial issues and most available information on these topics online is also provided in English. Respondents might thus have the vocabulary to address these topics in English rather than their native tongue. However, as it is acquired mostly through online and especially social media paths, the use of terminology might be influenced by content that originates mostly from the USA making term interpretation more difficult.

Another set of limitations arises from the limited case selection. Many European countries were not represented and a diversity in African countries could not be accounted for. Additionally, the sample was relatively homogenous in age and educational background. To obtain deeper insights into the specific processes underlying ERI development, belonging, and group self-definition future research should structure the data according to the locality of primary socialization as it seems to influence processes strongly. Potentially, processes for individuals with mixed African and European ancestry should also be studied separately as their narratives differed substantially from the others even when arriving at similar identities.

Conclusion

Thus, PAD appear to construct ERI in similar ways across Europe, albeit in a nuanced and flexible manner. They predominantly identify with the term Black to describe their experiences but simultaneously reject explicit ethnic-racial labels. ERI development is shaped by experiences of external categorization and discrimination, the intersection of race and ethnicity with other identities, and the pursuit of information about their ERI. Place of birth and primary socialization significantly influence identity formation, while experiences of external categorization did not differ substantially between European states. Family support as a buffer against exclusionary categorization and access to relevant information and conversations about race and ethnicity, especially beyond the US context, are crucial yet challenging in all consulted national contexts. Social media partially mitigates this informational difficulty and online attachments can be the foundation of a sense of belonging particularly in the absence of other PAD.

Those socialized in Europe interpret their experiences through ethnic-racial lenses but prioritize explicit national identification, aligning with the centrality of national identities observed in Europe. Respondents thus show an implicit ERI but perceive stronger belonging to inter-ethnic groups based on shared experiences of external categorization and exclusion from the majority society than to groups that are defined in ethnic-racial terms. This is understood as a safeguard for the recognition of important intersectional identities of individuals which might get erased in group ethnic-racial group self-definitions.

PAD in Europe thus develop complex and dynamic ERI which however only partially impact their sense of belonging, and collective self-definition as a distinct group. Belonging and groups are primarily structured around experiences of exclusion and shared racialization, favoring fluid and intersectional over rigid group definitions that are merely based on ERI.

Afropean can thus refer to shared experiences and positioning in society but does not offer a relevant group self-definition for PAD in Europe.

Appendix A

Participant Informed consent Form and Information Sheet (English version)

Information and Consent Form

for participation in the research project
"Lived experiences of people of African descent in Europe"

Dear Participants!

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in the study "Lived experiences of people of African descent in Europe".

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time, without giving any reason, or withdraw your consent during the course of the study. Refusal to participate or early withdrawal from this study will not have any adverse consequences for you.

Scientific studies are necessary to gain reliable new research results. By agreeing to make your knowledge and experience available within this interview, you are making a particularly important contribution to the success of my research. An important prerequisite for conducting a scientific study is that you give your written consent to participate in this study. I am particularly concerned to inform you in advance about the aims of the study, the procedure of the interview and the data protection guidelines. Please read the following text carefully as a supplement to the information I gave you in our conversation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail at kurz_jainaba@student.ceu.edu.

1. **What is the aim of the interview?**
   The aim of the interview is to understand your experience and perspective as a person of African descent living in Europe.

2. **Who is conducting the interview?**
   The interview will be conducted by Jainaba Kurz, a master's student at Central European University Vienna.

3. **What are the benefits of participating in this interview?**
   With your participation you support the scientific research project "Lived experiences of people of African descent in Europe". The aim of the project is to explore the experiences and perceptions of people of African descent in various European countries and thus to expand the sociological view of the realities of people of African descent in Europe.

4. **How does the interview proceed?**

After a short welcome and room for clarification questions I will ask you an open-ended question to which you can tell me everything that comes to your mind. I will ask you to include your pictures in your narrative whenever you see fit. While you talk, I will not interrupt you, but I will ask some follow-up questions afterwards. The conversation will be audio recorded for further processing. All personal data will be anonymized and will only be accessible to the researcher. If circumstances do not allow for an interview in person or if it is your personal preference, the interview can be held remotely.

5. In what way will the collected data be used? Can it be traced back that I participated in the study? Can statements I make during the interview be associated with me?

The audio recordings will be anonymized in the course of the transcription, so that it will no longer be possible to identify you personally. Only the person conducting this research has access to the confidential data, in which you are mentioned by name. This person is subject to a strict duty of confidentiality. Even if the results and individual statements are published, for example in research reports, the data will remain anonymous. The provisions of the Austrian Data Protection Act apply to the handling of data

6. Are there any costs or obligations for me?

Your participation in the study will not incur any costs for you and you do not commit to any further cooperation.

Informed Consent

Study "Lived experiences of people of African descent in Europe"

Name of the participant (in block letters):

.....

I have been informed in detail and in a comprehensible manner about the objectives, significance and scope of the study and the resulting requirements for me. I have also read the text of this participant information sheet. Any questions that arose were answered in an understandable and sufficient manner. I have had sufficient time to decide whether I wish to participate in the study. I currently have no further questions.

I reserve the right to terminate my voluntary participation at any time without incurring any disadvantages. Should I wish to withdraw from the study, I may do so at any time by contacting Jainaba Kurz (kurz_jainaba@student.ceu.edu) verbally or in writing.

I agree that my data collected in the course of this study may be recorded and analyzed.

I agree that my data will be stored electronically in an anonymized form on a permanent basis. The data will be stored in a way that is only accessible to the researcher.

Should I wish to have my data deleted at a later date, I can do so by contacting Jainaba Kurz (kurz_jainaba@student.ceu.edu) in writing without giving any reason.

I have received a copy of this participation information and consent form. The original remains with the researchers.

.....

(Date and signature of the participant)

.....

(Date and signature of the researcher)

Appendix B

Thematic Analysis Codes

Theme	Subthemes	Notes/ Explanations
Standing Out	(perceived) difference to majority	Consider if distinction between ethnic/cultural or racial is made
	Role model / representative	
	"not here either"	Standing out in PAD circles or African contexts
Family Networks	Support structure	
	Realization of differences/ intersectional experiences	
	Silence about ethnicity/race	Not talking about topics or denying existence
Fitting In	Invisble PAD bond	
	United "others"	
	Being "European" (national)	Taking on norms, language adaptation, citizenship as recognition
Black Signifiers	Cultural markers (music, food, hair)	
	Empathy / open-mindedness	Personality traits
	United in difference	

Appendix C –

Identity terms used

Name	Explicit self-definition	Terms used in reference to self (in order of mention)
Capucine	Cameroonian	Africa, Black, immigrant
Oyinbrakemi	Nigerian (in Europe), ethnic identity in Nigeria	Nigerian (who was socialized in Germany) [Nigerianer (der in Deutschland aufgewachsen ist)], Black [Schwarz], African [afrikanischer Mensch], person of African or Black descent [Mensch afrikanischer oder schwarzer Herkunft]
Leonora	Black Styrian, on the whole simply Black [im Großen und Ganzen einfach Schwarz]	Joyful individual [fröhlicher Mensch], Black [Schwarz], mixed, "not Austrian" [kann ich nicht sagen, dass ich da jetzt dass ich mich als Österreicherin identifiziere], "not a foreigner" [Ausländerin]
John	Originally from Ghana, but born and raised in Italy	Black, Ghanaian, Italian, African
Binour	French and Comorian woman	Woman, Black, Muslim, French, of African descent, child of immigrants
Isabel	Greek	Cameroonian, second-generation African, multicultural, Black, Greek, immigrant
Sofia	someone. Really. Strong. Always willing to learn and. Someone that. Really puts the other. People, the other peoples, feelings and happiness on top of mine	Black, African
Elijah	French, it makes people think the least	Black, of African descent, French, mixed

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