OUT OF AFRICA
NEW MEDIA, BACK WRITING AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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Barbara Hauer-Nussbaumer
Supervisor: Tobias Denskus

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the relation of New Media, in particular blogging, at the intersection of the African Diaspora, identity construction and postcolonial thought.

Postcolonialism is a theory and practice that seeks to encounter the dominant Western discourse and its affects on both the individual as well as society as a whole. It critically addresses and means to deconstruct Western representations of the ‘Third World’, in the case of this study ‘Africa’. It aims at hearing and recovering the experiences of the colonized or of those who have to deal with colonialism's legacies and one of the most established strategies to do so is ‘writing back’ and delivering a counter-story that challenges the dominant discourse and its inherent power structures.

New Media, through the relative ease of access and the communicative possibilities they present, blur the lines between media producers and consumers. They offer an attractive option for anyone with a certain level of computer literacy (and economic conditions) to enter the stage and produce his/ her own media content. Through New Media, it becomes possible to confront dominant media culture, politics and power and reclaim a space where a different story can be told.

Weblogs, or blogs, are one of the most popular phenomena within New Media. They are a format for creating a sense of individual presence on the Web, allowing the author(s) to articulate and archive his/her/their thoughts. They can be seen as ‘digital identity narratives’, where people tell stories about themselves and how they see the world.

In the frame of this study, six weblogs which belong to a blogosphere of African, mainly diasporic bloggers, have been analysed using a combination of narrative analysis and qualitative interviews in order to learn more about how New Media impact on the construction of identity for those who are permanently challenged by society for being ‘the Other’, and how they are used to oppose the Western discourse about Africa and to ‘write back’.

Key words: New Media, Blogging, Postcolonialism, Identity, Diaspora, Africa, Narratives
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Framing the research questions

People from ‘the West’, when they think of Africa, immediately have certain images coming up in their minds. Mostly, these images are characterized by being in stark contrast to what we would associate with anything ‘Western’. Why is that so? There is of course no easy answer to that question. But one might be that the dominant Western narrative about Africa is shaped by prevailing power constellations, stereotypes and representations which are rooted in Colonialism, its ideological foundations and its legacies.

The media, defined as a major site where meaning is re-produced (Hall 1997: 3), contribute to a great share to the maintenance and continuous dissemination of a Western-centric conception of what is believed to be ‘Africa’, which Kenyan journalist and author Binyavanga Wainaina accurately sums up in his satiric article on ‘How to write about Africa’:

"Always use the word ‘Africa’, or ‘Darkness’ or ‘Safari’ in your title. [...] In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. [...] Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls, and eat things no other humans eat. [...] Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West.” (Wainaina 2005)

At the core of this discourse is what Edward Said (1978 in McEwan 2009: 122) describes as ‘Othering’ of Africa and its people, rendering them as subordinate, inferior and without agency and voice. This perception has not only been crucial to the European self-definition and assumed superiority but has also impacted the way Africans see themselves, because (cultural) identity, according to its postmodernist conception, is relational and constructed through difference (the Other).

A theory and practice which challenges and seeks to encounter the dominant Western discourse and its affects on both the individual as well as society as a whole is Postcolonialism. Challenging the spatial imaginaries of the West and the non-West, postcolonial thought supports an understanding of the ‘here’ and the ‘there’ as interconnected and mutually constituted (though often in unequal ways) (McEwan 2009: 28-29). In this regard, it not only aims at the deconstruction of Western representations of the ‘Third World’ but also addresses questions of power, of who is allowed to speak and heard versus whose voice is kept quiet. For this end, Postcolonialism aims at ‘hearing or recovering the experiences of the colonized’ (Sidaway 2000 in McEwan 2009: 24) and as literature theory explores ways in which writers from formerly colonized countries have attempted to articulate and re-claim their own cultural identities. Through this kind of back-writing, the dominant discourses shall be challenged and a counter-story provided.

What is a common ground for many postcolonial writings is the rejection of an image (and its implications) that draws on social categorizations rooted on Western presumptions about us versus
them. An experience which is particularly relevant in this context and which resulted in some of the most significant postcolonial writings\(^1\) is the experience of the Diaspora. It is the experience of the self in a foreign and often hostile environment; an experience that creates a concern with place and dislocation and which constitute the ground for the postcolonial ‘quest for identity’ (Ackah 1999 quoted in Baaz 2001: 11).

The quest for identity of the African Diaspora is certainly an on-going process, although its characteristics and challenges may have shifted with time. Cultural globalization and the possibilities contemporary communication technologies have on offer can be seen as important conditions that have altered the parameters. New Media, through the relative ease of access and the possibilities they present blur the lines between media producers and consumers (Lievdrouw 2011: 7). Through New Media, it becomes possible to confront dominant media culture and to reclaim a space where one can challenge dominant discourses and present a counter-story (ibid.2).

Weblogs, or blogs, are one of the most popular phenomena within New Media. They are a format for creating a sense of individual presence on the Web, allowing the author(s) to articulate his/her/their thoughts (Erwins 2005: 369). They are spaces where we tell stories about ourselves and our way of seeing the world. Thus, blogging at the intersection of postcolonial back-writing and the African Diaspora constitutes the field of interest for this study and the overall question that shall guide this research is:

_Are New Media, in particular blogs, the new sites of postcolonial ‘back-writing’?

And with regard to the particular experience of the African Diaspora and the formation of identity in the context of displacement, a further question is:

_How does blogging impact the quest for identity amongst the African Diaspora?

Plus, as New Media are used to encounter the Western representations of ‘Africa/n’ and to tell a different story,

_what is it that is being told? Being out of Africa, what narrative does that generate?

Based on these preliminary theoretical considerations and following the research questions, the study aims at the analysis of six blogs that are part of a blogosphere where members of the African Diaspora engage with issues of contemporary African art, culture, and political commenting. Through that, the blogs - africaisdonesuffering.com, africaontheblog.com, anotherafrica.net, iamafropolitan.com, afroklectic.com and afroblush.com - not only deal with issues which are drawn on for the construction of an African identity but also intend to challenge the conventional Western discourse about Africa through the creation of an alternative image.

The research questions shall be explored on a combination of narrative analysis and qualitative interviews. Whereas the narrative analysis of the blogs focuses on the interpretation of the message they carry, the interviews explore the perspective, the background, the motivations and the

\(^1\) As for instance in the case of Frantz Fanon, his main works ‘Black Skin, White Masks’ (1952) and ‘The Wretched of the Earth’ (1961), where both the result and reflection of Fanon’s diasporic experience in countries of the West.
interpretations of the bloggers. In order to do so, the question has to be: who is narrating, when and why and with what audience in mind.

1.2 Representation, meaning and media

This study wants to look at blogging as a specific strategy to encounter the Western regime of representation which renders Africa to a subordinate position vis-à-vis a predominantly naturally perceived hegemony of the West and its subjective conceptions of the world.

But what does representation in this context mean? Why is it of such importance? The following chapters aim at clarifying some of the basic conceptions this study is grounded on and to mark out the foundation of its theoretical framework.

Representation is, as defined by Stuart Hall (1997: 17), the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the very link between our understanding of the world and language. The combined use of these two enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world or to the imaginary world and the ideas we possess of objects, people and events. This paper draws on the constructionist approach where the social character of language is highlighted (cf. chapter 2.1). According to this approach, meaning is constructed by using representational systems and it is social actors who use specific conceptual systems, symbolic practices and language to make the world a meaningful place, and to communicate their meaning of the world to others (ibid. 25). Thus, by how we represent things, we give meaning to them – by the words we use to describe them, the stories we tell about them, the images we produce of them, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify them and the values we place on them (ibid. 3).

But why all the fuzz about meaning? As we live and perceive the world, we attribute meaning to the things and phenomena that in one or the other way surround us. And it is in accordance to that meaning that we act. But not only does meaning influence our actions, it also contributes to the understanding of who we are (and who we are not) and to whom we (want to) belong. Meaning is what gives us, as individuals and as part of a society, a sense of our identity. Belonging to a specific society, or culture, means that people possess a shared set of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think about and to interpret the world in roughly the same way (ibid.). The question for this research therefore is not what Africa is but what meaning it is attributed, a meaning that might differ according to culture, and as a consequence also influences different identities, belongings and actions.

French philosopher Michel Foucault added a further component to the interplay of representation and meaning – that of discourse. Discourse according to Foucault is a group of statements \(^2\) which provide a language for talking about, and a way of representing the knowledge concerning a particular topic at a particular historical moment (Hall 1992 in Hall 1997: 44). For Foucault, meaning is only constructed within discourse; and that nothing exists outside of it. For this study, this argument is of particular importance since it allows the affirmation that ‘Africa’ does not exist.

\(^2\) Discourse appears across a wide range of texts and other sites of representation. A single text cannot constitute a discourse (Hall 1992 in Hall 1997: 44).
outside of the discourse about it. However, once a specific discourse has been institutionalized, the challenge (for those who don’t agree with it) is to deconstruct it. But this is not an easy thing to do since discourse not only ‘rules’ about acceptable ways of speech and conduct, but also ‘rules out’ alternative ways of talking about a subject. (Hall 1997: 44).

Within representational practices, the passive form is thus determinant. We are either represented or we represent others. And this easily creates discomfort or even outrage if the representation does not correspond to self-understanding of the subject. Therefore, representation is a field of struggle.

Popular battlefields for this struggle are the media, since they constitute a major arena where representations are re-produced. Traditional mass media, or ‘old’ media, though tend to reinforce the passive character of representational practices as they ensure that the power to represent many resides with the hands of only a few. This is one major reason why ‘new’ media have gained such popularity because they seem to transform the passive into active, allowing us to represent ourselves. Their impact on the audience though may be mistrust since in terms of actual coverage old media still seem to prevail. Manuel Castell (2007: 247) uses the term ‘mass self-communication’ when writing about New Media. Especially regarding blogs, Castells goes as far as saying that “a good share of this form of mass self-communication is closer to "electronic autism” than to actual communication” (ibid.)³.

The impact on the audience though shall not be at the centre of this research (as it would go beyond its scope). Rather an understanding of media as practice, as used by Nick Couldry (2012) shall be applied, asking what people are doing in relation to media (ibid. 37), and therefore allowing the social researcher to move beyond the ‘old dilemma of individual versus society and agency versus structure (ibid. 39). Thus, what do people do, think, and believe in relation to media, and what do they use media for (ibid. 37-53) is at the centre of this study.

1.2.1 The signifier ‘Africa’

The before quoted excerpt of Wainaina’s ‘How to write about Africa’ mentions some of the most common images transported in the Western media discourse. It illustrates what probably most people in the West (‘the West’ used as the signifier in opposition to Africa) think of when they hear the word ‘Africa’. The signifier ‘Africa’ is therefore a deeply problematic one. This is so because it is not only discriminatory and often racist, but it is also used to legitimate the West’s conduct (meaning influences actions!) towards a presumed subordinate entity – Africa and its people.

Signifier is a term which goes back to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. For Saussure, language, is a system of signs, which can reach from sounds to written words to images, and beyond. Saussure though analyses the sign on the basis of its division into two further elements – the form (the actual word, image, etc.) and the idea or concept with which we associate the form. What Saussure

³ Castells here refers to a survey by Pew Internet & American Life Project stating that 52% of bloggers say that they blog mostly for themselves, while only 32% blog for their audience.
understands as the actual form is called the *signifier*, the more meaningful idea of it he calls the *signified* (Hall 1997: 30-31).

But the relation between the signifier and the signified are not permanently fixed. Words shift their meanings, and the concepts they refer to (can) change. How come? According to Saussure’s constructionist approach (cf. chapter 1.2 and 2.1), the relationship between the signifier and the signified is the result of social conventions specific to a particular group of society as well as to specific historical moments, and consequently all meanings are the product of culture and history.

What does that mean for the signifier ‘Africa’? As all meanings are produced within a certain culture and historical moment, the two events that stand out for the case of Africa are with no doubt Slavery and Colonialism. In both cases, ‘Africa’ served as the object of assignation, point of reference (for the creation of the own, Western identity), and further on of appropriation. With their ideological foundation in Enlightenment, these two historical moments have shaped the Western narrative about Africa fundamentally (ibid. 239). Based on the believe that Africans have an identity of their own which is not, as in the case of the ‘enlightened’ European, guided by reason and science, but by nature and tradition, they were ranked at the bottom rung of the evolutionary ladder (ranging between barbarism and civilization), and this lead to the development of a regime of representations with the passive, childlike and obedient, but at the same time savage and dangerous African (ibid. 136) as one of the most dominant images. Colonialism was then justified in terms of bringing adulthood, rationality and modernity to Africa (ibid. 135). These types of ‘old’ representations of Africa seem to have been absorbed by ‘modern’ versions, yet maintaining their basic conceptions.

**Figure 1:** Colonial representations of Africa – Now and Then

"Mrs. Shaw’s sewing class at Rabai, East Africa"\(^4\)  \hspace{1cm} Bob Geldof in Ethiopia in 1985\(^5\)

Especially the image of Africa as the ‘Dark Continent’, as cursed by plagues like Aids and Malaria, as waiting for our help, of Africa as the victim, as poor, helpless and starving is what (still) determines the current regime of representation (just think of NGO campaigns!). In the most positive sense, it is

\(^4\) Image: http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Benevolent-Colonialism-Mrs-Shaw-s-Sewing-Class-at-Rabai-East-Africa-Posters_i1872890_.htm, accessed the 04/11/2013
about stunning landscapes, ‘preserved’ traditions or ‘beautiful people, always happy’. Wainaina’s article once more comes into mind and proves to be most incisive.

Figure 2: Current representations of ‘poor Africa, waiting for help’

Stereotypes are thus central within the common narrative about Africa. Generally speaking, stereotypes function on the basis of a few simple and memorable, widely recognized characteristics, reducing everything about it to those traits, and exaggerating, simplifying and fixing them (ibid. 258). They are based on binary positions of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, ‘West’ versus ‘Africa’, and they reflect a violent (symbolic) hierarchy where one of the two governs over the other (ibid.). It is therefore also a question of power, more precisely of symbolic power. As Adichie (2009) says, “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

Based on the Saussurean understanding that meaning is constructed, Hall (1997: 32) concludes that meaning and representation are open to change, and the production of new meaning and new interpretations is possible. Though, for the case of ‘Africa’ this is not an easy job to do, since the Western version of the signified Africa has, over many years and with the help of the media, reached the status of a global superstar. In this regard, Mbembe’s (2002: 243) point of view seems to be relevant. According to him, slavery and colonialism are not only historical moments which have contributed to the formation of a symbolic hierarchy and a respective regime of representation of the West over Africa. They have also served as a “unifying centre of Africans’ desire to know themselves, to recapture their destiny (sovereignty) and to belong to themselves in the world (autonomy)”.

Therefore, the fact that the signified ‘Africa’ does not belong to Africans has brought to emergence different strategies to reclaim Africa - with blogging as one of them.

1.3 Relevance

My attention to and interest for this topic is based on the fact that I find myself at the intersection of two competing narratives – the dominant and the counter-narrative. As a European, I am very
familiar with the common stereotypes which reside within the Western image about Africa/ns, but as a European living in Mozambique, I also see these images constantly challenged and I have become a regular reader of some of the blogs I am about to refer to in my research. On several occasions - one very prominent occasion was the Kony 2012 campaign - I was able to witness the wide and also very emotional reactions Western media coverage received in the African blogosphere and New Media portals.

"Where previously mainstream Western media told our story for us, Kony 2012 rallied our collective consciousness, vaulting Ugandan and African voices like Teju Cole, Rosebell Kagumire, Semhar Araia, and Solome Lemma to the global stage. [...] This not only signalled the rise of a new African voice, but the coming wave of Africans reclaiming agency [...]. (Ruge in Taub 2012: 140)

This "struggle to reclaim the international perception and narrative about an entire continent" and the way it interacts with the construction of identity are at the core of this research project. It is about looking at the ways a group like the African Diaspora, who is normally either ignored or negatively misrepresented by the dominant media channels, use the communicative possibilities of New Media in order to express their views and make their voices heard.

This is an important matter in the context of Communication for Development’. Communicating for development, according to Wilkens (2008), engages a wide variety of processes of mediated as well as interpersonal communication designed to promote socially beneficial goals. These goals range from facilitating sustainable economic benefits to promoting transparent governance to creating social spaces for interpersonal exchange and community dialogue, and to asserting cultural identities and practices.

It is in regard to the latter two that this study is particularly relevant since the assertion of one’s cultural identity and to enter in even dialogue in many cases, as in the case of the African Diaspora, demands to stand up to a dominant discursive regime that impedes an inclusive development.

As outlined in chapter 1.2, discourses are deeply embedded in dominant power relations, determining who is allowed to speak with authority and where such speech can be spoken (McEwan 2009: 122). They determines whose experience and whose learning has been brought to bear in the understanding and shaping of our world and its development (ibid.).

Yet, discourses are always open to contestation (ibid.). A discourse is never a monologue but “always presupposes a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies” (Terdiman 1985 in Ashcroft et al. 2002: 167). Thus, there is no discourse without any counter-discourse, and in the light of Communication for Development, efforts which challenge the “dominant, universalizing, and arrogant discourses of the North” (McEwan 2009: 27) that not only inform our minds, but moreover the formulation of development approaches and policies, are of high relevance and deserve maximum attention.

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2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Initial considerations

New Media as a subject of study is placed within the field of communication studies, but – in line with a more holistic approach of removing media from the centre stage and placing them instead in a wider social context (Hansen et al. 1998: 12) – within this research they are explored as a conglomerate of various facets: New Media’s contribution to identity construction (individual and collective), their importance for diasporic communities, and New Media as a means to oppose a dominant and to construct and promote a counter-narrative. These facets are deeply intertwined and this study is therefore situated at the intersection of various branches of social science, namely communication, cultural and development studies.

Social science is a very vast field that embraces a wide variety of academic disciplines and fields of study. What unites them, very broadly speaking, is their intention to study society and its institutions in a systematic and disciplined manner and to explore how and why people behave the way they do, both as individuals and as groups within society (Hansen et al. 1998: 11-12). But, in order to approach these questions, different approaches have developed over time and consequently different epistemological regimes emerged. However, the main antagonism seems to be between objective and subjective modes of knowledge. Whereas objectivism is more concerned with the impartial replicability of the knowledge produced (and therefore resembles more the ambition and approach of natural scientist), subjectivism emphasises the uniqueness of human beings and the subjective meaningfulness of human behaviour (Diesing 1966: 124). And opposed to objectivism’s ontological paradigm of naïve realism, which assumes the existence of an objective external reality (ibid: 111), subjectivism takes reality as being socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln in Denzin & Lincoln 1994: 109).

As for the case of this research, at the centre of the investigation stands meaning. Meaning is of course highly subjective and therefore, this research is embedded within the approach of social constructionism and its particular way of approaching the world. Social constructionism is opposed to types of research that intend to discover and investigate given causalities and essentialisms8. Instead, it departs from the presumption that the world, and the meaning which is attributed to it, is socially constructed and consequently rejects an essentialist view which defends the opinion that there is an underlying essence defining the ‘real’ or ‘true’ nature of any particular social category (Pickering 2008: 21).

8 A typical essentialism is for instance to refer to women as ‘naturally’ nurturing, caring and cooperative, or referring to black people as ‘naturally’ rhythmical. A prominent anti-essentialism is Simone de Beauvoir’s famous adage that “one is not born a women, but becomes a women” (Beauvoir 1984: 295 in Pickering 2008: 21). There is nothing ‘natural’ about womanhood or ‘blackness’, but becoming a woman or ‘black’ is a cultural process which is historically specific and variant (Pickering 2008: 21). Social constructionism opposes such essentialism and tries to uncover it.
2.2 Presentation of the applied methods

Theory and method need to work together in order to deliver a legitimate research study. For this reason, the applied methodological concept corresponds to the study’s theoretical and epistemological groundwork of social constructionism, where the focus is on the interpretation and negotiation of the meanings of the social world (Kvale 2009: 52). Methodology is therefore understood as a site where knowledge is produced. Both within the interviews as within the narrative analysis of the blogs, it is not about discovering a meaning that had been waiting to be revealed but about co-authoring it in a sort of teamwork between the researched subject and the researcher.

2.2.1 Narrative analysis

In the context of this study, the blogs and alike are analysed as narratives. But what are narratives? Another word that is being used for narrative is stories. In our life, we constantly tell stories, to ourselves and to others. We are surrounded by stories and we use them as resources for the construction our own stories, lives and worlds. These stories are not simple reflections of ‘facts’ but rather organizing devices through which we interpret and constitute the world (Lawler in Pickering 2008: 32). Through them, people make sense of the world and of their place within it (ibid. 34).

The approach used for this study is an understanding of narratives based on hermeneutics in the tradition of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur considers narratives in their social context – as stories completed, not in terms of their components (structure), but in the circulation of relations between the story, the producer, and its audience (Lawler in Pickering 2008: 33). For him, what is more important than the story’s structure is what it does. And this, according to Ricoeur, is the narrative’s power to make the world intelligible because we can situate it within a story (ibid.).

Hermeneutics is an approach primarily concerned with the understanding and the interpretation of the meaning of a text. Although hermeneutics has its roots in biblical interpretation, its applications has extended to a wider field and takes as its focus ways of understanding, studying verbal as well as non-verbal objects. The object of study – the text – can take various forms: from written texts to any form of human action. Its concerns is with ‘what is the significance of what happened?’ rather than with ‘what happened?’ (White 1996 in Lawler, in Pickering 2008: 36). Hence, it is not merely about understanding the texts themselves, but of understanding the social world as always interpreted and of interpretation as central to people’s social existence (ibid. 36).

Paul Ricoeur, in his article ‘The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text’ (1973), introduces a specific way of studying texts. His starting point is the distinction between verbal speech and written text. Based on that, Ricoeur defines four traits which constitute the main features of his hermeneutic model of ‘text’-analysis (ibid. 95-103):

(1) Fixation of meaning: It is possible to study the Aussage of a text, the inscription of what is said, because through writing, meaning becomes fixed. But once meaning is inscribed, it takes on a life on its own and there can exist a
(2) **Disjuncture of meaning:** When being an object of interpretation, the meaning of the text and the intention of the author may not overlap anymore. It is now with the reader of the text to define its meaning. A text can thus become detached from its author and this can lead to the

(3) **Unfolding of non-ostensive references:** Whereas in spoken discourse the dialogue ultimately refers to a situation common to the interlocutors where both author and audience can delimit the meaning of what is said, written texts free themselves from the narrowness of the dialogical situation. When emancipated from the situational context, the text takes on an autonomous, 'objective' existence - independent of its author.

(4) **Infinite number of audiences:** Also within the fourth trait, the narrowness of the dialogical relation is transcended, this time in regard to the audience addressed through written discourse. Whereas in oral discourse, the number of people addressed is limited to the direct addressee(s) - present in the same space and time as the speaker -, in written discourse, the audience can be said to be basically everyone who can read.

Hence, although written text exhibits the inscription of meaning, Ricoeur makes us aware that this meaning may become the ‘victim’ of distanciation and autonomization, where the meaning a text evolves for its audience may not correspond to the author's intended meaning and, in contrast to a verbal speech event, the author looses the capacity to influence the transported meaning. Therefore, when trying to recover the meaning the blogs and their narrative have, these are principles that have to be kept in mind in the course of the analysis.

Now, although the study of a narrative shall not be reduced to its structural components when inclined to a hermeneutic approach, some basic elements which organize a narrative are still helpful in the attempt to grasp its meaning. For Lawler (in Pickering 2008: 34), three main constitutive elements can be defined: **character** (human or as well non-human), **action** (movement through time), and **plot**. The plot, which is a key element of the narrative, is produced through processes of **emplotment**, in which events are linked to each other in a causal relationship (earlier events causing later ones) (ibid.). It is important to say that of course not all events are told. Only those, which are believed to have a meaningful place in the narrative, are selected, and through its place in the narrative, every event is **given** meaning.

### 2.2.2 Qualitative interviews

Whereas the narrative analysis of the blogs focuses on the interpretation of what they communicate, the interviews are to explore the perspective, the background, the motivations as well as the interpretations of the bloggers.

The main purpose of a qualitative interview is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to the interpretation of their meaning (Kvale 1996: 124). It is an interpersonal situation; a conversation of two people about an issue of mutual interest (ibid. 125), a specific form of human interaction where knowledge evolves through dialogue. A qualitative interview is thus a stage upon which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of the interviewer and the
interviewee (ibid. 127). The interviewees are therefore seen as active meaning makers rather than passive information providers (ibid.)

An interview can differ in regard to its purpose, with possible variations being exploration versus hypothesis testing or description versus interpretation (Kvale 1996: 127). The latter distinction is the one of relevance for this study. Based on a hermeneutical interpretation of meaning, this distinction refers to the general question concerning the purpose of any text analysis. The question is whether the analysis is restricted to merely get at the author’s intended meaning of the text, or if the aim is to analyse the meaning the text has for the reader/researcher. For the analysis of an interview, the implication of this distinction is that it has to be clear if the purpose of the study is to solely get an idea about the personal understanding of the interviewee about an issue, or if the researcher, based on the interviewee’s descriptions, intends to arrive at a broader interpretation about the issue. In the case of this study, the interviews shall serve for both - to offer an insight into the personal meaning the blogs have for the interviewees as well as allow conclusions about the role blogging plays in relation to a broader field of questions at the intersection of Postcolonial back-writing and identity formation.

Thus, since the purpose of the interviews is to grasp their meaning, the mode of analysis applied in this case is that of meaning condensation, involving five main steps (2009: 205-7): First, the complete, transcribed interview is read through carefully in order to get a sense of the whole. In a second step, the ‘natural meaning units’ of the text as expressed by the interviewees are determined. These units can emerge from the data through recurrence, through direct connection to the research questions, or through coming into sight on the foundation of the theoretical framework of the research topic (Meyer in Pickering 2008: 82-83). After that, the theme that dominates the natural meaning units is defined – as understood by the researcher - and restated as simply as possible. The fourth step brings the meaning units in relation to each other, the research questions and the theoretical framework. Finally, the essential themes of the entire interview/s are tied together into a descriptive statement.

This process is what Kvale later on (2009: 210-16) describes as a system of three different interpretational contexts: self-understanding, critical common-sense understanding and theoretical understanding. Thereby, the self-understanding leads to a (more or less) critical common-sense understanding, which is ultimately embedded in a theoretical frame, and which is likely to exceed the self- and common-sense understanding (ibid.). These different contexts may merge into each other during the analysis but it is nevertheless important to keep them in mind in order proceed structured and consciously about the different contexts and levels at work when analysing interviews (and other texts).

Due to limitation by distance, time and money, the interviews were not carried out as face-to-face interviews, but via Skype calls. In terms of structure, a list of pre-defined questions was elaborated,
though, in the course of the interview, the design switched from structured to semi-structured, since the insistence on the predefined structure would have detained the interviewee from elaborating on issues considered important. For the outline of the interview design, please see Chapter 7.2 in the Appendix.

2.2.3 Limitations and reflections on the applied methodology

Due to the scope and time available, the research compass was subject to some necessary limitations with regard to the feasibility and credibility of the study - the number of blogs and interviews was held small, the analysis restricted to the blogs instead of including the wide variety of other New Media channels the bloggers use (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.) and the response and perceptions of the audience excluded.

The number of six blogs and interviews was determined on the supposition that three of the blogs were individual and the other three collective projects. This, so the intention, would have allowed a comparison of the two concepts, but, as the analysis will show, all six blogs by now are sites which are maintained by more than one person. And although the number of analysed blogs and interviews might appear small, the collected and available data is very rich and extensive, in particular due to good interview partners who were open and willing to respond a quite long set of questions (see interview outline, chapter 7.2).

In order to approach the research questions of this study, the applied methodology seemed to be the most adequate as the purpose was to find two methods that focus on the exploration of meaning and that complement each other in the sense that they cover the topic from different angles - the narrative analysis at the blogs and the message they carry, and the interviews at the motivations and driving forces of the bloggers.

Both methods are concerned with the exploration and interpretation of meaning which, in the case of this study, happened on various levels: the interpretation of the meaning of the blogs, the interpretation the interviewees attribute to the blogs (guided by the interview questions which of course lead the answers into a certain direction), and finally the interpretations of the interviews themselves (the interpretation of the interpretation) – all put into reference to the theoretical framework of the study. And although a qualitative analysis, embedded into hermeneutics, is all about interpretation that goes beyond the initial interpretation of the author, the degree of subjectivity within the analysis was very high and offers a vulnerable point that gives justified cause for criticism. And in a sense, this subjectivity is also what Ricoeur himself pointed to, saying that the “reading of a text always takes place within a community, a tradition or a living current of thought, all of which display presuppositions and exigencies, regardless of how closely a reading may be tied to the quid, to ‘that in view of which’ the text was written.” (Ricoeur 2004 in Pickering 2008: 46).

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adequate method to deal with that situation: Skype call, audio only. For the pure fact that the bloggers I selected for interviews all live in different places of the world, doing the interviews via Skype was the only viable option. But it turned out to be also very convenient because I felt that both the interviewees and I could feel ‘safe’ when talking about their personal life, disregarded the issue of the ‘Other’.
This means that the analysis – both of the blogs as well as of the interviews – could be considered a very subjective, and in terms of possible analysis outcome, very biased (in the favour of the researcher) project, that may be contested in regards to its validity. However, the obtained insights the researcher gains, ‘even’ when applying such ‘vague’ qualitative methods like narrative analysis, are not just be the product of the researcher’s mind, since the specific ‘aboutness’ of a text sets certain limits on the possible range of possible interpretations, as Umberto Eco argues (Eco 1992 in Pickering 2008: 46). What is important though is that the interpretation can (and even should) go beyond the initial interpretation of the author, as this is what makes the research an interesting, and relevant) undertaking.

However, in order to explore the topic more deeply, some other methods that take the audience more into consideration would certainly have also delivered important insights. Also, the chosen methodology didn’t allow the analysis of the visual aspects of the blogs although it soon became obvious that this constitutes an important part of the blogs, as they have a strong impact on the reader and, for sure, also tell a lot about the authors.
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory is the foundation for our conceptual understanding that we apply to the way we see and make sense of the world. Hence, the following chapters seek to outline the theoretical framework for this study, which consists of three main thematic blocks: Postcolonial theory, identity and New Media. These three fields are to be seen as the theoretical cornerstones that were drawn on for the very formulation of the research question as well as for the analysis itself.

3.1 Postcolonialism

3.1.1 Introduction

As the word makes clear, Postcolonialism is a concept related to colonialism, and may be used as simply as to refer to places that used to be colonized, have then undergone decolonisation processes, and consequently are now to be considered postcolonial. However, it is more than that. A wider comprehension is that of Postcolonialism as a "critical politico-intellectual formation that is centrally concerned with the impact of colonialism and its contestation on the cultures of both colonizing and colonized peoples in the past, and the reproduction and transformation of colonial relations, representations and practices in the present" (Gregory 2000: 612 in Baird 2011: 2).

With respect to the contestation of colonial relations, representations and practices, Postcolonialism as literature critic seeks to de-construct the colonial discourse. It is in this form that postcolonial thought and theory has become most popular, referring to both the examination of literature produced by authors in colonial countries as well as to literature produced by the colonized, which is often intended to provide a counter-story. In this spirit, Postcolonialism can be summed up as re-reading, re-writing and ‘writing back’ (McEwan 2009: 24).

3.1.2 Postcolonialism as ‘writing-back’

Considered to be the founding text of postcolonial theory is Orientalism by American literary theorist Edward Said of Palestinian origin. In Orientalism (first published in 1978), Said examines classic European writers and the ways they influenced and helped to maintain a societal fantasy of European superiority (McEwan 2009: 62). With Orientalism, Said introduced the notion of colonialism as not only operated by economic and military domination but, equally important, as a discourse of domination (ibid.). Said critiqued the false assumptions underlying Western attitudes towards Asia and the Middle East and he believed that colonial discourse, based on a set of false and romanticised images, operated instrumentally as a Western projection onto, and the will to govern over the Orient (ibid.). Said concludes that discourses about the Orient were ideological representations with no corresponding reality, saying more about the West than they actually did about the world they claimed to represent (ibid. 63).

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10 Postcolonialism per se does not focus on situations in relation to European colonialism only, yet a major part of the academic and intellectual discussion has focused on this specific case and this research is no exception.
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indian literature theorist and another important figure of postcolonial theory, puts her focus on the effects representation and knowledge have on those who are positioned as their subjects. In this regard, Spivak introduced the term *subaltern*, thereby referring to those who are excluded and do not have a position from which to speak, or who are wilfully ignored in dominant modes of narrative production (ibid. 11). Thus, they are either spoken for, spoken about, or simply overlooked (ibid. 70).

On the ground of these considerations, postcolonial theory embraces those occasions and attempts where people try to reclaim their voice, speak for themselves and oppose the dominant regimes of representation. Yet, Achille Mbembe, political scientist of Cameroonian origin, here points to the danger of re-enforcing the opposed image when trying to replace it with a new one. Mbembe states that, in their intent to defeat the dominant image of Africa,

"African discourses on the self [...] draw their fundamental categories from the myths they claim to oppose and reproduce their dichotomies: the racial difference between black and white; the cultural confrontation between civilized peoples and savages; the religious opposition between Christians and pagans; [...] They are inscribed within an intellectual genealogy based on a territorialized identity and a racialized geography [...].“ (Mbembe 2002: 256-7)

Mbembe thereby draws onto Martinique-born Frantz Fanon, who was one of the most influential postcolonial writers. Fanon's work was influenced by his personal experience as a black intellectual in a white-dominated society (McEwan 2009: 45). Fanon conceived himself as French but was profoundly disappointed by encountering French racism. In Black Skin, White Masks he charts this disillusionment with a culture that he had considered as his own but which rejected him and treated him as the Other (ibid.). On this ground, Fanon developed the concept of *dual narcissism* (narcissism understood as self-development), meaning the functioning of identities in a narcissistic reflection of the Self in the Other (Bhabha 1994: 51). For Fanon, by looking at oneself through the eyes of the colonizers, the colonized try to escape their blackness and yet, remain “sealed” in it, (Fanon 1986: 11, 117 in McEwan 2009: 45), never able to attain the culture of colonizer which they are instead urged to mimic (McEwan 2009: 45).

A way out of this dilemma may be fictional writing. This has shown to be a prolific way to give voice to the own experience, and to articulate, re-claim and celebrate (cultural) identities. In this regard, Nigerian novelist and poet Chinua Achebe\(^\text{11}\) (who has passed away just recently this year) and amongst contemporary authors, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie, Taiye Selasi of Ghanaian descent or Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole have to be named. In their work they not only tell their countries' stories from a Non-Western point of view but also deal with the individual whose personal history is determined by the experience of the Other and confrontation of Western with African culture and identity. As their immense popularity shows, they have apparently touched the nerve of a whole generation of people of African descent living abroad who seem to be identifying

\(^{11}\) Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (first published 1958) is by many considered to be the most important book of modern African literature and was one of the first books to tell the story of European colonization from an African perspective.
with these issues\textsuperscript{12}.

Hence, based on the believe that the power of writing history and of representing other people(s) and places continues to reside within the West, Postcolonalism is about a counter-story. In doing so, it touches deeply upon questions of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, upon questions of identity for people who have to deal with colonialism and its legacies. As Baaz (2001: 6) puts it: “Colonial history still shapes contemporary identities, not only in the sense that past ideas and images remain embedded in contemporary discourses and identities but in the sense that the colonial constitutes one of the histories in relation to which people are positioned and position themselves.” Postcolonialism is thus a strategy which accepts that history matters. And it is not only about writing back, but it is in good part about \textit{writing the self}.

### 3.2 Identity

#### 3.2.1 Introduction

“\[
[I]dentity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.\]
\textquote{Mercer 1990: 43 in Hall 1996: 597}"

The above statement is based on the believe that in modern, and even more so in postmodern times, identities are breaking up due to the structural changes that have been transforming societies since the late twentieth century\textsuperscript{13} (Hall 1996: 596). Categories such as class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality used to be stable reference points for identity and they helped to give the individual a definite location within society (ibid. 597). But in (post)modern societies, our sense of selves as integrated subjects (ibid.) is being undermined. Instead, the dislocation or de-centering (ibid.) seems to be the case. This means that the individual is de-centered from his/her place within society as well as from him/herself. This constitutes a crisis of identity (ibid.) and the question now is if in our postmodern world, people are also ‘post’ any fixed conception of identity. Hall approaches this question on the basis of three definitions of identity - the Enlightenment identity, the sociological identity and the postmodern identity.

Whereas the Enlightenment subject was already born with a fixed ‘inner core’ of personal identity which in the course of time unfolded but essentially remained the same, the sociological subject took into consideration the surrounding social environment as modifying element for the formation of human identity. According to the sociological conception, identity is hence formed in the interaction between the self (the inner core) and society (ibid.). But, although this conception

\textsuperscript{12} Not only do their books count with a big readership, also their various Internet presences and appearances on other media channel speak to a big audience. For more information on these authors see http://www.taiyeselasi.com, http://www.tejucole.com, http://chimamanda.com.

\textsuperscript{13} Prominently summed up under the term ‘globalization’. For a good overview on what globalization encompasses, see Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s book \textit{Globalization: The Key Concepts}. (2007), Oxford: Berg


16
recognizes the influence from outside, the idea was still that of ultimately aiming at a stable identity which unifies subject and society.

The identity of the postmodern subject differs dramatically from this understanding: there is no more coherent, unified self. Rather, it is constantly formed and transformed. These transformations, according to Hall, occur in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us (Hall 1987 in Hall 1996: 598). And as systems of meaning and representations multiply in our globalized world, “we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify which – at least temporarily” (ibid.). Now that nothing anymore is fixed, identities are more about becoming rather than being. Merchant (2006: 239) describes this phenomenon as a continuum, where identities move between what he calls ‘anchored’ and ‘transient’. Anchored identities are those which are influenced by a long history of socio-cultural practices, such as religion ethnicity or gender. They relate to aspects of our lives over which we have little control. In contrast, transient identities change over time; they are more easily made, remade and unmade. They are influenced by peer group affiliation or changing cultural conditions (ibid.). Certain interactions, experiences, contexts and events in the life of a person contribute to the salience of specific types/aspects of identity at a particular moment in time.

A constant function in this process of becoming is difference. For Hall, identities are constructed through difference (1996a: 17). This means that it is “only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what is not [...] that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed” (ibid.) Identity is therefore also an act of power through which something is excluded and through which that which threatens it, is repressed (ibid.).

### 3.2.2 Identity and ‘Africa’

In the case of this research, the relation to the Other, to difference and to what is not in order to define identity are about Africa versus the West and the binaries, stereotypes and representations introduced in the previous chapters. The question of African identity and of what constitutes ‘African’ can therefore not be understood outside the history of Western colonialism (Baaz & Palmberg 2001: 6). What is of interest though are the ways in which this history is addressed. In this regard, Achille Mbembe (2002) introduces Nativism as a concept (amongst others) which has served to make sense of history and which is employed as a strategy for the construction of identity in the African context.

Nativism is a current of thought that is characterized by a tension between the claim for Africans belonging to the same generic human identity as the rest of the (Western) world and an opposing particularistic move, emphasizing difference and specificity. This concept therefore has ‘race’ at its centre, but the ways of how to interpret it are different. However, it is not about rejecting the concept of race per se, but of rejecting “the prejudice that assigns this race an inferior status” (ibid.

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14 According to Mbembe, during the time of slavery, Africans where denied the belonging to humanity. It they were not excluded completely, they were at best assigned an inferior status in the hierarchy of race. (Mbembe 2002: 252-3)
254). The nativist concept pursues a defence of the humanity of Africans based on the claim that their race, traditions and customs have a specific character. Tradition has thus a privileged position. It is based on the understanding of an authentic African culture, one that makes Africans unique. On the ground of this uniqueness, “Africa is supposed to reinvent its relationship to itself and to the world, to own itself, and to escape from the obscure regions and the opaque world to which history has consigned it” (ibid. 254). The African identity according to this mode of thought is therefore derived from the relationship between race and geography, and consequently, “Africa becomes the land of black people” (ibid. 256).

Yet, the ‘land of black people’ is not only relevant for those who live in it, but also for those who live outside of it, namely those who represent the African Diaspora.

3.2.3 African Diaspora and Collective Identity

The term Diaspora has its roots in the Greek meaning for ‘dispersal’ and the term ‘African Diaspora’ has accordingly been used to emphasize the unifying experiences of African peoples dispersed by slave trade, as well as to simply refer to black communities across national boundaries. In any case though, being in the Diaspora is a condition of displacement. In the words of Tina Campt, Director of the Africana Studies Program at Barnard College,

“Diaspora is not about what happens when you move; it's what happens once you decide to stay in one place. […] it is not about sacrificing a relationship to elsewhere, it's about maintaining a relationship to here and elsewhere and putting them in constant dialogue. This produces new ways of being in the place where one is, yet it's always in dialogue with the place that you came from, and being at home at the same time.”\textsuperscript{15}

One of the main characteristics of the diasporic condition is thus the maintenance of the relationship with the here and there, and of putting this disparate pair into constant dialogue. In this regard, Campt corresponds to Patterson and Kelley (2000: 15, drawing onto Safran 1991: 83-4: 15) who describe diasporic identities as determined by their dispersal from the ‘homeland’ – the emotionally laded place of origin and the making of a memory and a vision of what it is imagined to be –, social marginalization in the current living location, a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland, a desire to return, and a continuing relationship and identity with it. This group of characteristics and emotions shapes the consciousness and solidarity within the Diaspora. In the words of Aimé Césaire\textsuperscript{16}:

“I understood that I could not be indifferent to what was happening in Haiti or Africa. Then, in a way, we slowly came to the idea of a sort of black civilization spread throughout the world. And I


\textsuperscript{16}Aimé Césaire, interviewed by the Haitian poet René Depestre, 1967, http://africasacountry.com/aime-cesaire-is-a-country/, accessed on 10/12/2013
have come to the realization that there was a "Negro situation" that existed in different geographical areas, that Africa was also my country."

Diasporic identity is therefore not only about the development of a specific 'I', but more about the formation of a certain 'we', hence of a collective identity. Collective identity as defined by Cerulo (1997: 386) is a notion that addresses the "we-ness" of a group, "stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce." As Stuart Hall (1990: 223) puts it,

"our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, it the truth, the essence, [...] of the black experience."

Though this might sound essentializing, Hall argues that this conception of a collective diasporic identity played a critical role in anticolonial movements and postcolonial struggles, as well as in political projects such as Pan-Africanism and continues to be a "powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representations amongst hitherto marginalized people" (ibid.). This political manifestation of Diaspora has thus been employed to hide differences and complexities in order to fit all into one 'unifying' category (Patterson and Kelley 2000: 13-20).

Like Hall, Appadurai (1996: 15) also recognizes the sometimes essentializing, or naturalizing effect of culture – culture described by Appadurai as a dimension of difference - when used in the service of unifying a group, in particular a globally dispersed, "counternational and metacultural" (ibid. 16) group. This is particularly the case when the group coalesces around a certain desire or struggle, as in the case of the African Diaspora the struggle to abolish misconceptions and vilifying stereotypes. Thus, Appadurai (ibid. 15) just like Hall also ascribes a political potential to groups which are conscious about their collective identity, culture and heritage and mobilize cultural material in a deliberate, strategic and sometimes populist way (the term applied by Appadurai here are 'culturalist movements').

Hall’s and Appadurai's approach therefore make the strong symbolic character of ‘identity politics’ obvious, where the personal, deliberate choice which the formation of identity includes comes to the fore (Waters 1990 in Cerulo 1997: 389). To adopt or stress the African side of identity might in some cases, or better said, in some moments of life, be the necessary choice that responds to a specific situational context or personal need (for a member of the African Diaspora this might be the need to assert oneself against the dominant, Western Other). In this case, identity is more concerned with the symbols rather than with the culture itself (Alba 1990: 306 in Cerulo 1997: 389).

Taking all this into consideration, it becomes clear that "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think" (Hall 1990: 222). We are neither born with one that is just suitable, nor do we pick an identity and stick to it for once and for all. Rather, identities seem to be hybrid, constantly transforming formations, in which we actively invest, with history, representations,
language, culture and society as our main resources. So, if we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" (Hall 1996: 598). This points to the active part we play in the construction of our identity through the telling of a particular story; our life-story. In the following, New Media, in particular blogging, shall be represented in their function as digital identity narratives and hence in their function as a means to construct identities.

3.3 New Media

3.3.1 Introduction

We are living in a time where new forms of Internet-based communication and publishing possibilities are emerging almost daily. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Tumblr and many other types of media platforms that, supported and linked to communication devices such as laptops, cellphones and tablets, constitute a network of communication channels which is often referred to as New Media. They enable people to easily (based on the presupposition of Internet access and a certain level of computer literacy) produce and distribute content, and to share "information, experiences, perspectives, artistic creations – and almost anything else – with their fellow Internet users around the world" (Manning 2012) in almost real-time.

New Media thus a very broad term that is not an easy term to define, especially as new forms are constantly evolving and originating. But with the help of some salient qualities, Leah Lievrouw (2011: 8-13) gives a definition that seems to be fairly comprehensive. According to her, New Media differ from other media forms in four essential ways: (1) they are based on the recombination of different media technologies, (2) they constitute a network of network, where any point can connect with any other point in the network, making it (technically) possible for any user to retrieve and exchange messages and programs from any other user or site on demand, (3) they seem to be ubiquitous in terms of space and time and, (4) they are fundamentally interactive (based on their infrastructure and architecture).

Manuel Castells (2007: 246) addresses the new developments on the basis of his concept of the network society:

"The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time. [...] The communication foundation of the network society is the global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many both synchronous and asynchronous."

New Media are therefore not exclusively about new technologies. Rather, what makes them new is the wide variety of user-oriented possibilities to combine and remix features from different kinds of media technologies and content, be it visual, written, or spoken, and to allow a high degree of interaction and participation, with the latter two appearing to be New Media’s most evident, and in
terms of social impact most important features. The possibilities to search, share, recommend, link, argue and so on provide the user with an unprecedented degree of selectivity and reach in his/her choice of information, personal interactions and expressions (Lievrouw 2011: 13) and by producing their own media content, New Media enable individuals and social groups to take the reins and gain visibility and voice on the international media stage. The days of being obliged to solely consume what the big media institution serve seem to be over since the boundaries between formerly clearly separated categories – producer and consumer - are breaking (Hintz in Cammaerts & Carpentier 2007: 245) and a third category, the presumer (Rennie, 2007: 25), has surfaced.

The striking element of New Media consequently is the self: they are self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception (Castells 2009: 70). A popular representative of the digital "Daily-Me" (Lievrouw 2011: 13), where content production as well as consumption is centered on the self, are weblogs, or blogs.

3.3.2 Blogging

As of October 2006, Technorati17, and Internet search engine for blogs, was tracking 57.3 million blogs. An average of 75,000 new blogs were created every day, with about 1.2 million posts daily. For 201118, 60% of all blogs where managed by ‘hobby-bloggers’, with expressing their “personal musings” as one of the main motivations.

In its main sense, a weblog is a site on the web. It contains a series of entries (posts), normally arranged in reverse chronological order (with older posts normally archived). Each entry is either a text, an image, a link, or a sound or video file (or a combination of these). In most of the cases, blogs include the possibility for reader responses via comments which appear as footnotes to the posts (Erwins 2005:369). Most of the blogs are started as single author blogs, but over the time often convert into a collective project. Most blogs are dedicated to a specific topic, from political discussion to cooking blogs to travel journals or any other kind of topic. But treating blogs only as a mere format of publication, something essential is missed:

“A blog is a TV set with the tube ripped out and a real, unpredictable, changeable, attention-wandering, living, breathing person sitting inside it.” (Erwins 2002 in Erwins 2005: 370).

What Erwins is pointing to here is the particular relationship between the weblog and its author, which makes it a space where personal identity is displayed, and (per)formed. Thus, when regularly updated, the blog gives its readers a strong sense of the author's presence. It is a sort of a personal diary, though with a public face. Erwins (2005: 373) states that the “blogger’s commentary on the world, other websites, other people, other webloggers, helps to define his or her self in relation to

the wider environment.” The blog is a presentation of oneself and one’s thoughts to the world, to an audience, and to oneself (ibid.) In this regard, Teju Cole19 comment applies well:

“I think, for everyone, when you speak about the world, you speak about the self.”

A blog is thus a space where, at a specific moment in time – and thereby conforming to a postmodern conception of identity - , one or several aspects of a person’s identity are acted out and presented to the world; blogs are “digital identity narratives” (Koosel 2011) speaking to the world.

Yet, telling a story about ourselves (cf. chapter 3.2.3) is a highly selective process. As Sarup (1996: 16 in Erwins 2005: 271) states:

“When we talk about our identity and our life-story, we include some things and exclude others, we stress some things and subordinate others. The process of exclusion, stress and subordination is carried out in the interests of constructing a story of particular kind.”

In order to do so, the blog format presents a set of possibilities to give the bloggers online identity a specific shape: the profile section (‘About’), the categories which organize the information produced on the blog, the blogroll, as well as links to other websites, related blogs, photostreams and other networks such as Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr. They all provide opportunities to showcase the blogger’s identity, revealing both aspects of our ‘anchored’ and ‘transient’ identities (see Chapter 3.2.1).

In the course of the study, the term ‘New Media’ and ‘blogs’ will sometimes be interchanged. This is due to the impossibility to actually analyse them separately. Although New Media is a much more general term, referring to the many different communication and publishing possibilities available, blogs, although they are per se only one of them, are (by now) tightly linked to and embedded into other New Media devices – not one of the blogs which was used for this study is not connected to Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr. Thus, although the focus of the study should stay with blogging, the analysis will at some points also switch to making general statements about New Media as a whole.

3.3.3 Blogging as ‘back-writing’

In Technocrati’s recent state of the blogosphere report of 2011, to speak their mind on an area of interest was stated as the primary reason to blog for 31% of all hobby bloggers. This makes blogging an important platform to present alternative or marginal views, and thereby to confront dominant media culture, politics and power (Lievrouw 2011: 2). The confrontation of dominant media culture politics and power takes us to what Castells 2007 describes as counter-power, a concept which has earlier in this paper also been referred to as back-writing.

Back-writing means delivering counter-stories or counter-narratives. Power, which according to Castells is “the structural capacity of a social actor to impose its will over other social actor(s)”, is

decided in large parts by the media (Castells 2007: 239). But power relations are inherently conflictive, as they reflect the diverse and contradictory character of societies (ibid.). This is where counter-power comes into play, meaning “the capacity by social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society”, as „resistance to domination, be it political, cultural, economic, psychological, or otherwise […]”, aimed at changing the values and interests institutionalized in society [...].” (ibid. 248)

In a further step, counter-power may be translated into the construction of a counter-narrative or –story (for a more on narratives, see chapter 2.2.1). Here, this study wants to draw on Bamberg (2004). His concept of counter-narratives starts with the assertion that “stories in principle are rhetorical tools for point or claim-making” (ibid. 358). As counter-stories they always have to be seen in relation to a dominant- or master-narratives (also variably called plotlines, master plots, dominant discourses, or simply story lines or cultural texts), which “structure how the world is intelligible, and therefore permeate the petit narratives of our everyday talk” (ibid. 361). The counter-story intends to resist the framework of intelligibility provided by what is taken for granted. For the storyteller, this may invoke a liberating and emancipating purpose (ibid.). However, the teller, according to Bamberg, “never totally step[s] outside the dominating framework of the master narrative, but always remain[s] somewhat complicit and work[s] with components and parts of the existent frame ‘from within.’” (ibid. 363).

To Castells, (2007: 239), both the objected power as well as projects of counter power nowadays operate in a new technological framework of media which transform the relation between the two. Mass self-communication is one of the trends that contribute to this transformation (ibid.). As already introduced beforehand, blogging is an important and popular medium within mass self-communication (cf. chapter 1.2). The function of blogs as digital spaces for identity performance interacts with their potential to constitute a project of counter-power, where the bloggers articulate their opposition to an opposed, dominant group or views, show solidarity with each other and engage in the construction of a discourse or a strategy to overcome and deal with exclusion or injustice (Asen 2000 in Lievrouw 2011: 65).

However, this potential of New Media to act as spaces for counter-power is not uncontested. The discussion in this respect ranges from considering their role as either functional or dysfunctional (Aday el al. 2010: 12). The optimistic point of view argues that the Internet is generating positive connections, spreading information, and proliferating points of contact across societal divides (ibid. 11), whilst the pessimistic position focuses on what Zizek\(^\text{20}\) has called the *echo-effect* or *echo-spaces* of the Internet, where one only needs to turn to people and sites that reflect his/her own opinions, thus attributing the Internet with the power to fortify polarization and bias-confirming information (Aday el al. 2010: 11), rather than the ability to promote dialogue beyond the rim of one’s tea-cup.

In any case, anotherafrica.net and the other blogs portrayed in this study are analysed in this light -

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\(^{20}\) Interview with Slavoj Zizek in derStandard.at, derstandard.at/1348284192381/Slavoj-Zizek-Das-Internet-als-Kampfplatz, accessed 21/12/2013
as digital narratives that act both as a means to construct identities as well as to oppose a certain master narrative, be it successful or not.

3.4 The level of action

The core concepts of this study, be it Postcolonialism, New Media, or diasporic identity, all share one crucial characteristic: they refer to the global. Therefore, they cannot be seen detached from globalization, defined by Robertson (1992 in Eriksen 2007:4) as “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness about the world as a whole”. Central to this compression are the advancements and possibilities offered by communication technology and the sheer infinite opportunities to always and everywhere connect with ‘the world’.

An approach that is built on this compression of the world and the processes that emerge from it are Appadurai’s *ethnoscapes* and *mediascapes* (Appadurai 1996). At the intersection of these two, transnational populations, communication and social/culturalist struggles converge. Thanks to the globally accessible mediascape (by others referred to as the Web 2.0, or in this study as New Media), a group like the African Diaspora, which is part of the globally active ethnoscapes - the landscapes of persons and group identities that are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bound or culturally homogenous (ibid. 48) - can easily move and connect, disregarded by national boundaries, and produce their own information, or as Appadurai (ibid. 35) called it, “image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality”.

Ethnoscapes and mediascapes are thus strongly linked to each other and they constitute the (virtual) ground for the deterritorialized struggle of the African Diaspora to stand up to the Western image imposed on them. The level of action where the blogs are based, or in other words, their operation range, is thus the global as they accommodate a globally active group of people (the African Diaspora) and refer to a globally operating master-narrative (Western conception of Africa).
4  ANALYSIS

4.1.1  Introduction

For this study, six blogs have been selected: africaisdonesuffering.com, africaontheblog.com, anotherafrica.net, iamafropolitan.com, afroklectic.com and afroblush.com. These six blogs are representatives of a wider sphere of blogs that all, by some means or other, have Africa at their heart and that are either entirely managed by Africans in the Diaspora or in a co-production with people living on the continent. The thematic orientation of this blogosphere, often in connection with other New Media services such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr (as the most prominent ones), is very diverse. Some cover political issues and understand themselves as a counterforce to Western-centric news reporting, others want to promote economic development by offering information about best-practice initiatives and opportunities, yet others see themselves as the promoter of African literature and/or other forms of artistic expression, and, last but not least, a wide variety of ‘life style blogs’ exists that aim at representing the distinct forms of contemporary African ways of life, with some focusing of subcultures and other in turn covering mainstream topics such as fashion or beauty issues for the ‘African woman’ in general. What is common though to all of them is that they respond to a felt under-representation or mis-representation of the ‘African perspective’ in the Western media21.

The six blogs that were selected for this study are part of this blogosphere. They are all managed by a team of authors, ranging from 2 people (iamafropolitan.com) up to 18 different contributors (africaontheblog.com). Thus, they are multi-author blogs, though some of them had initially been started as single author projects and only over time evolved into including more contributors.

The way the blogs where selected was a process that started over a year ago with the Kony 2012 campaign which had resulted in extensive and emotional reactions amongst people of African descent, showing deep discontent with the campaign itself and its reception in the Western hemisphere. Through reading a post on one site (africasacountry.com), I was taken to similar sites by the links and comments there available and slowly but surely, I discovered a whole alike blogosphere where issues concerning Africa where presented in an apparently alternative way that was faraway from the common style of reporting on Africa I was used to.

Due to my personal language limitations, I restricted myself to those sites in English. Then, when I already knew that I was going to write my theses on the topic of blogging within the African Diaspora, I selected those blogs that were active (regularly updated) and I picked out the ones that, besides an already significant title, had a clear statement in their ‘About’ section about the intention to depict the particularities of ‘Africaness’ and/or about to intention to represent a different image of Africa (different to the traditional representations in Western Media).

The number of six blogs seemed to be appropriate since it allows general statements about a phenomenon which are still well-grounded on a sufficient number of individual case studies the analysis draws on. For this aim, I first looked at each of the blogs in detail and then filtered out the significant similarities, and differences.

4.2 Narrative analysis of the blogs

4.2.1 Presentations of the blogs

africaisdonesuffering.com

‘Africa is done suffering’ (A.I.D.S) is a New Media site managed by three young people. The site is centred on a blog, but integrates different media channels - Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Tumblr. Based on "[t]he essence of who we are, past, present, and future, [that] lies in the weaving together of shared conversations, personal narratives, and the upholding of traditional values in the face of modern trends", A.I.D.S "seek[s] to create an atmosphere that encourages conversation between Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora", Questions of identity are thus at the forefront for at A.I.D.S, but the site does no want to limit itself to issues that only concern those in the Diaspora but articulates a desire to be a platform which integrates both those away from and those on the continent.

Its catchy name, claiming that ‘Africa is done suffering’, makes it clear that the site intends to contrast the image disseminated in the Western Media where negative aspects such as poverty and suffering prevail. This shall be achieved by "generating resolutions to change the media-enhanced perception of Africa as the world’s handicapped continent". As some of the comments on the site say:

“Africa is done suffering simply means that it’s time to tell our own stories.,” or “We as people of the African countries can disturb the current dialogue that excludes our vibrant voices and interject the truth of the continent into the world so that others can benefit from our collective greatness”.

The site offers a thematic organization on basis of series: ‘Artist Lounge’, ‘Rise Africa’, ‘Talk Africa’ and ’Women in Africa and the Diaspora’. In addition, A.I.D.S sorts its posts according to monthly themes, as for example ‘The Feminist Edition’ (11/2013) or ‘The Africa of the Future’ (10/2013). In collaboration with other actors, A.I.D.S is involved with and linked to a book club (‘Narrate Africa’) and also features an initiative of a video/blog series that „seek[s] to tackle deep, unanswered questions about the role of Africans, Afro Americans, and non-American Blacks in the black diaspora“.

A very strong element of A.I.D.S is its visual appearance. This is what sets it apart from the other blogs, where the visuals are also important to underpin the message, but don’t appear that much in the foreground. At A.I.D.S., the visual language seems to aim at portraying the diversity of what

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22 To read the full ‘About’ – sections of each of the blogs, please see Appendix 7.1.
constitutes Africa and ‘Africaness’, with a focus on positive, self-conscious, young and dynamic representations.

**Figure 3:** Visuals at africaisconesuffering.com: African beauty and diversity

**anotherafrica.net**

Similar to A.I.D.S. in both its visual language and thematic orientations is anotherafrica.net. This multi-author blog of currently 10 contributors also focuses on questions of identity, though with a stronger emphasis on art and culture. The sites main categories, besides ‘Art & Culture’ itself are ‘Photography’, ‘Fashion’, ‘Design’, ‘Heritage’ and ‘Music’. With posts on topics under these thematic divisions, the blog claims that “another dimension to Africa exists. This continent [...] is most often spoken of in terms of all the woes and troubles faced by its peoples, inhabitants and descendants. It is hard to imagine what could be inspiring or inspired if all that we heard was negative.”

In order to create a different narrative, anotherafrica wants to be optimistic, “based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage and kindness. What we choose to emphasise in this complex history will determine our lives.

The site aims at showcasing “the creative tour de force of its [Africa's] peoples and supporters, however removed. It is about restoring a respect for the wealth of knowledge stored in its varied cultures and peoples of different colours, races, ethnicities and tribes. It is not about division but rather inclusion. It is about genuine inspiration, shared knowledge and experiences, dialogue, it is about specificity.”

**Figure 4:** anotherafrica.net: showcasing the creative tour de force of Africa’s peoples
africaontheblog.com

In contrast to A.I.D.S and anotherafrica, the visuals of ‘Africa on the blog’ (AOTB) are much less dominant, if not to say conservatively discreet. Its logo even seems to take up a quite traditional, stereotypical image of Africa where the continent is depicted according to its animal wildlife.

**Figure 5:** AOTB – Using a more ‘traditional’ visual depiction of Africa

Also in terms of content, AOTB differs from A.I.D.S and anotherafrica, with a focus on political commentary rather than on art and culture. The content-ordering categories ‘African Development’, ‘African Diaspora’, ‘African Politics’ and ‘African Matters’ reflect this and corresponds to the following statement which can be found in the site’s ‘About’-section:

“No big deal for us here is that we as Africans are telling our stories in our own words as well as talking about issues that affect us. Since it is unlikely that we will be invited on CNN or the BBC to tell the world about the Africa we know and love, Africa On The Blog is about us telling the world about Africa in our own words.”

Thus, the blog directly refers to the marginalization of the African perspective in the Western (mass) media. Therefore, although life-style issues also have their place (section an African Food for example), AOTB appears more as a site which aims at constituting an alternative news and opinion-shaping media font. To this end, the site relies on currently 14 contributors who, as a condition, have to be of African heritage and cover a wide variety of occupations, formations, and interests.

iamafropolitan.com

‘I am Afropolitan’ is a site created around a specific identifying unit which is ‘the Afropolitan’:

“the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You’ll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; [...] There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie’s kitchen. Then there’s the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands [...] We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.”
The term ‘Afropolitan’ was coined by Taiye Selasi in her article ‘Bye Bye Barbar’\textsuperscript{23}. With the ‘Afropolitan’, Selasi, an upcoming young author of Ghanaian descent has apparently managed to describe a vast generation of young ‘Africans of the world’ who construct their identity on the ground of the successful (and stylish) combination of plural heritages. The article as well as the term are referred to on many different sites and have created a wide discussion about its meaning and validity amongst the African Diaspora\textsuperscript{24}.

However, with the reference to this specific identity, iamafropolitan.com appeals to a big audience, which is proved by around 28,000 ‘likes’ on Facebook achieved only within the first week after its launch in October of this year. The site’s declared objective is to cover and feature “excelling Africans at home and around the globe”. Thus, the main content on all of iamafropolitan’s channels (Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter) is the portrayal of Afropolitans who are successful in what they do and who may serve as inspiration for the wider community.

\textbf{Figure 6:} “Afropolitans On The Rise” and “Afropolitans We Admire” on iamafropolitan.com

\textbf{afroklectic.com}

A blog that features the story of one specific Afropolitan experience is afroklectic.com, where it is about “celebrating the emerging creative culture within the African-Australian community, Africa and the Diaspora”. The blog’s focus is on life-style issues with Fashion, Photography and Music & Performance as the categories that have gathered the most posts. In contrast to the other sites used within this study, is the one that (still) presents posts that are written in a more personal style,

\textsuperscript{23} To read the full article, visit http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76

\textsuperscript{24} For an insight into the discussion the article created, see http://theafrobeat.blogspot.com/2007/03/what-is-afropolitan-by-taiye-tuakli.html or http://africasacountry.com/the-afropolitan-must-go/
where the individual history, opinions and experiences of mainly one person (Gillean, the founder) are presented.

The blog is linked to a variety of other New Media services (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Vimeo, Instagram and Pinterest) and both the visuals as the very content transmits a very fresh and upbeat image of all that concerns Africa and African culture. This corresponds to the articulated philosophy of afroklectic, which states that the site deliberately wants to highlight the positive characteristics of Africa, with proud reference to tradition and the rich diversity the continent has to offer:

“Africa is not dirt, mud and thatch. Africa is rich textiles, ancient tapestry woven in renowned villages for hundreds of years, strings and strings of coloured beads, adorned all over the body. [...] Africa is not the hollowed cry of a neglected race. Africa is the soulful song of a chosen people within novels, poetry, paint, clothing, jewellery and dance.”

Based on this approach, the blogs want to “educate on what Africa is, pushing aside the tired misconception of what Africa is not. Embracing our culture through our creative practices.”

Figure 7: A very positive approach to the African influence on identity and culture on afroklectic.com

afroblush.com

Like afroklectic.com, the sixth blogs used for this research, afroblush.com also represents the experience of mainly one person (Louisa) and is spun around and committed to representing the positive outcomes of the merging of African and Western culture:

“Afroblush is a dynamic and independent cross-cultural style, arts and culture blogazine (blog-magazine hybrid). Since 2010 we’ve covered the best in contemporary culture between the African and European-diaspora. [...] Afroblush was created to reflect the voice of Afropeans and the power of Africa’s influence on global popular culture.”

Used here as both source as well as audience are “Afropeans”. Though this term is less comprehensive than the Afropolitan, at its heart it refers to the same idea: a cultural identity that is
defined by trans-culturalism; in the case of afroblush that is the identity of the African and Afro-Caribbean Diaspora living in Europe.

Amongst the selected six blogs, afroblush is the one that is best described as a life-style blog. The content ordering categories are: Culture, Society, Style, Beauty, Photography, and Travel, again with a strong emphasis on the visual - with beautiful, positive, young modern diversity as the slogan that would best describe the site’s visual appearance.

Figure 8: Cultural diversity and life-style on afroblush.com

4.2.2 The blogs as narratives

In the narrative analysis of the blogs, the research interest is on the inscriptions of the meaning of what is said. To begin the analysis, it is helpful to start by taking a look at the three main elements which where earlier on (see chapter 2.2.1) cited as the constitutive elements of a narrative: character, action, and plot (Lawler in Pickering 2008: 34).

Now, who are the main characters of the blogs? In the first line, it is of course the individuals who have founded and who regularly contribute content to the sites. They are predominantly young people of African descent, who either grew up or currently live in a country considered as belonging to ‘the West’. They consequently belong to the African Diaspora and, when looking at and reading through the blogs, the discussion about what Africa means to them and what it means to be of African heritage clearly stands at the centre. The blogs seem to be an on-going reflection about the bloggers identity as individuals who have been confronted with a quite different feedback on their heritage and culture than the one they wish for and than the one, as a reaction, they are displaying on their sites.

When reading the ‘About me’ or ‘Who we are’ sections, this is mentioned in different, but clear ways. The declared intentions of the bloggers can be summarized under three principles and are as follows: (1) to deconstruct the negative image of Africa, (2) to start a different, optimistic discourse about the meaning of Africa directed at the ‘own people’ (people of African descent) as well as directed at the West (the Other), and, with regard to the specific experience of the Diaspora, (3) to highlight the positive impact of the merging of African with Western culture. In pursuing these principles, they not only want to speak out for themselves, but they also wish to connect with other
likeminded people and create a community based on a dialogue about shared experiences and beliefs.

“Our main goal is to use communication as a tool to bring together young Africans scattered throughout the nations. We look to promote unity and build a strong sense of connection amongst the disconnected.” (africaisdonesuffering.com/rise-africa)

“We will use creativity as a means for inspiration and dialogue, sharing a contemporary vision, Another Africa in the arts and culture, design and architecture, fashion, music, photography and more and we hope that you will join us along this journey.” (anotherafrica.net/about)

Yet, when looking more closely at the ‘About me/us’ section, the bloggers seem to be part of a social elite. Most of them have at least one academic degree, they are young, apparently economically well of working as journalists, designers & Co, and they are at home in various cultures and places of this world. Hence, at first sight they don’t differ a lot from any other cosmopolitan. Consequently, the term Afropolitan, although it hasn’t only received agreement from those it means to describe (in particular for its elitist character) comes back into mind and seems to manage quite well in describing the specific group of African Diaspora these blogs represent and speak to.

With respect to gender, the blogs integrate both female and male bloggers, with a narrow majority though for women. However, only one of the blogs - iamafropolitan.com - has been funded by men. The others do integrate male contributors, but the initial initiative and consequently the orientation, design and structure of the blogs was and is in female hands. If one wants to find an explanation for this, one (however a mere assumption only) might be that a critical reflection on representations and identity on the ground of ‘soft’ characteristics as art, culture, fashion, and lifestyle is ‘women’s business. This doesn’t mean that blogging to represent the ‘African perspective’ is solely a female thing. There are innumerable blogs and bloggers out there, and the variety of thematic foci is very wide. One prominent focus is for instance blogs on economic, entrepreneurial and technological issues\textsuperscript{25}, others focusing on political and social analysis and commentary\textsuperscript{26}, or again others which focus on a specific country or region only. Yet, the blogs which are represented in this study are those whose main character are people who define themselves and their perspective on the ground of the diasporic experience and therefore seem to have a particular attentive and reflective eye on questions of identity. And since culture in its broadest sense is one of the areas where this specific identity is most manifest, the blogs focus on the different aspects this embraces – art, design, culture and fashion.

Yet, besides the bloggers themselves, there is another level of character that is very present in all of the blogs. If by character we want to refer to the central theme of the narrative, then, since the sites deal with the direct or indirect correction of a (felt) mis-representation, both the rejected as well as the aspired image are to be entitled as having a leading role in the construction of the blogs’ stories. Therefore, the West and the ‘Westerner’ on the one hand, and, opposed to this, Africa and people of

\textsuperscript{25} see for example tmsruge.com, or simige.com

\textsuperscript{26} see for example africasacountry.com
African origin on the other hand are main characters of the sites. The characteristics of this binary, established long ago but not yet abolished, is still powerful and continues to determine how people are represented, and subsequently how they represent themselves.

This reference to the past, to the stereotypes and depiction of Africa which has its roots in history, and the upholding of traditional (African) values is to be located within the concept of historicity, which holds much importance within hermeneutic text analysis. As Lawler says, “no one lives in an eternal present and the past – both individually and socially – informs and impacts on people’s presents.” (Lawler in Pickering 2008: 38). Thus, “I am” or “We are” is already biographical (ibid.) and the community we feel that we belong to, and the traditions we preserve, are interrelated with the way we attribute meaning to the world, and consequently the narrative we construct.

The characters who determine the narrative of anotherafrica & Co can thus not be seen unhitched from history, which is referred to in form of the old stereotypes and images the blogs oppose (eg. africanisdonesuffering.com). This historical image is one of the main resources drawn on and what it provokes is the creation of a specific counter-narrative: modern, black, proud, beautiful, intellectual, innovative, dynamic and self-assured (as opposed to the ‘old’ characteristics such as passive, childlike and obedient, see chapter 1.2.1, The signifier ‘Africa’) are the attributes which immediately come to the visitor’s mind when looking and reading through the blogs, based on a combination of the featured content, the writing style and the visual design.

‘Africa’ as a category, as the ‘Dark Continent’, described by lacks and failures, plagues and catastrophes, thus not only continues to function as “a polemical argument for the West’s desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world” (Mbembe 2001 in Ferguson 2006: 2) but also provokes a reaction of those who are affected by this image. The blogs draw a picture that stands in stark contrast to the Western categorization of Africa. And yet, the opposed image, the master narrative the blogs intend to contrast, is always present; it is present through the strong commitment to be different, to show to oneself and the world that Africa is not ‘the Dark Continent’.

“Our goal is to raise the image of Africa not only in the eyes of the world but also amongst Africa’s own people. We seek to enable the growth of pride amongst young Africans in reference to their heritage, culture, family traditions, and overall respective countries. [...] We are encouraged by the positive attributes of Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. We want to highlight the wealth of Ghana, Somalia, North and South Sudan and Zimbabwe. We find hope in the unquenchable spirit of Angolans, South Africans, Congolese, and Senegalese. We are empowered by the strength of Cameroon, Burundi, Tanzania, Mali and all of the countries of Africa. For this reason we declare that Africa Is Done Suffering.” (africanisdonesuffering.com/rise-africa)

With this commitment the blogs can be seen as the ‘soft’, or the ‘cultural’ branch of the current ‘Africa Rising’ narrative, where economic growth and technological innovation in Africa are being praised in glowing terms (with The New York Times and The Economist as their most prominent
ambassadors\textsuperscript{27}). The ‘Africa Rising’ narrative told in the blogs does not promote Africa’s economic potential but African culture, art, design, fashion and perspectives. By doing so, the blogs’ narratives correspond to Mbembe’s (2002) conceptualization of Nativism as a leading approach within ‘African modes of self-writing’ (see 3.2.2). Within this approach, particularities, difference and the uniqueness of African traditions and customs are highlighted and supposed to reinvent African’s relationship to themselves and to the world, to own itself, and to escape from the obscure regions and the opaque world to which history has consigned it” (ibid. 254).

“\textit{Africa is not dirt, mud and thatch. Africa is rich textiles, ancient tapestry woven in renowned villages for hundreds of years, strings and strings of coloured beads, adorned all over the body. [...] Africa is not the hollowed cry of a neglected race. Africa is the soulful song of a chosen people within novels, poetry, paint, clothing, jewellery and dance. And this is Afroklectic. [...] Embracing our culture through our creative practices.”} (afroklectic.com/history)

“It is about restoring a respect for the wealth of knowledge stored in its varied cultures and peoples of different colours, races, ethnicities and tribes. [...] It is about genuine inspiration, shared knowledge and experiences, dialogue, it is about specificity.” (anotherafrica.net/about)

The second element of a narrative is that of action, of the story’s movement through time. In the case of the blogs, the action is constituted by the posts, which either appear as simple as in chronological order (the most current one on top), or categorized into thematic groups - as for instance ‘Art & Culture’, ‘African Politics’, or ‘Afropolitans we admire’. What is featured in the posts may be about the work of a photographer, the release of a new book, critical comments on the recent elections in Kenya, the bloggers reflections on Afro-Feminism or an article on the controversial debate about the meaning of ‘hair’.

The covered events, issues and thoughts ‘move’ through time as they constitute moments/occasions in the lives of the bloggers were their identity as people of African heritage has been either challenges or reinforced. Their ‘assignment’ is to fit the desired image of a ‘new’, ‘different’ Africa. Yet, each event alone, without being seen in direct connection to the other featured events, would not transport the same meaning the ‘aggregate’ does. Only when put/linked together, the account on Chimamanda Adichie’s new book release, the portrait of Nigerian born (and currently widely acclaimed and popular) actor Chiwetel Ejiofor, or one of the many posts on ‘How to grow African hair naturally’ form a coherent whole which conforms to the blogs’ titles and aim to picture another Africa.

The way the events are presented varies. Sometimes, it is in a more reserved manner, solely presenting e.g. a photography exhibition, whilst other posts foreground the emotions and personal thoughts of the author on a specific topic or situation which he/she found him/herself in. However,

it is clear that the covered events are attributed a very particular meaning when featured on the blogs. And this meaning is produced by the way the events are bound together, the *plot* of the story. The plot is produced through the process of *employment*, where events of quite different nature – in the case of the blogs it is posts on books, fashion, art exhibitions, food recipes, political analysis, etc. – are linked to each other in a causal, significant relationship. A temporal causality though is mostly not the case. The causality is rather achieved though the thematic skeleton of the blogs which locates each post as a meaningful part into a bigger structure and which is determined with the help of the blog’s name (most of the names are already quite blunt and self-explanatory) in combination with the ‘About’, ‘Who we are’ and/or ‘Why this blog’ (or similar) rubrics. Though, these elements only reflect what the very person, the blogger, has experienced/felt and which then, as a consequence has led him/her to set up a weblog which tells a very specific story.

In the process of linking the events into a consistent plot, both the narrator and the audience participate on the basis of a shared cultural understanding that the specific events belong to this specific narrative (Lawler in Pickering 2008: 36). For the blogs, this shared understanding, or in other words, the common denominator, is that of being of African descent, of being confronted and disliking the common representation of Africa within Western Media and, as in the particular case of the African Diaspora, the shared experience of people who have to deal with ‘the Other’ in their everyday lives. These shared experiences speak to a collective identity. And this seems to be an identity which strongly highlights its African side and the corresponding symbols. This is an important aspect as most of the bloggers seem to be equally ‘at home’ in the West and ‘the African homeland’, but due to a set of reasons (as further on explored in the interview analysis), to stress their African side is, at that specific moment in their lives, a felt need, and therefore necessary choice.

“Having been born in Uganda, and brought up in the UK, in my mind I’m an African living in Britain; yet it’s only when I go to Africa do I feel like an British person in Africa. Despite often feeling inconclusive about my cultural identity, this site was a catalyst to understanding and engaging in the debate and cultural symphony of these two places.” (afroblush.com/about-us)

African diasporic identity is thus nothing set; it is, as stated earlier (chapter 3.2.3), socially and historically constituted and may even represent a political project. As africaisdonesuffering.com asserts:

“Our mission is to become a multimedia platform where those in Africa and the Diaspora can discover the power of community through the sharing of our experiences. We seek to provide a safe place for young Africans across the globe to connect with one another and express their struggles, triumphs, fears, courage, shortcomings, and strengths; a place for them to share their lives.”

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28 In order to learn more about the precise motivations of the bloggers, the interviews were carried out. They will be analysed in the next chapter (4.3.).

29 The symbolic language (especially in terms of visual language) used in the blogs is one aspect which had to stand back in the context of this study due to the limited time and scope, but further research in this respect would be needed in order to expand the understanding of the blogs in relation to African diasporic identity.
With this call to share their lives through the chaining link of the African diasporic experience, the blogs seem to speak to many (none of the blogs has less then 800 ‘likes’ on Facebook). What has emerged as a result is a common commitment to "keep the african flag flying" as one commentator on afroblush.com says and „to educate on what Africa is, pushing aside the tired misconception of what Africa is not" (afroklectic.com/history). Cultural marginalization and ‘third world’ stereotypes are thus contested with ‘African pride’ based on the promotion of the African perspective and “the power of Africa’s influence on global popular culture” (afroblush.com/about-us). In this process, the ‘we-ness’ of the African Diaspora is stressed and it is not surprising that the blogs are highly selective in regards to what is covered – only what fits the narrative is featured (cf. chapter 3.3.2).

Differences are put aside in order to make place for the ‘Afropolitan’, or ‘Afropean’ collective identity, where common experiences and challenges are shared in order to stand strong against the disliked representations of what ‘the Others’ believe to be African.

The strong visuals of the blogs are to bee seen on the backdrop of the ‘we-ness’ of the group. For the purpose of a collective identity, the symbolic characters of the shared culture are very important, maybe even more important then the culture itself (see chapter 3.2.3). The visual images may serve as a way to illustrate these symbols, which in the case of the blogs highlight the beautiful and positive side of the African heritage, blended with modern, cosmopolitan elements of global culture. And as already mentioned beforehand in the context of the presentations of the blogs, some of the sites stand out with respect to their visual language. Furthermore, visualizing the symbols of the collective identity not only is a good way to refer to common symbols of reference, but also a means to powerfully contrast the opposed representations (as they leave a strong impact on the visitor of the blogs).

**Figure 9:** Contrasting the opposed narrative with visual power – young, modern and global vs. poor and local

With respect to Ricoeur’s view on narratives and his traits to approach the inscription of the meaning of a text, what is salient in the case of anotherafrica & Co is that these texts cannot enjoy what Ricoeur (1973: 95-96) calls ‘freeing themselves from the narrowness of the dialogical

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30 Sources (from left to right): http://nurturestore.co.uk/dec-appealwater-comes-before-play, http://afroblush.com/about/, accessed 20/12/2013
situation’. What gets in the way of this liberation is one of the main features of New Media, in particular Social Media: the enabling of almost synchronous communication. Consequently, the authors of the text, the bloggers, are almost immediately confronted with the reaction and the opinion of their audience. In return, the authors also have the possibility to react and to explain what their intention was when writing the posts and the meaning and interpretation they meant to give to the respective event/thought. Hence, the dialogical situation is still active and the fixation of meaning is not set. But this is of course an intended and most welcome feature. The bloggers even ask for this interaction, wishing to create a community and dialogue around their specific view and values. The dialogue and the community-creating facet therefore seem to be a central purpose of the whole project. And the community of the bloggers and readers seem to agree on most issues. It is very rare to find comments that disagree with what and how it is presented; rather most comments are of approving and encouraging nature. Therefore, the distanciation between the intention of the author and the meaning of the text for its audience seem to be insignificant.

Koosel (2011) in this regard refers to New Media as ‘spoken-written communication’, since they have more in common with spoken conversation than with written communication and literature genres. In spoken-written communication, the tie between the speaker and the discourse is still active and blogging, if successful in terms of speaking to an audience, has more of an active dialogue than of writing for oneself only (more on this aspect is to be found in next chapter). The risk of a disjuncture of meaning of a text form the initial intention of the author is thus significantly reduced.

4.3 Interview analysis

In order to find out about the motivations that led to the set up of the blogs, about the meaning they have for the bloggers and which functions they fulfil, six interviews were conducted with representatives of the blogs analysed in the previous chapter. Except one case, the interviews were all with the blogs’ founders. The one exception was in the case of africaontheblog.com, were the interview was carried out with one of the contributors.

Here and there

Since one of the main particularities of the diasporic experience is the continuing putting into relation of the here and the there, of the place of living and the place of origin (‘homeland’), this was one of the first issues addressed in the interviews. Thus, with respect to the particular situation for those living in the Diaspora, it was tried to obtain an insight into how the respondents deal with their multiple heritage. This was approached through questions around the notion of ‘home’, and the received answers, besides a predominant difficulty to define the term’s meaning, disclosed the blog’s function as a space to reflect on this.

“[T]he blog actually helped me figure out that I’m a hybrid. Because before, when I started the blog, I was kind of like yeah, I’m Australian all the way, and then I’m like no way, no way that I’m Australian, I’m just born in Australia, and that’s it, I have no connection to Australia. And I think the blog really kind of developed my thinking and my thought process and then I realized no, I’m a
combination of the two, I can’t separate the two. And so yeah, I think that’s what the blog’s done for me.” (Gillean, afroklectic.com)

“I’m born in Uganda, and I came to UK when I was about two, so I go to Uganda quite frequently [...] and...because I’ve been raised in the UK, I don’t particularly feel that I, I am African, I am Ugandan, but when I’m in Uganda, I feel displaced, certainly, because I...ehm...to them, I’m probably more English than I am Ugandan, but then in England, I’m not English, I’m African, so [...] I was hoping that the blog would be a positive platform for people who are, embrace kind of the Western, ehm, place or heritage, as well their African, Africaness, or Afrocentrism...” (Louisa, afroblish.com)

These two quotes thus point to the feeling of displacement. This sentiment of not knowing where they really belong to might be the reason why “a lot of Africans living in Europe really embrace Afrocentricity because [...] sometimes it’s a bit of a remedy for homesickness”, says Louisa from afroblish.com. Yet, Louisa adds that “often, when we do go home, the reality doesn’t live up to the fantasy that we have in our minds, of, you know, being in Africa and that kind of stuff.”

The feeling of displacement, which seems to be a central characteristic of the Diasporic experience, might thus be a factor that contributes to an intensified reflection of questions of identity. This is particularly strong in the case of the African Diaspora, where the dominant, stereotypical Western perceptions of Africa represent an increased threat to the identity. A person of African descent living in the West is forced to deal with the old conception of Western Self and African Other. Missla from anotherafrica.net describes this experience as follows:

“[G]rowing up in North America, [...]we are all others. We became others for one very specific reason, when we left Africa. [...] and so I think that [...] anotherafrica was probably a response to being in the African Diaspora and for not being in Africa. I think that I was trying, not compensate but to redress, let’s say, the ridiculous comments I received [...] when I was asked [???] in hospital in Vancouver where are you from, Ethiopia, oh wow, you don’t look like you are starving! [...] So [...] you start to feel like, is there something wrong with me? Like, I have to redress the fact that these people are educated, and then you know, their ignorance. I have to reclaim my position.” (Missla, anotherafrica.net)

Consequently, since it is the Africans side of their identity which is uncertain, unclear (to them) and threatened from the outside, it is with a clear focus on this aspect that the bloggers present themselves and intend to reclaim their position as Africans, thereby defending it against the mis- and underrepresentations they have to deal with.

Community

The blogs therefore fulfil the function of reflecting on questions of displacement, belonging and of finding a positive approach to the bloggers’ multiple heritage. But there is (of course) more to it. A second main function of the blogs is the construction of a community around this specific set of concerns.
“[W]e are all people that on an individual level have been asking ourselves the same questions... but not able to find some kind of community, to be able to have these discussions, for, the only way that this was actually possible is through having a social media driven type of website...” (Missla, anotherafrica.net)

“I think that blogging is a platform where you’re able to say... to reach out to other people and see if people have similar ideas, see what other people think about your ideas and that’s also a place where you connect with other people. I’ve met a lot of people through blogging, you know, you have like blogger friends...” (Sitinga, africaontheblog.com)

But it is not only about connecting with likeminded people who ask themselves the same questions. The purpose of the community goes a bit further, namely to enforce the impact of the own voice, and this conforms to the political, or at least strategic character of a group identity as mentioned earlier (see chapter 3.2.3).

“I mean I’d like to really see more Africans like blogging... connected online, cause I think collective voices are important, ehm, it’s one thing for one person to say something but if multiple are saying the same thing, I think change can really come, or at least the way that we represent ourselves...” (Sitinga, africaontheblog.com)

The possibility to connect with others therefore seems to be an essential element for the bloggers. Although some of them say they have initially started the blog as something they do for themselves, the desire to use the medium as a means to connect with others who share the same concerns and interests at a certain point comes to the fore. As such, the blogs cannot be seen as mere ‘online digital diaries’. They are comprised as stories built with a clear audience in mind, they are stories deeply embedded in a social context and dialogue. The meaning they carry, as already mentioned in the narrative analysis, is produced in almost immediate feedback with their audience. In some cases, as the interview with Gillean shows, the blogs, at some point might even cease serving the authors individual need to express him/herself and to connect with others, and instead are maintained because the audience asks for it.

“I wrote in my blog about a few month ago that [...] I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do with afroklectic, cause I realized that there were people who are connected to it, and I always felt like I was doing it as service to them, because my heart wasn’t totally in it at that time, like I missed my vibe, I didn’t know what to write and stuff like that and people emailed me and just said, do video, so someone suggested, when you go to London, you have to write about it, cause we wanna know what you’re experiencing and finally when I got to London, I did this like really long post, like really long post, I got like over a thousand views on it, and that’s a lot. It was like 2000 views. That’s a lot. Cause, usually, we’re in the 1000 range, so, that post was like over 2000, and I was like, oh my goodness, people clearly wanna read about this experience, so I’m thinking of doing video, because even though I write on the blog, I’m not a friend of writing...” (Gillean, afroklectic.com)
Like this, although the blogs (especially afroklectic.com and afroblush.com) still exhibit a strong personal style, being centred around the individual founders and authors and their personal views and experiences, the tendency is increasingly towards servicing the collective. The personal need to reflect on issues of identity retreats into the background and instead, the collective project of telling a common story gains weight. From this point of view, and according to Lawler (in Pickering 2008: 43), the blogs in terms of narratives don’t belong to the teller alone, they also incorporate the story of the others, the audience, and as such they contribute to a form of sociality, incorporating and speaking to the knowledge, experiences and narratives of the others (the readers).

**Connecting to the ‘homeland’**

Besides the orientation towards the members of the own group (the Diaspora), the bloggers also desire to use the blog (linked to other New Media formats) in order to connect with Africans living on the continent.

“We basically just wanted to create a platform that could connect, efficiently connect the disconnected...ehm...I know that there’s kind of a rift between the Diasporan, such as myself, like Africans that don’t currently live in Africa, and Africans that live on the continent.” (Beulah, africaisconesuffering.com)

This might respond to a need to maintain the link to what the interviewees refer to as their roots (Gillean, afroklectic.com), their essence (Osekre, iamafropolitan.com) and their sustenance (Nick, iamafropolitan.com), or as Louisa (afroblush.com) calls it, to “home in”:

“I mean, [...] it’s great to integrate and it’s important to mix, you know, but, it’s also important to have some kind of sense of belonging, so, when I say, or when I talk about being African, it’s really about homing in on...you know, the beginning, in where you come from, you know, just in terms of heritage, and in terms of history. Because unless we really understand where we are coming from, I don’t really think that we can properly understand where it is that we want to go.”

Besides the individual need to ‘home in’, it also seems to be a felt responsibility for some of the bloggers to maintain the tie with continent (the ‘homeland’). It is a responsibility that Sitinga from africaontheblog.com explains with the privileged position she sees the African Diaspora in, having the ‘Western’ (economic) power at their disposal but still representing ‘Africa’:

“I think the African Diaspora is kind of like a bridge. So I see their role, they have an advantage, they’re in the West, and the West, I mean, has the economic power on the, on the global political economy, so they have those kind of privileges that you get when you’re in the West, but they’re also Africans, so they’re able to bridge a gap, and that we can speak for the continent.”

**Generalizations versus complexity**

Though, ‘the continent’, or ‘Africans that live on the continent’ is of course a very vast term. And it is Nick’s (from iamafropolitan.com) statement that helps to clarify who is most probably envisaged by most of the bloggers when referring to ‘Africans on the continent’:
“I mean I think there’s sort of the idea of Afropolitan, the way that I see it is not just limited to people in the Diaspora, I think [...] it applies to equally people on the continent, ehm, after all there are big cities in Africa and there’s a thriving urban culture, there’s sort of a growing middle class, there’s the, you know, advent of technology where, you know, the introduction of increasingly high speed internet…”

Accordingly, the ‘Afropolitan’ here refers to those who basically share a similar social, economic and (global) cultural background. And the approach to the meaning of ‘Africa/n’ might therefore be a global concept which speaks to people no matter where they are located. This corresponds to the fact that the very country where the bloggers have their roots always stays in the background. It is not about Nigeria, or Ethiopia. It is not about the merging of Ghanaian with British culture. It is about ‘Africa’, and ‘African’ culture and perspectives. Hence, it is once more about a category which is hard to grasp. However, this is not surprising as the very concept of the African Diaspora is a very global and unspecific one. And yet in exists. It may exist as a response to an equally unspecific, general and superficial term as the Western/colonial concept of Africa. Thus, the reference to ‘Africa’ for those in the Diaspora seems to be equally unspecific.

“[I]t’s funny because the word Africa means so much more to people in the Diaspora than to people on the continent. Because the balance of specificity and generalization is very much understood when you are on the continent. For example, when I was in Ethiopia recently, I was wearing a certain hairstyle, like with braids, and people where like oh I see, you’re form [??], you are form the North. So, there’s codes, and people look at you, at your features, they are very specific. [...]...so people are very specific. And when they use the notion of Africa, it means something! It actually means something! In the Diaspora, not even specifically in the Diaspora, off the continent, it often means nothing…” (Missla, anotherafrica.net)

However, the bloggers seem to be concerned with this very generalizing notion that ‘lumps it all together’. As Beulah (from africaisdonesuffering.com) says:

“I don’t really want the West to see Africa as anything...special, but just to be treated with respect, and not seeing it as a monolith. Or like when people say African culture, that’s such an insult, because how can a whole continent have a culture? Just stuff like that. Like, people would never say European culture, or North American culture. But African culture is a phrase that is [...] accepted and no one really winks [??] an eye.” (Beulah, africaisdonesuffering.com)

In order to present an alternative to the monolithic representations of Africa, the bloggers take the reins and work towards a more complex and diversified image of Africa and to contrast the Western stereotypes.

“[T]he only way that you can overcome stereotypes is by having complexity and information. And I think what the Internet what it affords is a certain level of democracy and a certain possibility of a globalized civil society, you know what I mean? [...] what it affords is the possibility and the
potential for people in Africa or African descent elsewhere to start writing their own narrative. For me it’s very important”. (Missla, anotherafrica.net)

“I think that Africans as people living in Africa and out of Africa, we have a responsibility to ourselves, to [...] inform people, [...] it’s not the BBC’s job to necessarily portray a good, you know, light of Uganda. It’s up to Ugandans to be able to tell people what the world, to tell the world what they want them to know about them, so...ehm...unfortunately I think that the general mainstream media depicts kind of negative images of Uganda, [...] I don’t think we should be relying on other people to tell our story. I think that we all need to be kind of global citizens, [...] and re-write a lot of, ehm, misplaced history that we’ve been subjected to [...] and [...] I hope that it’s kind of my contribution to seeing African Culture and African people, ehm, within a contemporary setting, and within a cosmopolitan setting as well, in a positive light.” (Louisa, afroblush.com)

Therefore, by speaking for themselves, a more diversified image shall be achieved, ore at least one which represents the own, personal perspective. And this explains why the bloggers primary focus is not to disabuse the West of its wrong image, but to address ‘the own people’.

“Yeah, so if someone, if some American thinks that all of Africa is [???] and bush, you know, at first we were like, let’s show them we have matches, let’s show them that we have swimming pools, but then we learned it’s not really our, you know, we don’t need to prove ourselves to anybody. If they want to say, if they want that knowledge, they can go seek it. So then we started looking towards our own people and see, you know, what we can do for them.”

(Beulah, africaisdonesuffering.com)

“[My aim is to, usually to reach people, ehm, some of the times it’s because it’s something that I am interested in and I just wanna put out that idea out there but other times and probably the majority of the times, it is to reach people and the audience that I am usually trying to reach is other Africans to say that this is what’s going on on the continent when it comes to this topic or look at how they write about the continent in this way and this is what it can possibly mean.”

(Sitinga, africaontheblog.com)

New Media: Possibilities and Limitations

These statements show that the bloggers somehow appear to be torn between the two objectives of simply entering into dialogue with other people who were interested in the same Africa-related issues on the one hand, and on the other hand, to address the Western media and minds. And it is here that the blogs reveal their limits in terms of reach, impact and in terms of their capacity to stand up to the power of the traditional mass media canals.

“I really would like to see blogging be taken more serious in certain things and stuff. I mean, if you have a blog by the Huffington Post, or the New York Times, usually that’s taken more seriously, which is good because they’re helping to raise the profile but I also think that independent blogs should also be taken more seriously, and I think with Africa on the Blog, it get’s partnership with the Guardian and Christian Science Monitor, helps to lift the profile of independent blogs too.”

(Sitinga, africaontheblog.com)
"I hope at some point we become more mass, [...] I think it really comes down in a way to...if an entity is a verified brand, we take it for fat, [...] when an institution like the Guardian publishes something like that, its credibility is just multiplied exponentially, simply because it's a major institution, it's a brand." (Missla, anotherafrica.net)

Nevertheless, the accessibility and mere possibility (or chances) to reach out to a significant number of people plus the immediacy with which the message reaches its audiences constitute the convincing arguments that speak for blogging (and New Media in general) as the most adequate medium. As Sitinga from africaontheblog.com puts it "you say what you wanna say without being limited by editors". And more generally speaking, for those who don't get exposure thorough mainstream media, as it is the case for Africans and the African Diaspora, blogging and other new and social media formats like blogging, Facebook & Co are simply still the best way to go (Archetti 2012: 199).

In addition, the wide variety of New Media formats and features offers the possibility to prepare the content according to the personal preferences of the reader which in turn may increase the number of people reached. Gillean from afroklectic.com is currently considering the possibility to use video-posts instead of writing. Like this, although she might not be using ‘traditional’ text, she will still be able to maintain the blog format and tell her story. Thus, through linking the sites to Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Youtube or Instagram (currently the most famous ones), the content can be presented by either focusing on the visuals ("because people don’t read as much as they used to", Louisa from afroblush.com) or on text, by either giving only headlines or by offering in-depth analysis.

"[A] medium like Instagram might be appealing for people who want to just, you know, get a quick caption, and see an image...on Twitter you are giving them just the highlights and you’re taking them to some place else, on Facebook you actually can do little bit of both, [...] so, I think what we’re trying to do is appeal to, you know, the ways in which different people [...] are able to digest information in the way that they find more suitable, ehm, to kind of fit into their hectic lives..." (Nick, iamafropolitan.com)

This shows that, as Lievrouw (2011: 8-13) has said, what defines New Media is not the invention of new technologies but rather the combination and remixing of features from different kinds of media technologies. The possibilities are numerous and one can simply chose the way that appears to be most suitable in order to reach ones audience (as well as what most suits the personal communicative preferences).

Serving a complex set of functions
The blogs are thus not just blogs. They are the ‘home base’ of a wider network of New Media sites which not only combine different devices but also different purposes. They help the bloggers to figure out what their African side means to them, to gain pride in it, to promote African culture and help it stand up and rise vis-à-vis the generalizing, often negative and stereotypical representations which still dominate the Western perceptions. Therefore, Africa and everything African as
backward traditional and ‘un-modern’ is the image which the blogs seem to be contrasting by presenting a narrative that seeks to portray the complexity, creativity, achievements, cultural power, and in particular, the contemporary relevance that arises from Africa or the African Diaspora. And as already mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the blogs analysed in this study have a strong focus on culture and art in order to draw this desired picture. Louisa from afroblush.com explains this approach as follows:

“[T]he thing with talking about the serious issues, it’s that sometimes it affects the perspective, and when you think about Africa, you’re only thinking about the development, your thinking about eradicating poverty, but there are actually a lot of exciting and colourful and vibrant and fun and positive parts, so our emphasis is on fun things are happening in Africa and by Africans, so I just felt like culture was so much more of a, it’s a gentler place to be able to explore […] I hope that it’s kind of my contribution to seeing African Culture and African people, ehm, within a contemporary setting, and within a cosmopolitan setting as well, in a positive light. “ (Louisa, afroblush.com)

Thus, with the construction of a positive picture about Africa, as the interviews show, the blogs address a threefold audience: the self (the blogger), the community (the African Diaspora), and the West. If the blogs manage to successfully address the latter remains unanswered. Though with regard to the community and the self, the interviews seem to indicate that the blogs manage to reach their goal.

“I would definitely say that Social Media has helped African voices tremendously. I think that there’s an emerging sense of pride and growth. When I was in high school, it was, people were ashamed that they were African. And there are still a lot of people who are ashamed to say they are African but it’s changing. […] I would definitely say that it’s changing." (Beulah, africaisdonesuffering.com)
5 CONCLUSIONS

When studying texts as narratives, the point of the researcher should naturally not solely be in terms of “Look, there is a narrative!”. Rather the question has to be what the consequences of the narrative are (Lawler in Pickering 2008: 37). In order to answer this question, Lawler (ibid.) says that narratives can do two main things: they bridge the divide between self and other, individual and society, and they bridge the gap between past and present.

The blogs have shown that they clearly do so. They proved to be narratives that function as a means to make sense of the individual experience of people who are confronted with what it means to be be-titled a member of the African Diaspora. It is thus a response to the reactions the bloggers get from their surrounding societies: they are confronted with stereotypes, ignorance and racism. This, unfortunately, not only is an implicit part of the diasporic experience per se (the being an ‘Other’ to the surrounding society) but in particular of the specific experience of an African ‘Other’ in the West, where being from Africa imposes a series of ‘historical’ perceptions and stereotypes onto the individual.

What comes along with this experience, according to Ashcroft (et al. 2002: 8-9), is the concern with place and displacement, and of myths of identity. And these are common features to all postcolonial writings (ibid.). And as the analysis has shown, it seems that in order to answer questions of “Who am I?” and “What constitutes my identity?” blogging is a good means to work on finding, or rather processing on finding an answer – and identity. By using the blog to openly display and communicate how the bloggers (want to) see Africa and what they want (the Western) society to associate with it, the active part, which we are able to play in the construction of our identity, becomes obvious. Thus, the blogs are about consciously imagining and choosing identity. The result is an actively constructed image where the positive, the inspiring aspects of “Africanity” are highlighted – portraying emerging African artists, covering contemporary developments in African design, fashion etc.

Yet, the blogs have shown to serve as something more than merely a project of ‘finding oneself’. As the interview analysis has shown, although some of the blogs have started as individual projects, most of them, after a certain while start focusing more on the construction of a community of people that live the same experience. They speak to a community which defines itself on the ground of the characteristic of being African. And it is here that the collective identity of the African Diaspora, the ‘we-ness’ of the group comes to the fore.

The blogs are therefore not only about telling an individual story. The bloggers speak to and for a bigger group of people; they aim at defending the African perspective against the dominant Western understanding. However, one may criticize that they cannot be seen as actually representing ‘Africa’, since the bloggers seem to belong to an elitist segment of society and they, either describing themselves as Afropolitans, or Afropeans, probably have more in common (when looking at their educational and professional background) with any other (Western) cosmopolitan than with the majority of Africans on the continent. Nevertheless, being an African Other in the West has shown to create a particular unifying experience that speaks to many - as the constantly
The growing number of ‘likes’ on the Facebook presence of the blogs’ show (with iamafropolitan as the frontrunner with almost 80.000 ‘likes’). And although the bloggers don’t speak out of a subaltern position, in order to locate the blogs in a framework of postcolonial thought this is not an exclusive condition. Despite their belonging to an elite, the bloggers heavily engage with issues that can be situated within this line of thought since their common aim is to speak for themselves instead of being spoken of and to portray ‘another Africa’ with reference to a discourse that, as this study argues, is embedded within the history that unites Africa and the West on the ground of colonialism and its legacies.

Their aim is presenting an image where ‘Africa is done suffering’ and which is basically defined by the contrary to the opposed stereotypes. And it is this aim which provides the blogs with a coherent story strand, deliberately stressing specific aspects and leaving aside others (the clear focus is on showing all the beautiful, modern and innovative aspects, leaving the more problematic and less beautiful ones aside). The result however, the delivered image which is displayed in the blogs, still can’t do without binary oppositions. It is again about positive vs. negative, rich (in terms of culture and art) vs. poor, dynamic vs. passive, Africa vs. the West.

The blogs’ central theme is therefore the negation of the rejected image, always trying to prove that Africa is not backward, poor, waiting for help etc. And this is what Bamberg (2004: 363, also see chapter 3.3.3) in his assertion on counter narratives referred to as the teller’s incapability to step out of the dominating framework of the master narrative. The tellers, in this case the bloggers, remain somewhat complicit (unwillingly though) and work with components and parts of the existent, objectified frame. Hence, the question which remains and which was not able to answer within this study is if the blogs manage to actually deconstruct the fixed stereotypes or if they only present the other side of the same old coin.

But as already mentioned before in the context of the interview analysis, the blogs are in first place directed at the self and the other members of the group. It is only indirectly, or in the second place that the bloggers actually intend to address the Western Media. And yet, the challenge should be to link the individual efforts and reflections and the critical exchange between the bloggers to broader dynamics and processes (cf. Denskus & Papan 2013), in this case the general Western discourse about Africa, thereby lifting the blogs out of the limitations of their own echo-space.

In any case, the striking feature of the blogs seems to be that they are constructed in a constant dialogue, be it within the community or with the Other (the West), placing the bloggers and their narrative in relation to the wider society (the blog’s potential for social change lies here). This corresponds to Tina Camp’s allegation of dialogue being one of the defining traits of the diasporic condition (see chapter 3.2.3) and New Media prove to be a suitable medium and space for this purpose.

Castells’ attribution of New Media as ‘electronic autism’ is thus not false but in this case takes a backseat. In contrast to Castells’ (in many cases justified) critical assertion, the blogs seem to correspond more to Appadurai’s ‘community of sentiment’ (Appadurai 1990 in Appadurai 1996: 8). The collective reading and criticism of the Western narrative of Africa, and New Media’s community
building potential, facilitate the emergence of a collective identity where “a group [...] begins to image and feel together” (ibid.). In the face of the Other, national boundaries or local particularities apparently become secondary and are overlooked in order to ‘converge into translocal social action’ (ibid.). This explains why the actual country of origin, as shown in the analysis, seems to be only of very marginal importance, but instead, the ‘African’ experience is highlighted.

It is therefore somewhat ironic that despite this in a sense reductive reference to ‘Africa’, the bloggers’ aim is to use New Media to showcase its complexity and diversity. In this aim, they join the efforts of many others – famous or less famous - who have reacted and used writing as a means to “reject the single story of Africa”\(^{31}\). And this reaction might provoke a further reaction, and so on, until - in the words of Chinua Achebe\(^{32}\) - “a balance of stories” is achieved “where every people will be able to contribute to a definition of themselves, where we are not victims of other people's accounts.” As Achebe goes on saying, this does not mean that nobody should write about anybody else anymore, “but those that have been written about should also participate in the making of these stories.” And this is definitely something the bloggers do. They use the easy accessibility of New Media to enter the stage and to tell a different story. They write about themselves and thereby overcome, or at least deal with the common passivity which seems to be inherent in many representational practices. Therefore, what the blogs show very well is that

“African agency is alive, and self-aware. The new normal is an Africa shaped and built by the new storytellers, the technically savvy youth bulge, and the uncompromising entrepreneurs. The new normal is an Africa embracing its role as a global partner worthy of respect and not just a perennial recipient. The question is, did the world recognize what just happened?” (Ruge in Taub 2012: 142)

Therefore, since the bloggers assert that they go online because they feel their voices are underrepresented (according to Sitinga from africaontheblog “not just on the Internet, on the blogosphere and everything, but just in general, when it comes to literature...”), that they blog because they use the medium to reclaim their position (in a society where they are caught between the stools - the African and the Western stool), and that they blog in order to define for themselves what makes them African, the main research question if “New Media, in particular blogs, constitute the new sites of postcolonial back writing” here will be answered with a clear yes. Blogs, and in an extension New Media, are the new sites because they allow the bloggers to become ‘the new storytellers’, avoiding the limitation of traditional forms of back-writing where the process of getting heard is much more restricted by the difficulties one faces when wishing to publish a book or article. Instead, the bloggers self-confidently enter the global mediascape and use the possibilities there available to write, or maybe more adequately, to speak (as it has a more direct, immediate connotation writing) back.

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In order to conclude, a prospect on possible future research shall be given, and this will be done in relation to the third research question, since it is here that the (methodological) limitations this study faced became most obvious. The analysis disclosed some of the common denominators the blogs show which are used to tell a different story, and, since the blogs (and New Media in general) are also very much focussed on the visual, to paint a different picture. But the main questions which hasn’t been able to approach properly but which on several occasions as shown to be an essential aspect of diasporic identity in relation to back-writing and New Media is: What are the actual symbols the African Diaspora draws on in the course of telling their story? What are the images and icons/iconic figures they refer to? What are the purposes of these images/symbols/icons and how are they transformed? These are only some ideas but of course, the possibilities for further and deeper research are endless...
6 REFERENCES


Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). InterViews, learning the craft of qualitative research interview.


Webpages
http://africaisdonesuffering.com/category/blog/
http://www.africaontheblog.com
http://afroblush.com
http://www.afroklectic.com
http://www.anotherafrica.net
http://iamafropolitan.com
7 APPENDIX

7.1 About-Sections of the blogs

anotherafrica.net/about

Another Africa as in its namesake, proclaims that another dimension to Africa exists. This continent, the second largest in the world is most often spoken of in terms of all the woes and troubles faced by its peoples, inhabitants and descendants. It is hard to imagine what could be inspiring or inspired if all that we heard was negative.

At Another Africa, we are optimists not that we are necessarily a bunch of blithe, slightly sappy whistlers in the dark of our time. To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage and kindness. What we choose to emphasise in this complex history will determine our lives.

In our case, it is to showcase the creative tour de force of its peoples and supporters, however removed. It is about restoring a respect for the wealth of knowledge stored in its varied cultures and peoples of different colours, races, ethnicities and tribes. It is not about division but rather inclusion. It is about genuine inspiration, shared knowledge and experiences, dialogue, it is about specificity. No longer is it good enough to speak of Africa in monolithic terms, especially in a globalised world. This change begins first and foremost amongst Africans to recognise that there unique histories and cultures are not in competition.

If we see only the worst in humanity and the story of Africa, it will destroy our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world and the future of Africa in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a away, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory. That is what we hope to do here.

We will use creativity as a means for inspiration and dialogue, sharing a contemporary vision, Another Africa in the arts and culture, design and architecture, fashion, music, photography and more and we hope that you will join us along this journey. Help us ask the tough questions to activate thought, but also help us to celebrate the rich ideas and talents of its peoples and their endeavours. Let us wait no longer to inspire change, today is the start of our future.

Based on an adaptation of a powerful and inspiring speech by American-born historian, playwrite and activist, Howard Zinn (1922-2010).

africaisdonesuffering.com/rise-africa

Rise Africa is a group of individuals who seek to create an atmosphere that encourages conversation between Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora. The essence of who we are, past, present, and future, lies in the weaving together of shared conversations, personal narratives, and the upholding of traditional values in the face of modern trends.

33 All retrieved the 18th of November 2013
Our vision is a world community of connected, conscious, and rising Africans, who strive for change to cultivate the great promise of Africa through affirmations, daring conversations and continuous actions.

The phrase “Africa is Done Suffering” is in no way intended to dismiss or disregard the past and present struggles endured by Africans. We fully acknowledge the challenges that Africans face on a daily basis, including the staggering AIDS rate among people of African descent around the world. This disease has produced a grievous tide of devastation across the continent. It is in the face of these struggles that we find our vision for a community of connected, conscious, and rising Africans who cultivate the great promise of Africa by employing learned skills and acquired resources.

Our team is geared toward vocalizing the frustrations of our people as well as generating resolutions to change the media-enhanced perception of Africa as the world’s handicapped continent. We are encouraged by the positive attributes of Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. We want to highlight the wealth of Ghana, Somalia, North and South Sudan and Zimbabwe. We find hope in the unquenchable spirit of Angolans, South Africans, Congolese, and Senegalese. We are empowered by the strength of Cameroon, Burundi, Tanzania, Mali and all of the countries of Africa. For this reason we declare that Africa Is Done Suffering. We believe awareness leads to conversation, conversation to action, and action to change. We are about community, knowledge and positivity rather than the despair that too often dominates the essence of Africa.

Our mission is to become a multimedia platform where those in Africa and the Diaspora can discover the power of community through the sharing of our experiences.

We seek to provide a safe place for young Africans across the globe to connect with one another and express their struggles, triumphs, fears, courage, shortcomings, and strengths; a place for them to share their lives. Rise Africa is a central online location where individuals can gather to discuss African current events, educate one another, and encourage progressive thinking and action. Our main goal is to use communication as a tool to bring together young Africans scattered throughout the nations. We look to promote unity and build a strong sense of connection amongst the disconnected. Our goal is to raise the image of Africa not only in the eyes of the world but also amongst Africa’s own people. We seek to enable the growth of pride amongst young Africans in reference to their heritage, culture, family traditions, and overall respective countries.

No event in a community is ever isolated; we believe everyone must first acknowledge and then take responsibilities for the issues within our communities while exploring solutions in an effective manner. We invite you to become a part of our dynamic discourse. Speak your mind. Contribute. Be heard. Optimism is that stubborn reminder that even in our darkest hours, somewhere, there shines a beam of hope. Join us as we declare that Africa is Done Suffering.

dafricaontheblog.com/about-2

Africa on the Blog is a multi-author blog by people of African heritage and is supported by Babs Saul and Sarah Arrow.

This blog was inspired by Ida Horner’s desire to provide a space for Africans in the diaspora to tell their stories. Ida contacted Sarah Arrow who is successfully running BIRDS ON THE BLOG and suggested the idea of setting up Africa On the Blog alongside BIRDS ON THE BLOG. The idea evolved and we decided to open it up to all people of African heritage wherever they are in the world.
So why should you read our blog:
You might be interested in the Africa that the popular media will not write about
You might be a friend of Africa
Or you might simply be curious

The big deal for us here is that we as Africans are telling our stories in our own words as well as talking about issues that affect us. Since it is unlikely that we will be invited on CNN or the BBC to tell the world about the Africa we know and love, Africa On The Blog is about us telling the world about Africa in our own words.

Sit back as we take you on a journey that transcends African culture, landscapes, ways of life, politics, food and international policy as it affects Africa as well as the occasional rant.

iamafropolitan.com/who-we-are

What We Do
We celebrate AFROPOLITANS on the Rise,
AFROPOLITANS Hard at WORK
AFROPOLITANS Who INSPIRE
and AFROPOLITANS we ADMIRE!

Who We Are

Who is an AFROPOLITAN?

“They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You’ll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie’s kitchen. Then there’s the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.”

- Taiye Selassie coined the term Afropolitan in her essay "Bye-Bye Barbar"

Why This Platform?

Our mission is to create a community for dialogue about Africa, to create a platform for the exchange of ideas on the continent and around the globe.

afroklectic.com/history

History

Afroklectic.com is an online space celebrating the emerging creative culture within the African-Australian community, Africa and the Diaspora.

I was born in Australia to Ghanaian parents and found it very hard to find myself in the mix of the Australian and Ghanaian (African) culture. From a young age, I turned to creativity to find myself and maintain my culture. I followed through and pursued design at a tertiary level. Yet, I felt a backlash from the African community. Questions of why and looks of disapproval became
the norm when I told African people I studied Visual Communications at University. At the time, I couldn’t really find people within my African-Australian community who were involved in the creative discourse and had the same issues. I found comfort in online spaces all based in countries other than Australia. As time went on, I started to notice an emergence creativity within the African-Australian community. I felt that there needed to be a space to promote this culture, a space to voice opinions, promote work and experiences of African-Australian creatives. So I started the Afroklectic blogspot, which has now evolved into Afroklectic.com.

I hope you enjoy this space!

- Gillean Opoku. Founder of Afroklectic.com (2011)"

**Philosophy**

“Africa is not dirt, mud and thatch.

Africa is rich textiles, ancient tapestry woven in renowned villages for hundreds of years, strings and strings of coloured beads, adorned all over the body.

Africa is not poverty, famine and disease.

Africa is the strength, will, tenacity and wide brimmed smiles of millions of butter pecan to black berry molasses coloured people.

Africa is not the hollowed cry of a neglected race.

Africa is the soulful song of a chosen people within novels, poetry, paint, clothing, jewellery and dance.

We are an eclectic cohort of designers, writers, artists, performers and entertainers.

We are Africans in Australia.

And this is Afroklectic. A place to educate on what Africa is, pushing aside the tired misconception of what Africa is not.

Embracing our culture through our creative practices.

- Sefakor Dokli (2011)

**afroblush.com/about-us**

Afroblush is a dynamic and independent cross-cultural style, arts and culture blogazine (blog-magazine hybrid). Since 2010 we’ve covered the best in contemporary culture between the African and European-diaspora.

Founded in 2010, by current Editor Louisa Kiwana, a graduate in graphic design and journalism, and widely respected researcher and consumer branding consultant; Afroblush was created to reflect of the voice of Afropeans and the power of Africa’s influence on global popular culture.

**Afropean: as a concept and as a people**

I often talk a lot about the concept of ‘Afropeanism’, a term a used to describe myself as it refers to the trans-cultural influences of members of the African and Afro-Caribbean diaspora living in Europe. Having been born in Uganda, and brought up in the UK, in my mind I’m an African living in Britain; yet it’s only when I go to Africa do I feel like an British person in Africa. Despite often feeling inconclusive about my cultural identity, this site was a catalyst to understanding and engaging in the debate and cultural symphony of these two places.

**African Fashion**
African fashion and design is creating its own mainstream, setting its own standards, opening its own doors and is no longer being influenced, but is now the influence. Having continuously provided one of the richest sources of imagery for designers, going as far back as the 19th century African (and African inspired) design, remains a source of new age style and inspiration, expressive in the vitality of modern life within both urban and luxury settings, and will always have a place on this site.

As the popularity of African design becomes more common within contemporary fast fashion, I ponder over whether the appropriation of African design is already upon us. This is something we will be exploring widely in 2014.

7.2 Interview outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By this set of questions it is hoped to find out about personal relation with and the meaning the subject attributes to Africa as a place of reference.</td>
<td>Can you tell me something about your personal background? Where are you from? Where do you live? What is your education/profession? Age What does ‘home’ mean for you? What does ‘Africa’ mean to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What meaning does the subject attach to the blog? What are the main motivations why the subject started to blog?</td>
<td>Why do you blog? Why did you start this blog? What were your motivations? Why do you blog about Africa? How did you choose the name of your blog? What is the story behind it? How has your blog evolved over time? When/on what occasions do you blog (post a blog entry)? What is the trigger to sit down and write a post? What are the issues, events you cover in your blog? How does blogging make you feel?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What perception of his/her audience does the blogger have?</td>
<td>Whom are you writing to? Are the people who actually read your blog also those you intended to write to? Where is your audience located? What would you say characterizes your audience? What do you have in common with your audience? Has your audience changed over time? What do you think do your readers most appreciate about your blog? How do you respond to the feedback you get on your posts and your blog in general?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the perceived two narratives – Africa versus the West –</td>
<td>What, in your opinion, characterizes the relation between Africa and the West?</td>
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<td>the blogger is referring to?</td>
<td>What is the image the West has about Africa? Do you think that the West has a wrong image of Africa? If yes, what is wrong about that image? How do you want the world to see Africa? Do you think your blog contributes to the creation and dissemination of a different image of Africa?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does the African Diaspora characterize itself?</td>
<td>Would you say you are part of the African Diaspora? What characterizes a member of the African Diaspora? Is there a unifying element, something (some specific experience) all Africans in the Diaspora share? Probably you know Taiye Selasi, author of 'Ghana must go'. She was the first to popularize the term 'Afropolitan' in 2005 (in her article Bye Bye Barbar). There she calls herself Afropolitan: not citizen, but African of the world. Have you heard of this term? What do you associate with it? Would you consider yourself Afropolitan? What do you think is the difference between Africans and Africans in the Diaspora? In your blog, do you address Africans and Africans in the Diaspora separately?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How is the meaning of the blog reflected in its structure and design?</td>
<td>Please explain the structure of your blog! How often is your blog updated? Who contributes content to your blog?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What meaning and function does the subject attribute to New Media and blogging?</td>
<td>Are you familiar with the term New Media? How would you characterize it? What do you like about New Media, blogs in specific? Is there something you don’t like about New Media? Is your blog connected to other blogs? Do you also regularly read other blogs? Can you name a few? What do you like about these blogs? Have you also met some of the bloggers you are connected to in real life? If applicable: Why did you connect your blog to Facebook (Twitter, Tumblr, …)? Why do you think that is necessary? How would you like to see in the future of blogging? Face-to-face exchange? How shall your blog develop in the future?</td>
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7.3 Interview analysis - groundwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural unit</th>
<th>Central theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>I guess home is where I feel comfortable, but there’s always a tension, [...] I lived in five different places and moved like six major times, so I understand that one of the challenges [???] is of locating yourself and what it takes to feel in balance, or out of balance and...and so, sometimes I am envious of people who grew up in one place simply, you know, because it’s easy for them to identify where they belong, ehm...but that’s not a possibility for me, so...home is many things. It’s not something I can’t come up with a simple answer to...(Missla)</td>
<td>The difficult notion of home for those in the Diaspora, and as a result the challenges this involves to identify with a place/culture in terms of belonging</td>
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So, I don’t think there’s ever a home for me, I think that...ehm...that’s probably why a lot of Africans living in Europe really embrace Afrocentricity because it’s kind of ehm...a homesick, sometimes it’s a bit of a remedy for homesickness, if that makes sense. Ehm...but often, when we do go home, the reality doesn’t live up to the fantasy that we have in our minds, of, you know, being in Africa and that kind of stuff. (Louisa)

Home is the States I think, in a more superficial sense. But, whenever I really talk about going home, it’s Nigeria. (Beulah)

I mean, I call myself Malawian, because I am, ehm...as far as where I call home...ehm...I mean I don’t know, I mean I call Malawi home, pretty much. I still see myself as a, ehm, somebody who’s visiting another nation, even though I’ve lived here for such a long time right now, but I am an international student...ehm...and so yeah, I’m Malawian. I consider Malawi home, in other words. ...(Sitinga)

I used to think that Ghana was home. Like, I grew up with an identity crisis basically, [...] I always thought that I was Australian, and my parents are the Ghanaian ones. And that’s what I always thought. And...when I was about 13, [...] this Aussie girl asked me where are you from, and I said to her Australia and then she asked me again where are you from, and I’m like Australian and then she asked again and then I was like what do you mean? And than she...she...she gestured her hand, her arm, to kind of, she was trying to say like I’m talking about skin, like trying to point at her skin, like saying, no, there’s something more, like, you can’t be Australian, and that was just with her hand gesture, and then I just looked at her and I was like, what? [...] then I went home and then looed at my self in the mirror and I was like oh my goodness, I guess I’m not Australian. I must me Ghanaian. [...] and then when I went to Ghana I was like, this is home, like this is where I meant to be, and then I came back to Australia, and then I was like, I don’t like Australia anymore, Ghana is were I wanna go, Ghana is where I belong [...] it was
<p>| when I was like 23 when I was like, you know, I gotta let go, I'm like two sides, you know, I'm from a hybrid culture, like, I'm not one or the other, I have to balance it out, [...] since moving here, I realized that Australia is actually home, I think...I think Australia is home. Because I think, when I leave here, where am I going? Home, to Australia. Like, my mom and dad are there, my friends are there, my family is there, and to me, I think, that's home. (Gillean) |  |
| I'm born in Uganda, and I came to UK when I was about two, so I go to Uganda quite frequently, about every two years, and...because I've been raised in the UK, I don't particularly feel that I, I am African, I am Ugandan, but when I'm in Uganda, I feel displaced, certainly, because I...ehm...to them, I'm probably more English than I am Ugandan, but then in England, I'm not English, I'm African, so this is kind of like...I was hoping that the blog would be a positive platform for people who are, embrace kind of the Western, ehm, place or heritage, as well their African, Africaness, or Afrocentrism...(Louisa) | The feeling of displacement and blogging as a means to articulate the multiple heritage and find a positive approach to it. |
| [...] the blog actually helped me figure out that I'm a hybrid. Because before, when I started the blog, I was kind of like yeah, I'm Australian all the way, and then I'm like no way, no way that I'm Australian, I'm just born in Australia, and that's it, I have no connection to Australia. And I think the blog really kind of developed my thinking and my thought process and then I realized no, I'm a combination of the two, I can't separate the two. And so yeah, I think that's what the blog's done for me. (Gillean) | A key moment in the life which constitutes the rupture between the phase when the African heritage used to be insignificant or marginal and the phase when this heritage/Africa came to the fore. |
| [...] the period of probably my high school, university, at that time I don't know if I was so concerned about what was happening in Africa, I was very consumed with, or concerned with integrating myself as a teenager in Canada, and I think that...you know, as a young adult in my early twenties, when I went back to Eritrea, [...] that was probably one of the first serious times when I started to think about my own history, where I come from, what does that mean, and started to think what Africa means for me, and it's an on-going question, you know. (Missla) |  |
| [...] but I just say Africa....is my essence, you know? That's who I am, that's...that's where I was raised in, that's you know, the principles that I was raised in, you now, the ideas I have as a person, my sense of place, my sense of identity, my sense of culture, ehm, so....yeah, Africa is probably my everything I guess...(Osekre) | Africa as being the constituent element of the individual's identity. |
| I mean, I think for me, I agree with everything Osekre said, but for me I just simply say Africa is sustenance...(Nick) |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barbara Hauer-Nussbaumer</th>
<th>Out of Africa New Media, back writing and the African Diaspora</th>
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<tr>
<td>[...] it’s my roots, that I definitely can acknowledge, it’s my roots. It’s what kind of cultivated me. Cause it’s my parents, you know, they were born in Ghana, everything is about Ghana for them, and I, and they really, ehm, they really kind of submerge into it, so, it’s always on my mind, I constantly think about it [...] (Gillean)</td>
<td>The feeling of a felt unjust under- or mis-representation of Africa/African as a motivation to start blogging.</td>
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<td>I was very surprised [...] discover that Asmara is an amazingly remarkable city for its architecture, [...] and I just asked my self why didn’t I know this, [...] why didn’t my family speak about this, it just sort of raised a whole bunch of questions, asking me why this thing that exists, nobody recognizes it, or nobody speaks about it and it made me wonder and it made we think that I should do something about that and that’s really where the initial idea started (Missla)</td>
<td>The process of transition from doing the blog for oneself to doing in order to serve the community.</td>
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<td>I actually honestly did it for myself and really, I didn’t think that anybody else would be interested. It didn’t dawn on me that other people might be asking themselves the same questions. (Missla)</td>
<td>The blog as a way to find an answer on what the notion of Africa/African means to the blogger vs. the African image of Africa which is felt to be generalizing and unspecific.</td>
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<td>So, it started up as something for myself, and then, [...] I showed it to a couple of friends and they were like wow this is amazing, you should really put more efforts towards this, and so I did... (Missla)</td>
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<td>[...] one of the fundamental questions that I was asking is that, what’s wrong with that place? Like, why is it so messed up? (Missla)</td>
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<td>[...] it’s more than a simple image, and it’s more than a simple endorsement of a certain notion of Africanicity, which may or may not exist, you know what I mean? I mean, I think we’re maybe quite slow in terms of how we produce content ...because we’re not just saying oh wow! This is a beautiful African print...damn! Stick that photo on, we’ll like get then a thousand likes over it. And then, meanwhile, because the thing is that all of us are like asking ourselves is that African?, and what does that mean that we have to ask ourselves, okay, we actually should start speaking about this, its trace, you know, sort of the genealogy of this fabric, let’s not just simply buy into this kind of [???] notion that is constantly being propagated and somewhere being celebrated. So, I think, those kinds of things inform how we publish content...(Missla)</td>
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</table>
| [...] in the Diaspora, not even specifically in the Diaspora, off the continent, it often means nothing, I mean, I was looking at this photo story by that photographer who is living in the States, and documenting endangered animals in the East African plains and this one story that he
has done, it has been blogged, like in ten days, on the [??], the National Geographic, the [??] Post, and every single publication has referred to an African lake that creates these crazy creatures, like some tiger, an African darara. And I'm like, it's really, I never thought about it, this idea that Africa is a country, I mean, these people do not have the capacity to place Tanzania. [...] When you are in South Africa, there is no way that a publication, any of the publications would come up with an African lake. In fact, they would be specific saying, boarding Kenya, and, and Tanzania. (Missla)

 [...] the first image that I would want them to have is a realistic image, to actually cover, to actually see Africa like they see themselves, first of all. Cause sometimes people, [...] like Africa is this place where people are like this, things are like this and this is how it works, and it's so different from what we know. But it's really not. A lot of things that go on on the continent are the same as in other people's worlds. People do the same things, they, people worry about their kids going to school, people use the Internet, people have parties, people get together, people read, they do the same things that other people are doing. They might do it, I mean, in a different way but, ehm, I think that's the major thing I'd like to see. People actually viewing Africa for what it is and then also seeing it just like any other place. (Sitinga)

I think that... ehm.... people often confuse Africa...ehm...talk about it as if it is a country whereas it is, you know, a lot wider. People rarely say, oh I fell European, you either feel English or you feel German or, you know. And I think that people often forget that there's, you know, Nigerian are so much different to Ghanaians and Kenyans and so much more different to Ethiopians or the Sudanese, so...ehm, but unfortunately I think that sometimes each of these countries don't get to tell the world their stories, and...in order for us to be able to characterize them appropriately, so, sometimes it's out of convenience we opt for using the term African as a whole... (Louisa)

Because, the thing is like, when I say that culture or artistic practice can really help to reclaim Africa, I'm talking about you know, design sensibilities, possibilities, how to leverage your own traditional practices to make them contemporary [...] And in order to do that, you really have to understand where you are coming from and your history, to know where your gonna go. (Missla)

The importance and role of culture and arts as a means to address the own African heritage and past and integrate it into the bloggers’ current life situation.

[...] and looking into different media, and we just want to take up some kind of the issues, kind of feature music and entertainment and that kind of thing alongside important issues such as growth and the economy, and

Life-style issues as a way to make "important issues (economy, politics) easier
business, and making a healthy balance between the two. (Louisa)

[... the thing with talking about the serious issues, it’s that sometimes it affects the perspective, and when you think about Africa, you’re only thinking about the development, your thinking about eradicating poverty, but there are actually a lot of exciting and colourful and vibrant and fun and positive parts, so our emphasis is on fun things are happening in Africa and by Africans, so I just felt like culture was so much more of a, it’s a gentler place to be able to explore, and you don’t have to be academically superior or, or...I didn’t want to be intimidating...ehm (Louisa)

I really didn’t want it to be heavy, I want it to have a good balance but I want it to be more about culture and lifestyle, not culture and politics. Yeah, I don’t want it to be intimidating. And people interested in hair care products can equally be interested in ehm...you know, economic issues, but it’s unlikely that somebody who goes onto a web site that’s talking about, ehm, economic growth also wants to find out about hair products, it’s, I just want it to be somewhere were, yeah, it’s a mix. (Louisa)

I hope at some point we become more mass, you know what I mean? And when I say mass, it’s just that...I don’t know. Sometimes I think...cause there’s not a lot of followers and for example if CNN or New York Times or whatever else...[...] I think it really comes down in a way to...if an entity is a verified brand, we take it for fat, you know what I mean? [...] when an institution like the Guardian publishes something like that, its credibility is just multiplied exponentially, simply because it’s a major institution, it’s a brand. (Missla)

I really would like to see blogging be taken more serious in certain things and stuff. I mean, if you have a blog by the Huffington Post, or the New York Times, usually that’s taken more seriously, which is good because they’re helping to raise the profile but I also think that independent blogs should also be taken more seriously, and I think with Africa on the Blog, it get’s partnership with the Guardian and Christian Science Monitor, helps to lift the profile of independent blogs too. (Sitinga)

[...] the only way that you can overcome stereotypes is by having complexity and information. And I think what the Internet what it affords is a certain level of democracy and a certain possibility of a globalized civil society, you know what I mean? [...] what it affords is the possibility and the potential for people in Africa or African descent elsewhere to start writing their own narrative. For me it’s very important. (Missla)

[...] we aspire to be a source of encouragement to people, cause there’s so many negative, eh, negative images of Africa, everywhere, in [???]
Media, so, it’s kind of like an escape for that, and luckily we are seeing the emergence of a lot of online magazines, and a lot of, you know, sources that present Africa in another way, that comes from Africans themselves, not you know, outsider anymore... (Beulah)

[...] when I was growing up, because I live in America, and I wasn’t in Nigeria, you know, my home of origin, every time I heard of Africa, it was about starvation, or AIDS, or some kind of terrorism or something, and so it’s like every time I heard about the place I’m from, it was in a sense of suffering. And a lot of people are critical of the name, because they’re like it’s negative you know this is not, you know, you don’t want to associate suffering with Africa, but suffering is already associated with Africa every, in everywhere you look. And so, when we say that we are done suffering, it’s a, it’s a claim of aspiration. (Beulah)

The other motivating factor is sometimes when I read things and they’re just not doing justice to the continent or they’re saying things that are wrong or perpetuating like a stereotypes about Africa, so that sometimes also motivates me to blog about that particular topic [...] so like Western media is also an audience where I am, like, look what you are writing is not accurate because of XYZ ... (Sitinga)

[...] it’s something that we have been talking about for several years, you know, just friends hanging around, just sort of discussing, you know, the image of Africa around, around the world, and how we would like to sort of, make an impact... (Nick)

[...] and I think that Africans as people living in Africa and out of Africa, we have a responsibility to ourselves, to inform eh...yeah, to inform people, we can’t, it’s not the BBC’s job to necessarily portray a good, you know, light of Uganda. It’s up to Ugandans to be able to tell people what the world, to tell the world what they want them to know about them, so...ehm...unfortunately I think that the general mainstream media depicts kind of negative images of Uganda, with the occasional enlightening story and documentary. [...] I don’t think we should be relying on other people to tell our story. I think that we all need to be kind of global citizens, and piece together [...] and re-write a lot of, ehm, misplaced history that we’ve been subjected to. Yeah, it should...yeah, it should be up to us, we need to take more responsibility of that. [...] Yeah, I mean, and I think that it’s, I hope that it’s kind of my contribution to seeing African Culture and African people, ehm, within a contemporary setting, and within a cosmopolitan setting as well, in a positive light. So that’s what I try to feature, do interviews with people, ehm, for them to be able to tell their story (Louisa)

[...] the only thing we can do is write about is, we are our own editorials,
that’s to me, you don’t use words to fight that, you use actions, so for me, yes, the media is doing something, but I see that as an opportunity for us to do something about it, for us to project ourselves and show the real side of Africa what we experience. (Gillean)

I mean I’d like to really see more Africans like blogging...connected online, cause I think collective voices are important, ehm, it’s one thing for one person to say something but if multiple are saying the same thing, I think change can really come, or at least the way that we represent ourselves... (Sitinga)

I realized that what I was trying to do was to create a space where many voices, many voices where allowed to exist. Because there was not going to ever be one definite idea about this space, and one of my frustration was, where I felt I, it was just very difficult to find, like...dialogue if you wanna say...or...or having information that will help people come to their own conclusions, and so I realized that I needed to find the likeminded people to contribute, you know? (Missla)

[...] my aim is that that forum will be used, ehm, more as people get to know about it and we can have conversations there and chat there and you know, we can bring up interesting topics, people would come there to, you know, chat about the topics, ehm, so, for a very vibrant platform of community place for everyone to come and participate, ehm, you know, we would also would love to see the platform is engaged by everyone. (Osekre)

[...] all the different platforms that are available, that create community, [...] this idea of creating a civil society in some way, you know, of putting together people who want to be together, in the sense of a community, together. Like the, let’s say the contributors, [???] we are all people that on an individual level have been asking ourselves the same questions...but not able to find some kind of community, to be able to have these discussions, for, the only way that this was actually possible is through having a social media driven type of website, which is [???] also like having Facebook, and also having like Twitter, and Tumblr, and also having the possibilities of using tools like Skype, and g-chat and all of that. (Missla)

I think that blogging is a platform where you’re able to say...to reach out to other people and see if people have similar ideas, see what other people think about your ideas and that’s also a place where you connect with other people. I’ve met a lot of people through blogging, you know, you have like blogger friends, or people whose names you see constantly...across the social media, Internet, ehm...platforms, who blog about

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certain things. So you come to know certain bloggers as well. (Sitinga)

And I think this is what, that’s one of the motivating factors behind the platform, ehm, to pretty much have a place where people can go, ehm, especially Africans in the Diaspora, and see what everyone in the Diaspora is up, or see who is doing what, in a process, celebrate that, you know? (Osekre)

We basically just wanted to create a platform that could connect, efficiently connect the disconnected...ehm...I know that there’s kind of a rift between the Diasporan, such as myself, like Africans that don’t currently live in Africa, and Africans that live on the continent. So...ehm...we just wanted to create this place where people could share their experiences on a free platform and have conversations about some of the shared experiences we have... (Beulah)

[...] we try to reach out to young people on the continent that might be looking to have a conversation with other people, and a lot of times, when there’s conversation about Africa, in recent years, it’s been dominated by Diasporans and people who are on the outside looking on, you know, we’re trying to give them a platform to show their voice. And also we’re also looking to reach out to the Diasporan as well. There are a lot of people like myself who feel disconnected, so we’re just trying to get them, you know, somewhere to share their voices... (Beulah)

[...] but I think at the core of this is just a platform that is trying to create a space for Africans in the Diaspora, Africans at home, to be able to, ehm, interact, and exchange ideas. Eh, for us, it’s about showcasing things that we are doing, ehm, and that, other people are doing that we wish we knew about and we wish that, you know, Africans in Europe would know about, and stuff like that. (Osekre)

I mean I think, our, a lot of our fans, ehm...are all from, you know, the continent, ehm, so, ehm, there’s a huge engagement over there, as well as, you know, engagement States side. So I think for us, we’re sort of in a happy medium where we actually have people that are engaged on both fronts. And so, you know, whether we intended for it to be that way, but, you know, not even going to the philosophical, it just sort of happens to be the case, and I think this speaks to this need for dialogue, you know, a two way dialogue on both sides, people who are on the continent, and people who are in the Diaspora. (Nick)

Ehm, and I think people, I mean I think there’s sort of the idea of Afropolitan, the way that I see it is not just limited to people in the Diaspora, I think there’s, it applies to equally people on the continent, ehm, after all there are big cities in Africa and there’s a thriving urban culture, there’s sort of a growing middle class, there’s the, you know, Through New Media connecting those of African heritage who share the same urban, middle class, global culture on both
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<th>Barbara Hauer-Nussbaumer</th>
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<th>advent of technology where, you know, the introduction of increasingly high speed internet [...] And I think we provide, we exist in like the happy middle where both parties overlap. (Nick)</th>
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<td>[...] the audience that I am usually trying to reach is other Africans to say that this is what's going on on the continent when it comes to this topic or look at how they write about the continent in this way and this is what it can possibly mean. (Sitinga)</td>
<td>Blogging as a means to inform and educate the own people (other members of the African Diaspora) about Africa related issues.</td>
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<td>Yeah, so if someone, if some American thinks that all of Africa is [...] and bush, you know, at first we were like, let's show them we have matches, let's show them that we have swimming pools, but then we learned it's not really our, you know, we don't need to prove ourselves to anybody. If they want to say, if they want that knowledge, they can go seek it. So then we started looking towards our own people and see, you know, what we can do for them. (Beulah)</td>
<td>blogging as a way to address the particular situation of being African Diaspora which means being different than most of the other people in the surrounding society and, as a consequence; blogging as a way to reclaim one's position within the Western society.</td>
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<td>[...] growing up in North America, particularly in Canada, ehm...is that...ehm...we are all others. We became others for one very specific reason, when we left Africa. [...] and so I think that...in myself, I realized that anotherafrica was probably a response to being in the African Diaspora and not for being in Africa. I think that I was trying, not compensate but redress, let's say. The ridiculous comments I received in high school were I was asked if [???] on an elephant, or when I was asked [???] in hospital in Vancouver where are you from, Ethiopia, oh wow, you don’t look like you are starving! [...] So of course, at some point, you start to feel like, is there something wrong with me? Like, I have to redress the fact that these people are educated, and then you know, their ignorance. I have to reclaim my position. (Missla)</td>
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<td>[...] what it is to be in the Diaspora that you fore and foremost become an other and this is a shocking thing to conclude. And this is noting that you are being in control of. This is something that is forced and imposed on you. And it comes in many forms and manners and attention and eh....and in displacement that one feels when going back to where it is that you came form, that you realize that you are different and don't belong there as well, and you try to figure out, what does that all mean, and so like many of us become hybrids, you know what I mean? (Missla)</td>
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<td>[...] and also I realized that as Africans in Australia we're not represented, no one realizes that we're here [...] and so I was like, you know what, I'm really gonna push this blog, and like really capture that Australian experience, you know, form the African perspective, so yeah, that's kind of how I've got here (Gillian)</td>
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<td>And it's funny because the word Africa means so much more to people in</td>
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the Diaspora than to people on the continent. Because the balance of specificity and generalization is very much understood when you are on the continent. For example, when I was in Ethiopia recently, I was wearing a certain hairstyle, like with braids, and people where like Oh I see, you’re form [??], you are form the North? So there’s codes, and people look at you, at your features, they are very specific. When I was in Senegal, I met this [??], he was like, you are Ethiopian, aren’t you, or you are from that region, I can tell. Eh, so people are very specific. And when they use the notion of Africa, it means something! It actually means something! (Missla)

I mean, I don’t really want the West to see Africa as anything...special, but just to be treated with respect, and not seeing it as a monolith. Or like when people say African culture, that’s such an insult, because how can a whole continent have a culture? Just stuff like that. Like, people would never say European culture, or North American culture. But African culture is a phrase that is [??] and accepted and no one really twits [??] an eye. (Beulah)

 [...] People don’t read so much. That’s why I try to make my site as visually entertaining as possible, because people don’t read as much as they used to. So, yeah, just thinking about new different ways and platforms to engage with, with our users...(Louisa)

 [...] I would definitely say that Social Media has helped African voices tremendously. I think that there’s an emerging sense of pride and growth. When I was in high school, it was, people were ashamed that they were African. And there are still a lot of people who are ashamed to say they are African but it’s changing. Eh, I am not sure if you are familiar, but there’s a lot of kente cloth that is incorporated into Western Fashions and elements of... [...] You know, from various African cultures that are being instigated in receiving disposure...I would definitely say that it’s changing. (Beulah)

I think our part is to take the resources that we acquired from our adoptive countries and to either use them to build back home, or to showcase our original homes in another light, like in a light that hasn’t, that isn’t narrow or one dimensional. [...] So now that people such as myself are benefiting from the sacrifices of their parents and, you know, getting their Masters degrees, we can use that power, because it is power and we can use it to empower our own people. (Beulah)

I think the African Diaspora is kind of like a bridge. So I see their role, they have an advantage, they’re in the West, and the West, I mean, has the economic power on the, on the global political economy, so they have those kind of privileges that you get when you’re in the West, but they’re

| **Africa** of being more than just ‘the Other’, but being perceived with a higher level of complexity. |
| The importance of the **blog’s visuals**, responding to people’s decreased will to read a lot. |
| The impact of New Media of gaining a positive approach to the own **African identity**. |
| The perceived role and responsibility of the **African Diaspora** to speak for Africa and to portray a different image of Africa and to help the people on the continent to progress. |
also Africans, so they're able to bridge a gap, and that we can speak for the continent. (Sitinga)

I definitely think that, that’s something that we have in common. Now, of course I can’t assume that that’s everybody's hope and dream, but I would definitely say that it’s the majority, like, it doesn't matter who I talk to, I can talk to [???] in England, I can talk to a South African who lives in Australia, we all have that same hope, and we all have that same longing towards, to return home. Or not even it’s basically return home, but, like, this is gonna sound cheesy, a bit like spiritually, that’s how we see our home, that’s where we feel most comfortable, that’s where we want to see improvement. (Beulah)

Oh, I think it’s just the most accessible. I can’t go out and start a TV station, or even if I want to submit an article in a newspaper, it wouldn’t reach as many eyes as New Media would, so I think, just understanding that New Media I feel has more reach, that was definitely one of the reasons. And yeah...accessibility is really the main thing. (Beulah)

Because I think blogging, first of all it's easy to get published, ehm...you say what you wanna say without being limited by editors, [...] Why I chose blog? Yeah, it’s just easier to get published, rather than going through a whole, a whole thing of submitting an article to journals, submitting articles to a newspaper, you might not hear from them, ehm....they might not like (Sitinga)

You now, when you say something on the radio, it’s archived, but it's not immediately accessible, ehm...but, you know, everyone is on the Internet now, ehm, friends all have, I believe 3G networks are in most countries now, they have sophisticated?? phones to be able to engage in, ehm, most of what we are sharing, [...] this is a most suitable medium for us, like if we have en event, we probably do some video stuff where we interview, you know, people interviewed, and we put it on our Youtube channel and stuff like that. Ehm...but, right now, I think this is kind of the most accessible form, ehm, Twitter... you know, Instagram, Facebook...(Osekre)

[...] people want served bits, some terms?? of information in bites, so ...a medium like Instagram might be appealing for people who want to just, you know, get a quick caption, and see an image...on Twitter you are giving them just the highlights and you’re taking them to some place else, on Facebook you actually can do little bit of both, but you also not, you know, a magazine where you are going into an exposition on this particular achievement of this particular person and a biography, so, I think what we’re trying to do is appeal to, you know, the ways in which different people, and even the same individual over the course of a
period of time, able to digest information in the way that they find more suitable, ehm, to kind of fit into their hectic lives…(Nick)

I would also like to branch into different mediums, possibly, as our team grows, it’s something that we are discussing maybe towards end of 2014, but running podcasts, and, ehm, maybe having some kind of a channel, getting people together, ehm, and doing kind of more video interviews rather than just editorial, because people watch as much as they read. People don’t read so much. That’s why I try to make my site as visually entertaining as possible, because people don’t read as much as they used to. So, yeah, just thinking about new different ways and platforms to engage with, with our users.

So I think there isn’t so much of a…dependence on Western channels of communication. So whereas I don’t think that there are more African artists, I think that it’s just so we are more exposed to African artists, ehm, so I think that, by having their own networks and things like Youtube, and blogs, and Twitter, also I mean the people are a lot more fluent to access the kind of, the kind of media that they want to see. Whereas if they had to go through, you know, radio and TV, the decision there are being made wouldn’t be up to what the audience might want to see, it’s up to the news agenda at that particular time, so I think that’s why. So I think ultimately people are being exposed to, are being able to extract different elements of culture and music and stuff. Hem, that’s why the popularity has grown…(Louisa)

Through New Media and the ease to access the different communication channels offered by it, African culture is becoming more popular in the West.