

## Research Article

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# Introduction: Contemporary African and Black Diasporic Spaces in Europe

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**Abstract:** This special issue explores spaces where identifications with the African diaspora become articulated, (re)negotiated and, as demonstrated by many articles in this issue, established as a field of the collective agency with transformative power in European societies. The African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe are constructed not only by individuals' engagements in Africa and its global diaspora but also through the collective agency, aiming at promoting change in European societies shadowed by the normative whiteness, nationalist discourses and policies, human rights violations and overt racism. In this introduction, we discuss the empirical studies presented in this special issue as examples of academic, political and artistic spaces of African and black diasporic agency. Together, the articles make visible the diversity of African and black diasporic spaces in Europe. They also challenge methodological nationalism as well as essentialising discourses of race and ethnicity by acknowledging the global circulation of African and black diaspora cultures and the meanings of the transnational connections for diaspora communities.

**Keywords:** African and black diaspora, diaspora spaces, Europe, collective agency, cultural production, anti-racism

The theme of this special issue on contemporary African and black diasporic spaces in Europe approaches diaspora communities and cultures from various perspectives. Here, the notion of *African and black diasporic spaces* refers both to different forms of collective agency based on individuals' identifications with Africanity and/or blackness and to sites and settings where this agency occurs. The idea of diasporic space is used here as an abstraction (see, e.g., Brah 208-210). Instead of the notion of (black and African) culture, the idea of space or spaces of cultures allows us to avoid pre-given categorisations and strict distinctions among different African and/or black communities and cultures. We argue that this is important if we want to promote research on both the diversity of and the transformations within the African and black diaspora(s).<sup>1</sup>

This idea of spaces referring to landscapes of people and agency (for discussion on the metaphoric use of concepts of space, see Vertoveck 22) resembles Appadurai's notion of "scapes" (33-43). Appadurai's theorisations on ethnoscaping, mediascaping, technoscaping, financescaping and ideoscaping focus on particular social phenomena and sites of the agency; however, the starting point for the articles in this special issue are experiences and situations of particular social groups, namely African and black diasporic people in Europe. Instead of the particular scapes discussed by Appadurai, the empirical case studies included in this issue focus on some of the overlapping sites of human agency where identifications with

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<sup>1</sup> There is a lot of variation in the terminology used to refer to racial identities and categories. Since in cultural studies, races are understood and approached as social constructs, we do not need quotation marks to distinguish them from other ideas of races. In this introduction, we also use lower case letters for words such as black and white, but the authors of the articles have made their own decisions concerning these choices.

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Africaness and/or blackness in Europe are articulated and (re)constructed in academic, political and artistic spaces.

Diasporas are global and transnational by nature—not only local histories, political and other forces shape the everyday lives of diaspora communities. These communities are also shaped by transnational connections and global circulation of political, ideological, cultural and other flows (Appadurai 37; see also Zeleza, “Diaspora Dialogues” 46). These flows, through which diasporas are constructed, should be acknowledged as important contexts for the study of African and black European spaces. All these factors, together with the rapid demographic changes and transformations in racialised relations in many societies, make the research on African and black diaspora a challenging field of study (see also Brubaker 1-7).

The current political climate (see Paul Gilroy’s essay in this issue) makes it increasingly difficult to deny racism and its effects on all African diaspora communities in Europe (e.g., *Being Black in the EU*; Nwabuso 16-17). Furthermore, growing numbers of people who identify with racialised minorities in Europe, especially young people of African descent born in Europe, have started to confront what Wekker refers to as the white innocence (*White Innocence* 16-18; see also Essed et al.) that has prevented discussions on racism and colonial violence in Europe. Nevertheless, in many studies about African diaspora communities in Europe, race and questions related to racism are still being ignored.

Especially in studies that are positioned in the vast and rapidly growing multidisciplinary area of migration research, a common starting point has been the ethnicity paradigm where the studied people are categorised according to ethnicity or country of origin. Instead of exploring diaspora subjects’ experiences as racialised subjects, those studies have focused on immigrants’ integration into Europe or their transnational connections with their (parents’) countries of origin, for example, their participation in the development co-operation and policy-making concerning Africa (e.g., Norgolo et al.; Sinatti and Horst). In turn, in studies on black diasporas, race has always been a central category and racial identification a starting point. Such conceptualisation of the African diaspora and diasporic identities in this field, especially when focusing only on people of sub-Saharan African descent, often excludes identifications that are more complex and situational (as shown by many of the articles in this special issue) than those sometimes presented in the research literature on blackness.

It is possible to distinguish between African diaspora studies and black diaspora studies based on the differences described above—their different objects of studies and to some extent, their different histories—as academic fields in Europe. There also seem to be some variations in how researchers in these fields approach and understand the political dimensions of academic knowledge production, including the meanings of researchers’ own positionings in racialised relations. Despite these differences in how researchers in these fields approach some questions and position their work—as African diaspora studies, black studies, or Afro-European or African European studies—this special issue does not represent an effort to define these research fields. Neither is it our intention to make here any clear distinctions between African diaspora and black diaspora studies. Instead, this special issue offers many empirical studies on those processes through which individuals negotiate their identifications with Africaness and/or blackness and by doing so create contemporary African *and* black diasporic spaces in Europe.

Racialised identities are negotiated not only through global political movements and vocabularies that are often inspired by academics involved in these movements. People discuss racialised relations and their own racial identifications with the aid of local vocabularies that always carry traces of their earlier meanings. In the case of migrants, they also use those ideas and conceptualisations of racial relations that they have learned in their old home countries in Africa or elsewhere in the diaspora. Researchers positioned in critical cultural studies cannot ignore these different meanings of race and racism; neither should they disregard what anthropologists call emic knowledge and interpretations of the studied people. The notion of emic knowledge refers here to the ways in which people themselves verbalise their racial identifications.

The processes of identity formation and the way that diasporic identities are articulated in the so-called new African diaspora (Okpewho and Nzegwu) can differ from those in the older African and black diaspora communities whose histories were rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Therefore, academics’ definitions of *black diaspora* or *African diaspora* are not necessarily embraced by all African and black diaspora subjects. Furthermore, identifications with blackness and/or Africaness can be shifting and situational.

Although the word *black*, unlike *African*, always refers to the politicised discourse on race, *African*, *Afro*, *Afropean* and *Afropolitan* can as well include strong political and anti-racist messages.

In the following sections of this introductory essay, we first position this special issue in particular academic spaces and then introduce the articles by discussing them as studies on *political* or *artistic* African and/or black diasporic spaces. Those spaces overlap in various ways and are intertwined with other sites and forms of human agency, such as media spaces (e.g., Bailey et al.; Mainsah). It would be impossible to describe any diaspora activities in only academic, political or artistic spaces; therefore, the way that we have placed the articles under the subheadings below is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. African and black diaspora spaces in Europe have always been venues of intersecting transnational and local activism, as well as sites for collaboration among people of different professional and other backgrounds.

## Academic Spaces

In the academia, black diasporic spaces have been created by national and international researchers' networks and their collaboration in different fields of black activism. Although African and black diaspora studies can be considered a relatively new scholarship in Europe, intellectuals from Africa and the diaspora have for decades already theorised encounters between Africans and Europeans and raised discussions on the meanings of race. The writings by Frantz Fanon and others have inspired many black European intellectuals, including Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and other representatives of British cultural studies, whose works have brought questions of racism, racialised identities and blackness in Europe to wider academic audiences. In some countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, women have played a central role in developing black (feminist) activism and research on blackness in Europe. The fact that research in Europe, including African and black diaspora studies, is published in many different languages may have slowed down co-operation among European researchers and the recognition of this research field. Furthermore, unlike research focusing on the recent migration from Africa to Europe, black European studies have been not only inspired but also (to a considerable extent) carried out by researchers in the US (e.g., Hine et al.).<sup>2</sup> However, the volume of the research undertaken in European universities, as well as the collaboration among researchers in Europe, seems to be on the rise.

Since the early 2000s, researchers from different European countries and from the US, who are involved in particular international research programmes, have organised conferences and other events to create more spaces for research and discussions on the situation of Afro/black Europeans and how the African presence in Europe has influenced European societies and cultures. The *Black European Studies Conference*, organised in Mainz in 2005 (see *BEST*) inspired many new networks and research programmes. Along with other events and networks, the *AfroEuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe Conferences* in Spain (University of León in 2006 and 2009; University of Cádiz in 2011), the United Kingdom (University of London and Open University in 2013) and Germany (University of Münster in 2015) became important forums for academics, artists and activists from different countries to promote research on African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe (e.g., Beezmohun; Brancato; Espinoza Garrido; López).

The *Sixth AfroEuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe Conference* was organised at the University of Tampere, Finland in 2017, after the funding for the *AfroEuropeans* research programme (see Lopez 1-6) had already ended. In an open meeting during the conference, a decision was made that promoting African diaspora and black diaspora studies in Europe by organising these conferences would be continued by an open network that would welcome not only academics but also artists, activists and other professionals. Similar to the programme's achievements, this network collaborates with other research programmes and networks in these fields of research and activism. The call for conveners for the next conferences on AfroEuropean studies was published in Tampere; afterwards, a decision was made that these conferences would be organised in Lisbon in 2019 and Brussels in 2021. Another discussed topic in that network meeting was how to make scholarly publications in this field available for a broader audience,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the staff and the affiliated faculty listed on the website of the Black Europe Summer School.

including activists, the people and the communities that are our studies' subjects, and researchers who (or whose universities) cannot afford expensive publications.

As organisers responsible for the Tampere conference, we welcomed the opportunity to publish this special issue as an open-access publication in *Open Cultural Studies*. Articles in this issue can easily be positioned in critical cultural studies where knowledge production is understood as a political practice. Along with other research traditions closely related to cultural studies, such as decolonial, feminist and diaspora studies, black/Afro-European/African European studies aim at rewriting the (hi)stories that continue to ignore minoritised communities and their knowledge, despite multiple contributions of earlier African and black intellectuals and activists to the European scholarship. The number of scholarly publications on the African diaspora and blackness in Europe has increased rapidly, and the political dimensions of academic knowledge production have also been emphasised in these fields of cultural analysis. Studies that are positioned in black/Afro-European/African European studies examine the African diaspora communities and cultures in Europe, as well as encounters between white Europeans and people and cultures that in the majority discourses have been, and still are, defined as *others*. Questions concerning racism, anti-racism and the meanings of race as a collective political identity can be considered the starting points of these studies.

Nevertheless, normative whiteness still overshadows academic knowledge production in Europe. This problem also concerns some countries, such as the UK, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, with significant numbers of citizens who identify with Africaness and/or blackness. According to Kehinde Andrews ("The Black Studies Movement"), who leads the first black studies undergraduate degree programme in Europe at Birmingham City University, "There is a crisis of representation with only one per cent of academic staff in Britain being Black."

The fact that the guest editors of this special issue are two researchers categorised as white follows from our roles as organisers of the *Sixth AfroEuropeans Conference* in Tampere, which in turn derives from our own research interests, networks and activism, but it also indicates the whiteness of European universities. The small number of non-white academics in European research institutes cannot be explained by demographic factors alone, not even in predominantly white societies, such as Finland. Structural racism makes it more difficult, even impossible, for some people to enter academic spaces and have their perspectives acknowledged and voices heard. This situation inevitably affects individual researchers' work opportunities, as well as their possibilities to find funding for their projects on African diaspora(s) and blackness in Europe. Unsurprisingly, also in Europe, black students and researchers have understood the importance of research on racism and the situation of minoritised communities, as well as racialised identities and identity politics. However, white academia is not necessarily a supportive environment for research(ers) in those areas.

Our epistemological engagements as scholars in critical cultural studies force us to think about how our own positionings in racialised and other social relations influence our knowledge and understanding of African and black cultures and spaces in Europe. After *Open Cultural Studies* agreed to publish a special issue on African and black diasporic spaces in Europe, we approached some colleagues who identify themselves as black researchers in African and black diaspora studies and asked if they would like to participate in this project as guest co-editors. These colleagues couldn't invest their time in this project, but we are grateful that they all, among many other black scholars, agreed to contribute to this issue as reviewers. To make more space for black scholars' knowledge and perspectives in this special issue, we decided that all research articles submitted for this issue must also be reviewed by experts who position themselves as black scholars.<sup>3</sup>

When empirical studies are evaluated, it is important that the reviewers know the locations, communities and cultures (not only the research on them) that are the subjects of the studies. In many countries, people of colour have started to study black communities and have brought questions concerning the normative whiteness of academic knowledge production into the foreground. Therefore, we argue that

<sup>3</sup> By black scholars, we refer to academics who define themselves as black or people of colour, also through their research interests.

acknowledging the epistemic advantage (Harding 147) of black and other scholars who are positioned in racialised minorities do not necessarily mean succumbing to essentialist ideas of “who can know.” Scholars of colour are more likely to challenge studies where the whiteness of European societies is taken as an inevitable premise. Therefore, their situated knowledge should be valued in other research fields as well.

Searching for manuscript reviewers can be particularly challenging in emerging fields of research with structural hindrances, such as those described above. Our decision to look for experts who identify themselves as black scholars has turned out to be an inspiring assignment. Tracing (potential) reviewers with different disciplinary backgrounds and expertise in the many areas and topics discussed in the articles has revealed the volume and the richness of the rapidly growing field of African and black diaspora studies in Europe. Editing this issue has also deepened our understanding of the many national and transnational connections between black academics and activists.

Both the topics of the articles published in this issue and the backgrounds of many authors and reviewers have also raised questions concerning academic versus activist discourses. Even in research fields where these discourses cannot be fully separated, which we argue to be the case in African and black diaspora studies, standards and rules for academic publications exist. All our reviewers—respected academics, many of whom consider themselves activists—have emphasised this point in their reviews. Commitment to epistemologies that accentuate political dimensions of knowledge production does not undermine the research quality. On the contrary, it may increase the credibility and applicability of research.

Another issue underlined by the reviewers is the importance of knowing local contexts, including the ways that the studied people themselves conceptualise and verbalise their identifications with blackness and Africanness. Many reviewers, like some of the contributors to this issue, emphasise the need to identify the differences among and within African/black diaspora communities in various locations, especially those between Europe and the US. Therefore, we argue that Afro/African/black European studies are needed not only to expand our understanding of European societies but also to develop such theoretical premises of African and black diaspora studies that will allow us to examine the plurality and the multivocality of all African and black diaspora spaces on a global scale.

## Political Spaces

**Paul Gilroy's** essay in this issue discusses the political climate that shapes the everyday lives of African and black diasporas in contemporary Europe. As Gilroy argued already in many of his earlier works, racist and fascist political climate can only be explained by understanding both the long historical trajectories of racial hierarchies and social and political transformations, advanced now by neoliberalism. Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* and *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* captured the complexities of European modernity, built on colonial traditions and racialised hierarchies. His sophisticated analysis of the deep contradictions in the denial of the racist colonial past and the quest for acknowledging the humanity of all (e.g., *Against Race*) has served as an inspiration to researchers and political movements worldwide. It is exactly this complex conjuncture, determined now by the rise of neo-fascist political sentiment across Europe that his essay in this issue continues to analyse.

By exploring the new emergence of the alt right and its intellectual roots, Gilroy shows how fascism is fundamentally and inherently connected with racism. Nonetheless, the difficulties in identifying the ways in which these ideological forces intersect and rely on the political ontology of race remain constant challenges to contemporary politics and research alike. The tendency to avoid or ignore this connection has been powerfully advanced by the emergence of the new political alt-right movements through social media, with the affective circulation of hatred and playful racist meme cultures that work to normalise racism and simultaneously create transnational networks of hostility.

Exploring these present political challenges lies at the heart of understanding global inequalities, human rights and the fundamentals of Europeanness. By bringing together different historical dimensions of the current political life of Europe, Gilroy's essay invites black European studies and anti-racist academics, in general, to expand their gaze and expertise to areas that are challenging yet urgent.

The political climate that is increasingly hostile to immigration from outside of Europe has affected the everyday lives and identities of both old and new African diaspora communities across Europe. Not only African immigrants but all Europeans categorised as black have become targets of a racist and fascist political climate that is also manifested in direct acts of violence. According to a recent survey on the experience of racism among 5,803 African immigrants and descendants of African immigrants in 12 European countries, roughly one-third of the respondents (30%) have experienced racist harassment in the five years before the survey<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, over half of those who had experienced violent attacks did not report it to any organisation because either they believed that reporting it would not change anything (34%) or the victims do not trust or are afraid of the police (28%) (*Being Black in the EU* 9-10; see also Nwabuzo).

The manifold ways in which racism has been countered by individuals, groups and associations in Europe have often remained invisible in public and official records. Many of the articles in this special issue discuss the importance of documenting these invisible histories of organising anti-racist work. They also outline the struggle to find and create spaces for expressing ideas and acting as political subjects that allow for multiple transnational identifications.

**Pamela Ohene-Nyako** explores black European women's anti-racist agency in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Her article is a study of the supportive role of the Women Under Racism sub-programme within the World Council of Churches, as well as the SISTERS network that emerged from it in the early stages of the European black women's movement. With her analyses of the impact of the Afro-American activist, Jean-Sindab, and the Afro-Brazilian activist, Marilia Schüller, on these political activities, Ohene-Nyako sheds light on the importance of transnational connections for black European identities. According to her, in these political spaces, identifications and solidarity were also extended to migrant, black, Sinti-Roma and Sami participants who endorsed a collective identity as "we the women of Europe."

The examination of the multifaceted African and black diasporic identifications in Europe and the words referring to them continue in **Gladys Akom Ankobrey's** ethnographic study on 12 black Londoners' lived experiences with Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism. These terms (words, notions) can be considered African diasporic spaces where ethnic, racial and political identifications are negotiated. Her study shows how Afropolitanism (see Knudsen & Rahbek, 13–42) and Pan-Africanism (for identifications with Pan-Africanism, see also Grégoire) are constructed and deconstructed in both diverse and overlapping ways that question the centrality of the middle passage epistemology (see Wright, *Physics*) and the tendency to essentialise experiences in the African diaspora discourse.

In many countries, resistance to racism and fascism (in the form of xenophobia, Islamophobia and homophobia) has brought different minoritised communities together to resist these oppressive forces. These anti-racist spaces, with their transnational and global links to black activism in other locations, have made it easier for people to identify with blackness in those countries where blackness has until recently been a problematic point of identification for various reasons (in Northern Europe, see Rastas 368-75). However, as shown by some of the articles in this special issue, the popularity of later expressions, such as Afropolitan and Afropean and other terms referring to Africaness and/or racialised relations,<sup>5</sup> suggests that in Europe, many people of African descent do not necessarily want to rely on words that may hide the complexity of their cultural, racial and political identifications.

In their article comparing Afro-Dutch and Afro-Italian communities, **Serena Scarabello** and **Marleen de Witte** explore the emergence of a transnational, Afro-European imaginary, distinguished from both white European and African American formations. They remind us that the practices of self-making in these African diasporic spaces should be understood in the context of the history of colonialism and the contemporary politics of othering. According to Scarabello and de Witte, these identities neither turn away from nor simply add to Europeaness "but are in and of themselves European".

Several articles in this special issue show different ways in which the Mediterranean route has become an integral part of the European social landscape. They explore the interconnectedness of African diasporas and contemporary struggles for immigrant rights, as well as how these connections, through activism and resistance against "Fortress Europe," produce new identities and spaces for self-making.

<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted between 2015 and 2016.

<sup>5</sup> For mobilising people under the "Pan-African" banner, see, for example, Grégoire.

**Giuseppe Grimaldi** explores how the European refugee crisis, fortifying borders and the deaths in the Mediterranean Sea have mobilised the Italians of Eritrean and Ethiopian origins and the resignification of the *Habesha* identification<sup>6</sup> among the children of the immigrants. The ethnographic research, conducted in the neighbourhood of Porta Venezia, applies the concept of the Black Mediterranean (drawn from Gilroy's Black Atlantic) as a representation of a broader transnational social space (in this case, a space of possibility), as well as a powerful theoretical framework to make sense of the processes redefining ethnic, national and transnational identities in contemporary Europe.

Finding spaces for expressing ideas and forging political alliances to raise awareness and express identities often operate in two ways, as described by Nancy Fraser ("Rethinking"), with the concept of subaltern counter-publics. Minority groups can form their own discursive arenas, first, to define their interests, needs and identities in their own terms. Second, they can bring their views to the larger, locally, nationally or globally organised debates and in this way, thematically widen the debates and expand the groups of people who can participate in politics.

**Julia Borst** and **Danae Gallo González** explore such spaces in the context of African diasporas in Spain and Portugal. While digital media have advanced the circulation of racism and the formation of alt-right communities, they have also provided avenues for alternative voices of the marginalised and different minority groups. By exploring Afro-Spanish and Afro-Portuguese online sites, *Afroféminas*, *Femafro*, *Negrxs Magazine* and *Plataforma Gueto*, Borst and González argue that by generating political debates and collective action, these online spaces allow for decentralised national and transnational networks of community building.

The case studies illustrate how mediated participation expands politics to new communicative spaces of belonging and solidarity (cf. Nikunen) that allow the multifacetedness of African and black European experiences. The African and black European activism described by Borst and González is often aimed at complementing mainstream media with voices of the marginalised and experiences of injustice. However, research has pointed out that increased fragmentation of the mediascape poses further challenges to how these spaces of inclusive solidarity and belonging could reach the larger public sphere and contribute to discussions on ideas of national and European belonging. This problem is further complicated by the growing hostility of alt-right and anti-immigrant groups, who purposefully fabricate and distribute images and news to harm particular, often already vulnerable, groups of people (immigrants, refugees and women), as argued by Gilroy in this issue.

## Artistic Diaspora Spaces

In different parts of the world, Africans and their descendants have cherished their traditions, sometimes in extremely difficult conditions, and have created new diaspora cultures that have arisen not only from their African heritage but also or especially from coping with and resisting racism and other forms of oppression. In African diasporic spaces, artistic work and political engagement have always been intertwined. In the course of history, artists, also in Europe, have been important figures in creating what we understand as African and/or black diaspora cultures. For many black artists, art is not only a means of political action but also or merely a "survival strategy," as stated by the Afro-German spoken word artist Maciré Bakayako (Kelly 153). Moreover, being "just an artist" would be difficult for Africans and black artists in Europe, which is not an option even for those artists who would rather be seen through their art and professions or other political goals than merely as racialised subjects or representatives of "African art" (Rastas and Seye 84).

The visibility of artists and curators of colour in Europe over the last couple of years seems to have come as a surprise to many art consumers and the media. This bewilderment, articulated in statements such as "Art is the new black" (see Otieno), can partly be explained by the normative whiteness of European art institutions. However, it is also related to the ways and the means by which art professionals of ethnic and racial minority backgrounds make interventions in public spaces. They call for "new grammars" (Reed) in

<sup>6</sup> In Grimaldi's study *Habesha* refers to an ethnonym used as a source of identification among people originating from Ethiopia or Eritrea.

discussions on arts, or as stated by Gabi Ngcobo, curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, “complicate things, not to make things comfortable” (qtd. in Otieno).

The increasing ethnic and racial diversity in European art scenes and the active roles that African diasporic people have taken in these fields have not been limited to publications, exhibitions and other events established and organised by Afro/black Europeans. In some European countries, especially in the UK and in the Netherlands as well, African and black diaspora communities have long been active in raising discussions on the colonial and racist histories of their societies and organising activities that focus on social forgetting, social remembering and public histories of slavery and its legacy (Small and Nimako). However, similar to all social spaces, museums and other heritage institutions are racialised fields where black subjects still face the same problems they encounter everywhere. In other European countries as well, black artists, curators and activists have vigorously put diversity discourses into action and brought the global decolonial movement into European heritage institutions.

In the US, recognition and respect for the legacy of people of African descent gained one landmark when the National Museum of African American History and Culture was finally opened in September 2016 in Washington, DC. In Europe until recently, most projects that involve recording, archiving and exhibiting diaspora communities and their endeavours by Africans and black people themselves have taken place mainly in the UK and other countries with larger African and black diaspora communities. Lately, in other European countries, people of the African diaspora have started projects that involve searching and documenting their local minority histories, many of which are closely related to diaspora politics and black activism in other locations.

**Mitchell Esajas** and **Jessica de Abreu’s** article is an introduction to the establishment of the Black Archives by people from the Surinamese and black communities in Amsterdam. The Black Archives is a critical intervention in the dominant ideas of European cultural heritage—narratives that tend to overlook black European communities and the histories of colonialism, slavery and its legacies. Esajas and Abreu’s description of an exhibition project, based on their archival research about the lives of the black radicals Hermina and Otto Huiswoud, highlights the intersections with global and local black radical history and activism.

Recent projects by many African and black artists and curators in Europe have aimed at more appropriate representations of blackness and African and diasporic histories, cultures, arts and aesthetics, as well as a more inclusive understanding of European, national and local identities.<sup>7</sup> The increase in the African and black presence, especially in the visual and the performing arts in Europe, has generated plenty of discussion around the notions of “African art” and “black art.” In his article, **Mischa Twitchin** explores the paradoxical space that African art inhabits in the art history canon formulated and determined by western museums. His article on what the Benin artist Meschac Gaba has called the “Eurocentric African problem” examines the paradoxes engaged by Gaba’s reflections on his Museum for Contemporary African Art project, now owned by Tate Modern. Twitchin asks when refracted through the commitments of a black artistic agenda, how might art institutions reconceive their understanding of modernism in the light of African, diasporic or Afropean perspectives?

**Heather Shirey’s** article is a compelling contribution to how art can activate and expand public space, with references to global identities and the African diasporic culture. By exploring Yinka Shonibare’s Nelson’s Ship installed in London’s Trafalgar Square, Shirey shows how Shonibare’s model ship in a bottle, with its sails made of factory-printed textiles associated with West African and Afro-European identities, has temporarily challenged the normative power that defines social and political spaces in Britain.

In twenty-first-century Europe, the growth of the research on the African diasporic literature—and the so-called migrant literature in general—indicates the significance of these literary fields, not only for the people of the diaspora but also for larger audiences. In addition to the many political concerns raised by the diaspora and migrant literature, their popularity can be explained by their ability to add to the knowledge of the varying contexts and the complex processes of belonging and community building within the diaspora

<sup>7</sup> For example, many of these projects are presented in the art magazine *Contemporary and (C&) Platform for International Art from African Perspectives* and in Carol Dixon’s blog *Museum Geographies*.

communities and in the rapidly transforming societies in general. These literary fields renew traditions and aesthetic trends in literature. They also remind people of the multilingualism of European societies and raise new questions concerning the meanings of translation. (Bekers et al.; Innes and Stein; Knudsen and Rahbek; McLeod; Ponzanesi and Merolla; Stein; see also Beezmohun et al.)

**Jamele Watkins'** article in this special issue explores the possibilities of silence in the Afro-German author and spoken word performer Olumide Popoola's novella, *this is not about sadness*. Watkins discusses the hybrid form created by Popoola—a performed novella written in two languages (English and Creole) that tells the story of silence and the emergence of the connection in the community of women. Using the theories of community building by Fatima El-Tayeb and of opacity by Édouard Glissant, it argues for an identity that is not dependent on roots and family trees or “projected” onto others but is produced through the connection.

Music and the performing arts have always been especially important political spaces for people whose participation in politics and other social fields has been restricted. *Black music* refers to various musical styles created by people of African descent who have confronted and fought against racism at different times and locations. There is rich research literature on African diasporic and black music, with different theorisations concerning its origins and links to other music cultures (e.g., Garcia 268; Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic” 133-35; Zeleza, “Dancing to the Beat” 211) and the links between anti-racist movements and black and African diaspora music. In Europe, there is a growing body of research especially on hip hop, the “cultural lingua franca of the African diaspora” (El-Tayeb 29). However, spaces for the so-called traditional African music and dance, as well as other music-related activities by African immigrants in Europe, can also be approached not only as venues for cultural encounters but also as political spaces.

**Livia Jimenez's** ethnographic study on African nightclubs in Lisbon and Madrid is an analysis of the commodification of the dance labelled *kizomba* as a form of symbolic violence that disguises postcolonial structural inequalities and unsolved conflicts through a discourse on a neutral “approaching of cultures” on the dance floor. According to Jimenez, this discourse portrays the performances displayed at African discos as “basic” and unworthy. Through resistance to commodified *kizomba*, nightclubs have become spaces of cultural resistance. Jimenez also discusses the global cultural industries' increasing power to name social groups, structure practices and exercise symbolic violence.

**Alica Aterianus'** article demonstrates the ways in which the network of the Senegalese *sabar* dance offers a space for recognition and integration in Europe and how *sabar* dancers (re)invent “traditions” in migration. The ethnographic study illustrates how the transnational dance network allows for the negotiation of intersectional power relationships, transcending gender, race, generation, class and nationality.

**Antti-Ville Kärjä** introduces the concept of the Black Baltic Sea to explore the musical dimensions surrounding the notion of blackness in Northern Europe. Inspired by Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, Kärjä envisions the Baltic Sea region as an interdiasporic space with its own dynamics of postcolonial racialisation, prejudices against blackness and histories of the migration that become exemplified in different genres and practices of music.

**Jasmine Linnea Kelekay's** study on Afro-Finnish hip hop examines rap as an avenue for mapping African diasporic identities and racialised experiences. Her analysis of a selection of songs performed by black/Afro-Finnish rappers shows how these young Finns discuss racism and the normative whiteness of Finnish society and how they define blackness in relation to identity, racism and national belonging.

## Conclusions: Towards New Epistemological Spaces

The articles in this special issue illustrate the multiplicity of African and black diaspora communities and the richness of their cultures in Europe. While the research on African and black diasporas in Europe may be considered marginal, it, in fact, explores fundamental issues of the relations among power, human rights and cultural practices in changing societies. Therefore, each of these studies informs readers about larger trajectories related to social relations and cultural production in changing societies.

By introducing case studies while engendering knowledge from experience, this special issue points to important areas of knowledge production. These studies shed light on the ways in which a marginal position may offer an epistemic advantage that allows understanding and recognising defective knowledge claims and oppressive social structures. Furthermore, the sources (artworks, publications, etc. discussed in this special issue) that have remained invisible or have been silenced in the official, popular and easily accessible “cultural archives” (Wekker, *White Innocence* 1-3) are foregrounded as valid objects of research. At the same time, by introducing the research on these spaces and sources, these studies participate in making histories of anti-racist actions visible. All research that acknowledges the fact of racism and the meanings of race, which vary, depending on our positions in racialised hierarchies, disturbs the normative whiteness of European academia.

However, the diversity among and within diaspora communities in different locations (as demonstrated by their descriptions in this special issue) also requires updating the theoretical framework of African diaspora studies. Research on African diaspora(s) and discussions on blackness have been strongly determined by Middle Passage epistemologies and by African Americans’ histories and cultures (e.g., Wekker, “Another Dream” 281; Wright, “Middle Passage” 217). Migration flows from Africa no longer follow patterns of colonial relations (Hamilton 549). Therefore, the epistemological frameworks of African diaspora studies can no longer be built only on traditions inspired by questions related to the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade or the ideas and the conceptualisations of blackness developed in the US. Even in the US and Canada, many scholars have emphasised the need to acknowledge “the new African diaspora” (e.g., Okonofua; Okpewho and Nzegwu; Zeleza, *In Search of African Diasporas*).

African and black diaspora studies are sometimes discussed as if they only contribute to the research on marginalised groups and their situations in different societies. However, we argue that these studies and diaspora studies, in general, can help researchers and readers recognise some of those social and cultural transformations in European and other societies that easily remain invisible in the research guided by methodological nationalism. This “assumption that nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 301) still seems to be a kind of guiding principle in the research on European societies, as well as in migration studies. In the research on diasporas, their global and transnational dimensions cannot be ignored, which should direct attention to the increasing diversity, transnationality and global connectedness of all societies.

If we want African/Afro/black European studies to represent critical cultural studies, we also have to accept those questions that go beyond identity politics. We argue that it does not mean ignoring the importance of identity politics or its research. Grant Farred (257) reminds us of the imperative to think “out of context” in cultural studies since we cannot address every political event in the same way. In his essay in this issue, Paul Gilroy calls for research to imagine alternatives and ideas of what the world would be like without racial hierarchy and inequality. In this spirit, the collection of case studies in this special issue illustrates different ways in which African and black diasporic spaces are created as productive cultural spaces to express, negotiate and imagine a better life in Europe for all.

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