

# Envisioning Solidarity in the African Women in Europe Platform

Inauguraldissertation  
zur Erlangung des Akademischen Grades  
eines Dr. Phil.,

vorgelegt dem Fachbereich 02 Sozialwissenschaften, Medien und Sport  
der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität  
Mainz

von

Gavaza Maluleke

aus Giyani, Südafrika

(Mainz)

2015



# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.1 Public Realm and Action .....	11
2.2 Key points in Transnational Feminism.....	13
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	<b>18</b>
3.1 Conducting researching on the internet .....	19
3.2 Methodological assumptions .....	24
3.3 Data collection process: start to finish.....	26
3.3.1 Website home page.....	29
3.3.2 Discussion forums.....	30
3.3.3 Interviewing.....	33
3.4 Data Analysis.....	34
3.5 Ethical Consideration .....	42
3.6 Conclusion .....	45
<b>Chapter 4: The African Women in Europe Platform</b> .....	<b>46</b>
4.1 Description of the African Women in Europe platform.....	48
4.1.2 Homepage .....	48
4.1.2 Inside the African Women in Europe platform .....	51
4.1.2.2 Other tabs on the Homepage.....	55
4.2 African Women in Europe platform in context.....	58
<b>Chapter 5: Multiplicity of Positions</b> .....	<b>66</b>
5.1 'Women' .....	68

5.2	'African Women' .....	71
5.3	Being 'African Women in Europe' .....	76
5.4	The complexity in multiple positioning .....	81
5.5	Conclusion .....	86
<b>Chapter 6: The Condition of Home and Here .....</b>		<b>88</b>
6.1	'Here' .....	89
6.2	'Home' .....	107
6.2.1	Homelessness and the Unhomely .....	115
6.2.2	Memory and the condition of 'home' .....	118
6.3	Conclusion .....	122
<b>Chapter 7: The Doing of Mothering from the Margins .....</b>		<b>125</b>
7.1	Mothering from the margins .....	126
7.2	Mothering as performative acts .....	131
7.3	The Doing of Mothering Unveiled .....	133
7.3.1	Children's voices inform the doing of mothering .....	133
7.3.2	Doing mothering requires support and help .....	140
7.3.3	'Doing mothering as part of cultural preservation and heritage' .....	144
7.3.3.1	'Discipline' .....	144
7.3.3.2	'Food' .....	148
7.3.3.3	"Language" .....	152
7.3.3.4	"Race" .....	159
7.4	Conclusion .....	161
<b>Chapter 8: Envisioning Solidarity .....</b>		<b>164</b>
8.1	Solidarity at different moments and levels .....	165
8.2	Envisioning Solidarity .....	177

8.3	Conclusion .....	179
<b>Chapter 9: Conclusion .....</b>		<b>183</b>
9.1	Reflecting on findings.....	184
9.2	Contribution.....	190
9.3	Conclusion .....	192
<b>Bibliography .....</b>		<b>194</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explores the experiences of African migrant women in Europe as articulated by the members of the African Women in Europe (AWE) online platform. My relationship and interaction with the AWE began in 2008 while preparing for my second move to Europe. I was scouring the internet searching for a forum for Africans in Europe when I came across the online platform at which I immediately became a member. My search for such a community or a group was prompted by my own experiences as an African female living in Europe in which my encounters with people tended to be centered on certain parameters that positioned me in specific ways. I was always located as a black person (race) which was a familiar position for me as a South African and within this context; it also meant that I became African (geopolitical location). Through this positioning, all “knowledge” about me could be known and thus, I was positioned inside of Africa and outside of Europe. These positions were interesting to me because before I left for the Netherlands, I was a Shangaan person who spoke Xitsonga (meaning black in South Africa) and resided in Limpopo and all of this was identifiable through my name. Through my body, it was evident that I was female and young because names in Xitsonga are not gender specific but can be linked to one’s year of birth. All of this information and identifications were very clear for me and hence, being identified as black was a comfortable space but becoming African in the Netherlands was a strange feeling. The identity ‘African’ felt too big for that small space I occupied because even within the context of South Africa, I always feel I cannot speak for all cultures, identifications and experiences represented there and so my feeling, was what more within the African continent.

My encounter with becoming African in the Netherlands and my inadequacy in speaking about and representing all of Africa led me to position myself outside of Africa. This experience was tough for an eighteen/nineteen year old to work with, however, my South African upbringing helped immensely in this situation because part of the process of fighting apartheid also meant that many black South Africans came to realize that being positioned within a specific category is only negative when you allow the one who positions you to always actively inject meaning into that

category and that was something that was hammered into me as a child. It thus became an encounter which helped me reflect and destabilize some of my ingrained belief system because in that year, I also learnt that being black in the Netherlands was different to being black in South Africa which was shocking. I had always identified Afrikaaner people in South Africa as originally from the Netherlands and therefore Dutch. Because of this assumption, I believed that my experience in the Netherlands as a black person would not be radically different to the apartheid system in South Africa. However, I was rather surprised to find that the negative perceptions of me were associated with my position as an African and less as a black person. It was these negative perceptions of Africans that made me realize that I did not want to be positioned as an African in the Netherlands and still feel outside of being African because of my own inadequacy to speak about the continent. This was the beginning of my interest in learning more about Africa and engaging with the idea much more. And therefore, although this encounter with my “Africanness” started off as being strange and uncomfortable, it was also a positive experience in that it led to the beginning of my identification with Africa. Hence, when I decided to move to Europe in 2008, I did not google “South Africans in Europe” but “Africans in Europe”. It was through this experience and my membership in the platform that compelled me to ask: “What are some of the stories that bring the members of the platform together?” and “How can these stories better help us understand solidarity?” This study will explore and interrogate these questions by looking at what the platform and its members articulate through their positioning. In order to fully grasp the stories articulated by the members of the platform, the next section will give a brief overview of what the AWE platform is about.

The African women in Europe platform is an online space made up of +- 550 members, of which the majority are women from all over Africa. Most of the members are all living in different parts of Europe; however, there are members in the platform who reside in other parts of the world such as Africa, North America and the Caribbean. The focus of the membership in the platform is an interest in moving to, living, working, settling in or doing business in Europe and thus the reason why some members are not located in Europe. It is also important to point out that most of the

members are immigrants to Europe in that they were born in their respective African countries and have migrated to Europe for various reasons such as work, family or studies. This is a private platform, which means, only members are able to have access to the content of the platform. However, visitors are given a glimpse of some of the topics, issues and discussions going on in the platform so as to aid them in deciding whether they should become a member. When the platform started out, it was free to join the platform; however, after a number of years, the founders noticed that some members were not actively participating in the platform. As a way to ensure that those who joined the platform were committed members and would fully participate, a membership fee of 20 Euros was introduced.

As explained on the AWE website, this platform aims, “to foster communication in the form of exchanging ideas and information, sharing personal stories and forming friendships” (AWE website). This is in line with what the founder shared in the platform’s 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary report where she explains that the website was created with the idea “that women can work together and reflect a positive image of an African woman: intelligent, hardworking, multitasking, ambitious, family supportive and deserving of respect” (AWE 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary report 2011: 1). There are different groups in the platform in which members are encouraged to create and join in order to generate discussions as well as groups of shared interests. Participation consists of engaging in discussions with other members in the forums, putting up discussion topics, writing blogs etc. Members are also encouraged to start discussions on various topics that are not group specific and open to all members so as to foster communication between all members in the platform. Members are also able to connect and create friendships with other members in their area or based on shared interest. The platform also makes it easy to ask other members for help, information or advice in relation to whatever topic through different means such as a discussion topic or a personal message. The members do not only exchange ideas online but also have offline meetings. These meetings are organized in different cities around Europe; mainly small gatherings geared to foster friendships across the national borders within Europe. These offline meetings should not be seen as informal because the organising committee always creates a comprehensive programme that covers a wide



range of issues. Some of the popular activities in the programme have been the invitation of influential guest speakers to discuss various topics, entertainment in the form of musical performances and fashion shows highlighting the talent of the members in the platform and an award ceremony that recognizes some members' achievement in business, community participation, politics, arts and culture. The awardees are nominated and voted for by others of the platform. As clearly indicated in this description, the AWE platform offers a variety of opportunities for its members to support each other, share information and maintain ties with their countries of origin.

Such online platforms have become increasingly popular considering the technological advancements currently taking place globally and it has been interesting to see how these developments have reconfigured the lives of those living in the diaspora. According to Radhika Gajjala, "in the case of a diasporic individual for whom home is no longer a concrete geographical place, cyberspace presents itself as an ideal site for the recovery of 'community' and connection with other diasporics with similar backgrounds" (2003:45). This is clearly evident in the work of Victoria Bernal where her analysis of the Eritrean cyberspace reveals "the struggles of ordinary people to participate in national debates, narrate history, define legitimacy and articulate a moral order" (Bernal, 2006:176). However, this recovery of 'community' does not only mean the recycling of old ideas but also the emergence of a new space with a variety of voices. Bernal argues that, "Eritrean websites have fostered the emergence of counter-publics and spaces of dissent where unofficial views are voiced and alternative knowledges are produced" (Ibid.,). It is also important not to overstate this aspect of alternative voices in that as pointed out by Gajjala, "this creation of identity by technology is determined in various ways by access to technology, the design of the technologies, and the medium through which the identity will be shaped (2003:45). This is observed in the case of Haitian immigrants in the U.S who used the platform, Haitian Global village, to sustain their identity in the host country while trying to work in solidarity with those facing challenges in Haiti (Parham, 2004: 200). One of her main findings indicated that "the participants...kept their dialogue civil and encouraged differing opinions" (Ibid, 213). However, she also noted that, "the

dynamic within such forums may vary considerably... depending on the particular combination of personalities on the forum. Overall, the space...allowed users to reflect on their identity as Haitians in diaspora and to consider the nature of their relationship to Haiti as a diaspora community” (Ibid.). This is in accord with Gajjala’s argument when she asserts that, “the collective imaginations of the people involved will also be restricted by what is perceived as their material, social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and geographical location”( 2003:45). In both the Eritrean and Haitian diaspora, the national location is highlighted and thus it is easy to observe strong national identities as the driving force behind the community building across borders. However, what happens when the perceptions include more than one location? In the case of the AWE platform, the geographical locations are continental ones that could include various perceptions on social, cultural, ethnic and religious location. Moreover, the notion of gender is also highlighted. With all of these locations in mind, the dissertation asks this central question:

- How is solidarity forged and negotiated across borders?

This central question stems from my own engagement with the AWE online platform in which this space is managed by its own members and although at first glance, this platform appears to be based on specific categories, differences amongst the members are recognized and highlighted. From this position, the study is more interested in how the members of the AWE platform forge and negotiate solidarity and as such, in order to answer this central question, the following secondary questions are put forward:

- What positionings are articulated by the platform and its members, and what relationships, links, connections and disconnections can be observed through these articulations?
- What power relations/dynamics are revealed (in both directions) through an examination of these links and relationships?

Adopting a transnational feminist perspective in which solidarity is taken from Chandra Mohanty Talpade is that, “it places mutuality, accountability and the recognition of common interests as the basis of the relationships among diverse communities” (2003: 7). Instead of enforcing a commonality of oppression, this

definition of solidarity locates communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together at the centre. To Mohanty, diversity and difference are encouraged, “to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances” (Ibid., 7). By focusing on the platform and its members’ positioning, we are forced to go beyond the idea of collective identities as the basis of identities and become open to the notion that solidarities are worked on and negotiated, and thus cannot be assumed. By doing so, attention is directed to the power dynamics that emerge during the process of forging solidarities.

In order to address all these aspects, a qualitative approach was employed. Data was collected both online and offline as a way to gain a more holistic view of their positioning. The online material used for analysis was the main page of the website and the forum discussions. The main website page was chosen because it is the first point of encounter for all the members before joining the platform and this is one of the areas that is not private and therefore geared towards the wider public. The forum discussions were chosen because this is the space in the platform where members can interact guided by a specific theme, topic or question. During the analytical process, data from the online platform became primary data because of the naturalistic aspect it brought to the table. This was in comparison to the semi-structured interviews conducted with seven members of the platform including the founder and co-founder, which felt more rehearsed. Conducting these interviews were part of the preliminary plan but were conducted mainly to counteract the potential of losing out on the face to face interaction that the forum discussions lack. However, after transcribing some interviews and some analysis, the decision was taken to employ the interviews as secondary material when needed because the online material offered better material for analysis. The data was analyzed using a form of critical discourse analysis which is known as Mediated discourse analysis (MDA). As defined by Ron Scollon, MDA chooses to focus on social action as opposed to discourse or language. This does not mean that the language or discourses are rejected but that they are just seen as a part of the focus and not at the centre (Scollon, 2009: 140). In other words, in MDA, social actions are called mediated actions as a way to highlight the notion “that all social actions are mediated by cultural tools or mediational means. The most salient and

perhaps most common of these mediational means is language, or to use the term we prefer, discourse” (Ibid.,144). As such the use of language or discourse by the members of the platform as part of their positioning enables us to locate the actions that are revealed as part of forging and negotiating solidarity. Within MDA, certain aspects of CDA are still present and hence the ability to explore the dynamics that emerge within the power relations in the acts of positioning. However, as CDA has a tendency to look at power relations from the bottom up, and because this dissertation focuses more on seeing the subjects as being positioned at different power levels at different times, it is important to use an analytical tool that will interrogate power moving in both directions.

As a member of the platform myself, it was important to locate myself in the data collection process as in both the offline and online data, I had to acknowledge that I viewed the material from multiple positions. Firstly as a researcher and a member, there was proximity and distance that is happening in this space. As a researcher and author of this dissertation, it was therefore important to highlight my part as a member and how I contribute into the story that I am retelling about this platform. I view my role as a researcher in this context as that of a storyteller who “perceives and “makes” the story” (Arendt, 1958: 192). My understanding of this realm is that in joining the platform, I became part of the web of human relationships that exist when people come together and therefore have revealed the ‘who’ I am through action and speech. The “who” I am that I have revealed to the members so far is unknown to me but has become entangled in the web of relationships and now part of the story. Furthermore, once I took up the position of the researcher, I became the storyteller who is now privy to the stories that are a result of the action and speech with which the members including me have revealed to each other (Ibid). Thus as the storyteller who perceives and makes the story, it is important to be cognizant of my own role as the actor in the larger story that I am telling. This was important to realize and understand that as I analysed the members’ positioning, I was slowly becoming aware of my own positioning. Moreover, I constantly had to be sensitive about how my own experiences as a South African could be beneficial and a hindrance at the same time. Diversity is a common experience for South Africans and thus, this is useful tool and

yet at the same time, it could also be problematic because I potentially ascribe my own understanding of race on to the members due to my historical background growing up in apartheid South Africa and my perceptions of race.

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The first chapter is the introduction in which I give a synopsis of the rest of the dissertation. This chapter is then followed by the methods chapter where I detail the methods used in the study. This was especially important because I conducted research both online and offline and therefore, this process would be interesting to delineate and explain in a bit more detail. Chapter three to six are the analysis chapters where I include the theoretical framework and data from the research as part of the analysis. I conclude by summarizing the findings of the study, contribution to scholarly work and future directions for the study. The analysis chapter is the bulk of this study and as such, I will explain the contents of these chapters briefly here. Chapter three is titled, *Multiplicity of positions: Relationships and disconnection* and this chapter examines the title of the platform and other visible markers on the main website page to explore the relationships, linkages and disconnections alluded to by the platform's multiple positioning. In chapter four, *The Condition of Here and Home* is the title of where the analysis of the members' positioning in the platform begins. This chapter interrogates the way the members position themselves around issues linked to their interaction with 'Here' and 'Home'. In this chapter, the liminal position taken up by the members exposes how certain issues are discussed as a way to highlight their liminality and thus demonstrating that the issue itself is not necessarily, what binds the members together. Chapter five is an extension of the previous chapter in that it takes up the issue of motherhood as a way to illustrate how important the liminal positioning is to the members of the platform in forging their relationship with each other. Chapter six takes on the task of demonstrating how solidarity is forged and envisioned within the platform and beyond. This is accomplished by using various examples from the platform and those that have been analysed in the previous chapters. Chapter seven concludes this dissertation and gives a summary of what the analysis of this dissertation has shown thus far.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on the theoretical approach used to understand how solidarity is forged on the AWE platform. Theory is described as a statement or position taken up by the researcher to explain what is going on with the phenomena that is being studied. As argued here, theory is “a framework for critically understanding phenomena and as a basis for considering how what is unknown might be organized” (Silverman, 2005: 99). This study can be approached from many theoretical lenses and this is why it is important to explain from the beginning that although this study works with subjects and a site of analysis that can be characterized as transnational, the focus of this study is not discovering whether the members of the AWE platform are transnational as this is an assumption that is held from the onset. As pointed out by Silverman, “theories are self-confirming in the sense that they instruct us to look at phenomena in particular ways. This means that they can never be disproved but only found to be more or less useful” (Ibid.,). At the centre of this study is a need to understand what the transnational does and for this reason, a transnational feminist perspective was chosen as the starting point because the term ‘transnational’ within this perspective, “signals attention to uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital. Through such critical recognition, the links between patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms, and other forms of domination become more apparent and available for critique or appropriation” (Grewal and Kaplan, 2000).

Transnational feminism has its roots in postcolonial studies and third world feminism and developed by Postcolonial feminist theorists who at the time, were grappling with questions on how to link gender to colonialism, modernity and globalization (Mohanty, Grewal and Kaplan). It was also during this process that Indepal Grewal and Caren Kaplan started working on studies with a focus on gender and travel as a way to research relations between women from different countries, instead of focusing solely on women versus men (Grewal and Kaplan, 2000). This change in focus could be partly seen as a reaction to some of the problems associated with the direction in which U.S based feminisms seemed to be heading at that particular time. According to Chandra Mohanty Talpade, “the increasing corporatisation of U.S

culture and naturalization of capitalist values has had its own profound influence in engendering a neoliberal, consumerist (protocapitalist) feminism concerned with “women’s advancement” up the corporate and nation-state ladder” (2003: 6). It is this strong focus on studying relations between women that led to the consideration of transnational feminism as a theoretical framework for this study. Moreover, taking into account that solidarity is at the centre of this dissertation, the approach of feminist practice as articulated by Mohanty highlights a number of issues that are relevant to understanding solidarity. Mohanty argues that, “feminist practice as I understand it, operates at a number of levels: at the level of daily life through the everyday acts that constitute our identities and relational communities; at the level of collective action in groups, networks, and movements constituted around feminist visions of social transformations; and at the levels of theory, pedagogy, and textual creativity in the scholarly and writing practices of feminists engaged in the production of knowledge” (Ibid.,5). The main area that feminist practice is applicable to in this study is on the “level of daily life through the everyday acts” which is the starting point that forms part of understanding solidarity in this platform. The level of collective action in groups would be the outcome of this study in which feminist visions of social transformation would become evident or not. Lastly, this affects or influences my position as a researcher and personal activism in that I have to be cognizant of my own writing practices that enable a specific production of knowledge. And this is an aspect that is important to discuss before delving deeper into the discussion of the theory. My personal motivation to work with transnational feminism also stems from its commitment to the decolonization of knowledge (Ibid.,7). As stated by Megan Bénéat-Donald, “research is the main characteristic of academic knowledge in the minority world, and also the main point of contention most strongly fought against by indigenous communities worldwide” (Bénéat-Donald, 2012). Moreover, she states that the “the power held in the role of the researcher stems from the ability to exert authority through hidden value judgments, covert ideological frameworks, misinterpretations, distortions and exaggerations, which are then unquestioningly upheld as ‘Truth’” (Ibid.,). As a researcher who holds the power of being the “knower” but having had experiences of being positioned as the “known”, the issue of knowledge of production is one that I am always conscious of when conducting

research. This is because, “knowledge production and the act of ‘knowing’ have been and can be used, intentionally or not, as powerful tools of domination and colonization. Perceived by the ‘knower’ as a neutral act, the act of ‘knowing’ can have very different connotations for the ‘known’ (Ibid.,). Working with a perspective that is focused on the decolonization project, allows me to engage with this issue. As stated in the introduction of this study, a number of issues surrounding how Africans are known and have come to know themselves stems from our historical engagement with colonialism and some of these issues still persist today. And thus, as an African engaged in research on people who identify as Africans, it is important to engage in a decolonizing project in which “profound transformation of self, community and governance structures” take place. Moreover, it is argued that decolonization “can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination. It is a historical and collective process, and as such can only be understood within these contexts” (Mohanty, 2003: 7).

On a personal level (self), this transformation requires a constant awareness and interrogation of my own position in the research as both a researcher and the researched. As a researcher in a European context, it is easy to become caught up in discourses where European forms of knowledge are privileged and this is how colonizing projects on Africans and their experiences are perpetuated. Moreover, as the researched and on the community level, it is important to avoid being trapped into highlighting only the positives and the challenges as this has the tendency to maintain the African subject in a perpetual victim position and also strips Africans of the ability to be human. The motivations outlined above are the reasons why a transnational feminist perspective was chosen for this study. It is important to point out however that another approach was brought in to highlight very crucial aspects of the platform before bringing in the transnational feminist lens. This important aspect is that in this study, the AWE platform is understood as the realm of human affairs. The next sections will provide a more detailed discussion.

## **2.1 Public Realm and Action**



The approach of the realm of human affairs is taken from Hannah Arendt where she describes the realm of human affairs as “consist(ing) of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together. The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt” (1958, 184). The coming together of the members in this platform is the beginning of the web of human relationships described by Arendt. However, an important aspect of the public realm is not just the coming together, but the speaking and acting that occurs in the platform. Through acting and speaking, the members establish relationships, links and connections with each other and this feature is highlighted by Arendt when she argues that, “action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries” (Ibid., 190). The public realm as postulated by Arendt directs the analysis to focusing on the kinds of relationships that are established in moments of action and speech.

Arendt’s work on action and speech is very illuminating for this study as she focuses on the relationships between the actors in the realm of human affairs by placing emphasis on this idea that, “because the actor always moves among and in relations to other acting beings, he is never merely a doer but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposites sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings (Ibid., 190). It is here that the notion of doing and suffering as part of the process of acting and speaking with others becomes interesting in that it highlights a side of power that is not always dealt with in detail. This is especially true in the context of marginalized groups or people because there is always the assumption that they are sufferers (victims) and therefore not doers (actors). However, by being acting beings, they are both doers and sufferers, and thus power is present in this context regardless of whether there is doing or suffering. This becomes more evident when Arendt goes on to argue that, “power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence” (Ibid.,200). Moreover, she asserts that, “power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted

company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities” (Ibid., 200). As actors moving amongst other acting beings, it can be argued that the members of the platform are disclosing their realities through the positions they take up. Moreover, by taking up this perspective of the public realm and power, there is an emphasis on looking at power within the platform as having the potential to establish and create something new.

## **2.2 Key points in Transnational Feminism**

Arendt’s idea of the public realm as the space of speech and action is a great starting point for this study, however, in order to interrogate factors that influence and motivate speech and action, a transnational feminist perspective is crucial. In this study, the definition of transnational feminism is taken from Swarr and Nagar where it is proposed as,

an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can: a) attend to racialised, classed, masculinised, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capital patriarchies, and the multiple ways in which they(re) structure colonial and neo-colonial relations of domination and subordination; b) grapple with the complex and contradictory ways in which these processes both inform and are shaped by a range of subjectivities and understandings of individual and collective agency; and c) interweave critiques, actions, and self reflexivity so as to resist a priori predictions of what might constitute feminist politics in a given place and time” (Swarr and Nagar,2012: 5).

By approaching the platform and its members’ positioning from a perspective in which it is understood that their acting and speaking is a way to establish and create relationships with each other requires that we also attend to Mohanty suggestion that, “the fact of being women with particular racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual, and geographical histories has everything to do with our definitions” (2003:142). The awareness that race, ethnicity, class or even geographical history as important factors

to how the members define themselves is crucial as it also relates to the positions they take up when acting and speaking. Bringing in the transnational feminist perspective as a lens adds another dimensions to the understanding of the platform and its members as it recognizes that the members' disclosure of realities as distinct human beings are potentially also influenced by specific locations (continental and gender in this context). According to Grewal and Kaplan, it refers "us to the interdisciplinary study of the relationships between women in diverse parts of the world. These relationships are uneven, often unequal, and complex. They emerge from women's diverse needs and agendas in many cultures and societies. Given a very heterogeneous and multi-faceted world, how do we understand and teach about the condition of women? When we ask this question, relations between women become just as complicated as those between societies or between nations" (Grewal and Kaplan, 2000). Moreover, it allows us to view "patriarchy as a system that constructs both women and men in harmful ways. Rather than view gender justice as an individualistic goal to be attained by every woman – a view that sometimes views men as "the enemy" –alternative visions in which patriarchy is conceptualized as a system that oppresses everyone can be more useful" ( Salem, 2014). This argument affirms the position taken in this study in that although the focus of this dissertation is women, this does not mean that the approach taken views women in a binary position to men or that the agenda is to exclude men. The choice to focus this study on women has less to do with the exclusion of men and more to do with a research interest in feminism and the need to highlight the experiences of African women.

This perspective highlights an important feature of this study given that in order to understand how relations are established between the members of the platform; relying on the notion that solidarity in this platform is solely based on the idea of 'woman' because the platform is exclusively targeting women is not only limiting but also based on assumptions. The assumption that the condition of women all over the world is the same is one that this perspective challenges and forces us to look at other facets that also contribute to the condition of women. With this perspective on the AWE platform, it makes visible links and connections that might not have been visible had the focus only been on the assumption that this platform is about women.

Although the AWE platform is solely focused on women, doing a feminist critical analysis opens up the discussion and asks the question: what to call scholarship where gender is not the explicit focus, but feminism is the explicit mode of analysis" (Campt and Thomas, 2008: 8). Moreover, it places emphasis on looking "at race, sexuality, and class not only as bounded categories but as concepts that "travel" -- that is, circulate and work in different and linked ways in different places and times" (Grewal and Kaplan, 2000). This is where the idea of taking into account the transnational gains its significance. Kaplan and Grewal argue that the term transnational has gained currency in a number of focal areas, namely in "a) Theorizing migration as a transnational processes; (b) to signal the demise or the irrelevance of the nation-state in the current phase of globalization; (c) as a synonym for the *diasporic* (d) to designate a form of postcolonialism; and (e) as an alternative to the problematic of the global and the international, articulated primarily by Western or Euro American second wave feminists as well as by multinational corporations, for which "becoming global" marks the expansion into new market" (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994).

In this study, the attention is on the first focus which is theorizing migration as a transnational process. On a platform such as the AWE, it is evident that migration is part of the experience of these members and there are clear transnational processes taking place, and therefore if we look at the positions taken up by the members and the different categories used, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that these categories are not bound or fixed by travel. As such, a transnational lens enables us to contemplate issues around mobility, encounters, conflicts and disconnects—how commonalities are produced as well as differences and the genealogies that create these representations" (Grewal, 2008: 197). It is only through the lens of the transnational that it becomes evident that, "something called 'foreign' is used to create something called 'domestic', how social movements can move across national boundaries and morph into something, how boundaries and networks shift and change and the connections between finance, labo(u)r and gender, race and sexuality" (Ibid.,198). With that in mind, the transnational feminist approach allows us to be aware that issues and positions are articulated through multiple related contexts and this often results in different meanings in different places (Ibid.,). These connections

and links also show the importance of why Grewal and Kaplan call for Western feminists to examine academic work and everyday life in terms of understanding that privilege in a world system means someone else's exploitation/oppression (Grewal, 1994: 19). And thus at times, what is assumed to be a common idea ends up being a difference which then suggest that more attention is paid to the "interweaving of the histories" of those under study as this will result in an emphasis on relations of mutuality, co-responsibility and common interests" as the anchors of feminist solidarity (Mohanty,2003: 242).

In the midst of writing this chapter, I was asked to assist my students on a project they had undertaken in support of South Korea's request to the United Nations for assistance in their endeavour to push the Japanese government in recognizing that their Comfort Women policy during World War 2 was a crime against humanity. This was not the first time I had come across this issue in South Korea, however, it was the first time I had worked rather closely with the topic. Reading up more on the issue, I discovered that victims of the comfort policy were women who were taken to former Japanese military installations, such as comfort stations, for a certain period during wartime and forced to provide sexual services to officers and soldiers (Digital Museum). The internet provided much reading material on this issue and I was able to find some translated stories that were told by South Korean women who had been through this experience. South Korean women were not the only victims of this wartime policy and there are stories on the internet from women in Indonesia (Included here is Dutch and mixed race women), Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines (Digital Museum). Many of the stories detailed what they went through during their time at the comfort station but also the consequences they have had to deal with after they attempted to return their home countries and those that returned. Reading these accounts made me think about the stories of the women from Benin state in Nigeria who have been/are victims of human trafficking to North Africa and Europe. The issue of human trafficking does not only affect Nigerian women, however, I was quickly reminded of their situation because I had read a number of articles that detailed their stories. The situation of the victims of the trafficking occurring in Nigeria and those victims of the Comfort policy from South Korea are radically

different from each other in terms of geography, past (war and poverty) versus present (economic instability and war) events and the way in which the violence was perpetrated against the women. In the South Korean context, it was part of the Japanese government's military policy and thus a more institutionalized system and in the Nigerian context; this crime is perpetrated by individuals responding to the economic situation in the country and thus not easily linked to the Nigerian government.

However, it is at this point that a transnational feminist lens becomes useful given that this perspective takes on a comparative focus with the aim of showing the interconnectedness of the history, struggles and experiences of both these groups of women (Mohanty, 2003: 242). In this context, I was able to observe that many of the South Korean women, although this happened in the 1940s, were coerced into going to the comfort stations under the guise of finding better employment in factories etc. This is a similar situation for the Nigerian women in that many of their stories show that they travelled with their traffickers under the guise of better working opportunities. As shown here, both these stories are happening at different times and contexts, and yet the stories of deceit are eerily similar. It is from these differences and similarities that Feminists such as Mohanty argue that solidarity can be achieved between women from different national, racial and cultural communities (Ibid.). As stated here by Mohanty, "a solidarity perspective requires understanding the historical and experiential specificities and differences of women's lives as well as the historical and experiential connections between women" (Ibid., 242). This perspective is very important because it moves us away from assuming that solidarity initiated in a women's group is possible only because they are all women. Moreover, it is important to recognize that there are always going to be (individual) differences that exist but with these differences, connections and commonalities are also present.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine how the online platform, African women in Europe (AWE) and its members forge and negotiate solidarity across borders. My intention in this chapter is to describe to the reader the process I underwent in collecting data for this study. As with any research, the process was not straight forward and required a lot of back and forth movement between what I wanted to do and what could be done in the field. The research design that I began with when I started this study was interested in interviewing individuals who were migrant and female from different African countries. This was because my research interest at the time was keen on capturing and exploring the experiences of African migrant women in Europe with a strong focus on their different contexts. My membership in the African women in Europe platform had given me the idea to use the internet as a place to recruit respondents because the target population for my research could be found on this platform. However, when I started discussing the study with various people in the research training group and at conferences, I found that the platform itself would be a great case study for the research. This changed the direction of my research and I found myself looking at the platform as a site of analysis instead of just a place of recruitment.

This shift in focus forced me to rethink some of the earlier data collection methods but also added new material that could be of interest in the analysis. It is important to point out and this is something that will become evident in this chapter, the methodological journey that I undertook did not have clear cut boundaries to all the different aspects mentioned here but that I kept going back and forth between the collection of data, the analysis and the writing and thus making the process always on-going. This chapter is structured in such a way that in the first part of this chapter, a detailed account of the assumptions that underpin this study are given in order to make transparent and clear the methodological decisions for this research. I also discuss the implication of doing research on the internet and the impact this might have on various issues taken for granted in research conducted offline. The second part of the chapter will describe in detail the data collection as well as the analysis and

writing process to make clear to the reader how I came to have the data and results shared in this study. Lastly, I will deal with issues of confidentiality and the ethical nature of the research. This is important because of the fact that this research was done both online and offline and both these fields have different considerations that need to be taken into account.

### **3.1 Conducting researching on the internet**

When the focus of my research changed to using the internet as a site of analysis in which most of my data would be collected, figuring out what the 'field' was in my study became very important. The AWE platform enforces the idea of a bounded space by making their platform a private space only for their members and this is controlled by the use of passwords. As explained by Christine Hine, in many studies about the CMC as a context, the boundaries of the group tend to be, "symbolically enacted (by active participants) through the discourse of the group and through the devices which control access such as MUD addresses and passwords, IRC channel names and newsgroup hierarchies" (Hine, 2008). She goes on to argue that, "the socially constructed and maintained boundaries coincide with the (socially constructed) technical devices that carve out a bounded space. This might not be a conventional, physical notion of place, but it is analogous in its focus on bounded social contexts (Ibid, 2008). The AWE platform follows a similar format in how they create and carve out their bounded space, and thus figuring out what the field was for this research was made relatively easy. The platform had also created ideological markers within which to define those who can join and participate in the space. Moreover, these markers can be viewed as part of a self-defining process in which those who self-identify with those markers are able to see themselves as having the power to join or enter based on those specific markers. What this platform is doing is explained by Markham in her experiences of the 'field' online in that, "what we consider "the field," then, is both enabled and constrained by the technological possibilities, the ideological markers established by the participants, and the negotiation of self-operating within, through and outside these contexts" (Markham, 2003: 53). In addition to these markers being useful online, it also made data collection



offline easy as I recruited the respondents online and followed them offline. By having a definite field online within which to begin and do the work enabled the rest of the data collection process to be smooth. Doing research on the internet can be a very complex process. However, by being clear from the beginning as to the study's research aims and objectives, the complexity can be lessened and it can be a great way to do research. The complexity in which I speak of is highlighted by Markham in her assertion that users on the internet experience computer mediated communication as a tool, place or a way of being and sometimes as all of these things mentioned simultaneously (Markham, 2007:330).

In my case, after thoroughly looking at the research questions and ensuring that I was clear on the objectives and aims of the study, I began to examine the AWE platform itself in order to understand what the internet is for the platform and its members and thereafter, how it is used. It became clear after this process that the internet for AWE and its members was a tool, place and a way of being. For the research subjects and the platform, the internet was conceptualized as a tool where information is transmitted and received and it was also a place in which this information can be stored. Moreover, it was a way of being in which they can self-define through specific boundary markers and also through the experiences articulated and shared within the platform. Although the research subjects used the internet in all three ways, I had to make a decision based on my research aims on the way in which the internet would be used in the study. The process of making clear how the research subjects use the internet aided in my own process and I was able to recognize that to meet my research objectives and answer the research question, the internet in this study had to be conceived as both a place(research context) and a way of being. Markham gives this definition for the internet as a place or research context as being "those social spaces constituted and mediated by computer mediated interactions" (Ibid.,331) and thus it is a space where I can collect data for the research project. Conceiving the internet as a way of being for the members and the platform serves the purpose of opening up and seeing how the members of the platform position themselves within the space. As Markham explains, although the internet might be a network of computers, "through the design, control and, play of information in online contexts, personalized worlds

can be created, organized and enacted. Moreover, through interactions on the online contexts, “the outcome is a fuzzy mapping of imagined geographies, perceived physicalities and transcendent forms. As a means of reinscribing, reconfiguring or otherwise shifting identity, body and self’s connection with the other” and as such the internet for some, becomes a way of being (Ibid., 333).

She goes on to argue with regards to the way of being and the importance of text is that “the words we use both reflect and shape our understanding of our world, but this process never occurs in a vacuum. The process is thoroughly dialogic; cultural forms exist only through the exchange of messages and the subsequent adoption and reproduction of textual artifacts. As we sit in front of our computers, we type and send messages, composing ourselves through word choices, sentence structures, graphic accents, and typos” (Markham,2003:6). Her argument reinforces my reasoning to see the research subjects in the platform as using the internet as way of being which enables them to position and represent themselves through text on the internet. In working this out, I was able to establish how well fitting researching on the internet was for my particular research aims as I would be able to use the internet as a research context where data can be collected on a group of subjects who use this space for various reasons and that I would be able to focus on the process of self and political definition as part of the subjects’ way of being. The next part that I dealt with in this process of conducting research online was my position as a member of the platform. Following Annett Markham when she cautions that, “when we drill down to the basic epistemological assumptions undergirding any study of discursive practices in culture (physical or virtual), consideration of how the interaction among participants and researchers reflects and shapes identities, relationships, and social structures constitutes a useful, reflexive, and ethically essential practice”(Ibid.,7). This was important in this context as suggested by Markham especially when conducting research online because there are “multiple dialectic tensions operat(ing) simultaneously and perhaps unconsciously to influence the researcher’s choices”(Ibid.,6).

An issue that emerged as both an opportunity and a challenge was the separation of

being a researcher and the researched. Being a researcher and the researched was a great opportunity given that I had a wealth of knowledge of the researched because I was in a way a member of this community. At the same time, I was acutely aware of the challenge of being able to separate my 'knowing' and the subjective 'knowledge' shared by the members of the platform. As noted here, "whether the researcher is using text-based online environments as an interviewing tool or studying virtual cultures constructed and sustained solely through online media, knowledge claims about the Other are essentially mediated by the other's presentation of self through any medium, the interaction between the self(researcher) and other (participant) during the data collection process, and the researcher's production and presentation of the words of the other in the interpretation and writing phases of the research project"(Ibid.,7). Some of the questions that I asked myself during this process were: how do I go about separating the two when analysing the data? How can I ensure that I do not create people with views like mine but can actually stay true to what these members are saying? How do I deal with information and outcomes that seem to paint the members and platform in a negative way? Fortunately, I had come across this same challenge when working on my thesis for my master degree. In my master thesis, I studied women from the same ethnic group where analysing and working with the data forced me to deal with aspects of my cultural heritage that were not favourable. I learnt through this process that all kinds of stories emerge when doing research, some good and others very negative. And as such, if I open myself up to learn about myself through their experience, this would be a gain instead of a loss. Moreover, I realized that it is important to let the stories be told so as to humanize and dignify the people one is researching because in my case, I was also humanizing myself. This became an important aspect of why I was doing research and when the same issue came up in this research, I chose to follow the same path. I was constantly aware and reflective about this point that no matter what the research showed, that I would share all findings without bias or judgement as these research subjects deserved to be shown in the way that they represented themselves regardless of my opinion and views on their representations. A similar issue related to the above situation that needed a lot of reflection because of the blurred nature of my position is my role in how I shape or transform the subjects of my research. As much as I did not participate in the forum

discussions that were analysed for this study or the interviews, analysing and writing about members of the AWE platform, I did feel like writing about my own experiences. Markham shares her own experience of how when she first started conducting online interviews, she visualized all her subjects and in most cases, most of her visualizations ended up conjuring people that looked like her friends (Markham,2007: 342).

In my case, the issue of visualisations did not create any problems as all the forum discussions had a picture of the posting member attached. However, during the analysis and writing section, this was another issue altogether. As a researcher using critical discourse analysis, it is a well-known fact that our own work is driven by social, economic and political motives” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 7), however, a clear distinction had to be made between a socio-political stance towards the research and imposing my political ideas on the members of the platform. This is no easy task as an African female migrant in Europe like the members, the insider and knowing position, is at one moment an opportunity and in the next, a problem. My attempt to effectively deal with this issue was to share my analysis with others in order to get their views and thoughts on my interpretation. I also shared my work with another colleague/friend who is of African descent living in Europe but not part of the platform to challenge some of my interpretations. This process helped me in more ways that I could have thought because some of my findings centred on the notion of motherhood, and someone who is not a mother yet; my experiences in this field are very limited. However, my friend is an African mother raising her children in Europe and therefore her views on the issue were always refreshing and added another dimension to my interpretation. Moreover, what also helped in this case was my constant awareness of my own South African historical context and how issues of race were so much more ingrained in me than it was in other African contexts. I recognized that some of the racial jargon that is used in the platform by some of the members might have a different intention to how I would read it because of my sensitivity to racism. This was constantly at the back of my mind and as such, when my South African racialized, historical lens emerged, I worked with it to understand how this might be read differently. It was important for me not to dismiss it altogether as it can prove useful at times, however, just not at all times so an awareness and reflection on

it was critical and productive.

Thus far I have only noted some of the challenges that I encountered, however, there were some benefits to also researching in such a context. One of these benefits was the easy way in which the Founder and the members could trust me while conducting research in the platform. As part of the platform, the Founder saw me as a member and therefore it was easier for her to believe that I would protect the members in my research. However, I also believe that it was because I had been a member of the platform for a number of years and although I had not met the founder till I interviewed her, we had interacted via email on the platform and I believe she felt she could trust me based on the information she had learnt about me over the years. This made me realize how I had represented myself in the platform over the years was significant to how the founder felt a level of trust with me. This became clear to me when I conducted my interview with her. This was our first meeting face to face and before we began the interview, she explained that she had observed that I had lived in many countries and was especially interested in hearing some of my experiences. This made me assume that she had also been looking at my profile on the platform over the years and could glean some information from that. Gaining entry into the “field” so to say was very easy and getting respondents was also not a long duelling process because many of the members who I approached as possible respondents were very enthusiastic about participating in the research and also showed me a lot of support and encouragement. This made me realize that although holding the dual position of being a researcher and the researched has its benefits; it also requires a lot of reflection in order to avoid positioning dilemmas.

### **3.2 Methodological assumptions**

Due to the orientation of this study which is to examine the positioning of the African women in Europe platform through the analysis of text written by the members and the platform, it was imperative for this study to be conducted using qualitative methods. This is because one of the central motifs of qualitative research as indicated by Bryman is to focus on the way research subjects understand and interpret their

social reality (Bryman, 2012:11). Moreover, according to Snape and Spencer, “those practicing qualitative research have tended to place emphasis and value on the human, interpretative aspects of knowing about the social world and the significance of the investigator’s own interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied” (Snape and Spencer,2003: 7). Taking into account the investigator’s own interpretations is especially important in this study because of my position as a researcher and as a member of the platform which when acknowledged and made visible, has serious implications on the outcome of the study. This is especially important in that the researcher also plays a role in the choices made as to what assumptions underpin and frame the study. Furthermore, Annette Markham argues that it is important for those studying virtual cultures or doing their study on the internet to reflect on the frames of references used in their research as “the frames of reference we use to guide our premises and procedures are deeply rooted in physical foundations and modernist ontologies” (Markham, 2003: 2). The aspect of doing research on the internet using methods and foundations that were not specifically created for internet research is an important point to reflect and discuss as the internet does not always have the same borders as offline.

As indicated earlier, this research is interested in looking at the positioning of the platform and its members and thus the focus is to reveal the links and connections as well as the disconnections and disjunctures that occur through this positioning. For this reason, the transformative research paradigm was chosen to guide and inform this study. Transformative paradigm as coined by Donna Mertens is part of the critical theory tradition and has its focus on “the question of power (that) arises in terms of privileges associated with economic status, religious beliefs, immigrant status, race/ethnicity, tribal identity, gender, disability and status as an indigenous person or a colonizer, to name a few basis on which power differentials have been historically evidenced” (Mertens, 2007/2012). This fits in so well within this study as it enables the researcher to look closely at the links and relationships that are created by the differentiation processes which are highly dependent on categories of race, class, gender etc and to then examine the power dynamics that occur within this space. Furthermore, the ontological assumptions linked to this paradigm are that, “there are

multiple realities that are socially constructed, but it is necessary to be explicit about the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial, gender, age, and disability values that define realities. Different realities can emerge because different levels of unearned privilege are associated with characteristics of participants and researchers (Mertens, 2007: 216).

These assumptions are also reflected in the theoretical framework of transnational feminism in which the politics of location and difference are marked as important because they also place emphasis on not just looking at the multiple positions subjects take up but how the historical, geographical and imaginative borders with which people are faced with provide the foundation for these realities. Another important factor that is both emphasised in transnational feminism as well as in this transformative paradigm is the importance of taking into account the interactive link between the researcher and the participants. The transformative paradigm is underlined by epistemological assumptions that, “to know realities, it is necessary to have an interactive link between the researcher and the participants in a study. Knowledge is socially and historically located within a complex cultural context. Respect for culture and awareness of power relations is critical” (Ibid.,216). This is an issue that is very important in this study because of my position as a researcher as well as a member of the platform. Due to the multiple positions I hold, it was important for me to interrogate and analyze these positions while analyzing the research subject. This awareness was equally challenging as it was fruitful in that it made it more sensitive to some of the power dynamics that were occurring between me and the members as I analyzed their positions. Furthermore, building on this notion of power relations, she argues that “this involves understanding the historical and social contexts, as well as building relationships that acknowledge power differences and support the development of trust amongst the involved parties” (Mertens, 2012:7).

### **3.3 Data collection process: start to finish**

This section will detail the data collection process of the research project from start to finish. As this research involved studying an online community that I (researcher) was

already a member of, gaining entry into the field itself was not difficult. I joined the AWE platform soon after it started in 2008 and even though I had not met the founder or some of the members of the platform, I had added them as friends on my page and exchanged emails with them a few times. This was one of the reasons I joined the platform because I was looking for African women living and working in Europe for networking and exchanging information. Although my stay in Europe at the time was only for a year, I carried on travelling and living abroad and thus I chose to stay a member of the platform because it also included women living in other parts of the world. In staying a member of the platform the whole time meant that it was easier to gain access of the platform when I started working on the research project. When I first began the project, my main idea was to conduct semi-structured interviews with some of the active members. I thought it would be easy to get into contact with some of the members to arrange interviews as emailing them on the platform was just a click away. As part of following protocol and ensuring that I had permission of those in charge of the platform, I emailed the founder of the platform first requesting help with my research project and to gain permission to contact the other members for interview requests.

Contacting the founder and gaining permission was important for me as a member of the platform because I did not want to violate the privacy of the space. The members of the platform had joined AWE for their own reasons and as such, for them to now be confronted with interview requests without prior notice from the Founder might not have been considerate. I also wanted to maintain a respectful relationship with the Founder of the platform as the platform was her project and she needed to be informed if anything other than what I had joined the platform for was taking place. I emailed the Founder a short overview of the research project explaining what the work was about and how the platform could be of use to me. I also added a link to the project website for her to confirm that this was real and suggested a Skype meeting to discuss this in detail as she lived in a different part of Germany and Skype would be quicker. The founder was interested in allowing me to research the platform but wanted more information so we decide to Skype. At this point, I had decided that I would also collect data on the platform for analysis and so during our Skype meeting, I explained



the research project in detail and the role of the platform in the project. During the discussion, she brought up some misgivings she had about allowing me to conduct research on the platform and asked me some questions which were pertinent to her decision to allow me to use the platform. She was happy with my responses and told me that they had helped another research project before so this should be okay as well. She also suggested that I could also join some of their offline events and that way I could conduct some interviews with some of the members including her and also to collect more data during the offline meetings. My meeting with the Founder proved to be very effective in that not only did I have her permission to conduct research on the platform but also more ideas on how to collect data.

While waiting for the offline event to take place, I started to email prospective interview partners and because I was interested in interviewing people from different countries living in different parts of Europe, I diversified my pool of interview partners. I emailed eight members who were on my friend list in the platform in order to see who would respond. Out of the six, four members responded to my email and agreed to the interview. At the same time, I also posted a discussion topic on the forum asking for interview partners. Additionally, I received four responses of interest to my discussion forum and started emailing with all these eight members to arrange interviews. During this process, I started to look at the forum discussions and found that they contained a great wealth of materials on the topics that seemed important to the members of the platform. A decision was made to be more open about the data that would be collected for this study and to keep the discussion forums in mind. At the offline event, I conducted an interview with the Founder and also found two more interview partners in the process. I used the online event to interview the Founder and to recruit interview partners. I did do some observations at the event and wrote down my thoughts afterwards but I always felt that I had missed some important details so I decided not to use the notes in my study and just to focus on the data in the platform and from the interviews. After the offline event, I made some appointments to conduct interviews and ended up arranging seven interviews with the members. While waiting for the interviews to begin, I went back to the online space and looked at the discussion forums. One of the advantages of collecting data online

has been the ability to access data from my desk without having to travel and lose time in the process (Hine, 2008: 31). Unlike with the interviews where I was required to wait for the respondents to give me an appointment and then having to travel to the venue to conduct the interview; collecting data online proved to be more effective and to receive. In addition as argued by Dholakia and Zhang, once the online data has been accumulated, it can be easily downloaded and this would be more economic. Moreover, "such data can be stored and analyzed anytime, anywhere, by anyone who has Internet access to the data files" (Dholakia & Zhang, 2004). This section has discussed the process I began for data collection and now, I will discuss the different data collected and some of the challenges and opportunities encountered in the process.

### **3.3.1 Website home page**

The main website page was a critical part of the data collected in that it not only contained a variety of data that could be analyzed; it also answered one of the main research questions. On the main website page, the name of the website, the slogan and the introductory video were viewed as the main points of information that could be collected for analysis. The rest of the information on the website was deemed impossible to collect as this information changed on a daily basis depending on what was being updated and thus seen as difficult to follow for analysis. Another interesting aspect of analysing these three points of data was that they were solely created by the founder of the website and therefore, by virtue of joining the website based on these points, the members were agreeing to the positioning set by the founder. And this positioning in a way directs how the members of the platform position themselves within the platform itself. This was also interesting as this is the only aspect of the platform that is open to the public which means non-members are able to access this and get a picture of what the website is about based on the information set forth on this page.

This was the easiest data to access because as soon as I gained permission from the founder of the website, I could start the analysis process. However, analysing was not

as easy in that the material differed in that it was not only text but also pictures and a video. I analysed the data with three different groups (members of the RTG in Mainz, members of RTG in Hildesheim at a workshop and with 2 other postgraduate students). With all these groups, we focused on the data with the objective of locating different meanings that could be inferred from the name, the slogan and what was said in the video. Although it would have been interesting to also analyse the pictures in detail, it proved to be much easier to focus on the text (what was being said or written) from a critical discourse analysis perspective. Furthermore, Markham argues that, “in text based computer mediated communication, text is the means by which embodiment is constructed, disavowed, or reconfigured, a process that differs from traditional sense making wherein there are embodied research experiences that are studied and written in text later (Markham, 2003:4). This assertion highlights the importance of text based computer mediated communication, and how subjects employ this opportunity to construct or even position themselves and as such, creating a great opportunity for researchers to analyse data that in its original format. Moreover, focusing on text created consistency within the data as the rest of the data collected would be text as well.

### **3.3.2 Discussion forums**

The discussion forums in the platform provided the primary data for analysis in this study. This decision was made once I realised that although the interview material was good, the discussion forum material felt more authentic. This does not suggest that interview material is not authentic, however, in this case, the topic and the subsequent discussion that ensued afterwards is all initiated by the members and therefore I had no control as to which way the discussion would go or what material would be there. For instance, a topic was started on African women and prostitution in Europe was started. My own assumptions would have been that this topic would have many responses and views but it did not get many hits. This suggested to me that what might have been a topic that I assumed would be interesting to the members was not necessarily so and as such, what is important and discussed in those forums is what the members deem interesting and crucial to them. If I had only relied on

interviews, I might have brought up the topic of prostitution in the interview and in a way directed the member to a topic that might not necessarily have been important to her. Moreover, as explained here and reinforcing what has been quoted above on the importance of text, “written communications differ from oral communication in that people are able to carefully select what they want to say, how much they want to say, and how they want to say it – without fear of being interrupted before they have fully made their points. When people have to write things down to communicate, they often are more articulate. They work harder at saying what they mean” (Dholakia & Zhang, 2004). Furthermore, these discussion forums can be seen as mimicking a discussion that would potentially take place in a focus group. The major difference being that this occurs online and more importantly, the topics discussed are decided by the members and the responses are not coordinated. Markham also brings up a very important aspect in that, “the social reality of online culture is an ongoing accomplishment of conversation. We begin to exist as a persona when others respond to us; being, in this sense, is relational and dialogic (Markham, 2003:4). Additionally, the major potential of online forum discussions as data is the lack of coordination and structure that one would normally find in interviews and focus group discussions. The discussions occurred in a setting that was less contrived for the purpose of data collection and thus almost a natural setting.

Selecting material from the discussion forums was not an easy feat as most of the topics were not only interesting but could potentially be used to answer the research questions. It was then decided to choose the topics based on purposive sampling by selecting thematically related discussions that could be linked directly to the theoretical framework of transnational feminism. Although this created a limitation in that what was analysed cannot be generalized to explain the platform holistically, it could still be used to explain one pertinent area that seemed important to the members. This brought the numbers down substantially and then in turn I also eliminated all the discussion topics that did not have any responses. Even though I recognize that those discussion topics that did not have responses were important to analyse because silence from the members on the topic is a form of positioning as well, in this case, I made a decision to focus on positioning that related to text but also where

other members responded. It thus became important to look at where the interaction between the members was as their positioning was linked to each other in that interaction. I was also faced with the dilemma that some discussion topics had 20 responses whilst others only had 3 or 4 responses. Another factor to point out in relation to the responses was the fact that a discussion topic with 20 responses did not automatically mean that all 20 responses were from different individuals but could be a discussion between 3 or 4 members back and forth. What was important to me for this study was that an interaction was occurring between two or more members and therefore showing that action and speech in this sense requires the presence of others as explained by Arendt (1958:188).

A positive aspect of working with the forum discussions is that there was no transcribing because the members had written out their thoughts on the forum making the collection process a lot simpler. However, due to the fact that the discussions did not disappear from the platform, it meant that some discussions had time lapses. So a discussion that was started in 2009 could have responses from different years. This means that the discussions did not take place in real time but over a long period spanning a number of years. This can be viewed as a disadvantage in that discussions are not occurring over a short period in order to stimulate an interesting debate; however it does show that some of the topics discussed in the platform remain relevant over a long period. What this could possibly suggest is that new members joined later who found the topic interesting and relevant in that particular time and therefore responded to that discussion or even that it was not relevant in 2009 but had become relevant in 2011 due to various factors and as such, the topics have a longer time span. This is not always possible to do with offline discussion forums unless the researcher is conducting a longitudinal study with the same discussion group and can confirm this. I find that this is one of those advantages for doing research online in that it can retain data for a longer period but also within the platform, the members are able to access the information and can go back to it over and over and therefore having more time to even respond differently after a few years. It is because of some of the advantages mentioned here that the discussion forums, although never intended as such, became the primary data for this study. In addition,

it is important to mention that there are many advantages to analysing data collated online and the only aspects discussed here were the ones that I encountered in my research.

### **3.3.3 Interviewing**

I chose to go with a semi-structured format for the interview with a focus to get more in-depth information from the respondents. The interviews were conducted with only seven members of the platform. The respondents were with members whose current situation was as follows: a Cameroonian residing in Germany, a Nigerian residing in Switzerland, a German residing in Germany, two Kenyans (one was the co-founder) both residing in England, a British person of Caribbean descent residing in England and a Kenyan (Founder) person residing in Germany. The interviews were conducted between June and December 2012 with me travelling to where all the members were based in order to conduct the interviews face to face. This was important to me in that I knew some of the members online through their responses to the discussion forums. The interviews were conducted in public spaces (coffee shops, offices and restaurants). All the respondents were happy for the interviews to be recorded. However, because our meetings took place in public spaces, at times, the information on the recording was not always legible. All the interviews were conducted in English. The time duration of the interviews varied with the longest being seventy minutes and the shortest one being forty minutes.

The interview began with a short introduction of my dissertation and explaining to the respondents about confidentiality. I also gave them the space to ask questions related to the interview process in order to address some of the reservations they might have about doing the interview. My first question to the respondents was along the lines of how they found out about the platform and what motivated them to join. My reasoning behind this line of questioning was to see how these members positioned themselves as part of the platform to the wider public and to basically uncover the meanings the members attached to being part of the platform. All the interviews were easy and the respondents were very open about their experiences.

However, one of the disadvantages of the interviews for this study was that the process felt more staged and rehearsed. This feeling came from comparing the raw data that could be gained from the forum discussions. This was one of the main reasons why I finally decided to focus on the forum discussions as my primary data and to use the data from the interviews as secondary data where it could add to the discussion forums. It is also important to mention that not all the members interviewed had contributed to the discussion forums that were analysed.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

From the onset, this study has been preoccupied with exploring the relationship between the act of positioning (articulated in text through language by the platform and its members) and power (emerging dynamics in the articulations) as part of examining how solidarity is forged in the AWE platform. There is no better way of exploring language and power, than through critical discourse analysis and hence the choice to use it as a method of analysis for this study. There are various forms of critical discourse analysis and the particular one chosen here fits with the theoretical framing of this study as well the research paradigm guiding this study as this was important for answering the research questions. The perspective of CDA undertaken in this study is that of mediated discourse analysis (MDA). As explained here by Ron Scollon:

MDA takes the analysis, interpretation and explanation of social problems as its central concern hence the focus in MDA on social action... MDA takes it that power relations in society are not only discursive or just discursive but are grounded, instead, in practice. MDA, therefore, sees discursive practice as one form of social practice, not the foundational or constitutive form of practice out of which the rest of society and the resulting power relations arise...MDA takes it that discourse is among the means by which society and culture are constituted. MDA also argues that society and culture are constituted in the material products of that society as well as in its non-discursive practices (2009: 141).

This definition of MDA clearly illustrates that the main focus of the analysis is on social action and although discourses are still an important part of the analysis, they

are not central to the analysis in the way in which it is done in CDA. According to Scollon, this is because “CDA is a programme of social analysis that critically analyses discourse that is to say language in use as a means of addressing problems of social change”. And while these two share some goals, they also differ in that “MDA strategizes to reformulate the object of study from a focus on the discourses of social issues to a focus on the social actions through which social actors produce the histories and habitus of their daily lives which is the ground in which society is produced and reproduced” (Ibid.,140). MDA places a strong emphasis on social action which is in line with the focus of this study in that in order to understand solidarity in the AWE platform, there is a need to pay close attention to the actions of the actors during the process of forging solidarity. This is further highlighted by the idea that MDA “offers a programme for capturing the broad socio-political issues of our time in the simple daily actions of our lives” (Ibid., 145). This is exactly what I aim to do in this study because I attempt to capture a socio political issue such as solidarity by examining the actions of the members of the AWE platform once they enter the online platform. However, it is important to note that social actions in MDA are defined as mediated actions because of the need to underscore that all social actions are mediated “by cultural tools or mediational means” (Ibid.,143). And as a result, discourse is just one of the many ways in which social actions are mediated and thus opening up the different ways in which we can view the different acts. Karen Wohlwend (2013) describes the purposes of MDA as follows:

1. To locate and make visible the nexus of practice – a mesh of commonplace practices and shared meanings that bind communities together but that can also produce exclusionary effects and reproduce inequitable power relations
2. To show how such practices are made up of multiple mediated actions that appropriate available materials, identities, and discourses
3. To reveal how changes in the smallest everyday actions can effect social change in a community’s nexus of practice. (Wohlwend, 2013:2)

As clearly shown here, the focus of my study is concerned mainly with the first purpose mentioned by Wohlwend in that the main point is to locate the “commonplace practices and shared meanings that bind communities together” and more importantly, to also be conscious of the fact that these practices can “produce



exclusionary effects and reproduce inequitable power relations". By locating the shared practices, the idea of solidarity as articulated by that specific community is made visible. However, as in all articulations, power relations are present and also have to be taken into account and working with MDA is a great way to ensure that this happens. MDA is structured around a set number of concepts that are very useful in guiding the research project from the beginning of the study. These concepts are: mediated action, site of engagement, mediational means, practice and mediational means, nexus of practice and community of practice. Here, I will give a brief overview of these concepts as defined by Scollon and it is as follows:

**Mediated action:** A mediated action is defined as a social action taken with or through a mediational means (cultural tool)

Site of engagement: is defined as the convergence of social practices in a moment in real time which opens a window for a mediated action to occur

*Mediational means:* A mediational means (a term in either the singular or plural) is defined as the semiotic means through which a mediated action, that is any social action, is carried out (communicated).

**Practice and mediational means:** A practice is a historical accumulation within the habitus/historical body of the social actor of mediated actions taken over his or her life (experience) and which are recognizable to other social actors as 'the same' social action

**Nexus of practice:** MDA takes a narrow view of social practice as composed of social practices (count nouns, not a mass noun). When these practices are linked to other practices (both discursive ones and non-discursive ones). MDA uses the term 'nexus of practice' for the linked practices which social actors recognize in the actions of others.

**Community of practice:** A community of practice is defined as a group of people who regularly interact with each other towards some common purpose or goal. (Scollon, 2009)

These concepts are at the core of MDA and are very useful when used in the beginning of the research process as they help clarify and identify important aspects that are crucial for the progress of the study. In the case of this dissertation, I came across this specific form of CDA at the end of the data collection process and as such, I worked

with this method in more detail in the analysis process. This means that I did not go through the method step by step in the same way that a Researcher who started off with this method from the beginning would have done. Nevertheless, I found that it was useful in reaffirming certain decisions that I had undertaken in the research process. At the centre of this research is solidarity and how it is forged in a particular space by a specific group of people and therefore my main focus is on the positioning taken up by the people and the space itself to create solidarity. I had decided that the AWE platform would be the main site of analysis and this decision was reaffirmed when looking at the concept of site of engagement. I had already decided that I will focus on the positions taken up by the members of the platform and the platform as my main unit of analysis. Therefore looking at the MDA concepts helped identify that the unit of analysis (the positioning) can be seen as mediated actions. Moving on from there, the next step was to identify the social actions of the platform and its members which would be collected as data and this had been a challenging point up to now in that the platform had a lot of materials and I had also conducted semi-structured interviews with some of the members, and this left me with a lot of data but no methodical way in which to choose the best data for analysis.

This is where the concept of mediational means was useful in that I was able to identify the different mediational means in which social actions are communicated on the platform and thus settled on focusing the analysis on text based material. This translated into three different text based data. Firstly, text on the homepage which included the title of the homepage, the slogan of the platform, the text in the video whereby the founder has recorded information about what the platform is about and encourages visitors to the homepage to become members. Inside the platform, I chose to focus on text based material from the forum discussions as this is where the members were interacting with each other. The final text based data I had were the interviews that I had conducted with some of the members on their experiences as African women in Europe and with the platform. With all this data, I recognized that three last concepts in MDA; practice and mediational means, nexus of practice and community of practice were present in the data and therefore these are the aspects I can focus on in my analysis. When I looked over all the data that I had collected, I

realized that although I had not set out to collect data with MDA in mind, the data that I had collected was similar. As advised by Scollon, a triangulation of four types of data is suggested for this method and they are as follows:

- *Members' generalizations*: What do participants say they do (normatively)? This is often at variance with both objective observation and with that member's own individual experience.
- *Neutral (objective) observations*: What does a neutral observer see? Often at variance with the generalizations made about the group or the self.
- *Individual experience*: What does an individual describe as his or her experience? Often characterized as being different from one's own group.
- *Interactions with members*: How do participants account for your analysis? This will mostly focus on the resolution of contradictions among the first three types of data. (Scollon, 2009: 150)

This method suggests that Researchers do this triangulation by collecting data in the form of discourse survey, scene survey and focus groups. As I worked with the method at the end of my data collection process, I had not followed this recommendation. However, I did see that idea of focus groups could produce similar results as online discussion forums, even though there were differences because the online discussion forums were online and the discussions were initiated by the members and not the Researcher as would be the case in focus groups. Nevertheless, when I viewed the data I had collected, I was able to see aspects of the triangulation suggested aside from the last point which deals mainly with interactions with the members. All other three, members' generalizations (homepage), Neutral observations and Individual experiences were evident in the homepage and forum discussions respectively.

Moreover, Scollon states that, "it will be difficult in any particular study to develop data of all four types to the fullest extent" (Ibid.,155) and thus, although I did not fully cover all four types of data, I had managed to include most of it. This part of the process is described as the engagement process because it focuses on recognition and

identification and this is the part of the methodology that aids the Researcher in identifying the social actors and the mediated actions which is crucial to the social issues of the study's interest (Scollon and Scollon, 2004: 3). Having undergone this process and confident that the data collected corresponded with the research interests, I proceeded to the Navigation process which is the analysis section. The navigation process is where the researcher can now start the mapping and circumferencing process (Ibid.,8). As stated by Scollon and Scollon, the second task is "to map the cycles of the people, places, discourses, objects, and concepts which circulate through this micro-semiotic ecosystem looking for anticipations and emanations, links and transformations, their inherent timescales, and to place a circumference of relevance around the nexus of practice" (Ibid.,9). In this part of the process, this is where material is selected and filtered in order to be left with manageable data for analysis. To do this, they suggest that it is important to begin by looking at the semiotic cycles of the actions under study. This is accomplished through the help of a set of topics and questions that one can work with while creating a semiotic cycle. They do argue that semiotic cycles cannot be conducted for each and every action, actor etc and as such; it is recommended to focus on those that have already been identified. The topics and questions suggested are described below:

- **Persons: Historical body**

How did these participants all come to be placed at this moment and in this way to enable or carry out this action?

- **Discourses in place - Semiotic aggregates**

*What aspects of this place are central or foregrounded as crucial to the action on which you are focusing and what aspects are backgrounded?*

- **Discourses in place - Overt**

*What discourses in this place are central or foregrounded as crucial to the action on which you are focusing and what discourses are backgrounded.*

- **Discourses - Internalized as practice**

*What discourses are 'invisible' in this action because they have become submerged in practice?*

- **Objects - Cultural tools (mediational means)**

*What is the history of this object as a mediational means for this action?*

- **Concepts - Cultural tools (mediational means)**

*What is the history of this concept as a mediational means for this action? (Ibid,11-13)*

In this section, I also created a set of questions pertaining to this study in which a semiotic cycle for the topic of Africa was developed with the help of the above questions. Since I had already identified the title of the platform on the homepage as the starting point, I began there and started to map out the semiotic cycle of Africa in the title and then followed the same process for Africa in the text of the discussion forums.

The questions are as follows:

- *What is the historical significance of Africa in this moment in time that makes it an important as a form of positioning?*
- *What aspects of Africa are foregrounded and which ones are backgrounded?*
- *What discourses of Africa are central or foregrounded as part of the positioning?*
- *What discourses of Africa are taken for granted and therefore made invisible because of the way they are used in practice?*
- *What objects are used to articulate about Africa as part of the mediational means and what historical significance do they have?*
- *What is the history of using the concept of Africa in which it was used as a form of positioning?*

These questions were then applied throughout the rest of the text and adjusted when needed to fit the material being looked at. Using this process, I was able to bring down 154 discussions to 15 discussions in the Forum discussions. With this process concluded, I proceeded to the analysis process where I would examine the semiotic cycles that were created in the previous step when answering the questions I posed to the data. Following the guidance of Scollon and Scollon (2004), this was achieved by using several topics and questions that help to guide the analysis. These are:

- **Anticipations and emanations**

*How is this action anticipated in the historical body of the persons involved?*

- **Links and interactions among semiotic cycles**

*How have just these elements come together at just this moment to produce this particular action?*

- **Transformations and resemiotizations**

*Is the action under examination a point at which resemiotization or semiotic transformation occurs?*

- **Circumferencing**

*What are the narrowest and widest timescales on which this action depends?*

With the help of the above questions, I created similar questions as shown in the first mapping of the semiotic cycle and this was used to examine the material that I was working closely with in detail. Carrying on with the Africa positioning, I asked the following questions:

- *How is taking up the category of Africa expected to be read, understood or imagined by those who are targeted?*
- *What are the expectations of using this category along with other elements in the title at this particular moment?*
- *Is this position of Africa being reinforced, reproduced or transformed in this process?*
- *What is the relevance of taking up this African position?*

Once this process was conducted on all the data being analysed, the next step focused on finalizing the analysis by linking some of the findings in the data with the help of other forms of analysis. Scollon and Scollon argue that, MDA works mainly with three forms of analysis of discourse to interrogate the data (Scollon and Scollon, 2004: 19). Critical Discourse Analysis is the first one normally used and this is to deal mainly with “questions of power between social interests in society”. The question that is usually asked in this case is *How are social power interests produced in this discourse?* (Ibid.,).

The second form of analysis is Interactional sociolinguistics and this is mainly concerned with the interrogation of “interpersonal relationships, participation structure, positioning, alignments and identities” (Ibid). Although it is argued that is primarily based mostly on talk, it should also be noted that “participants in speech events also take up positions and alignments in relationship to the places they are in and the objects they are using in those places” (Ibid.,19). The question is therefore: *What positions and alignments are participants taking up in relationship to each other, to the discourses in which they are involved, the places in which these discourses occur, and to the mediational means they are using, and the mediated actions which they are taking?* Lastly, Linguistic anthropology has carried forward the interest in examining the relationships between language and culture on the one hand and between those and

thought on the other (Ibid.,). And the question here is: *“How are sociocultural or historical thought or cultural patterns in the language and its genres and registers providing a template for the mediated actions of participants in the nexus of practice?”*(Ibid.,). For this process, although it is suggested that CDA is used first, I began with Interactional sociolinguistics because of the way in which this analysis focuses on text and positioning which is at the centre of this study and examined what positions were taken up by the members when discussing the topic of Africa. I then moved on to working with Linguistic anthropology as this aspect explored the link between the text the members used in the platform and the links it has to sociocultural and historical patterns of understanding in relation to Africa that might provide moments of recognition for the members in the platform. CDA was then brought into the analysis last to specifically look at the act of positioning with the use of Africa and what power dynamics emerge from using this discourse. Working with MDA, although came at the end of the data collection process, gave me a good structure and guidance to better examine and explore the data in a way that enabled to achieve the intended aims of my study.

### **3.5 Ethical Consideration**

As dictated by the principles of research ethics, it is imperative to discuss some of the provisions I made in protecting the privacy of subjects and maintaining the confidentiality of any of the data collected. This section is even more important because I collected data both online and offline and as such, some of the issues that I would take for granted offline are rather important online. Markham has argued the importance of “constant and critical reflexivity about one’s own everyday activities throughout the research process” as this would help one gain a better understanding and appreciation of one’s hidden ethics (Markham, 2007: 16). In the platform, anonymity of the subjects was an issue that I had to consider seriously because one of the requirements of the platform is for members to use their name and a picture of themselves. Although members do not always use their last names, in most cases, names and pictures were always there. This might be the case because the platform is a private space and therefore the members feel more protected than they would in a

public space but also because it is encouraged by the AWE team. Additionally, some of the members have met at their offline meetings and thus creating trust within the space. It thus enables members to feel safe enough to use their names and pictures as well as share their opinions without the same fears one would have if they were in a public space. So even though it has been argued that anonymity on online communication makes for an environment that makes it possible for subjects to be more open to share their thoughts (Dholakia & Zhang, 2004), it was evident that this could not be applied to the platform as the members were not necessarily anonymous as the possibility of meeting each other was more likely because of the online meetings. This lack of anonymity on the platform meant that I had to be very protective of the members' privacy. This was also one of the reasons why it was important to also gain consent to conduct research on the platform from the Founder and the members. And more importantly, this also give me the space and flexibility to collect data within the platform in a more open way. As part of my way of maintaining the members' anonymity and privacy, I do not refer to the members in the dissertation by their name but only as 'members'. However, I do quote their words from their discussion forums and interviews verbatim. Part of this quoting also included the title of the discussion forum and the date in which the member posted their comments. This was more to help guide the reader and less for the analysis.

However, my choice to cite the quotes verbatim was related to critical discourse analysis as some of the analysis requires the text to be in its original form. This is also asserted by Herring when she argues that, "refraining from making verbatim quotations would pose a considerable challenge to the reporting conventions of discourse-based research. Focusing on changing identifiers is not a total solution, but a situated compromise" (Herring, 1996). As part of the compromise, I ensured that most of the quotes did not always follow in chronological order unless it was pertinent for the analysis. Moreover, as Markham asserts, "if someone types solely in lowercase and uses peculiar spelling, the researcher's correction of grammar may inappropriately ignore and thus misrepresent a participant's deliberate presentation of self. If someone spells atrociously or uniQueLY, and the researcher corrects it in the research report to make it more readable, a person's creation of identity may be



the price of smooth reading” (Markham, 2007). As part of this process, I also made sure that I did not correct any grammatical errors or change the sentences structures in the discussion posts as I felt that this was part of the way in which the members expressed themselves as they wrote. Markham also cautions against the same issue when she explains,

The process of configuring texts for publication includes such taken for granted editing activities as transforming the participants’ utterances from disjunctive non sentence structures to smooth paragraphs; correcting grammar, spelling, and punctuation; or transforming the appearance of their fonts to reflect standardized typefaces acceptable for the venue and audience. Whether for purposes of interpretive clarity or readability, these transformations can have significant consequences. Introducing artificial linearity to certain interactions may not alter the meaning of the utterances, interaction or identity of the textual being embodied through these utterances. (Markham, 2003)

Questions of authenticity seem to come up quite a bit in many studies that are linked to the internet. When I first started my project, this seemed an issue in the sense that I was planning to use the online platform as a way to recruit interview partners and as such, I wanted to also meet them offline as to somehow ensure their authenticity. I did conduct interviews as explained above. However, once my research focus shifted and focused more on the members and the platforms’ positioning online, authenticating respondents became less important. I was more interested in what those members who responded on a specific discussion forum had to say, not whether they were real or not. The dissertation is more concerned with what is revealed in the discussion and less on whose name is attached to the post. It can be argued that I should use some of the data that I collected during the interviews especially of those respondents who also participated in the forum discussions in order to get a more holistic view of who they are. As mentioned earlier, not all the respondents whom I interviewed participated in the forums and as such, this would not make for fair data. My research interest is not concerned with who these members are offline but what they are writing online. In other words, what their text tell us about their positioning toward each other

and the wider public. I do use some texts from the interviews but this is more to add to some of the ideas shared online by the members. And as Markham asserts, “as the researcher engages in analysis of visual, verbal, and interactive presentations of self-online, certain elements become evident, highlighted, or passed over. Obviously, we cannot pay attention to everything, so the analytical lens is limited by what researchers attend to, collect, and consider as data” (Markham, 2007:339).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to take the reader on a journey to understanding my experiences of undertaking research online. During this process, there were moments of frustration but also moments of jubilation as I found myself navigating through the process of data collection. This process is not necessarily over because as I write this chapter, I am still processing everything that this research project has produced and is still producing. The main issues that became clear during the writing process were the importance of the internet in changing how we collect and collate data in research. This does not always result in positive outcomes, however, for the purpose of this project; working with data collected online was very effective. One aspect that proved to be helpful throughout this whole process is flexibility. Even though I started this project with some ideas and standpoints that I wanted to push forward, I found that by being flexible to the process of data collection, to being open to other ways of collecting data enabled me to go in a direction that I would never have thought to go. It also opened me up to a whole new field of internet research which is going to be useful in the future in that as more and more people use and incorporate the internet into the daily lives. I found the experience of conducting data collection both offline and online very illuminating. Having started with some preliminary analysis of the discussion posts and also having had some people as friends on the platform, it was interesting to observe the assumptions I had made about the members just based on their online persona. This is because once I met some of the members offline, it was clear that some people matched their online profiles in behaviour and ideas, while others not so much. This was not reflective of the members as much but more about my own perceptions and way of seeing things online and offline. The other issue that

came up was my dual position as the researcher and the researched. This topic has been thoroughly discussed and in my experience, I have found that there are both advantages and disadvantages to this duality. However, it is through being aware and self-reflexive throughout the whole process that aspects that seem to be a disadvantage at first become an advantage and the same can be applied the other way around.

## Chapter 4: The African Women in Europe Platform

“By use of information of technology, women of like mind can reach each other despite geographical distances all over Europe” (Taken from AWE 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary report 2011: 1).

As stated in the above quotation, the African Women in Europe platform is an online space that brings women of like mind together, despite geographical distances. Online platforms such as the AWE have emerged in the last decade with the rise of the internet. As explained here by Wilson and Peterson, “the growth of the global computer network known as the Internet has facilitated the rapid emergence of online interactions of dispersed groups of people with shared interests” (2002: 449). These online interactions occur within a space which can be defined as a social space because some researchers have started to argue that, “social spaces are new areas where people can meet, communicate with others and assimilate. Social spaces provide the initial medium to form and maintain basic connections, which in turn enable individuals to create relationships” (2003: 1432). Although it can be argued that relationships created online are not real and thus less valid, studies conducted on virtual communities have found that relationships formed online still show that “ties to the community are also intermittent, specialized, and varying in strength”.

Moreover, they also argue that “members of a virtual community bring their offline values into their discussions and interactions therefore intertwining both social lives together” (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Due to the variations in ties and also the intertwining of their social lives and other varied factors, online groups tend to be more varied in characteristics, focus and purpose. As pointed out by Wilson and Peterson, online groups can range, from small groups engaged in tightly focused discussions of specific topics, to complex created worlds with hundreds of simultaneous participants, to millions of users linked by an interest in markets or exchange networks for goods and information” (2002:449). This chapter will give a description of the AWE platform in order to establish what kind of an online group it is and what is happening inside the platform. I will then, further, locate and

contextualize this platform in literature so as to illustrate why the implicit focus on African female migrants in Europe and for the reader to gain a better understanding of the context in which the AWE platform is formed

## 4.1 Description of the African Women in Europe platform

The AWE platform is an online space for African women living in Europe with +550 members. The platform creates the impression that it brings together women from different parts of Africa living in various European countries to foster communication in the form of exchanging ideas and information, sharing personal stories and forming friendships. First time visitors who are interested in joining the platform have to pay a lifetime membership fee of 20 Euros to join and this fee is a form of commitment to joining and participating in the platform. Figure 1 is an illustration of the homepage and the information available to first time visitors.



FIGURE 1: Homepage of the African Women in Europe platform.

### 4.1.1 Homepage

As shown in figure 1, the content and information provided on the homepage of the platform is just enough to give the visitor a glimpse of what happens inside the

platform. The tabs, although visible on the home page, cannot be accessed by non-members as they contain information on what happens inside the platform. As a member of the platform, one can click on one of these headings and will be subsequently taken to that page. However, if a non-member clicks on one of the headings, they will be automatically taken to sign in or sign up page. On the right hand side of the home page, the first link that is shown is that of the welcome to the homepage where visitors and members are encouraged to sign in or sign up in order to become members or enter the website. Below is a link description that shortly says: African Women in Europe Website. Exchange your views. Reach out to fellow African women all over Europe” and this is followed by the contact information of the website which is [info@africanwomenineurope.eu](mailto:info@africanwomenineurope.eu) and this can be assumed as placed there for visitors who would like to contact the founders of the platform and make inquiries. Following this information is a heading titled **AWE founders** and it provides some information of the platform founders. AWE has a founder and a co-founder whose information is provided in this section. The content on display is their names, their pictures and short quotations about their beliefs in relation to the platform. Below this information are three advertisements that somehow relate to the platform’s themes. The **advertisements** are by an online transfer company World Remit, a clothing shop Sapelle that designs clothes using African print and an accommodation company called Airbnb. The next section shows some members’ upcoming **birthdays** with their pictures. This information could be the platform’s way of indicating that the members on the platform are real. Below this, is the **About AWE** section and the information about AWE is provided using a video by the Founder. The video is a 2:23 minute video that gives a short description of what the platform is about and communicates the goals and mission of the platform. This video is very important in that this is the only concrete information available that can give the visitors an idea about what the platform is about and what the potential members can expect once they join the platform.

The heading **Forum** follows the **About AWE** section and it details some of the on-going forum discussions that are currently taking place in the platform. This section only shows 5 forum discussions but it is always the latest discussions. Non-members

can only look at the discussions but cannot read as these can only be accessed inside the platform. The last three headings shown in the homepage are **AWE partners, Links and a Live traffic feed**. The AWE partners are companies that are connected to or work with AWE and currently, these are KIVA and Inuka.org. AWE links are social media sites where the AWE platform is linked to and their current links are Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. These links are places where potential members are also able to access more information about the platform. The live traffic feed shows current visitors who have viewed or logged on to the website in the last hour depending on the number of people who have visited. On the main part of the homepage is a heading titled **The News** and in this section, current news or issues are discussed. The news section contains information from the AWE newsletter and the current topic features EBOLA and what this is about. It also gives information on the AWE award application information for the upcoming AWE Event in 2015 taking place in Geneva. The next section shows a slide of **photos** that have been posted by members in the platform. Most of the photos are those from the events, however, it is possible to find personal pictures that are shared by the members in the platform. This section is also a way to show the validity of the platform and that the members in this platform do exist. The section below this is titled **Latest activity** which lists about four current activities that have taken place inside the platform. The activity ranges from two members becoming friends or a member posting a discussion forum or responding to one. The section **Blog posts** follows thereafter and it is similar to the previous section in that it shows the **Latest activity** in the platform; however, it only shows the latest blog postings with the author of the blog post, the date in which it was posted and how many members have commented on that particular post.

Both the **Latest activity** and **Blog posts** section are meant to communicate briefly what is occurring within the platform and to give the readers an idea of what topics to expect. The next heading is on the last **African news** taken from BBC news. The news section is updated weekly in that it highlights one major headline per day for the week. All the news shown are linked to what is happening in Africa and this clearly shows what the platform is focused on and thus indicating to the reader what to expect within the platform. The last section shows links to the different **groups** available in

the platform that potential members can join once they become members. Information about the groups shows a picture of the group, the title and how many members are part of this group. Only five groups are displayed at one time and some of the groups that are currently showing are “African women in the UK”, AWE awards and Mixed culture group. Based on the information provided on the homepage, it can be assumed that the target group of this platform fits into Arjun Appadurai’s Ethnoscape which he describes as the, “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations” (2000:325). Appadurai’s definition includes all kinds of movement; however, the title of the platform indicates that the target group is immigrants. This is further cemented through the advertising companies that are on the homepage in that all the companies present clearly show that this platform is linked to migrants who might be sending remittances back to their home countries and more specifically African women involved in travel. Another important feature to point out is the location of residence (Europe) and the location of connection/interest (Africa). The location of Europe is not as clearly shown aside from the title, however, the location of Africa is very apparent in that the news section only updates news about Africa.

#### **4.1.2 Inside the African Women in Europe platform**

Once a visitor decides to sign up and become a member, they can now log on and click on the different tabs that could be seen on the homepage. Clicking on the different tabs is a very good way to get well acquainted with the platform and it is also a way to navigate inside the platform. The first tab is the **About us** title and the content on this page is similar to the **About AWE** video posted on the homepage, only this is in print. Here is the information as stated on the **About Us** page:

**Thank you for showing your interest in joining AWE Website**

**A.W.E** is a private website platform created to **connect** African women living, working or in business in **Europe** and in **Africa**. The website is managed by its



own members. Our mission is to reflect a **positive image** of an African woman by creating a relaxed atmosphere where African women can support, encourage and empower each other. The website platform assist members to exchange ideas and share experiences through discussion board, private/public messages, photos, videos and blogs Members can join various groups according to individual preferences and make new friends. Every year members meet in one of the cities in Europe. During the social meeting members get to know each other in organised conferences with different themes.

### **Objectives and Aims.**

To **empower** African women.

To support upcoming and existing **entrepreneurs**.

To **positively** reflect the image of an African women.

To offer an **informative** and easy to manage **networking** platform.

To connect and form sustainable **partnership** among members .

To offer **training, conferences** and **workshop** online and off-line

(AWE platform homepage)

The information as shown above includes what the platform is about and describes the platform's Objectives and Aims. At the bottom is the contact information of the platform and an online report written for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year anniversary of the AWE platform. The contact information provided includes the email address, telephone number and Skype id. The 3<sup>rd</sup> year anniversary report is a 19 page online informative report that shares detailed information about the platform as a whole. It also provides a number of profiles of some key members of the platform who have participated in previous award ceremonies. The next important tab is the **My page section**. This is a personal page which all members of the platform are expected to complete and as this is a short profile, other members are able to visit the personal page and can get to know about the different members on the platform. On this page, some information about the member is made available. There is a profile picture, name (not always full name),

current location/country of residence and sometimes the age of the member. The age is not always available as this is just an optional requirement and left to the members' discretion. Below this information is the members' information on how the member has participated in the platform. It lists blog posts, discussions, groups, events, photos, photo albums and videos. Depending on how the member has participated, it will show a number. For instance, if a member has participated in a forum discussion, it will show that under discussion, one or two and this is a good indication for the administration to note which members are participating and which are not. This is very useful for the administration as they sometimes delete non-participating members and they are able to use this information as a way to inform their decision.

**My friend** section is situated below the profile information and this shows the number of friends this particular member has and shows some members pictures to make it easy for the member to click on some of their friends for quick access to their profiles. There is also a group section showing all the groups in which this member is a part of. This section only shows a few groups depending on how many groups a member is a part of so just because only five groups are shown does not mean those are the only groups this member is a part of. On the main part of the page, there is the member's latest activity like posting on another members' wall, blogs posts or new friendships. Following this section is a brief profile with headings such as *relationship status, about me, how did you find out about this site and have you read the terms and service of the website*. The members can write any information they want with regards to this section, it can be brief or detailed, it all depends on the member. There is also a section to post photos and these are some of the photos that might be visible in the main homepage photo section and this all depends on when the photos were posted. Old photos are less likely to be shown as the main photo section only shows a certain number of photos. The last aspect made available on the members' page is a comments wall and this part is where other members can drop short messages to each other if the information they want to share is not private as this is visible to all members who visit the member's page. The right hand side of **My page** is made up of all the links of the main home page but also has a part with the members' profile name, inbox that shows all private messages from other members, friends which shows all those who have added that

particular member as friends but have yet to be confirmed and lastly, group invitation that have been sent to the member and the member can confirm or reject the group membership.

The **Members** tab takes the new member to a page where a list of the members, name, their pictures and location are shown. It is also on this page that the number of current members is also displayed and this number is always changing as new members are joining or old members deleting their accounts. One can also search for the members by entering the name in the search section but it is easier to look through all the members by clicking on the number at the bottom. Page 1 lists the latest members to join and page 30 is the last number with the members who joined first. In the section, we also find a code of conduct for the members and how to behave in the platform. There is also a chat room available in this section which shows members that are online at that particular moment and available to chat. The next tab is where all the **Groups** can be found. There are 45 groups in the platform and the groups are created by the members. Those who create the groups can invite certain members but the rest of the members have the right to join groups they like or find groups of shared interest.

Some of the groups that have been created are country or regional groups such as African women in Germany or East African women in Europe. There are also interest specific groups such as: Save a life group, African women in Politics or Stop violence against women. In the group section, the members are also able to post different food recipes that they would like to share with other members. The recipes range from all kinds of food so it is not necessarily African or European but it is more about interesting recipes that the members would like to share with others. The next tab is the **Discussions** section and this is where the discussion forums can be found and this is where the members can start a topic that they would like to discuss with the other members and also respond to new or old topics that have been started by others. Currently, there are 175 discussions and the discussion topics range from issues such as “Black hair care in Europe”, “What is Ebola? Get informed and share” to “Woman to Woman”. The topics appear on the screen based on the most recently posted one but if a member is searching for a particular topic, they can also search using the search

button or click to arrange the topics based on the latest activity(meaning responses), the most popular or the newest discussion (most recent discussion). A member can also click to be informed via email if there any new discussion posts so as to ensure that one does not miss any important information. The discussion forums make up the bulk of the analysis of this dissertation.

### **4.1.3 Other tabs on the homepage**

The rest of the tabs that will be described here are not that relevant for this particular study and as such, the content will be brief. The **Events** tabs details all the upcoming events like a group get together or the AWE upcoming events like the annual events that they have in a city in Europe. In this section, one can also click on the event partners and sponsors and will be redirected to the platform's blog page where sponsors of past and current events are posted. This page also contains information about how to contact the platform when interested in partnering or sponsoring the events. In the **Courses** section, the information that is available is on online courses offered by AWE platform and most of the courses offered seem to be focused on business. The one that is currently available is for day training on home based entrepreneurship. Consequently, this section also has links to Back to business group and Start up business group which are available on the platform already. This platform also offers **advertising** space for different business and in this section; they give detailed information on the pricing for those interested in advertising on the website. They also offer business to send promotional emails to their emails and explain the rates for that and because the platform also has a blog radio talk show, they also offer to business to advertise there.

The **Contact** tab takes the member to an email me form online where they can email as part of contacting the African Women in Europe Organisation. This section also discusses how members can get their websites or information advertised to other members on the website and to do so, it is advised that the members get a premium membership where they get specific benefits in relation to their company or business that they would like to promote. This is specifically targeted at members who have

business and would like their business to be promoted on the website and at events. **AWE award 2013** tabs takes the member to a different website which is a blog that belongs to the platform and this is where information on the last AWE event and the different awards that were handed out. The last event was held in the UK in 2013 and as such, pictures from the event with award winners and of the event in general are posted for those who missed out on the event or who have just joined the platform and would like to see what the platform and its members have been up to.

**AWE Live radio** show is an event organised by the AWE team where they discuss different pertinent issues that are deemed important for their audience. They invite a guest to come and speak about the specific theme and the last show held was in 2013 where they discuss overcoming child abuse with a member of the platform who is an author about this specific issue. Other discussions on the radio show that have been discussed in the past ranged from topics such as “challenges and advantages of studying in Europe” to interviewing Soul Artist “Azania”. This is a live show and it goes on for an hour. The second last tab is the **Donate/Sponsor/Advertise** section and below is the information provided on the page:

Dear AWE Members

AWE Website is a free website for African women and their fans. The website is managed by its own members. Donating, sponsoring or advertising on this website helps us to manage the website and it's activates. We are grateful to all our sponsors in the past event and are always looking for supporter to support what we do. We are glad to hear from you.

The last tab is the **Press section** and here all the press releases that have been done by the AWE platform or written about the platform are displayed. The press releases range from being on TV as part of advertising their UK event to articles written about them as part of the Diaspora. This description of the platform already points out that this platform can be viewed as a transnational space on the basis of two preconditions. As explained by Portes et al, “identification of these necessary conditions does not depend so much on new empirical evidence as on the logical contrasts with earlier periods of immigration, when the same activities were not in evidence” (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 2000: 224). This can be clearly applied in the context of this

study because the site of analysis is an online space used by immigrants and these kinds of spaces would not have been possible without the advancements that have been made in technology today. It is for this reason that a precondition that is indicative of this platform's transnationality is on the basis of it being online. As asserted by Portes et al "the space-compressing power of modern electronics allows person who have command of these resources to engage in transnational activities without the need for face-to face contact. Hence, the barrier of distance gradually diminishes as communities become able to substitute traditional personal contact with new electronic means of communication" (Ibid., 224). Although this argument is more focused on an individual being able to be to in contact with those in their home country through technology, this is also applicable to this platform in that it enables members to connect across borders.

In reading the **About Us** page and looking at the platform's aims and objectives, it is evident that this is a platform is to connect women in Europe and in Africa. All these members are living in different parts of Europe and might have never met had it not been for the development of virtual communities. Moreover, this is not only a space where members are able to interact with each other through the discussion forums but also a space where they can create or find smaller communities of shared interest through the groups created. The groups also encourage the members to meet offline, start projects together or advice each other on various issues. What we also see through the Live Radio show and the AWE award events is that whatever happens on this space does not remain there but also goes offline and reaches a wider audience. There are suggestions that the members are engaged in transnational activities and this is also closely linked to Portes et al's argumentation that "the ready availability of air transport, long-distance telephone, facsimile communication, and electronic mail provides the technological basis for the emergence of transnationalism on a mass scale" (Ibid., 224). In presenting the description of the AWE platform, an interesting aspect that is highlighted is the importance of the internet and the crucial role it plays in enabling the development of transnational spaces such as this platform.

## 4.2 African Women in Europe platform in context

As illustrated in the introduction chapter, my own experience as a self-identified African female migrant in Europe (at the time of conducting this study) forms an important part in establishing the experiences of African female migrants in Europe. By using my experience as the starting point, I want to highlight that this is a subjective experience amongst many other experiences that exist within this group. As stated before, my encounter with Europe a number of years ago transformed my own thoughts about Africa and brought to the fore an identification with being African that had not existed before. In high school, I took history as a main subject and in this class; we covered African history with a strong focus on the period of the independence struggle which featured presidents such as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Felix Houphouet Boigny (Ivory Coast) and Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia). By this time in South Africa, apartheid had ended and the curriculum was just beginning to include a more African centred curriculum. For this reason, my knowledge of the African continent was based on what I had learnt in that particular history class, the public discourses (which placed South Africa outside of these discourses) that existed of Africa and my own experiences as a black person in apartheid South Africa which is a part of the continent. And since South Africa itself is diverse and very much divided among racial, ethnic or geographical lines, it was hard for me to identify as a South African and hence even more difficult, with being African.

The public discourses that existed of the African continent were that of a continent ravaged with drought and wars, and because these discourses were circulating within South Africa, the Africa being discussed was that of a place far away that did not include my own experiences. Interestingly, these discourses were circulating during a time when discontent and impending civil war was looming in South Africa. The “Western” view and depiction of Africa has always been negative and have tended to create the impression of Africa as being incompetent and this can be easily attributed to the colonial discourse that existed about the African people (Asiegbu, 2009:2). Martin Asiegbu describes the colonial image that has existed of Africans by Europeans to be that of inferiority, irrational and barbarian and accordingly, “until Africa grows

up, becomes developed and joins the industrialized world, the colonial representation of her will remain" (Ibid.,4). This argumentation can easily be evidenced by discourses that prevail of Africa where Western writers still describe the continent as diseased, weak and sickly by nature. As stated here by Matthews and Solomon in their analysis of such writers in Western media, "Africa has not simply had the misfortune of falling ill, but is characterised by an inclination to easily become diseased; it has some kind of weakness which makes it prone to various debilitating conditions" (Matthews and Solomon, 2003: 6). And this was the Africa that I knew of before coming to Europe but this idea of Africa became more pronounced when I was positioned in it. To be clear, this was not the view that was held by everyone but some of the questions and comments I received in relation to Africa always seemed to give me the impression that all Africans were placed in one category regardless of their location in the world and thus we all fell into the diseased, backward and irrational category of Africa. Interestingly, if that positioning had been solely based on my racial identity and not conflated with the territory of Africa, as a South African, the position would have seemed familiar but in this context, I was identified as black and once I opened my mouth and spoke, I was differentiated from the black Suriname population that resides in the Netherlands and the African Americans that have also migrated to Europe.

Once I was identified as African, everything was clear and all comments related to the continent suggested a knowing about my life back in Africa and my reasons for being in the Netherlands that were not always true. It was interesting to always note that people were never really interested in Africa aside from trying to get confirmations of what they already knew to be true. Thinking about it now, it reminds me of Asiegbu's assertion that the colonial discourse was that, "nothing African was good enough, and nothing good could be African. Without a history, culture and civilization, how human would the African be?" (2009: 5). This lack of interest in the human experience of Africans has had a great impact on the way in which Africans view themselves. As Asiegbu argues here, "the most arresting impact of Africa's negative history is...its influence on the African psyche, the fact that the African was forced to perceive himself in the light of that negative history and, above all, came to accept that image



as exquisitely his/hers" (Ibid.,5). Asiegbu's argumentation is a view that I can only attest to through my own experience as an African and in a way, I would not want to assume to be the same for everyone. However, I have my own personal experience as a black person in South Africa in which I can honestly say his argument of the negative impact of inferiority on the African psyche does ring true. It is a constant battle that occurs in moments when as a black person, I am told that, "you speak very well for a Black person" or "you are not like other Africans I know". The battle emerges when you start to wonder if this is a compliment and whether you should be happy that they see you as different from other black or African people. And it is here that I am inclined to agree with Asiegbu when he argues that, "the humanity of the African (is) was, thus, heavily contested. All through life, the African had it as his/ (her) self-imposed task, to prove this humanity of his/(hers)" (Ibid.,5, My additions).

This is because in this moment when I hear that comment, for a moment there I think I have proven my humanity and then in an instant, a realisation dawns on me that this very comment has just potentially insulted all other black or African people. This task of proving our humanity differs in every person and for some Africans; it becomes a competition to outdo the other on who is the most European (Ibid., 5). This idea is further clarified by Asiegbu when quoting Owomoyela in that, "Africans have not been the only people overrun by rampaging Europeans but Africans are unique in their belief that their future lies in becoming, in thought, speech, and habit, like their erstwhile colonizers" (Asiegbu quoting Owomoyela 1987:37). Although much of this argumentation is clearly linked to the colonial times, we can still find remnants of such discourses when we look at the boat migrants who are willing to risk their lives to reach Europe. This is not to argue that African migrants want to become European but these ideas of Europe as "paradise on earth" and "as an easy environment to live" stem from circulating discourses of Europe as being superior and the place where one can find success. These notions are not only fed by what is shown on television and information on the internet but also by those African migrants living in Europe who visit their home countries and only disclose one side of their experience in Europe. This has led to many migrants finding different ways to migrate to Europe, however, one that is popularly recorded in the public discourse is that of the boat migrants in

which an impression is created that, “millions of sub-Saharan Africans are commonly believed to be waiting in North Africa to cross to Europe, which fuels the fear of an invasion”. Moreover, “the migrants themselves are commonly depicted as “desperate” and (supposedly passive) victims of “merciless”, “ruthless” and “unscrupulous” traffickers and criminal-run smuggling gangs” (De Haas, 2008: 2 and 3). Due to the popularity of these discourses in the media, there is a picture that seems to be painted of African migrants in Europe which prefers the homogeneity of the group at the expense of accounting for the differences. It is important to clarify though that the Netherlands was slightly different because a differentiation was made between North Africans (Moroccans) and the rest of Africa. This differentiation revealed that there is awareness that not all of Africa was the same way. Moreover, if these discourses were to also take into account that there are different migrations trajectories that occurred at different times in history, more differences would emerge within the group.

As explained by Paul Zeleza, during the different phases of African history, there has been evidence of the different ways in which people from the continent have migrated to the different host countries. In studies of the African diaspora, Zeleza differentiates between three phases of diasporas that shows different ways in which Africans migrated to the different countries (2005). I have chosen not to define the group using diasporic terms; however, I do find that using examples of the diaspora does help illuminate the experiences under study. In the diasporas of colonization, he includes students who went to study abroad and then decided to stay in the host country, seamen who became settlers and others who were able to migrate and could become citizens. The second group is defined as the diasporas of decolonization, and within this, he identifies those who migrated to include “the so-called ‘indigenous’ Africans, European and Asian settlers, who relocated overseas during the struggles for independence and immediately after” (Ibid., 12). The last group is described as the diasporas of the structural adjustments programmes that were formed in 1980s and within this group are, “migrations engendered by economic, political, and social crises and the destabilizations of SAPs. They include professional elites, traders, refugees, and students” (Ibid., 12). These different migration trajectories show that there are

different groups that have now settled in Europe that have a different migration trajectory to those who have newly arrived or those arriving by boats. Moreover, interesting in this diasporic group is the recognition of African European and Asian settlers who left during decolonization and have now settled in the different host countries. Because they display characteristics that can be explained as being Asian (read: indigenous Asian migrants) or European (read: similar to the locals), the way in which they are known or spoken is rather different to my positioning even if they position themselves within the African category. This suggests that in the context of African migrants in Europe, there is a discourse that accounts for their difference, however, only in so much as it explains how the migrants are 'racially different' to the locals and only serves the purpose of creating outsiders. And this can be understood in this explanation by Audre Lorde when she argues that, "much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior" (Lorde, 1980:1).

Taking what Lorde is saying and applying it within the context of African migrants in Europe, regardless of the different stories that migrants might have to tell about their own experiences, the local society reinforces their specific knowing of the migrant groups as different from the norms in society and refuses to recognize the differences that exist within this particular group. In maintaining the African migrant group within these simplistic binary positions and therefore ignoring the differences that exist within the group, it overlooks a number of important issues. Some of these issues overlooked are the different experiences for the migrants in the host countries which might be the result of the different migrant trajectories but also the different positions taken up by the African migrants themselves who have different perceptions of each other. And these different perceptions are justifiable in that along with those who migrated in the past (diasporas of colonization, decolonization and structural adjustments), there are those who could be identified as newly arrived migrants (contemporary) or temporary ones such as myself. African migrants have been

participating in the wave of migration that has been rapid under conditions of globalization (Castles, 2002: 1183). Zeleza finds it important to distinguish between the different diasporic formations in that he argues that the historic diasporas “are those whose resettlement occurred in the past, while the new diasporas are those formed from the waves of more recent migrants. The past is of course a moving location” (Zeleza, 2005: 14). And even within this new group, there is diversity in the social and cultural characteristics of those who are migrating (Castles, 2002: 1183). Zeleza illustrates this well when he says:

Like the historic diasporas, the contemporary diasporas are differentiated and their internal and external relations are mediated by the inscriptions of gender, generation, class, political ideology, and religion. But unlike the former, the latter have to negotiate relations with the historic diasporas themselves and also not just with ‘Africa’ but with their particular countries of origin and the countries of transmigration. The revolution in telecommunications and travel, which has compressed the spatial and temporal distances between home and abroad, offers the contemporary diasporas, unlike the historic diasporas from the earlier dispersals, unprecedented opportunities to be transnational and transcultural, to be people of multiple worlds and localities. They are able to retain ties to Africa in ways that were not possible to earlier generations of the African diasporas (2005:14-15).

Interesting here is the complex nature of the experiences of contemporary migrants and this is the group which this study focuses on as highlighted in the description of the AWE platform. The advancement in telecommunications and travel has greatly influenced the way in which migrants today are able to forge relations in more than one locality. This has been highlighted by Schiller, Blanc and Basch in their examples of Filipino and Caribbean transnationalism, in that as the migrants settled in their new countries, they also developed “multiple social, economic, social and political ties that extended across borders” (1995: 54). Unlike migrants in the past, migrants today are afforded the opportunity to interact with both the countries of settlement and the countries of origin and thus creating a link between the two localities (Ibid., 48). In this

particular study, it can be assumed that the members of the platform see themselves connected to both Africa and Europe, and thus the question is not on their transnationality as such, but a closer look at what transnationality does to their everyday experiences. What I mean here is what experiences are encountered in their transnationality and how does this influence the positions they take up.

To articulate this precisely, Zeleza has posed some questions in relation to African diasporas in which he asks: “how do the different African diasporas remember, imagine, and engage Africa, and which Africa – in temporal and spatial terms? Second, how does Africa, or rather the different Africas – in their temporal and spatial framings – remember, imagine, and engage their diasporas?” (2005: 16). The focus here is on Africa but in this study, the idea is to interrogate both sides and as such, how different Europes are imagined and engaged with by the members in the platform. Moreover, how this particular group experiences and articulates the different Europes. Another important issue that was also mentioned by the author is the differentiation within migrant groups and these differentiations are inscribed by factors such as gender, religion, class etc. For this study, the focus will be on the gender dynamic and this is mainly because this is something that is made important by the AWE platform itself in that it focuses on women. This means that along with their transnational experiences, the AWE platform wants to make a point of highlighting African migrant women’s experiences as being important or needing an exclusive space to be discussed. This could be attributed to the high numbers of women who are migrating now and thus contemporary migration is marked by the feminization of migration. As the 2008 study by the Global migration group (GMG) revealed, “International migrants are a heterogeneous group. From highly skilled professionals to the young men and women who are smuggled across borders to work in sweat shops, they include people who have been in the country for decades and those who arrived only yesterday” (GMG, 2008). Although it is now known that migrants are a heterogeneous group, African migrants in Europe tend to be seen as a homogenized group and thus discourses that circulate around this group will be applied to everyone regardless of the differences that exist. As explained here by De Haas, “although the media focus on “boat migrants”, most sub-Saharan and, in particular, North African

migrants use other, less risky, methods to enter Europe - tourist visas, false documents, hiding in (containers or vehicles on) vessels, scaling or swimming around the fences surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. In fact, the majority of irregular African migrants enter Europe legally and subsequently overstay their visas" (2008, 5). And when studies are conducted about the different migrant trajectories of African to Europe, there is a tendency to privilege the male migrant experience which then ends up representing all migrants.

This is evident in a study conducted by Joris Schapendonk in 2012 titled *Turbulent Trajectories: African Migrants on Their Way to the European Union* which is only made up of male respondents and yet the article is about "African migrants". This privileging of male voices makes other voices such the female ones invisible. This does not mean that there are no studies that focus on African migrant women in Europe, but even in those studies, there is still that tendency to only highlight African women as victims by limiting their experiences to human trafficking (Prostitution) and Female genital mutilation (FGM) (Thierfelder, Tanner, Kessler Bodiang, 2005). In choosing to view African women in Europe within such a limited perspective, a whole group of women with a range of differing experiences are categorised into a particular box. Both human trafficking and FGM reflect a lack of agency in that in both instances, these women are powerless and victimized. This is not to argue that such issues are not important or relevant, however, by mainly focusing on African migrant women in Europe from this perspective generalises all African migrant women. It further reinforces the notion that all African women regardless of location are victims and powerless. This insistence in framing African migrant women as victims makes one agree with what Miguda argues when she asserts that, "African women have not escaped the generalities and larger frameworks of knowledge production around which Africans are assembled as the "Other"" (Miguda, 2002). With this in mind, in the same way that current discourses of Africans have not changed from the colonial discourses, it can be suggested that the same idea can be applied to the idea of painting African migrant women as victims. From this, it can be argued that the stereotypes of African women in Africa follow African migrant women to their new host countries. However, going back to the argument asserted earlier by Asiegbu, it is not just the public discourses

that bring and maintain certain stereotypes of African migrant women. It is important to also take into account how African history has affected the African psyche as this could potentially mean that African migrant women in Europe might still carry these discourses themselves and perpetuate them at different times and moments. This awareness is important as it moves the focus away from only blaming the local context but to interrogate both aspects that influence the experiences of African migrant women in Europe. As noted earlier, some of the experiences and activities inside the platform indicate that this is an online platform that enables the members to engage in transnational activities. Delving further into the kinds of transnational activities that are developing within this platform could prove to be very interesting, however, when one examines the complex context that forms part of these members' experiences, it becomes more important to focus more on what their involvement in transnational activities reveals and in other words, what does the transnational do to the members' lives as this brings us closer to seeing other facets that make up the concept of transnationality.

## Chapter 5: Multiplicity of Positions

This chapter will focus on how the platform positions itself to the wider public and what this informs us of what the platform is attempting to do in its positioning. As noted in the introductory chapter, the platform is geared towards bringing a group of people together to forge solidarity by interacting with each other on the platform. One of the premises of this study is that solidarity is forged at different moments and on different levels and as such, it is a complex and ambiguous process that requires a sensitivity to the various factors that the platform and its members encounter and engage with as they partake in this process. It is for this reason that it is important to examine the different positions taken up by the platform as a way to uncover how categories are postulated in the process of forging solidarity without having to rely on the fixed nature of these categories. The analysis in this chapter is structured in two sections. Firstly, I examine how the platform positions itself through its own title. As the title uses social categories that tend to be linked with certain assumptions of stable, fixed identities, it is important that this study does not fall into the trap of linking these social categories with specific collective identities that seemingly represent what Uma Narayan calls the 'package picture of cultures'. This view of the 'packaged picture of cultures' assumes that cultures or identities are neatly wrapped packages, sealed off by sharply defined edges that help to maintain the contents within the package to be distinctly differentiated from other packages (Narayan, 2004:2). And thus she argues that we have to move away from this approach because "these packages are more badly wrapped and their contents more jumbled than is often assumed and that there is a variety of political agendas that determine who and what are assigned places inside and outside a particular cultural package" (Ibid.,2).

By taking an approach that is open to the changing nature of these categories, I delve into the second part of this chapter where I will explore how the platform takes up multiple positions in order to show that the members engage and interact with various factors in order to act and redefine themselves and this opens up different ways of collaborating and forging solidarity with each other. For the analysis, data is taken from the main website page visible to all and therefore includes namely, the title of



the platform, the slogan and the introductory message by the founder in a video on the main website page. Exploring the main website page and its positioning will be insightful in gaining a better understanding as to why and how the members position themselves inside the platform.

## 5.1 'Women'

The title of the group, African Women in Europe, appears to be an integral part of how the platform positions itself to the public. On the surface, it can be assumed that the title positions the reader into viewing this platform as centred on the category of 'woman' and therefore all those who are part of this platform are expected to identify as part of the collective social identity of gender. This assumption does have merit in that central to this group's name is the idea that members should be women. This is further cemented with this message from the founder when she says:

*You are encouraged to sign in if you are a woman". (Founder's message on video posted on AWE website)*

With this information, it can easily be assumed that this platform is organizing around the collective social identity of gender which if following Robin Morgan (1970)'s proposed idea of a global sisterhood, women's unity hinges upon the shared condition experienced by all those who are born female and thereby implicating all men, regardless of race, class, nationality to be part of a universal patriarchy that oppresses all women equally (252). It would then follow that through the platform's positioning, the coming together of the members in the platform is in opposition to men and it is based on their shared victimage as women in their subordination to men. The idea behind collective social identities is their all-encompassing, unifying and stabilizing nature in which all those who identify with that specific identity are homogenized and then positioned as a group. This is precisely what Trinh T Min-ha (2004) when writing about Postcolonial women in her work "Not You, Like You: Postcolonial women and the interlocking questions of identity and difference", argues against in that if, "identity as understood in the context of a certain ideology of dominance has long been a notion that relies on the concept of an essential, authentic core that remains hidden to one's consciousness and that requires the elimination of all that is

considered foreign or not true to the self, that is to say, non-I, other”, then “in such a concept the other is almost unavoidably either opposed to the self or submitted to the self's dominance” (415).

Thinking of identity within such an ideology of dominance relies on the notion that both women and men are homogenous groups and thus, the differences articulated by these two groups are accounted for by gender alone which was an assertion made by early feminist theorists (Yoder and Anaikudo, 1997:324). Subsequent feminist theorists and researchers have challenged such notions by arguing for a more complex approach to understanding differences among women that take into account race, ethnicity, class and so on which does not only shatter the homogeneity of women as a category but also complicates the relationship between women themselves (Ibid, 324). When we start taking into account these differing experiences between women, it is evident that there are differences between the members of the platform themselves. This is not to assert that differences based on ethnicity, race or nationality makes them distinct from each other. Rather, the argument followed here is taken from Arendt's thoughts on human distinction and action. Arendt begins by making a differentiation between human distinctness and otherness. She asserts that, “otherness in its most abstract form is found only in the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas all organic life already shows variation and distinctions, even between specimens of the same species. But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself” (Arendt, 1958: 176). The significance of this argument for the platform is revealed in the assertion that only man can express the distinction and distinguish himself, however, to achieve this requires the presence of other people. When we apply this thinking to the platform, one can argue that the members do not stand distinctly from each other based on race, ethnicity or nationality but that they express their distinction of race, ethnicity or nationality through action and speech by being in each other's presence. This is even clearly expressed when she argues that, “through them (action and speech), men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other” (Ibid., 176).

Therefore instead of viewing the use of 'women' in the title as an assertion that these members find their togetherness in their shared experience as a homogenous group of women or in their opposition to men, rather it is through their coming together as women that their distinctness becomes more pronounced. And because this distinction relies on action which is characterised by its boundlessness and unpredictability in outcome (Ibid.,191), it can be argued that the platform is asserting its relation and disconnect to both women and men simultaneously. This moves us away from assuming that there is a seamless category of woman that assumes a common subjugated experience for all and more towards the idea of gender as a performative act (Butler, 1988: 521) which is performed in reaction to occurrences in a specific time and space. Carrying on with Butler's argument, it is important to mention that,

Gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. The complex components that go into an act must be distinguished in order to understand the kind of acting in concert and acting in accord which acting one's gender invariably is. (Butler, 1988: 526)

My interpretation here is that to sustain certain acts of gender, it is necessary for the individual actors participating in the performance to actualize and reproduce these acts. Based on the first sentence alone, one would see the argument as only considering gender as part of a stable script that is only performed in one location and thus the performative acts never have to be adjusted. This would be problematic for this particular argument in that the performative acts of the members in the platform would be limited to a script that has not changed but in bringing the whole name of the platform into focus, it is clear that this assertion would be challenged. Upon closer reading though, Butler brings up the importance of distinguishing between the complexities that go into an act as a guide to understanding the kind of "acting in concert" and "acting in accord" which is more appropriate to explaining how the category of 'woman' is being used by this platform.

There is a need to unpack how gender is performed in order to make visible the different ways in which the gendered act is being performed. Therefore we can argue that the complex components mentioned by Butler can be seen as the other components that make up the title of the platform which is being African and in Europe. These other components not only affirm that gender is a performative act in this platform but also bring up the notion of positionality. By bringing up African and Europe as part of its performance of a gendered act, one can argue that the platform positions itself to the wider public as part of reproducing the platform's acting in accord. And more importantly, it can be suggested that the platform, through this positionality, frames those who become members to reproduce their acting in concert. This argumentation follows my earlier argument that in seeing gender from an essentialist perspective, women are pitted against men and in that process, certain dimensions that position different subjects within this collective social identity are silenced. Instead of seeing gender as a collective social identity that is stable and fixed, it becomes imperative to see it as position that is constituted by other dimensions which do not always locate and position subjects in the same way. In order to fully understand why there is this need to perform their gendered act in the platform, it is imperative to look at the other dimensions asserted by the title as this will give us more insight into what goes into the gendered act and the complexities that arise within such a positioning. The next section explores the position of being 'African Women' and how this informs their gendered act.

## **5.2 'African Women'**

As part of the process of answering the question posed above, it is important to begin by indicating that the African continent is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest continent in the world comprising of 54 (+2 disputed) countries and where one-quarter of the world's languages are only spoken there (Diamond, 1999). Jared Diamond goes on to further state that, "no other continent approaches this human diversity. Africa's diverse peoples resulted from its diverse geography and its long prehistory. Africa is the only continent to extend from the northern to the southern temperate zone, while also

encompassing some of the world's driest deserts, largest tropical rain forests, and highest equatorial mountains" (Diamond, 1999:377). This diversity that Diamond talks about tends to be forgotten or set aside in favour of Africa "the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other-worldly" (Mbembe and Nutall, 2004: 348). And this is because "Africa has been caught up in a web of difference and absolute otherness" (Ibid.,348) which can be traced back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when most of the continent was under European colonial rule. According to Richard Reid, "there existed a firm belief that Africa did not have a history. This perception of Africans lacking a history was further compounded by the fact that most African societies were non-literate and thus giving Europeans a good argument in which they contended that a people without writing, without documentation, could not possibly have a history (Reid, 2012:6). This "truth" persisted throughout much of the colonial period: "Africans were perceived as "primitive", "savages" and lacking in political, cultural and technological sophistication" (Ibid.,6). The "truth" mentioned here positions everyone under the same category and as such a differentiation is not made between men and women. All Africans are "primitive, savages lacking in history" and therefore the likelihood of assuming that being "African" in the title of the platform relates to this collective identity is rather high. This could be true to some extent in that there is no differentiation made between African men and women when it comes to the negative perceptions, and yet, there is a difference between how people are perceived and how they perceive themselves and this is important here. If members of the platform are showing their distinctness to each other in the platform, is it possible that there is a difference in the meaning behind the being "African" position asserted by the platform? Moreover, if being "African" shares the same meaning for all Africans, why is the platform and its members so adamant in asserting their gendered act?

The reasoning behind this strong assertion might be better understood through the illustration of African women novelists such as Grace Ogot, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Ba, Buchi Emecheta who in their attempt to represent their specific positionality in a male dominated literary world, found themselves having to negotiate the creation of their fictional characters (Nnaemeka, 1994: 142). According to Obioma Nnaemeka,

women in African oral tradition were not only seen as “performers and disseminators of beliefs, cultural ideals, and personal/collective history but also as composers who, sometimes, transformed and re-created an existing body of oral traditions in order to incorporate women centred perspectives” (Ibid.; 138). This notion of women as disseminators of beliefs, cultural ideals and personal/collective history becomes relevant in this context when we look at the earlier argument of seeing the being “women” in the title of platform as a performative act. For women in oral tradition to be disseminators, they needed to tap into their past, to have information of their personal/collective history in order to share and carry that information forward. This brings us back to Butler’s argument of a gendered act as a rehearsed script that needs actors to actualize and reproduce it again and again. However, Nnaemeka seems to challenge Butler’s argument by adding that the women in the role as composers were able to sometimes transform and re-create some of the stories from the past. This illustrates two aspects that are crucial to a performance. Performers rely on a script in order to perform their act but most often, the actors also have to add their own twist to the performance in order to make it their own and thus changing or transforming the script in some way. Carrying on with this argument, it then becomes evident that the position of being “African women” that is asserted by the platform might be an indication that their performative gendered act is influenced by a script from their past (which is African in the sense of where it occurred but distinct and subjective in terms of experience). However, this script is adaptable and can be transformed in order to either emphasize or conceal women’s experiences in the story being told. To affirm this argument, Diallo states that, “due to continent’s peaceful and friendly relation to time, African storytelling can always be adapted to the time and space to meet the present needs of the audience” (Diallo, 2004:15). This is because in storytelling, the story is not expected to remain static and as stated by Meghan Lehnerd:

Generation to generation, mouth to ear and down the line, the stories circulate. From pre-colonial Africa until today, oral tradition has been used by its residents to pass history through the generations...As the stories and histories pass from one mouth to another, each storyteller leaves a mark in the way in

which it is retold. The story becomes a part of the storyteller and the storyteller becomes the story (Lehnerd, a quote taken from the blog, Vera the storyteller). This quote captures the ever changing nature of the story perfectly and thus what is passed down and received by the next generations can never remain the same as the original story. Moreover, the mark left by the storyteller on the story encourages the idea that the story is expected to change depending on various factors. Applying this in the context of the platform and keeping in mind the argument that members of the platform are influenced by their African history, it can be argued that the stories within the platform being performed by the members are not static and as they are being retold, the members add something new to the story. The retelling of the stories is not without its own challenges and looking closely at the depiction of African women in literature throughout history can shed some light into some of the challenges and opportunities characterised by the position of being “African women”.

In an article written about the representation of African women in colonial literature, the author argues that, “one of the primary characteristics in the representation of the African woman is the construction of her inactive silence...it is crucial that her absence takes the form of voicelessness – voicelessness in a discourse in which sexuality and access to language together forms part of the discourse of access to power” (Busia, 1989-90:87). Looking at this argument by Busia, it is clear that although African men and women might have shared the ‘truth’ of having no history, the way in which African women were depicted in colonial literature shows that they were perceived differently by those writing the literature. This has not always been this way because as pointed out here by Nnaemeka, “in African oral tradition, women were very visible not only as performers but as producers of knowledge, especially in view of oral literature’s didactic relevance, moral (izing) imperative and pedagogical foundations” (Nnaemeka, 1994: 138). Due to their role as performers and producers, women had the power to reproduce and transform stories that they were retelling about women’s experiences to their audience.

The change occurred when the transition was made from oral to written tradition as this is where African women were left behind and by the time they entered the domain,

a uniquely male literary tradition was already in place. Essentially, this meant that for a long time, African women novelists published literary works that showed a close affinity with their male counterparts which has been/was to portray African women as one dimensional (Ibid, 140). This has resultant in African women writers taking up the position of liminality. Nnaemeka argues that African women writers “are not just marginal; they are liminal figures” (Ibid., 142). For the African women writers, this liminal position is a result of finding themselves in an ambiguous space of being neither here nor there where dynamics of “both/and” permeate and thus denying polarization (Ibid., 142). The liminal position for African women novelists is founded on their experiences as the “alienated colonized who has to contend with the sexual politics of their environment” (Ibid., 142). This is where the link between African women writers and the AWE platform can be made. Members of the AWE platform suffer from this issue in which, as Africans, they share some common experiences with African men in that they tap into an African past in order to reproduce their gendered acts. Furthermore, as Africans in Europe, they are viewed as part of a homogenous group in which the experiences of men are made visible within the African migrant discourse while African women’s experiences are rendered invisible. And thus in using African in the title as part of the positioning, the platform finds itself in a liminal position in which to perform their acting in accord (tapping into their historical African past) establishes a relationship to African men and thus finding themselves positioned inside the African migrant discourse. And yet in this position, they find that their experiences are made invisible and therefore the need to bring “women” in the title in order to perform their gendered act in concert, and this allows them to position themselves outside of this discourse. Their positioning reflects Victor Turner’s assertion that liminal entities, “are neither one thing or another; or may be both; or neither here nor there or even maybe nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography) and are at the very least “betwixt and between” all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classifications (Turner, 1964: 48). In this argument, the platform reflects a “betwixt and between” position because they do share experiences with African men but they also share experiences with each other as African women outside of African men. This liminal position hints at other aspects of liminality that are to come in this platform and looking at Europe in the title,



“African Women **in Europe**” makes this clearer and this is what will be dealt with in the next section.

### **5.3 Being ‘African Women in Europe’**

‘In Europe’ is the new environment in which the members of the platform and the platform locate themselves. To understand the position of the members as being in Europe, it is important to take a closer look at the history of African migration to Europe. The migration of African people to Europe can be traced as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century during colonial times. It became even more popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when former colonial powers attracted labour from former colonies (among others) (Van moppes, 2006:1). After the independence of many African states, many people migrated to Europe in search of a better life thus underlining the difference in wealth and income levels between the two continents (Ibid., 9). However, it is important to point out that this influx of migrants to Europe was also encouraged by many European countries (France, Britain, and Germany) as they were in need of labour to deal with post war reconstructions and thus focused their recruitment on former colonies (Hansen, 2003 Kushnick, 1993). Some of the host countries harboured the illusion that the migrants were temporary and would indeed go back to their own countries once the labour boom ended. However, it soon became clear that migrants were there to stay and as such, immigration became a politicized issue (Hansen, 2003: 29.)

When the European economies slowed down and labour was no longer needed, primary migration was ended. According to Hansen, “by the 1970s, nearly all the European countries had ended primary migration as a way to stop the influx of migrants but... the deed was done. Colonial migrants had entered in the main as citizens, and as such had the right to claim family reunification. For the others, governments attempted to limit family reunification, and even to encourage repatriation, but all such efforts failed...as a result, in admitting young men in the 1950s and 1960s, European states committed themselves to admitting wives, children and grandparents later” (Ibid.,29). It is during this period that the term “fortress

Europe” was introduced. According to George Mavrodi, fortress Europe “points to the restrictive and defensive characteristics of common EU policies in the last two decades, but it is not new in itself. Its origin dates back to World War II, and later to the negative, liberalist criticism against the Common Market project” (2010:1). There are two main issues that are introduced here that are critical to understanding this being “in Europe” position: the way in which “wives” are viewed and located within the narratives of migration and the politics of immigration which has led to the term Fortress Europe. Before dealing with these two issues, it is important to attempt to explain why ‘in Europe’ in the title is a location and not an adjective to describe the members of the platform. In other words, why does the platform use ‘in Europe’ in their title instead of calling themselves Afro-Europeans.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, Afro European is an adjective used to describe “of or relating to Africa and Europe (Merriam Webster). Moreover, on the website, Afropedia, Afro-Europeans (Black Europeans) are citizens, immigrants, mixed raced individuals of African descent. Significant communities are found in France, Britain and the Netherlands. The term ‘Afro-European’ gives the impression of describing someone who is both African and European in the same way that African Americans are in U.S race relations. It is evident that the members of the platform do not locate themselves within this category in that they describe themselves as Africans in Europe giving the impression of their migration process as a recent occurrence. Although migration is central to both these descriptions, I would argue that for Afro-Europeans, the migration process might be evident in how they look, how they were raised or even how they identify but it is not a process that they experienced. And this would differ for the members of the platform in that by asserting that they are Africans in Europe, a strong tie to Africa is highlighted and thus giving the impression of a recent migration process or even of transmigration (a going back and forth between the two continents). This does not suggest that those who identify as Afro-Europeans are excluded from joining the platform as many of the members in the platform are married to and have children with European men or have children that were born in Europe and therefore these children might be described as Afro-Europeans.

It is more so that Afro-Europeans can be part of this platform so long as they are interested in tapping into that African historical past that forms part of their Afro-European description. Important here is the shared interest in having, finding or accessing that African historical, cultural aspect and less about being African. Interesting in this whole discussion about Afro-Europeans and their access to African history is the idea of women as carriers of history and thus the exclusion of men in this role. If in the context of the platform, African women are carriers of African history and heritage, it can then be assumed that an Afro-European child born of an African father and a European mother is less likely to know about their African heritage because of the father's lack of interest/ability to pass down this information. This belief might explain the inclusion of European women within the platform when it comes to issues of motherhood and the exclusion of African men when it comes to this very same issue. It can be argued that there is an assumption that European women who are married to African men or are connected to Africa in some form are more likely to want to be part of this platform as they might be faced with similar issues as the other members of the platform. And yet, there is still this contention that even within this inclusion, European women are excluded and this goes back to the notion that although the African and European women might share the experiences of being female, their gendered experiences might differ within this context because of African women's experiences as immigrants in Europe.

Inderpal Grewal and Karen Caplan argue that "the homogenizing project of nationalism draws upon female bodies as the symbol of the nation to generate discourses of rape, motherhood, sexual purity, and heteronormativity (2000: No page numbers). More importantly, immigrants have to deal with processes of nationalisms whereby new patriarchal elites are able to use their power to produce the generic "we" of the nation. Due to the homogenizing project of the nation using female bodies, it can be argued that African women in Europe as immigrants are positioned outside while European women are positioned within the generic 'we'. Looking back historically as to how migrant women were brought into Europe through family reunification, then it should follow that if European women's bodies are used as the symbol of the nation, then migrant wives/mothers/women would also symbolize the

cultural 'other' albeit in an invisible way as their entrance into Europe was through their husbands. Furthermore, it is only in recent times that women's migration has become a new trend and it is now defined as the feminization of migration. This term argues that there has been an increase in the number of females who are migrating alone, although the numbers are still low in comparison to men (Van Moppes, 2006:1). This informs us that their situations and experiences as women are less likely to be included in the public discourse on African migrants. Taking stock of all of this and applying it to the context of African migrant women, it becomes evident why there is a need to be seen as African women in Europe and not just Africans or Women in Europe.

This reiterates the importance of positionality and how even though subjects are able to identify with each other on the basis of collective social identity, the way in which they are positioned is not always the same. This outside positioning of African women in Europe might be further indicated by the slogan, *Together we are STRONG*, which in what it does not say gives the impression of difficulty and hardship for the members of the platform and that by coming together, they can triumph over their challenges. The slogan, as it stands, supports this and can be viewed as a response to their experiences of exclusion in their current location. Interestingly though, the slogan also adds another dimension through the notion of togetherness and strength in that their coming together brings about a form of power. In their coming together, action and speech occur and therefore actualizing power which is what the slogan seems to hint at. Furthermore, we see that the coming together of the members of the platform does not only aid in establishing relations but also reiterates their performance of their gendered act in concert. Seeing the slogan within these two perspectives enables us to see the argument by Grewal and Kaplan on the importance of presenting the complexity of how women become women or other kinds of gendered subjects (2000). Women do not only become women through experiencing subordination but also through reacting or responding to the experience they are confronted with. Rich argues along the same line in *Notes towards a Politics of Location*, that in order to understand the situation of women, it is a necessity to ask the questions "where, when and under what conditions have women acted and been acted on, as women?" (Rich,

1984: 10). Here, Rich reiterates the importance of highlighting the complexity of women's situation by showing that one cannot only assume to know women's situation based on their gender because a number of factors/conditions play a role in how women define themselves as women. More importantly, she highlights a tendency in feminist research to only focus on spaces as one dimensional and for instance, that a particular space is only able to victimize women. Earlier, we discussed how being in Europe seems to be a challenging space for African women and this seems to be a plausible experience for them. However, by coming together in Europe, the AWE platform shows the potential appearance of power and thus forcing us to acknowledge the multidimensionality of their experience in Europe. Through this view, we are able to see examples of how and "where have women acted". Moreover, we are able to see that Europe does not only victimize the women but also becomes a space in which they are able to act.

Looking back at Nnaemeka's article on African women writers and how their liminal position manifests itself, she argues that liminality manifests itself as a "nervous condition" in which "African women writers' awareness of the powerful gaze of the reader/critic (usually male), this gaze circumscribes them and compels them to "negotiate" the creation of their fictional characters. As these women assume their marginal position in a masculinist literary culture, they deploy different strategies to (re)present the specificity of their position (Nnaemeka, 1994: 142). This is a crucial point for this section in that it reveals the potential of what being in Europe means for the AWE platform. Earlier observations have illustrated that for the members of the AWE platform, as African women in Europe, their positioning can be outside of the context of Europe because of their immigrant status. And as such in response to this positioning, they respond by being part of a platform where they assert their position as African women. This action highlights two things, i.e. the power that is actualized in their coming together in the platform but also that as subjects, they are both sufferers and doers which illustrate that being in Europe is not a one dimensional space for them. Moreover, by taking up the African position in order to tap into their African historical past, they insert themselves into the African migrant discourse and into a relationship with African men. However, in doing so, there is the potential to

render their experiences as women invisible. This puts them in a liminal position as it was suggested in the context of African women writers. The powerful gaze of being in Europe circumscribes them as subordinates and invisible and yet it also compels to them into action where they can negotiate and redefine themselves through their positioning in the AWE platform. So far, these three sections have shown the importance of all three positions in the title and how integral they are to each other in how they are used by the platform. Highlighting the interconnectedness of these positions is an attempt to move away from the notion that by claiming a gendered position means that other positions such as a geographical or a continental one which seem to be apparent here have to be made invisible. As evident here, all these positions work together to illustrate the space in which these members are acting from and thus how their solidarity is forged. However, it is also important to indicate the ways in which through the title's positioning, relationships and disconnections are created and established. Some of these relationships and links as well as the disconnections are evident in the first sections and therefore discussed, however, this next section will attempt to foreground this links, connections and disconnections in order to better understand how solidarity is forged within this platform.

#### **5.4 The complexity in multiple positioning**

In the last section while analysing the title of the platform, it emerged that there were multiple positions that interconnected in the way in which they are used by the platform. In its process of creating a space of human togetherness, the platform employs a multiplicity of interconnected positions through which relationships are established with others in the wider public. At the same time that these relationships and links are established, a disconnection with the same groups also occurs. As demonstrated earlier, in taking up a gender position, a relationship to both men and women was articulated. In examining the being "African women" position, a relationship to African women in Africa became evident whilst a difference is articulated towards African men as well as European women in Europe. Furthermore, while analysing the "in Europe" position, it also became clear that a relationship is established with African men in Europe, Afro Europeans and European women in

Europe but a distance occurs between the members and African women in Africa. All these dynamics—establishing relationships while at the same time creating disconnections—reveals two important points in this study. Firstly, in establishing relationships with the various groups, the platform reveals its own liminal position. At times, it looks like the liminal position held is the margin however, it can be argued that it is also an in-between space that enables the members to hold the inside as well as the outside positions.

The second part comes up in the disconnections that occur with the same groups at various moments and this is where the platform and its members show their acting. This disconnections are not only created by the platform on a whim but are at times, a reaction or a response to a particular action and therefore, it is as Arendt argues, “since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others” (Arendt, 1958: 190). And what is important here is to recognise that the actions occurring within the story are part of a bigger story that has its roots in the past and it will continue on after the platform. Bhabha brings the two parts together very well when he asserts, “these ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (1996, 2). The argument here is that the platform is very adamant in positioning itself in this in-between space or this liminal position because it enables the members the space to create something new or redefine themselves. This can be observed in this excerpt taken from the video by the Founder of the platform where she says:

*“Our mission is to create a relatively relaxed atmosphere where African women can support, encourage and financially empower each other... to **positively** reflect the image of an African woman.” (Founder’s message on video posted on AWE website)*

In stating that the mission of the AWE platform is to create a space for African women as well as to reflect a positive image of African woman, the platform establishes a strong relationship with African women in Africa. However, it is clear through the platform’s title that this space is created within a European context and thus it is

obvious to see that the platform straddles two locations at the same time. It can be argued that aspects such as support, encouragement and financial empowerment might be appealing to African women in Africa and thereby a point of shared interest with members of AWE, however, redefining the image of an African woman might not be an issue for African women in Africa because within their own continent, they are not defined as African women but just women. The issue of reflecting a positive image of an African woman is an issue that affects members of the AWE platform because of the location in which they are in. This is important here in that by articulating a difference to African women in Africa, it reveals the kind of acting that the platform and its members might be doing.

Accordingly, Grewal and Kaplan state that current scholarship show how gender, sexuality, religion and class are producing different kinds of women in relation to different patriarchies. This is strongly suggested in this assertion by the platform in that they need to reflect a positive image of an African woman as this implies that they are experiencing negative discourses that are clearly linked to being “African women in Europe”. In this moment, it becomes clear that a difference is being articulated by African women in Europe towards European women and African men in Europe. This is because even during the migration process, African women and men’s experiences are highly gendered and this is because of their glocalised structural positions (Ifekwunigwe, 2004: 298). She affirms this argument by giving an example taken from Westwood & Phizacklea that, “if one asks a recently arrived migrant woman today where the opportunities for work lie in Europe, she will tell you that apart from sex work or domestic work, the avenues for employment are closed to her” (Ibid.,298). Through the example given here, the lack of opportunities experienced by African migrant women might be shared by African migrant men. However, even within this shared experience, a difference exists and this might be better illustrated in the type of work available to migrant women. African migrant women, like other migrant women from Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America have often been linked to sex work or prostitution in Europe due to the increase in prostitution across borders occurring in the last twenty to thirty years (Ibid., 403). It is through this upsurge in African migrant women working as prostitutes that the negative image of African



women has emerged in Europe. This is not to say that African migrant men are not involved in sex work, however, media discourses have tended to associate migrant sex work with women instead of men. Moreover, because of the way prostitution tends to be publicly linked to the female body, a link is established between African women in Europe and European women. Again, the liminal position that African women in Europe take up comes up although they share certain experiences with African men in Europe due to migration, there is a disconnect that emerges because of the negative image that is only placed on African women. At the same time, they find themselves connecting to European women through the discourse of the female body and prostitution.

Secondly, it is evident that African migrant women are positioned differently to European women because of their immigrant status. The lack of opportunities in terms of resources sets them apart from European women in Europe and thus making it imperative to articulate a disconnection to European women. This could be partly linked to the homogenizing project of the “we” in nation building where misrepresentations and exclusions of the other are part of the issues that African women have to deal with. European women in Europe participate in these nation building projects thus colluding in the misrepresentation and exclusion of Africans (women) in Europe. This is not to say that European women in Europe are not affected by patriarchy or other discriminatory practices, which is what links them to African women in Europe in the first place. However, this linkage goes only as far as to show that African women and European women in Europe have varying experiences which are not shared because of how patriarchy positions them and therefore their issues cannot be addressed in the same way. This argument is further corroborated by Audre Lorde, while being interviewed by Adrienne Rich, where they discuss the different choices offered to white and black women in the US. For Lorde, “not only are some of the problems that face us dissimilar, but some of the entrapments and weapons used to neutralize us are not the same” (1981:731). As such, although African and European women in Europe are connected to each other through the linkage of patriarchy, the way in which patriarchy positions them is different thereby important for African women in Europe to articulate their difference. In this first part, I have

demonstrated how through these positioning, relationships and links are established while at the same time, disconnection are created. Through this, the liminal position or the in-between space taken up by the platform becomes more visible and hints at this positioning being influential in the kind of acting that occurs within the platform.

In this statement by the Founder, there is a hint as to the kind of acting or redefining that is occurring within the platform when the founder says:

*"We believe an African woman is what is inside you, not what is outside, not your colour". (Founder's message on video posted on AWE website)*

This statement can be seen as part of the positioning. As shown earlier in the analysis of the title, the liminal position taken up by the platform emerged which suggested the kind of acting and therefore redefining what might occur in the platform. Through this statement, it can be suggested that the founder is giving an indication of a redefinition that is taking place through action, however as seen here, she is unable to do so and thus goes on to describe what it is not. As suggested here by Arendt (1958), "in acting and speaking, men (women) show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (179). And this is what the founder is attempting to convey when she says, "an African woman is what is inside of you" as this is the uniqueness that is revealed by the 'who' in the act. However, she is unable to go on and starts to describe what one is not (outside appearance and colour) and this is because as Arendt argues that, "the moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him" (Ibid.,181). And so as the founder attempts to indicate the 'who' that's revealed through the acting and speaking that occurs within the platform, she is unable to do so primarily because as stated by Arendt, "this unpredictability of outcome is closely related to the revelatory character of action and speech, in which one discloses one's self without ever knowing himself or being able to calculate beforehand whom he reveals" (Ibid., 192).

This can be related back to an earlier argument on how the platform could be a space in which the members are able to perform their gendered act that takes its influences from their African historical past and experiences from their new environment. Like any performance, what the actor reveals is very clear to the audience and yet not necessarily evident to him/her and this is the same for the Founder in this statement in that although she has an idea of her actions, she is unable to fully reveal the outcome of these actions because they remain hidden to her. This is affirmed clearly by Arendt in her assertion that, “it is more likely that the “who,” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimōn* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters” (Ibid.,180). This section has shown how through the platform’s positioning as part of their coming together, an emergence of relationships and disconnections to other people is revealed that helps to understand the processes that are taking place in the platform. In moments where the platform’s position establishes a relationship, an outside/inside position emerges which hints at the acting that occurs within this platform. At the same time, through this liminal position, a disconnection to the same people emerges that highlights the need for the platform’s kind of acting. It also becomes evident that even though the kind of acting that is occurring within the platform is acknowledged by the actors, the ‘who’ that is revealed through this acting is not visible to them.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, close attention was given to how the AWE platform positions itself by analysing the main website page of the platform that is accessible to the wider public. Through this analysis, it became evident that this platform used multiple positions that were interconnected in the way in which it positioned itself in order to bring members together. In analysing the use of “women” in the title, it was apparent that idea of women in the platform, although central to the platform, did not have a stable, clear idea of what a woman is and more focused on the gendered act itself. This was made visible through how distinct the members were from each other and therefore making it evident that this platform is a space in which distinct human beings come

together to perform their gendered acts. In order to understand what the performance of their gendered act entailed, an analysis of the being “African women” in the title followed. This analysis revealed how oral tradition in African history strongly influences how the members perform their gendered act through the notion that stories do not stay the same and can/should be retold by adding something new.

Noteworthy in this section was the liminal position in which the platform pointed at through its positioning. Looking at the situation of African women writers, some similarities emerged that pointed to the liminality in the platform’s positioning. This liminality is further exacerbated by their new environment in “Europe” and an analysis of this new environment revealed as Africans in Europe, they share some common experiences with African men and yet because of this shared experiences, their experiences as African women are rendered invisible within the discourse. However, in Europe also becomes a place in which they are prompted into action. The platform’s strong positioning is a way to insert their experiences into the discourse in response to being rendered invisible and yet to do so also requires that they take stock of their experiences as Africans. This liminal position not only serves the purpose of affirming their own position as a platform but it establishes relationships and disconnections with other groups in the wider publics. In the liminal position, it becomes evident that the platform and its members take up both the inside and outside position. This means that they establish relationships with various groups while at the same time, creating distances to the said groups. In establishing relationships and links, their liminality becomes more pronounced and thus legitimizing the kind of acting that occurs within the platform. Their disconnections reveal what prompts them into the kind of acting. Further analysis showed, however, that even though as actors they are aware of their acting, they are unable to say “who” exactly they are revealing in their story. It is for this reason that this study focuses on understanding how solidarity is envisioned within the platform and not on whether there is solidarity in the platform. This aspect will become clearer in the next chapters.

## Chapter 6: The Condition of 'Here' and 'Home'

The previous chapter dealt solely with how the platform positioned itself to the wider public revealing how interconnected the different positions taken up were. The analysis also hinted at the interaction of being "African (women)" in "Europe" and how this impacts on the kind of acting and self-definition that occurs within the platform. This highlighted the relevance that migration has on the everyday experiences of these members and thus could be a very important factor in how solidarity is forged within this platform. Although much of the research recognizes that the migration experience, like any human experience, produces different outcomes (both positive and negative) which are determined by a combination of complex factors that can be seen in and through structures and actors (Aina and Baker, 1995: 11). Many migrants are able to find success in the migration process through the attainment of economic capital; however, research also shows that even those who find success may be subject to gender, ethnic and racial discrimination in the host country (Piper, 2005: 1). Yet, to only focus on the migrants' experiences in the host country would be remiss in that as some research has shown, even though migrants face "discrimination, loss of status and erosion of skills in destination areas", there is also the possibility of "upward mobility at home, as remittances are invested in small businesses, housing, and children's education" (Ibid., 2).

This is further informed by the view that immigrants can no longer be viewed as "persons who uproot themselves, leave behind home and country, and face the painful process of incorporation into a different society and culture" but more as transmigrants (Schiller, Blanc and Basch, 1995: 48). According to this description, "transmigrants are not sojourners because they settle and become incorporated in the economy and political institutions, localities and patterns of daily life of the country in which they reside. However, at the very same time, they are engaged elsewhere in that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated" (Ibid.,48). Through an understanding that migrants are involved in activities both in the host countries and in countries of origin highlights the significance of the

interconnectedness of the positions that are asserted by the platform. In this chapter, the focus will be on how the members position themselves within the platform and what is revealed through their positioning. In the analysis of the main website page, it became apparent that the interconnectedness of their positionings revealed that an in-between space, a liminal position, exists within the platform and therefore it is very important to examine this liminality as articulated by these members. Although gender related issues are expected to arise, the focus in this chapter will be more on the geographical spaces suggested by “Home” and “Here” and to explore the members’ experiences with both locations in order to uncover how the liminal position manifests inside the platform and what meanings can be derived from this to help further our understanding of how solidarity is forged within this platform. Therefore, the aim is to examine the moments in which these interactions occur and explore what these moments tell us about how solidarity is forged within this platform. The data analysed for this chapter is taken from five of the discussion postings in the forums and some excerpts taken from two interviews with the members.

## **6.1 ‘Here’**

For members of the AWE platform, experiences surrounding the position of being in Europe or ‘here’ are as much discussed as that of being African. Discussions in the platform on being in Europe are closely related to residing in a specific geographical space and to issues surrounding adjustment and adaptation in the host countries. In this section, both aspects will be dealt with as they seem pertinent to the members’ positioning. The geographical location of being in Europe is mainly described through a continental lens while at other times, through specific experiences of a specific country in Europe such as Germany or the United Kingdom. This description makes sense when taking into account the context in which these discussions take place, as most of the members of the platform reside in different parts of Europe. Many of the European countries are well represented in this platform and this is further indicated by the numerous country groups in the platform which the members can join and participate in. The idea of the country group is envisioned as a way to encourage members who live in the same country to connect more easily both online and offline.

Some of the discussions by members related to living in Europe are not only linked to the locality as being unfriendly or unwelcoming to foreigners as suggested by other migrant experiences. As illustrated here in this study on the situation of Asian migrants in the US, “plans to return were reinforced by the conditions emigrants found in the US. While Irish, Eastern and Southern European immigrants settling in the US in the nineteenth century were seen as racially different from the white US mainstream, the colour line drawn against Asian immigrants was more impenetrable and embedded in law, as well as rhetoric and social practice” (Glick-Schiller,1999:196). In the case of some of the members of the platform, their struggles in adapting are also related to what their experiences were before moving to Europe. As some members illustrate, difficulty in adjusting has been linked to the changes in their behaviours or lifestyle in comparison to what they had experienced back in their countries. In the discussion forum post on *how has your life changed since you moved to Europe*, this member shares how when she first moved to Germany, she had to adjust to being on time and her way of dealing with this was to wear a Watch all the time. She explains:

*For the first time in my life then in my mid 20's I had my watch on me 24/7 apart from bed time. Until today I cannot stay without a watch. I panic if I forget the watch or for some reason the battery is low and slow.*

***You know why?***

*1<sup>st</sup> I am in Germany, time keeping is important in fact it is VERY important.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> I hate to be late. I hate to give excuses why am late which is very obvious when you are black “NO HURRY IN AFRICA!” (Forum Discussion, 5 October 2010)*

For this member, being in Europe is closely linked to her understanding of how the local context constructs certain behaviours as being African and black. She expresses a form of anxiety when not wearing a Watch and thus not being able to be on time as this might make her stand out in German society. She brings in her view of Germany as a location where punctuality is very important which places her in the position of having this knowledge and viewing it as important thus seemingly having an inside position. At the same time, she asserts that she hates being late in Germany as this lack of punctuality will not be linked to her as an individual but as part of shared identity of being African and that immediately positions her outside. From this, it can be surmised that through her engagement with the local context, she becomes well

versed in certain norms and through assimilation (becoming invisible); she can be positioned inside the local context. However, not following the local norms can lead to being positioned outside on the basis of being African/ black (too visible). However, this outside positioning inserts her into an inside position of being African where her gender becomes irrelevant.

This is where the in between/liminal position she holds becomes evident and by sharing this experience in the platform, she is interested in hearing other members' subjective experience in relation to the topic. What is interesting about her liminal position is the structural inferiority that she is faced with. Noteworthy here, is that structural inferiority as discussed by Turner is not a form of powerlessness but "powers of the weak" (Turner, 1969:95). Noticeable here is that this liminal position is conflictual for her in that in order to be accepted in her locality, she has to reject what is deemed as part of her being as it defines her negatively. In her need to adjust, Germany becomes a space in which she negates the 'no hurry in Africa' aspect. In order to negate this aspect, she has to distance herself from certain parts that could be construed as African and therefore viewed negatively. Due to her race which is black and thus associated with the continent, there is no way to make that part of herself invisible. This will always place her in that outside position. However, through her residence in Europe and being placed in that inside position in which she is able to learn about the negative discourses and stereotypes that are attached to her race and the continent, a form of power emerges in that knowledge. This is how the structural inferiority as powers of the weak shows itself in that she is able to demonstrate her power and with this, the possibility to act becomes available. Interesting to note is how her actions are revealed in different ways. Firstly, by wearing a Watch all the time, she responds to the stereotypes and negative discourses surrounding Africans and time by going against them. This is a form of self-definition in that even though, she is not sure what she is revealing to the locals by being punctual as an African, she is setting something in motion which is what Arendt argues is part of the definition of what "to act" means (Arendt, 1958:177). She argues that, "to act in its most general sense, means to take initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, "to begin", "to lead," and eventually "to rule," indicate), to set something into motion (which is the



original meaning of the latin *agere*)” (Ibid.,177). Following this definition, it is also clear that by bringing her story to the platform and sharing it with the members is a form of taking initiative. Her action is twofold in that she reveals herself through action to the locals and also to the members of the platform. She establishes a relationship with both groups through this interaction regardless of how different the content of her action is. This resonates with what Arendt says in that, “ action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries” (Ibid.,190). As it will become apparent, there are many limitations and boundaries that the members are exposed to as they navigate their way through life in Europe. In the discussion, *life in Europe, how do you cope especially if you don't speak the language?*, two members share their experiences of discrimination and assert that :

*As for some white people thinking you should not be there, as a senior person in my organisation, I STILL experience this!! I work for the EU, laws and all!!There will always be people like that, you can't change them.( Forum Discussion, 26 February 2008)*

*It nice to hear of the changes in other parts of the world but here in London it is still not dead or gone. Discrimination is still full on and worse still when it involves a member of an ethnic minority group discriminating against another to gain favour with the whites!(Forum Discussion, 26 February 2008)*

Both these examples illustrate significant experiences in relation to their positioning as Africans in Europe. Firstly, their experiences reinforce the notion that the members of this platform are transmigrants in that they do not only reside in Europe but are active members and thus contributing to society. These excerpts show that in their daily interaction with the local communities, they are not just positioned as Africans based on their geographical or cultural difference but as visible minorities due to the racial difference. This assertion is made because both members discuss this issue by describing the locals as “white” instead of describing them as European or German/French. Although the position of being African by itself carries its own

narratives of colonialism, of being underdeveloped and war torn, a racial dimension with the migratory experience adds to the positioning of the subject and therefore highlights the importance of the locality in constructing the subject. In the first discussion post, the member brings up her own experiences of racial discrimination in the workplace. She does not share specific experiences as such but she does point to or allude to the notion of having tried to prove herself in the position she holds, and yet because of certain racial attitudes, she has not been able to change this situation.

This is interesting when thinking back to the earlier discussion with the member who wore a Watch all the time in response to the negative discourses linked to African or black people. This member has undergone this process of self-definition in the workplace and she has not been successful in changing other people's perception about her and this is because with action, one can never be sure of the outcome or who they reveal in their action (Ibid). And therefore, even during the self-definition process, no matter the intent, the action does not always guarantee a specific outcome. Interestingly, the second posting brings up another dimension to the discussion. The member argues that discrimination still exists but it is much worse when it comes from another ethnic minority. In her discussion, she also mentions that this discrimination is occurring in London and in a way contextualising the different experiences that migrants are faced with in different parts of Europe. Her experience of racial discrimination is very interesting in that it gives an insight into the racial immigration politics that occur in Britain.

According to Louis Kushnick, popular racism in British society, "was reinforced and relegitimated by state racism taking the form of a series of racist immigration laws enacted between 1962 and 1971, passed by both Conservative and Labour governments – bipartisanship in action – and justified on the grounds that it was the number of blacks entering the country which created problems and poor race relations" (Kushnick, 1993:18). This kind of institutionalized racism resulted in all kind of racisms "appearing in many forms in all areas of society – in the workplace, in the housing market, in the schools, and in the criminal justice system" which in turn produced specific consequences (Ibid., 18). Kushnick argues that one of the

consequences was the coming together of all discriminated groups under a black political identity. Citing Sivanandan in his assertion that: “because of the undifferentiated racism meted out to us in the community and in the workplace; we came together at a particular moment of time as blacks and not solely as Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, and Africans. Black was the colour of our politics, while Asian, African, etc. was the colour of our culture” (Ibid., 18). This member’s expectation of solidarity with other members of the ethnic minority stems from this idea of coming together under one political identity and yet as shown here by Kushnick, this was not in the interest of the British state and as such,

State strategies, supported by major sections of the British media, operated to break such a unity. Asians were portrayed in the media as being hard-working, as having strong families and cultures as well as a clearly differentiated class structure which could be slotted into the existing class system... the African Caribbeans, on the other hand were not only seen as lacking the characteristics of hard work, ambition, commitment to education, and strong families and cultures, but, worst of all, from the point of view of the state’s need to control them, they had no clearly differentiated class structure (Ibid).

This article was written in 1993 and this discussion post took place in 2008. This shows that the strategies used by the British state through media has had an impact. The construction of a black political identity created in response to the racism experienced by all who were minorities and immigrants to Britain could not endure because discrimination was not only experienced by minorities from the majority but between the minorities themselves. This member’s experience as an African and part of the immigrant minority alludes to the challenges faced by those in the liminal position in which the powers of the weak, although having the potential to act and thus transform the situation, the outcome is always unpredictable and does not guarantee a lasting positive change. It reinforces the idea that to act is just to set something in motion, however, what happens later is not necessarily up to the actor any longer as the acting does not occur in isolation but around others. It is because of such outcomes that Arendt (1958) argues that, “action and reaction among men never move in a closed circle and can never be reliably confined to two partners” (190). From this discussion,

it can be surmised that these discriminatory practices are not exclusively happening to African women in Europe and thus leading to the notion of a shared experience between African women and men in Europe as well as with other immigrant groups in Europe.

In the same discussion, another member had commented earlier and in some way challenges the argument about possible moments of shared experience between African men and women in Europe on one level by arguing that:

*Its very very difficult and as an African and a woman very very very...(Forum Discussion, 20 February 2008)*

Although she agrees that life in Europe is not easy for Africans in general in Europe, she laments that as a woman, it is even more difficult. This assertion greatly emphasizes the different experiences women and men have in the local contexts as African immigrants. This difference might not be based on racial discrimination but more on the limitations they encounter as women trying to enter the labour market in Europe (Ifekwunigwe, 2004: 398). African men and women who migrate to Europe have different experiences upon arrival mainly because of what is available to them as women in the labour market (Ibid.,398). This is why it is so important, according to Grewal and Kaplan, to “attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies” (2000). It is to draw attention to these kinds of inequalities and differences that challenge the idea of a solidarity based on a continental or racial identity. This is not to argue that such solidarities are not possible, however, if these differences and inequalities are not taken into account, then there is the risk of only highlighting solidarities that are universal in nature and are based on the premise of making other categories/experiences invisible in order for that one specific category to be visible. This is an argument that is clearly shown by Patricia Hill Collins in her book, *Black Feminist thought*, when she talks about African American women’s experiences and how an articulation of experiences of violence in the African American community by

African American women is portrayed as a betrayal to the African American solidarity movement (1990, 20).

Continuing on within the same discussion, two more members share how they cope with life in Europe by saying:

*You have to learn the language under all circumstances otherwise you cant cope. That is why there are intergration courses, you learn the language and then you are "intergrated". (Forum Discussion, 15 February 2008)*

*I have leant the language i dont have problems with it.i did my fitness liezenz in German...and i have been working in these country for 7 years..i went to England and i was amazed to find out that they have already passed equality law where in Work places they give equal oppotunities practically..because these law exists already in European union laws but its not practiced here in Germany. (Forum Discussion, 21 February 2008)*

In the first posting, the member addresses the situation of learning the language and sees it as imperative in order to cope with life in Europe. She echoes a popular discourse geared towards immigrants that once they learn the language, they will subsequently be integrated. She directs attention away from the African position as a whole to the immigrant position inside of being in Europe. This immigrant position where learning the language is imperative is shared by all immigrants who move to a country where the language spoken locally is different from what they speak. The language issue does not necessarily affect migrants from Africa who have migrated to the former colonial power whereby the local language spoken will be the same as their home country's language. This places the migrants in this position at an advantage and therefore again reiterating the need to be attentive to these different trajectories. By highlighting the importance of speaking the local language, she points towards the notion that through learning the local language, one can become integrated and therefore be in an inside position. However, she questions this assertion by placing the quotation marks on the word integration which leads us to believe that she is also questioning whether speaking the language or taking on the inside position through

knowledge, actually challenges the outside position she holds as an immigrant in Europe in reality. This questioning could be seen as what could potentially be a subversive use of a public discourse. This member does not passively accept the discourse of integration, but uses it in a way that challenges the discourse itself. This also shows that the liminal position the members hold does not only manifest because of the transmigration process but also as they try to adapt to their new host countries.

The second member argues that language has not been a problem for her personally as she already speaks it. She draws attention away from this aspect even though she acknowledges that it could be a problem. Nevertheless, from her experience, even with the language skills, one cannot avoid experiencing problems such as the one she identifies as the lack of equal opportunities in the work place in Germany. She locates Germany as the place where she experiences this and compares it to England where her experience was different and more positive. Apparent from these discussions are the conditions in which these members are acted on with the context playing an important role. By bringing the example of the work place inequalities, it is hard to decipher which category (gender, race, continental or immigrant) is the problem. However, it can also be asserted that it could be all of these categories and the most important factor to observe here is how local contexts are experienced differently by immigrants. For this member, England was a better local context for her than Germany; however, another member shared how discriminatory practices were still rampant in England and thus contradicting this member. This discussion highlights a crucial point in that it is easy to argue that solidarities between immigrant communities are based on shared experiences of discrimination, and yet these two members have experienced discrimination differently in Germany. In this context, this could be explained by the fact that one of the members has lived in more than one host country and therefore can make comparisons. And this is noteworthy in that although migrants have a shared experience of migration, their different trajectories cannot be taken for granted when thinking about the kinds of solidarities that emerge within such groups.

Another important point to factor into this discussion is the action they take to deal with these challenges. The members bring these issues up in the online community with the assumption that other members have experienced this sort of exclusion and can share their coping skills. In raising the topic in the online space, an importance to both the online and offline space is assigned. Even though, the online community is there as a support structure to offer advice and coping strategies, the need to be accepted within their offline communities and their host countries still takes precedence. Recalling the “when” raised by Rich in discussing the politics of location, it is important to recognize the significance of time when things occur. Their ability to act in bringing this issue online to other members who live in different parts of Europe and who might potentially have similar experiences impels us to identify the importance of the Internet at this point in time. The wide reach of the internet has expanded people’s ability to interact and collaborate across geographic divides. Their ability to act in this case is determined by having access to the internet. Pointed out by Ronald Rice and Caroline Haythornthwaite (2006), the difference in people’s timing in order to access power and information is an important source of social inequality and unequal participation. Through the internet, they are able to share this experience across borders and nations. What they also show in some way is that in the European context (as the space they inhabit), the issues are experienced across borders/nations albeit on different levels and thus not necessarily nation bound but more about how they are perceived as Africans or African women. In other words, their experiences differ more on how they experience a situation and not necessarily on what situation they experience.

Returning to an earlier discussion on *how has your life changed since you moved to Europe*, another member recounts her experience of how it was difficult for her to adjust to her life in Europe because she did not have a house girl to help her with chores as she was used to in her home country. Although initially stated as a challenge, it is also shown as a new learning experience. A more detailed explanation of her experience is seen here:

*I believe the worst thing that i found hard to cope with is the fact that i did not have a housegirl. My kid was used to have everything done for him and i had my dinner on*

*the table and my clothes ironed ready next day, breakfast on the table in the morning... it was a shock trying to do all those things on my own Next tough thing was my kid could not even dress himself since the housegirl did all the work... i tell you this was a mountain to climb.. thanks God we are now on the top but i tell my friends back home that one lesson i learnt is to appreciate the housegirl you have in house, you never know what you've got til its gone! i have now learnt how to distribute my chores within the week so i can have a lazy weekend if it allows.... there's still a lot of work to be done! the other positive thing was when i went home, i got comments on how good when it comes to obeying traffic rules... i guess that is one thing i have learnt from Europe! (Forum Discussion, 5 October 2010)*

Her experience of not having a housegirl or having to do all these chores on her own shows the difference in lifestyle to what she was used to back in her home country. However, this is misleading because it gives the impression that the experience of having a housegirl is a phenomenon that only occurs in Africa or her home country and also as an experience that all Africans share. Although the housegirl phenomenon is represented as an African experience by this member, it would be remiss not to point out that this is more of a class phenomenon than a continental based experience. Having help around the house is a common experience shared by those who can afford to pay for such services everywhere in the world. This is a class based experience and it is interesting how through her migration process, she has moved from high to low. This takes us back again to the liminal experience where Turner asserts that liminality implies that, “he who is high must experience what it is like to be low” (Turner, 1969: 96). By experiencing what it is like not to have a house girl gives this member a different outlook and maybe an appreciation on how much work the domestic worker had to do.

What is also interesting about the housegirl phenomenon in Africa is that it can be likened to the concept of Au-pairing that is popular in many countries in Europe, North America and emerging in China. To help us understand the concept of an au-pair, Diana Osterbreek-Latoza explains that, “the au pair exchange programme is an internationally recognised educational program through which young people learn a



new language and become acquainted with another society and culture by (or becoming) being placed as an au pair” (2007: 193). Having participated in an au-pair exchange programme in the Netherlands myself in 2002, I have to say that my host family were interested in giving me insight into the Dutch culture while I contributed around the house by doing light household work such as babysitting, picking the children up from school and washing dishes. And thus I make this comparison between au-pairing and the housegirl concept (domestic work) with my own experience as part of the reference point. However, although my experience fits within the framework of the Au-pair exchange programme, a number of other au-pairs have not had the same experience. A case in point is that of some Filipino au-pairs in the Netherlands. According to a study conducted by Osterbreek-Latoza with the Bayanihan Foundation, an organization that has been assisting Filipino au-pairs since 1993 revealed that the au-pair exchange programme is highly attractive to Dutch couples with children as a cheaper alternative to the high costs of crèche facilities (Ibid.,196). However, it appears that some au-pairs have experienced abuse at the hands of their host family in that they have now become domestic workers (Ibid).

The Bayanihan Foundation has dealt with many Filipino au-pairs who come to them with complaints such as having to deal with: “long working hours and heavy work; verbal abuse and indifference by host families; unpaid and cheap labour; irregular free days or no free days at all; bad service and exploitation by au pair agencies” (Ibid., 196). Through this example of Filipino au-pairs in Netherlands, there is clear links to what this member brings up in her discussion about having a house girl. Transnational feminists advancing feminist solidarity suggest attentiveness to the interweaving and connections between women from different communities (Mohanty, 2003: 336). This is to highlight experiences such as these where an aspect that might seem to only occur in one place might actually be happening elsewhere and as such women from different contexts might be able to connect with others in similar situation and less with women in the same context. These kinds of connections can help expose the links and disconnects that exist between women around the world whether it is during moments of privilege, subjugation or complicity. This is important to unpack and understand when it comes to solidarity because it opens up different spaces for

women to build solidarity with those who they share a position with despite differences of race, religion, culture or nationality.

Although this seems to be a class issue and is brought forward as such, it is interesting to observe how the issue becomes more about being here versus life back home. She uses the class issue as an example to demonstrate the differences between her experiences in host country in comparison to her life back home and I would argue that in the process of highlighting her in-between position as a way to forge solidarity with the other members, class becomes less relevant in that it is only used as an example. My argument here contends that this member does not assume that all the members of the platform have had a house girl but she does believe that they know how it feels to have things change because of the migration experience. What becomes apparent is that it is this betwixt and between positions that the members highlight firmly and all the issues brought forward such as race or class become examples to demonstrate this in-betweenness. Furthermore, in her representation of Africa and Europe, it becomes clear how through the migration process and the interaction with the local setting, people bring with them only a part of the total culture in which they come from. This argument of representing only a part of the culture can also be applied to the comments she receives back in her home country about obeying traffic rules as this is attributed to living in Europe. This is interesting because of her residence in Europe, she is placed in the outsider within position of having improved her driving and therefore different from those in her home country. She also affirms this position by judging it as a positive and declaring that it must be related to her being in Europe. This is telling in that when she lived in her home country, her obedience to traffic rules when driving was not good. This is seemingly associated to the context of her home country because by virtue of being in Europe, she has improved in this regard. This assertion confirms the narratives of her home country (in Africa) as disorganised and lacking in discipline when it comes to areas such as traffic rules and driving while Europe is seen as the space of organisation and discipline, and therefore those who move there learn this behavioural patterns. This goes back to the member who started wearing a Watch all the time in response to the

environment of punctuality she found herself but also not wanting to be visible for being late as an African.

In the context of this member's story, it is through her visit to her home country as an African living in Europe that she is positioned within this narrative. She becomes visible as an outsider because of her newly learned behaviour in obeying traffic rules and this is a visibility that is not problematic to her because it is related to the positive stereotype of Europe. Whereas for the member who had to wear a Watch in Europe, it is through her residence in Germany that her lack of punctuality would make her stand out because it would be associated with her with the negative stereotype of Africa as disorganized. Both these members illustrate some important points about their experiences of migration and transmigration. Through migration, one member is positioned outside of Europe and inside the African discourse. In the course of transmigration, another member is positioned outside of Africa and within the European discourse. And within this platform and as they articulate their positions, they demonstrate a visibility and an invisibility. One could argue that this is reflective of what Turner asserts as that, "liminality may perhaps be regarded as the way to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense, the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configuration of ideas and relations may arise" (1960, 48). The argument is that although both members share two different liminal experiences with differing consequences, structural assertions and actions are displayed in both their stories as they assert their liminal positions. In the member who visits her home country, she does not mention her invisibility but this can be inferred as a structural assertion that is evident through race or ethnic belonging which positions her inside. However, she becomes visible through her actions of obeying traffic rules which are actions that position her outside. And thus even though her liminal position might be viewed as negating any structural assertions, however in this member's case, it is evident that this is not true because it is her invisibility (being an insider) that makes her stand out (visible, outsider) when she obeys traffic rules which is not the norm in that context. However, in that moment, it inserts her within Europe where she becomes an insider and thus establishing a relationship with those in Europe, a possibility that might not have occurred had this

liminality not manifested in this situation. This same logic can be applied to the member who wears a Watch.

Moving on, in the discussion post, *How do you celebrate Christmas in Europe*, a member brings into the forum discussion a topic that she was asked offline. In the post, she explains how she was asked to describe the Christmas experience in her mother country, and although, she does not mention who the interviewer is or give details about the audience and the reasons as to why she needed to share this experience, she leaves it to the reader to assume. She states:

*Recently i was interview and asked to describe how we celebrate Christmas in my mother country (KENYA).I also had to say how I celebrate Christmas here in Germany. How do you celebrate your Christmas here in Europe? What makes it different?*  
<sup>1</sup>(Forum Discussion, 29 December 2010)

Based on what she is asked to describe, one can infer from the questions that the interviewer and the audience are those who are not familiar with how Christmas is celebrated in Kenya and there is an assumption embedded in the question she is asked which implies that what she will share is different. In her retelling of the story, she reveals an interesting aspect of the space occupied by those who are different. Upon a closer examination, it becomes clear in her description that she is talking to a German audience interested in how Christmas is celebrated in Kenya. The reason as to why she needs to share this is to compare her experience of Christmas in Kenya and here in Germany. She is asked as a Kenyan to describe how they celebrate Christmas in her mother country therefore occupying the authentic insider position of being Kenyan. Even though she resides in Germany, the authentic insider position she holds during this interview also explicitly shows her outside position in German society. In this authentic insider position, she is encouraged to open up and talk, and more importantly to articulate her difference. It is something demanded and expected by the audience or they would feel as if they have been cheated. (Minh-ha, 1987:14) Moreover, in order to hold this authentic insider position, it is important for this member's articulation of difference to conform to the rules as to make sure that her

---

<sup>1</sup> The interview in full: <http://www.badische-zeitung.de/muellheim/von-mangos-mohn-und-haferwuerstchen>

difference does not go as far as to question the foundation of their beings and makings (Ibid.,14).

In the interview, the interviewer's starting point is from a nationalist perspective which assumes that there are differences in how Christmases are celebrated between Kenya and Germany. This assumption, although true in that there are differences, inherently sees Kenya and Germany as homogenous countries that have distinct cultures and therefore possess a single way of celebrating Christmas. This resonates very strongly with what Gupta and Ferguson argue in that, "it is so taken for granted that each country embodies its own distinctive culture and society that the term "society" and "culture" are routinely simply appended to the names of nation-states, as when a tourist visits India to understand "Indian culture"..." (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 7). This is also clear in the way that this member says, 'how we celebrate Christmas in my mother country' because the 'we' in this context is all Kenyans and the multiple ethnicities and regional differences that exist in Kenya become irrelevant. What can be inferred from this posting is that this member accepts the way she has been positioned by the interviewee as holding the authentic insider position as a Kenyan. More importantly, through this question, the member is kept in a dual position in that she not only explains how she celebrates Christmas in Kenya but also here in Europe. There is an expectation that through her residence in Germany, she now has knowledge about both Christmas in Kenya and in Germany which then gives her the inside position in both spaces. This is interesting in that in the same way that people are positioned outside of a space, they can also be positioned inside it in a different way.

Additionally, when she brings this topic to the members of the group and asks for their contribution, her starting point is not Africa/the respective mother countries but here in Europe and how this is different from what they are used to. She asks the other members to share their own experiences here in Europe and how this differs thus also assuming and confirming that Christmas experiences for African women in Europe is different from what they are used to without emphasising any particular countries of origin. One can argue that for this topic to be applied to this online space and for the

other members to participate, she has to disrupt the national standpoints and move towards a more continental generalization. In addition, it is always a way to establish a relationship with the other members by appealing to their liminality. By asking the members to discuss their experiences in Europe shows their involvement with the local traditions while at the same time, she asks them to show how these differ from their previous experiences in Africa which assumes that the members have prior knowledge of Africa. This liminal position strengthens the relationship of this member with the other members of the platform who also share their own experiences. Moreover, in starting from the members' experiences in Europe and not in Africa per se, she does the same thing as the interviewer albeit a bit differently which is to invoke a feeling of how different "here in Europe" is to what it was before in the motherland. By doing this, the member positions herself and the members inside Europe by expressing an insight into how Christmas is celebrated but by saying how this experience is different, the European experience is questioned. This suggests that the African Christmas experience comes naturally to the members and therefore can be used as a reference point.

Continuing on with the notion of Africa as a reference point, one member states in this excerpt taken from the discussion *how has your life changed since you moved to Europe,*

*I love Africa and everything it represents, the culture, the food, the people the atmosphere, the air smells and everything because people are genuinely happy and not materialistic, and self-centered as here in Europe. In Europe the self-centered individualistic, lifestyle suits them fine because it's expensive to live here and because it's embedded in their culture.. The African characteristics suits us fine because it also embedded in our culture and way of life.. (Forum Discussion, 17 October 2010)*

The sweeping generalization and the binary position of 'us' and 'them' enacted here are very clear in describing what she loves about Africa and how it compares to 'here in Europe'. As John Rutherford (1990) argues, "binarism operates in the same way as splitting and projection: the centre expels its anxieties, contradictions and irrationalities onto the subordinate term, filling it with the antithesis of its own identity..." (22). Africa is the starting point for the discussion and in sharing her opinion on what makes her love the continent, Europe is brought in to make a strong

case for Africa. In the same way that Rutherford argues, this member does the same thing in that Europe is defined by what Africa is not and although African culture is not the same everywhere, it becomes an important signifier to negate what is here. Europe is described as self-centred, individualistic and this is an opinion expressed by this member, however this kind of generalization is very much consistent with the justificatory or preservative discourse frequently observed in the reproduction of essentialist notions of African and European culture. Justificatory or preservative discourse is a macro-strategy aimed at the conservation and reproduction of national identities or narratives of identity (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 18).

In this case, Africa is the reference point for what meanings are attached to Europe which can be understood as more of an Afrocentric view. Afrocentricism examines information from the standpoint of Africans as subjects, human agents, rather than as objects in a European frame of reference (Asante, 1992: 2). However the problem with Afrocentricism is that it aspires to construct an authentic, natural and stable rooted African identity that relies on forms of racial or cultural essentialism which ultimately results in an ethnic absolutism that reifies the very categories of racial oppression (Gordon and Anderson, 1999: 286). Such ethnic absolutism leads to a singular description of African people as being genuinely happy yet that is not necessarily the case for all African people. The other description of African people as not materialistic and self-centred is only through comparison of Africa to Europe which relies on essentialist notion of culture. According to her, Africa and Europe have two distinct cultures and certain lifestyles which are embedded in the cultures and even though she reside in Europe, the lifestyle only suits 'them' and 'their' culture as opposed to what it is like in Africa which is suitable to 'us' and our culture. In this member's view, the binary position of 'us' and 'them' are very strong and maintain the two groups as two distinct cultures. What is also interesting here is how the member uses her liminal position as a moment of knowing about both continents and to make sweeping generalisations.

In all these excerpts, the members show that their interaction with Europe tend to begin from a position of being African and then encountering new experiences in the

host countries. Taking up this position, a relationship with all those who are outside the platform that identify as Africans (including men) is established. However, some excerpts also show the members' encounter with home countries from the position of being African in Europe and what this produces. These discussions illustrate that the members both experiences moments of proximity as well as distance in that they have inside knowledge which puts them in close proximity while certain experiences places them at a distance. This proximity is what problematizes the notion of binary positions between Africa and Europe because in that moment of wearing the Watch and being punctual, she is as part of Germany as she is African. The same can be argued for the member who displays great skills in obeying traffic rules in that as much as she is African, she is also display what is "deemed" European and therefore hybridity can be observed. Moreover, one can borrow Avtar Brah's argument and say that in the context of these members and their relationship to Africa, "the notion of home is intrinsically linked with the way in which the processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances" (Brah 1996, 194).

## 6.2 'Home'

In a number of the discussions in the platform, the keywords home, there, homelands, motherland and mama Africa are used to describe Africa and the countries of origin and some members tend to use the words 'our', 'my', and 'we' when describing or discussing their experiences of Africa, motherland or their countries of origin. 'Home' is also characterized as a geographical location which at times is drawn from continental, regional or nationalistic references and naming depending on the context of the discussion. Additionally, instead of country groups, the platform has regional groups such as women from Southern Africa or women from East Africa in which members can join to discuss issues of interest from the particular region. This kind of regional grouping is reflective of the way in which the regional trading and development blocs such as *Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)*, Southern African Development Community (SADC) are organized in the continent. For this particular context, such regional grouping might be related to difficulty in having country groups because of the vastness of the continent.



In the discussion, *Pray for Africa*, the member who starts this discussion begins with her observation on the politics of her motherland Kenya and the upcoming elections and directs the discussion to the different countries in the continent while at the same time making general references about the continent as a whole. She states:

*When I observe the current atmosphere of politics in my mother land Kenya, and as we come nearer to 2012 elections I must admit I am very concerned. I do not want a repeat of 2007 elections clashes again. Please lets' try and make a difference in our continent. From my own understanding and limited knowledge, **Africa is blessed continent** with great people, natural resources, wildlife and cultural heritage among others. Moreover, it has developed greatly in the last century. Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the **corruption, poverty, injustice** in many countries of Africa. Not to forget, the **civil wars** in different countries like Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt and also Ivory Coast. The great suffering in countries like Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and others not mentioned. As African women, I feel and know it a crucial time to make a difference. Its' our time to enlighten and advocate for justice and educate those we can reach. I believe **ignorance, selfishness, tribalism** among others have greatly affected our countries. Therefore, I further beg you, for those who fear God to go on our knees and **intercede for Africa. Pray without ceasing for our lovely continent Africa, before we are enveloped by bloodshed, poverty and second time colonialism.** Everyone can make a difference and together we can do great. Sisters lets' help conserve our Heritage!!!! (Forum Discussion, 5 April 2011)*

This posting begins with the member making a reference to a situation in her country of origin and then moving on to some general issues about the continent while highlighting specific countries. She highlights the positives in order to place emphasis on the negatives that affect the continent and some of the countries mentioned. The whole point of the post is to garner support from the members in order to pray away some of the issues plaguing the continent. However, in this process of calling for support and solidarity to combat these issues, she reveals some interesting aspects about her own positioning. In order to establish a connection with the other members, she does not only make references to the situation in Kenya but also to Africa and other parts in general and this shows recognition of the diversity in the platform.

There is an awareness shown here that other members might also be preoccupied with issues in their own countries in the way she is with her own country and thus, she appeals for their support through a process of generalizing while referencing specific issues and countries. This also indicates that although this platform is about African women and therefore the continent in general, the national or issues related to the national are still very important. This member shows an active interest in her own country and to the continent in general which reinforces this idea of seeing these members as transmigrants because although they are now based in Europe, they are still interested or encouraging each other to be involved in their countries of origin. For many transmigrants, their connection to their country of origin comes in various forms and as such for this member, praying to God is how she finds her way of contribution.

What is interesting in this excerpt is that this member establishes a relationship to Africa as a way of connecting with the members in the platform. As Africans who no longer reside in Africa but are still concerned about the issues happening in their countries of origin places her and the members as outsiders and in a way a liminal position emerges. This is not as strongly as demonstrated before, however, the members are in a liminal position in that they are not residing in Africa anymore and therefore they are outside of the continent looking in. However, she simultaneously articulates a form of difference and thereby creating a distance to the Africans in Africa by representing those in Africa as being ignorant and needing help while the members in the platform as being informed and can help the continent. In the process of forging a relationship with the members by showing an interest to be involved with the continent while at the same time, creating a distance to the continent, the liminal position emerges. This liminality is illustrated by this member when she appeals to the members, not just as women but as African women to advocate, enlighten and educate which are all adjectives that place her and the members in a position of authority/power over those residing in Africa. However, the appeal seems to insinuate that people in Africa need their advocacy because they suffer from ignorance, selfishness and tribalism and in this insinuation, African women are included. The question to ask here is if she is African as well, how has she become

enlightened and educated in order to enlighten and educate away the tribalism of the African masses in Africa? Better yet, what is her construction of African in the title African Women in Europe in comparison to the construction of Africans in Africa? One of the ways in which she establishes a relationship with the continent can potentially answer this question in that she does not connect to an Africa from the past but one of the present and the future. She discusses the present issues and how their involvement as African women could make a difference and thus being African for this member means an interest in the future of the continent. There is a suggestion that as African women, they need to act in concert with each other for the future of the continent. There is a form of power in their coming together which would enable their acting, even though their power seems to come in a form of dominance towards those in Africa.

Moreover, I would argue that there is a very close link to how she defines her being African and her experience as an immigrant in Europe. Firstly, this is a self-defining moment for this member and this self-definition is only possible when made in relation to others or a context. The way this self-definition occurs could also be likened to Sara Ahmed's insinuation that at times, "migration and nomadism are inscribed as exceptional and extraordinary in the very event of being defined against home" (Ahmed, 2008:339). This could explain why this member views herself as being better than the Africans in Africa. At the same time though, I would argue that for this member, the exceptionalism inscribed in migration cannot be fully appreciated because as an African immigrant in Europe, she has to deal with negative discourses of the continent. Moreover, for these discourses to change, this member believes that this situation in Africa has to change. All the negative issues that she asserts are problematic in Africa are words that are prevalent in the discourse on Africans in Europe. As many of the members do not reside in Africa and therefore not exposed to any of the issues she mentions, one has to wonder why this would have such an impact on her life. And this is where I argue that for this member, the problematic issues occurring in Africa affect how she is viewed as an African immigrant in Europe and thus her need to be involved. However, in her involvement in Africa, she is confronted with being outside of the continent, of being an outsider looking in

whereby she sees issues in Africa very differently to those in the continent and thus, representing herself as being better than the Africans in Africa and consequently dismantling the notion that there is a long standing authentic African identity which forms the basis for solidarity in this platform.

Another member then joins the discussion adds that:

*Today, dear God, I recognize that I have so much to pray for, for our MAMA Africa that I will leave the blessings up to you for you know how much Africa needs you right now lord, we ask that you protect her, love her, even when she cannot love herself, we ask that you intervene God and prepare her, courage her and love her like she needs to be loved. Together in prayer there is no other. (Forum Discussion, 5 April 2011)*

This member comments in a form of prayer and in her prayer, she proceeds to ask God to protect and love Africa because she is unable to love herself. A similar parental attitude towards Africa is prevalent in both posts and gives the impression that Africa is a child who is unable to help herself and therefore needs their help. Taking up this attitude creates an unequal power position in which the members are positioned differently from Africans or more importantly from women in Africa. This kind of positioning is illustrated very well by Feminist, Trinh T Minh-ha (1987) when she states:

One cannot help feeling 'special' when one figures among the rare few to emerge above the anonymous crowd and enjoy the privilege of preparing the way for one's 'unfortunate' sisters. Based on what other women are not (capable of) doing, such a reward easily creates a distance – if not a division. (p. 12)

Minh-ha's example is a fitting demonstration for this particular situation in that both postings reflect a sense of privilege, a specialness in being able to have come to gain enlightenment where others have yet to and thus as she argues creating a distance or even possibly a division between the women in the platform and the people in Africa. As illustrated here by the two postings, if the starting point for some of the members of the platform in their connection to Africa is unequally positioned; the chances for solidarity to occur between these members and women in Africa are not high if this is solely based on the continental identity because as Minh-ha argues, the reward linked

to the privilege of seeing one as being special is distance and division. This strongly suggests that even though members of this platform share a continental identity of being African, solidarity between them can be seen more as a process of negotiation, construction and imagination, and not a given. Furthermore, persistence in thinking that the basis for solidarity is a continental identity overlooks the unequal power positions that do exist within this very identity. Continuing with the members' interest in being involved in Africa, here are excerpts taken from the forum topic, *Politics in Africa*, where a discussion ensues on whether women would make better leaders or not in the context of Africa. The biggest issue that all the participants in the discussion seem to agree on with regards to politics in Africa is the failure in leadership. Here is what two members had to say:

*I cannot say with certainty that women would make better leaders, but given the fact that they, especially African women are used to bare hardships and going into self sacrifice to ensure that their families get basic necessities etc...there is not doubt, if more of them had powerful positions that would be more positive change in Africa and we would slowly start moving in the right direction.(Forum Discussion,16 April 2009)*

*I cannot say with certainty that women would make better leaders in an environment dominated by man. But, we have been leaders in our families for centuries and we are always good at passing the skills to our daughters. So with the right support structures I do not see why we cannot rise to the challenge. There is a quote from a Ghanaian nationalist which says 'If you educate a man you educate an individual, if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation' We also need to train our sons to respect their sisters in the home and treat them like equals. Because some of the issues which spill in to society start from our individual homes. When your daughter is the one who always cleans the home and the son sits and read a newspaper or watch television, you are setting a bad precedent. We should guide our children to understand that 'respect is earned not deserved'.( Forum Discussions, 17 April 2009)*

Both members do not commit to whether African women would make better leaders or not however, they both share arguments as to why it might be possible. According to the first member, African women are used to hardship and having to self-sacrifice for their families and as such, given the chance to be in powerful positions; they would

bring positive change to Africa. For the second member, African women could make better leaders because historically, women have held roles of leadership within the family and have always passed on these skills to their daughters. The second member identifies some of the reasons why women are treated unequally in society and recognizes that these inequalities do not only pertain to male domination but see women as part of the problem. Furthermore, she also views education as a way to change the situation. Interestingly this is one of the few discussions where they not only speak from a position of gender but focus on issues related to gender. What is equally fascinating about this discussion is how the members position themselves in the discussion. The first member sees herself as an African woman in that she is part of the platform and ends her account with a 'we' in which she includes herself in the group that wants to see Africa moving in the right direction. However, she does not see herself as part of the African women who are used to hardship and self-sacrificing for their families. In other words, she identifies with the continent in as far as her interest in participating in the discussion, in knowing African women's struggles and by including herself in the 'we' that wants to see Africa flourish which is similar to what the member in the pray for Africa discussion showed.

At the same time, she articulates a difference between her and African women in Africa in the way that she distances herself from what would make them better leaders by using words such as 'they' and 'them'. This liminal positionality which seems to be the predominant position taken up by many of the members of this platform is evident in that although the member is interested in the development of Africa, she also sees herself differently to those in Africa and it can be argued that this is central to how the members are able to forge solidarity with each other. Moreover, there is a structural inferiority here in that there is an assertion made that suggests that she is who she is because she is not an African woman who is used to hardship and self-sacrificing for her family. Additionally, she is who she is because she does not have to deal with the kinds of leadership issues that African women in Africa are dealing with by virtue of being in Europe. This in between moment is also point of self-definition as well in that through her linkage and disconnection to African women, she is able to cast herself in a better light on the basis of her location. This positioning is similar to the discussion

above and it shows how important it is not to just identify these in between moments, but to also look at what their implications are on the various actors. What this member does, even though her representations of African women in Africa are well intentioned, is similar to what western feminists used to do with women in the global South. She speaks for African women in Africa as a subject within because she seems to know and understand their situation and yet she is on the outside of it because she does not identify with what she assumes are their African experiences. At the same time, she wants to claim solidarity with them by proclaiming to be part of the “we”. Mohanty argues that “western feminists who sometimes cast third world women in terms of ‘ourselves undressed’, all construct themselves as the normative referent in such a binary analytic (2003:22). What this member and western feminists share is the inherited power of the location they inhabit and using that power to define themselves through what women in the global South and in this case, African women are.

The second member however does not articulate a form of difference to African women in Africa in that she includes herself in the discussion by using the pronoun ‘we’ and ‘our’. There is no separation between her and the women in Africa. She speaks from the position of her gender identification and less as an African woman in Europe or Africa. This is clear in the way she begins her discussion by stating her doubt on whether women would be better leaders in a society dominated by men. This includes all societies that suffer from this male domination and thus her statement is not only directed to Africa. Although her focus is Africa, by shifting the topic from continent specific to an issue about patriarchy, she does not fall into the trap of misrepresentation and reproducing of power dynamics as the other member did. The way she tackles this issue is also not based on distinct binary position of victim and victimizer but more focused on patriarchy as a system that influences both men and women’s behaviour. She brings up the point of women (including herself) of being complicit in the application of patriarchy in the homes and enforcing fixed gender roles that end up spilling over into society. Although this member is an African woman in Europe and part of this platform, she does not display a liminal position that is based on identifying with both being African and in Europe. Her liminality suggests a knowing about both the female and male aspects in patriarchy and using

that to discuss the topic on leadership. This is because she does not see women as only victims but as actors who are complicit within the system of patriarchy.

Looking at both discussion topics, *Pray for Africa* and *Politics in Africa*, one important issue that comes to the mind is that in discussing issues about the African continent, comparisons are not made between Africa and Europe in the same way that this occurs when they speak about Europe. Although there are insinuations through their positioning that some of the members relate to African issues from a position of authority and superiority, it can be argued that their positioning is mainly as outsiders looking in. However, their outsider positions are complicated by the fact that they were once insiders and have a vested interest in the continent's development, they see themselves as justified in speaking about the issues on the continent. The process of self-definition that seems to be evident in the many members positioning suggests that there are structural inferiors that lead them to action and in this context, self-definition. However, as shown throughout this discussion, the structural inferiors do not seem to be linked to movement as such, in the sense of travelling to the continent but more so through their interaction and interest in Africa remotely. This is indicative of the different ways in which migrants connect to multiple social fields. The next section looka at the structural inferiors that seem to occur in relation to the African context.

### **6.2.1 Homelessness and the Unhomely**

As shown in the discussion above, members of the platform seem to be interested in being involved in their countries of origin as part of their positioning of being African. Furthermore, in the interviews I conducted with two members of the platform, both revealed involvement in community projects in their countries of origin as a way to maintain ties. However, one member lamented that when she was in her home country visiting some of the projects she works with; people were not as open to her assistance as she would have thought. She states:

*"Now when I go and I am trying to talk...they say oh, here, this is how we do it...and you are like, give me a break. I am Nigerian, where I am, where I live, I am not Swiss and here you are telling me, this is how we do it...."(Interview, November 2012)*



This interview excerpt illustrates that the members might see themselves in the position of bringing knowledge from the host countries, however, this is not always well received by the people because they are now seen as people who do not necessarily know how things are done in the countries anymore. In being involved in the project in her country of origin, she still sees herself as part of the country. However, through the experience she shares, it is clear that some people in countries of origin see her as an outsider, someone who does not know how things are done anymore. As she says, in Switzerland, she is not seen as a Swiss person so how can her own people also see her as not Nigerian. In her effort to maintain ties with her home country through community projects, she is confronted with a sense of homelessness. She does not belong to Nigeria nor to Switzerland. This homelessness is part of the liminal position and it can be argued that this is a structural inferiority in that she is positioned outside by the people she sees as being a part of. However, one could also argue that this member is experiencing this sense of homelessness because of the way in which she views home. As stated here by Ahmed, "home... becomes associated with stasis, boundaries, identity and fixity. Home is implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience, indeed, where the subject is so at ease that she or he does not think" (Ahmed, 2008: 339). This is interesting in that if the member is experiencing this feeling of homelessness because 'home' is not a stable, fixed space of belonging, then this illustrates that through this process of transmigration, migrants' engagement with the countries of origin, reveals that not only are the subjects undergoing transformation, but so are the spaces left behind.

What is also revealed here is that the involvement in projects in her home country may also be motivated by the feeling of not belonging in Switzerland in that as she laments on this outside positioning in Africa, she explains that her position in Switzerland is also as an outsider on the basis of being Nigerian. For this member, the feeling of not belonging to either geographical space is more pronounced, however, as another member will show in an interview where she talks about 'home' and 'here', that this feeling is not only about a sense of homelessness, but also about being in-between. Here she explains:

*I have gone back home and sat with my friends and listened to what they are doing and I am like aah ok. what is that? I think differently. And I remember one time, I didn't know what my friends were discussing and my friend's husband has been to US and I was back home and I was like how can somebody do that and he told me, you are coming from abroad. Don't expect everybody to be like that. And there are some things you feel that you can go with those ideas back home and people don't understand. And here sometimes there is that in between. Ja. That in between. You are not really English but sometimes there are things that you are more passionate about and other people are not and vice versa. It is just knowing yourself, respecting your roots and taking advantage of both, i think. Because on the other side, back home they have good things too. We can see now, just the other day I brought up a discussion about London being one the loneliest cities on facebook. And some people were saying, why are you there? And I said it is not about running away but it is about solving the situation... Some people said tell them to come to Kenya for Safari. And we talked about this, it is good for people to come for Safari. Last year I brought 20 guests which was good but the Kenyans and the corruption, everything, prices they were charged double. You guys have to deal with your corruption. (Interview, December 2012)*

For this member, going back to her home country and having discussions with her friends made her realize that she has views that are different from her friends. Moreover, the views that she brings with her will not necessarily be understood. At the same time, she also realizes that she is not really English but does not explain why she feels this way. This gives the impression that her liminality manifests itself through her interaction with Africa rather than Europe. Moreover, she seems to display an awareness of good and bad things in both continents. She feels misunderstood by her friends at home but also feels a sense of loneliness in London. She notes that there are some good aspects at home but also there is the issue of corruption. This liminality does not exactly fit with homelessness, the idea of neither belonging here nor there as demonstrated earlier but more so with the notion of the unhomely, a term coined by Homi K. Bhabha. The unhomely, he argues, "is a shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha, 1992: 141). This shock recognition I think is clearly demonstrated in her retelling of the experience of loneliness. She expresses being different from her friends, people not

understanding her at “home” which I argue can also lead to a feeling of loneliness. And at the same, she talks about how London is one of the loneliest cities. This aspect of loneliness which according to her is a reality in London (here) is also reflected at ‘home’ too where one does not expect to be lonely and thus the shock in recognizing this possibility creates the unhomey.

A good example in support of this argumentation and can help clarify this idea of the unhomey is explained by Iranian scholar, Nasrin Rahimieh, who cites Modarressi in the essay, *Writing with an Accent*, in which he gives “this description of his altered relationship to the concept of home: “On the plane returning from Iran to the U.S., a strange idea kept occurring to me. I thought that most immigrants, regardless of the familial, social, or political circumstances causing their exile, have been cultural refugees all their lives. They leave because they feel like outsiders” (2007: 9). Could it be that this loneliness expressed by the member was an experience that was there before migration and now that she has migrated, it has become more pronounced? Moreover, “although the “unhomey” is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions” (Bhabha, 1992: 142). The presence of cultural difference is felt in this interview as she negotiates back and forth between the contradictory conditions of ‘here’ and ‘home’, not being understood or being able to share views with friends at home and feeling lonely in London while at the same time wanting to support Kenya and yet you “Kenyans and your corruption”. Evident in the excerpts shown above is that the liminal position in relation to the members’ involvement with the African continent displays the structural inferiors of power and powerlessness.

### **6.2.2 Memory and the condition of ‘home’**

In the AWE platform, some of the members’ relationship to being African is linked to a more nostalgic view of ‘home’ which occurred during a specific time. As this member demonstrates in the discussion, *Christmas plans*:

*When I was growing up, Christmas was a time for family. Close and extended family members would organize a party where we would all have a chance to meet, talk, cook, eat and have fun together. I always looked forward to those celebrations. I have not spent Christmas back home- in Kenya- for 8 years now. I am nostalgic for the get-togethers with extended family for a daylong/night long catching up, good comfort home cooking and noise-making. Out here, I spend a quiet one with my immediate family, we just sit around, cook, eat and enjoy each other's company. (Forum Discussion, 24 December 2008)*

For this member, her memory of Christmas in Kenya is connected to when she was growing up when time was spent with family celebrating and having fun together. In mentioning the time in which the memory is taken from, her nostalgia for the type of Christmas she experienced when she was growing up is more pronounced because of what she deems as being different from the experience 'here'. Her description of Christmas in Kenya is influenced by her comparison of Christmas in Germany. The differences pointed out are that Christmases at 'home' were about close and extended families, noisy, day/night long catching up whereas 'here' Christmas is quiet and only with immediate family. Here is the reproduction of the discourses of Africa as more communal and inclusive of the extended family thus noisy while Europe is more individualistic and more about the immediate family hence quiet. However, for another member, she misses Christmas in Kenya because it was stress free and fun. As she explains further here:

*I miss Christmas in Kenya with my family. I find it stress free. I find Christmas in Europe stressful. You have to buy presents to extended family members, send dozens of cards, decorating the house. You are forced to keep up with the tradition of it all, just to have your children in the same level as the other children. In Africa I remember it was fun. It was very much church oriented. New outfit to be worn on 25th and a good meal with the family was enough. I want to teach my children Christmas it's not about spending but a time to learn about Jesus and being together as a family. (Forum Discussion, 24 December 2008)*

In this instance, Christmas in Europe is stressful because of the extended family and having to keep up with a new tradition which in a way shows her need to conform to the local context because no one forces her to keep up with tradition but herself. For

this member, her recollection of Christmas at home was about spending time with family, going to church and wearing a new outfit on Christmas day. Wearing a new outfit on Christmas day is a tradition that is also common for children in South Africa and somehow contradictory to this members' suggestion that she wants to teach her children that Christmas is not about spending because someone has to spend money to get that new outfit. Her recollection of Christmas is that of a child and thus not seeing the expenses accrued during this time, and then comparing it to her time here as an adult where she is aware of the expenses that come with maintaining the traditions.

For both members, memories of Kenya are linked to experiencing Christmas during their childhood. Their experience of Christmas in Europe is during their adulthood and therefore the comparisons made are not necessarily on par with each other. Interesting about these two postings is the way in which the liminal position emerges. The members are both caught up in the in-between spaces of experiencing Christmas in Europe and in Africa, but what is different in this situation, is how the members are also moving back forth and between Christmas in their childhood and adulthood. These are two experiences that are different from each other and yet they point to a liminality that emerges through the experiences of cultural difference. The first members' memory of 'home' in a way mirrors the other member's current experience of 'here', the only difference is that it is seen through different eyes. The first member talks about extended families getting together and organizing parties which can be very stressful for the adults doing the organizing but stress free for a child who just has to participate whilst for the other member, it is rather stressful buying presents for extended families and decorating which she, as an adult, has to do but can be stress free for a child.

Looking at another excerpt taken from the discussion, *African Punishment in School*, where a member discusses a traumatic experience related to Africa. She states:

*Did it make you a better person today? Having been raised in Africa and gone to school there, I have this problem to forgive my high school head teacher for punishing us like prisoners than like students. My confidence was smashed I had to work so hard to get*

*it back. (Forum Discussion, 20 October 2008)*

This member brings up a sensitive topic that is connected to a memory that is linked to her time in Africa. In the retelling of this story, this member creates the assumption that all those who have been raised in Africa and went to school there have experienced corporal punishment of some sort. In creating the impression that this is an African issue, she appeals to the other members' thinking of having knowledge about Africa and thus even if they did not experience it themselves, they might know some other people who have gone through it and thereby having an opinion on the issue. By asking the question, *Did it make you a better person today?*, there is the impression that the member wants to know how the experience made others feel and whether there are others like her. The member is able to establish a relationship to Africa even though she resides in Europe by suggesting that what has happened in the past can still affect our present. For many of the members, they might have left Africa and the experiences linked to the continent behind, but these experiences can still follow them.

More importantly, this member highlights the centrality of liminality within this platform by using a liminal phase or moment in her life that occurred outside of a migration context but can still be related to Africa to establish a relationship with the other members. This is evident in that the experience of corporal punishment was part of an experience that she underwent during her childhood and school days in her country of origin in Africa. And during her liminal phase from this childhood experience to maturity where this punishment is no longer an occurrence, she was able to recognize the damage done by this traumatic experience to her confidence which she had to work hard to get back. The emphasis here is that she has already gained confidence back so her liminal period within this experience is in the past. Since this experience can be related to Africa, it becomes relevant in the process of creating and establishing links with the members of the platform. And her posting does receive a response from another member in the platform who also shares her experience of having gone through corporal punishment, although with a different opinion from the original poster. She explains:

*I was beaten at school too. I hated it, of course, but I cannot say it dealt a blow to my*

*self-confidence. I was a really bad child and so I think I came in for more than my fair share of beating. There is, I think, a salient issue to consider with regard to being beaten. If you are the only one being beaten, it can affect your sense of self. But if everyone is beaten, then it just becomes an unpleasant norm. I'm glad all the beating is on the wane. However tempting it can be to beat a child, I think people should refrain from doing so. Also, there's beating and beating. The kind of serious beating Joy seems to have suffered is different from the occasional smack that people sometimes give to a child. (Forum Discussion, 25 October 2008)*

This member's experience of corporal punishment did not affect her self-esteem in the same way that it did for the original poster and so her response to discussion is more on the topic of corporal punishment and her views on this topic rather than on a specific memory itself. Even though she recollects her experience of being beaten as a child and the justification behind it, her focus is more on understanding the other member's position and expressing her own position on the issue. Highlighted in this member's response is a notion that came up earlier suggesting that differences are not emerging because of the situation that is being experienced but more so on how people experience this situation. And this is because even though the two members have both experienced corporal punishment in the African continent, the differences in the outcome of their experience is not based on the fact that corporal punishment occurred in different African countries but more because of how each member experienced and interpreted having to undergo corporal punishment.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The members' positioning in the platform is that of transmigrants. They are situated in Europe and therefore involved in activities in Europe while simultaneously maintaining ties to their countries of origin in Africa in various ways such as working on projects or even through family visits. It is through this process of transmigration that the members are able to forge relationships with each other because in many of the discussion posts, the members find ways of establishing relationships with each other by discussing issues related to Africa or Europe. During this process, they find themselves in the in-between spaces, the liminal position in which they are either

outside or inside and sometimes in-between. What becomes evident in the forging of relationship is the foregrounding of their liminal positions while using issues related to class, race as examples to demonstrate their liminality. Even though racial discrimination or class based issues are some of the aspects shared by the members, these experiences are not experienced in the same way by all members. And thus, forging solidarity based on such issues would not necessarily possible. Whereas forging solidarity based on their experiences of being in-between seems more plausible as it is an equalizing factor.

As evident in the analysis, the liminal position manifests itself differently in their experiences as Africans in Europe or when they are Africans in Africa visiting from Europe. In their experiences as African (women) in Europe, the members position and are positioned outside in various ways and this brings about the structural inferiority that pushes them to take action and become involved in their countries of origin. In visiting Africa and being positioned as outsiders because of behaviours linked to Europe, a position that seems favourable and thus affirmed as a positive. Even though the members are at times aware of their structural inferiorities in that they sometimes mention these, there is a tendency to focus more on how to transform it and this is where the self-definition comes in. They became active agents in their stories and Europe is made to be the object instead of the other way around which is their reality offline.

However, in their experiences as Africans in Europe engaging with Africa or even as Africans in Africa visiting from Europe, they are also positioning or are positioned outside Africa. Again in this context, structural inferiorities emerge where the members respond by creating a distance between themselves and Africa through a form of self-definition. It is in these moments where it can be suggested that relationships are established with those outside the platform including African men, however, to know whether solidarity itself is forged, a deeper analysis would need to be performed. Looking at both discussion topics, *Pray for Africa* and *Politics in Africa*, one important issue that comes to the mind is that in discussing issues about the African continent, comparisons are not made between Africa and Europe in the same



way that this occurs when they speak about Europe. However, both actions during the process of self-definition create a distance with Europe and Africa by painting both locations in a negative light (Europe) or in a position of inferiority (Africa). Through this, it is evident that solidarity on the basis of a continental identity is not necessarily possible and thus highlighting the need to look at other way in which solidarity is forged. In this, we see what Turner means when he argues that, “liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low” (1965: 97). The members of the AWE platform, in their moments of liminality, are able to position themselves as higher or in a position of authority over those who reside in Africa and these positionings are made possible because the high cannot exist unless there is a low. Furthermore, the members’ relationship with Europe exposes them to what it is like to be low. Some of the structural inferiority in relation to Africa leaves the members feeling a sense of homelessness or the unhomely.

## Chapter 7: The Doing of Mothering from the Margins

“At home in Nigeria, all a mother had to do for a baby was wash and feed him and, if he was fidgety, strap him onto her back and carry on with her work while that baby slept. But in England she had to wash piles and piles of nappies, wheel the child round for sunshine during the day, attend to his feeds as regularly as if one were serving a master, talk to the child, even if he was only a day old! Oh, yes, in England, looking after babies was in itself a full-time job.”

Buchi Emecheta, *Second class citizen*, 1974

In the preceding chapters, the emergence of liminality was observed as an important component of how the platform and its members position themselves. This liminal position seemed to emerge strongly when discussing topics related to their migration experience, their adaptation in the new countries of settlement and their transmigration process. It also became clear that these experiences are used to highlight the members' liminality and thus revealing that the liminal position is taken up as a way to establish relationship between the members and as such, an important factor when understanding how solidarity is forged in the platform. Moreover, there was also a hint that this liminal position manifests itself in relation to the gender category and thus, in this chapter, the aim is to focus on the category of gender with an emphasis on the practice of mothering and what is articulated about this issue from the interstices of the positioning of being women, being African and being in Europe. Motherhood or the issue around being mothers makes up a central component of this platform, and as such it is interesting to explore constructions articulated by the members around this issue. The focus will be on the linkages and disconnections that are articulated from these in-between moments in order to observe what this reveals about solidarity within the platform. In examining this issue, Sara Ruddick (1980)'s argument where she asserts that “central to the experiences of our mothers and our mothering is a poignant conjunction of power and powerlessness” (343) is a great starting point in that it draws attention to the notion that mothering as an experience is not only one dimensional but that it has ambivalences which make the process of

mothering not an easy one. Data analysed in this chapter is taken from 7 discussion forum posts.

## 7.1 Mothering from the margins

As the protagonist in Buchi Emecheta's *Second class citizen* compares the mothering experience in Nigeria to that of the one in England, it is easy to observe how different these practices are to her. The Nigerian mothering practice is portrayed as simple and less complicated while in England, mothering might as well be a "full time job". The interesting aspect here however is not the comparison as such, but the ability by the protagonist to be exposed to and have an awareness of both mothering practices. Her exposure to both these mothering practices has been through the process of migration in moving from Nigeria to England. The awareness and knowledge she portrays is an experience that has been observed a number of times from the members of the platform which seems to reflect the between and betwixt feeling of liminality and not so much the neither here nor there that also characterises liminality. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this between and betwixt as portrayed here cannot be associated with transmigration in which migrants simultaneously point their lives in more than one society. The middle voice, as portrayed by Emecheta, seems to be experienced in the mothering practice of England while at the same time, holding on to the other mothering practice left behind in Nigeria and thus, although it gives the impression of the mothering practice in Nigeria as occurring in the present, this is a recollection of an experience in the past. And even though the current mothering practices in Nigeria might not be the same as the ones in England, there might be changes to it that could affect the way she thinks about it in the present.

Her between and betwixt position, in which she recollects the past because she has encountered a different experience in the present, is also a space in which the subject recognizes both mothering experiences and is faced with the potential to make a choice to either articulate how she reconciles these experiences or do nothing. In an excerpt taken from the discussion, *raising our kids in 2 cultures*, this becomes clear when one member responds by saying:

*Personally I think it's a challenge. It is a good opportunity for our children to experience both sides. But for our partners we have to explain to them and somehow agree to be in between. It's not easy. There is a big difference between the African culture and the European culture. One has to live for several years in each country to understand a little bit. (Forum Discussion, 30 June 2008)*

For this member, raising children in two cultures is a challenge in that there is a big difference between African and European culture, however, she acknowledges that it is good for the children to experience both sides. She does not explain which European or African culture she is talking about as both cultures are homogenized. However, this is not entirely surprising as this corresponds with how the platform is framed as an African Women in Europe space. She does not privilege either culture as being better but focuses more on finding a way in which both cultures can be experienced by the children and thus her suggestion of being 'in between'. This in between position suggests an insider position in both cultures because as explained by the member, "one has to live for several years in each country" and yet to be exposed to both by living in each country also suggests that there is a distance or disconnect to both these cultures at one time or the other. This is where the argument that their experience of both cultures plus the distance they have places them in the margin because they have now viewed both cultures and are privy to both the positive and negative sides of both cultures. Interestingly, she uses this liminal position at the margin to create and forge solidarity with the other members when she asserts that it becomes their (her and the members) responsibility 'to explain' and 'to somehow agree' with their partners on the importance of exposing their children to both cultures. The members are able to find solidarity in the knowledge that they are at the margins because of this liminal position they hold but also the fact that this liminality also puts them in a position of power in which, although difficult, they can take the initiative to persuade their partners to see the importance of both cultures for their children.

In the last posting, it is clear that the exposure to more than one culture which in this case is caused by migration forms part of this marginality. However, for some members, this experience can also occur in one's home country and yet because of the migration process, only issues linked to the migration experience tend to be privileged

when discussed in the platform. In *how important is your mother tongue*, a member posits that:

*I had problems with my son, who even back home did not want to learn my mother-tongue, preferring Kiswahili instead. However, we left home for US and Europe when he was only 8 and it was not long before he began to have trouble conversing in kiswahili. Help came in the form of sending him home during summer holidays when he turned 12...He asked to be sent home as he found Austria a little challenging for him and wanted to reconnect with his extended family back home. It worked miracles, at 17, he is now comfortable with the language and plans to spend as much time back home as he can. (Forum Discussion, 30 December 2008)*

In her situation, her son had the option to learn her mother tongue as well as Kiswahili, which is the official language of some countries in East Africa, and he preferred Kiswahili instead of her mother tongue. This is a common experience in many African countries. In South Africa alone, there are 11 official languages and because I learned English as a first language at school, my parents encouraged me to be fluent in my mother tongue, Xitsonga, as a way for me not to lose the language and cultural practice. Similarly, this member shows that this was an issue that she encountered in her home country where Kiswahili and a number of other languages exist alongside each other and she wanted her son to learn her mother tongue even though he preferred to speak Kiswahili instead. There is liminality present in this story in that she found herself wanting her son to learn her mother tongue but there was the presence of Kiswahili which we can surmise is a language that was familiar to her and the language he preferred to speak. Having no knowledge of the country in which this is taking place, it is hard to argue as to how the language set up is so it can only be speculated. In my knowledge of the context of Southern Africa, it is mainly in the urban areas where a melting point of languages is present and thus, one's hometown or province is where their mother tongue is spoken by many people. If she had resided in the urban areas, then her liminality about being in between would be reflected in the 'home' where her mother tongue is spoken and 'here' in the urban areas where although her language is spoken, Kiswahili is still the predominant language. Although she cites this liminality as an issue, it is evident that Kiswahili no longer poses much of a problem once she moves internationally. Her son was faced with the loss of Kiswahili but also

challenges of living in Austria. It becomes apparent here that it is his liminality that she recounts but what is also noteworthy is how she is able to help her son. Although being able to send him home during the summer is an important part of the story and it is a demonstration that her family's financial situation is stable and hints at a middle class status, she only mentions it as what worked in her situation but does not suggest it as something that all the members should do. And so what becomes evident here is that through her son's experience of liminality, she displays a liminality of her own but one of being on the margin, on the edge as the parent and that is how she is able to find a connection with the other members. However, the way in which she solves her problem is not a reality that all members can relate to and thus, although mentioned, is not as important.

What is interesting about this posting as well is that this member gives us a glimpse of the potentiality that is also inherent in this space and as Turner explains, "liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense, the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configuration of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner, 1960: 48). There is a tendency to assume that the liminal position is a negative space where one feels invisible, homeless and lost and this is an important part of it but what Turner also argues for is recognition of the other experiences that occur in this liminal position. When this member was in her home country, she wanted her son to learn her mother tongue but once she moved and he started to struggle with Kiswahili, it was more important for him to reconnect with extended family by sending him back "home". Kiswahili started representing "home" and became a language that she was comfortable with him learning. It can even be argued that this whole experience reconfigured the way in which she thought about languages and mother tongues. This situation can be likened to the decolonizing process that Njoki Wane experienced when she moved to Canada to pursue her graduate studies. She had been brought up in Kenya and was encouraged to pursue Western education as a way to further her economic situation and this led her to think that anyone who was unable to recite works by Shakespeare, DH Lawrence etc. was illiterate and backward (Wane, 2008: 185). As she says here, "unknown to me, the act of being schooled in the literary

canons so valued in Europe caused me to be disassociated from and devalue the cultural knowledges and wisdom of my ancestors, my community, and my family" (Ibid.,). However, once she moved to Canada and started taking classes in feminism, she found herself disengaged in many of the issues as she could not relate and whenever African women were mentioned, it was in relation to high birth rates, poverty and oppression which did not fully reflect the reality of African women as she knew it (Ibid.,). Through the migration process, she was now exposed to two worlds, one she had read about in her books when she was in Kenya and the other one she had left behind in her quest for the world in her books. As stated here, "I felt a rug had been pulled from underneath my feet" and as difficult as this was for her, it also became a "realm of possibility" in which she was able to find her centre and start the decolonizing of self (Ibid.,189). Although these situations are slightly different from each other, what we see in both is that the liminal position, the exposure to everything and nothing, is a space full of possibility that becomes evident in this platform through the members' search for solidarity.

In this illustration, she experiences liminality on the edge by highlighting the experience of her son. This liminality is characterised by a loss of Kiswahili and also the challenges in Austria, however, through his movement back and forth between Africa and through (his transmigration), a positive outcome emerged. The action taken to send him back home not only reinforced his connection to the continent but it has potentially created a hybridity in that he is both comfortable in his mother's country and also in Austria. It also changed the way in which she thought of Kiswahili which I would suggest is positive in that it has broadened her view on the idea of mother tongues. Noted here is how the mothering experience from this liminal position (through her son's experience) illustrate both a disconnect and a linkage to two different spaces but also how these two spaces influence how she performs her mothering act. Furthermore, this posting signals us to observe what Bhabha argues for in the case of minority agency which can also be applied in this context in asserting that "minority agency emerges through anxiety to produce the affective conditions of choice—of having to do something, or indeed failing to grasp the emancipatory wager—but, in either case, being faced with a potential of choice" (Bhabha, 1996: 127).

This idea of being faced with a “potential choice” is shown by the member in the second posting whereby when faced with a challenge, she resolves the situation by taking the action to have her son visit her home country in which learning her mother tongue is not as important as him being able to learn and be comfortable in Kiswahili. In both postings, both members share their liminal position of being in the edge, in the margins. The first members’ liminality is evident through discussing her own experience and she argues that this marginality is important in order for her children to be exposed to both cultures thus undergoing hybridity. The second member, however, shares her son’s liminal experience and in the process sharing her own liminal position from the margins and shows the potentiality of this space by illustrating her own action in response to the situation. The next section will further clarify how mothering is understood in this study.

## **7.2 Mothering as performative acts**

A central theme in the AWE online discussion is the topic of mothering or members as mothers. The centrality of mothering and the use of ‘women’ in the framing of the platform as African Women in Europe can appear to insinuate that womanhood is linked to mothering thus giving the impression that a gender identity exists. However, for this study, it is argued that it is important to move away from a stable, rigid gender identity and to start from what Butler (1988) argues that “if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (520). Therefore when we focus on gender as constituted through acts, we then see that the notion of ‘woman’ and therefore mothering can also be seen as a construct which is performed. To take this argument further, it can be argued that the word “women” in AWE does not mean that women are mothers but that women do mothering. This is an argument borrowed from Ruddick and thus to reiterate this further, she asserts that she chooses to concentrate on “what mothers do rather than upon what we are” as the latter falls into the trap of having to deal with biological questions (1980: 346).



The idea to focus on the doing of mothering, hence the performative act, is integral to this chapter in that this is how this platform came into being. In my interview with the founder of AWE, she stated one of the reasons she started this website was to get advice and support from other African women on how to deal with her son's bullying in kindergarten for having curly hair. It was not the fact that she was a mother but dealing with various challenges of motherhood that motivated her to start the website. Her actions seem to resonate with what Ruddick is talking about when she argues that maternal practice responds to the, "historical reality of a biological child in a particular social world" (1980, 348). It is evident through her words that even though maternal practice is linked to the notion of woman through the word maternal, the basis for the practice is not based on biological wiring but more so on performative acts as a response to the various experiences of the children. Hence, maternal practice and mothering will be used interchangeably in this study as they share the same meaning here. In this next posting, it is noteworthy that this member's mothering practice is more focused on growth and less on preservation and acceptability even though all three are interlinked. She says:

*Especially creating time to play with your kids, I cannot remember playing with my parents only with my brothers, sisters and neighbours. Most of us African women we have this problem. So we buy toys and think this will do the job. of cause not!!! We need to show them how to play with the toys and get down on the floor and do those brrrrrrmmmmmm brummmmm (driving a car) or reading books bed time stories and singing and dancing. (Forum Discussion, 7 October 2010)*

Her own childhood consisted of playing with her siblings and neighbours and less with her parents and she views this as an African mothering practice in that she points out that African women have this problem. She includes herself as part of the problem and proceeds to point out a way to subvert this mothering practice. She also gives the impression that she judges this mothering practice as not being good and a problem that persists even today. The first performative act of mothering which is negated in this discussion took place during a specific time and place under certain conditions. This mothering practice might still persist in her home country, however, it seems through the migration process; she has been exposed to an alternative way of

mothering and thus wants to adapt this variation of mothering. This posting best exemplifies the thinking that 'woman' and in this context motherhood should not be seen as a stable identity but rather as Butler (1988) argues, " the act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene" (526). This member makes us aware that this kind of performative act of mothering has been going on before her and continues today however, for this member, this act that one does or performs can also be reflected upon when confronted with certain conditions and thus one is able to make a choice to either carry on repeating this act or subvert it. This is articulated in her suggestion of mothers being more involved and playing with their children as a way to subvert this behaviour thus changing her maternal practice. Focusing on the doing of mothering from the liminal moments, the question to ask is, under which conditions do members of the platform respond or make the choice and what performative acts are repeated, subverted and even newly created?

### **7.3 The Doing of Mothering Unveiled**

This next section will focus on the members and their performative acts of doing mothering and the conditions that inform these performative acts. Through this analytical process, we will observe what conditions are recognized as relevant by the members. This section is subdivided into three parts and the first one will focus on how children's voices inform the doing of mothering. The second part will show that in the doing of mothering, help and support structures are very important. The last part will deal with how the doing of mothering can be seen as a way to preserve cultural heritage.

#### **7.3.1 Children's voices inform the doing of mothering**

The doing of mothering is in many ways informed by the needs of the children and as such it comes as no surprise that children's voices permeate the discussions in the AWE platform. In this section, we will explore the different issues brought up by the

children through the members and how these issues inform and allude to their ways of doing mothering. In the discussion, *Why am I so dark*, a member posts an issue to the discussion forum that she is apprehensive about which has yet to happen in hopes of getting advice from the other members. This is what she says:

*I am waiting for my kids to one day ask me this question. Why am I so dark than others? or why are you so dark coloured and dad so light? What is the most diplomatic way to explain this? I just want to be ready with a good answer. What did you tell your kids? What did you tell your kids? I would love to hear your respond to this. (Forum Discussion, 20 May 2008)*

In this posting, it is easy to ascertain that this member is in an interracial relationship where skin colour between the parents is apparent. Moreover, her and her family reside in a place where dark skinned people are not as common and thus the worry that her children will question their being different from others. This is a question that has not been asked by the children yet but this member is already anticipating that it will be asked and therefore planning how she will answer it. This question is formulated around the discourse of racial difference and thus her anticipation of this very question has its premise on the fact that racial difference in the context in which she reside is of importance. As the responses from the other members will show, racial difference in this platform is not discussed as a tool for separation. The bringing of this anticipated question into discussion in the platform also highlights that this is an issue that seems to be fairly new to her where she does not have an example from her own childhood on how to deal with this and thus requires advice from the other members who might share this experience or have been through this experience.

This is when it becomes visible that in the doing of mothering, parents or those charged with mothering are confronted with and anticipate a myriad of questions from their children in which they feel it is their responsibility to give the best possible answer. In a similar manner, Ruddick argues that, “the agents of maternal practice, acting in response to the demands of their children, acquire a conceptual scheme – a vocabulary and logic of connections – through which they order and express the facts and values of their practice” (1980, 348). Going along with Ruddick, it would mean that the fact that this member’s mothering practice is being dictated to by her

children's needs is not any different to her mother's way of mothering because all mothers regardless of time, their mothering practice is responding to the demands and needs of the children. This suggests as explained here by Irene Gedalof (paraphrasing Irigiray, 1974: 365) that "the woman as mother is positioned as place, the 'still silent ground' upon which the masculine subject is constituted, and as long as she serves that symbolic function she cannot take a place of her own or even take place, that is, exist and define an identity of her own as long as the positioning of woman/mother as a place is said to be – a site of stasis and repetition-as-same against which the dynamism of time is produced" (Gedalof, 1999:90).

In articulating what she anticipates could be questions her children might ask, this member clearly demonstrates that this women/mother position is a place where repetition-as-same occurs of the protective and preventative nature of the mothering practice. Moreover, by taking the action to bring this situation to the platform in the way that she does by positioning herself within this interracial identification and seeking responses and advice from those in a similar situation, she does two things. She establishes a relationship with those members who respond to her request for support which is where solidarity is forged. Interestingly, in establishing the relationship, she also shows Gedalof argument which is that, "there is always the possibility of a repetition that undoes, a repetition that communicates agency and produces something new and challenging" (1999:92). This is because by articulating this notion of mothering as informed by the children's needs and demands, there is repetition but then at the same time, she undoes this repetition by challenging it when she suggests that this doing of mothering is unknown to her. This action illustrates a number of important factors which are pertinent to this study. Firstly, the act of repetition in the mothering practice does not necessarily stay the same even when it seems familiar because of various factors and therefore it is important to recognize that mothering is a construction which is fluid and is always in process. Furthermore, in using the practice of mothering to establish relationships with each other as part of forging solidarity in the platform, it becomes evident that this act in itself has other consequences that go beyond the intended consequence of forging solidarity.

As the responses of the other members show, not all those who are mothering in the platform share the same experiences and contexts. Nevertheless, they can still impart their advice and share their opinions and as shown here:

*Hi, Just tell them that, that is the way the creator made you and that every skin tone is beautiful. Ps: I have a 4 year old nephew that will correct you, if you call him black, he says he is chocolate/brown. Children have their own perceptions of color adults are the ones that distort them. When confronted with that question just ask them what is their opinion and take it from there. (Forum Discussion, 29 May 2008)*

*In my opinion(i stand to be corrected here)i think you should explain to you boys that in the world people may take different colors as a result of creation, but what counts isnt what color their skin appears, but what lies within them. Teach them the value of person more than color and see, how well they will respond to it. (Forum Discussion, 30 May 2008)*

*I would say, simply bring up the children teaching them about where you come from, the culture, the traditions, the life etc. They grow up knowing that there are different kinds of races...each special in it's own way. My kids know that i come from Africa and their dad is from France and that they are a special "mix". (Forum Discussion, 31 May 2008)*

All the responses to the discussion post centre on the importance of teaching children that although different groups do exist, the children should learn to value people more. In the first and second posting, both members do not seem to show that they will be confronted with this kind of question in that they give a more generalized opinion on the issue of race. Yet the member in the third posting has a similar experience and her advice, even though general is also given with an example of what she has told her own children. So even though all four members are part of the platform and seem to be interested in the issue of race and mothering, they do not necessarily share the same experiences that inform their way of doing mothering. As seen in the next postings from the discussion, *Advice on kids and gadgets*, several factors influence what children need or require from their parents. One member posed this question:

*I have an 8 yr old who claims that all her friends have cell phones. When I was last in Kenya i did notice that all her cousins and her agetates did have phones. I am in a dilemna because i feel that she's too young to have one. What is she to use is for? She calls her friends from the house phone. she walks 500m to her school. Am I being too old fashioned or what? (Forum Discussion, 20 September 2009)*

In this member's question of whether she is old fashioned or not for being conflicted on whether to buy her 8 year old daughter a cell phone, it is striking to observe two voices in a contest that goes beyond a cell phone. On one hand, the daughter wants to have a phone because all her friends have one. On the other hand, the mother talks about her last visit to Kenya and seeing her daughter's cousins and peers with cell phones. What is interesting here in these two voices is that the daughter is more concerned about her peers around her, while the mother's decision is swayed by what is happening in Kenya. This suggests that the liminal position she shares in this discussion is a combined one between mother and daughter. Her daughter's voice seems to be informed by her local surroundings, while her decision on how to do her mothering is slightly more influenced by what she sees in Kenya. Although, she is still conflicted about this situation after seeing children in Kenya with cell phones, we can still see how important the mothering practice in Kenya is to her. What is made clear though is the mingling or intermixing of influences that will ultimately inform her doing of mothering. She does not only rely on her child's needs and demands, but more so on what she deems as acceptable to her to determine how she does her mothering. Another member responds to the question by explaining:

*I think kids of nowadays are really spoilt. Or should I say environment and peer pressure make them more demanding. Can you imagine my 5 yr old asked for a mobile phone and he can't wait to have one. He is now starting school actually officially on Monday and I know this question will come up soon...I think kids of today are not kids of yesterday and so are the parents. The new generation cannot be the same as last generation. The environment change people and are more advance. Parents are busy working just to have food on the table for the kids. You cannot have the kids playing outside without supervision. I love old days where we played kalongo!! Pretend games mama, baba, mototo. It's a challenge being a parent of today's generation. But we will make it (Forum Discussion, 20 September 2009)*

According to this member, children are more demanding than when she was a child because of the environment and peer pressure. She shares the previous member's experience in that her own child who is only 5 years old also asked for a mobile phone. Her position on this issue is that things today are very different from yesterday and as such parents have to also adapt to these changes and cannot rely on the mothering practices of yesterday. To place emphasis on this, she relives her own childhood experiences with a juxtaposition of the present situation where parents have to work hard to feed the family but still cannot leave the children unsupervised. This member's posting shows an in-betweenness of being in an advanced/present day situation while still holding on to the outdated/past. The children now are exposed to different factors compared to what she was exposed to as a child and thus her doing of mothering cannot be the same as what her mother did. This member also reflects Gedalof's notion of repetition in that there is a need to factor in that her mothering practice is informed by her children's demands but at the same time, she demonstrates a stronger undoing of this repetition by articulating how the environment is vastly different to how she grew up and thus, different factors and influences have to be accounted for when repeating past mothering practices. In other words, their doing of mothering needs to fit with the demands of the times.

For another member though, this argument does not suffice and she responds by saying:

*I personally think 8 is too young for a mobile phone, whether abroad or back home. Despite all the advanced technology and wanting to move with time, kids should be allowed to be kids, there's a time for everything and they should also growing up knowing that they can't get "everything" they wish for. We didn't either when growing up, but we still had happy childhoods. So, I don't think you are denying her much, she can still talk to her friends:) (Forum Discussion, 2 October 2009)*

This member brings both the discussions from the last postings together. She seems to be arguing against the doing mothering that is centred on influences from abroad and back home as well as the argument to keep up with the times and being advanced. She is more focused on a mothering that is informed by the need to keep children as children and teaching them to know that they cannot get everything. She gives an

example of a 'we' childhood where they were not given everything and yet 'they' had happy childhood. The 'we', is assumed to be inclusive of the members in discussion and more in reference to the past (home countries in Africa). Her approach seems to deviate from the other members in that she does not believe that parenting should be informed by the needs of the children and as such challenges the doing of mothering that is based on repetition. She argues more for doing what is good for the children and she justifies her argument by relating to how they (members) were raised. This is interesting because even though she challenges one form of repetition, she still relies on another form which is based on how they, as African women, were raised.

This section has illustrated that children do inform the way in which the members of the platform do their mothering which shows that even within the migration process, mothering practices are repeated. This repetition seems to suggest a stronger loyalty or need to be raising their child as it is still done in their home countries regardless of the current environment in their host countries. Having knowledge about mothering from their childhood, home countries etc. and knowing how mothering is done in the host countries appears to influence their responses to certain situations. Their responses still differ as there is a tendency to revere the ways of doing mothering from back home as this is linked to the members' childhood. While others seem to be more interested in letting go of the past and focusing on the present and future moments in their mothering. Their articulations seem to support Luce Irigaray's claims about the reproductive 'place' when she argues that what "mothers are meant to be is not just a ground upon which an unspecified masculine subject can stand, but is also a crucial terrain upon which collective identities are constituted and contested" (1985, 91).

This is also the cause of a movement back and forth between childhood experiences, how they were raised, to how they proceed with their own mothering practices today. There is a holding on to those childhood experiences but also a letting go at the same time to adapt to the times in as things are different today as to what they were yesterday. Their liminality does not only focus on their movement between Africa and Europe but also between the past and the present. The participants in this discussion might be African but are from different countries, they might all be mothers but how



they do mothering differs, and one can argue that their connection and relationships with each other seem to be around their liminal position. Additionally, this discussion at best exemplifies why it is important to focus more on what the members recognize as issues within the space and less on who they are as people.

### 7.3.2 Doing mothering requires support and help

In this next section, it will become evident that doing mothering is not only informed by the demands of the children as discussed in the last section but also by the need to have support and help. Needing help and support and how to get it are central themes brought to the platform by the members. In the discussion, *Work, kids, studies etc, how do you get on*, some members discuss the difficulties of juggling motherhood with careers and education, and how they coped. One member responds to the discussion by saying:

*I had my first one in my first year at uni and it's tough!! The way I coped was to take advantage of every help I could get. Pay a friend to babysit for one night and use that night to finish all your dissertations and course work. (Forum Discussion, 9 April 2008)*

This member had her first child while studying at university and she found this situation tough. Her coping strategy was to take advantage of every help she had access to and one of the example she gives is where she paid a friend to babysit in order to do her coursework. This suggestion seems to be aimed at those with younger children in that the sharing is based on when this member had her first child while at University. From her use of language, it is clear that her doing of mothering seems to revolve around her as the main doer as she does not mention a partner or husband. Due to the lack of details not provided in the response, we can only surmise that she does the mothering alone as a single parent or she sees the responsibility of doing mothering falling solely on her even when she has a partner. The latter suggestion seems to be more credible in that the same member adds to discussion again by saying:

*Yes, you do have to multi-task. You have to be more organised than everyone, the kids, the husband and the baby-sitter!! If you don't mind my asking, how old are your kids? You have to get them involved in housework and delegate more, otherwise you will be*

*overwhelmed!! My first is now in the teens, so it is a bit easier to give them responsibility at that age. At least, he does not need me to bath him or iron his clothes. I still have to organise when he wakes up, his meals and all that, but there is a lot he can do for himself. (Forum Discussion, 28 March 2008)*

This member suggests that the responsibility of mothering falls on her in that she has to multi task and be more organised than everyone else. In her current situation, she still needs support and help, however because she no longer has young children, the problem is solved by ensuring that everyone participates in the provision of support and that includes the children themselves. This idea of coping seems to rely on the children being older and also having easy access to a babysitter. Nevertheless the impression she gives is that the sole responsibility of mothering still falls on the shoulder of the mother even when there is help from a babysitter, husband or the children. What is interesting in this discussion is the articulation of the difficulty of the doing of mothering and in coming on this platform to discuss these issues, the members challenge certain depictions of women as “self-sacrificing mothers, mothers as creators who must bear pain with patience and nurture selflessly” and as such open up the space for women to speak to the idea of “mothers as women who feel pain, anger, frustration, or women drained by the responsibilities that accompany their roles as mothers” (Akujobi, 2011: 22). This is not to say that such depictions do not exist, however, these are not the only experiences of mothering out there. Moreover, women experience mothering differently. As some members illustrate, gaining access to help in the form of a babysitter is not always that easy and their children are still young so support and help have to be sought from less conventional means. As this member explains:

*I had already started trying to do most of the work after my baby goes to bed, now i need to figure out how to get more help, i don't have too many friend in this city but i have found a couple of English speaking playgroups and meetups i'm hoping to get involved in. (Forum Discussion, 9 April 2008)*

Her child is still a baby and thus she is able to do most of the work when the baby is sleeping but as she says, she still needs to find some form of support and help. Since she does not have many friends in the city that she can ask to babysit as suggested by the other member, she has to be resourceful and look externally. In her case, English

speaking playgroups and meetups are the options available. On the basis of having few friends in the city and her interest in joining a language based playgroup, it is easy to infer that this member is new to the city and has just relocated to a country or city where she does not speak the official language(s). The picture painted here is that motherhood is difficult; however, not having a good support system in the form of friends or living in a country where there is language barriers further augments to the difficulty of motherhood. Notwithstanding, the availability of English playgroups and meetups to make new friends can help alleviate this problem and this is her solution. Through the English meetups, she is also able to meet and socialize with other people who are parents and thus creating more opportunities for finding new communities. The English meetup groups will also afford her to find solidarity with a variety of participants who by virtue of being in Europe have a common language with her and also share this experience of mothering are interested in finding support. This illustrates that some of the members are not only part of the AWE platform but also join or participate in other communities of shared interests. Moreover, although this platform positions itself in such way that it articulates a difference to other women in Europe, there are links and connections that are made with various groups by virtue of being in Europe and sharing a common interest and language. In another discussion, *dysfunctional society*, a member shares her experience of parenting by saying:

*Parents need help and support to handle the stresses and strains of life. This can be someone who takes the kids off for a while allowing parents time to recharge and re-energize. Back home, it is easy to rely on relatives and hired help for this However it is a different story out in the western world, where things are very different. Other types of help could be counselling services where people can go to seek non-judgemental help and advice. Lack of help can drive parents to the brink and unfortunately those who suffer are the children. (Forum Discussion, 27 October 2009)*

For this member, the concern is that parents need support to have time on their own to recharge so that they are able to take better care of their children. This was a common issue for all the members who participated in the *Work, kids, studies* discussion, however, she points to a factor that was not brought up in the other discussion. According to her, the situation is different for her and some of the

members because they have all been exposed to doing mothering with the help from relatives and hired help in their countries of origin or what she calls home. Her doing of mothering that she links to home echoes the concept of othermothering. This concept stems from the African philosophy that suggests that children do not only belong to their biological parents, but the community at large. Therefore this concept does not only take the form of women helping other mothers but these practices can also go beyond racial and gender boundaries (Wane, 2000: 112). Moreover, now they also have to contend with doing mothering in the “western world” where things are different. This response is similar to Emecheta’s protagonist who compares mothering practices in Nigeria to those in England, although the focus is a bit different. Support and help come in different forms to what she is used to but it can still be helpful and that is in the form of counselling services.

In all these postings, it is evident that all members agree that an essential part of doing mothering is the need for help and support. For these members, doing mothering is not an easy task especially when juggling it with careers and studies and as such seeking and figuring out how to gain support and help becomes important. There is also the sense that all the responsibility of the mothering practice should fall on those who take on the role of doing the mothering. Aside from the member who differentiates between the experiences of getting help at ‘home’ and in the ‘western world’, all the responses focus on how help can be sought out or gained within the context in which they are in now. This highlights that the support is very much centred on being in Europe, although other aspects from being African are occasionally borrowed from. In view of the members’ suggestions to pay friends to babysit, to get the whole family involved including the children, to join playgroups and meetups, and to seek counselling services, it is clear that the notion of othermothering is not only practiced in Africa but also in the host countries.

### 7.3.3 'Doing mothering as part of cultural preservation and heritage'

This last section will deal more closely with the other conditions that the members are exposed to in relation to their children and how they utilize these conditions to articulate, through their doing of mothering, ways to preserve cultural heritage.

#### 7.3.3.1 'Discipline'

The topic of discipline came up in the discussion forum, *raising our kids in 2 cultures*, where it was closely linked to the notion of culture. However, due to the fact that culture as a concept is a loaded term, it is important to mention from the beginning that the way it is used in this study is based on how the members use the term. In this excerpt taken from, *raising our kids in 2 cultures*, one member points out the difficulty for parents raising their children in two cultures when married, and more specifically to a non-African partner, when she says:

*Those of you married to non-african partners even have a triple burden I know that from experience I had the same problem with my ex-boyfriend whos a german,.. he didnt like it one bit that I yelled at the boys or even talked loud to them it was our biggest problem but again I saw that what he was saying was absolutely true we agreed on telling the boys just once to do something if they didnt ,...consequences followed which ranged from grounding them to not letting them watch TV or even cutting off their pocket-money. How I managed to successfully pull my boys through up to this time is that I simply combined the positive things from "my" african upbringing and the positive things here in Germany plus the day-to-day changes the kids were going through. On the whole I think theres no laid-down patent manual about how to bring our kids up between two cultures all we have to do is trial and error because however we want to inflict the african culture into them their current culture will always dominate and what might work for one kid will never work for another I see that with mine. (Forum Discussion, 1 July 2008)*

According to this member, raising children in two cultures is a burden and for those whose partners are non-African, it is a triple burden. She follows this statement with an example of her own when she had a German partner and they disagreed on a

certain parenting style. Her parenting style was that of yelling at her children which might have been informed by how she was raised and once she became involved with her German boyfriend, she became exposed to another way of punishing her children. Even though she asserts that this was a challenge for her and her boyfriend, she also was able to see his point. Here, the liminal position emerges through her exposure to the two different ways of raising children where she had to take action in dealing with her situation. In the context of this member, by being in a relationship with someone who had a different upbringing from her exposed her to a different way of parenting her children. This is a situation that can be found in many contexts, however, due to the way in which this platform is framed and as part of forging solidarity, this member highlights her situation as of being that which is linked to intercultural relationships. Shouting and yelling as a parenting style is one that is practiced in many families whether in Europe or Africa, however, because she is in a relationship with a German man, she takes his different upbringing and his parenting style as linked to being German. This suggests that the platform's positioning and the way it is framed influences how the members articulate certain issues. Her liminal position is further reinforced in that her successful parenting has been due to the combination or the hybrid nature of her parenting where she takes the positive aspects from the African side and the positives from the German context plus other day to day factors.

Even though the notion of culture is used very loosely by this member especially when she talks about African or even German culture, there is awareness that all cultures consist of both negative and positive aspects. And it could be suggested that through her encounter with her ex-boyfriend, a liminal position of being on the edge emerged in that she was able to see that there are certain aspects that she relates to her African upbringing that were not positive. In the same way that she sees certain aspects in parenting within the German context as negative. This marginal position occurs in moments of challenges as she explains that having different parenting styles from her boyfriend was problematic but at the same time, a negotiation process begins in which she is able to see both sides and even starts to question the validity or rigidity of her African upbringing. This is noted when she places quotation marks on "my African upbringing". This questioning, however, is not say that her African upbringing is not

good as she still continues to use it but maybe she questions parts of it and hence the reason to take only the positive aspects of it.

After sharing her experience and what she has done in terms of her own parenting situation, she proceeds to generalise her opinion and include the other members. For this particular member, there is a need to pass on her African culture to her children through mothering and there is a suggestion that other members might feel this way as well. The assumption that all the members need to pass on their culture could be linked to a discourse reiterated by Wane when she says, "African women are the guardians of traditional knowledge...and through narration, women pass on knowledges of African cultures and ways of knowing" (Wane, 2004: 4). This discourse on African women as guardians of knowledge and passing this knowledge on can be likened to Iris Young's argument when she asserts that, "traditional female domestic activity of women, which many women continue today, partly consists in preserving the objects and meaning of home" (1997: 332). As stated by Young, "the work of preservation... involves teaching the children the meaning of things among which one dwells, teaching the children the stories, practices, and celebrations that keep particular meanings alive" (Ibid.,333). The member's assumption that all the other members who are involved in the doing of mothering are or should actively be passing on their culture to their children starts to make sense in that this role of preservation is an activity that is associated with women. It can also be argued that in the context of this platform, this need for preservation of culture through the mothering process becomes more heightened by the interaction of the members and their children with the local culture in which there is a suggestion that the members might have no control over what the children are exposed to or are influenced by. This lack of control is very interesting in that the liminal stage that Turner discusses is also characterised by a lack of control for the neophytes participating in the rituals. And so as she suggests, the members have to be open to the process in that even though one form of parenting might work on one child, it does not necessarily mean it will work on the next.

In response to the above posting, another member who is in a mixed marriage gives a similar example of raising children where there is difference in parenting style, she explains:

*Yah it's a challenge being in a mix marriage. A lot of understanding and working together is the key to success especially where children are involved. Discipline is something I have been straggling with. I have been using the European style as you mentioned above but sometimes it doesnt work. If I go for holidays in my home country people say I am spoiling the kids I should discipline them African way. If you know what i mean. Sometimes I do try but it goes all wrong when I come from holidays and I change the rules again. I am still learning and juggling the two cultures. (Forum Discussion, 2 July 2008)*

This member discusses discipline but does not classify it as strongly under culture as the other member does, but more so as European style versus African way. She also expresses how much influence the current (German) culture has on her children. Evident here is also how through her connection to home, is she able to observe the influence of the European style of parenting in herself and thus finding herself in the margins. She also attempts to re-establish the connection to Africa by implementing a particular parenting style and tends to struggle when she arrives back in Europe. It is clear that through transmigration, this member moves back and forth between her country of origin and the host country and in the process finds herself on the threshold. An interesting observation here is that both members, through their exposure to two parenting styles and being on the edge, they reveal that the liminal phase can be characterised by a lack of control while simultaneously giving the actors the space to act and to have power.

Their lack of control stems from wanting to do things their way, inflicting African culture or punishing the African way when in Africa, however, this is not possible because other factors such the local culture or host countries also play a role. However, what is also happening is that these members do have power in that they are able to be exposed to both cultures and thus have the potential to act in a variety of ways as part of performing their mothering act. While the second member finds it challenging and sees the process as part of her learning to juggle the two ways of discipline, the



first member, however, is more interested in the preservation of her African culture but what we see happening is what Young suggest is that, “the activities of preservation give some enclosing fabric to this ever changing subject by knitting together today and yesterday, integrating the new events and relationships into the narrative of a life, the biography of a person, a family, a people” (Ibid.,333). Continuing with this debate on culture, Young’s argument will be taken up in detail as we observe how the members are discussing other facets of culture such as food.

### 7.3.3.2 ‘Food’

Food as part of mothering practice seems to play a major role for the members of the AWE platform. The forum discussion topic, *what do you cook*, had the members participating in drones in which all the members shared their stories on what and why they cook certain foods. Even though a number of members spoke about food in general, some discussed what they cook in relation to their children and thus giving the impression that their decision to cook certain foods was related to their doing of mothering. As shown by these two members:

*I cook both Kenyan foods and other foods from other cultures that I have found healthy. My son loves Chapatis but he will not eat ugali so I save Fridays as my ugail eating day while he has permission to eat something else. I serve chapatis with pinto beans since I can't get dengus and I prefer making chapati day as a no meat day. I make my own French fries (Chips) which my son loves, offcourse. I hardly cook beef because it does not taste the same like the real beef in kenya and absolutely no pork.(Forum Discussion, 17 October 2010)*

*I cook Kenyan and Belgian meals weekly. My family has learnt how to appreciate the different foods I put on the table. I cook ugali, chapatis, githeri, beans, lentils etc. I also prepare once in a while foods from other cultures, couscous from Morocco, pasta from Italy, Mouambe from Congo, plantin(bananas) from West Africa. I really like trying different foods. (Forum Discussion, 17 October 2010)*

In this discussion, both members discuss what they cook in relation to their family. The member in the first posting cooks food from Kenya and other cultures which she finds healthy. So even though incorporating more than one culture into her cooking is deemed important, a healthy diet seems to be at the forefront. She seems to be open to negotiation when it comes to certain ingredients like using pinto beans instead of mung beans which are used for cooking *dengus*. But then this negotiation can only go so far in that she hardly cooks beef because it does not taste like real beef from Kenya. This implies a preference for the type of beef sold in Kenya. This member's positioning suggests a class dimension. The way in which the member speaks gives the impression of being well off, of having choices and preferences in terms of her diet and this is interesting in that there is tendency to always link migration with struggles in the host countries. Even within this study, a number of the discussions do suggest that the local context tends to be challenging for the members and hence their need to establish a connection or relationship to Africa. However, this member's cooking of Kenyan food for her child does not seem to be motivated by difficulties linked to the context but more so as a choice and what can be viewed as a preservation of her culture. The member in the second posting brings in two countries and the foods into the discussion. We can only assume that Kenya is her home country and Belgium is the host country but foods from these countries are central. She also points out that foods from other cultures are also prepared for her family but even then, the different foods mentioned stay within the boundaries of Europe and Africa.

In both postings, the members seem to cook or prepare the food for their family with a purpose in mind. In the first posting, *chapati* and *ugali* are foods eaten in Kenya and so in mentioning what her son enjoys or dislikes in relation to Kenyans foods gives us a glimpse into how this member is attempting to raise her child by incorporating foods from her home country but we also see how the child reacts by liking certain foods while disliking others. This is similar to what the mother in another posting said about no matter how much one tries to inflict the African cultures on the children, some things might work on one kid but are not always guaranteed to work on all the children. More importantly, it also shows that although preparing food and feeding their children is important for the wellbeing of the children and this giving the

impression that mothers are seen as only nurturers and supporters of their children and their husbands (Young, 1997: 314). Moreover, this becomes a dual situation in which cooking African food is meant to nourish their children but at the same time, it is always a way to pass on their cultural heritage. As Young explains in this example, a woman “prepares the sauce according to her mother’s recipe in order physically to nourish her children, but at the time she keeps alive an old cuisine in a new country” (Ibid.,334). This is why one can argue that the members also use this very space of mothering to actively maintain certain foods from their past, their cultures and home countries while incorporating other factors such as new foods from other cultures, healthy diets etc. This suggests that the role of preservation is not merely a form of repetition but also of creating something new. This is because what the mothers do and teach about their home countries is not always readily accepted or entirely rejected by the children but it is important because it gets integrated into whatever experiences the children are having. What is important to note is that the children are also not passive in their upbringing as they also play a role. In the second posting, the member is more concerned with incorporating both Kenyan and Belgian meals into her family diet than whether this is what they like. She believes it is more important that the children learn to appreciate what is being cooked for them. Let us look at another member’s response on what she cooks:

*I love Curries.. due to Indian and swahili influence, my rice tends to be spicy or cooked with Coconut rice, I don't like plain rice. Roast is an English dish as well as a Kenyan dish! the British love meat as much as Kenyans although we prefer Goat meat. Chapatis, Githeri, Sukuma wiki is all cooked in my house and my children loves it. We are lucky in UK we have a few African shops and butcheries where you can buy a whole goat and get whatever ingredient you wish. Unfortunately I don't have a sweet tooth , so I leave this to my daughter as she loves baking and also very good with trying different dishes, at the moment she has perfected herself in cooking a Jamaican dish, Chicken and Mango curry! eaten with Basmati rice.. it is yummy! (Forum Discussions, 18 October 2010)*

The member talks about the different foods she likes and why she likes them. In doing this, she shares the complex historical context that colonialism has had on food in her mother country. What is prepared in her house reflects the connection to Africa which is shown through the colonial influences evidenced by food such as curries, roast and

coconut rice. At the same time, the United Kingdom is her place of residence but this location is made more complex than the rest of the European continent in that there is the exposure of other foods such as Jamaican dishes and the availability of African shops. This member is knowledgeable about both Kenya and the UK and makes some comparison between the two locations. There are similarities such as Roast being an English dish as well as Kenyan. The availability of African shops and butcheries in the country she resides in makes it easy to access certain ingredients from her home country and thus enabling her to cook more food and exposing her children to food from home.

Although this is important for the member, she also seems to be open to what the local context has to offer and hence the reason for her daughter to now be experimenting with Jamaican dishes. The discourse around cooking food as part of doing mothering in the platform appears to be more occupied with ensuring that foods from their home countries are included in their children' diets. Moreover, the members also seem to utilize what is available in the local context by being open to the various foods that are there and as such, they end up exposing their children to more than just African or the ethnic foods of that country. This illustrates that the preservation of culture through the cooking of African food for their children, has the members not only repeating what they have cooked before but they are also incorporate new foods, new ideas into the fabric of their culture. The children do not always enjoy all the "African" foods put on the table but end up being exposed to it. Depending on the context and the availability of ingredients from the home countries, the foods that the children are exposed to will vary and as such, one cannot argue that what is being cooked is African but what is deemed African according to the individual. Moreover, the interest of the parents in eating healthy foods and having access to local foods in the host countries influences the variety of foods fed to their families. In the process, children end up being exposed to more foods than what the parents might have initially intended and thus the liminality of the members ends up being a position of potency and possibility.

### 7.3.3.3 “Language”

Although food appears to play an important role in the doing of mothering which allows mothers and children to be connected to various cultures, many of the members of the platform see language as an important tool in the doing of mothering as it allows them to preserve cultural heritage among other things. In this section, we will delve more into what informs the decisions to teach the mother tongue or certain languages and what this tells us about their doing of mothering. In the forum discussion, *how important is your mother tongue*, one member responds to the discussion by explaining:

*For children it is easy to learn a new language. I am an adult and am struggling with my German. The more languages they learn the better for them in the future. I talk to my children in English and my husband speaks to them in German. I can't imagine going to Kenya and my children can not talk to my relatives. I will spend the holiday translating... (Forum Discussion, 17 April 2008)*

According to this member, the more languages children learn, the better it will be for them in their future. Her children will be bilingual in that she speaks to them in English while her husband speaks to them in German. This decision is informed by the fact that she wants her children to be able to communicate with her relatives in her mother country and as many people speak English and are less likely to speak German, this is the strategy she employs. Although this assertion is supported by other members, there is also a difference in the view on the mother tongue and colonial languages. As one member expresses:

*I start conversing with my 13 yr old in swahili and before I know it, we both have switched to English...I just need to try harder than I am at the moment. Honestly.. when we went to Kenya for the first time and saw how my daughter was getting frustrated to speak to her grandma, I actually felt embarrassed. I promised myself to be speaking to her more in swahili but Alas... its not happening..The Europeans came, conquered and lived in Africa for many years, and they never forgot their language...(Forum Discussion, 17 April 2008)*

The member in the first posting speaks in English to her children while the member in this posting wants to teach her children to speak Kiswahili and not to converse with them in English. What is interesting here though is that although the members are both from Kenya, their views on which languages to teach as the mother tongue differ. The member in the first posting teaches her children English which is an official language in Kenya and can be assumed to be a language she views as a mother tongue. At the same time, the member in the 2<sup>nd</sup> posting prefers to speak Kiswahili, which is the other official language in Kenya, instead of English. The reference to European colonialism by this member alludes to the notion that Kiswahili might be considered more of an African language and hence more acceptable than English. Although Kiswahili is considered an indigenous language, the way in which English was brought to Kenya by British colonialism, Kiswahili was a trade language from the coast that spread across the country (Ogechi, 2009: 143). This means both languages are not necessarily mother tongues to both women, however, due to the use of English and Kiswahili as mediums of communication in the urban areas (Ibid., 143), it becomes clear as to why both languages might be seen as mother tongues by the two members. Interestingly though, when we think of the relatives left behind, there is an argument by Aidoo in which she expresses the anguish of the African mothers left behind by asserting that, "in spite of these ordeals that African mothers have endured, her children do not truly appreciate her and add to her suffering by returning with grandchildren with whom she cannot communicate, those who speak only "English, French, Portuguese, etc. and she doesn't!" (Aidoo, 1997: 123). Following this argument, it can be assumed that there is still a difference between Kiswahili and English in that for the member, who is only teaching her children English, she is going to add to her mothers' suffering by bringing grandchildren she cannot communicate with. While this argument might be compelling when arguing against the dependency of Africans on colonial languages (Lodhi), it is important to point out that it cannot be assumed that all "African mothers" are only conversant in the local language instead of being multilingual. These two postings take differing standpoints on the language debate and thus showing the complexity in which a stable, fixed idea of an African identity is very problematic when thinking about solidarity. However, what is indicated here by these different positions is that these two members do share the

reason as to why it is important to teach their children their mother tongue, which is to foster better communication between their children and their relatives in the home countries, even though their situations differ. This suggests that there is a strong need by these members to have their children able to connect to their home countries, however, every situation articulated here is distinct and cannot be assumed to be experienced in the same way.

Besides fostering communication with their relatives abroad, some members also want to ensure that the children are fluent in the languages of the host country. This member says:

*Mother tongue is very important but I think the children should be very good in the language of their other countries too because if I hear the turkish kids out here speak german its nothing but very appalling thats why most of them have no chance of really doing well in school. (Forum Discussion, 30 June 2008)*

Although she agrees that the mother tongue is important, this member promotes the idea that the children should also be good in the language of their host countries. Her decision is informed by the discourse surrounding Turkish children living in Germany who are unable to speak German well and therefore struggle at school. Her mothering practice is motivated by her need to ensure that her children are able to do well in school. Here we see how the local context seems to take centre stage in what the mothers find is an important language for their children to learn. The perspective of children learning the language of their host country is also echoed by another member; however, she sees this as the reason why many parents struggle to speak to their children in the mother tongue. This is what she says:

*I think a lot of us do struggle when teaching/talking to our kids the mother tongue. First and foremost when we are abroad our main concern is for the children to pick up the local language...for your case is it Dutch that they teach in school? Otherwise it will be paying for International school to learn English which is widely spoken in Kenya. We should try all we can to talk to them in one african language popular in your home country. Learning the mother tongue gives them a sense of identity and also they respect themselves more as African origins.(Forum Discussion, 9 January 2009)*

Even though she sees the preoccupation of parents with ensuring their children speak the language as a hindrance to teaching the children the mother tongue, she still sees it as a viable option. This is because if the children do not attend the local school, they have to attend International schools in order for the children to learn English. However, she encourages everyone to teach their children an African language popular in the home country and this is interesting in that she moves away from the notion of a mother tongue to a popular language in the country of origin. There is suggestion here that the concept of the mother tongue in many African countries is not as simplistic as it might be suggested by the topic at hand. As pointed out in those earlier postings, the members articulated English and Kiswahili as mother tongues but both these languages are more likely just widely spoken and as this member says, widely popular.

It is evident that the doing of mothering takes on the responsibility to ensure that the children are able to adapt and do well in school. Moreover, mothers take on the responsibility to ensure that their children's sense of identity is sustained. Here the liminal position of being African and being in Europe are important in that the children need to be exposed to an African language in order to respect their place of origin but it seems that this is only important because they are in Europe and not living in Africa. Young (95) suggests that the "possibilities of the repetition that undoes, or that recollects forward in order to birth something that is both new and familiar, could be a way of getting at the dynamic messiness of the work of inhabitation that is still rarely articulated in the scholarship on migration". Young's argument exemplifies what is happening in this platform in that members would like for their children to learn their mother tongues - which is part of the repetition, however, this repetition seems to be that of "undoing" in that, what used to be a mother tongue in the past is rather messy. Further, because they want their children to sustain their African heritage, it is more important that they speak a popular African language in their particular country of origin than to not speak any of the languages at all. This can be a way of getting out of what Young calls "dynamic messiness of the work of inhabitation". This dynamic messiness can be further illustrated here when these two members' explain:



*Although my kids were born in UK of mixed race parentage, I try to teach them twi so that they can appreciate their heritage. ( Forum Discussion, 25 June 2008)*

*Its important for one to learn their mother tongue, and you have put it very well its their heritage. (Forum Discussion, 31 May 2008)*

For these members, teaching children their mother tongue or learning it is an important part of appreciating heritage. For the first member in this first posting, her children are of mixed race parentage and were born in the UK, and therefore it is important for her to teach them Twi. The fact that they are UK residents means that they are not always exposed to the Twi heritage and thus through their learning of the language, they get to gain ownership of their heritage. The second posting supports this notion of the link between language and heritage, however she also points to something interesting. She argues that it is important for one to learn their mother tongue and this suggest that she is not speaking particularly from a mothering perspective but more so from her own experience. This hints at the point that liminality for some of the members, did not begin with the migration process but was already experienced in their countries of origin. However, this platform through its positionality encourages the members to focus on specific liminal positions in order to forge solidarity with each other. Moreover as another member adds:

*I think mother tongue is very important, not just for communication but for the sake of culture preservation. Our culture is eroding so fast. Soon nobody will be able to speak their languages anymore if we are not careful. I think a way to help you teach your kids the language, well apart from speaking with them is to encourage them to read material in that language. Or even visit sites that are in your language. (Forum Discussions, 26 June 2008)*

This member acknowledges that speaking a mother tongue is essential for communication; however, more importantly she considers it to be integral in the preservation of culture. According to her, 'our culture' which we can assume is African culture is eroding and thus teaching of the mother tongue to the children can help ensure that the culture does not get lost. Through the mothering process, parents can ensure that they preserve a culture through their children. Interestingly though, according to Fonchingong citing Omolara Ogundipe Leslie, the same African culture

that they would like to preserve and pass on through their children is viewed as one of the structures that keeps African women as victims and subordinates (2006, 138). This argument shows African women as victims and subordinates of cultural structures and this misses out on an important factor which is demonstrated by this member and others in the platform in that mothers/women are influential in what is taught to their children and thus have more power than what is assumed in Leslie's argument. Moreover, if we go back to the role of women in the domestic sphere as preservation, it can be argued that the preservation of culture does not necessarily only need to be linked to the oppressive nature of certain aspects of culture but as part of remembrance because what the mothers preserve is what they remember about yesterday (past) and how they can fit it with what is happening today (present). As argued here, "the activity of preservation should be distinguished from the nostalgia accompanying fantasies of a lost home from which the subject is separated and to which he seeks to return. Preservation entails remembrance...Nostalgia is always longing for an elsewhere. Remembrance is the affirmation of what brought us here" (Young,1997: 334).

Working with the concept of remembrance as part of the process of preservation in the form of an "affirmation of what brought us here" instead of a "longing for an elsewhere" is rather critical for this platform because as in this discussion of language, there are many discussions that pertain to Africa and their countries of origin in which one would assume that their preoccupation with preservation is nostalgia. However, the members illustrate that what they would like to preserve is an affirmation of who they are and this is why they are able to repeat while undoing this repetition when confronted by new situations that require change. Not all members in the platform share the view of cultural preservation; here is how one member describes her experience on the importance of mother tongues. This is what she says:

*I am german, have been in england in one and half year. When I came back I have not been able to speak good german anymore. It cost me about 2 month to come back. With my husband I have been speaking english all the time, it has been my language, but today, after being back in germany since 8 years, i start to struggle in english. My daughter who is german is well, is struggling with every language. She has been*

*speaking fluent english with 4 years, but today she is not passing the class because of english. It very difficult with the languages. My own idea to the whole thing is, either you have an intelligence for languages or not. Me for example I am good in math, my kids as well, also why I should be worried about. By the last visit in africa somebody translated for the kids, it has not been nice, but I am quite sure when they would stay there for a while they could communicate as well. It is only a matter of time. They love their african family, I find this more important. (Forum Discussion, 24 June 2008)*

According to this member, languages are difficult and can complicate children's lives. She asserts that either you have the ability to learn languages or not. We can deduce that her children do not speak the language of her husband's country in that she notes that during the last visit to Africa, someone had to translate for the children and this was not a good experience. However, she believes it is more important that they love their African family. Her position and the perspective she takes on the mother tongue topic discussion differs from the other members. Even though it is not mentioned in her post, we can surmise that her children do speak German, which is her mother tongue, and therefore the other language that they would be learning would be for communication with their relatives in Africa. With this analysis, it becomes clear why her position would differ slightly from the other members in that her doing of mothering does not have to be preoccupied with preserving culture and heritage because this is already taking place. At the same time, she is in agreement with some of the other members that language is important to foster communication between her children and the relatives in Africa. Even though she is part of the platform, we can see through this member's articulation that as a German woman, her being in Europe does not have the same consequences as it has for the other members. Additionally, a distance and connection is established at the same time in which by virtue of being mothers and dealing with the issue of language, she can relate to the members' need to teach their children the language in order for the children to communicate with their relatives in Africa and thus the link. However, the link can only go so far in that because her children already speak her mother tongue and in a way, she is already part of the 'we' of the nation and able to preserve her heritage, the other members do not share this experience and thus there is a disjuncture between her and the members who are characterised by being African.

#### 7.3.3.4 “Race”

The last issue that also seems to play an important role in informing the doing of mothering for the members of the platform is race which seems to be linked with culture here. In the discussion forum, *what are we teaching our children about culture*, a member responds to a video posted on the topic of children and how they see or understand themselves racially. She asserts:

*That is a powerful video. When that child said that the black doll is ugly and that by association she was ugly, i almost cried. That is self-hatred to the core. She hates herself at such young age, and those kids are the new generation. As a parent we really have to be careful of what we are legating to our children. There is no excuse for someone living in the west to claim the ignorance card, libraries and the internet are accessible for everyone. Why black parents buy white dolls to their children? sew wigs into their children head and bleach their skin? WHAT IS WRONG WITH US?*

Her response is that the responsibility falls on the parents. For her, it is the responsibility of the parents, through their mothering process, to be careful about what they teach and pass on to their children. This posting is a good illustration of how the doing of mothering becomes complex. Accordingly, as a ‘black’ parent living in the ‘West’, the responsibility of the parent to the child is threefold. They are parents and as such have to ensure the wellbeing of the children but they are also black parents. This means that they should be aware that when buying white dolls for their black children, sewing wigs into their children’s head and bleaching their skins, they are raising children who will develop “self-hatred”. Additionally, they cannot claim ignorance because they are black parents in the West and libraries and internet are accessible to teach and inform them. This level of responsibility carried by the parents is reflected by the responses of the other members in the discussion. This is what they said:

*This is just soooo sad!! watching this video just reminds me as a parent the importance of reminding my children to tell THEM how beautiful they are and should not see it in any other way. What I don't do is emphasise colour as we are all children of God, hair or skin color should not determine our level in society or how ugly or beautiful we feel*

*as Beauty is in the HEART! I do tell my children to do their best at all times and remind them they are just as good as any other child. Education is the key. (Forum Discussion, 23 June 2008)*

*I can understand how you felt coz I was shocked and it made me think what am I /are we doing to help our children not to think like that. Don't misunderstand me coz it's not the white/black doll am angry about its us parents. We better find a good way to explain our children how beautiful they are over and over again whatever the age. The person inside them is what that matters. and give them examples of famous people so that they can have them as their "super star". (Forum Discussion, 12 June 2008)*

Both members in these postings recognize the ways in which racial inequalities in societies can manifest in children. Nonetheless, their focus is the same as the earlier posting, in that they see the parents as carrying the responsibility on how the children turn out. The only difference is that their focus is more centred on the discourse of teaching children to know that their beautiful regardless of colour or hair type. The first posting places emphasis on education while the other cites the importance for children to have role models in whom they can emulate. This is interesting in that all their responses seem to place all the responsibility on the immigrant parents and do not address the local context and the role it plays in the racist experiences of their children. The way the members deal with the issue of racism could be likened to the ideology of assimilation. As described here by De Souza quoting Fuller, "assimilation demands that immigrants change to fit into the host culture by rejecting their own ways, with no corresponding demand for change on the part of the dominant group, therefore the dominant group's ways remain the same" (De Souza, 2004: 470). By making the correlation between assimilation and the way these members deal with racism is not meant to suggest that there is a demand of some sort from the local context to behave this way. I am more so taking up the next sentence of the definition of assimilation in which the local context's attitude towards an issue like racism remains unchanged even when confronted by this issue.

This section has shown the various factors that inform and condition the ways in which the members of the AWE platform do mothering. Using discussions on

discipline, food, language and race, we have seen how all these factors seem to condition the different decisions taken by the members on how to do their mothering. Articulating their resolve from the in-between moments, it is evident that being African, being woman and being in Europe all influence how these members perform their doing of mothering. Moreover, there are moments of ambivalences in which connections and disconnections occur depending on whether being African or being in Europe is made significant. In this case, the doing of mothering is not only focused on the health and wellbeing of their children but also their responsibility as mother to preserve culture and heritage. At times, by being connected and maintaining ties to the home countries, they observe through their mothering how less of a connection they have with these countries. However, they try to preserve their culture and heritage through their mothering as a response to the experience of being in Europe. What we also see in these articulations is how repetition is occurring while at the same time, a birthing of new ideas is happening through the repetition. Even though the mothers are using food, language to teach their children about the countries of origin as part of what they see as the responsibility undertaken in the mothering practices, different factors that destabilize and complicate this repetition process emerge in which the undoing of repetition occurs. Iris Young's words of "recollect(ing) forward" becomes key to understanding how the members are dealing with the experiences of raising children in the diaspora.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

As the AWE members' discussions has shown, women do mothering, a practice that is not stable but constantly negotiated due to the various conditions and influences that are involved. The members of the platform who have children are not only mothers but are *doing* mothering, as demonstrated by how they position their experience of rearing children by highlighting the marginality of their situation, and not by assuming there is a stable idea of motherhood. The marginality here is not necessarily negative or positive but can be seen as both because in many of the experiences shared, members indicate knowledge of both their host countries and

countries of origin which simultaneously puts them in a position of power and powerlessness. Their marginal position emerges through interaction with the two locations as well as when dealing with their children's voices, which seem to permeate some of the forum discussions. The importance of the children's voices in the discussion forums also bears out Ruddick's argument that mothering practices have always been informed by the needs and demands of the children and as such, this is repeated even within the migration context.

The experience of being in Europe is an important part of these members' lives in that their encounters with difference and their actions to deal with these difference aids in revealing their need to stay connected and maintain ties with their countries of origin. In examining the importance of support and help to the practice of mothering, it also became apparent that othermothering is a concept that was carried over to the host countries, although not to the extent that it is practiced in African countries. Moreover, food and language also seem to travel with the members and are maintained in the host countries as central components of the mothering practice in different ways. By cooking food from their home countries for their children, they are able to stay connected to their countries of origin. Carrying on with the notion of being connected to the home countries, for the members teaching the children their mother tongue or the official languages of their home countries gains importance in that not only does it foster better communication between the children and the relatives back 'home', it is also a way for the children to appreciate the heritage and pass it on to future generations. The need to preserve their heritage through cooking food from home or teaching their children their mother tongue is also a form of repetition in that this is always what mothers have always done. Moreover, it also became evident that the doing of mothering in this platform is essentially more about the children and the mindset of those doing the mothering. For these members, doing mothering is not an easy task especially when faced with the aspect of being African in Europe, however dealing with these issues of being different can be liberating while at the same time, limiting. This is because members are faced with challenges that make visible their outsider position in both host and home countries while at the same time, being able

to tap into both resources when deciding what to expose to their children. For example, in tapping into the resource of cooking food from their home countries as part of preserving their culture and thus repeating what they have been taught, a repetition that undoes is also occurring because they are faced with having to incorporate different foods because they do not necessarily have access to all the ingredients they need. The repetition that undoes then exposes their children to other foods which is not what they intended to do in the first place.

Regardless of whether its children's voices, needing help and support, or cultural preservation, the doing of mothering that is articulated by the members of this platform reveal the strong notion that motherhood is not biological but a historical and social construct that retains certain aspects but is fluid therefore ever changing. The liminal positions taken up by the members revealed a more complex picture in that their connections to their countries of origin and host countries do not only manifest in having knowledge of, speaking about or the comparing of here and there but of a more negotiated experience. An experience where at times binary positions are reinforced, outsider-insider positions are reproduced and similarities within differences are found. It is also evident that the use of certain topics such discipline, food, language and race are not necessarily meant to indicate a shared experience because there is a tendency to highlight their marginality within these topics instead of having the same experience. The members discuss their doing of mothering from the margin using these topics as a way to create and establish relationships with each other. In all the responses in the discussion topics, the members always share subjective experiences that sometimes differ from each other and yet they are able to connect with each other because their connection is on the basis of their doing of mothering from the margins. The participants in this discussion might be African but are from different countries, they might all be mothers but how they do mothering differs, and as such an analysis of solidarity needs to be more critical of the ways in which such groups frame themselves. By concentrating on how the members position themselves when it comes to certain issues, we are able to discern that solidarity in this platform is envisioned from the doing of mothering in the margins.



## Chapter 8: Envisioning Solidarity

The aim of this study from the beginning has been to show how solidarity is forged in the AWE platform. However, in order to get to this aim, it was important to explore and examine how the platform and its members positioned themselves. Through this examination, it was revealed that liminality or the liminal position is central to how the members' position themselves in the platform. In taking up the liminal position, the members of the platform establish relationships with each other and also with others outside of the platform. This is because this liminal position always emerges in relation to the categories used in the title of the platform. This resonates strongly with what Turner explains when discussing liminal entities such as neophytes, he argues that, "among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism" (Turner, 1965: 95). This assertion by Turner supports the idea of liminality as a condition or position where relationships are established and therefore a reasonable argument for how solidarity is forged in this platform.

As this aspect has been hinted at throughout this study, it is now time to examine in detail how solidarity is possible from and within the position of liminality. As shown in the different chapters, the members do not always articulate their liminal position in the same way and thus it is important to look at how the different manifestations of liminality can illustrate solidarity in the platform. Moreover, due to the nature of how the platform positions itself with the use of categories, it is not enough to just show that the members of the platform establish relationships as this will result in findings that show that the members establish relationships with everyone. Rather a focus on how these relationships are created is crucial as this helps broaden our understanding of solidarity. In so doing, this will expose some of the unintended consequences that materialize as the members forge solidarity with each other. As explained earlier, solidarity in this study is taken from Chandra Mohanty (2003)'s definition in which she places "mutuality, accountability and the recognition of common interests as the basis of the relationships among diverse communities" (7). Instead of enforcing a commonality of oppression, this definition of solidarity locates communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together at the centre. To

Mohanty, diversity and difference are encouraged, “to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances” (Ibid., ). The recognition of difference in the AWE platform is made apparent and highlighted in many instances and thus making it interesting to see how solidarity is forged while respecting and acknowledging differences.

## 8.1 Solidarity at different moments and levels

*Hello sisters,.. First of all BRAVO!! for the good work you've all been doing raising kids NOT ONLY amid multiple stress but caught up between 2 cultures and 2 different "centuries" What are the ADVANTAGES and DISADVANTAGES of raising our kids in the DIASPORA??? (Forum discussion, June 30, 2008)*

Looking at this excerpt taken from the discussion post, *raising our kids in 2 cultures*, this member starts the topic with the question that is clearly positioned to those who have children. This is a topic that is central to motherhood and thus it can be assumed that it fits within the notion that this platform is centred on women. However, the way in which the topic is positioned and framed suggest that mothering in this platform takes on another form as it is characterised by the condition of two cultural influences. She starts this discussion with the hope of hearing some of the actions and reactions (positive and negative) that emerge from raising children within this condition. This topic begins a discussion between two members who both share differing stories and experiences. Although motherhood is a common experience for the two members in the discussion, it is how this topic is framed that establishes a relationship between them. In this discussion, the main component highlighted is the between and betwixt position of being caught between two cultures (in this context, Africa and Europe) and two centuries (past and present, modern and traditional). One member acknowledges that raising children is a stressful situation on its own but it becomes even more so when you add this between and betwixt position that the members find themselves. The position taken up by this member does not suggest the reasons as to why or how the members find themselves in this liminal position. The focus is on the assumption that many of the members who are part of this platform are raising children from this

between and betwixt position. What is interesting about the way in which this discussion post is framed is what was suggested in the analysis of chapter of 5. The argument put forward in chapter 5 suggested that the positioning taken up the platform was that this was a space where gendered acts influenced by the historical connection to Africa and the current experiences of Europe would be performed. There is a liminality suggested in this positioning of a between and betwixt position where the platform frames itself around the idea of then (past) and now (present), and the here (Europe) and there (Africa). It is for this reason that in order to understand why the members position their posts the way they do in their discussions; we have to begin by understanding how important the positioning of the platform is in this process.

An analysis of the AWE platform showed that liminality or the liminal position taken up was instrumental in understanding the platform's use of certain categories. This became evident in the findings shared in chapter 5 where multiple categories were used to position and frame the platform. This framing by the platform brings to mind a kind of promise made by those who decide to join the platform. This is as Arendt asserts that, "the power generated when people gather together and "act in concert", which disappears the moment they depart. The force that keeps them together, as distinguished from the space of appearance in which they gather and the power which keeps this public space in existence, is the force of mutual promise or contract" (Arendt, 1958: 245). In following this argumentation by Arendt and applying this to the platform is that through the information provided on the main website page, those who join the platform are kept active members because of the force of the mutual promise in which they "agree" to when they join. Despite the unpredictable nature of actions, it is not the gendered acts that bring about solidarity in the platform but the liminal position in which those who are acting beings are influenced or reacting to in this space. And it is for this reason that even though the platform gives the impression of being about women, their liminal position is always highlighted and fore grounded. To make this clearer, Arendt argues that,

The unpredictability which the act of making promises at least partially dispels is of a twofold nature: it arises simultaneously out of the “darkness of the human heart,” that is, the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act (244).

This assertion by Arendt illustrates why the gendered acts that are suggested as part of the framing or positioning of the platform cannot be seen as the reason for solidarity in the platform. This becomes evident when some of the examples shared in the platform (Chapter 6 and 7) where the members, although are discussing issues of race, class or motherhood, tend to position these issues more as experiences in which their liminality is highlighted. An example of this is shown in chapter 6 where the issue brought forward is that of racial discrimination they face as immigrants in different European countries. Revealed in this discussion was how their experiences differed more on how they experienced a situation and not necessarily on what situation they experienced. And therefore we can also argue that because of this different perception of the situation, a different reaction or response would follow. This is why even though different gendered acts are articulated in the platform in reaction to certain issues that are common to all members; it is rather difficult to find the linkages and relationships of solidarity along these lines because of the unpredictable nature of actions. This then brings us to the main point of this chapter which is to argue that liminality is at the centre of how solidarity is envisioned in the platform. Liminal entities as defined by Turner are “persons or principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs (Turner, 1965:125). Although the members of the platform, through their different positioning, demonstrate that they fall into all three categories, this does not necessarily make them liminal entities. The argument in this dissertation is that the members take up liminal positions in the platform as part of the process of establishing relationships with each other. They highlight their liminality or liminal position very strongly in the platform but this does not necessarily mean that this is how they position themselves offline. This is where the significance of the platform as a whole becomes evident. The

platform becomes a space in which they can take up their liminal positions as they come together and forge solidarity with each other. However, in order to come together, there is a need for categories that will enable their coming together. And it is here where we can liken this platform to what Turner calls *communitas*, which he argues is elusive and hard to pin down but is very much a part of liminality in that it “breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality, and from beneath the structure, in inferiority” (1965: 128). Moreover he argues that, “*communitas* emerges where social structure is not” and yet “*communitas* is made evident or accessible, so to speak, only through its juxtaposition to, or hybridization with, aspects of social structure” (Ibid.,128). In these two assertions by Turner, a number of issues relevant to this argument are evident. Structure is as important to *communitas* as it is not and what he means by this in terms of this platform is that the categories used are as important to creating liminality but at the same time, through liminality, the members break away from the categories. Looking at two excerpts taken from the discussion post, *Christmas plans*, some of the members respond to the topic by sharing what they will be doing during the Christmas period and this is what the first member said:

*We go home (Malawi) every other year. Unfortunately this year is not one of those. When I am in Geneva for Christmas, I like to spend the day at home with some friends. I always bake a turkey, with yummy stuffing (according to my daughter) and some cranberry sauce. This is always a favourite for my guests and children. I also bake some American corn bread and the house' favourite chocolate cake among many other dishes. Drinking Eggnog spiced with cinnamon is something I learnt many years ago during my stay in the USA and I have always maintained it, simply because I like it. (Forum discussion, 17 December 2008)*

The first point that comes to mind upon reading this excerpt is that this member shows some characteristics of being middle class. She is able to travel with her family every other year to Malawi from Geneva and she has also lived in the US which also shows that this is not her first migration experience and thus she is very mobile. To begin with, the indication that some of the members in the platform are middle class is not

a surprise in that some of the members are able travel to their home countries on a regular basis and many of them are rather mobile in that their current country of residence is probably not the first country they have lived in. However, there are other members in the platform who are first time migrants in their current country of settlement and also others who are not able to visit their countries of origin regularly. Those stories are shared in the platform, however, interesting about this member's posting is that even though she will be spending Christmas in Geneva and therefore details her Christmas plans, she still manages to start her posting with a reference to her relationship with her home country. If she was asked to detail her Christmas plans in a conversation taking place outside of this platform, this member would talk about spending time with friends, cooking etc. However, because she is in the platform where the members are positioned within this connection to both countries of origin and countries of settlement, the member brings up her visits to her home country in order for the other members to relate to her.

Although class is an important factor in that it becomes visible when she is sharing her experiences of connecting to her country of origin, it does not carry much relevance in the platform. She is more interested in establishing a relationship with the other members on the basis of being connected to her country of origin even though she currently resides in Europe and showing her middle class status becomes evident through this process. And this is where Turner's argument on *communitas* and the hybridization with social structure is helpful in explaining why in the process of displaying liminality, the member is able to highlight her middle status and yet at the same time, this status is not important or relevant to what she is doing. This is further supported by another member who shares her Christmas experience and although different from this first member, they are still able to relationship with each other. She says:

*When I was growing up, Christmas was a time for family. Close and extended family members would organize a party where we would all have a chance to meet, talk, cook, eat and have fun together. I always looked forward to those celebrations. I have not spent Christmas back home- in Kenya- for 8 years now. I am nostalgic for the get-togethers with extended family for a daylong/night long catching up, good comfort home cooking*

*and noise-making. Out here, I spend a quiet one with my immediate family, we just sit around, cook, eat and enjoy each other's company. (Forum discussion, 24 December 2008)*

As is clearly shown by this member, she has not been able to visit her home country in a number of years and so in comparison to the previous member's posting; it could be argued that she might be working class and does not have funds to regularly visit her country of origin. However, I would argue that these two members are able to relate to each other through the way in which they position their experiences. The first member did not share any experiences of how her Christmases were spent in Malawi but she is able to establish a relationship with the country through visits and then proceeds to detail her Christmas plan in Geneva. The second member on the other hand has not been able to visit Kenya and so she establishes her connection to the country through a memory of Christmas during her childhood and then only writes a short description of what she does in her current country during Christmas. By positioning their experiences from their liminal positions, they illuminate each other's experiences. Although what they share is different, being here and wanting to be there is evident in both their experiences and this is where the relationships are established and solidarity is forged. Even though both members talk about different 'homes', and even possibly different 'heres', they are able to connect with each other on the basis of that in-betweenness and as such, the here (countries of settlement) and there (countries of origin) are only important in that they are useful in highlighting their liminal positions. Although these positions do not always manifest in the same way, it is through this liminality that the members establish and forge relationships with each other. What is important to highlight and emphasize in this discussion on forging solidarity with each other by taking up liminal positions is the significance of categories (Africa, Europe, motherhood, class) in the way they feature in this process. It can be argued that the categories are not used because they are fixed and stable by nature but more so, because the members are able to demonstrate their subjective experience in relation to these categories. What is revealed in the analysis, however, is that at times the categories are used alongside the liminal position and at other times, the categories are just useful in that they are able to highlight their liminality.

Moreover, by creating connections with categories such as both here (Europe) and there (Africa), these liminal positions also establish relationships and links with other groups outside of the platform. One of the main groups that the platform establishes the strongest links with through its positioning is African women in Africa. In the discussion post *Empowering women in Gumu-Ghana*, a member starts a discussion topic where she highlights her involvement with a group of women in Ghana and asks the members for donations. She says:

*As part of our helping hand programme, we have recently adopted a shea co-op in Gumu - Ghana. This co-op is currently made up of 40 women. We are supporting this co-op through our fundraising campaign. (Forum discussion, 17 October 2009)*

Similarly as the other members in the previous postings, this member asserts her connection to the African continent by sharing her engagement with a Shea co-op in Gumu, Ghana. The co-op is made up of African women and thus establishing a relationship for this member with African women in Africa. However, interesting about this discussion is the varying ways in which the members who respond to her fundraising project position themselves to African women. Here are their responses:

*It's encouraging to see African Women in Europe creating activities and supporting fellow African women in Africa. Well done (Forum discussion, 18 October 2009)*

*It's great to see African women supporting one another especially for projects like this one to be self-sufficient. Very inspiring! I will put my contribution and also check your progress on facebook. (Forum discussion, 26 October 2009)*

The first responder positions the members of the platform as being one group and the women in Africa as belonging to another group. This suggests that she sees the members of the platform as having a distinct experience that is different from African women in Africa and as she brings up the notion of creating, it gives the impression of African women in Europe as having the ability to act and support those in Africa. Interestingly though, the second response is slightly different in that she places all the women, members of the platform and those in Africa, as African women who are supporting each other. Her focus is more on all the women being self-sufficient which suggest that she assumes both groups as sharing this issue. What we see is that although for some members, a relationship between members of the platform and



African women in Africa is created, a distance is also visible which indicates that solidarity between the members of the platform and those in Africa is one that is not based on a fixed idea of being African but a process of negotiation.

Having established that a relationship is created between the two communities, two elements emerge which are important to understanding how solidarity is envisioned by the members of this platform. Here are some examples taken from the discussion post, *Politics in Africa*, where members shared some of their points on this matter:

*“How can women in Europe influence politics in Africa, in aim of improving lifes of African women”. (Forum discussion, 16 April 2009)*

One member responds and says:

*We need leaders who know the needs of the common man and who is willing to serve those needs and not personal interest. However, since Kenya is supposed to be a democracy, leaders are elected. Thus if we are dissatisfied with our leaders, then we have ourselves to blame because we elected them. The power needs to be returned to the common man/woman. These people need to be educated on how to identify a good leader and how to demand the keeping of the campaign promises. We have to hold our leaders accountable and we cannot do so if we don't know how to elect them in the first place. I would say, civil education is important and should be reinstated. (Forum Discussion, 16 April 2009)*

Another member adds:

*I have noticed that when African leaders are addressing people in Africa most of those present will be women mostly because they will be food handouts or equipment of some sort to help in the home. In a way this shows how as women we are used to support bad leadership unwillingly. I would put this down to lack of empowerment. If we have the necessary resources we will be able to stand up and challenge bad leadership. The lack of empowerment to women is done deliberately so leaders can bring handouts to women and keep them supporting their stay in power. You cannot bite the hand that feeds you. (Forum Discussions, 17 April 2009)*

As shown in all these excerpts, the members have a vested interest in improving the lives of African women in Africa. In the first excerpt, the member poses a question to the members of the platform giving the impression that an assumption is made on the

part of the member posting this topic in that she believes that they, as a community, can make a difference in the lives of the African women. In the two responses that follow, the members discuss both civil education and empowerment as what is needed to help African women. Furthermore, even though they identify bad leaderships as a common issue affecting the lives of the women, both members identify the different ways in how this leadership issue affects them. Recalling some of the experiences shared by the members in which they are positioned outside because of the negative stereotypes of Africa, it could be argued that her involvement and interest in the continent is a way to deal with this powerlessness of being defined by the images of African women.

This is similarly argued by Shanaz Khan who in discussing their experiences of Muslim women in Afghanistan and Muslim immigrant women in Canada in which she argues, "Muslim woman living in their "home" countries and in the diaspora have some similar issues, but their current locations are different and generate different sets of needs and realities. Yet there is often a conflation of the two in conventional accounts so that the woman living here is responded to by the issues evoked by the sensational messages of the woman living there" (Khan, 2001:15). And thus one could argue that by establishing a relationship with African women in Africa and the interest in helping improve their lives is part of the process of transforming their own powerlessness into a form of power. They are able to take control of the situation in that by improving the lives of African women in Africa, they would be able to change the image of African women in general and therefore changing the way they are perceived and positioned in Europe. However, as shown in other examples, the members experience certain situations differently which becomes evident in the way they respond and position themselves. The member in the first response begins by positioning herself within the 'we' and then at some point, switches and starts to talk about a 'they' and then switches back to being part of the 'we' again. Interesting here is when she is part of the 'we' and when she creates the distance between her and the common man/woman. It seems that she is no longer part of the 'we' when the common man/woman needs to be educated and thus positioning herself as being better than those in Africa.

One can argue that this member positions herself both inside and outside of Africa, however, this outside position is only taken to self-define herself as not lacking in education like the common man/woman she describes. Noted here is that there is a power inequality in the relationship between African women in Europe and African women in Africa in the way that the members articulate their position on some issues. What this articulation shows is how self-definition can be problematic when applied within binary positions whereby a particular place/location is privileged as the point of reference. This argument is suggested by Chandra Mohanty Talpade (2003) in her discussion where she argues that Western feminists' representations of women in the global South are closely linked to their own self representations. She argues that in contrast to women in the global South, there is an "(implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" (22). Not all the members take up the same position as shown by the member in the second posting who seems to see herself as part of the 'we' and does not distance herself to the situation in Africa. However in making visible this power inequality in the relationship, it illustrates the significance of recognizing and destabilizing the notion of inequality only occurring within the female/male dichotomy and points to the terrain of the feminist space as a highly contested space.

To further substantiate this argument, it is evident that the members articulate their positioning as authentic insiders in chapter 6 on topics related to Africa, a position which they seem to accept. In doing this, they again establish a relationship and a connection to those who are African by speaking and having authority on the topic of Africa and the continent. By speaking for Africa as Africans, they become representatives of all Africans including African men in Europe. Interestingly though is that this positioning does not only occur in Europe but also during their visits to Africa. In their visits to their home countries in Africa, they are also positioned as being part of Europe and this position is one that is not about being women but being Africans in Europe and thus, an experience they might share with African men in Europe. This is a position that they seem to find problematic at times but also one they

welcome when it suits them. They indicate that this positioning is problematic when they experience homelessness and then unhomely. But they also seem to welcome it when they are positioned in Africa as better or superior because of their being in Europe. What is made visible here is the complex way in which lines of solidarity are established and are always changing. By focusing on these moments where these lines open, it becomes important not to focus on the fixed idea of categories but the breaks through the categories. This is in line with Reagon's notion that people go out seeking coalitions in order to find a home, and what they do find is that coalition is nothing like home. You do not get fed in a coalition, you have to give and this is why coalitions happen in the streets where you find a whole lot of people who are nothing like you and having to work with them (1983:360).

Going back to the articulation of homelessness which some members experience whereby they are positioned outside of Europe as immigrants while at the same time, being positioned as outsiders in Africa because of their residence in Europe. Within both contexts, the members experience these positioning as both negative and positive at the same time. Within Europe, as immigrants, they can speak as authentic insiders on topics about Africa while at the same time; they are excluded as not part of the 'we' because of their immigrant status. In the African context, they are positioned as representative of Europe in a way and thus superior or better which reflects the relationship of Africa to Europe. They are also positioned as outsiders when they try to engage in projects where they would like to bring their skills that they have learnt from Europe. These articulations thus create complex picture of what Europe and Africa are to the members. In view of the members' relationship to women in Europe, a similar picture as that with African women in Africa develops. Europe becomes a complex place for the members in that they sometimes experience it as beneficiaries when in their home countries because of the power dynamics that are foisted on the location of Europe in Africa. In these moments, they are part of Europe in that when they look at the conditions of African women in Africa, their conditions differ. And it is here that they can claim for a brief moment to find solidarity with women in Europe, even if for a brief moment. However when in Europe, their status as immigrant women places them outside of the 'we' of the nation and thus distancing them from

European women in Europe. Being positioned outside of Europe and inside Africa is through the negative stereotypes that the local contexts has on African women and Africans in general.

This could be argued is what pushes the members of the platform to feel the need to teach their children their traditions, languages because of the lack of positive recognition in things associated with Africa. And it is through this process that they do, however find European women who are also faced with similar issues. This is because Europe and the conditions in Europe are also not fixed and therefore not all European women are part of the 'we' in the same way. There are European women who want their children to be exposed to more than one language, tradition etc. and thus are faced with similar challenges as the members of the platform. This creates an opportunity in which solidarity is made possible in that this is moment where a common interest is found. In such a situation, differences are not erased in the process of seeking solidarity but that a common interest is established despite the differences. In this study, it is evident that taking up the liminal position with the use of categories is important because it establishes connections between the members of the platform and diverse communities and this is where the mutuality that Mohanty talks about in her definition of solidarity.

Mutuality occurs only between the members when they take up the liminal position. Moreover, because their liminality uses specific categories for it to be highlighted, relationships with other groups outside the platform are established. As noted though, these relationship are not without their power dynamics or even distancing mechanism, co-implication becomes apparent. Co-implication in the sense that the members are able to recognize the different conditions that exists between them and the diverse communities of women they identify with. Co-implication is important because it shows how the members' histories are intertwined with other women and how at different times and different levels, power shifts and changes. This is a crucial point not only in highlighting solidarity as it is being done here but also to show how women as a group are not always victimized and that there are various moments where agency can be gleaned from various communities of women. By claiming these

differences and speaking from specific locations, the members reject the notion that they are passive recipients to the external factors (regardless of whether they are negative or positive) around them. Thus suggesting that they are a part of a “historicized, fluid movement” and “actively contribute to the context within which (their) position can be delineated” (Alcoff, 1988:434). By acknowledging the differences that exists amongst them, they are going beyond just simply recognizing the places they inhabit as a location but also seeing it as a place where meaning is constructed and seeing themselves as active participants.

## **8.2 Solidarity envisioned?**

In this analysis, a number of factors have been highlighted to indicate how solidarity is forged within the platform which suggests that because of the way this is achieved; through the process of taking up the liminal position, a number of issues emerge within this process which should broaden our understanding of solidarity. To begin with, it is evident that the way in which liminality is used in this platform as a way to establish relationship is not uniform. The members’ articulation of different experiences do illustrate an inbetweenness, a between and betwixt situation and at times, a marginality in which two worlds are experienced. However, what is interesting and it pertains to how solidarity is understood is how through these articulations, the members also indicate the complexity of these two spaces, “home and here”, “Africa and Europe” they inhabit.

The articulations in this platform problematize our ideas of locations and the different cultural experiences that we expect to see in those locations. Doreen Massey argues that one problem is with “the idea that places have single, essential, Identities” (Massey, 1994). The members of the platform illustrate this issue so well in that there are so many different experiences of both Africa and Europe articulated by the members that lead to the recognition that both these locations are not seen as having single identities. Members can articulate their differing experiences of both Europe and Africa without any resistance because for this platform, the locations themselves

are not as relevant as the liminality the members hold between these locations. This is because these locations albeit at times discussed as entities are seen as reflected in each other. As a member showed earlier, loneliness can be felt in London where she is an immigrant as much as in her home country of Kenya because for her, these two locations constitute each other. They are no longer just geographical locations. There is a suggestion here of Massey's argument when she attests that, "what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the face that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, 1994). This argument can be closely linked to the preservation argument which was illustrated during the analysis of the doing of mothering as articulated by the members of the platform. Although the members reflected a pattern of repetition in which the doing of mothering appeared to resemble what all mothers have been doing since time immemorial, a repetition that undoes was also demonstrated in different ways. Not only do the members work hard to maintain and preserve some of their cultural knowledge and heritage through their children which can be viewed as repetition. At the same time, they also incorporate new forms of knowledge, thinking and heritages as part of their process of dealing with "two cultures and two centuries". In doing so, there is a demonstration that place or a space such as the AWE gains its specific framing and location because of the meeting, the weaving that is taking place within the platform. And this is not to argue that it does not borrow from the past, all of that which is brought in from the past is important. However, it is those relations formed within this space, what forms of remembrances are brought in, the articulations they take up and what experiences are encountered that form part of what is created, weaved into the space.

It is through this process of forging solidarity with each other in which categories of the past and the present are brought in that engenders the members to forge solidarity with other groups outside the platform. However, in doing so, power inequalities emerge especially within the relationship between the members of the platform and African women in Africa. In examining the discussions that illustrate this power dynamics, it can be observed that the power inequalities that emerge do not reflect a simple asymmetry in which African women in Europe display power over those in

Africa on the basis of just being in Europe. The picture painted is more complex and one of the arguments that can be brought forward is that the members of the platform reflect a certain power hierarchy mainly because of their own situation as African women in the host countries. What is meant here is that African women in Europe want to differentiate themselves from African women in Africa because of the way in which the discourses of African women in Africa are used on them in Europe. One can argue that by wanting change and improvement for African women in Africa would also mean change for them as African women in Europe.

With this thinking in mind, this study argues that solidarity in this platform cannot be assumed nor is it a given based on the idea of a fixed, stable identity but more of a process that is envisioned. It is envisioned because having taken the view that the AWE platform is the realm of human affairs, it can be surmised that the liminal positions taken up by the members in the platform can be likened to Turner's prophets and artists in which he argues, "tend to be liminal and marginal people, "edgemen," who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the cliché associated with status incumbency and role playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination"(1965: 128). This is because not all the liminal positions in the platform result in clear, established relationships but one that are imagined as well as is evidenced by their situation with African men and European women. Moreover, their liminal positions are the results of their speech and deed, and for this reason, it can be argued that they are unpredictable in nature. This unpredictability thus encourages negotiation and shows us that solidarity in this platform is a work in progress.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

In the previous chapter, there were numerous hints as to how solidarity is forged within this platform and in this chapter, the aim was to concentrate on this topic and develop an argumentation on this particular question. The analysis has demonstrated that the process of forging solidarity begins with the main website page and making a decision to join the platform. The argument is that the platform is framed and



positioned as a liminal position which in a way suggests to the members by joining the platform, a mutual promise is agreed upon. This mutual promise, although unpredictable in its outcome, sets in motion what happens inside the platform. Reviewing the discussions that are taking place in the platform suggests that liminality or taking up a liminal position is at the centre of how relationships are established inside the platform. However, for the members to be able to take up the liminal position, different categories and issues are brought up as a way to achieve this aim. It then becomes clear that these issues and categories, although very important, are mainly only relevant at the point in which they enable to members to highlight their liminality. This is evident in that in many of the situations discussed, the members' subjective experiences are encouraged which shows that although the topic under discussion might be a common issue, it is not experienced in the same way and therefore, different opinions to deal with the issue is encouraged.

However, the liminal position is always highlighted and focused on regardless and this also influences the different responses to the discussion because the members also ensure that their liminality is also evident. This highlights some of the issues and problems that are linked to assuming that solidarity/ unity occurs on the basis of fixed, rigid ideas of categories. The African women in Europe platform and its members rely on the use of categories as part of highlighting their liminality as a way of bringing the members together of its members. The issue with assuming that solidarity is based on fixed ideas of categories makes the subjects within the categories ahistorical and without agency. Making the subject ahistorical erases them out of history and keeps their identities as stable and unchanging. It also keeps them hostage to the categories rather than seeing them as subjects who chose to use the categories as they see fit. By viewing the AWE platform as a *communitas* broadened our understanding of why the platform uses categories in order to take up their liminal position. Structure, and in this case, categories at times go hand in hand with the liminal experiences or are used in a hybrid manner. The use of the categories also exposed that through their liminal positioning, the members establish relationships with other groups outside the platform. The ways in which these relationships are established and with that the recognition of mutuality with different groups, distance

is also created when differences in conditions emerge. These conditions are evident with relationships with African women in Africa, African men in Europe and European women in Europe. These differences highlight the different ways different groups are acted upon and act in different locations and at different times and how inequalities are not only linear but can also show the co-implication of various communities with each other. These differences can be observed with how they view their condition as immigrant women in Europe as being better than those of African women in Africa. At the same time, they find their condition of being immigrant women in Europe to be different to that of European women in Europe because they are not faced with the same situations. As they negotiate through these differences, it becomes evident that differences are important because they enable the members to go beyond these moments of differences and seek common interests with the various groups. This shows that differences and commonalities exist in relation to each other and do not need to be separate (Mohanty,2003: 242).

They are able to go beyond these differences when they recognize how the differing positions illuminate each other's histories and these differences are not just negative but more complex and thereby requiring them to seek out common interests. They find common interests with each other in the platform from their position of liminality where such feelings such as homelessness and unhomey occur because of the way they are positioned when interacting with Africa. They also find commonalities with African women in Africa in the moments of the historical past that they share with each other in relation to colonialism. Although these aspects affect them differently in their different location, it is something that they share with each other and can work towards eradicating. They are able to find common interests with women in Europe who are faced with the challenge of raising children in multicultural households and whereby it is they who take up the responsibility to ensure that their children are exposed to both because the local context does not provide this exposure. Eventually, it is discernible that their solidarity with each other, with African women in Africa and with Europe goes beyond their shared identity to being about their common interests. Whether it be the liminal positioning that they share with each other, their connection to some African women in Africa because of the shared historical past that

still affects both groups today albeit differently and their experience of being in Europe which leads them to find some commonalities with some European women in Europe with shared interest, it is clear for many of the members of the platform that acknowledging the differences is important in enabling them to find these moments of commonalities that go beyond a shared victimage and to a place in which they attempt to negotiate through these different conditions of being different to find common interests that leads to their envisioning of solidarity. To echo Min-ha (2004) again, it is as if the members of the platform are saying, "We live in Europe and therefore are a part of it, while at the same time, emphasising their difference by positioning themselves as African" (my own quotation). It is from this liminal position that the members always take up filled with ambiguities as well as moments of potential and opportunities. And in the words of Bhabha (1996) "the awareness that it is the ambivalence in our identifications – with others, objects, ideas, ourselves – and its agonistic 'choices' that determine the antagonists we engage, the solidarities we seek, and the values we serve (p.124).

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

The aim and purpose of this study was to understand solidarity as demonstrated by the members of the AWE platform. The central question to this study was: How is solidarity forged and negotiated across borders? As part of answering this question, secondary questions were formulated which were: What positionings are articulated by the platform and its members, and what relationships, links, connections and disconnections can be observed through these articulations? What power relations/dynamics are revealed (in both directions) through an examination of these links and relationship? To answer the questions, data was collected using qualitative methods. Data was collected both online and offline as a way to gain a more holistic view of their positioning. The online material used for analysis was the main page of the website and the forum discussions. The main website page was chosen as this was one of the areas that was not private and therefore geared towards the wider public and it was the first point of encounter for all the members before joining the platform. The forum discussions were chosen because this was the space in the platform where members could interact with each other with the guide of a specific theme, topic or question. The data was analysed using a method of critical discourse analysis known as mediated discourse analysis as this study was interested in exploring the positioning (actions) and the power relation that emerged from the positions taken up by the members. By working with this method of analysis, I was able to examine the actions of the subjects under study as mediated in the AWE platform and what these actions can inform us through various forms (language, discourse) how solidarity is forged in this platform. Within MDA, certain aspects of CDA are still present and this is how I was able to explore the dynamics that emerge within the power relations in the acts of positioning. As this dissertation is more focused on seeing the subjects as being positioned at different power levels at different times, it was important for to interrogate power moving in both directions and not just from the bottom up as it is usually done in CDA.

## 9.1 Reflecting on findings

This dissertation studies the experiences of African migrant women in Europe as articulated by the members of the AWE platform. The main aim of the study has been to understand how solidarity is forged within such a platform by analyzing the positionings taken up by the platform and its members. Working within a transnational feminist perspective, the analysis of this positioning has been to focus on foregrounding the links and relationships articulated in this platform, whether it is conceptual, material, temporal and contextual so that it can make visible the power dynamics that emerge (Mohanty, 2003:243). This approach has been very important in this study as the subjects under interrogation self-identify as African Women in Europe and therefore it would have been easy to assume their homogeneity as African migrant women. Such an assumption is problematic in that it locates them within a specific power dynamic that sees women as a powerless unified group (Mohanty, 38) and in the process, overlooking the alliances, subversions and complicity that are occurring within the categories/identifications used. And so in order not to reproduce and perpetuate such ideas in this project, it is important to look critically at how the categories are used by the members of the platform instead of approaching with the assumption of “women as a category of analysis” which is referred to as “the crucial assumption that all women, across classes and cultures, are somehow constituted as a homogenous group identified prior to the process of analysis...what binds women together is a sociological notion of the sameness of their oppression” (Ibid, 22). Furthermore, in the case of this study, there are other categories that intersect with the gender category and therefore, a transnational feminist perspective makes visible the need “to problematize a purely locational politics of global-local or center-periphery in favor of ... the lines cutting across them” (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994:13).

Taking this approach, this dissertation finds that the platform’s positioning (Chapter 5) does use the gender and geographical location categories as a frame to bring the members together; however, these categories are neither stable nor homogenous. Instead, the members and the platform take up multiple positions with regards to these categories and employ them in interconnected ways and thus illustrating that

the different categories constitute each other. In so doing, the findings brought up the argument that this platform positions itself as a space that brings together members to perform their African influenced and inspired gendered acts as a response or in reaction to the European context which was suggestive of a liminal position. During the first part of the analysis, the results did not indicate as to how this liminal position manifests itself and the significant role it plays in understanding solidarity in the platform but it did hint at this aspect of liminality as being an important part of the platform's positioning.

However, an analysis of the members positioning in the platform presented a more detailed but complex picture. The findings suggests that the members of the platform are connected to both their countries of origin and their new countries of settlement which is characteristic of transmigration. However, the way in which they connect to both spaces reveals the importance of exploring, "transnational migrants' 'lived reality' to determine whether or how they might be bifocal with regard to their social ties and personal outlooks" (Vertovec, 2004: 974). Throughout the discussions in the platform, the members articulate the different issues of interest around the notion of here (Europe) and there (Africa, home). This is an indication that the members have a dual orientation or a bifocality that they use to frame their issues. In their interaction with the local context, the members tend to be positioned outside as immigrants in Europe, or as authentic insiders of African cultural practices. What is evident in the analysis is that even though the members are sharing experiences of being positioned, they also responded by positioning themselves. They either conformed to the norms of their local contexts and thus making themselves invisible or by accepting their positions as Africans and therefore speaking for their particular countries.

It also becomes apparent that some of these outsider positionings are what motivates some of the members to become more involved with their countries of origin. These involvements are not necessarily uniform throughout the platform and this was what also became interesting. Some members showed their involved by being more hands on and supporting projects in their home countries while some just wanted to raise their children knowing their particular African culture. However, in the same way as

their interaction with the local contexts, their interactions with their countries of origin were not without their own positionings. Some members shared experiences of being positioned inside of Europe because they no longer reside in Africa and have acquired new habits that position them outside. While others expressed feelings of not belonging when working on projects or interacting with people in their home countries. It became evident that the experience of neither here nor there emerged strongly when interacting with the countries of origin because when it happens in the host countries, the members view it as normal as they are outsiders but when experienced at home, it creates a feeling of homelessness. The same can be argued of experiencing feelings such as loneliness in the new country of settlement but when one encounters this feeling because of being misunderstood, they are left feeling unhomey. These experiences illustrate that by broadening our thinking to include new forms of migrations where migrants not only settle in their new countries of settlement but also still maintain ties to their countries of origin (Schiller,1999), we are able to observe the ways in which the migrant experiences is not only influenced by the conditions of the new country of settlement but through the interactions with countries of origin. These findings suggest strongly that the members of the platform are bifocal in their orientation. However, as shown above, the members' interaction with the local contexts as immigrants is not experienced in the same way.

The same argument can be applied with the way in which these members articulate their experiences of 'home' or Africa. Moreover, the way in which these members are positioned or position themselves when interacting with both spaces seems to illustrate that these spaces are more interconnected and thus highlighting the need to problematize what Grewal and Kaplan mentioned earlier which was the locational politics of global-local or center-periphery and forcing us to be attentive to the links that cut across these locations. Moreover, the interconnectedness of these two spaces and the way in which the members interact with these spaces also illustrate that these are not fixed but ever changing as well. This is because even though the examination revealed that their positionings to these two spaces are similar to the notion of 'juggling between two worlds', the connection to both these spaces are more complex and required a framework that not only relied on the definition of the local and global

in terms of “physical geography or territory” but one that is open to the notion that they “exist simultaneously and constitute each other” (Ibid, 242). The notion of a ‘juggling between two world’ assumes that the members are engaged in relatively stable sites of belonging, the ‘here’ and ‘there’ and misses out on “the messy, dynamic nature of the...practices involved” (Gedalof). Seeing the interaction with “home and here” as relatively stable sites of belonging is also problematic in that it only highlights their engagement as negative, home as a space of nostalgia and here as the space of domination, invisibility and victimization. All these aspects are important and do occur in the everyday lives of migrants, however, this is not necessarily the reality of everyone and at all times. In taking this approach, this opened up the different ways in which the members engaged with these two sites, at times in a negative or positive way, and some other times in ways that suggested that their relationship with Africa is only possible through their interaction with Europe and vice versa. An important point that is also highlighted by these findings is an argument forwarded by Vertovec in which he suggests that “the effects of transnationalism for changing meanings, attitudes and experiences both 'here' and 'there' are relevant to recent studies concerning migrants and transformations of the meaning of 'home'” (2004 :976).

More importantly, it also highlights how the interaction with ‘home’ transforms the migrants’ meanings of ‘here’. Both these transformation could potentially lead to Ahmed’s assertion when she argues that, “the sense of not being fully at home in a given place does not lead to a refusal of the very desire for home, and for a community and common heritage. Rather, the very experience of leaving home and ‘becoming a stranger’ leads to the creation of a new ‘community of strangers’, a common bond with those others who have ‘shared’ the experience of living overseas”(Ahmed, 2008:337). Another issue that also emerged rather strongly within this platform while examining the idea of solidarity in the platform is that of motherhood. The AWE platform already creates the impression that this is a space already designated as only for women and as such, it was important not to go in assuming that this topic of motherhood as a dominating topic in the platform also means that this is what brings the members together. As Mohanty argues, “the experience of being women can create an illusory unity”(118) in that the unifying factor here would be the idea that



all women who share the experience of motherhood are able to forge solidarity with each other. However, relying on the experience of being women as a unifying factor cannot account for the reasons as to why the members do not always articulate the same experiences of motherhood even though they are all women. In many instances in the discussion forums, the members articulate their experiences of motherhood which is a fact that they share, however, it became apparent that the members experience the same situation differently. This is pointed out in the many actions taken to deal or resolve some of the challenges they encounter as they attempt to do their mothering. This supports Mohanty's argument that it is "the meanings attached to gender, race, class, and age at various historical moments that is of strategic significance" (118). The findings in the AWE platform, at first glance, seem to suggest that the doing of mothering as articulated by the members is not necessarily different to how mothering has been organized in the past. The members in the platform show that the decisions made on their doing of mothering are informed by their children and by their need to preserve their cultural heritage through language and food.

In addition to this, a closer analysis of these articulations illustrate that these members are engaged in process of repetition by attempting to pass on their cultural heritage and by answering to demands of their children. At the same time, they undo these repetitions by demonstrating the complexity of doing mothering from their liminal positions in which at times, the influences of both 'home and here' are clearly visible, past and present moments have to be factored in and thus illustrating what Gedalof argues as showing that these members are "not just juggling...two pre-existing and relatively unchanging structures of belonging" but that "both structures and agents of belonging (are in)...messy and dynamic entanglements of constraint and enablement, being and becoming, movement and inhabitation" (2007). These findings illustrate that in the discussion of transnational motherhood, there is a need to include these kinds of experiences instead of privileging "separation and distance as the motor of any dynamism in the reproductive sphere" (Ibid.,). Moreover, it is important to contend that it is in these liminal moments, of the interconnectedness of home and here while destabilizing these same spaces through repetition and the undoing of repetition that the members are able to forge solidarity with each other.

Aside from this, it can be posited that these liminal positions also create the strongest relationship with African women in Africa and this is shown in many of the discussions in the platform. However, what becomes clear during the analysis is that even though proximity was created during this positioning, distance was also created at the same time. There were moments of inequality between the two groups where African women in Europe reproduced power dynamics that are reminiscent of the power dynamics between women from the North and Global South. The assertion is that this power dynamics emerge because of a complex process of power and powerlessness. What is meant by this is that the members of the AWE platform are involved or interested in working and uplifting African women in Africa or even Africa in general as part of dealing with the negative stereotypes that exist of Africans in Europe. This is because the African women in Europe are positioned in specific ways in the countries of settlement precisely because of the local contexts' views and stories of African women in Africa.

And thus by being positioned this way, powerlessness is there and because they see that the issue is not Europe but Africa, it is better to change the situation of African women in Africa in order to transform their own situation (the way in which they are viewed and positioned) in Europe. Furthermore, the findings also showed that there is a possibility to forge solidarity with European women in Europe. This is evidenced by a member in the platform who self-identified as German and her articulation in the platform demonstrate the same liminal position as the other members. As with African women in Africa, there is a proximity and distance between her and the members in that what is highlighted as important by the other members because of their immigrant status is not necessarily an issue for her. What these findings suggest is a challenge to the idea of solidarity forged from the category of being women in that they dispel the idea of 'common oppression' as the basis of solidarity for women and as bell hooks argues, this idea ...was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality. Women are divided by sexist attitude, racism, class privilege and a host of other prejudices" (1984, 44) and this same idea seems to be present here. At the same time, the possibility of

solidarity between the members of this platform as well as with women in Europe and Africa suggest of feminist solidarity “across the globe that transcends class, race, sexuality and national boundaries” (Mendoza, 2002). The seemingly contradictory findings illustrated in this study can be possibly be explained in this assertion that, “Transnational feminisms are spaces of conflict, of contradiction, of contact in which women, women of color, and other marginalized actors, have transformed discourses and spaces that exclude them” (Tohidi,2005). As noted here, a complex picture of solidarity emerges that leads to the contention that solidarity in this platform can only be envisioned primarily because it is both imagined and still in process. It is imagined because it is not an outcome that any of the members can positively predict as what happens in the platform relies on the acting and speaking of subjects who because they are in each other’s presence, can never predict what the result of their actions are. Moreover, the particular story that is being told in this platform is still ongoing and therefore the argument that can be put forward for solidarity in this platform at this present moment hinges on solidarity only being envisioned.

## **9.2 Contribution**

The findings in this study demonstrate convincingly the importance of a transnational feminist perspective in that by paying attention to the interactions between women from different nations, the analysis was able to open the different ways in which women become gendered subjects. And as the findings show, what these members become is influenced by external forces as much as the internal forces within. In so doing, it became clear that women’s differing experiences do not just entail a male versus women binary positioning but the are other factors that play a role which is effectively why members of the platform were able to establish relationships and collaborate with each other not just on the basis of their shared victimage and subordination as women but based off of their choice to highlight the liminal positions. Liminality as an aspect that emerged very strongly indicates the importance to academics and others working with collective social identities to be cognizant of the different ways in which subjects use this categories because as shown in this platform, it is a much more complex picture. Moreover, although these categories are

employed, it is more to highlight the liminality and less on the significance of the category itself. Further, because this study was preoccupied with solidarity, the use of categories also suggested other possible lines of solidarities that might be established at different moments depending on the context and situation.

An important element to include here in which the findings of this study are relevant is the area of African migration studies. There is a tendency, not always, but more often than not, to always study migrants in precarious situations such as the migration routes of African migrants or the issue of human trafficking for African women. These are all very important issues and have to be studied but it is also important to include stories that do not carry this burden. The members in my study are what you may call “normal” people. They are not necessarily in a precarious situation and they are in the online platform because they are looking for fellowship and support. Their stories do not contain any pressing issues or buzzwords and thus might give the impression that this is not worth researching, however, I would argue differently. The findings of this research clearly indicate the importance of this issue for African studies precisely because their stories are so simple. This is how groups that are always seen as great exhibits for marginal or victimization stories can be humanized. Telling stories that are “normal” is important because there is a need to start viewing them as subjects who are capable of also marginalizing and victimizing others. This is how they become human instead of always being seen as victims.

Finally, an important aspect that needs to be highlighted is the relevance of doing research online. As noted already, this study was conducted online and as such, many important aspects were revealed that showed how important it is to be attentive to the internet as a space for subject making. Most of my analysis came from the online discussion forums and although accessing such spaces to gain such data might not always be easy, working with such data made such a difference to me as a Researcher. This was especially helpful because the topics that were analysed were the creation of the members without the research agenda in mind. Therefore my findings, although with my input, reflect the issues that the members of the platform were dealing with at the time of the postings and thus, represent their authentic subjective experiences.

Some of the limitations that are found in this study are centred on the findings of this study being based on a select group of and my position as a researcher and researched. In this study, the words African women in Europe was used countless of times, however, the subjects of this study only represented a small group of those who potentially identify as African women in Europe. It was for this reason that it was important for me to highlight that the solidarity discussed in this study is only applicable to this particular platform. The findings as such cannot be generalized to a whole population; however, their experiences can be useful in broadening our thinking and approach towards migrant groups everywhere. The other aspect that needs to be highlighted as a limitation is my own ability to decolonize my knowledge. This is as suggested by Salem when she asks an important question in feminist research by saying, “have we really decolonized our own knowledge and whether our interventions are impositions rather than attempts to create transnational solidarity” (Salem, 2014). And this is a limitation in this case in that throughout this process, I have been attentive to my own intervention in that by doing this research, by asking the questions that I did in the platform, and by reaching the conclusions that I had, was it all imposition or have I decolonized my own knowledge? This is a question that I cannot answer and thus my response would have to be that the decolonizing process is a work in progress and thus by working within a transnational feminist praxis, I have engaged enough with the ideas to be able to start this process.

### **9.3 Conclusion**

This journey began with just the idea of documenting the experiences of African migrant women in Europe. As an African woman myself, it started as a way to understand and examine my own experiences as a migrant in Europe in order to learn more about myself. And in the process, this dissertation has grown and developed into a study interested in understanding how solidarity is forged across borders and to do this, the AWE online platform and its members were examined. My findings in this study have demonstrated that the questions asked at the beginning of this study have been successfully answered. Moreover, unexpected aspects emerged that were not necessarily evident in the beginning and only became clear after the long process

of analysis. My findings have shown that members of the AWE platform establish and envision solidarity with each other from their liminal position. This liminality is already evident in the title of the platform and thus this positioning is taken up in the platform itself. In their use of categories to highlight their liminal position, they show the importance of the categories in as far they enable the members to achieve their intent but do not become relevant when establishing and forging relationships with each other. However, the use of categories does open up different possibilities as to relationships that could be envisioned beyond this platform. In so doing, they reveal the different ways in which women become women and the differences that exist thus demonstrating the importance of not only focusing on just the relationship between women and men but also between women. These findings also illustrate the need to understand that subjects use categories in the same way that categories are used to define them and that once we start to look beyond the notion of subjects as one dimensional, other factors emerge that show how subjects as actors that are both sufferers and doers. And by focusing on this duality, their ability to take up liminal position as a way to establish and envision solidarity with each other becomes visible.

As I said earlier, this research inquiry was also about me. Having the opportunity to be a member of this platform and also research this group of women has been a privilege for me, one that was both challenging and yet very rewarding at the same time. As noted earlier, this research contributed to a number of scholarly areas, but it also contributed to my growth as an individual and this is something that needs to be noted and acknowledged. The members of the platform in sharing their thoughts and opinions on this space, and then giving me the permission to analyse these experiences gave me the opportunity to both challenge my own ideas and realities, but also to reveal aspects about my own positioning in this world. I was able to see and not see myself in their experiences; I established better relationships with some of the members during this research inquiry when analysing their posts than when I interacted with them as members and that is a contribution to my own individual growth that I had not foreseen. And as such, to conclude, this dissertation was a story that included my own story and even though, this part has ended, it is a story that is ongoing.

## Bibliography

- Aidoo, Ama Ata. (1997). *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflection from a Black-eyed squint*. New York: Longman.
- Ahmed, Sara. (1999). Home and away narratives of migration and estrangement. *International journal of cultural studies*, 2(3), 329-347.
- Akujobi, Remi. (2011). Motherhood in African Literature and Culture. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 13(1), 2.
- Asiegbu, Martin. F. (2009). African Migrants In Spite Of "Fortress" Europe: An Essay In Philosophy Of Popular Culture. *OGIRISI: a New Journal of African Studies*, 6(1), 1-23.
- Alcoff, Linda. (1988). Cultural feminism versus post-structuralism: The identity crisis in feminist theory. *Signs*, 405-436.
- Appadurai, Arjun. (2000) Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. In: Lechner, Frank and Boli, John (Eds.). *The Globalization Reader*. Blackwell Publishers
- Arendt, Hannah. (1970). *On Violence*. Houghton Mifflin Court
- Arendt, Hannah. (1958). *The human condition*. University of Chicago Press
- Asante, Molefi. K. (1992). Locating a text: Implications of Afrocentric theory. *Language and literature in the African American imagination*, (154), 9.
- Baker, Jonathan., & Aina, T. A. (Eds.). (1995). *The migration experience in Africa*. Nordic Africa Institute.
- bell, hooks. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*.
- Betts, Alexander. (2008). Global Migration Governance. *Global Economic Governance (GEG) Working Paper, WP, 43*
- Bénéat-Donald, Megan. (2012). Decolonizing Knowledge: Power Dynamics of Research and Academia  
<http://meganbeneatdonald.com/2012/06/17/decolonizing-knowledge-power-dynamics-of-research-and-academia>
- Bernal, Victoria (2006). Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online. In *Global Networks*, 6(2), 161-179

- Bhabha, Homi. K (1994) *The location of culture*. Psychology Press
- Bhabha, Homi. K. (1996) Anxiety in the midst of difference. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 21(1), 123-137.
- Brah, Avtar. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Bryman, Alan. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford university press,
- Busia, Abena PA. (1989). Silencing Sycorax: On African colonial discourse and the unvoiced female. *Cultural Critique*, 81-104.
- Butler, Judith. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
- Castles, Stephen. (2002). Migration and community formation under conditions of globalization. *International migration review*, 36(4), 1143-1168.
- Campt, Tina., & Thomas, Deborah. A. (2008). Gendering diaspora: Transnational feminism, diaspora and its hegemonies. *Feminist Review*, 90(1), 1-8.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. (1999). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- De Haas, Hein. (2008). The myth of invasion: the inconvenient realities of African migration to Europe. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(7), 1305-1322.
- De Souza, Ruth. (2004). Motherhood, Migration and Methodology: Giving voice to the "other". In *The Qualitative report*, 9 (3), 463-482
- Dholakia, Nikhilesh., & Zhang, Dong. (2004). Online qualitative research in the age of e-commerce: data sources and approaches. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 5, No. 2).
- Diallo, Garba (2004). On being an African. *African Renaissance*. Adonis & Abbey Publishers
- Diamond, Jared. M.(2005). *Guns, germs, and steel*. National Geographic.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *Second-class citizen*. Heinemann, 1994.
- Fairclough/ Kress (1993). *Critical Discourse Analysis*.
- Fonchingong, Charles C. (2006). Unbending Gender Narratives in African Literature. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8(1), 135-147.



Gajjala, Radhika. (2003). South Asian digital diasporas and cyberfeminist webs: Negotiating globalization, nation, gender and information technology design. In *Contemporary South Asian*, 12 (1), 41-56.

Gedalof, Irene. (2007). Unhomely homes: women, family and belonging in UK discourses of migration and asylum. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 33(1), 77-94.

Gordon, Edmund. T., & Anderson, Mark. (1999). The African diaspora: Toward an ethnography of diasporic identification. *Journal of American Folklore*, 282-296.

Grewal, Inderpal. (2008). The transnational in feminist research: concept and approaches. In *Mehrheit am Rand?* (pp. 189-199). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Grewal, Inderpal., & Kaplan, Caren. (Eds.). (1994). *Scattered hegemonies: Postmodernity and transnational feminist practices*. U of Minnesota Press.

Grewal, Inderpal ., & Kaplan Caren, (2000) Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Feminist Practices. *Journal of Postcolonial studies*, 5(1)

Grewal, Inderpal., & Kaplan, Caren. (2001). Global identities: Theorizing transnational studies of sexuality. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7(4), 663-679.

Gupta, Akhil., & Ferguson, James. (1992). Beyond "culture": Space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural anthropology*, 7(1), 6-23.

Hansen, Randall. (2003). Migration to Europe since 1945: its history and its lessons. *The Political Quarterly*, 74(s1), 25-38.

Herring, Susan. C. (Ed.). (1996). *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives* (Vol. 39). John Benjamins Publishing.

Hine, Christine. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. Sage.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette., & Avila, Ernestine. (1997). "I'm Here, but I'm There" The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood. *Gender & Society*, 11(5), 548-571.

Ifekwunigwe, Jayne. O. (2004, November). Recasting 'Black Venus' in the new African diaspora. In *Women's studies international forum* (Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 397-412). Pergamon.

Khan, Shahnaz. (2001). Between here and there: feminist solidarity and Afghan women. *Genders*, 33, 1-26.

Kushnick, Louise. (1993). "We're Here Because You Were There": Britain's Black Population. *Trotter Review*, 7(2), 7.

- Lehnerd, Megan. (2005). Vera as a Storyteller  
[http://africanwomenwriters.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2005/05/vera\\_as\\_a\\_story\\_1.html](http://africanwomenwriters.typepad.com/my_weblog/2005/05/vera_as_a_story_1.html) ( Uploaded 27 August 2014)
- Lodhi, Abdulaziz Y. "The Language Situation in Africa Today." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1993, pp. 79–86
- Luke, Allan. (1995). Text and discourse in education: An introduction to critical discourse analysis. *Review of research in education*, 3-48.
- Lorde, 1980
- Massey, Doreen. (1994). Space, class and gender. *Cambridge: Polity*.
- Matthews, Sally., & Solomon, Hussein. (2003). The necessity of a challenge to Western discourses by the African Renaissance. *Acta Academica-University of Free state*, 35(2), 148-168.
- Markham, Annette. N (2003) Representation in online ethnographies: A matter of Context Sensitivity. In: Sarina Chen, Jon Hall, and Mark Johns ( Eds). *Online Social Research: Theory, Methods, and Ethics*. Peter Lang Publishers
- Markham, Annette. N (2007). The Internet as a Research Context. In Seale, Clive., Gobo, Giampietro., Gubrium, Jaber. F., & Silverman, David. (Eds). *Qualitative research practice*. Sage.
- Mavrodi, Georgia. (2010). *The other side of "Fortress Europe": Policy transfers in the EU and the liberalising effects of EU membership on Greek immigrant policy*. COMCAD Working Papers 89. Centre on Migration Citizenship and Development. University of Bielefeld.
- Mbembé, Joseph-Achille., & Nuttall, Sarah. (2004). Writing the world from an African metropolis. *Public culture*, 16(3), 347-372.
- Mendoza, B. (2002). Transnational feminisms in question. *Feminist Theory*, 3(3), 295-314.
- Mertens, Donna M. (2007). Transformative Paradigm Mixed Methods and Social Justice. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 1(3), 212-225.
- Mertens, Donna M. (2012). Transformative Mixed Methods Addressing Inequities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(6), 802-813.
- Miguda, Edith. Outskirts online journal.
- Minh-Ha, Trin. T. (1997). Not you/like you: Postcolonial women and the interlocking questions of identity and difference. *Cultural Politics*, 11, 415-419.

- Mohanty, Chandra. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Zubaan.
- Morgan, Robin. (1970). *Sisterhood is powerful*. New York.
- Narayan, Uma. (2004). The project of feminist epistemology: Perspectives from a nonwestern feminist. *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*, 213-224.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. (1994). From orality to writing: African women writers and the (re) inscription of womanhood. *Research in African Literatures*, 137-157.
- Ogechi, Nathan Oyori. (2009). The role of foreign and indigenous languages in primary schools: the case of Kenya. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus: Multilingualism and language policies in Africa | Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachenpolitik in Afrika*, 38, 143-158.
- Osterbreek-Latoza, Diana. (2007) The Filipina Au Pairs in The Netherlands. In: Høgsholm, F. M. (Ed.). *In de olde worlde: views of Filipino migrants in Europe*. Philippine Social Science Council.
- Parham, Angel Adams. (2004). Diaspora, community and communication: Internet use in transnational Haiti. In *Global Networks*, 4(2), 199-217
- Piper, Nicole, (2005). Gender and migration. *Policy Analysis and Research Programme*. Geneva: Global Commission on International Migration.
- Rahimieh, Nasrin. (2007). Border Crossing. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27(2), 225-232.
- Reagon, Bernice. J. (1983). Coalition politics: Turning the century. *Home girls: A black feminist anthology*, 1.
- Rice, Ronald. E., & Haythornthwaite, Caroline. (2006). Perspectives on Internet use: Access, involvement and interaction. *Handbook of new media: Social shaping and social consequences of ICTs. Updated student edition*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 92-113.
- Rich, Adrienne. (1984). *Notes toward a Politics of Location*. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, 29-42.
- Rich, Adrienne and Lorde, Audre. (1981) An Interview with Audre Lorde. *Signs*, 6(4), 713-736.
- Reid, Richard. J. (2012). *A history of modern Africa: 1800 to the present*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Rouse, Roger. (1992). Making sense of settlement: Class transformation, cultural struggle, and transnationalism among Mexican migrants in the United States. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 645(1), 25-52.
- Ruddick, Sara. (1980). *Maternal thinking*. *Feminist Studies*, 2.
- Rutherford, John. (1990). The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha. *Identity, Community, Culutre, Difference*. J. Rutherford. London, Lawrence and Wishart: 207-221.
- Salem, Sara. (2014) Postcolonial Feminism and decolonizing Intersectionality. *Feminist wire*. Uploaded 09 December 2014  
[https://www.academia.edu/6789689/Decolonial\\_intersectionality\\_and\\_a\\_transnational\\_feminist\\_movement](https://www.academia.edu/6789689/Decolonial_intersectionality_and_a_transnational_feminist_movement)
- Scollon, Ron. (2009). Action and text: towards an integrated understanding of the place of text in social (inter)action, mediated discourse analysis and the problem of social action. In: Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). *Methods for critical discourse analysis*. Sage.
- Scollon, Ron., & Scollon, Suzie. W. (2004). Nexus analysis. *Discourse and the emerging Internet*. London/New York.
- Schapendonk, Joris. (2012). Turbulent trajectories: African migrants on their way to the European Union. *Societies*, 2(2), 27-41.
- Schiller, Nina. G., Basch, Linda., & Blanc, C. S. (1995). From immigrant to transmigrant: Theorizing transnational migration. *Anthropological quarterly*, 48-63.
- Schiller, Nina G. (1999). Citizens in transnational nation-states: the Asian Experience. In: Olds, Kris, Dicken, Peter, Kelly, Philip F., Kong Lily and Wai-chung Yeung, Henry (Eds). *Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific Contested Territories*. Routledge: London and New York
- Snape, Dawn., & Spencer, Liz. (2003). The foundations of qualitative research. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, 11.
- Silverman, David. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical handbook*. SAGE Publications unlimited (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)
- Swarr, Amanda. L., & Nagar, Richa. (Eds.). (2012). *Critical transnational feminist praxis*. SUNY Press.

- Tohidi, Nayereh. (2005). Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives.  
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/history/dubois/Transnational%20Feminism.html>
- Thierfelder, Clara., Tanner, Marcel., & Bodiang, Claudia. M. K. (2005). Female genital mutilation in the context of migration: experience of African women with the Swiss health care system. *The European Journal of Public Health*, 15(1), 86-90.
- Turner, Victor. (1995). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Transaction Publishers.
- Turner, Victor. (1964). "Betwixt and Between: The liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*" The proceedings of the American Ethnology society. Symposium on New Approaches to the study of the religion, pp 4-20
- Van Dijk, Teun. A (1995). Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Japanese Discourse* , 1 (1), 17-28.
- Van Dijk, Teun. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & society*, 4(2), 249-283.
- Van Moppes, David. (2006). The African Migration Movement: Routes to Europe. *Research Group Migration and Development, Nijmegen*.
- Vertovec, Steven. (2001). Transnationalism and identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration studies*, 27(4), 573-582.
- Vertovec, Steven. (2004). Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation. *International migration review*, 38(3), 970-1001.
- Wodak, Ruth. (2002). Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis
- Wodak, Ruth., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Methods for critical discourse analysis*. Sage.
- Wane, Njoki Nathani. (2000) Reflections on the mutuality of mothering: Women, children, and othermothering. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 2 (2), 105-116.
- Wane, Njoki Nathani. (2004) Mothering in an African Context as Portrayed in Joys of Motherhood (Buchi Emecheta, 1979). *Asian Women* 18, 33-48.
- Wane, Njoki Nathani. (2008). Mapping the field of Indigenous knowledges in anti-colonial discourse: a transformative journey in education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 11(2), 183-197.

Yoder, Janice., & Anaikudo, Patricia (1997) "Outsider Within" The Firehouse Subordination and difference in the Social interactions of African American women firefighters. *Gender and Society* 11: 324-341

Young, Iris. Marion. (1997). House and home: Feminist variations on a theme. *Gender struggles: Practical approaches to contemporary feminism*, 314-346.

Zezeza, Paul T. (2005). Rewriting the African diaspora: beyond the black Atlantic. *African Affairs*, 104(414), 35-68.



