Here we speak: Challenging racist and gender-oppressive structures in and through the Instagram space

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Master's Thesis

June 2022

ABSTRACT

Various scholars have studied the advantages and disadvantages of using social media platforms such as Instagram for digital anti-racist and anti-sexist activism efforts. Overall, they concluded that while Instagram can be a productive tool to raise awareness, mobilize people, and forward structural change, the platform is simultaneously governed by these structures. As such, it is crucial to understand how the individuals engaging in such digital activism efforts invade, perceive, and navigate the Instagram space to then comprehend how this type of activism contributes to (offline) structural change. Therefore, this thesis answers the research question of how Black female microcelebrities navigate the Instagram space to challenge racist and gender-oppressive structures in Austria. A qualitative mixed-method approach, including digital ethnography via the walkthrough method, qualitative content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, was used. Using digital ethnography, the compositions of the Instagram profiles of five microcelebrities were analyzed, followed by a more in-depth qualitative content analysis of the practices of these women via an analysis of 106 posts and story highlights. Finally, three women were interviewed to understand how they perceive the socio-technical structures of the Instagram space and how that correlates with their content creation and sharing practices. As a result of the data collection and analysis process, the following four themes were developed: educational activism, space shifting, effects on mental health and coping mechanisms, and connecting personal to structural issues. Within these themes, Black microcelebrities were found to use Instagram to educate others and themselves by raising awareness, providing historical contexts and explanations, and thereby challenging the status quo of knowledge and 'common sense' in Austria. Similarly, they shift between offline and online spaces as well as between personal and structural instances of oppression to transform these spaces into networks governed by the ideas of Critical Race Black Feminism, digital activism, and spaces where notions of social justice exist. When doing so, however, the women in this study experienced severe impacts on their mental health and well-being, restricting

their potential to speak up freely, become visible, and thereby contribute to structural change. Consequently, they were found to use the notions of the (in)visibility paradox to strategically employ their visibility to raise awareness for oppressive structures and their invisibility to shield themselves from potential repercussions of their actions.

Preface

"I understand that I will never understand. However, I stand."

When I first read this phrase on a picture of a protest sign shared by one of the participants of this study, the connotation of the message resonated with me deeply, and I decided to choose it as the guiding principle for this thesis. As a *white* woman, I am aware that I will never be able to comprehend the lived identities of Black women in Austria fully. However, informed by the academic idea of standing on the shoulders of giants, I let myself be guided by a Critical Race Black Feminist paradigm, immersed myself and my work in it as well as I could, and appreciated the knowledge that researchers within that paradigm produce.

The results of these efforts are presented in this thesis, and I would like to take this opportunity to first and foremost thank the women who participated in this study for their cooperation and patience in explaining their motivations, rationales, and personal experiences with digital activism. In addition, I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for my supervisor Dr. Amanda Paz Alencar, who guided me throughout the whole process of finding a topic until finalizing this thesis during personal turmoil and uncertainty. Thank you for your valuable feedback, for having a sympathetic ear, and for a calming attitude whenever I needed it most.

Finally, I would like to thank all my companions of the past year who – in one way or another – contributed to the success of this project. Dankjewel and спасибо to Maud and Polina for being my first MCS and now closest and best friends. Thank you for the study sessions, the mental support, the pep talks, and the stress-relieving fun times we had throughout the past two years. Dankjewel to Demi, Jildou, Jeremy, and Lara for your patience whenever I had to prioritize this thesis over my duties as I.F.A. ACE's Public Affairs Manager. And, ultimately, danke Mama, dass du mir gezeigt hast, was es heißt, eine starke Frau zu sein und dadurch meinen Feminismus angezündet hast, und mir trotzdem erlaubst, Tochter zu sein und mir seit 25 Jahren immer wieder ein Zuhause bietest, in dem ich auch mal nicht stark sein darf.

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List of Abbreviations

CRBF	Critical Race Black Feminism
DE	Digital ethnography
NA	Narrative analysis
QCA	Qualitative content analysis
RQ	Research question
TA	Thematic analysis
UOA	Unit of analysis

"One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, place where we know we are not alone." -bell hooks.

1. Introduction

On June 2nd, 2020, the global Instagram space was flooded with posts consisting simply of a black square; a collective action termed Blackout Tuesday to raise awareness for racist structures and police brutality following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in the US (Coscarelli, 2020). In particular, the activistic effort called for others to stop posting common Instagram content and instead focus on educating themselves about racism and helping others. The Instagram space was transformed from a platform traditionally associated with aesthetic visuals and entertaining videos to a space governed by Black[1] activistic ideas (Coscarelli, 2020; Leaver et al., 2019).

While Black activism has been prominent in countries such as the US for decades, it has a relatively short history in Austria (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011). However, as a direct result of incidents such as the murder of George Floyd and activistic actions and the following resurgence of the European Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020, the visibility of individual Black activists in Austrian social media spaces has been increasing significantly. From a socio-technical perspective and building on Puwar's (2004) concept of 'space invaders,' this thesis aims to understand the digital work of these activists and how they adapt to and adopt social media affordances.

Guided by a Critical Race Black Feminism (CRBF) framework, this analysis is socially relevant as it highlights how Black women challenge the societal structures they are subjected to, such as gender and racial norms (Puwar, 2004). From a critical race and gender studies perspective, patterns of exclusions and access barriers to

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[1] Capitalizing the B in the word Black aims to "make clear that this is a constructed classification pattern and not a real 'characteristic' that can be traced back to the color of the skin" (Amnesty International, 2017). Thus, this spelling indicates that being Black does not refer to someone's skin color but to them experiencing racism and being perceived in certain ways.

societal and academic domains can be challenged (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). Next, an analysis of the concept of space invaders and applying it to how Black women invade Instagram to call out oppressive structures they experience offline and online contributes to understanding and challenging these structures (Gray & Stein, 2021). In other words, understanding how Black women use Instagram for their activistic goals helps to understand how Black activism in Austria functions and how oppressive societal structures can be changed.

In addition, this thesis is academically relevant as it positions itself at the intersection of humanities and technology studies, thereby looking "inside social media and [exploring] their situated nature, moving away from the human subject alone and into the relationships between people and their tools" (Milan, 2015, p. 2). This discussion is often side-lined in academic research, particularly in research involving Black women, a gap this thesis aimed to close. By the same token, the discussion around these topics generally focuses on access barriers and digital divides when talking about Black women, not the actual practices they use (Knight Steele, 2021). To close this research gap, this thesis aimed to include Black women's voices, who "are the ones most side-lined in [academic] discussions" and a highly under-researched group in the Austrian context (Alexander-Floyd, 2015, p. 467; Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011). This was achieved through interviews, content analysis, and a digital ethnography of their Instagram profile.

In brief, the concept of 'space invaders' asks what happens when female and racialized bodies enter or 'invade' physical and digital spaces not initially designed for them (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Gray, 2020; Puwar, 2004). Two ideas govern such discussions: (1) The entering of space to negotiate power relations and challenge normative structures and (2) the tension between hyper-visibility and invisibility (Puwar, 2004). To illustrate, Black activists enter the social media space to become visible to educate others about race and gender oppressions and initiate collective actions to fight those (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). In some cases, these activists become Instagram microcelebrities, i.e., highly visible individuals who use Instagram's visual

tools such as images and videos to achieve a "state of fame that is rooted in digital environments" (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Chan & Gray, 2020, p. 356).

These tensions of (in)visibility are crucial to considering Black women as space invaders (Chan & Gray, 2020). On the one hand, social media tends to render Black women invisible, as their individuality is neglected, and they are presented as a homogenous group (Lünenborg & Bach, 2009). On the other hand, their 'otherness' within those spaces leads to hyper-visibility because Black women differ significantly from the dominant space occupant, who is *white*[2] and male (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011; Puwar, 2004).

By the same token, researchers found that while Instagram can be used as a tool for collective action, it is simultaneously governed by the very oppressive structures Black activists try to fight (Gray & Stein, 2021; Noble, 2018; van Dijck & Poell, 2015). That is to say that offline inequalities perpetuate online, for instance, due to *white* media ownership and biased algorithms (Noble, 2018).

Resulting from these considerations of CRBF, space invaders, and socio-technical tensions of Instagram, this thesis aims to answer this research question (RQ): How do Black female microcelebrities navigate the Instagram space to challenge racist and gender-oppressive structures in Austria?

To answer this RQ, this thesis is structured as follows. After this introduction, the second chapter includes a theoretical framework discussing various academic perspectives on CRBF and intersectionality, the concept of (digital) space invaders, and its connections to notions of (in)visibility as a tool for resistance, and the socio-technical structures of Instagram. The third chapter describes the methods applied in this thesis, starting with epistemological positioning within CRBF, followed by an explanation of the used methods, a description of the participants, data collection

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[2] Similar to the notions of the spelling of Black, this spelling of *white* does not necessarily refer to the skin color of a person but rather to their "dominant and privileged position" within racial structures in society (Amnesty International, 2017). Thus, adopting this spelling aims to critically reflect on those racial structures and who benefits from them.

and analysis, and ends on notions of ethics, reflexivity, and positioning. The RQ was answered utilizing a qualitative mixed-method approach, including elements of digital ethnography, qualitative content analysis, and semi-structured interviews. In the penultimate chapter, the results of the data analysis process are presented and discussed in line with the theoretical framework through the following themes: educational activism, space shifting, effects on mental health and coping mechanisms, and connecting personal with structural issues. Finally, the conclusion chapter answers the RQ by connecting these themes and drawing conclusions based on the theoretical discussion of the results. In addition, potential limitations are described, and advice for further research in the field is provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Critical Race Black Feminism

"We must make conversing among ourselves about the plight of black women our first and most urgent priority", writes Nikol Alexander-Floyd (2010) as their concluding sentence in an article about CRBF and highlighting the experiences of Black women in various domains of society (p. 818). Similarly, this thesis positions itself within a CRBF paradigm and thus centers such ideas of highlighting the work and voices of Black women (Alexander-Floyd, 2010; Chan & Gray, 2020; Hill Collins, 2000). As such, this thesis centers discussions around how Black women are perceived as well as aims to include them as "narrators and co-producers of knowledge" (Gray, 2020, p. 3). This dichotomous focus is significant in the Austrian context, as Black activism is a relatively new phenomenon, and the voices of Black women are often excluded from both the media and the academic discourse (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011; Lünenborg & Bach, 2009).

Within contemporary discussions about Black activism worldwide, CRBF focuses strongly on deconstructing implicit and covert forms of racism and the tools and strategies to construct a different narrative around Black women. Put differently, Black feminists and allies "ask questions about the quality and content of racial hierarchies and stereotypes" and thereby aim to "[decenter] Whiteness and maleness as the lens" through which issues are often analyzed and discussed (Noble, 2013). As such, notions of institutional and structural racism are often at the heart of the CRBF paradigm and discussions around it.

Within the Austrian context, structural racism is often "gender-oriented" and – together with other forms of oppression – still largely evident (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011, p. 159). As a result, various collective actions of Black women have recently emerged in Austria, such as the Black European Women's Council and the Black Women Community (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011; Mbaduko, 2020). In line with a CRBF approach, such initiatives aim to support Black women in terms of constructing identity and in dealing with issues of discrimination such as racism and sexism (Schwarze Frauen

Community, n.d.). Notably, such efforts are often made online and in digital networks, granting easier access to women across the country.

        In light of omnipresent racist structures, such digital networks can be considered virtual 'safe spaces' for the Black community; a sort of "'virtual' reality for a population where tangible 'Black spaces' are non-existent" (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011, p. 178). In other words, in circumstances where physical, material safe spaces are non-existent due to structural oppression of marginalized groups, moving online and creating communities centered around the same values of their members can provide as an alternative. However, while such communities can to a certain extent be considered 'safe', the (social media) platforms on which they are hosted are powerful institutions with their logic and mechanisms in place (Hjarvard, 2008). Within social institutions such as social media institutions, certain power dynamics are evident, particularly so when analyzing the institutional structures through a CRBF lens (Wright et al., 2007). In other words, a CRBF approach aims to uncover the structural tensions of institutions, with agentic individuals and groups on the one hand and structural issues and limitations on the other.

        To understand how these power relations and structural tensions come into play in these institutions, it is imperative to understand that institutional racism as a concept "remains strongly contested within and outside the academy" (Wright et al., 2007, p. 147). To illustrate, institutionalized racism does not imply that institutions such as the media are inherently racist spaces, but rather explains how power is distributed and naturalized in these spaces. Moreover, a CRBF approach aims to unravel these processes, explain how they disadvantage marginalized groups, and deconstruct hegemonic ideas that circulate in these spaces. Lastly, and most importantly, however, the primary goal of CRBF scholars is not to yet again highlight forms of oppression and discrimination, but to center Black experiences and "to value the lives, stories, and interests of [Black] women in academic spaces" (Alexander-Floyd, 2010, p. 810).

2.1.1. Intersectionality

Notably, such discussions do not exist without explicitly or implicitly mentioning intersectionality. Initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the intersectional paradigm is inherent to CRBF, as it draws attention to distinct experiences of Black women and their race, gender, class, sexuality, and more.

On the one hand, an extensive body of literature focuses explicitly on intersectionality (Wright et al., 2007, p. 147). Such research centers the analysis of the distinct experiences of Black women and the interdependency of the aforementioned identity characteristics. Put differently, such somewhat interdisciplinary studies focus, among others, on racial, economic, social, ableist, and religious aspects of Black women's lives and analyze how these influence each other (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). Importantly, intersectionality scholars repudiate the basic assumption that various characteristics of a person's identity merely add up and increase the level of discrimination they experience, but rather demonstrate the links and interdependency between these characteristics (Lünenborg & Fürsich, 2014).

On the other hand, a significant part of CRBF researchers argues that implicitly addressing intersectionality cannot be omitted from *any* analysis including Black women, as intersectional experiences are ubiquitous in their lives (Hill Collins, 2000). In other words, they claim that while intersectionality studies are a crucial contribution to the body of CRBF literature, CRBF does not exist without intersectionality. As a result, while this thesis acknowledges the centrality of intersectionality, it focuses on the broader idea of highlighting the activist work of Black women in Austria, and therefore takes an implicit intersectional stance.

In particular, this thesis builds on beliefs that intersectionality is not merely a concept or theory to study, but a "well-established paradigm" that underlies the lives and identities and therefore the study of and with Black women (Alexander-Floyd, 2010, p. 814). As such, intersectionality is not applied to highlight identity characteristics and mark them as distinguishing categories, but as an underlying idea when aiming to understand and describe the lived experiences and practices of Black

women. By doing so, the construction, perpetuation, and resistance of power relations in the media can be analyzed (Lünenborg & Fürsich, 2014). In addition, an intersectional approach is used to "avoid hasty explanations for a complex discourse" (p. 971). In other words, by implicitly addressing the interdependence of various issues Black women face, simplistic and nonreflexive interpretations of data can be avoided. Moreover, the following sections establish a theoretical framework around the ideas and theories of CRBF, which will be used as the underlying paradigm that guides the analysis of the data collected for this thesis. In particular, the concept of space invaders and ideas of (in)visibility in the digital activism space will be discussed, followed by a theoretical analysis of the socio-technical structures of the Instagram platform.

2.2. Space invaders

Coined by Nirmal Puwar in 2004, the concept of space invaders aims to explain the tensions that arise when (Black) women enter spaces that were not originally designed for them. Originally, Puwar (2004) applied the idea to physical spaces, such as public squares and the collection of people who gather in such public places for different reasons. As such, questions of somatic norms and visibility of 'Others' arise, asking who the dominant occupant of a given space is, what it is that differentiates other occupants, and how these other occupants become visible. As a result of claiming a space and becoming visible, such individuals or groups can transcend imageries and boundaries and thereby challenge hegemonic beliefs about who is and is not allowed in a space (Brown, 2015).

Following this early definition of space invaders as a concept applied to public squares, later studies focused on other domains of society such as sporting and academia (Brown, 2015; Wright et al., 2007). To illustrate, Brown (2015) and other authors discuss the role of sporting space invaders and how sportspeople are racialized and presented as having an "unfair advantage" over allegedly non-racialized bodies (p. 7). As such, such sporting space invaders challenge deeply

rooted beliefs about the sports domain in society and introduce notions of social justice into this domain. In other words, by claiming their space and becoming visible in the sporting industry, individuals "make room for broader conversations about social justice" both inside and outside the industry (Brown, 2015, p. 7).

By the same token, although they generally experience patriarchal and racist structures, Black women in academia feel that they have a "future and role in higher education", and thus employ strategies to claim and keep spaces within this domain (Wright et al., 2007, p. 158). In their article, Wright et al. (2007) offer notable insights into the role of academia as an institution and its connection to issues of institutionalized racism. To illustrate, while higher education is generally considered an open-minded and liberal space, it is nevertheless governed by oppressive systems and structures. As such, Black women as space invaders do not only play a crucial role by claiming these spaces but by making visible these oppressive structures and fighting to change them from within. In Brighenti's (2007) words, they are struggling "for a new model of society" that "brings back the visibility (as political control) of the public sphere" (p. 332).

Somewhat contrary to the notions of claiming public space, one of the main strategies Black women employ in their fight for institutional change is the creation of safe spaces (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011). Specifically, in situations where Black people feel excluded from and experience a lack of community, they employ strategies to create such communities to satisfy needs for feelings of belonging and collectivity (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011; Wright et al., 2007). Given the ubiquity of new technologies and the collaborative nature of the internet, such communities are nowadays mostly established in the digital realm, particularly on social media.

2.2.1. Digital space invaders

When discussing the opportunities and limitations related to creating digital communities, the concept of social media as a 'space', specifically one to be invaded and become visible to negotiate power relations, is relevant (Gray, 2020). In essence,

Puwar's space invader concept aims to explain how 'different' bodies enter spaces and how those spaces thus "momentarily unearth" and accommodate unprecedented forms and feelings of collectivity (Bassi, 2006, p. 317). In recent adaptations to digital spaces, media scholars analyzed how for instance social media and the gaming landscape are invaded (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Gray, 2020). By doing so, the groups invading these spaces challenge hegemonic structures of racial and gendered oppressions and build communities of collective action or safe spaces (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020).

In the context of social media as a space, such hegemonic structures are characterized by numerous factors, such as platform regulations, the development of digital counterpublics, and the predominantly *white* (male) media owners and occupants on the one hand, and Black female space invaders on the other hand. For this reason, patterns of challenging racial and gender norms are particularly pertinent, as Black women differ from the prototype male, *white* media owner in race *and* gender (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). In other words, while most social media spaces have been created by *white* men, Black women can be considered space invaders who claim these spaces for their causes such as engaging in digital activism and thereby challenging stereotypical assumptions about gender and race (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Hurley, 2021).

In terms of digital activism, these spaces embody ideas of being cultural grounds for digital feminist work, especially Black feminism. Black women have occupied and used these spaces for various purposes during the past years, such as hashtag activism, fostering collectivity, and positioning the lives and experiences of Black women at the forefront of digital practices (Knight Steele, 2021). By adopting the affordances of social media for their purposes, Black women effectively claim the digital space and use it "in ways that far surpass the possibilities imagined for them" (Knight Steele, 2021, p. 4).

At its core, the concept of space invaders is governed by challenging normative structures on the one and negotiating (in)visibility on the other hand

(Puwar, 2004). Similarly, research on digital Black activism focuses on how Black women aim to increase their visibility to collectively fight oppressive structures (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Duffy & Hund, 2019; Georgiou, 2018). In particular, they use social media to "draw attention to the intersectional dimensions of Black women's lives, buttressing dominant, hegemonic narratives of what it means to be a Black woman" (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022, p. 3). The upcoming section aims to investigate current literature on this topic, focusing specifically on the usefulness and risks of visibility, notions of mediated visibility, and the core strategies of digital Black activism.

2.3. Visibility as resistance

While visibility remains a core part of Black activism, ideas of increasing visibility as *the* strategy to challenge oppressive structures have long been discredited in academic literature (Duffy & Hund, 2019). In other words, while moving on stage and thereby out of the shadows of oppression is a crucial first step, the dangers of hyper- or super-visibility cannot be neglected. This is particularly the case for Black women, as Brighenti (2007) claims that visibility is a "deeply gendered" issue that is often related to race and "moral systems based on *well-ordered* ontologies" (pp. 330-331). As such, visibility can be used as a tool for resistance to precisely such "*well-ordered* ontologies" and oppressive, sexist, and racist social structures.

When doing so, notions of agency and self-representation are often discussed in academic literature, as both making oneself visible and ultimately being visible can be considered "a political act in and of itself" (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020, p. 675). For instance, Ahmad and Thorpe (2020) illustrate how (Black) Muslim sportswomen use self-representation on social media to showcase the inherent complexities of their identities as non-Western Muslim sportswomen. By doing so, they use the digital space to (re)claim agency and represent themselves according to their ideas of how they want to be represented. Similarly, Georgiou (2018) argues that the self-representation of refugees and migrants provides "the much-needed alternative

form of mediation against the voiceless and threatening Other that predominates in Europe's mainstream media" (p. 54). To sum up, numerous researchers conclude that using social media and its affordances to become visible and share one's reality, daily life, ideas, opinions, and more, is a political act of resistance to hegemonic and oppressive (i.e., sexist and racist) structures.

However, while visibility is a crucial tool for Black women trying to raise awareness for and fight oppressive structures, it can simultaneously be harmful to such groups, in the sense that it makes them vulnerable to external influences (Georgiou, 2018). By the same token, visibility arguably works along a spectrum from being entirely invisible to instances of hyper- or super-visibility, situations that can harm the well-being of their subjects (Brighenti, 2007; Georgiou, 2018).

Within this "(in)visibility paradox", invisibility is simultaneously considered as a form of oppression and a safe haven from discrimination (Theodoro & Cogo, 2019, p. 12). To illustrate, becoming visible is necessary to negotiate agency and construct an identity, but being invisible is simultaneously a safe option to shield oneself from being publicly vulnerable. For instance, researchers found that prolonged periods of being highly exposed to the public can harm activists' physical and mental well-being and increase their likelihood to suffer from burnout (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). In addition, being highly visible in digital spaces increases the amount of information and digital traces that are publicly available, which in turn subjects highly visible individuals to increased risks of surveillance, both from the government and media institutions as well as from the public (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022).

While a more thorough discussion around the dangers of hyper-visibility in forms of biased algorithms and digital surveillance and policing will follow at the end of this chapter, the following sections aim to elaborate on how Black women engage in and are subjected to mediated visibility.

2.3.1. Mediated (hyper-)visibility

According to Pearce et al. (2018), "socially mediated visibility refers to *technical features* of social media platforms and the *strategic actions* of individuals or groups to manage the content and associations visible on social media channels, as well as inferences and consequences resulting from that visibility" (p. 1310, emphasis in original). On the one hand, social media are open playgrounds and spaces for *actions* of resistance, given their relatively easy access and collaborative nature (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020). On the other hand, social media's *technical features* and affordances are key visibility success metrics for social media users, indicated by the strong focus on the number of for instance likes and followers (Duffy & Hund, 2019). For this reason and based on the duality of Pearce et al.'s (2018) definition, this section theoretically explores Black women's strategic use of social media and mediated visibility.

To illustrate, marginalized groups such as refugees or Black women use digital media spaces to perform mediated visibility by framing the documentation of their daily lives as a form of resistance (Stavinoha, 2019). As such, mundane social media practices such as posting a selfie (i.e., a picture of oneself usually taken with the front camera of a smartphone) can become a political statement against existing power structures (Leaver et al., 2019). This is specifically relevant in CRBF literature, as Black feminist practice understands "the mundane and insignificant aspects of life and acts as a pivot" for Black microcelebrities and their causes (Chan & Gray, 2020, p. 358). Thus, by posting a selfie, individuals perform identity, counter-hegemonic representations of their daily lives, and, finally, become visible in the digital space.

Next to that, discussions around mediated visibility do not merely include descriptions of which actors are visible in which spaces but focus on more complex analyses of these spaces, audiences, and patterns of visibility within them (McClearen & Fischer, 2021). Put differently, mediated visibility asks "when, where, and to whom" someone is visible (p. 65). As such, the Instagram space is not only used by Black women to document their lives and experiences but to share content that is aimed at

maximum reach and visibility by employing the aforementioned strategies (Leaver et al., 2019).

However, in line with the idea of visibility on a spectrum, the usefulness of constantly trying to increase one's visibility is limited (Brighenti, 2007; Duffy & Hund, 2019). Put differently, while raising awareness and increasing visibility of oneself and one's ideas are crucial tools for Black microcelebrities and activists, high levels of visibility can become harmful when they contribute to social Othering (Gray & Stein, 2021). Plainly speaking, when Black women become hyper-visible in social media spaces, they simultaneously become subjects to harassment, surveillance, and what Gray and Stein (2021) term the "carceral logics" of social media or the "carceral state" (pp. 538-539). In such a state, individuals no longer have the agency to share content entirely related to their opinions and experiences but must adapt to the social media logic to avoid getting policed.

Notably, researchers claim that being exposed to such forms of hyper- or super-visibility is critical for women in particular, as they are more likely to experience online harassment, digital surveillance and policing, and being rendered invisible by social media algorithms (Duffy & Hund, 2019). Duffy and Hund (2019) explain that the latter is often the case when women enter digital spaces not initially designed for them and address issues that are not traditionally female. In other words, when women invade male spaces "the algorithm privileges and rewards feminized content deeply entwined with consumption, beauty, fashion, baking, friendships and boyfriends in the vein of the historical bedroom culture of the teenage magazine" (Bishop, 2018, p. 70; Puwar, 2004).

As a result of the risks of violence, digital policing, and being (re)rendered invisible by algorithms, Black females apply carefully drafted strategies such as self-policing, posting content at specific times during the day and deleting it afterwards, and, last but not least, engaging in digital activism to actively fight these risks (Gray & Stein, 2021; Leaver et al., 2019).

2.3.2. Digital activism

Triggered primarily by long-standing traditions of mis- and underrepresentation in mainstream media, Black women were some of the first digital activists in the social media space (Williams, 2016). Originally, Black women used digital activism primarily to raise awareness for cases of police brutality against Black people, and later to call attention to gendered issues such as sexualized violence (Gray, 2020). Knight Steele (2021) summarizes this shift as follows:

> Coming to Black feminism online and in the blogosphere meant that digital Black feminists reconciled the need to protect and care for themselves while considering the greater good of their community. [...] Digital Black feminism centralizes agency and requires others to recognize Black women's need to prioritize themselves – to insist that Black women's lives – cis and trans – must matter (Knight Steele, 2021, p. 862).

However, the early techno-enthusiastic ideas of Twitter revolutions and the inexhaustible power of using digital activism to bring about socio-political change have been contested and academically debunked repeatedly (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020; Nacher, 2021). In other words, although the digital aspect of digital activism supports the easy and barrier-free spreading of campaigns, ideas, and social critiques, issues such as filter bubbles and echo chambers, the unequal access to social media, and slacktivism limit the power of this activism (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020; Williams, 2016). Regardless of these tensions, however, it is academic consensus that digital activism is a crucial element in the toolbox of Black activism in general, in particular by engaging in call-out culture and using hashtag activism.

2.3.2.1. Call-out culture

According to the Cambridge dictionary, call-out culture describes "a way of behaving in a society or group in which people are often criticized in public, for

example on social media, for their words or actions, or asked to explain them"
(Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Within CRBF literature, such practices are described as
"core parts" and "as a form of resistance against a history of oppressive
objectification" (Gray & Adeyemo, 2021, p. 869; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022, p. 7).
Simply put, exposing ideas and structures that are inherently racist and sexist are
essential practices of Black feminism, and Black women are often at the forefront of
using them (Gray & Adeyemo, 2021).

On the one hand, call-out practices are considered "act[s] of agency and self-
definition" and therefore activistic and empowering (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022, p.
7). As a result of such practices, digital cultures and acceptable online behavior are
changing continuously, which can be considered a success for Black activists (Ng,
2022). To illustrate, US activist Tarana Burke individually started calling out sexist,
misogynistic, and abusive behavior in 2006, and her practices developed in the
global #MeToo movement (Alexander, n.d.). Similarly, Black feminist activists started
the #SayHerName movement by using social media to expose the lack of media
coverage and representation of police brutality against and murdering of Black
women (Gray & Stein, 2021).

On the other hand, Black women often put themselves at risk of (online) harm
and getting policed by either their audience and the rules and conventions of the
platform they engage on (Gray & Stein, 2021). This is particularly the case when
women call out racist and sexist structures within these spaces, as they aim to
criticize the very structures they are subjected to and thereby challenge inherent
power structures and established hierarchies. In addition, call-out culture and the
often subsequent shift to cancel culture is criticized as being an idea of "wokeness"
and "empty performative politics" (Ng, 2022, p. 40). As such, its efficiency in reaching
a large audience and thus changing socio-political structures is contested.

2.3.2.2. Hashtag activism

Next to the debated call-out culture, hashtag activism is often considered one of the key practices in CRBF. Generally speaking, hashtags are a marker of content as belonging to a specific category or a tool to frame content within a larger narrative (Leaver et al., 2019). From a technical perspective, they are thus a way to organize information by actively labelling it, which allows users to retrieve and see it as a collection of related topics. Similarly, hashtag activism is a tool to start and sustain discussions around the precarious situations of marginalized groups by collecting and framing content as evidence for these circumstances and establishing "intertextual links" between posts (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 6; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022). As such, hashtags are a tool to develop and make visual counterpublics and start discussions around being a Black woman that go beyond the mainstream hegemonic representations of marginalized groups.

One of the most used and researched hashtags is the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag which originated in 2013 and resurged in May/June 2020 after the killing of George Floyd in the US (Knight Steele, 2021). However, although this hashtag is widely used and has arguably contributed to substantial awareness and structural changes, Black *female* activists continue to develop new hashtags within BLM (e.g., #SayHerName and #YouOkSis) to focus on intersectional issues of being female. In her aptly titled article 'When the Black lives that matter are not our own', Knight Steele (2021) explains how Black women thus fall back on the idea of prioritizing their well-being while nevertheless considering the "greater good of their community" (p. 862).

However, similar to the dangers of hypervisibility in terms of being policed, hashtags can easily be banned or limited by the social media platforms on which they circulate (Leaver et al., 2019). In addition, hashtags and the causes behind them may be hijacked by other parties and repurposed for ideas opposing the original aim of the activists, thereby diluting the message and power of the campaign (Avraamidou et al., 2021). For this reason, Black women are once again limited in

their freedom and agency to fully share their narrative on social media, as they employ strategies to avoid getting banned or reappropriated (Gray & Stein, 2021).

2.3.3. Social media

While digital activism describes using the internet and digital media for activist purposes more broadly, social media are usually at the center of such discussions, as they are arguably the easiest accessible tools for new age activists to share their ideas and goals (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020; Williams, 2016). In particular, Instagram is a popular tool among digital activists, as the photo- and video-based platform is rooted in ideas of visuality and therefore useful to share critical ideas, such as anti-racism work, in aesthetic and creative ways that appeal to the audience (Babin, 2021). For instance, Babin (2021) illustrates how the carousel tool of Instagram (i.e., sharing up to ten connected visuals in a single feed post) is used for so-called slideshow activism, in which complex issues are broken down into easily digestible pieces of information or infographics. However, on the one hand, "the visual aesthetic has the potential to be prioritized over the real social issue being discussed" (p. 2). On the other hand, adapting to the visuality of Instagram allows digital activists to reach larger audiences.

When using Instagram as their primary communication tool, some activists can be considered microcelebrities, which are defined as highly visible individuals targeting a smaller audience rather than entertaining a large mass of people (Chan & Gray, 2020). To illustrate, Leaver et al. (2019) argue that microcelebrities are not defined by the "reasons behind or routes towards their prominence" but rather by establishing close and invested connections with their audience (p. 106).

Interestingly, this status as microcelebrities shields activists from some of the dangers and risks such as being subjected to digital violence or being rendered invisible, as the niche and like-minded audience is a safer space than large and anonymous masses of people (Chan & Gray, 2020). Consequently, however, these microcelebrities remain in their echo chambers and struggle with reaching people

outside their small audience, which is crucial to challenging structural norms (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). By the same token, as activists use Instagram's affordances to increase their visibility, they simultaneously adapt to the logics of the platform. In other words, "the incorporation of (new) media into the communicative repertoire of activists appears to be one of adaptation and conformity, rather than active shaping of the medium itself" (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020, p. 1833). Nevertheless, numerous digital activism researchers argue that digital activism is centered around agency and the possibility to contest ideas and structures that are prevalent on social media and Instagram specifically (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Knight Steele, 2021; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022).

All in all, while the Instagram space can be ground zero for Black activists in their quest to collectively initiate structural change, the app's logics simultaneously perpetuate the oppressive and marginalizing structures activists try to fight. To address these issues, the following section aims to connect the space invader concept and the notions of visibility and digital activism to analyze how Black microcelebrities actively negotiate the socio-technical structures of Instagram.

2.4. Socio-technical structures of Instagram

"The dynamics of collective action are as much defined by the politics of platforms as by the intentions of its users to achieve a communal (political) goal" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, as cited in van Dijck & Poell, 2015, p. 3). While this is a direct quote taken from van Dijck and Poell's (2015) article, the underlying idea represents a larger consensus in academic literature, namely that the role of social media as an activistic tool is a highly complex and ambiguous one. While the relatively easy access to social media (compared to traditional media outlets) continuously proves valuable for activists to share their messages and ideas, social media platforms are governed by structural issues similar to offline reality (Gray, 2020).

For this reason, "social media are best seen as socio-technical and 'cultural-ideological' artifacts with an agency of their own: they carry specific encoded politics (a certain worldview) and policy (community rules and legislation)" (Milan, 2015, p. 2). As such, social media and their logics and affordances are always a product of their (mainly *white* and male) creators, who to some extent translate their ideas and worldviews into the development of the platform (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). By the same token, researchers argue that social media is never "immune from the movements and ideas that circulate in society at any one time" (Freedman, 2015, p. 283). As a result, social media platforms are governed by both their creators and their users, who use the platforms' affordances for their causes and by informal cultural guidelines and structures.

Research on the cultural structures of Instagram argues that while Instagram can be a site for cultural and social change, it simultaneously embodies existing online and offline social inequalities (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). On the one hand, patterns of collective action, increased visibility, and challenging hegemonic gender and race ideas are evident on social media (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Brighenti, 2007). On the other hand, the economic and ideological power of social media platforms and the resulting pressure to conform to increase visibility curtails the potential to initiate fundamental structural change (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). In particular, while visibility is a crucial tool for Black activists to raise public awareness, their 'Otherness' in the space subjects them to hypervisibility and thereby makes them "subject[s] to different forms of digital and physical violence" (Gray & Stein, 2021, p. 542; van Dijck & Poell, 2015).

Notably, complex discussions around whether marginalized groups can speak (up) in a public arena or whether such efforts are *always* governed by hegemonic ideas are not a new phenomenon. In 1988, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak called for careful attention to whether critical representations of women – even in instances where they speak for themselves – work towards increasing their freedom of action or contribute to perpetuating power dynamics (Spivak, 1988, as cited in Biskamp,

2021). In summary, while claiming that social media can increase the visibility of 'different' bodies and challenge hegemonic beliefs, the inherent characteristics of any platform make it debatable whether doing so can result in substantial structural change.

In such discussions, notions of (barriers to) access and participation on social media are crucial considerations. Plainly speaking, having access to a certain space such as a social media platform is the first necessary precondition to speak up and become visible on that platform (Arthur, 2021; Brighenti, 2007). In addition to simple access, digital literacy and the ability to use the affordances of a platform for one's purposes are often limited for marginalized groups (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). As Dumitrica and Felt (2020) argue, the commercial orientation of social media companies favors individuals who are already powerful in the offline world over individuals who may be savvy in their social media use, but rather powerless in the offline world. As such, the Instagram space can be described as "not just a passive backdrop to human behavior and social action but is constantly produced and remade with complex relations of culture, power and difference" (Gray, 2020, p. 164).

As such a space, Instagram is actively used by Black women to (re)claim their agency and thereby develop counterpublics who actively challenge existing power relations in the space. For instance, Arthur (2021) explores how female Black travelers use Instagram accounts to collect and recount their traveling experiences to not only encourage other Black women to travel more but also to challenge the normative, usually *white*, idea of what traveling is. By doing so, they challenge the idea that digital participation "has long been associated with whiteness, power, and privilege" (Arthur, 2021, p. 53). Next to that, the visual nature of Instagram also supports Black women in visualizing and remediating ideas about what being Black and a woman entails (Edwards & Esposito, 2018). Notably, such potential is not only enabled by the content Black women share but equally so by the comments and resulting discussions around this content.

While these informal structures, guidelines, and ideas are virtually infinite in number, Instagram also offers Community Guidelines that legally enable and limit the use of the platform (Leaver et al., 2019). By doing so, platforms "exercise significant political economic and infrastructural control" over their users, for instance by policing certain forms of nudity or violence, but not others (Duguay, 2019, p. 3). Notably, Duguay (2019) argues that when doing so, platforms often fail to protect marginalized groups such as Black women with their policing practices, but instead allow discrimination against such groups and do not police hate speech or other forms of digital violence against them.

By exercising these forms of control, the creators and people behind Instagram actively decide what users can and cannot do on the platform (Leaver et al., 2019). Arguably, these people's worldviews and inherent biases influence these decisions and therefore the logics and affordances of the Instagram platform (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). According to Leaver et al. (2020), the two most prominent ways in which Instagram polices its users are via controlling hashtags and algorithms. Consequently, hashtags and algorithms are crucial tools and barriers in terms of visibility for activist microcelebrities, as they decide what and who becomes visible and what remains in the shadows (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). To explore these complexities, the following sections address Instagram's Community Guidelines and the socio-technical structures of the platform in terms of power relations and oppressive structures.

To sum up, Instagram offers valuable and productive spaces and tools to negotiate and thereby challenge existing power structures, while being governed by a) limitations in terms of access and participation, b) the ideas and biases creators put into the platforms in the forms of hashtag and algorithmic surveillance, and c) the very structures that are being challenged.

2.4.1. Oppressive algorithms and other forms of control

Looking at power dynamics on social media through a CRBF lens, algorithms and hashtags are often at the forefront of the discussion (Noble, 2013). To make themselves visible, social media users are heavily dependent on the underlying algorithms of the platform. In other words, the developers of platforms and algorithms are in power in terms of deciding who becomes visible and who does not (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Notably, it is academic consensus that algorithms are inherently biased and perpetuate offline inequalities in online spaces (Noble, 2018). Put differently, as developers program algorithms, they "steer user experiences, content, and user relations via platforms" (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5).

As Noble (2018) argues, algorithms are created by people and therefore reinforce trends in society, such as sexism and racism. As a result, social media algorithms have the power to reinforce oppressive social and economic relationships and draw a certain picture of reality that is informed by sexist and racist ideas. As such, algorithms present an access and participation barrier for Black women, as they are often rendered invisible by the oppressive nature of algorithms (Alexander-Floyd, 2015).

Along the same lines of (in)visibility, researchers argue that algorithms and algorithmic control of social media platforms contribute to the creation of filter bubbles or echo chambers, which in turn limit the activist potential of Black microcelebrities (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). In other words, given that the Instagram space is extensively governed by algorithms, it becomes a "space of likeminded people", and while Black women remain highly visible in their spaces and communities, they are rendered invisible outside of them (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020, p. 1827). Conversely, Black women often enter and use the Instagram space to connect with content they already have a prior interest in and to connect with like-minded individuals, such as other Black women (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022). As such, this thesis aims to focus on the perceptions of these women and how they negotiate the power of algorithms and other forms of control on social media.

Researchers found that microcelebrities employ various strategies to deal with (in)visibility and the limitations and risks that come with it. On the one hand, Instagram users from marginalized groups tend to be more careful in terms of their posting behavior when these posts are targeted to outside audiences (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022). This is because misogynoir structures and digital violence toward Black women are commonplace on social media and Black women have adopted strategies to avoid such harassments. On the other hand, microcelebrities who aim to become more visible to spread their messages, goals, and ideas adapt their behavior on Instagram in line with underlying algorithms (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). Put differently, they work 'with' the algorithm and try to understand which techniques they must employ to increase their reach on social media, such as sharing images of themselves to conform with the idea that the Instagram algorithm prefers such personal content over more serious topics (Leaver et al., 2019).

Another way in which Black women try to circumvent algorithmic censorship and are rendered invisible by biased algorithms is by self-policing their content. For instance, Gray and Stein (2021) illustrate how Black women's experiences with digital surveillance and policing (e.g., content that gets flagged or deleted by the platform) make them highly savvy social media users who are likely to know which content might run these risks. As a result, they actively choose not to share 'risky' content, thereby self-censoring and adapting to the (carceral) logics of social media (Gray & Stein, 2021). Notably, researchers found that women and Black people are more likely to be subjected to such oppressive logics than white men (Senft & Baym, 2015).

Such practices are generally viewed as an answer to larger trends of surveillance that women experience on social media. Brighenti (2007) argues that surveillance is one of the main negative consequences when the visibility of individuals increases. Explaining these shifts, they claim that "tracing the origin of the word 'surveillance' in clinical language, the disciplinary thesis reveals a completely different meaning of being seen and watched: no longer recognition, but subjugation, imposition of conducts, means of control" (Brighenti, 2007, p. 336).

Similarly, research on space invaders argues that "super-surveillance" is one of the main challenges that Black women face when entering spaces not designed for them (Alexander-Floyd, 2015).

　　While this thesis positions itself at the intersection of technology and humanities studies, the overarching CRBF paradigm calls for highlighting the voices and experiences of Black women (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). As such, digital surveillance is not researched from a technical standpoint (i.e., researching how algorithms and policing works) but from a standpoint that aims to uncover how Black microcelebrities *experience* oppressive algorithms and other forms of control.

3. Methodology

3.1. Epistemological positioning

This research is grounded in a Constructivist and CRBF paradigm (Brennen, 2017). Thus, this thesis aimed not to uncover 'the truth' but to understand how Black women negotiate *their* truths online. These truths are "shaped by specific historical, cultural, racial, gender, political, and economic conditions, values and structures" and thus interlinked with the ideas of the intersectional paradigm (Brennen, 2017, p. 9). For these reasons, the CRBF and intersectional call for a qualitative research approach because it acknowledges that experiences are highly individual, especially when related to marginalization and discrimination (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). Consequently, a qualitative approach was applied to analyze the practices of these women in-depth (Brennen, 2017). In particular, a qualitative mixed-method design including digital ethnography, qualitative content analysis, and semi-structured interviews was used to a) analyze Black microcelebrities' work and b) highlight their voices to reduce the research gap from various perspectives (Alexander-Floyd, 2015).

The decision to approach the topic from three different methods or perspectives was two-fold. On the one hand, the triangulation of findings helped answer the RQ that involved both socio-technical elements of Instagram and practices of Black women, which will be discussed in more detail in section 3.4. Data collection and analysis (Brennen, 2017). On the other hand, the sensitivities of the topic and my role as a researcher within this project called for specific attention to reflexivity and theoretical positioning (Leurs, 2017). Plainly speaking, by using multiple data sources and thus perspectives, I aimed to position Black women's experiences and practices rather than solely my interpretations at the center of this thesis. While more specifics are discussed in section 3.6. Reflexivity and positioning, the following sections elaborate on the three applied methods and how they contributed to answering the RQ.

3.2. Research method

As a point of departure, a digital ethnography (DE) was conducted on Instagram. While ethnographies generally "focus on understanding what people believe and think, and how they live their daily lives," digital ethnographies translate these practices to analyze digital communities (Brennen, 2017, p. 166). In the case of this thesis, the goal was to analyze and understand the practices of the Black feminist activism community in Austria and "empower the women as narrators and co-producers of knowledge" (Gray, 2020, p. 157). Moreover, as DE focuses on the context in which meanings are produced, my Austrian background helped me to understand underlying sociopolitical topics and structures. As such, DE guided me in following this community on Instagram and immersing myself in their content, posting behavior, and appropriation of Instagram's tools.

3.2.1. Walkthrough method

One effective tool to conduct a DE is the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2016). Because this method is "grounded in a combination of science and technology studies with cultural studies," it was ideal for this thesis' aim to critically analyze both the cultural work of Black women and Instagram's socio-technical structures, tools, and functionalities (Light et al., 2016, p. 881). For the present thesis, the walkthrough method was used to explore underlying socio-technical structures of the Instagram platform, related to how Black women invade the space, use it for their activist purposes, and are governed by its structures that enable or curtail visibility.

In particular, the focus of this thesis' application of the walkthrough method was on what Light et al. (2016) term the "everyday use" of the analyzed platform (p. 893). To illustrate, the Instagram profiles were analyzed based on which affordances the microcelebrities use, such as posting on their feed, sharing stories, and saving stories in their story highlights. In addition, the composition of the profile was analyzed. This involved looking at both activistic and non-activistic content to

understand how an activistic identity is constructed on Instagram and how this identity is used to work towards the microcelebrities' goals (Light et al., 2016).

3.2.2. Qualitative content analysis

The next step included a qualitative content analysis (QCA) of Black women's Instagram content based on two reasons. First, DE is limited in the depth of analysis it achieves. Most researchers thus supplement their analysis with other methods such as thorough content analysis to avoid relying on superficial data only (Brennen, 2017). Second, this thesis aims to include and highlight Black women's experiences and the narratives they share, which can be achieved by analyzing their posts and the messages they share in their content (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011).

Using QCA allows for an in-depth analysis of the meaning-making processes of participants (Brennen, 2017). In particular, it enables an analysis of how Black women use language (i.e., spoken and written language as well as the affordances of Instagram as tools for expression) to negotiate their digital activism and the way they make sense of the structures around them (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2021). Finally, QCA also reveals larger meaning-making patterns circulating in society and how these patterns reinforce certain social arrangements and structures. For this thesis, these opportunities are used to analyze how Black women make meaning of the Instagram space and the circulating power dynamics related to the activistic characteristics of the platform. What should be noted here is that the stories we get when applying QCA are produced with rather than by someone (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2021). In other words, using QCA, the participants' narratives can be analyzed alongside the findings and theoretical assumptions of the literature review.

3.2.3. Semi-structured interviews

Finally, three semi-structured interviews were conducted to further highlight and include the voices of Black microcelebrities and center their experiences. Initially, this thesis aimed to rely more heavily on these interviews and the insights provided

by individuals directly by conducting more interviews and using them as the primary data source. However, reaching potential participants and convincing them to participate in this project turned out to be more difficult than expected, which is why the focus of data collected shifted from semi-structured interviews to qualitative content analysis.

The three interviews that were conducted provided additional insights into the motivations and experiences of Black microcelebrities and proved to be pertinent for the data analysis process. By the same token, the interviews also served as another tool to center the voices of Black women and their experiences and thereby fill the research gap established in the introduction of this thesis (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). This was particularly relevant considering my positioning in this project as a *white* person doing research with Black women. In other words, the insights provided by the interviews offered a useful perspective and helped to identify and reflect on potential biases, as will be discussed further in this section.

In summary, the qualitative mixed-method approach contributed to answering the RQ as follows. First, the walkthrough method was applied to analyze Instagram as a space and start retrieving insights into how Black women navigate this space and its tools. Second, qualitative content analysis of Instagram feed posts and story highlights contributed to exploring the practices, tools, and methods Black microcelebrities use to challenge oppressive structures. Finally, the semi-structured interviews served as contextual data to, on the one hand, include Black voices in this project and, on the other hand, guide the analysis of the results of the first two methods.

3.3. Units of analysis and sampling

The study population analyzed in this thesis is the digital community of Black feminist activists in Austria, mainly Vienna. Their Instagram profiles, behavior, and activities were analyzed to discuss their practices and answer the RQ. In particular, their overall Instagram profile was used as the unit of analysis (UOA) for the first

method (walkthrough). For the QCA, Black microcelebrities' feed posts and story highlights were used as UOAs to understand their practices more in-depth. In particular, feed posts and story highlights were analyzed because the initial screening of their profiles revealed that those are the two most frequently used tools by the women in this sample. Finally, the individual women and their experiences and opinions were the UOAs during the interviewing process.

Three criteria must be met to be included in the data set derived from the study population. First, the person must identify as being Black and a woman. Their gender was verified by looking at their profile bio (i.e., their self-identification on their profile), as most participants include their preferred pronouns in that section. If the preferred pronouns were not included in the profile bio, the feed posts were scanned for indicators that the profile owner identifies as a woman (e.g., referring to oneself as a woman or using the pronouns she/her when talking about oneself). Second, they must be active as an Instagram microcelebrity in Austria, which means using Instagram to reach a public audience and achieve a certain level of digital prominence in their field (Chan & Gray, 2020). Notably, the status as a microcelebrity is not connected to a certain number of followers, likes, or comments on Instagram but the person's positioning and prominence within the Black feminist activism movement in Austria. As the final sampling criteria, they must highlight activism on their profile, for instance, by sharing activist content or taking a stance on sociopolitical topics. This was established by scanning their bio, feed posts, and story highlights to confirm their activistic orientation.

The sampling process was initiated via one Black microcelebrity that I was already familiar with and based on her profile using 'digital snowball sampling' to locate other microcelebrities she is connected to (Sarstedt et al., 2018). In particular, this involved scanning her activistic story highlights to find stories in which other profiles/people are linked and scanning their profiles to establish whether they fit the sampling criteria or not, and then doing the same for the profiles found via this technique. Next, Instagram profiles of collective initiatives (e.g., the Black Voices

Referendum) were skimmed to find key players in the Austrian Black feminist activism scene.

Via this process, a list of twelve Black women fitting the sampling criteria was compiled. All of them were contacted and asked to actively participate in the study in the form of an interview. However, only a limited number of women replied, and only three people agreed to be interviewed. To compile an adequately sized data set for the mixed-method approach according to the methodological guidelines, the profiles of five Black women were included in the final sample, including the profiles of two of the interviewed women. These five profiles were chosen based on excluding similar profiles, making the final sample as heterogeneous in terms of content and strategies as possible. Next to that, these five profiles represent what Pridmore and Dumitirica (2021) describe as a typical sample, a sample that includes average cases (i.e., microcelebrities) from the Austrian Black feminist activism community.

In the next step, the Instagram posts of the sample of five Black women were sampled according to the following criteria. The main sampling criterion to be included in the data set of Instagram content for the QCA was the type of post, namely either a feed post (still images/text-based posts) or a story highlight. In addition, these posts needed a clear activistic focus to shift the analysis from a more general walkthrough of their profile to their practices as digital activists. For instance, posts that include calls to mobilize people to join local demonstrations or story highlights that share educational content on racism and sexism. Finally, all posts were shared between June 2020 and April 2022. This criterion was based on the global resurgence of the BLM protests and the increasing prominence of Black activism in Austria. An overview of the analyzed profiles, the content that was analyzed, and the interview participants can be found in Appendix A.

3.4. Data collection

During this step, elements of the walkthrough method and QCA were used to collect data from Instagram and the women's profiles. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather contextual data to guide the further analysis of the collected content.

Using the walkthrough method described by Light et al. (2016), a first scan of the profiles and their focus was conducted. While doing so, attention was paid to the composition of the profile in terms of what content is present, the thematic focus of the profile, and the type of activism that was performed. In addition, the use of the functionalities and affordances of Instagram were captured by inspecting the different types of content and possibilities that come with it (e.g., tagging other people in posts). During this process, both screenshots and field notes were taken. On the one hand, screenshots of the profile header (including the profile picture, the number of posts, followers, and following, and the bio), the icons of the story highlights as they appear on the profile, and the feed posts since June 2020 were taken. On the other hand, these screenshots were supplemented with field notes informed by the theoretical framework, the characteristics of the profiles, and "cultural research skills" to recognize "indicators of embedded cultural discourses, such as [...] conceptions of gender, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and class" (Light et al., 2016, p. 13).

In the next step, each profile's feed posts and story highlights between June 2020 and April 2022 were skimmed to identify all posts that are activistic. While doing so, approximately 10 posts and 15 story highlights were chosen per profile, in line with the sampling criteria and based on which posts fit these criteria best. Incidentally, one profile only included five feed posts, of which only two had an activistic focus. The number of story highlights was thus increased to 33 as the majority of content on the profile was shared via stories. All posts (including the captions) were screenshotted and added to a codebook file in Microsoft Excel, including a unique ID per screenshot and leaving space for open codes next to the

screenshots. Based on this process, 106 posts and story highlights from 5 profiles were sampled. Of these 106 posts, 39 were feed posts (including 16 carousel posts and 8 videos/reels), and 67 were story posts.

Finally, in-depth semi-structured interviews with three microcelebrities from Austria and Germany were conducted via Zoom. Existing literature and data gathered during the walkthrough and QCA data collection served as sensitizing concepts to develop the interview guide. To illustrate, the interview guide contained icebreaker questions about the beginnings of the interviewees' activistic behavior to analyze their role as space invaders, questions about the community they target on Instagram, questions about the posting strategies employed by Black activists, and the advantages and disadvantages of Instagram as a tool for digital activism and increasing visibility. In addition, walkthrough field notes and preliminary patterns were used as prompts to elicit more elaborate responses (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011). For instance, one participant primarily engages in digital activism to raise awareness about police brutality in Nigeria by sharing publicly unknown information, which was addressed during the interview.

The data collection process was finalized after saturation was reached in terms of the departmental guidelines for this thesis project and after reaching a confident level of depth of the data (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2021). In particular, this study focused on in-depth and detailed understandings of the practices of Black microcelebrities rather than including a larger number of profiles or posts.

3.5. Data analysis

As a result of the data collection, a Word file including profile screenshots and field notes, an Excel codebook including screenshots of posts and story highlights, and three written interview transcripts were prepared for analysis. Using both Microsoft Excel and ATLAS.ti, this data was analyzed using thematic analysis (TA) and narrative analysis (NA).

TA was useful as a method to answer the RQ as it aimed to describe different experiences in "rich and detailed, yet complex" accounts and uncover pervasive patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In other words, using TA allowed me to look for patterns within digital activism practices across all analyzed profiles and thus across the digital community of Black feminist activists in Austria. In particular, the four steps of data immersion and open, axial, and selective coding were followed. In addition, TA's flexibility to include both deductive and inductive elements was used to apply sensitizing concepts such as notions of (in)visibility and digital activism strategies such as callouts or hashtag activism while also leaving room for findings emerging from the data.

Next to TA, NA was used to answer the more agentic part of the RQ, i.e., how Black women *challenge* racist and gender-oppressive structures in Austria. NA focuses on sense-making processes and storylines on how participants describe their experiences and their results (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2021). For this thesis, this lens was useful as it contributed to answering how Black microcelebrities position their practices and strategies in the larger narrative of changing oppressive structures. In other words, how do they make connections between their actions on Instagram and changing racist and sexist structures in Austria? In particular, the tools of authorship, structure, chronological sequence, and logical connection between elements, characters, relationships, and roles were applied (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2021). By doing so, descriptions of how Black women view their agency compared to structures they are subjected to and their view on the impact of their (collective) actions were made.

In the first step, open codes were applied to the interview transcripts using ATLAS.ti. Based on these open codes and the first emerging patterns, the collected Instagram posts were open coded in the Excel codebook. Next, the interviews' open codes and the Instagram content were categorized separately, both inductively by emerging patterns and deductively by relying on the sensitizing concept from the theoretical framework. This was followed by a round of axial coding in which the

categories were applied to the data again to get more nuanced insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, connections between the categories were established, and themes were built. Notably, in this final step, the data from all sources (i.e., interviews, Instagram content, and field notes) was combined by simultaneously consulting each source during the process. During the results writing process, NA was applied by identifying emerging patterns of authorship, logical connections, and characters and developing a narrative storyline within and between each theme (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2021).

Throughout this process, the qualitative research's iterative and inductive nature is exploited by using findings of the walkthrough method for the QCA and during the interviews and vice versa and finally merging all findings to answer the RQ (Brennen, 2017). By triangulating the findings of three methods and applying TA, patterns in Instagram's structures and the women's perspectives could be described. While the walkthrough method revealed patterns of the socio-technical structures governing the Instagram space (i.e., what people [can] *do*), the QCA and interviews uncovered how these structures are perceived and negotiated by Black women (i.e., what people *say* they do). In addition, sensitizing concepts such as (in)visibility patterns, digital activism tools, and Instagram's structures were applied during both the data collection process (i.e., to develop the interview guide) and the data analysis process (i.e., during the coding process) in a deductive way.

3.6. Ethics, reflexivity, and positioning

The sensitivity of this thesis topic requires ethical considerations and reflexivity. My background as a *white* person can result in power dynamics and biases during data collection and analysis of meanings created by Black women (Brennen, 2017). During TA and NA, the gathered data was decontextualized, and deeper meanings might have been lost as I could not identify them as a non-member of the Black community (Leurs, 2017). I aimed to avoid such pitfalls by relying on CRFB

literature and methodologies, asking for informed consent from the interviewees and working transparently and reflexively (Flick, 2007; Leurs, 2017).

Asking for informed consent from the interviewees included an informative document explaining the project's intentions and context and a description of the topic (Brennen, 2017). Additionally, it included information about voluntary participation, options to revoke participation at any given time, and clear descriptions of how data will be used (e.g., right to privacy and confidentiality). Similarly, a general information document was developed to contact microcelebrities via email or Instagram direct messaging to ask them to participate.

Notably, informed consent was asked from the interviewees but not from the owners of the analyzed profiles. As explained before, reaching Black microcelebrities was more difficult than expected, which is why the decision was made to use only publicly accessible profiles (i.e., profiles that do not require following the microcelebrity to see their content) and to entirely anonymize their data in the final thesis (i.e., not including screenshots or other identifying features and using pseudonyms for their names). Moreover, the decision to use pseudonyms instead of more generic terms such as participant or a numerical identifier was made to contribute to the aim of highlighting and centering the voices of Black women (Alexander-Floyd, 2010; Chan & Gray, 2020; Hill Collins, 2000). By doing so, the participants' privacy was protected, and they did not have to fear repercussions based on their inclusion in this project. At the same time, their individuality and contributions to the Black feminist movement in Austria were acknowledged.

Regarding practical limitations, conducting a DE and combining it with QCA and interviews is time-intensive, particularly regarding contacting and establishing rapport with participants (Baral et al., n.d.). By the same token, conducting interviews digitally via Zoom, necessary due to the geographic distance between the researcher and the interviewees, allowed for less personal interactions and minor technical barriers such as unstable internet connections (Brennen, 2017). Thus, digital interviews risk not being able to establish the same rapport level as offline interviews

and overlooking non-verbal communication. Moreover, technical considerations such as starting the Zoom recording or unstable internet connections caused occasional interruptions to the flow of the conversation.

4. Results

In the following sections of this chapter, the results of the data collection and analysis processes are presented and discussed, considering the theoretical framework. Specifically, the practices of Black women to engage in activism in the Instagram space to challenge structural issues in Austria are illustrated through the following four themes and their sub-themes: (1) educational activism, (2) space shifting, (3) effects on mental health and coping mechanisms, and (4) connecting personal to structural issues.

When presenting these results, data from all three sources (i.e., walkthrough of the profiles, content analysis, and interviews) was amalgamated to present one coherent storyline of how the Black women in this study use the Instagram space and how they experience its structures. Within each theme, a narrative structure is followed that accounts for authorship and power structures, logical connections between the elements of their activistic efforts, and the roles and relationships of the various characters in the Black activism collective in Austria.

4.1. Educational activism

When analyzing the type of content Black microcelebrities post on Instagram to engage in digital activism, it becomes evident that a large part of it focuses on educational aspects around (the historical context of) racism, the structural problems in Austria, living there as a Black person, and other topics. When posting about these topics, the participants try to raise awareness and provide their perspectives by calling out certain structures and explaining them in their posts or captions. To do so, they reappropriate the tools Instagram provides, such as using story highlights to increase the longevity of topics and content and adjusting their content to the reel format. In turn, by doing so, they transform the Instagram space from an aesthetic, visually oriented stage to a more text-heavy and profound activism platform.

4.1.1. Raising awareness and (re)claiming the narrative

Since Black activism is a younger phenomenon in Austria than in other countries such as the US, there is still a large need to raise awareness of the existence of racism and racist structures and the difficulties Black people face in Austria and elsewhere. As such, one of the main patterns in the data of this study were intentions and posts created to raise awareness of issues such as the Black Voices Referendum and how to support it, structural problems in the Austrian education and health care system, and racist brand and street names. To illustrate, some of the participants use their story highlights to share posts from the Instagram profile of the Black Voices Referendum and other collectives such as AustrianPikin.

> Dear Austrian followers! The Black voices petition is a cause that is particularly close to my heart. With our signatures, we could finally take a long-term step against the structural racism that prevails in Austria and change a few things for the better (Layla's Instagram story highlight)!

Notably, these practices of raising awareness and challenging societal structures are not simply aimed at increasing the visibility of the microcelebrities and their efforts as their main activistic tools. Instead, by raising awareness and educating others, as explained in the upcoming paragraphs, the Black women in this study aim to change the narrative around issues such as stereotypical terms, skewed representations of historical events, and more. Thereby, they challenge the status quo on the knowledge that has been considered common sense and what Brighenti (2007) terms "*well-ordered* ontologies." (p. 331). In other words, they use education and anti-racist knowledge to increase their visibility in the Instagram space and thereby challenge the digital culture that is prevalent on Instagram (Ng, 2022).

However, feeding into the academic consensus that increasing visibility is no longer the main tool that Black activists use, their focus on education and creating new narratives serve as examples of how visibility and awareness are applied as tools for resistance (Duffy & Hund, 2019). When applying these tools, the women in this study regularly follow up their mentioning of an issue with an explanation about it and an educational aspect. For instance, posts about a racist street and brand name, including a racist slur, are followed by explanations of why the term is racist and the historical context behind both the term and the naming of the street/brand in question.

> "M." is the oldest German term used by whites to construct Black people as different. The term was translated from other European contexts, and etymologically goes back to the Greek term moros, meaning "foolish," "simple-minded," "stupid," and also "godless" (Layla's Instagram story highlight).

By doing so, the women in this study (re)claim the narrative and sovereignty of interpretation of certain issues (e.g., which terms should and should not be used). They also employ logical, theoretically backed up, and historically embedded explanations of why something is racist to justify their actions and the existing need for activism. Similarly, they reference where information comes from and investigate "perspectives from all kinds of people from everywhere." Consequently, they challenge power structures on Instagram in terms of who is using certain terms and how that contributes to the perpetuation of racism in Austria (Gray & Stein, 2021). They experience social media as a useful tool to do so, as the barriers to access and the power the platform holds are lower compared to traditional media outlets.

> But I think it's really cool that information is now so easily accessible to everyone. So, you need a laptop or a smartphone, and

fortunately, many people have them now, or pretty much everyone

in Austria does. And you can simply inform yourself. You can stay in

touch with people. That's also really cool (Nora's interview).

But at the end of the day, I think it's very, very remarkable that it

became so massive by circulating online. I don't think it was

because of posters or or or... I can't imagine that it was announced

on television or the radio (Tamika's interview).

By educating others, Black women inherently challenge power structures and established hierarchies evident in the Instagram space. Put differently, Black women take on the role of educators redefining the prominent narrative. They use their agency and mediated visibility to challenge the traditional hierarchies whose ideas and knowledge are visible (McClearen & Fischer, 2021). Looking at this via the concept of mediated visibility that asks "when, where, and to whom" microcelebrities are visible, it becomes evident that the women in this study are visible as powerful narrators and educators who reclaim the narrative around racist and gender-oppressive structures in Austria (p. 65).

4.1.2. Callout and slideshow activism

Similarly to how Black microcelebrities use Instagram to raise awareness for racist structures in Austria, they use the platform to call out specific instances that exemplify the existence and perpetuation of these structures. While raising awareness and calling out structures may seem identical, they differ in terms of the directness and the types of language they use. For instance, in a post calling out the racist nature of a street name in Vienna, Layla concludes the caption by tagging the official accounts of the city, the mayor, and the deputy mayor of Vienna:

Sharing is caring! Here I explain why the reproduction of racist stereotypes in language and the cityscape contributes to the further perpetuation of racism in Austria. [...] It's time to act! @stadtwien, @michaelludwig_official, @birgithebein (Layla's Instagram post)!

In particular, the participants of this study often directly address "*white people*" or institutions such as the city of Vienna to call out problematic structures (Natasha's Instagram post). From a narrative perspective, the women thus take up authorship and agency to include other characters in their activistic narrative. As a result, the addressed are framed as the source of oppression and structural issues, and their callout as an activistic tool to challenge such (power) structures. Interestingly, instances of reciprocal discussions between the microcelebrities and the called-out institutions were not common in the data, indicating that while power structures are being challenged, they run the risk of deflagrating instead of initiating meaningful discussions (Gray & Stein, 2021).

These practices of calling out companies and instances of racist experiences but not engaging in a conversation can be considered a form of slacktivism (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). On the one hand, calling out racist structures crucial for Black female activists, as their voices are often the most marginalized (Gray & Adeyemo, 2021). On the other hand, it can be argued that simply calling out organizations without actively trying to hold them accountable lacks the power to change these structures and therefore limits the effects of this form of digital activism (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020).

Aimed at, in fact, creating impact, much of the analyzed content focuses on explaining *why* something is racist, followed by contextual information and suggestions on how to change the underlying structures. This is particularly evident when the women use Instagram's carousel feature (i.e., posting up to 10 pictures in a sort of slideshow presentation in one post) and thereby fragment information into digestible pieces of information (Babin, 2021). The callout grabs the viewer's

attention in terms of visual impact and narrative structure. In contrast, the actual call to action is built up via explanations and justifications (Oltra et al., 2021). In other words, complex discussions around racism are broken down into a narrative, starting with an easily understandable explanation of why something is racist, moving on to a more thorough analysis of the context, and ending with a call to action on how to change the structural issue behind it.

Notably, Kerry mentioned during the interview that one of the main tasks in her work is to "think about how accessible and understandable" the topics she discusses on her account are. She argues that she must unravel her content significantly or even omit certain ideas because her followers lack "certain cornerstones to understand certain topics." To illustrate, Kerry views herself as an expert who must adapt her posting behavior to a less knowledgeable (*white*) audience. However, she simultaneously adapts to what she perceives as prevalent knowledge within the Instagram space and thereby partially adapts to the existing Instagram culture. While this exemplifies how traditional power structures are being challenged, it simultaneously confirms the general idea that Black microcelebrities trying to change Instagram's structures are simultaneously governed by them (Gray, 2020; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Circling back to how educational carousel posts impact their viewers, it can be argued that due to a lack of audience knowledge, Black microcelebrities need to prioritize easily accessible information over impactful content to promote structural change. In other words, how Instagram allows its users to structure and present their content perpetuates the lack of knowledge among the audience and, consequently, the existing societal structures. In addition, academic literature accuses callout culture of not being efficient in changing societal structures. It does not tackle the problems at their roots but focuses on performative activistic efforts (Ng, 2022).

4.1.3. Transformation of the Instagram space

In addition to using Instagram to *share* educational content, the Black women in this sample also use the platform's advantages to easily *access* information and get inspiration for their activistic quests. These patterns were evident in the interviews and the content they posted, in the sense that Black microcelebrities often share content from others to their story and save it in their story highlights.

> I just unfollowed people and started to follow people where I had
> the feeling that I can take more away from it, that it, that I recognize
> myself more in it or find myself in it and feel represented, that I also
> somehow have a connection to my own culture and can learn things
> about my roots. And that above all I also learn things that I pass on
> to other people. [...] I just try to be in environments where I can
> always take something with me, which I can then also carry back in
> my work in the social field (Kerry's interview).

While these strategies may be useful to find new inspiration and motivation for activistic actions, they might contribute to creating echo chambers (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). To illustrate, the women in this study share ideas and content from other activists, thereby creating a network of knowledge within their digital community. In other words, Black activists inspire and reproduce each other's knowledge and content, thereby creating an echo chamber in which certain ideas prevail while others remain invisible (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022). Interestingly, most academic literature on the topic focuses on how such forms of control limit the power of digital activists. However, the findings of this study point towards a more passive formation of echo chambers through the interconnectedness of content consumption and content creation, rather than a direct influence of Instagram's control mechanisms.

As briefly mentioned, the content circulating in these networks is usually more text-based and serious than Instagram's aesthetic and entertaining visual culture

(Leaver et al., 2019). By focusing on such content, they introduce the idea of discussing social justice in a space originally designed for different purposes (Brown, 2015; Duffy & Hund, 2019). Thereby, Black microcelebrities challenge the visual and aesthetic Instagram culture that focuses on topics such as lifestyle, makeup, and fashion and instead engage with more serious and substantial content related to sharing information and knowledge.

While some researchers argue that more serious content may be less visible due to Instagram's algorithm's preference for aesthetically pleasing content, the participants of this study do not share this experience; for instance, Kerry claims that her most successful content is serious educational content (Babin, 2021). Nevertheless, some of the content the women shared adapts to the traditional culture of Instagram, for instance, by featuring pictures of themselves, sharing aesthetically pleasing pictures of food, and using Instagram-typical hashtags such as #foodblogger, #happysunday, and #plantbbased.

On a broader level, the women in this study reappropriate what is traditionally perceived as feminine Instagram culture and thus take not only a Black activistic but also a feminist stance (Leaver et al., 2019). Simply put, by prioritizing information, knowledge, and empowerment, they challenge stereotypical societal assumptions about what women should and should not use the Instagram platform for and thereby strive to inherently change the platform (Wright et al., 2007). Notably, such patterns are also implied in the interviews.

> I don't want to then show the "careless" side only but then rather
> also still show, yes, I don't know, meaningful things sometimes.
> Because we are already spammed with crazy things (Tamika's
> interview).

All in all, Black women benefit from the transformation of the Instagram space to a more serious platform with tools that encourage sharing knowledge and

information, such as carousel posts and story highlights to increase the visibility of topics (Duffy & Hund, 2019). Similarly to Brown's (2015) discussions around how Black sportspeople invade the sporting space, the Black women in this study invade the Instagram space to move away from a superficial and visual culture towards a platform centered around ideas of social justice and the challenging of oppressive structures. As such, the practices of the women in this study exemplify the invasion of a space to introduce ideas of challenging racist and gender-oppressive structures from within the space (Wright et al., 2007).

Conversely, the women also actively contribute to the transformation of the space by entering it and posting about these issues via Instagram's wide array of tools (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020). For instance, the reels format is commonly used to post more entertaining and special content because creating a reel is considered a greater effort than creating a post and is mainly used for special occasions. Next to that, the stories feature is mainly used to post about current events (e.g., attending a protest) and share content from other sources (e.g., other Instagram accounts). By posting about current events, the longevity and digital visibility of these events are increased, while sharing content from other sources increases visibility and the connectivity within the Austrian Black activism network.

To summarize, the participants of this study do invade the Instagram space and collectively challenge oppressive structures from not only within but also actively contribute to the transformation of the space by acting within it and becoming visible (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020). They do so in both online and offline spaces and exhibit patterns of shifting between those spaces, which are discussed in the next section.

4.2. Space shifting

When looking at the practices the participants, use to navigate the Instagram space as space invaders, patterns of moving between spaces become evident. To illustrate, the participants of this study use Instagram to document their participation

in physical protests, thereby shifting between offline and online spaces. In addition, they shift between different online platforms, such as other social media platforms besides Instagram or online magazines and newspapers. Next, while some of the literature argues that digital networks generally can be safe spaces for marginalized communities, the participants experience a more nuanced version of safe space characteristics on Instagram, which will be discussed in the upcoming sections (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011).

4.2.1. From the 'real' world to the online world and back

By shifting between online and offline spaces, the Black women in this study use Instagram to share footage from offline events and promote offline events to their audience. Connecting these general patterns to the ideas of space invasion, it becomes evident that Black women do not only transcend the boundaries of entering one single space but instead migrate between different spaces (Brown, 2015). When doing so, they exploit the perceived benefits of each space and use this array of tools to share their content and ideas and engage in digital activism. Put differently, the women in this study not only invade one space and challenge the evident stereotypes and oppressive structures but also create and employ a network of multiple (offline and online) spaces and their affordances to advance their activistic goals (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020).

When doing so, they regularly share footage of traditional activistic actions such as organizing and attending protests and appearing in traditional media outlets such as magazines and national TV. In addition, they promote offline events and activities such as educational workshops and local protests to mobilize their audience to engage in traditional offline activism. Incidentally, the characters included in the women's narratives (e.g., by appearing in posts or being tagged in content) are friends and acquaintances they are familiar with in the offline world. Notably, a local connection is generally evident in these patterns.

I somehow had this regional aspect and this thing that I live in

Vienna, and I like the city and noticed that there is somehow still a

gap or an error in the system with the aspect that it's just about

minorities being discriminated against. So, it's... I really like it when I

have a certain closeness to the topics because then it's easier for me

to do research and I can empathize well (Nora's interview).

Consequently, their forms of digital activism are grounded in traditional, offline activistic motivations that are then translated to digital content, shared, stored, and made available long-term in their Instagram posts and story highlights. Arguably, they thus do not necessarily transform Instagram as a social media institution from within but instead use its tools to contribute to the goals of traditional activistic efforts such as protest mobilization (Brighenti, 2007; Wright et al., 2007).

Next, this focus on traditional activism also contributes to patterns in which Black microcelebrities prioritize increasing the visibility of the causes they address over increasing their individual visibility. In other words, instead of using their visibility as a tool for resistance, as explained by contemporary digital activist scholars, they tend to rely on more traditional forms of visibility in which the focus is on topics instead of individuals (Brighenti, 2007; Gray & Stein, 2021). Notably, some of the women in this study mention that this decision to stay invisible is a conscious one to protect themselves from the repercussions of (hyper)visibility, such as being subjected to online harassment (Gray & Stein, 2021). While the next theme discusses these coping mechanisms in more detail, the following paragraphs further develop the ideas of shifting between online and offline spaces.

When connecting online with offline activism, the visual of the protest sign is significant. To illustrate, numerous posts from different participants include pictures of protest signs and their slogans. In addition, some protest signs include hashtags or Instagram handles, which further highlight the interrelation between the online

and offline space. In other words, although those hashtags and handles do not fulfill their intended use because they are written on a physical protest sign instead of being used on the digital Instagram platform, the women in this study reappropriate Instagram's affordances in their offline activistic efforts (Leaver et al., 2019). In turn, the inverse pattern is evident in the sense that the metaphor of the protest sign is used to share educational content online. To illustrate, one participant uses illustrations of people holding up protest signs, positions her textual educational content on those signs, and thereby frames her work as an activistic effort.

Interestingly, Bonilla and Rosa (2015) argue that using hashtags as an activistic tool is useful to raise awareness about the oppressive structure and to establish "intertextual links" between content on Instagram (p. 6). The women in this study, however, do not only create these intertextual links via connecting Instagram content but also by connecting offline and online contexts. While Avraamidou et al. (2021) argue that changing the context of hashtags can reduce their effectiveness, the findings of this study signal a powerful connection between different activistic efforts. Put differently, similarly to how they invade and transform multiple spaces, the women in this study use offline and online hashtags to create their activistic network and pursue their activistic goals.

Finally, another pattern that exemplifies how Black women shift between the online and the 'real' world is their adaptation to current events. To illustrate, the black square posted for Blackout Tuesday on 2nd June 2020 was, for many, the first activistic post on their profile and, therefore, the start of their digital activism. In addition, Instagram stories and highlights are used to address current topics and increase their longevity by making footage of offline events available long-term. Next to being evident in the Instagram content and field notes, these patterns were also expressed during the interviews.

If something happens that is somehow, yes, worth putting into a

reel, where you somehow maybe have a story behind it or somehow

some kind of hook then we like to use reels, because of course they

also work really well and we save our stories, for example, when I go

to demonstrations or something, or if there is somehow something

else, another event, where you don't make a video, but a story, then

we save that in the highlights (Nora's interview).

To summarize, Puwar's (2004) pioneering work on space invaders explains what happens when racialized bodies enter spaces that were originally not designed for them. Later, scholars on digital space invasion argued that by invading digital spaces, hegemonic structures within these spaces could be challenged (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020). In addition, the findings of this thesis paint a more extensive and nuanced picture in which Black women enter and invade the Instagram space, bring about socio-political change, but simultaneously exploit the benefits of multiple spaces and platforms to create their network.

4.2.2. Instagram as a safe space

Another central theme in the discussions around Black women as digital space invaders is the creation of safe spaces; in other words, (enclaved) digital communities where they do not have to fear any racist or sexist hostility (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011; Gray & Stein, 2021). Similar patterns were found in the data set of this research, specifically related to using individual communication and the advantages of what the participants experience as their filter bubble to create a safe space. To illustrate, when Instagram and its direct messaging feature are used to communicate with friends, the participants of this study consider that kind of safe space as one of the main advantages of using Instagram.

There are some things I like about Instagram, so I can't lie about

that. [...] And if it's someone from church sharing a verse with me

because they saw something, or if it's my best friend sending me

dog videos, I don't know. Or if it's another friend sending me Black

Magic, don't know, quotes or some nice reels of black women etc.

Yeah, I think all that... I think that's good. I think that's... That's fun

then (Tamika's interview).

Moreover, some of the women in this study experience their filter bubble and algorithmically curated content as something pleasant and comforting, especially when it contains entertaining topics such as videos including animals and Black feminist empowerment content. Interestingly, researchers argue that such algorithmically curated content can lead to homogenous communities in which Black activists are visible while they remain invisible outside these communities (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). However, the women in this study do not necessarily perceive this danger but instead enjoy the curated content based on their interests. Nevertheless, as soon as they leave that enclave of individual communication and their curated feed, some of the Black microcelebrities in this study find the idea of Instagram as a safe space laughable, as indicated by the following example from Tamika's interview:

[laughs] So Instagram is certainly not a safe space. At least that's

how I would see it, but what I do like a lot... There are some things I

like about Instagram. [...] At the moment I like to use it to

communicate, so the chats. I often write with many people there [...]

I find it positive and nice when you share certain things that are also

positive and funny. [...] But I think you shouldn't see Instagram too

deep, and I just wouldn't describe it as a safe space (Tamika's

interview).

While the literature on the topic of Black women and algorithms generally focuses on algorithmic discrimination and biased algorithms, the women in this study instead experience it either as a pleasant way to engage with interesting content or

as a tool to shield themselves from unpleasant experiences on Instagram (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Noble, 2013). As such, they actively work with the algorithm and other tools that make Instagram a safe space (i.e., direct messaging) and reappropriate those for their benefit. This is mainly due to two reasons: the heaviness of some topics that Black microcelebrities deal with and the hostility they experience on Instagram, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.3. Effects on mental health and coping mechanisms

When engaging in digital activism, Black women often experience strong effects on their mental health, both in terms of the type of topics and content they deal with and in terms of navigating oppressive and challenging to navigate structures on Instagram. In other words, given the difficult nature of the topics addressed in Black activism such as experiences with racism and police brutality, Black women experience effects on their mood and mental well-being. To illustrate, Kerry argues in one of her Instagram stories that:

(Post)colonialism is a heavy topic. Contrary to white peoples beliefs, black peoples DO NOT enjoy talking about it 😅 However it does need to be talked about and if we left it up to you... well, check your school history books. Food/Health is the only way this topic does not give me activism burnout/take a heavy toll on my mental health (Kerry's Instagram story highlight).

Next to content and topics that are difficult to handle, Black women also experience inherent structural issues in the Instagram space that impact their well-being and mental health. For instance, experiencing pressure to share content, trying to conform to the requirements of the Instagram algorithm, and engaging with their audience were described as challenging by the participants. For instance, Tamika

described it as "very energy draining to have to answer a lot of people sometimes or hold the conversation or think you have to hold it."

In addition, receiving negative comments and experiencing a lack of reaction from Instagram's side were mentioned as oppressive issues that might take a toll on the microcelebrities' mental health. Contradicting the literature on the topic of oppressive algorithms and policing by Instagram, the issue that the Black women in this study face are not being policed or silenced in the Instagram space (Noble, 2018). Instead, they feel like they are extradited to Instagram's arbitrariness in policing, restricting, and deleting comments on *their* profiles. To illustrate, some women expressed concerns about if and how fast Instagram deletes racist comments compared to policing content on other topics such as Covid-19-related vaccinations.

> I also ask myself whether the number of racist expressions is simply so high that they cannot keep up with them at all and cannot check it as quickly as if, I don't know, someone is talking about a demonstration, someone is talking about an event. [...] Because I couldn't explain it any other way that they aren't waiving it that quickly. They must be flagging that like hot cakes, actually (Tamika's interview).

Next to experiencing difficulties related to the structures on Instagram and the topics the microcelebrities talk about, they also experience insecurities and ambiguities about their behavior on Instagram. In other words, the women in this study question and reflect on themselves, their actions, and the impact of their efforts because they do not see any progress in changing structural issues. From an intersectional standpoint, it can be argued that women are more likely to experience such hesitations because they are generally more likely to have self-doubts, specifically when discussing issues that are not traditionally female (Duffy & Hund, 2019). Furthermore, doubting one's actions may not be a direct form of policing, it is

evident that these ambiguities restrict women's freedom to post and express themselves freely. In other words, the results of this study reveal a narrative in which not the direct policing and oppressive tendencies of Instagram limits the women but rather how they, as the main actors perceive what is and is not possible within the Instagram space.

> And now the question is: Well, of course we can share it again and really make noise. But the question is, why does the structure allow such things? [...] That just shows that even if you believe, ah yes, there is already progress, then you just hear something like that and then you really question whether there is progress (Tamika's interview).

When it comes to preventing and coping with these issues, the participants employ various techniques, for instance, distancing themselves from the content by unfollowing certain accounts or the platform by taking a break from Instagram or considering deleting it altogether. Thus, they actively choose to become invisible to protect themselves from the oppressive and difficult-to-manage structures on Instagram. While the literature on the tensions of (in)visibility mainly focuses on how the socio-technical structures of Instagram (e.g., algorithms and filter bubbles) render people invisible, the results of this thesis point towards a different pattern of strategically using invisibility as a tool for protection.

> I then just think to myself okay, this is too much. I just do it then, I just turn my phone off and I put it on airplane mode or I charge it and listen to music and miss my missed calls and text messages and Instagram tags (Tamika's interview).

Notably, when doing so, patterns of agency and taking matters into their hands are evident, indicating that they do not trust the Instagram platform to improve the situation but rather feel like they have to take action themselves. Incidentally, Gray and Stein (2021) explain in their article about the carceral tendencies of Instagram that women often experience Instagram and its oppressive structures as a restrictive space that limits their ability to exercise agency. While the findings of this study point in a similar direction, they simultaneously reveal that women use their agency to navigate these oppressions and limitations by strategically leaving and reentering the Instagram space at their convenience.

However, while such strategies might be a healthy way to cope with the oppressive structures Black women experience on Instagram, they simultaneously prevent them from becoming more visible and use their visibility to achieve structural change. Put differently, the participants expressed hesitation regarding excessive posting about sensitive topics because they worry about the consequences in terms of feedback from both their audience and the Instagram platforms. Interestingly, even experiencing such consequences second-hand (i.e., retelling incidents from others) is sufficient to prevent Black women from posting, raising awareness, and becoming visible.

Next to patterns of self-policing and posting at specific times that are evident in existing theory, the described patterns of not posting contribute to a better understanding of how fear of negative consequences restrains the visibility of both the topic and the person (Gray & Stein, 2021; Leaver et al., 2019). In other words, because Black women are worried about potential negative consequences based on (personal) experiences and the perceived structural problems of the platform, they adapt to the carceral logics of social media (Gray & Stein, 2021).

4.4. Connecting personal to structural issues

When retelling such instances of racist encounters or oppressive experiences on Instagram, the Black women in this study often move from personal experiences

to structural issues. In other words, they use a personal story as an anchor to address a larger issue that is present in society and logically connect those. For instance, various participants shared personal racist incidents such as being called a racist slur and feeling like an "attraction at the zoo" for *white* people, as Natasha shared on her Instagram story.

Interestingly, while the women do not always explicitly connect such personal encounters to larger structural issues, the transfer is made implicitly, for instance, by saving such content in a story highlight called "activism" (Natasha's Instagram highlight). As such, although they do not necessarily consider the practice of sharing a personal story an activistic act, the participants of this study frame these stories and their interpretations as activism in terms of raising awareness about the difficulties they face due to being Black in Austria.

One tool that the participants of this study repeatedly used was the (political) discussion around Black hair. The participants shared pictures of themselves with different Black hairstyles such as locs, wigs, and afro hairstyles. Interestingly, however, they connect such seemingly personal and trivial pictures with captions that raise awareness about the politicization of Black hair, thereby using their personal visibility as a political act (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Leaver et al., 2019). Moreover, Kerry added the hashtags #algorithmpost and #selfiesunday at the end of one of her captions, arguably to indicate that she is posting a picture of herself to adhere to the logics of the Instagram algorithm that favors photos of people over textual content (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). Generally speaking, she used the caption to explain the connection between her activistic focus on decolonial nutrition and reclaiming the narrative around health and her choice to loc her hair.

> After I went plant-based 4 years ago and started learning more
> about Ital living in the Caribbean, I knew it was only a matter of time
> before I loc'd my hair. It felt like an obvious and sure next step in my
> journey. [...] Most people don't do locs for fashion but rather

because locs represent everything they believe in (Kerry's Instagram post).

Discussions around the politicization of Black bodies and, in particular, Black female hair are readily available in academic literature. As Thompson (2009) explains, "for the vast majority of Black women, hair is not just hair; it contains emotive qualities that are linked to one's lived experience" (p. 831). Similarly, the participants in this study use their experiences around their hair to a) construct their identity and b) position themselves into the larger narrative around the discrimination against Black bodies. By the same token, sharing content related to personal decisions, such as which hairstyle to wear, can be considered a way to self-represent and share personal opinions as a form of resistance (Georgiou, 2018). However, considering the politically charged notions of Black hair, it can be argued that sharing content about it is not merely an act of sharing mundane, personal, and beauty-related topics but an explicit form of activism in which Black hair serves as a token to educate others about the value of it and thereby change the narrative around it.

Next to framing and creating a narrative around their hair, the research participants use various other strategies to construct their identity as Black women in Austria. To illustrate, the majority of participants use either English or a mix between English and German to a) express their dual identity as being part of the diasporic community and b) to increase their mediated visibility, as their posts become accessible to a larger audience of German- and English-speakers (McClearen & Fischer, 2021). Next to that, relations to their origin country are made by using the affordances of Instagram, for instance, by tagging a location, using a certain flag emoji in a post or story, and using hashtags such as #african and #nigeriandiaspora.

When doing so, they construct their identity as being Black as something that obligates them to engage in activism. In other words, some of the participants of this study expressed that they feel less privileged than *white* people in terms of their options to distance themselves from activistic work. For instance, Kerry explained in

the interview that she felt obliged to leave the *white* veganism bubble on Instagram by unfollowing accounts and changing her posting behavior because it did not correlate with her values and decolonial approach to nutrition.

> They then very often stay on this track of animal rights and animal
> protection and everything else then just completely falls into the
> background. And that's just something that doesn't work for me
> because I'm a Black woman. I can't ignore other things as easily as
> other people can. I just can't make myself so comfortable that easily
> (Kerry's interview).

These trends somewhat contradict the findings described in the previous section, in which Black women use their agency to leave the Instagram space and (temporarily) no longer engage with their audience and with digital activism in general. Interestingly, however, Kerry does not describe feeling pressured by the Instagram platform and its users but rather by her identity as a Black woman. This confirms that while Instagram exhibits its oppressive structures, it also perpetuates visible inequalities offline, such as Kerry feeling pressured due to her Black identity (van Dijck & Poell, 2015).

An additional step in moving from personal to structural issues is to focus on connectivity and collectivity. Black microcelebrities use the Instagram space to develop a network by, for instance, tagging other people and collective profiles and sharing footage of traditional collective actions such as attending a protest. Notably, from a narrative perspective, the interviewees often used 'we' instead of 'I' and mentioned collective initiatives such as AustrianPikin, "a platform for Nigerians & beyond – making change one step at a time" (AustrianPikin, n.d.).

> And there, for example, I posted a lot and there I was, so we
> organized a demo, organized a demonstration and I was there. [...]

We also helped them now and then referred other people in other
countries and cities and for them, we also collected money and
food, hygiene products, clothing, etc. Today we are going to a
meeting which is organized by 'Asyl in Not' and there we will listen
to what the next steps are for the African Students, who have just
fled from Ukraine (Tamika's interview).

From a CRBF standpoint, this focus on collectivity and connectivity is crucial,
considering the consensus that structural change can only be achieved by collective
efforts working towards the same goal (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Knight Steele, 2021).
The nuance this study adds to these ideas is how Black microcelebrities use
Instagram to connect their personal experiences, their personal network, and the idea
of having collective actions to further their activistic goals. By doing so, they create a
new form of counterpublic that does not only involve sharing activistic content but
instead creates a culture of individual experiences and collective actions
simultaneously.

Interestingly, however, while Kerry focused strongly on the ideas of
collectivity, public health, and building a community around decolonial nutrition, she
simultaneously stated that she is "not interested in these higher levels." In other
words, while she engages with the described notions of building a community to
initiate change and increase the quality of life of her community, she does not self-
identify as an activist. However, it can be argued that the content she posts
nevertheless contributes to a set of collective efforts to change structures in Austria,
particularly from an intersectional perspective in which she aims to connect issues of
health, gender, race, and socio-economic status of marginalized groups. By the same
token, Ahmad and Thorpe (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; van Dijck & Poell, 2015) argue
that even when women do not self-identify as activists, their use of social media can
nevertheless be a "powerful form of storytelling" (p. 677). Similarly, Kerry's activities
on Instagram are a powerful invasion of *white* ideas on health and contribute to

challenging the lack of knowledge about decolonization and, thereby, the status quo of the structures in Austria.

5. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the practices of Black female microcelebrities on Instagram in Austria. More specifically, this thesis was positioned in a CRBF framework and aimed to employ the concepts of space invaders, visibility as resistance, and the socio-technical structures of Instagram to answer the question of how Black female microcelebrities navigate the Instagram space to challenge racist and gender-oppressive structures in Austria. During the analysis of the data collected from Instagram and interviews with the participants, the results pointed at four main themes.

To begin with, one of the main findings of this study was the engagement of Black women in educational activism by prioritizing text-heavy, serious, and fundamental content over visually pleasing images. When doing so, they assume the role of the educators to raise awareness, change the narrative, and directly call out racist and gender-oppressive incidents and structures. They do so by using the different tools of Instagram, such as stories to increase the longevity of topics and carousel posts to explain complex issues. By doing so, they challenge and reverse evident power structures on Instagram, as they play the role of the powerful narrators and educators. In addition, by changing the hegemonic narrative on Instagram via education, they transform the space into one centered around social justice issues, which also benefits them.

However, the patterns evident in this theme point towards the creation of echo chambers in which a certain set of topics and knowledge circulates between a network of people who use it a) to educate themselves and b) to educate others. Comparing these findings to the existing literature, they add a more nuanced understanding of how homogenous bubbles are not only the result of Instagram's socio-technical structures but also of how Black microcelebrities benefit from the use of Instagram (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). Another interesting finding considering the current literature was how callout activism could be viewed as slacktivism. To illustrate, the callout activism employed by the women in this study rarely initiated

mutual conversations with the parties being called out, resulting in limited structural change in Austria.

The second prominent theme involves the participants shifting between online and offline spaces and combining traditional with digital activism. More specifically, they do so by sharing footage of traditional activism, such as pictures from a protest, sharing information to mobilize others, and using hashtags to create associations among content. Next to that, the women use Instagram in a more personal and individual way, such as using the direct messaging feature to exchange content or messages with acquaintances from the offline world. When doing so, they experience Instagram as a safe space in which they feel seen and represented. Notably, this only applies to this personal communication and not to Instagram in general, which is perceived as the opposite of a safe space due to harassment and online hate patterns.

When connecting these patterns to the literature on space invasion, it becomes evident that the participants not only invade one space and try to change it from within but also use a combination of offline and online activism, different platforms, and different platform tools to create their network (Puwar, 2004; Wright et al., 2007). By the same token, they selectively use Instagram's (and other spaces') tools and structures to create this new space, rather than falling into the binary of Instagram as either useful or limiting for digital activism. For instance, while the women use hashtags as described in existing literature (i.e., to contextualize and group content), they also use hashtags to create links between offline and online networks and to frame their content as being activistic rather than simply informational (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

The third theme describes how the idea that digital activism can be harmful to the mental health of the ones engaging in it. To illustrate, the women in this study experience the topics they address, the navigation of the difficult structures on Instagram, the pressure from both the platform and the audience, and the lack of support from Instagram's side as having severe impacts on their well-being.

Moreover, they regularly question their actions and their impact, which in turn prevents them from posting activistic content because they do not always see the benefits of it. As a result, the participants developed a set of coping mechanisms, such as leaving the Instagram space for certain periods. When doing so, they become temporarily invisible, and the content that circulates on Instagram becomes temporarily invisible to them, which they use as an agentic tool to protect themselves and stay grounded in the offline world.

While prior research discovered patterns of deteriorating mental health of digital activists due to being overworked and experiencing burnout, the findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of how the structures of Instagram relate to the mental health of Black microcelebrities (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020). To illustrate, the women in this study are not necessarily worried about being policed or rendered invisible by the Instagram algorithm. Instead, they worry about the platform not managing negative comments and online hate on their profiles. Interestingly, this distrust in the platform and fear of repercussions of posting is invoked by both first-hand and second-hand experiences (i.e., stories from others), indicating the severeness of such instances. As a result, they adjust their posting behavior and avoid topics that might trigger such digital harassment, in turn preventing them from freely engaging in digital activism (Gray & Stein, 2021; Leaver et al., 2019).

The final theme explains how the women in this study connect personal to structural issues by implicitly or explicitly establishing conjunctions between their identities as Black women and oppressive structures in Austria. To illustrate, they discuss issues such as the politicization of Black hair, strategically employ English and German to reach a larger audience and focus on collective efforts to further structural change.

This focus on collectivity is one of the most fundamental tools within the CRBF paradigm that frames collective actions of Black women as the main tool of resistance (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Knight Steele, 2021). Notably, the women in this

study do not solely focus on collective action but on using their personal experiences to develop a counterpublic with a culture aimed at structural change. In other words, digital activism and collective action are not just tools to advance structural change but become a culture on its own based on personal experiences of what it means to be Black in Austria and convictions on how to make Austria less oppressive and more inclusive.

To answer the RQ, Black female microcelebrities successfully navigate the Instagram space to pursue their activistic goals of changing the narrative and thereby challenge structures in Austria. However, as previous literature indicates, they are governed by the very structures they are trying to challenge, such as breaking out of their bubble and entering the mainstream content on Instagram. Finally, it is evident that Black female microcelebrities have invaded, changed, and keep changing the Instagram space and culture by continuously finding new ways to navigate the platform and thereby challenge its hegemonic assumptions and oppressive structures.

5.1. Limitations and future research

While the findings of this thesis contribute to adding nuance and new insights to the digital anti-racist and anti-sexist activism field, the study itself is not without its limitations. One major limitation was the difficulties in establishing contact with Black microcelebrities. To illustrate, almost 60 people were contacted and invited to participate in this study, aimed at a sample of 12-15 interview participants. However, many expressed being busy or unavailable for an interview for other reasons. As a result, only three interviews were conducted. And while the digital ethnography and content analysis aspects of the mixed-method approach successfully contributed to answering the RQ of this thesis, future research could benefit from a stronger focus on interviews to further advance the goal to prioritize Black women's voices (Alexander-Floyd, 2015).

Next to that, my positionality as a *white* person conducting this research implies certain limitations in terms of my ability to understand and interpret literature and data. To illustrate, although I strongly relied on CRBF literature and ideas, I am aware that I lack certain cultural skills and experiences needed to fully grasp the collective experiences made by the participants of this study (Leurs, 2017). Put differently, there may be aspects of Black activism, and the experiences of the women in this study that I overlooked could have contributed to answering the RQ more thoroughly. Moreover, considering that CRBF and anti-racist activism efforts are relatively new in the German-speaking context, the ideas within the community are constantly evolving. As a result, conclusions drawn today may be contested soon. This is particularly relevant with regards to the topic of this thesis, as (re)claiming the narrative, educating others, gaining the sovereignty of interpretation, and thereby challenging existing knowledge are key tools the participants used to challenge oppressive structures in Austria.

Considering these limitations, future research may employ a more longitudinal approach to observe how the patterns described in this thesis change over time (Babbie, 2020). In addition, given that structural change is inherently a lengthy process, a longitudinal study could reveal more in-depth patterns of how exactly structural change is produced via digital activism (Ellerbe-Dueck, 2011).

Finally, I would recommend future researchers develop clearer descriptions of what activism is and which Instagram practices can or cannot be considered activistic. To illustrate, as Instagram is being transformed into a more politicized space, personal opinions and worldviews can be more easily expressed. However, although various researchers argue that mundane acts such as sharing a selfie can be considered political, it can be argued that not every opinion and political statement is a form of activism and directly aimed at structural change (Leaver et al., 2019). For this reason, providing distinctive characteristics of activists and non-activists and analyzing the differences between those individuals could add to a more nuanced understanding of the differences between being activistic or politicized. Notably, this

is particularly relevant when researching anti-racism activism, as Black people are often pressured into having opinions and knowledge about activistic topics and talking about those, although they have no interest in being activists, as expressed by Kerry in this study.

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Appendix A

Participants overview

Appendix A1. Overview of final sample of five women and their Instagram profiles.

Name (pseudonym)	Number of Instagram followers	Thematic focus of profile	Number of posts sampled	Number of story highlights sampled	Interviewed
Tamika	6977	Private and END SARS movement	8	17	Yes
Layla	2502	Black activism	8	14	No
Natasha	2458	Student life and Black activism	10	15	No
Olivia	2865	Anti-racist legal consulting	4	9	No
Kerry	1785	Decolonial dietician	6	15	Yes
Nora	n.a.*	n.a.*	n.a.*	n.a.*	Yes
Total			*36*	*70*	

* Nora's Instagram profile was not included in the sample, as she is mainly active on the Instagram account of the journalistic media outlet she works for rather than her personal account. Nevertheless, the interview conducted with her provided valuable insights into the motivations and local connection of activism.

Appendix B

Interview guide

Introduction

- Go through informed consent form again – answer potential questions

- Explain purpose of study: To gain insights into how Black women in Austria
  and Germany use Instagram and what they think about it.
    - A lot of research has focused on content analysis, and I want to focus
      more on the experiences of Black women which is why I chose to use
      interviews.
    - Data use: Anonymous and confidential. Direct quotes may be used in
      the text, but only in ways that make it impossible to know who said this

- Briefly outline the structure/details of the interview (how long, no wrong
  answers, please ask if there are any questions during the interview, etc.)

- Ice breaker:
    - Can you please tell me a bit about yourself and what you do?
    - When did you start doing that on Instagram? And why?
    - I saw on Instagram that you [something interesting that is related to
      the topic] – can you tell me more about that?

Main Part

- Beginnings on Instagram – signing up and starting to use it
    - Can you tell me about your experience with Instagram during the past
      few years?
    - What are your motivations and goals for your Instagram use?
    - Visibility?

- Experiences with the community on Instagram
  - What kind of accounts are you connected with on Instagram (people, groups, movements, entertainment, ...)? Why? How do you usually discover new account and decide who (not) to follow?
  - Can you please describe your Instagram audience? Who is your following? Why do you think they follow you? What kind of content do they like to see and interact? How often do they interact with the posts you make and why?

- Use of different tools on Instagram (stories, posts, live, reels, etc.)
  - What type of content do you usually post on Instagram? Why? What is your motivation to post contents? How often do you post? What do you have in mind when you post?
  - Are there specific contents that spark more interaction/attention/ interest among your followers?
  - Have you ever got any note from Instagram because of any content you posted? If so, what was it? Why do you think this happened? How did you react?

- Activism on Instagram (go into detail about the activism strategies they use)
  - I saw [something activistic I found on their profile] – can you tell me more about posting that?
  - Why are you using Instagram as the platform to communicate this?

- Posting strategies – what do they pay attention to when posting something on Instagram
  - What do you generally consider before you post something to your Instagram stories or profile? What are your thoughts on Instagram's algorithm? How do you use the algorithm to your advantage? How do

you feel does the algorithm disadvantage you? What considerations in terms of visibility on Instagram do you make before posting something?

- o What do you think are the advantages of Instagram for the type of content you post? And the disadvantages?
- o Have you ever considered deleting Instagram? Why? Why not? What would your alternatives be?

Closing

- Additional information
  - o What else is there that you would like to discuss regarding this topic?
- Any questions?
- Do you know other people who would fit the criteria and would be willing to talk to me?
- Thank you and please email me if you have anything else that you would like to add or any questions.

Appendix C

Appendix C1. Thematic coding sheet Instagram content.

Theme	Sub-theme	Exemplary quote
Educational activism	Raising awareness and (re)claiming the narrative	"'M.' is the oldest German term used by whites to construct Black people as different. The term was translated from other European contexts, and etymologically goes back to the Greek term moros, meaning 'foolish,' 'simple-minded,' 'stupid,' and also 'godless'" (Layla's Instagram story highlight).
	Callout and slideshow activism	"Sharing is caring! Here I explain why the reproduction of racist stereotypes in language and the cityscape contributes to the further perpetuation of racism in Austria. [...] It's time to act! @stadtwien, @michaelludwig_official, @birgithebein" (Layla's Instagram post).
	Transformation of the Instagram space	"What @anothermicrocelebrity said" (Layla's Instagram highlight)![1]
Space shifting	From the 'real' world to the online world and back	"We demand... Anti-racism trainings and education focal points! Not only for the executive! @collectiveInstagrampage" (Layla's Instagram post).[2]
	Instagram as a safe space	"I'm really grateful I get to create and hold safe spaces for people to come together, feel seen & appreciated. That's what food is really about" (Kerry's Instagram highlight).
Effects on mental health and coping mechanisms	n.a.	"(Post)colonialism is a heavy topic. Contrary to white peoples beliefs, black peoples DO NOT enjoy talking about it 😅 However it does need to be talked about and if we left it up to you... well, check your school history books. Food/Health is the only way this topic does not give me activism burnout/take a heavy toll on my mental health" (Kerry's Instagram story highlight).

Connecting personal to structural issues	n.a.	"After I went plant-based 4 years ago and started learning more about Ital living in the Caribbean, I knew it was only a matter of time before I loc'd my hair. It felt like an obvious and sure next step in my journey. [...] Most people don't do locs for fashion but rather because locs represent everything they believe in" (Kerry's Instagram post).

[1] In this Instagram story, Layla shared a post from another well-known microcelebrity about the renaming petition for a racist street name in Vienna and included the message "what @anothermicrocelebrity said."

[2] This quote is taken from a protest sign that is visible in the picture of the Instagram post and held by Layla who is attending a protest. In addition, she added the Instagram handle of a collective Instagram account that she owns but the name was anonymized in this quote to ensure her anonymity and privacy.

Appendix D

Appendix D1. Thematic coding sheet interviews.

Theme	Sub-theme	Exemplary quote
Educational activism	Raising awareness and (re)claiming the narrative	"And in that case, the younger generation, because that's what I would call us now, turned it around and tried to use the Internet to actually show the truth. [...] So they really tried to form a community and you can see that the younger generation used these tools to get together or to be, I don't know, louder and somehow have a voice" (Tamika's interview).
	Callout and slideshow activism	"I somehow had this regional aspect and this thing that I live in Vienna, and I like the city and noticed that there is somehow still a gap or an error in the system with the aspect that it's just about minorities being discriminated against. So, it's... I really like it when I have a certain closeness to the topics because then it's easier for me to do research and I can empathize well" (Nora's interview).
	Transformation of the Instagram space	"I don't want to then show the "careless" side only but then rather also still show, yes, I don't know, meaningful things sometimes. Because we are already spammed with crazy things" (Tamika's interview).
Space shifting	From the 'real' world to the online world and back	"If something happens that is somehow, yes, worth putting into a reel, where you somehow maybe have a story behind it or somehow some kind of hook then we like to use reels, because of course they also work really well and we save our stories, for example, when I go to demonstrations or something, or if there is somehow something else, another event, where you don't make a video, but a story, then we save that in the highlights" (Nora's

		interview).
	Instagram as a safe space	"[laughs] So Instagram is certainly not a safe space. At least that's how I would see it, but what I do like a lot... There are some things I like about Instagram. [...] At the moment I like to use it to communicate, so the chats. I often write with many people there [...] I find it positive and nice when you share certain things that are also positive and funny. [...] But I think you shouldn't see Instagram too deep, and I just wouldn't describe it as a safe space. But if, for example, you're in a group with your friends and you're sharing things, you could make that your safe space" (Tamika's interview).
Effects on mental health and coping mechanisms	n.a.	"There is also time, times where you just see too many sad story posts, because simply what happened and then you are just also... Then the energy is just also further down. Or if you see some video where something happens, where you then also think 'Okay, I think that's enough for today' and you just want to put it away" (Tamika's interview).

Connecting personal to structural issues	n.a.	"They then very often stay on this track of animal rights and animal protection and everything else then just completely falls into the background. And that's just something that doesn't work for me because I'm a Black woman. I can't ignore other things as easily as other people can. I just can't make myself so comfortable that easily" (Kerry's interview).

Appendix E

Appendix E1. Exemplary field notes collected from Tamika's profile.

General observations:

- Use of English language – barely any German content and if there was any German visible in a post or story, it was translated to English

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[Screenshot of profile header including profile picture, profile name, and profile bio][1]

Profile picture: a bloody towel from Nigeria that she also posted in a post to show that innocent people in Nigeria are being killed by the police

Bio:

- Lipstick emoji – full name – Austrian / Nigerian / British flag emojis
- Location: Vienna
- Tagged: @wearegcc (dancing group) and @adidas as employer for inclusive sizing ambassador
- Travel addict – identity as traveler
- Hashtag: #shakushakubae – seems to be her own hashtag, results in posts mainly from her

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[Screenshot of all her Instagram highlights including the cover image and the name of the highlight][1]

Story highlights:

- Random (travel content, selfies, daily life such as sporting or being at the park, pictures with friends)
- Multiple highlights about traveling (distinguished by countries)
- Highlight about dancing / the dancing group she is a part of
- Three activistic highlights: #ENDSARS, 4/6/2020 – first BLM matter demonstration in Vienna, 5/6/2020 – second BLM demonstration in Vienna

Feed posts since beginning of June 2020:

[Screenshots of her feed since June 2020][1]

- Majority of posts features her alone (both in selfies and in pictures seemingly taken by others) – only one post (outside the ones featuring protest content) with other people (other black women)
- Combination of professional and private pictures
- Traveling content
- Everyday life content
- + activistic content (6 posts clearly activistic)
- Other posts feature activistic hashtags such as #BLM, #BlackLivesStillMatter, #BLMeveryday, #blackwoman, and more
- 4 activist posts in a row about the demonstrations against the violent police force SARS in Nigeria
- Changing structures in Nigeria, not in Austria – but the action (demonstration) is taking place in Austria
- Posts used to mobilize people and share information about the demonstration (location, time, Covid measures, etc.)

- Story highlights used to save footage of the protests and reflect on it → making an offline protest highly visible online, also by using the tools that offline protests have (the masses of people, their protest signs, their speeches, etc.)

[1] The actual screenshots were redacted for anonymity and privacy reasons.