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## ***The Challenges of Studying the African Diasporas<sup>1</sup>***

The field of African diaspora studies has grown rapidly in recent years. What accounts for this? What are the current preoccupations of African diaspora studies and their limits? Who dominates the field and how can African scholars help reshape it? These are of course broad and difficult questions which cannot be adequately dealt with in a paper of this size. Suffice it to say answers lie as much in the shifting dynamics of knowledge production as in the changing contours of material production, in transformations that are simultaneously epistemic as they are economic, that are confined to and connect the academy and society, that are often as much national as they are transnational. In short, the rise of African diaspora studies can be attributed to, on the one hand intellectual and ideological imperatives, and on the other to developments in regional and global political economies.<sup>2</sup>

Intellectually, the growth of diaspora studies was facilitated from the 1980s by the rise of globalization and transnational studies as well as cultural studies and especially the 'posts' – poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. Also critical was the growth of interest in world history following multiculturalist assaults on the western civilization curriculum. This was accompanied by an explosion of conferences, centres, courses, and publications on diaspora studies. Particularly crucial in the Anglo-American academy was the publication of Paul Gilroy's (1993) influential, but deeply flawed text, *The Black Atlantic*. Ideologically, the field of African diaspora studies has benefited from the resurgence of Pan-Africanism and black internationalism, the age-old imperative for collective liberation for African peoples at home and abroad, fostered in part by the collapse of the schisms of the Cold War, the demise of apartheid, and the renewed search for an African renaissance.

Intellectual and ideological developments of course do not occur in a vacuum. The socioeconomic dynamics underpinning the growth of diaspora studies are varied indeed, but principally include transnational migrations and movements, globalization processes and the reconfiguration of nation states, and the awakened interest by African institutions and national governments in diasporas as a developmental asset – a remittance pipeline – and as the continent's potential global guardian. Contemporary African mass migrations within the continent and to other world regions including those containing diaspora communities have reconfigured the identities of African peoples as existing national, racial and ethnic identities are reconsidered, renegotiated and recalibrated. These processes are mediated by the intensified flow of ideologies, images, and identities facilitated by the new information and communication technologies.

The growth of African diaspora studies as an academic field has been uneven. It is stronger outside than within the continent itself, and there are of course important variations in each of these locations. This can be attributed to the very demands of the

diaspora condition, that diasporas are more likely to reflect on their diasporic identities than non-diasporized populations. Also, institutions of higher learning are stronger and far better resourced in the African diaspora hostlands of the global North than in most African countries. Within the diaspora itself, there are notable differences between the Atlantic and non-Atlantic worlds, between North and South America, between the Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone scholarly worlds, and within each of these worlds as is the case between the American and British academies.

As many commentators have noted especially those working in the burgeoning field of African diasporas in Asia, the field of African diaspora studies is largely framed by the Atlantic model in which the patterns of dispersal are reduced to the slave trade and the processes of diasporization to racialization (Zezeza 2005; Keita 2005; Campbell 2006; Larson 2007). As for the Americas, outside of the Caribbean and Brazil, race and blackness have not featured as highly in Latin American historiography as they have in US historiography (Vinson 2006). And in the Anglophone world, not only is the field more developed in the United States than in Britain, in the American academy there is the division between ethnic studies and area studies in which African American/Africana/Black studies and African studies are often lodged, respectively, while in the British academy the division is between those in cultural studies and in development studies (Hanchard 2004; Zack-Williams 1995; Zack-Williams and Giles Mohan 2002; Adi 2002).

African scholars are clearly late comers to the field of African diaspora studies, and among them migrant academics relocated to the academies of the global North especially the United States, Britain, and France probably predominate. One could argue that besides their exposure to the closer seductions of diaspora studies, many are driven by the diasporic imperative to defend Africa which is routinely defamed in the global North and by autobiographical impulses to make sense of their own transnational experiences and diasporic offspring (Zezeza 2008). I know attempts to understand better my Canadian-born daughter and African-American wife were a major inspiration for me. They and their colleagues and compatriots on the continent are also increasingly attuned to efforts by policy makers to engage African diasporas more productively – the AU has declared the diaspora Africa's sixth region.

As I have argued elsewhere, greater engagement by African scholars in diaspora studies might be critical in shifting the terms of debate in terms of their analytical, linguistic, geographical, and racial referents. Analytically, a continental perspective incorporating North Africa and South Africa helps decentre the 'Black Atlantic' perspective, both in its spatial and racial preoccupations with the Atlantic world and 'blackness' in so far as African scholars from northern Africa and among those of Asian and European descent in South Africa may not be preoccupied with 'blackness', thereby freeing studies and discourses of African diasporas from their racialized trope and trap.

Linguistically, the fact that African scholars are, collectively, multi-lingual in terms of the European languages thanks to the fiat of colonialism, can and should help in the reading and production of diaspora studies and discourses beyond English to include Portuguese, French, and Spanish, among the key languages of the Atlantic diasporas. Africa is also home to Arabic and several European and Asian languages that are part of the languages of the African diasporas in the regions that use those languages.

Geographically, involvement by scholars in different regions of the continent would help expand the spatial horizons of African diaspora studies. For historical and cultural reasons, historians from western Africa are more likely to focus on the Atlantic diasporas, those from northern Africa on the Mediterranean and Red Sea diasporas, and those from Eastern Africa on the Indian Ocean diasporas.

African diaspora studies have already enriched and will continue to enrich the field of diaspora studies in general. The field throws into sharp relief some basic questions: the meanings of the terms diaspora, Africa, and their combination African diaspora. How do the histories of African diasporas affect the way we think about diasporas, theorize diaspora? In the rest of the paper I explore some of these questions, obviously not in any detail given the constraints of space, but rather to share the analytical frameworks I have developed for my own project on African diasporas. My project seeks to examine the migrations of African peoples across the globe over the last few centuries, the formation of African diaspora communities in different world regions, and the various linkages between these communities and Africa. In short, it seeks to map out the patterns of African dispersals, processes of diasporization, and practices of engagement between Africa and its diasporas.

The paper is divided into four parts. I begin with brief definitional notes as a prelude to suggesting the simple, but critical point that African diasporas are global and multilayered, composed of multiple communities, different waves of migration and diasporization. The second and third parts outline very broadly the historic and contemporary dispersals and diasporas, and how we might examine their inter-relationships. The fourth part offers a possible analytical framework that might be useful in untangling the complex histories and dynamics of engagements between Africa and its diasporas, and attempts to sketch, again very broadly, the nature and dynamics of these engagements and linkages.

### **Defining Diaspora and Africa**

As George Shepperson (1993) has reminded us, the term African diaspora did not emerge in the Anglophone world until the 1950s and 1960s, although of course African diasporas as such existed long before then, and so did ideas and movements of African and black internationalism, which were captured by the concept and ideology of Pan-Africanism. Interventions by Shepperson (1968) himself and Joseph Harris (1968, 1982, 1993) did much to popularize diaspora studies in the Anglophone academy, especially in the United States where the civil rights and the black studies movements were assaulting the barricades of Eurocentric scholarship and white institutional exclusion. In the meantime, in Britain the term diaspora entered through the attempts of cultural studies scholars such as Stuart Hall (1980) and Paul Gilroy (1987) to theorize and explain postwar black British culture. An archaeological excavation of other linguistic and intellectual traditions, from French to Spanish to Arabic and Afrikaans, would surely yield different genealogies. Today, the term African diaspora enjoys pride of place in the increasingly crowded pantheon of diaspora studies.

In many cases, the term diaspora is used in a fuzzy and uncritical manner in which all manner of movements and migrations between countries and even within countries are encapsulated in its generous conceptual bosom, and no adequate attention is paid to the historical conditions and experiences that produce diasporic communities and

consciousness, or lack thereof. I say lack thereof because not all dispersals result in the formation of diasporas. In other words, dispersal does not automatically create a diaspora and once formed a diaspora does not live in perpetuity. Some diasporas disappear, some dispersals turn into diasporas long after the original dispersals.

Diaspora, I would suggest, simultaneously refers to a process, a condition, a space, and a discourse; the continuous processes by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is moulded and imagined, and the contentious ways in which it is studied and discussed. It entails a culture and a consciousness, sometimes diffuse and sometime concentrated of a 'here' separate from a 'there', a 'here' that is often characterized by a regime of marginalization and a 'there' that is invoked as a rhetoric of self-affirmation, of belonging to 'here' differently. The emotional and experiential investment in 'here' and 'there' and the points in between, indeed in the very configurations and imaginings of 'here' and 'there' and their complex intersections obviously change in response to the shifting materialities, mentalities, and moralities of social existence.

Diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings, of networks of affiliation. It is a mode of naming, remembering, living and feeling group identity moulded out of experiences, positionings, struggles, and imaginings of the past and the present, and at times the unfolding, unpredictable future, which are shared or seen to be shared across the boundaries of time and space that frame 'indigenous' identities in the contested and constructed locations of 'there' and 'here' and the passages and points in between.

In a broad sense, a diasporic identity implies a form of group consciousness constituted historically through expressive culture, politics, thought and tradition, in which experiential and representational resources are mobilized, in varied measures, from the imaginaries of both the old and the new worlds. Diasporas are complex social and cultural communities created out of real and imagined genealogies and geographies (cultural, racial, ethnic, national, continental, transnational) of belonging, displacement, and recreation, constructed and conceived at multiple temporal and spatial scales, at different moments and distances from the putative homeland. A diaspora is fashioned as much in the fluid and messy contexts of social experience, differentiation and struggle, and through the transnational circuits of exchange of diasporic resources and repertoires of power, as in the discourses of the intellectuals and political elites.

This leads us to the question of what is Africa and who are Africans that constitute, when dispersed and reconstituted, African diasporas. The idea of 'Africa' is an exceedingly complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, which make any extrapolations of 'African' culture and identity, in the singular or plural, any explorations for African 'authenticity', quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency. Elsewhere I have argued that Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries, geographical, historical, and cultural, have shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power, and African nationalism, including Pan-Africanism.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the maps and meanings of 'Africa' and 'Africanness' are being reconfigured by both the processes of contemporary globalization and the project of African integration. I work from the assumption that Africa is a material and imagined place, a historical geography, the constellation of the places and peoples embedded in its cartographic and conceptual bosom. It is an invention as much as 'Asia' or 'Europe' or the 'West' and all such civilizational spaces, but it has a physical, political, paradigmatic and psychic reality for the peoples who live within or who are from its cartographic and cultural boundaries, themselves subject to shifts.

As we all know the name 'Africa' is not African; it originally referred to the Roman province in present-day Tunisia, and only later was it extended to the whole continent, and much later still did the various peoples of the continent come to be referred to, or to refer to themselves as Africans; some still don't. Thus, exclusive claims to Africa based on the sands of the Sahara or doses of melanin represent the spatialization and racialization of African identity that are historically spurious. My Africa is the Africa of the African Union. How legitimate is it to project this Africa backwards? My answer is that almost invariably history is filtered through the lenses of the present and the Africa of the Pan-Africanist founders of the OAU, the predecessor of the AU, is no less handy than, indeed preferable to, the racist epistemic cartography of Africa invented by European imperialism that divided Africa into two, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa: Hegel's 'Africa proper'.

This means, quite simply, that African diasporas include all those peoples dispersed from the continent in historic and contemporary times, who have constituted themselves or been constituted into diasporas. The key words are 'historic times' and 'constituted'. At a technical workshop convened by the African Union (2004) in Trinidad in 2004, in which I participated, the following definition of diaspora was adopted after several days of heated debate:

The AU has committed itself to providing representation to the African Diaspora in its policy process. For this purpose, we recommend that the definition of African Diaspora refer to the geographic dispersal of peoples whose ancestors, within historical memory, originally came from Africa, but who are currently domiciled, or claim residence or citizenship, outside the continent of Africa.

This merely points to the complexities of the African diasporas and underscores Kim Butler's (2000: 127) point that 'conceptualizations of diaspora must be able to accommodate the reality of multiple identities and phases of diasporization over time'. She offers a simple but useful schema for diasporan study divided into five dimensions: '(1) reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; (2) relationship with homeland; (3) relationship with hostlands; (4) interrelationships within diasporan groups; (5) comparative study of different diaspora'. For Darlene Clark Hine (2001), black diaspora studies, as she calls the field, need to have three features: a transatlantic framework, an interdisciplinary methodology, and a comparative perspective. I would agree with the last two and revise the first that African diaspora studies need to have a global framework.

## The Historic Dispersals and Diasporas

There are numerous dispersals associated with African peoples over time. Colin Palmer (2000) has identified at least six: three in prehistoric and ancient times (beginning with the great exodus that began about 100,000 years ago from the continent to other continents) and three in modern times, including those associated with the Indian Ocean trade to Asia, the Atlantic slave trade to the Americas, and the contemporary movement of Africans and peoples of African descent to various parts of the globe. While such a broad historical conception of diaspora might be a useful reminder of our common origins and humanity, it stretches the notion of diaspora too far beyond analytical recognition to be terribly useful. So most scholars tend to focus on the historical streams of the global African diasporas.

Trying to categorize African diasporas is by no means an easy task. In terms of dispersal of populations we can identify four broad movements: intra-African, trans-Indian Ocean, trans-Mediterranean, and trans-Atlantic. In my view only the last three qualify to be regarded as potentially constitutive of *African* diasporas. The first are at best seen as ethnic or national diasporas (there is historical literature on trading diasporas, slave diasporas, conquest diasporas, refugee diasporas, pastoral diasporas). In terms of periodization, distinctions are often drawn between historic/old and new/contemporary diasporas. It is of course possible to talk of three broad periods, pre-fifteenth century, fifteenth-nineteenth centuries, and since the twentieth century. Needless to say, the periodizations vary for the different regions, and it is important to pay attention to transformations in local, regional, and global political economies and their intersections.

Studies of African diasporas largely focus on the Atlantic world, but the literature is growing on the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean diasporas, which antedate the trans-Atlantic dispersals and diasporas. One unfortunate result of the Atlantic model is the tendency to reduce all historic African diasporas to the dispersals of slavery and to blacks. To use Robin Cohen's (1997) typology, African diasporas are often seen as victim diasporas (in Cohen's schema the others are labour, trade, and cultural diasporas). This tends to freeze African diaspora history, homogenize African diasporas, and racialize them exclusively as black.

The eastern African region from Egypt to Mozambique was integrated into the Indian Ocean world many centuries before the rise of the Atlantic world. Recent studies clearly demonstrate that the African diaspora has very old roots in Asia – from Western Asia, the so-called Middle East, to south Asia including India and Sri Lanka, to which Africans traveled as traders, sailors, soldiers, bureaucrats, clerics, bodyguards, concubines, servants, and slaves. Thus, unlike the historic Atlantic diasporas, the Indian Ocean diasporas were comprised of both forced and free migrants.

Exploration of the African diasporas in the Mediterranean worlds of western Asia and southern Europe has been fraught with considerable difficulties not least the fact that until modern times this was the most intensive zone of cultural traffic and communication, in which communities straddled multiple spaces in complex networks of affiliation. The case of the Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula who swept through northern Africa following the rise of Islam in the seventh century is a case in point. They traversed northern Africa and western Asia, the so-called Middle East, although

with the rise of the modern nation-state and national identities, notwithstanding the enduring dreams of the Arab nation, it is possible to talk of, say, the Egyptian diaspora in the Gulf.

In Europe the first major zone of African settlement was in the southern flanks of the Mediterranean from ancient Rome to Andalusian Spain. The African presence in ancient Rome is now well documented in the works of several classicists, including African and diasporan writers. It is of course well known that northwestern Africans – the so-called Moors – occupied and ruled parts of the Iberian Peninsula between 711 and 1492, but they are rarely discussed in diasporic terms, as an *African diaspora*. Anouar Majid (2000: 77), the renowned Moroccan scholar, insists that Andalusian Spain was an ‘African kingdom in Europe’. In the Iberian Peninsula, the trans-Mediterranean and trans-Atlantic dispersals and diasporas met, in so far as some of the earliest Africans to settle in the Americas came from Spain and Portugal. Thus not all the African-descended arrivals in the Americas originated in Western Africa and the Atlantic islands. The historiography on the development of an Afro-Iberian population and their role in the Spanish occupation and settlement of the Americas is still poorly developed but is improving.

Beyond the Mediterranean littoral in Europe, there are ancient African communities from Russia to Britain. Some argue that the scattered African communities on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus mountains were brought there between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries as slaves for the Turkish and Abkhazian rulers, while others trace their origins many centuries earlier as remnants of an Egyptian army that invaded the region in antiquity. Allison Blakely (1986, 1994) who has also written on early African settlements in the Dutch world, believes the two explanations may not necessarily be contradictory, in that there were probably different waves of African dispersals in Russia. The history of Africans in Britain can be traced back two thousand years, but the African presence became more evident following the rise of the Atlantic slave trade. Many of the Africans worked as domestic servants, tradesmen, soldiers, and sailors. A growing stream of Africans coming for education, a tradition that began in the eighteenth century and accelerated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, later joined them.

The extent to which the various dispersed Africans became constituted into diasporas is extraordinarily complicated. In some cases, they disappeared, that is they were eventually absorbed into the host populations. In others, they have survived to the present as a distinct community as is the case with the Sidis of India. In yet other cases, new African diasporas are emerging from cultural memories rekindled by recent African migrations and the current circuits of global racial ideologies and solidarities. The transition from dispersal to diaspora depends, in part, on the regimes of integration, representation, and repression in the host society as well as gestures and impulses of connectivity from the homeland. In this context, there is a lot of debate, for example, on the integrative mechanisms of Islam in western Asia and Islamic Africa. Hunwick and Powell have argued that in the Mediterranean lands of Islam religious precepts prevented the emergence of the racialized voice of ‘black consciousness’ even among enslaved Africans.

The shift from dispersal to diaspora is far less problematic in the Americas largely because these dispersals are historically far more recent and the imperatives of

racialized slavery and later segregation ensured the differentiation and distancing essential to the formation and reproduction of diasporic identities. Nevertheless, the patterns of diasporization vary across the Americas because of national and regional diversity in the political economy of race, the demographic and cultural weight of the African presence, and the cultural ecologies of belonging and alterity. Altogether, according to Joseph Inikori, whose estimates are, in my view, the most reliable, 15.4 million Africans landed in the Americas during the four long, horrific centuries of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century more Africans had come to the Americas than Europeans, which has led Sheila Walker (2001) to contest the conceptualization of America as a European construct, as some kind of Eurogenic creation, and to restore the African and African diasporic contributions to their rightful place. 'For more than three hundred years of the five-hundred year modern history of the Americas', she writes, 'Africans and their descendants were the Americas' largest population. Therefore, the demographic foundation of the Americas was African, not European ... In the necessary process of re-creating themselves in their new milieu, these Diasporan Africans invented and participated in the inventing of new cultural forms such as languages, religions, foods, aesthetic expressions, and political and social organizations' (Walker 2001: 2-3).

African diasporas of various sizes were formed across the Americas from Canada to Argentina (yes Canada and Argentina had slavery too and have had long standing black communities notwithstanding their whitening campaigns). African diasporas emerged in North America's southern cone, Mexico and Central America, as they did in South America's southern cone, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The largest diasporan communities developed in the United States and Brazil, the leading political and economic powers of the two continents, each with its own brand of racial ideology, the racial separatism of the US and the mythical 'racial democracy' of Brazil, both of which engendered and sustained the exclusions that reproduced the complex and contradictory processes of diasporization. It was only in the Caribbean that the African diasporas retained their demographic superiority. Perched in the Atlantic in the middle of the Middle Passage, as it were, the Afro-Caribbean diaspora embodied all the complex connections, crisscrossings, and cultural compositions of the African diasporas of the Atlantic. Not surprisingly, Caribbean activists and intellectuals played a crucial role in all the transatlantic Pan-African ideologies and movements.

On the whole, studies of African diasporas in the Americas continue to be heavily focused on national histories. Even transnational histories often betray narrow analytical or linguistic concerns. For example, Paul Gilroy's influential text, *The Black Atlantic*, is essentially a celebration of the supposedly new and distinctive Anglophone diasporic cultural modernity in which not only Africa is an irrelevant reality, but much of Latin America is ignored. In most Atlantic diaspora studies, the diaspora in the United States often stands on the pedestal, the one against which to judge the identities of the other diasporas. The fact that Brazil has the largest African diaspora in the Americas, indeed in the world, is often forgotten.

## Contemporary Dispersals and Diasporas

In the twentieth century there were several new dispersals from Africa, a continent now divided into colonial territories and later into independent nation-states. Unlike their predecessors, whose communities of identity, either as imagined by themselves or as imposed by others, were either ethnic or racial (not to mention sometimes religious), the new African diasporas had to contend with the added imperative of the modern nation-state, which often framed the political and cultural itineraries of their travel and transnational networks. The 'new' or 'contemporary' African diasporas, as they are sometimes called, can be divided into three main waves: the diasporas of colonization, of decolonization, and of structural adjustment that emerged out of, respectively, the disruptions of colonial conquest, the struggles for independence, and structural adjustment programmes imposed on African countries by the international financial institutions from the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The diasporas of colonization would include the students who went to study abroad and stayed, seamen who became settlers, and many other others who could migrate and become citizens according to the prevailing immigration regimes in the host country. The diasporas of decolonization include besides the so-called 'indigenous' Africans, European and Asian settlers, who relocated overseas during the struggles for independence and immediately after. The diasporas of structural adjustment have been formed since the 1980s out of the migrations engendered by economic, political, and social crises and the destabilizations of SAPs. They include professional elites, traders, refugees, and students.

African migrations are of course part of a much larger story of complex global migrations. The late twentieth century has in fact been characterized as 'the age of migration'. However, the available evidence indicates that while the volume of international migrants has indeed grown significantly in absolute numbers since the 1960s and there have been significant changes in the character and direction of international migration, the percentage of people who have left and remained outside their countries of origin has remained remarkably steady and small: while the number of foreign-born persons, including migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, worldwide increased from 75.5 million in 1960 to 190.6 million in 2005, the change in the proportion of migrants in the world population changed only slightly, from 2.5 percent in 1960 to 3 percent in 2005. This compares to 2 percent in 1910 and 2.1 percent in 1930. As elsewhere Africa's migrant population increased, nearly doubling from 9.1 million to 17.1 million, but like the other regions in global South – Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean and Oceania – Africa's share of the world's migrant stock declined from 12.1 percent in 1960 to 9 percent in 2005. There was also a decline in the share of migrants in the African population, from 3.2 percent to 1.9 percent.

Particularly rapid in the closing decades of the twentieth century was African migration to Europe, which was characterized by increasing diversification in the number of countries both sending and receiving the immigrants. Dispersals from the continent and the diaspora itself grew in Britain and France, the old colonial superpowers. Quite remarkable was the emergence as immigration countries of southern European countries such as Italy, Portugal, and Spain, themselves emigration countries, a development that was as much a product of the improving economic fortunes in these countries and their integration into the prosperity and political sphere

of western Europe as it was of mounting immigration pressures on their borders to the east and the south. New African immigrant communities also formed in central and eastern Europe, especially following the end of the Cold War.

Equally rapid was the growth of African migration to North America, especially the United States. By 2005 there were approximately 1.5 million African-born residents in the United States, up from 700,000 in 2000, 363,819 in 1990, 199,723 in 1980, 35,355 in 1960, 18,326 in 1930, 2,538 in 1900, and 551 in 1850. The growth in African migration in recent decades is particularly remarkable, although Africans still accounted for a small proportion of immigrants to the United States, 3 percent of the nearly 33 million foreign born residents in 2005, up from 0.4 percent in 1960 and 1.9 percent in 1990. The relatively low rates and levels of voluntary immigration from Africa to the US until the 1960s can be attributed both to restrictive US policies against non-European immigration and the reluctance and inability of colonized African populations to migrate in any significant numbers outside the continent.

Changes in both Africa and the destination countries and regions are obviously important, so are the transformations in the receiving countries. In the case of the US the role of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s is of paramount importance. Quite literally, the postcolonial migrants from Africa to the US owe their fortunes to the doors opened by African American struggles. In the theoretical literature on the causes, courses, and consequences of international migration there are several theories, each employing radically different concepts, assumptions, and frames of reference, that seek to explain the factors that first, initiate, and second, perpetuate international migration, and third, that attempt to assess the effects of international migration on both the sending and receiving countries. Some emphasize economic factors and motivations; others offer political or sociological perspectives and propositions.

The economic theories include the neoclassical economic model, the 'new economics of migration' theory, dual labour market theory, and world systems theory. These theories need not be mutually exclusive. A process as complex as international migration is obviously the result of equally complex forces operating at various levels in space and time: the migration flows are determined by conditions in both the sending and receiving countries, including the state of the economy, political stability and freedoms, and immigration law, all of which are affected by broader forces in the global political economy. Whatever might initiate immigration, the factors and forces that perpetuate it can be quite different. Several theories have been developed to account for the rise of new conditions that emerge in the course of international migration that sustain it and function as independent causes for further migration. They include network theory, institutional theory, and cumulative causation theory. Once again, there is little that is intrinsically incompatible among the three theories. It stands to reason that migration involves both social networks and enabling institutions and is a cumulative process. The interplay between these factors obviously varies in specific contexts.

As might be expected, there is no agreement on the consequences of migration for the migrants themselves as well as for their countries of origin and their countries of immigration. A variety of models seek to explain the performance of migrants. One is human capital theory, according to which education and training are important determinants of income and occupation. Another is the split labour market thesis that

postulates the market is divided along racial, gender and other hierarchicized lines along which rewards are unequally distributed. Immigrants are positioned accordingly. The succession model predicts that a group that arrives last occupies the bottom position in economic rankings as previous groups progressively move up the occupational hierarchy. From these perspectives, African migrants can be expected to suffer triple subordination: as immigrants, as people who arrived recently, and as people many of whom are black.

Since the mid-nineteenth century various groups from the successive waves of African migrations have turned into new diasporas, while some have retained their status as temporary migrants or transnational professionals. A critical question raised by the literature on African immigrants and diasporas is the connection between the two – immigration and diasporization. In other words, when do new immigrants become part of the diaspora? I would suggest that not every migrant turns into a diasporan. Many Africans who have come to the United States, for example, since the end of the Second World War, have done so for temporary periods, as workers, expatriate professionals, business people, students, and tourists and often go back after the realization of their objectives. It does not seem to make much sense to regard such *temporary* migrants as members of the new diaspora. But temporary migrants can, and many do, become permanent migrants even if they maintain connections with home through periodic visits. A precondition for the transition from a migrant into a diasporan is *prolonged* settlement, followed by *permanent* resettlement in a new host country. Neither condition need be planned of course; indeed, many African migrants abroad do not always anticipate staying long or settling permanently, but often end up doing so.

At issue, then, is not *intention*, but the *duration* of stay, the separation of the there of the home country and the here of the host country. It is the offspring of such migrants who complete the transition from migration to diasporization for their families and communities. Thus the diasporization process is a cumulative one beginning with migration, followed by resettlement, and is reproduced through the offspring of the migrants. Using this schema, I would distinguish between African migrants, diasporized Africans, and African diasporas. In this context, long-term African-born residents of the diaspora hostlands would be considered diasporized Africans, while their offspring turn into African diasporas, more fully socialized into the experiences and identities of the historic diaspora. It can be argued, then, temporality defines diasporization as much as spatiality. In other words, the process of diasporization has spatial and temporal dimensions: African diasporas refer to Africans and their offspring resettled outside the continent. The historic diasporas are those whose resettlement occurred in the past, while the new diasporas are those formed from the waves of more recent migrants. The past is of course a moving location. It might be useful to distinguish the two in generational terms, to confine the new diasporas, broadly, to the diasporized Africans and their first generation offspring; subsequent generations often become absorbed into and indistinguishable from the historic diaspora formed out of much earlier waves of migration.

Like the historic diasporas, the contemporary diasporas are differentiated and their internal and external relations are mediated by the inscriptions of gender, generation, class, political ideology, and religion. But unlike the former, the latter have to negotiate

relations with the historic diasporas themselves and also not just with 'Africa' but with their particular countries of origin and the countries of transmigration. The revolution in telecommunications and travel, which has compressed the spatial and temporal distances between home and abroad, offers the contemporary diasporas, unlike the historic diasporas from the earlier dispersals, unprecedented opportunities to be transnational and transcultural, to be people of multiple worlds and localities. They are able to retain ties to Africa in ways that were not possible to earlier generations of the African diasporas.

Clearly, there are diasporas within the diaspora. In a sense, then, the entire diaspora world is constituted by what Earl Lewis (1997) terms with reference to the United States 'overlapping diasporas'. In the US there are at least four groups that can claim an African diasporic identity: first, the historic communities of African Americans, themselves formed out of complex internal and external migrations over several hundred years; second, migrant communities from other diasporic locations, such as the Caribbean that have maintained or invoke, when necessary or convenient, hyphenated national identities; third, the recent immigrants from the indigenous communities of Africa some of whom share racialized affinity with the two groups; and finally, African migrants who are themselves diasporas from Asia or Europe, such as the Ugandan Asians or South African whites. Each of these diasporas has its own connections and commitments to Africa, its own memories and imaginations of Africa, and its own conceptions of the diasporic condition and identity. The third group is sometimes divided by the racialized codifications of whiteness and blackness, sanctified in the colonial cartographies of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, and by US immigration law under which North Africans are classified as white.

Given the complexity and diversity of the African diasporas, it stands to reason that relations between the various groups are exceedingly difficult to map out. What I would like to suggest is a possible analytical schema, containing three elements that structure these relations: first, the contexts of engagement, the social arenas in which the different diasporas interact; second, the constructs of engagement, the dynamics that mediate their interactions; and third, the character of the engagements, the content and processes of interactions.

The contexts in which the various diasporas interact with each other are both private and public and the varied intersections between them. The private or privatized spheres include family and inter-personal relations. In the case of families we can think of inter-diasporan marriages and partnerships as well as intra-family generations of diasporization between parents from the same African country and their American-born children. The public contexts of inter-diasporan engagements are obviously even more multidimensional. I have identified seven in terms of their social weight and explanatory possibilities. They are: (1) educational institutions; (2) labour market; (3) religious institutions; (4) leisure activities; (5) business enterprises; (6) political process; and (7) community life. There can be little doubt that the encounters within each and across the various social domains are complex, contradictory, and always changing.

The connections and disconnections among the different diasporas are conditioned by four sets of factors. First, different sectors and organizations have specific institutional cultures that set the broad parameters of inter-diasporan interactions as do,

second, the push and pull of ideological affiliations which affect the tenor and possibilities of cooperation, accommodation, or conflict within specific or between different diaspora groups. The nature and formation of, third, collective identity and fourth, individual subjectivity, which are constructed through the prevailing practices of socialization, spatialization and representation also help structure these dynamics. In so far as all communities have multiple identities, inter-group relations among Africa's diasporas are partly affected by the intersections of some of these identities and interests.

As for the relations between the old and new diasporas, they are characterized by antagonism, ambivalence, acceptance, adaptation, and assimilation, which often denote cumulative phases of acculturation, mediated by the length of stay in the new hostlands, the spatial and social locations of the different diasporas, their respective connections to Africa and the hostlands and the attitudes of the historic diasporas. Antagonism is often engendered by stereotypes and poor communication on both sides. Historically, each successive wave of arrivals has been integrated, over time, for example, into the African American community, in the process transforming not only the new diaspora itself but also what it means to be African American. Barack Obama, the US Democratic Party's presidential contender, the son of a Kenyan father and white American mother, is a typical example.

### **Linkages Between Africa and Its Diasporas**

One critical measure of the diaspora condition as a self-conscious identity lies in remembering, imagining and engaging the original homeland, whose own identity is, in part, constituted by and, in turn, helps constitute the diaspora. This dialectic in the inscriptions and representations of the homeland in the diaspora and of the diaspora in the homeland is the thread that weaves the histories of the diaspora and the homeland together. Two critical questions can be raised. First, how do the different African diasporas remember, imagine, and engage Africa, and which Africa – in temporal and spatial terms? Second, how does Africa, or rather the different Africas – in their temporal and spatial framings – remember, imagine, and engage their diasporas? Given the complex ebbs and flows of history, for Africa itself and the various regional hostlands of the African diasporas, it stands to reason that the engagements between Africa and its diasporas have been built and shaped by continuities, changes, and ruptures.

Created out of movement, dispersal from a homeland, the diaspora is affirmed through another movement, engagement with the homeland. Movement, it could be argued then, in its literal and metaphorical senses, is at the heart of the diasporic condition, beginning with the dispersal itself and culminating with reunification, which is often perpetually postponed. The spaces in between are marked by multiple forms of engagement between the diaspora and the homeland, of movement, of travel between a 'here' and a 'there' both in terms of time and space. The fluidity of these engagements is best captured by the notion of flow, that flows of several kinds and levels of intensity characterize the linkages between the homeland and the diaspora. The diaspora or the homeland can serve as a signifier for the other subject to strategic manipulation. The flows include people, cultural practices, productive resources, organizations and movements, ideologies and ideas, images and representations. In

short, we can isolate six major flows: demographic flows, cultural flows, economic flows, political flows, ideological flows, and iconographic flows.

Much of the scholarly attention has gone towards the political flows, as manifested, for example, in the role that the trans-Atlantic Pan-Africanist movement played in engendering territorial nationalisms across Africa and how continental nationalism and the civil rights movement in the United States reinforced each other, and how in postcolonial times the various diasporas have engaged political processes and projects from conflict to democratization. In studies of the historic diasporas there has been an analytical tendency to privilege the political connections represented by the Pan-Africanist movement, while in studies of the contemporary diasporas focus concentrates on the economic impact: flows of remittances and investment. Economics is of course at the heart of the diaspora condition for both the historic and contemporary diasporas in so far as both were engendered by labour imperatives, one involving the demand for forced slave labour and the other the supply of free wage labour.

Ideological flows refer to the flows of ideas and ideologies that can be embodied in social and cultural movements and discursive paradigms, ranging from visionary philosophies and projects to transnational feminisms to literary movements in the African and black worlds. For example, there has been what Abiola Irele calls the 'cycle of reciprocities' between the literary movements of Africa and the Atlantic diaspora, most significantly the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement whose echoes found resonances in the Black Arts and the Black Aesthetic movements in the US and the cultural nationalist and the nativist critical movement in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

Iconographic flows refer to images and visual representations of Africa, Africanness and blackness that are created, circulated, and consumed through art works and the media. As Nkiru Nzegwu (2000) has demonstrated, transatlantic artistic dialogue has been continuous and intensified over the last half century, sustained and reproduced by the travels of artists, a shared visual language, and invocations of cultural memories and artistic motifs. 'Because the socio-economic conditions under which these artists create activates psychic vortices', she writes, 'art-making becomes a ritual in which cultural genealogy is revitalized, new realities are constructed, and new identities are announced'. African American iconographic constructions of diasporan identity and black modernity have been particularly influential, thanks in part to the global tentacles of the American state and capital, on whose corporate media and imperial wings they have been exported to the rest of the world. Examples include appropriations of African American cultural identity by British blacks during the Second World War, and of political blackness by the oppressed peoples of South Africa in the late 1960s. For their part the new African diasporas have been simultaneously recycling old and reinventing new iconographies of Africa and Africaness. Examples include the Senegalese traders selling the monolithic Africa of Afrocentricity, and the imports of Nollywood films by new African diasporas hungry for modernist self-representation.

The demographic flows are self-evident. Almost from the beginning to the present, the traffic of people from Africa to the Americas has never been one way; some have returned from the diaspora to the continent, whether permanently or temporarily, and

through their contacts and memories between the diasporas and the continent have been kept alive, and vibrant cultural exchanges maintained. Thus, Africa and the Americas have been permanently connected since the sixteenth century by the continuous flows of people in both directions. It is well to remember that the slave trade was not a one-time event, but a continuous process that lasted four centuries from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. We all know about the resettlement schemes in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, the quintessential sojourners of these transoceanic voyages were sailors, and to a lesser extent, soldiers, but there were also traders, students and scholars, political leaders and rebels, religious seers and proselytizers, and ordinary men and women seeking personal and collective salvation from the depredations of their times and circumstances.

Over the centuries cultures – from music to religion, foods to fashion – in both continental Africa and diaspora Africa changed and influenced each other, to varying degrees across time and space. This was a dynamic and dialogic exchange, not simply a derivative one between a primordial, static Africa and a modern, vibrant diaspora. This is to suggest the need for an analytical methodology that is historically grounded, one that recognizes the enduring connections between Africa and its diasporas, that the cultures of Africa and the diaspora have all been subject to change, innovation, borrowing, and reconstruction, that they are all ‘hybrid’, and that the cultural encounters between them have been and will continue to be multiple and multidimensional. We need to transcend the question of African cultural retentions and survivals in the diaspora, to examine not only the traffic of cultural practices from the diasporas to various parts of Africa, but also the complex patterns and processes of current cultural exchanges through the media of contemporary globalization from television and cinema to video and the Internet.

This is not always acknowledged in studies that examine the development of expressive cultures among the diaspora communities and the cultural traffic between the diasporas and Africa. Gerhard Kubik (1998) provides a useful typology that divides the interpretive schemes of diaspora cultures into six categories; what he calls, first, biological reductionism, second, socio-psychological determinism, third, pseudo-historical reductionism, fourth, historical particularism, fifth, cultural materialism, and sixth cultural diffusionism. It stands to reason that all these elements, the imagined ontologies of blackness, constructions of racial hierarchies, selective appropriations of African memories and alterity, material imperatives of cultural change, and the diffusionist trails of cultural transfer, have played a role in the development of diaspora cultures as distinctive cultures marked by similarities, differences, parallels, connections and exchanges with the numerous cultures of continental Africa. The communication and circulation of cultural practices and paradigms between Africa and its diasporas have encompassed religion, education, literature, art, and music, to mention a few. These flows have constituted, I would argue, an essential part of Africa’s modernities, globalization, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism.

Religion and music have been among the most important elements of cultural exchange. The traffic in religious ideas, institutions, and iconography, encompassing the African derived religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, has been particularly intense and an important aspect of the African diasporic experience, identity, struggle,

agency, and linkages with Africa. Africans dispersed from the continent brought religious beliefs, rituals, and values into their new lands of settlement and resettlement, just as diasporan Africans who subsequently returned or established connections with the continent came with reinvented religious practices or were sometimes proselytizers of the world religions. Music has been a powerful medium of communication between Africa and its diasporas through which cultural influences, ideas, images, instruments, institutions and identities have continuously circulated in the process creating new modes of cultural expression both within Africa and in the diaspora. Facilitating the traffic in music are persistent demographic flows and ever-changing communication technologies and has involved exchanges, simultaneously transcontinental, transnational, and translational, of artistic products, aesthetic codes, and conceptual matrixes.

Another cultural sphere in which linkages between Africa and its diasporas have been important is education. Records show diasporan Africans coming to the continent for formal and informal education although our knowledge of the patterns and magnitude of this trend remains poor. When Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone and Liberia College in Liberia, opened in 1827 and 1862, respectively, they served as Pan-Africanist institutions that attracted students and faculty from across West Africa especially, many of who were themselves of diasporan origin, such as the great nineteenth century Pan-Africanist intellectual Edward Blyden.

More common were flows from Africa to the diaspora, especially the United States, where the black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that mushroomed in the late nineteenth century served both as a Mecca for African students and a model for higher education in Africa itself. Until desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s, the HBCUs remained the main centres of African higher education in the United States where African elites and independence leaders were educated from Kwame Nkrumah to Nnandi Azikiwe and Hastings Banda, the founding presidents of Ghana, Nigeria, and Malawi, respectively. It was there that the serious and systematic study of Africa was pioneered, courses on African peoples established, and monographs and journals published long before the historically white universities, in pursuit of national security, disciplinary excitement or belated multiculturalism, discovered African studies. Continental and diasporan Africans also met in the imperial metropolises of Europe as well as in the educational and political institutions established by the new revolutionary states from the Soviet Union to China. Bennetta Jules-Rossette's (2000) *Black Paris* offers a remarkable portrait of some of these interactions in France that did so much to promote the scholarly, literary, and artistic solidarities of Pan-Africanism.

Clearly, engagements between Africa and its diasporas have been deeper and more diverse than is often realized, characterized by flows and counterflows of various magnitude. Taken together, these flows and complex linkages have produced contrasting impacts on social groups, communities and nation-states both in the diaspora and on the continent. They have shaped identities, representations of Africa and Africans, as well as self-perceptions by continental Africans and diasporan Africans. So dense are some of the flows and counter-flows that in some domains, continental and diasporic issues are often difficult to disentangle.

This is the challenge I have set for myself, to map out the dispersals of African peoples globally, decipher the complex processes of their diasporization, and examine

the changing patterns of engagement between them and Africa. Such a synthesis, I believe, provides a means of taking stock of the knowledge we have accumulated thus far in African diaspora studies and deepening our theoretical understanding of this infinitely fascinating and exceedingly complex phenomenon.

### Notes

1. A revised version of an essay specially written for presentation at the Teach-In, 'Rethinking the African Diaspora – Rethinking Africa', Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, May 15, 2008.
2. Tracing the rise of any intellectual field or formation is quite challenging. For African diaspora studies, the following authors provide useful snapshots: Patterson and Kelly (2000), Edwards (2001), and Zeleza (2005).

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