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AFRICAN DIASPORA AND THE SCATTERED AFRICAN COMMUNITIES ABROAD: INTERROGATING THE HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORANEOUS WAVES OF AFRICAN DISPERSALS IN THE NEW WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The term African diaspora, as George Shepperson (1993) reiterated, did not emerge in the Anglophone world until the 1950s and 1960s, however, African diaspora 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. Furthermore, interventions by George Shepperson (1968), and Joseph Harris (1968, 1982, 1993), played prominent role to popularize diaspora studies in the Anglophone academy, particularly in the United States where the civil rights and the black studies movements were assaulting the barricades of Eurocentric scholarship and white institutional exclusion. Thus, the term African Diaspora, today, enjoys pride of place in the increasingly crowded pantheon of diaspora studies. Often times, the term diaspora is used in a fuzzy as well as uncritical manner in which all manner of movements and migrations between countries and also within countries are encapsulated in its generous conceptual bosom, and besides, no adequate attention is paid to the historical conditions and experiences that produce diasporic communities. Indeed, not all dispersals result in the formation of diaspora and once formed a diaspora does not exist in perpetuity. To this end, some disaporas disappear, some dispersals turn into Diasporas long after the original dispersals. The term diaspora is simultaneously a state of being as well as 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. Undoubtedly, it is a mode of naming, remembering, living and feeling group identity moulded out of experiences, positioning, struggles, and imaginings of the past and the present, and often times, the unfolding, unpredictable future, which are shared or seen to be shared across the boundaries of time and space.

Keywords: **African diaspora, dispersals, Historic, Contemporaneous, waves.**

Introduction

Intellectual African diaspora studies as an area of study has in recent times drawn the attention of the academic community and even beyond. Thus, this development is partly because of the chequered as well as tortuous history of the black people among the inhabitants of the region. The African diaspora study is an important area for academic enquiry because of the strong African physical and cultural presence as well as the nature of the relationship between Africans in that area and their ancestral homeland.

A diasporic identity, in a broad sense, 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. Moreover, diaspora are indeed complex social as well as 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.

Undoubtedly, African diaspora consist of all those peoples dispersed from the continent in historic and contemporary era, who have constituted themselves or been constituted into diasporas. In a technical workshop convened by the African Union (2004) in Trinidad in 2004, 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, (African Union, 2004).

Drawing from Rosenblatt's statistics of 1940, Frank Tannembaum concluded there are 41 million blacks and mulltatoes in North and South America, or approximately fifteen percent of the total population (274 million). He further points out that at some time between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, every country in the Americas has had a measurable presence of blacks, Tannenbaum shares with us the nineteenth century perception of Humboldt:

> From Rio de Janeiro northwards, the coastal stretches of Brazil, French, Dutch, and British Guiana, Venezuela, Colombia on both the Atlantic and the Pacific, Ecuador, and Peru have significant and in certain districts preponderant numbers of people of African origin. This same holds true for both coasts in Central America. If Humboldt's reference is taken in a demographic rather than a political sense, the colonization of the Western Hemisphere has involved the settlement of many thousands of square miles by peoples who came from Africa rather than from Europe, and if we draw an arc from Rio de Janeiro to Washington D.C., and include the West Indian Islands within it, we shall have, in outline, the empire Humboldt talked about, (Frank Tannenbaum, 1947: 5-6).

This merely points to the complexities of the African diasporas and underscores, (Kim Butler 2000: 125-139), 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 diaspora 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. However, it appears that the last two are acceptable and revise the first that African diaspora studies need to have a global structure.

This paper's central theme is to discuss the historic and contemporaneous dispersals and diaspora, and how we might examine their interrelationships, against the background, composed of multiple communities, different waves of migrations and diasporization.

The Historic Waves of Dispersals

Over time, there are multitudinous dispersals associated with African peoples. The physical presence of the Africans in the western hemisphere has never been an issue of controversy nor that of debate. Rather what is not known or that is uncertain and also generated much debate and controversy is the issue of the actual number that was transported from Africa to the Americas. In this respect, our finding is that the demographic spread of the Africans in the New World, was and is still, not even. The factors of geography and the nature of economic enterprise that was involved in slavery period, determined the degree of density (vis-à-vis the sparsity) of the Black populations in the Western hemisphere.

An attempt to categorize African diaspora is by no means a herculean task. Colin Palmer (2000), has identified at least six: three in prehistoric and ancient times (beginning with 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, (Colin Palmer, 2000: 56-59), with respect to our common origins and humanity, although, such a broad historical conception of diaspora could be a useful clue, however, it in fact expands the notion of diaspora too far beyond analytical recognition to be stunningly useful. Put differently, indeed most scholars are inclined to lean more on the historical waves of the global African diaspora.

A task of trying to pigeonhole African Diasporas is a daunting task. With regards to dispersal of populations we can single out four broad movements to wit: intra-African, trans-Indian Ocean, trans-Mediterranean, and trans-Atlantic. Obviously, the last three are invariably constitutive of African disapora. Undoubtedly, there is historical literature such as on trading diasporas, conquest diasporas, slave diaspora, refugee diaspora and pastoral diaspora, but the first in terms of dispersal of population stated above, are indeed referred to ethnic or national diaspora. It is in fact worthy to note that distinctions are often made between historic and contemporaneous or contemporary diaspora. In other words, it can be referred to as old and new diaspora respectively; and this is in terms of periodization. In this context, three broad periods are discernable. They are pre-fifteen century, fifteenth-nineteenth centuries, and the twentieth century. More often, the periodizations vary for the diverse regions, however; more significantly, it is useful to pay attention to transformations in global political economies and their intersections as well as local and regional dimensions.

Although, it is important to note that the literature is growing on the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Diasporas, which antedate the trans-Atlantic dispersals and diaspora, but it is pertinent to realize the fact that studies of African diaspora largely focus on the Atlantic world. infact, one proximate and likely effect of the Atlantic model is the proclivity to reduce

all historic African diaspora to the dispersals of slavery. Using Robin Cohen's (1997) typology, African diaspora are often seen as victim diasporas (in Cohen's schema the others are labour, trade, and cultural diasporas), (Robin Cohen, 1997). Similarly, this development appears to abate African diaspora history, homogenize African diaspora as well as racialize them exclusively as Negro.

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

Thus, in the Mediterranean worlds of Western Asia and Southern Europe, exploration of the African diaspora, has been laden with considerable difficulties not least the fact that until contemporary times this was the most intensive zone of cultural traffic as well as communication, in which communities straddle manifold spaces in complex networks of affiliation. Following the rise of Islam in the seventh century, there was the case of the Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula who swept through northern Africa is a case in point that is incontrovertible. However, 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. Thus, the Arabs traversed northern Africa, Western Asia and the so-called Middle East.

Undoubtedly, the first major region of African settlement was in Europe, in the Southern-flanks of the Mediterranean from ancient Rome to Andalusia Spain. In the works of several classicists, the African presence is well documented including writers of African and diasporan descent. As an African diaspora, 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, although, they are rarely discussed in diasporic terms.

The renowned Moroccan scholars, Anouar Majid, contended that Andalusian Spain was an 'African Kingdom in Europe', (Anouar Majid, 2000: 77). In so far as some of the earliest Africans to settle in the Americas came from Spain and Portugal, this is so because in the Iberian Peninsula, the trans-Mediterranean and trans-Atlantic dispersals and Diasporas met. In other words, it should be noted that not all the African-descended arrivals in the Americas originated in Western Africa and the Atlantic Islands. On the other hand, the historiography on the development of an Afro-Iberian population and their role in the Spanish occupation and settlement of the Americas has not been given the attention it deserves but is improving.

There are ancient African communities from Russia to Britain, beyond the Mediterranean littoral in Europe. Some historians 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 was 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, (Alison Blakely, 1986). The African presence became more evident as a result of the rise of the Atlantic Slave trade but the history of Africans in Britain can be traced back to two thousand years. A sizeable proportion of Africans worked as domestic servants, tradesmen, soldiers, and sailors as well. In the eighteenth century, a growing stream of Africans coming for education became a tradition and accelerated in the nineteenth as well as the twentieth centuries.

Moreover, the degree to which the diverse Africans became constituted into diasporas is remarkably problematic. Often times, they disappeared, invariably, they were eventually absorbed into the host populations. As is the case with the Sidis of India, they have survived to the present as a distinct community. New African diaspora, in yet other cases, are emerging from cultural memories rekindled by recent African migrations as well as the current circuits of global racial ideologies as well as solidarities. In part, the transition from dispersal to diaspora is contingent on the regimes of integration, representation, as well as repression in the host society and gestures as well as impulses of connectivity from the homeland. Thus, there is a lot of debate, in this context, for instance, on the integrative mechanisms of Islam in Western Asia as well as Islamic Africa. In this respect, Hunwick and Powell have contended that in the Mediterranean lands of Islam religious precepts prevented the emergence of the racialized voice of 'black consciousnesses even among enslaved Africans, (Joseph Harris, 1993: 289-323; Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 2008: 10).

The imperatives of racialized slavery and later segregation ensured the differentiation and distancing essential to the formation and reproduction of diaspora identities; and the shift from dispersal to diaspora is far less obstreperous in the Americas largely because these dispersals are historically far more recent. On account 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, however, the patterns of diasporization vary across the Americas. During the four long, horrific centuries of the Atlantic Slave trade, according to Joseph Inikori, whose estimates are, in my view, the most reliable, 15.4 million Africans landed in the Americas.

More Africans had come to the Americans than Europeans, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, which had led Sheila Walker, 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, (Sheila S. Walker, 2001: 1-44). 'For more than three hundred years of the five-hundred years modern history of the Americas', she writes, 'Africans and descendant's were Americans' largest population, (Sheila S. Walker, 2001: 2-3). 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', Sheila S. Walker, 2001: 2-3).

Across the Americas, African diaspora of various sizes were formed from Canada to Argentina (yes Canada and Argentina had slavery too and have had long standing black communities notwithstanding their whitening campaigns). Similarly, African Diasporas

emerged in North America's Southern cone, Mexico and Central America, as they did in South America's Southern cone, Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Paraguay. In the U.S. and Brazil, the largest diasporan communities developed and they were the leading political and economic powers of the two continents, each with its own brand of racial ideology, the racial separatism of the US as well as the mythical 'racial democracy' of Brazil, both of which engendered as well as sustained the exclusions that produced the complex as well as the contradictory processes of diasporization. Africa diaspora retained their demographic superiority only in the Caribbean region. Thus, as it were, perched in the Atlantic in the middle of the Middle Passage, the Afro-Caribbean diaspora typify all the complex connections, crisscrossing; and cultural compositions of the African diaspora of the Atlantic. What is more, Caribbean activists and intellectuals played a crucial role in the entire trans-Atlantic Pan-African ideologies including movements.

Studies of African diaspora in the America, on the whole, continue to be heavily centred on national histories although transnational histories usually betray narrow analytical or linguistic affairs. Note worthy is (Paul Gilroys, 1993) in his magnum opus, the Black Atlantic, is indeed 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 disregarded. More often, in most Atlantic studies, the diaspora in the United States often stands on the pedestal, the one against which to judge the identities of the other diasporas. However, the fact that Brazil has the largest African slave holding diaspora in the Americas, in fact in the world, is often neglected.

Contemporaneous Waves of Dispersals

Thus, there were several new waves of dispersals from Africa, in the twentieth century, a continent now divided into colonial territories and subsequently into independent nation-states. On the contrary unlike their predecessors, whose community of identity, either as imagined by themselves or as imposed by others, was either ethnic or racial or sometimes religious, the new African diaspora had to contend with the exigency of the modern nation-state, and transnational networks which often framed the political and cultural itineries of their travel. Thus, the structural adjustment programmes imposed on African countries by the international financial institutions from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the 'new' or 'contemporaneous' African diasporas, as they are oftentimes referred to, can be divided into three main waves: the diasporas of colonization, of decolonization, and of structural adjustment programmes as earlier stated.

Basically, in the first category, the diaspora of colonization is among others the students who went to study overseas and stayed, seamen who became settlers, as well as a host of others who could migrate as well as become citizens in line with the prevailing immigration law in the host state. Furthermore, during the struggles for independence and immediately after, the diasporas of decolonization include the so-called 'indigenous' Africans, European as well as Asian settlers, who relocated abroad. Also in this category were victims of Structural Adjustment Programme since the 1980s out of the migrations stimulated by economic political and social crises include traders, students, refugees, and professional elites otherwise referred to as brain drain.

Undoubtedly, of course, African migrations are part of a much larger narrative of complex global emigration. In fact, the late twentieth century has been designated as 'the age of migration'. The available evidence shows that while the volume of international emigrants has in fact grown considerably in absolute numbers since the 1960s and yet 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 as well as small: while the number of foreign-born persons, and refugees, migrations including 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.

However, this indeed equate to 2 percent in 1910 and 2.1 percent in 1930. Thus, as elsewhere Africa's migrant population increased, nearly doubling from 9.1 million to 17.1 million, although like the other regions in global South-Asia, Latin America 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. In yet another genre, there was equally a decline in the share of migrants in the African population, from 3.2 percent to 1.9 percent. However, defined, notably 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.

In Britain and France, the old colonial superpowers, dispersals from the continent of Africa and the diaspora itself grew considerably in these countries aforementioned. Therefore, the emergence of immigrant countries of southern European countries to wit: Portugal, Spain as well as Italy was quite remarkable, themselves emigration countries, a development that was a function of the improving economic fortunes in these countries as well as their integration into the prosperity and political sphere of western Europe as it was of mounting immigration pressures on their border to the east as well as south. Consequent upon the end of the cold war, new African immigrant communities was also formed in central and eastern Europe.

Also the growth of African migration to North America, particularly the United States, was equally a rapid phenomenon. There were infact by 2005, approximately 1.5million African-born residents in the United States, up from 700,000 in 2000, 363,819 in 1990, 199,732 in 1980, 35,355 in 1960, 18,326 in 1930, 2,538 in 1900, and 551 in 1850. In recent decades, the growth in African migration is indeed remarkable yet 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. Until the 1960s, the relatively low rates and levels of voluntary immigration from Africa to the United States can be associated with both the restrictive United States policies against non-European immigration and the reluctance and inability of colonized African populations to migrate in any significant numbers outside the continent.

Invariably, changes in both Africa as well as destination countries and regions are indeed important, so are the transformations in the receiving countries. With respect to the United States, the role of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s is of cardinal significance. In fact and quite frankly, the post colonial migrants from Africa to the United States owe their breakthrough or fortunes to the activities and doors opened by African American struggles.

In terms of the theoretical literature on the causes, courses as well as the consequences of international migration there are several theories, each employing radically different concepts, assumptions, and frames of references, that seek to explain the factors that first, initiate, and second perpetuate international migration and third, that attempt to assess the effect of international migration on both sending and receiving countries. In some cases, some underscore economic factors and motivations; while others offer political or sociological perspectives as well as propositions.

Undoubtedly, the economic theories are to wit: the neoclassical economic model, the 'new economics of migration' theory, dual labour market theory, as well as world systems theory. Although, there is no doubt that these theories of course are not mutually exclusive. Thus, at various levels in space and time, a process as complex as international migration is obviously the result of the operation of equally complex forces. Therefore, in the global political economy: the migration flows are determined by conditions in both the sending and receiving countries, and the state of the economy, political stability and freedoms, and immigration law, all of which are affected by broader forces. Nevertheless, no matter what engender immigration, the factors as well as forces that protract it can be in fact different. Numerous theories have been developed and are responsible for the rise of new conditions that emerge in the course of international migration that sustain it as well as function as independent causes for further migration. What is more, they include network theory, institutional theory, and cumulative causation theory. Among the three theories, however, there is little that is inherently incongruous among them. Put differently, it means that migration consists of social networks as well as enabling institutions and a cumulative process. It stands to reason therefore, that in specific contexts, the mutual action or interchange of action and reaction between these factors obviously varies.

Invariably, there is no agreement, as might be expected, on the consequences of migration for the migrants themselves and for their countries of origin and their countries of immigration. Besides, a diversity of models seeks to explain the performance of migrants. The first is human capital theory, in which education and training are important determinants of income and occupation. Second, is the split labour market thesis that postulates the market is divided along racial, gender and other hierachicized lines along which rewards are unequally distributed. Accordingly immigrants are positioned. In yet another genre, the succession model prognosticate that a group that arrives last occupies the bottom position in economic rankings as previous groups progressively move up the occupational hierarchy, (Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 2008: 14). Thus, African migrants from these perspectives can be expected to suffer subordination: as immigrants, as people who arrived recently, and as people many of whom are black, (Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 2008: 14).

Significantly, it is trite to state here that there are Diasporas within the diaspora. Thus, the entire diaspora world is constituted by what Earl Lewis (1997) terms with reference to the United States 'overlapping diasporas', (Earl Lewis, 1995: 765-787). Indeed, there are at least four groups that can claim an African diasporic identity in the United States and they include: 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 Asias or South African whites.

Conclusion

More often, the tremendous and enormous interest the African diaspora in the Americas has generated as obscured a gigantic significant forced migration of Africans from their aboriginal homelands to alien societies-that vast exodus of enslaved human beings to the lands of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and South Asia that took place after the establishment of an Islamic world empire in the seventh and eight centuries of the Christian period. Beginning some eight centuries before the transatlantic slave trade, and not ending until several decades after the latter was halted, the movement of slaves across the Sahara, up the Nile Valley and the Red Sea, and across the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and India, societies as did the transatlantic trade, (H. Gemery and J.S. Hogendorn, 1979: 23-76; Proceedings 5th International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, 1979:433-467).

Yet, to date this phenomenon has stimulated little interest among either historians of Africa, historians of the Islamic world or those concerned more broadly with diaspora studies (Joseph Harris, 1993: 289). Joseph Harris's study of the role of African slaves in India remains the only monograph to deal with the problem from the perspective of a receiving society,(Joseph E. Harris, 1971), while the Mediterranean and the Near Eastern dimensions of the problem have been relegated to a handful of articles and papers, most of which deal with the trade in slaves rather than the more interesting (and in many ways more pertinent) question of the fate of these slaves in the societies that received them, (M.L. Kilson and R.I. Rotberg, 1971:36-56; Ibrahim K. Sundiata, 1977: 1-29; J.O. Hunwick, 1978: 20-40).

Gerhard Kubik (1998), provides a useful typology that divides the interpretative 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 (Gerhard Kubik, 1998: 203-227).

In conclusion, therefore, it stands to reason in the final analysis, 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.

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