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## Globalisation from below: conceptualising the role of the African diasporas in Africa's development

### Journal Item

How to cite:

Mohan, Giles and Zack-Williams, A.B. (2002). Globalisation from below: conceptualising the role of the African diasporas in Africa's development. *Review of African Political Economy*, 29(92) pp. 211–236.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/03056240208704610>

<http://www.roape.org/cgi-bin/roape/show/9202.html>

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# The African diaspora and development

Giles Mohan and A.B. Zack-Williams

**In the past both African Studies and Development Studies have ignored questions of the African diaspora. This point was made by Zack-Williams back in 1995 but since then there has not been much work attempting to rectify this matter. In this article we put forward a framework for examining the role of diaspora in development. This centres on recognising that the formation of the African diaspora has been intimately linked to the evolution of a globalised and racialised capitalism. While the linkages between capitalism, imperialism and displacement are dynamic we should avoid a simplistic determinism that sees the movements of African people as some inevitable response to the mechanisms of broader structures. The complexity of displacement is such that human agency plays an essential role and avoids the unhelpful conclusion of seeing Africans as victims. It is this interplay of structural forces and human agency that gives diasporas their shifting, convoluted and overlapping geometry. Having established that we examine the implications of a diasporic perspective for understanding the development potential of both Africans in diaspora and those who remain on the continent. We argue that both politically and economically the diaspora has an important part to play in contemporary social processes operating at an increasingly global scale. The key issues we address are embedded social networks in the diaspora, remittances and return, development organisations, religious networks, cultural dynamics, and political institutions. We conclude by suggesting where diasporic concerns will take us in the next few years.**

“he quickly decided that his contributions to the nation’s development, ironically enough, might best be made from elsewhere” (Wamba, 1999: 8)

"what is new is that making use of kin overseas is becoming an essential strategy for survival and improving life for some populations" (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 134)

## Introduction

The formation of the African diaspora has been intimately linked to the evolution of a globalised and racialised capitalism. Slavery, colonial labour policies, post-colonial conflict and economic hardship have all propelled Africans into the diaspora that grows ever more diffuse. Indeed one estimate from 1990 was that there were 300 million ‘Africans’ world wide compared with 540 million resident in Africa (van der Veer, 1995). This compares with 11 million Jews world wide and only 3.5 million in Israel. However, while the linkages between capitalism, imperialism and displacement are dynamic we should avoid a simplistic determinism that sees the movements of African people as some inevitable response to the mechanisms of broader structures. The complexity of displacement is such that human agency plays an essential role and avoids the unhelpful conclusion of seeing Africans as victims (Papastergiadis, 2000). It is this interplay of structural forces and human agency that gives diasporas their shifting, convoluted and overlapping geometry.

In this article we seek to sketch the contours of an analysis of the African diaspora and development. While there has been much work on migration and labour markets (Harris and Todaro, 1970; Durand, Parado, and Massey, 1996) there is very little on the complex linkages

between diaspora and development. Much of the work on the diaspora has been of a cultural nature, examining such things as the ‘survival’ of African cultural practices in the New World or the representation of ‘home’ in the processes of diasporic identity formation. Such issues are undoubtedly important and we will be touching upon them in what follows. However, very few studies examine the role that diasporic networks play in the well-being of both the diaspora itself and Africans on the continent. Such a lacuna is worrying given, as the opening quotes suggest, that migration and displacement have become central elements in recent survival strategies.

We begin by examining the intellectual trajectories that have led to the eclipsing of diasporic concerns in both development studies and African studies. This relates to the ways in which ‘Africa’ is imagined and apprehended in western intellectual traditions, the us/them dichotomy that followed colonial withdrawal, and the cultural bias of academic approaches to race and identity in western societies. The next section looks at concepts of diaspora and particularly the way in which they are defined and delimited. This is highly problematic given that some sense of common identity defines a diaspora yet much of what some groups deem to be diasporic actually lacks such commonality. Hence, we look at the elision between diasporas and networks in which the latter may lack a shared identity, but still be useful for developmental purposes. The major section examines the implications of a diasporic perspective for understanding the development potential of both Africans in diaspora and those remaining on the continent. We argue that both politically and economically the diaspora has an important part to play in contemporary social processes operating at an increasingly global scale. The key issues we address are embedded social networks in the diaspora, remittances and return, development organisations, religious networks, cultural dynamics, and political institutions. We conclude by suggesting where diasporic concerns will take us in the next few years.

### **Intellectual schisms**

This section examines the reasons why the concerns of diasporic Africans have rarely figured highly in either development studies or African studies. As such it picks up on some of the issues raised elsewhere by the present authors (Zack-Williams, 1995; Mohan, 2002). The basic question we address is *why has the diaspora not featured in discussions of Africa or of African development?* This brief and schematic archaeology of knowledge traces the evolution of knowledge about Africa and development in which there are two, mutually reinforcing schisms. First, between African Studies and studies of the African Diaspora and, second, between Development Studies and studies of the African Diaspora (see West and Martin, 1999 for an excellent analysis of some of these issues). From there we examine debates about globalisation and post-colonialism which are making more culturally-focused and less state-centred analyses possible and which are, in part, opening the intellectual space for critical studies of the diaspora. However, given that all knowledge generation is political we must also ask the question of why is diaspora becoming a key issue now and what ideological agenda might this visibility serve?

#### *Development studies, African studies and the diaspora*

“members of the white Africanist establishment have long sought to separate sub-Saharan Africa, the object of their study and research agenda, from the African diaspora and issues of race” (West and Martin, 1999: 8)

During the slave trade Africans entered the diaspora forcibly (Segal, 1998) despite the presence of a few ‘free’ Africans in Europe (Fryer, 1984). As we discuss in more detail below we must

remember that slavery also occurred in East Africa and was in a number of ways quite different from that which occurred out of West Africa and, as a result, affected subsequent developments (Segal, 1998). In the colonial period, colonial administration was about control and basic welfare (Phillips, 1976; Cooke, 2001). The 'natives' were seen as needing development and the spatial dynamics was such that a colonial diaspora was spread across the globe to administer the colonies *in situ*. It was then that African Studies emerged as a generalised area study in which academic pursuits aimed to study the diversity of cultures in order to govern them more effectively (Fyfe, 1999). The handmaidens in this endeavour were cultural anthropology, history and geography with their empirical focus of documenting and mapping people and resources (Godlewska and Smith, 1994). Similarly, colonial administration departments in the UK sought to train the generalist administrator for coping with conditions 'on the ground'. The only serious challenge to this intellectual and political state of affairs came from Diasporic and 'pan-African' activists like Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois. These intellectuals sought to bring together an anti-racist agenda with a programme for the salvation of Africa under the yolk of colonialism. While their impact was significant, they were perhaps more successful in championing anti-racism and black pride in North America than they were in significantly challenging the colonial project (Magubane, 1987).

Around the Second World War Africans began travelling voluntarily to the metropolises, primarily for education. These flows were added to at the end of the colonial era by the labour migrations from the Caribbean that added even greater complexity to what Gilroy (1993b) popularised as the 'Black Atlantic'. This period coincided with the 'invention' of development studies as an extension of colonial administration (Escobar, 1995; Cooke, 2001). As the colonies 'came home', sociology (and later cultural studies) handled questions of the diaspora (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1987) while development studies handled issues of Africa and the developing world 'over there'. This created an intellectual and spatial schism between studies of African development and the African diaspora. Overlying this is the political economy of Development Studies and the cultural emphasis of studies of Diaspora, which we return to below.

Similarly, African Studies has retained many of its generalist colonial (and neo-imperial) features and resolutely sees Africa as a self-contained continent. However, there has been a steady stream of attempts to rectify this; none of which we would argue have been as useful as critical political economy perspectives. First, recent attempts to re-theorise and mainstream African history, namely various forms of Afrocentrism, are extremely problematic in terms of their validity and the political programmes attached to this form of ethno-nationalism (Howe, 198; Gilroy, 1993a). They fall back on crude essentialisms that fail to capture the richness of African cultures as well as the multifarious experiences of the African diaspora. Second, the post-structural critique of African Studies, inspired by Said's Orientalist thesis, sees all forms of 'Western' knowledge as complicit in an imperialist mission and by revealing this fact they seek to 'decolonise' intellectual practice. While this is a complex and salutary debate it is problematic in that these scholars are good at 'deconstructing' the problem, but are less able to suggest ways in which concerned intellectuals can actually engage productively in attacking underdevelopment. A third response to some 'messy' political interventions has been the argument that Africans should be responsible for their own development. While this discourse is often undermined by the realities of aid conditionality and imperialism, it suggests that African Studies is less relevant to contemporary developmental problems. For example, Tony Blair's recent West African foray stressed the need for African solutions in partnership with donors. However, beyond these bland pronouncements of partnership and scare-mongering about the

threat of terrorism from Third World countries (reminiscent of Robert Kaplan's infamous diatribe on the coming anarchy) the British government failed to consult the leading West African Studies institution (Guardian, February 2002).

These three phenomena largely relate to the intellectual and political agendas operating in the USA and Europe, but what of African Studies in Africa? At one level the general economic malaise and the suspicion of many governments towards intellectuals has seen the undermining of support for study in general. Many scholars have either been victimised or are forced into taking relatively lucrative consultancy contracts which compromises their ability to voice critical judgements about the state of Africa's development. Increasingly the abstract post-structural debates that took place in Europe and America that challenge 'truth' are seen as indulgent and irrelevant for scholars facing the daily grind of survival. As such the input of African-based scholars into 'global' debates has been curtailed. However, with the economic and political crises of the past 20 years which saw large numbers of academics re-locating to departments outside their home country the lived experience of diaspora may begin to effect more critical transnational theorising.

*Globalisation, transnationalism and post-colonialism: has Diaspora's time has come?*

We believe that we can no longer afford to treat Diaspora as either a primarily cultural phenomena or one that is not relevant to (a journal of) African development. We will look at both the intellectual conditions that make this possible and the realities occurring around the globe. Intellectually we have globalisation studies and post-colonialism. Both challenge state-centred views of the world and make us re-think boundaries, communities and flows (Paolini, 1997). On the one hand globalisation studies have encouraged a broader 'world view' which looks to interconnections with 'others', although these tend to be limited to those others who present either a threat to capitalist hegemony or constitute new sources for accumulation. Paradoxically, on the other hand, the expanded remit of globalisation studies has for some seen the erosion of the relevance and need for area studies given that everywhere is connected to everywhere else which renders (studies of) regional specificity meaningless. Such a problem afflicts all area studies programmes although the thesis that capitalism is expansionary and uneven comes as no surprise to intellectuals who have been working within a critical political economy framework for three decades or more (Amin, 1976; Wallerstein, 1979).

To date much post-colonial theory has focused on the cultural-textual and looked at the ways in which Western canons appropriate, (mis)represent or silence the Third World subject (Goss, 1996). Postcolonial theory is not without its problems although we have not got space to elaborate on this (for useful critiques see Ahmad, 1992; Dirlik, 1994; Loomba, 1998). In general, there has been a tendency to underplay the role of capitalism in shaping global power relations, to imbue the Third World subject with too much agency, and to ignore the state either as an agent of imperialism or as a potential defender of rights. Increasingly postcolonial studies is addressing the combined questions of human agency and political economy with things like the Gramscian-inspired subaltern studies group in India (Guha, 1982), Dirlik (1997) and Ong's (1993) work on transnational business networks, and Mbembe's (1991) work on the state in Africa. These studies place greater emphasis upon the structural constraints facing Third World people without reducing them to helpless victims.

On the other hand events of the post-colonial period are making these theoretical interventions more relevant (Papastergiadis, 2000). Large-scale migration, often semi-legally or illegally,

means that the 'neo-diaspora', as opposed to the slave and colonial diasporas, has increased dramatically. Such movement is largely a rational response to economic hardship and political turmoil or is forced in the case of refugees fleeing from persecution and conflict. Second, information and transport technologies make interactions much easier and cheaper which can enhance a diaspora's sense of community. Diasporas, possibly more than any other grouping, are very much an 'imagined community' in Anderson's (1991) terms, but unlike nation-states they lack territorial integrity and political sovereignty. Finally, with persistent (and growing) racial polarisation in USA and Western Europe, the symbolic significance of 'Africa' for the Diaspora has increased as witnessed by the popularity of Farrakhan's Nation of Islam and Afrocentric discourses. Indeed, this last point raises an interesting, and persistent, question of whether diasporic concern over Africa is largely a response to the needs of the diaspora, particularly the North American branch, as opposed to pressing needs of the continent itself? The answer is not easy and depends upon the group in focus with, for example, recent African immigrants having a different relationship to the diaspora and Africa than African-Americans whose ancestors left Africa two hundred years earlier.

### **Conceptualising the African diaspora**

This last point alerts us to the fact that we must be wary about generalising about the 'diasporic condition' yet at the same time we must be reasonably precise about how we use it otherwise it can mean all things to all people. In this section we look at debates about defining diasporas in general and those specific to the African diaspora.

#### *Defining the (African) diaspora*

At the level of general theories of the diaspora the most commonly cited work is that of Safran (1991), Clifford (1994) and Cohen (1997). The term itself is contested and dynamic and its usage varies between groups and over time depending upon the ideological needs of these groups. One of the key problems is that the 'paradigmatic' diasporic experience, namely that of the Jewish exile from Babylon, has come to dominate the discussion (Akyeampong, 2000). Additionally, for the sake of our discussion, and with certain parallels, the African diaspora has been seen largely in terms of the horrific experiences of Atlantic slavery. These 'victim' diasporas (Cohen, 1997) were clearly terrible events and their effects are still felt today. However, not all diasporic experiences are as traumatic so we need to be simultaneously more flexible and precise in our theorisation.

The roots of the word diaspora lies in Ancient Greek where it is comprised of two elements - *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over) (Cohen, 1997). For the Greeks, diaspora signified productive colonisation, a positive movement for all concerned. In the subsequent millennia Diaspora gained more negative connotations following the enslavement and exile of the Jews from Babylon. Diaspora became linked to oppression, forced displacement and the ceaseless search for an authentic homeland. From here a number of other 'victim' diasporas followed; the most notable being the West Africans through slavery, Palestinians through Zionist expansionism and Armenians through persecution by The Ottomans. All these experiences involve forcible displacement by another group.

From these beginnings the term has broadened to include more voluntary and proactive movements of people and the connections between them. This broadened agenda calls "for re-imagining the 'areas' of area studies and developing units of analysis that enable us to understand the dynamics of transnational cultural and economic processes, as well as to challenge the

conceptual limits imposed by national and ethnic/racial boundaries" (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 14). This has seen cultural and racial difference as relational and, in some cases, positive as opposed to the victim discourse which sees such differences inevitably leading to tension and conflict. Robin Cohen (1997) has developed a classification of diasporas (See Figure 1) which moves beyond the rather narrow use of diaspora as being an essentially victim experience. However, as with any classificatory typology, discrete categories can never really capture the complex realities of lived experience.

Cohen's classification avoids the limitations of narrower definitions of diaspora in three basic ways. First, Cohen has added that not all diasporas are involuntary which affects their composition, outlook and developmental potential. He observes that "Being dragged off...being expelled, or being coerced to leave by force of arms appear qualitatively different phenomena from the general pressures of overpopulation, land hunger, poverty or an unsympathetic political regime" (Cohen, 1997: 27). So, people move and diasporas develop for more positive reasons than forced expulsion. Having said that, we must analyse all experiences contextually and empirically so that we do not abstract these concepts "away from the situated practices of everyday life" (Mitchell, 1997: 535). For some, diaspora may be liberating while for others their displacement is an ever-present trauma.

Second, Cohen includes characteristics that see both the imagining of home and its physical well-being and rejuvenation as crucial to defining diasporas. This borrows from William Safran's (1991) six-point 'ideal type' of diaspora. Safran argues that a diaspora exists once a peoples "have been dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral', or foreign, regions...(and)...they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return" (Safran's, 1991: 83-4). James Clifford (1994) argued that Safran builds his model too exclusively upon the Jewish experience which not only mis-represents the Jewish diaspora, but cannot be readily applied to other diasporas. For example, the Jewish diaspora is less homogenous than Safran believes with different sub-groups travelling to different destinations and through interacting with local factors they evolved different relationships with the 'homeland'. As Cohen (1997) observes, it is only certain factions of this heterogenous Jewish diaspora that call for a restoration of an exclusive homeland, with many others reasonably content to put expulsion behind them and live in permanent 'exile' (Elazar, no date). Hence, those with strong affinities with a homeland are more likely to support, either financially or politically, development efforts that seek to re-create or strengthen it.

Third, in terms of the geographies of diaspora Cohen adds a degree of complexity not found in Safran's typology and helps us see how diffuse connections around the globe can be a developmental benefit for some diasporic communities. Safran stresses a binary pattern where all connections ultimately (aspire to) return 'home'. For Clifford, and for our analysis of diasporic development, "lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return" (1994: 306). This means that rather than viewing diasporas as comprising two points - home and exile - where exiles simply want to return home, we need to think about multiple sites of exile and, crucially, the connections between them. As diasporas evolve over time, the members (or their subsequent generations) may move again yet retain links to their home, their original site of exile and those places where other diasporic members have also relocated to. This greatly complicates the spatiality of diasporas and produces, instead, a geography of diaspora which is built around multiple localities connected by ever-changing

networked relationships (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000)

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Figure 1: Cohen's framework for classifying diaspora

- 1) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
- 2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
- 3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
- 4) an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, prosperity, even to its creation;
- 5) the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
- 6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
- 7) a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least of the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
- 8) a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
- 9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Source: Cohen, 1997: 26

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#### *The role of identity*

One of the key questions in understanding diasporas is that of identity. As Byfield (2000: 2) argues “the creation of diaspora is in large measure contingent on a diasporic identity that links the constituent parts of the diaspora to a homeland”. However, the debate about identity is fierce and on-going with a broad split between those who see a relatively coherent and largely racialised identity and those ‘anti-essentialists’ who see identities as so multiple, provisional and dynamic that it is impossible to talk about them as fixed or coherent. This latter group (Gilroy, 1993a; Hall, 1990) prefer, instead, the metaphor of hybridity to capture the ever-changing amalgams of cultural characteristics.

Early studies of diaspora were largely anthropological and focused on the ‘survival’ of cultural traits from Africa in the New World (Patterson and Kelley, 2000). To a large extent this issue of authenticity and displacement set the terms for much of what followed. Some argued that there was an annihilation of cultural characteristics during the middle passage and saw no need to consider Africa as a reference point. Others saw African culture surviving in tact and took this as evidence of a desire to return. Such absolutes are rarely, if ever, seen in the real world. As Patterson and Kelley (2000: 19) observe “we must always keep in mind that diasporic identities are socially and historically constituted, reconstituted, and reproduced” and that these processes are linked by a racialised and gendered hierarchy. The contexts in which this occurs is structured along cultural, legal, economic, social and imperial lines, but one thing which is immutable is that “the arrangements that this hierarchy assumes may vary from place to place but it remains a gendered racial hierarchy” (Patterson and Kelley, 2000: 20).

A similar point is made by Echeheruo (1999) in response to the work of Paul Gilroy. As we

alluded to above, Gilroy is firmly in the anti-essentialist camp and rejects ethnicity and kinship as a basis of identity yet still refers to a 'black' Atlantic which requires some common inheritance. As a result Gilroy evokes a 'travelling culture' in the African diaspora which is seen as liberating, but in doing so he is in danger of denying the trauma of slavery and other displacements. According to Echehuo, Gilroy underplays the very essence of diaspora - the notion of exile. One thing we can learn from the Jewish diaspora in order to problematise the question of identity is that no matter how complex and mixed a diaspora is "you cannot not belong" (Echehuo, 1999: 9). Additionally, and playing into this, is the question of race. Whereas black people may have, as Gilroy expounds, some room to manoeuvre this space is not, in contrast to Gilroy's model, limitless.

"..the predicament for those who have a problem choosing where to belong is that they cannot quite get themselves to realize that their options in the matter are very limited indeed. Put bluntly, they have none. Paul Gilroy does not have a choice of identities. It is a spurious sermon therefore to speak (as Gilroy does) in this context of the 'instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade' (Gilroy, 1993, p.xi)" (Echehuo, 1999: 9)

So, the dynamics of identity within diaspora are highly complex and, to an extent, contingent on other factors. This process of 'articulation' "is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (Grossberg, 1995: 141 cited in Patterson and Kelley, 2000: 19). The key is to see that this articulation is constrained by racial, gender and economic forces so that individuals within diaspora are not infinitely free to determine their own identities.

This brings us onto one final element in diasporic consciousness; the question of return. Much has been made in the diaspora about the issue of return. The philanthropic movements which saw the establishment of Sierra Leone and Liberia were aimed at returning Africans to their 'true' homes. Similarly, a pillar of Marcus Garvey's vision was a Back to Africa movement for which he started the Black Star shipping line while scholars and artists such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Stevie Wonder set up homes in Ghana. However, again we must avoid generalising about the place of return in shaping the diasporic consciousness. For example, Whoopi Goldberg stated "I've gotten a lot of trouble for saying I'm American instead of African American. But I've been to Africa...and believe me, I'm American" (cited in Wamba, 2000: xv). Different individuals and groups have different relations to 'home' and return. Again, some see Africa in idealistic terms as a pristine haven or, according to the Afrocentrists, it was until white people came and despoiled it.

Others see home in pluralistic ways as a dynamic historical entity which continues to change so that it is meaningless to think of an authentic home to return to. What we have are multiple imaginings of home depending upon circumstances and level of consciousness. For example, in talking about the relationship between Caribbean identity and the African home, Stuart Hall comments "(T)he original 'Africa' is no longer there. It too has been transformed. History is, in that sense, irreversible" (1990: 233). Such an understanding leads Kwame Appiah to argue quite emphatically that "whatever Africans share, we do not have a common traditional culture, common language, common religious or conceptual vocabulary" (Appiah, 1993: 26). In both these comments we can see home and exile as two dynamic ends of a complex process of

spiritual and physical linkage. The power of return and home is captured in Brah's (1996) idea of 'homing' which is a lingering desire that may or may not be realised in reality. As Echeberuo argues "The power of the idea lies in the principle of it; that a return is possible forever, whenever, if ever" (1999: 4). This 'prophetic expectation' of return marks the diasporic identity out as different from other groups' identities.

*The spatial and temporal dynamics of the African diaspora*

Given the foregoing discussion it becomes apparent that we need to have a flexible framework for analysing the African diaspora, but not one so flexible that it loses any conceptual value. The insistence on the dynamism of identity formation in the context of overarching racial and gendered hierarchies forces us to rethink both the geography and history of the African diaspora. In this sub-section we look at both the periodisation and spatialisation of the African diaspora before arguing that diasporas overlap which has a number of practical implications for politics. We also discuss the ways in which diasporas shade into other transnational social formations, namely networks, whose organising principle may be more pragmatic and less identity-based.

In terms of periodising the African diaspora we have two slightly different, but complementary analyses (Okpewho, 1999; Akyeampong, 2000). Okpewho (1999) sees three phases or 'paradigms' of experience which link America and Africa and are part of a wider capitalist imperative. The first era was the labour imperative involving the slave trade, the second era was the territorial imperative involving colonialism, while the third era was the extractive imperative involving minerals and other raw materials. Each of these eras created new forces which propelled Africans, either forcibly or voluntarily, into diaspora. Akyeampong (2000) follows Harris (1982) in his temporal schema which is less tied to a logic of capitalism and more to a form of step-wise movement. He argues,

“The primary stage is the original dispersion out of Africa [especially through the slave trade]; the secondary stage occurs with migrations from the initial settlement abroad to a second area abroad; the tertiary stage is movement to a third area abroad; and the circulatory stage involves movements among the several areas abroad and may include Africa” (Harris, 1982: 8-9)

Like any historical schema these divisions are ideal-typical and can never capture all the variety of experiences. It also raises questions about the 'Arab slave trade' which was less a form of proto-capitalism and, therefore, not amenable to the same analysis. What both schemas show is that the forces generating the African diaspora have varied over time which does affect the forms of consciousness that we find. So, we must always be aware that while diaspora has certain heuristic and political value it “has always been employed (invoked) in such a way as to hide the differences and discontinuities” (Patterson and Kelley, 2000: 20). Some of these are resolutely spatial.

The spatialisation of the African diaspora is perhaps even more debatable than its historiography and tells us a great deal about politics and ideology within the diaspora. As noted earlier much of the debate about the African diaspora has been dominated by discussion of the West African, slavery-induced victim experience. Indeed, the forcible nature of this displacement does indeed make it more truly diasporic if we follow the Jewish model. However, if we include the idea of common identity as defining diaspora then the importance of expulsion is lessened. Spatially, we need to move away from simply privileging the 'Black Atlantic' experience and look at more

complex geographies of the African diaspora. Patterson and Kelley (2000) usefully conjecture about the 'Black Mediterranean' or the 'black Indian Ocean' while West (2000) adds the 'black Pacific'. West goes on to argue that this singular focus on the Atlantic slave trade as the foundational moment in the African diaspora is the result of a largely American led effort to make visible three centuries of exploitation. While clearly understandable this historical project has tended to render in-visible a wide range of alternative diasporic experiences. This can be seen if we look briefly at the East African slave trade.

Segal (1998) has argued that the Islamic slave trade of East Africa may well have involved equal numbers of people and lasted for a much longer time. An interesting question is why should scholars and activists be so much more aware of one slavery experience than another? The answer is not simple and lies in the nature of the slavery itself and the forms of political action it generated. The first thing is that slavery in Islam was less exploitative. This is not to say it was easy on the slaves or morally defensible, but it was less tied to a proto-capitalist logic. In the Atlantic trade slaves were treated as commodities which denied their humanity. By contrast Islamic slavery was directed to services because in Islamic societies agriculture was not plantation-based and labour was not in short supply. Here African slaves became concubines, maids, porters, guards, builders or cooks. Crucially, slavery constituted a form of consumption rather than a factor of production with many more women becoming slaves compared with the Atlantic trade. Another factor in the different treatment of these two forms of slavery related to the nature of the state. In Islam the state and religion were coterminous whereas in Christian states there were strong moves towards secularism and the 'national' interest. For Islamic states divine power was more important than the national economic and political interest so that slaves were treated as people rather than chattels. Without romanticising the conditions of slaves, the economic system of Islam was not geared so much to private accumulation and capitalism so that its objectification of labour did not develop. A further important element was that the Koran denounces racism which was the underpinning logic of the Atlantic trade. Given that slavery went against the basic principles of Christianity it could only be legitimated through a racist logic which deemed Africans to be sub-human and therefore only fit for menial labour and, to some extent, beyond the purview of Christian morality.

Spatially, socially and politically it is useful to think not of homogenous and discrete diasporas, but of overlapping and complementary ones. Like identity, people do not belong solely to one group, but occupy multiple subject or group positions. Diasporas form in relation to other diasporas so that "Africa was not the only diaspora to which African descendants belonged... African descendants were contributors to and participants in the construction of other diasporas" (Byfield, 2000: 5). For example, Rastafarians took on the spiritual use of marijuana from Hindus in the Caribbean (West, 1996), Pan-Africanists learned from the Irish republican movement, Mahatma Gandhi developed many of his strategies following his experience of black oppression in South Africa (Patterson and Kelley, 2000) while the Dalits in India learned from the tactics of the Black Power Movement (Prashad, 2000). Indeed, much of Paul Gilroy's (1987) *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* focuses upon the 'cultural politics of race and nation' and the interaction between a deterritorialised, diasporic consciousness and the concrete local, urban, and territorialised experiences which generate a multitude of 'hybrid' cultural practices and political responses. He asserts that "Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere. In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to

distinctively British experiences and meanings. Black culture is actively made and re-made (Gilroy, 1987: 154).

### *Diasporas and networks*

These questions of identity and of diffuse and overlapping diasporas brings us onto the issue of diasporas and networks. Diaspora, as we have argued, implies some kind of shared consciousness and of deterritorialised 'belonging' which in turn generates and enables common political, cultural or economic endeavours. However, there is evidence that suggests that such cultural constructs do not always prevail. The ties that bind may be much weaker and more ephemeral than the notion of diaspora allows for. That is not to say that some form of identification operates, but it may not be as solid or long-term as that found in a well-established diaspora. In these cases we see networks of, for example, country folk, ethnic grouping or race which effect tangible economic and political gains, but which are not a diaspora.

Consider the case of Congolese traders in Europe. MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga's study suggests that the traders "were not part of any structured trade diaspora but operated as individuals...personal networks...are not structured and permanent but are activated when they are needed by individuals trading on their own behalf, and not as part of ethnic trading communities" (2000: 12). They felt the traders were too individualistic and opportunistic to be considered a true diaspora. However, their trade is organised through various co-operative cultural ties while their shared 'pariah' status forces new bonds to develop. This cultural identity was formed around 'la debrouillardise' (meaning to fend for yourself in order to survive) and 'la Sape' (a stylistic movement which values European designer labels and conspicuous consumption, members of which are called *sapeurs*).

Similarly, other studies show that for ethnic business networks 'embeddedness' and 'social capital' are central to their success. For newly arrive immigrants, "participation in a pre-existing ethnic economy can have positive economic consequences, including a greater opportunity for self-employment" (Portes and Jensen, 1987: 768). Eventually, the "solidary ethnic community represents simultaneously, a market for culturally defined goods, a pool of reliable low-wage labor, and a potential source of start-up capital" (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993: 1329). However, while intra-ethnic business can be a source of advantage in the face of hostile political, economic and social forces in a host country it can also be a disadvantage, because ethnic loyalty may prevent actors from maximising their economic opportunities. In reality, economic actors, especially the more astute and powerful, 'switch' ethnic affiliation and diasporic identity on and off depending upon the relative advantages to be gained by either strategy.

Ong (1993) has demonstrated this in her study of Hong Kong Chinese business networks. As global capitalism has entered the era of 'flexible accumulation', multinational capital has decentralised and uses greater numbers of sub-contractors. This shift produces complex business networks which exploit dynamic market opportunities and increasingly fluid 'comparative advantages' of multiple sites. As Dirlik (1997: 309) argues "diasporic populations may also be strategically well-placed to deal with some of the demands of transnational production and other transactions that are transnational in scope". So, previous Chinese diasporic networks are perfectly suited to exploit the new terrain of global capitalism. These networks may be based around certain cultural affinities, but these are by no means static and are differentially exploited depending on market and political opportunities. As Ong (1993: 770) observes "Their flexible strategies have been devised not to collaborate in the biopolitical agenda of any nation-state, but

to convert political constraints in one field into economic opportunities in another, to turn displacement into advantageous positioning in a range of local contexts, and to elude national corporate interests in order to reproduce the bio-power of the family anywhere that capitalist opportunities are present". Crucially, the class dimension is important, because those best able to exploit these opportunities are from the upper classes, while working classes only feature as the 'nimble fingers' exploited in New York sweatshops or Economic Processing Zones in China and clearly benefit less profitably from the supposedly humanistic Confucian capitalism.

What is also interesting is that ethnic identity tends to be re-fashioned, if not fully created, in diaspora. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993: 1328) discuss the fortunes of Italian immigrants to America "whose original loyalties did not extend much beyond their local villages. These immigrants learned to think of themselves as Italian and to band together on that basis after the native population began to treat them in the same manner and to apply the same derogatory labels". This is a case where social capital and group identity were formed in response to the hostile treatment by the host. Hence, the very existence and density of ethnic networks is affected by the hostility of the host society which creates 'uncertainty'. Portes (1997: 7-8) argues that immigrant business networks "tend to generate solidarity by virtue of generalized uncertainty. Exchange under conditions of uncertainty creates stronger bonds among participants than that which takes place with full information and impartially enforced rules".

These observations suggest that different diasporic configurations operate in different ways and with different implications for development. We propose a three-fold classification (from Mohan, 2002) for examining the positive linkages between diaspora and development. First, *development in the diaspora* where people within diasporic communities use their localised diasporic connections within the 'host' country to secure economic and social well-being and, as a by-product, contribute to the development of their locality. Second, *development through the diaspora* whereby diasporic communities utilise their diffuse global connections beyond the locality to facilitate economic and social well-being. Third, *development by the diaspora* in which diasporic flows and connections back 'home' facilitate the development - and, sometimes, creation - of these 'homelands'. These categories, and the relationships between them, are fluid and blurred, reflecting the inherent tensions between deterritorialisation and fixity that characterise diasporas. For example, a Congolese trader in Paris, living with diasporic contacts, selling T-shirts sourced from a family member in Hong Kong, and sending part of the profits back to his/her extended family straddles all three categories.

### **Issues in diasporic development**

We have argued that diasporas are fragile deterritorialised communities whose identities are shifting, multiple and overlapping. However, in contrast to those who see this cultural dynamism as limitless and empowering we feel that the realities of gendered and racial hierarchies means that there are enough similarities to allow co-identification, even where this is largely in response to hostile treatment by others on the basis of skin colour. We have also argued that this identity is not always strong so that networked relationships which are more pragmatic and functional may be invoked in order to deal with pressing material concerns. Finally, we have argued that the 'geography' of diasporas and networks enables us to analyse different configurations of actors with diverse agendas. In this section we examine these in more detail.

#### *Embeddedness, networks and institutions*

In terms of diasporic development in place the shared identity of displaced communities can be

both a problem and a disguised blessing. Some communities experience hostility from their 'hosts', based on absolute beliefs in difference, which can be demoralising and dangerous. On the other hand, this hostility may force group members to draw on each other and take advantage of shared meanings, which then becomes a source of spiritual strength and competitive advantage. Fellow members of diasporic communities can be trusted more readily and may work more flexibly and cheaply for someone who is facing similar problems. In turn this can strengthen the sense of group identity as networks of ethnically-based businesses develop.

Spatially, such close connections between ethnic group members may generate and strengthen the tendency to cluster in 'enclaves', such as ghettos and China Towns, although there is no necessary link between an ethnic business network and its spatial concentration (Portes and Jensen, 1987). However, such processes of agglomeration are not solely the result of cultural affinity, but are usually influenced by other factors such as racist real estate markets, the cost of property, the wealth of the ethnic community and the legal status of individuals. For small firms serving local markets, which constitute the majority of diaspora business, the importance of proximity for information exchange is vital to establishing reputation and respect. Word gets around about who can be relied upon, so it is in this context that one of Waldinger's (1995: 565) respondents claims "New York is a small town (where) good and bad news travel fast".

In two studies of the African diaspora (Arthur, 2000; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 58) new diasporic members, either in order to migrate or on arrival, make use of existing diasporic contacts. Again, this varies between the cases depending upon the legality or illegality of the migrant. In the American study (Arthur, 2000), new immigrants need to have letters of sponsorship which may be an educational institution or a family member already in residence. On arrival they use contacts from within their diasporic communities to settle in. However, it is here that we need to be specific about how we define and delimit a community. Obviously, in cases where a migrant is joining a relation, it is they who help socialise the new arrival. In addition, there are formal organisations set up around particular ethnic, national or interest groupings. For example, in Atlanta there are Ashanti and Ewe mutual aid associations, both of which relate to ethnic groups in contemporary Ghana. However, there are also Ghanaian associations, alumni organisations of those educated in Ghana, as well as more general immigrant support organisations. These formal organisations

"have become a vital part of the network of associative relationships. Immigrants have always established such associations in host countries to *forge closer ties among themselves, with the members of the host society, and with their places of birth*. The African immigrant associations are the building blocks for the creation of African cultural communities in the United States" (Arthur, 2000: 71, emphasis added)

This forging of ties is both in place and across space and clearly links the developmental fortunes of Africans living at home and abroad. For the Congolese traders in Paris such organisations are impossible given their illegal status and they are forced to rely on more informal contacts. MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000) also use the concept of 'social capital' which for them relates to individual and family connections, kinship relations, ethnic affiliation, religious grouping or political contacts. All these may be drawn upon to enable the trader to pursue his or her commercial activities. In both cases, the Africans tend to stay relatively separate from their white 'hosts'. In America, the African middle classes tend to "form much closer relationships with black immigrants of the African diaspora...than they do with the native-born black

American population" (Arthur, 2000: 80).

### *Remittances and return*

Much of the work on migration and development has focused on the question of remittances (Durand, Parado, and Massey, 1996). While notoriously difficult to calculate there is an assumption that by fuelling consumption and benefiting relatively well off households, remittances are of limited developmental use in tackling poverty or creating although the assumption is rarely backed up by sustained empirical analysis.

In order to understand the dynamics of remittances and return it is essential to understand both the motivations for migrating and the concrete developmental obligations that this entails. In many African economies the question of risk is an ever-present consideration in any livelihood decisions. Where economic uncertainty and hyperinflation exist, migration can be a major adjustment mechanism. Indeed, migration has become a pre-eminent survival strategy for many African households (Akyeampong, 2000; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000).

The classic study by Harris and Todaro (1970) argued that migrants act as individuals based on optimising criteria. However, evidence suggests that the decision to migrate is located at the household level whereby family members see migration as a form of portfolio diversification which spreads risks between various income-generating activities. As a decision based within the family it places strong obligations on the migrants to succeed and to send money and capital goods back to those left behind. For example, MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000) discuss *lusolo* which is a Congolese belief that "success in commerce is a gift that is inherited in the family and that the wealth it brings belongs to the family and should be shared among them" (2000: 126). These 'pressures for redistribution' are strong and clearly link the diaspora to development. Similarly, Arthur reports of one migrant whose failure to send remittances resulted in virtual ostracisation with his father exclaiming "When you die make sure you are buried in America" (2000: 134).

The problem of calculating the size of remittance flows, as AFFORD (2000) note, is that only about 50% of them go through official channels. However, for example, it has been estimated that for Cape Verde, remittances accounted for around 17% of GDP. Similarly, Akyeampong (2000) asserts that Ghanaians in the USA remitted between \$250 and \$350 million per year throughout the 1990s with remittances outstripping FDI for every year between 1983 and 1990. A proxy of the growing importance of remittances to African economies is given by the growth of money transfer agencies. As Chikezie-Fergusson observes "Little wonder that money transfer companies such as Western Union and Money Gram have raised their profile among African communities: they are competing for business with the hundreds of African-owned money transfer ventures that are the lifeline for increasingly impoverished families in Africa with relatives (2000: 12-13). Such transnational communities are characterised "by an increasing number of people who lead dual lives. Members are at least bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political, and cultural interests that require a simultaneous presence in both" (Portes, 1997: 16). Among the Chinese diaspora such a duality earns these people the title 'astronaut' because they float in orbit between and above fixed locales (Ong, 1993).

More recent work on migration and development is beginning to explore the role of returnees (Amassari and Black, 2001; The Courier ACP-EU, 2001) who bring with them financial,

human and social capital and return to their home countries on a more-or-less permanent basis. While return does occur, it is often too risky so that living multiple lives and juggling locales is a form of risk-spreading, both physically (in terms of personal safety) and financially (in terms of diversifying assets). For example, Portes (1997) discusses the efforts made by Mexicans in New York and the regular contacts they maintain with their home *pueblo*. Such contact has been made increasingly easy and relatively cheap due to advances in information and communication technologies. Full-scale return is the exception rather than the rule which helps explain the limited success of schemes such as the Institute of Migration's which aims to encourage professionals in the Diaspora to return. Given the relatively high wages the migrants receive abroad such schemes are prohibitively expensive if realistic incentives for return are to be offered. If we accept that circulation rather than return is more normal then we must focus on both the individual and collective mechanisms by which developmental linkages are achieved and the impacts of these activities on the homelands.

More commonplace, then, is a multi-locale strategy (Trager, 2001). The case of Beatrice in MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga' (2000) study demonstrates how she ultimately wants to establish production units in Congo, but has experienced embezzlement of her money and so is looking at more diverse opportunities across the globe until the situation is more predictable.

"She bought equipment for a medical office with the profits of her trade. It went into operation, but was managed by a Congolese who embezzled the funds so that she had to close it down. She plans to sell the equipment to the General Hospital and has the necessary contacts there to do so...She plans to develop trade with Nigeria because it is a huge country and she has family connections there. She already knows wholesalers eager to buy T-shirts she has seen in the United States. She also plans new lines of business in Switzerland, where she has other connections" (2000:162/3)

The respondents in Arthur's (2000) study recognise the extreme difficulty and riskiness of doing business in Africa, but seem more optimistic than those in Paris. Arthur's survey showed that 80% of his respondents intended to return to Africa once they were wealthy enough and the political and economic climate had stabilised. Hence, "most African immigrants structure their economic decision-making by focussing on the long-term economic potential of their homelands. Participation in the economic development of their countries of origin are paramount" (Arthur, 2000: 129). As one Ghanaian stated

"Why should I spend over \$100,000 for a house in the United States paying an interest of about 8 percent for thirty years when with only \$20,000 I could build a nice two-storey building or purchase one in (one) of the exclusive communities in the Accra-Tema area...We have banks in Ghana now that will allow you to draw your money in dollars once you have a foreign account. Life doesn't get better than this" (2000: 128)

However, the attractiveness of such ventures clearly depends upon the political and economic stability of the African country in question and the well-being of the diasporic individual.

#### *Development organisations*

However, not all support for 'home' is through individual or family transfers. Organisations are playing an increasingly important role in linking the diaspora to African development. As Cohen's (1997) typology outlined earlier states a key element in diasporas is their support for a

homeland. In the next sub-section we examine the nationalist implications of this aspect of diaspora, whereas in this sub-section we look at the ways in which organisations support development. In studying refugee communities in Britain Al-Ali, Black and Koser (1999: 7) argue that "activities which sustain or support the society and culture of the home country within the exile community are considered by both communities to be equally important in shaping the future of the home country". Hence, the well-being of diasporic Africans and Africa are not distinct activities, but mutually implicated. One of the key dimensions in determining the capacity to support home country activities is the degree of integration within the host society. If the migrant lacks the right to work and/or faces routine hostility from the host state or individuals, they are less likely to express opinions or be able to afford to send financial support home. The legal status of the migrant or refugee is also crucial, because if they are illegal or awaiting residency status, they are in a weak position to organise support for others. A further influence on the ability of individuals and groups to support activities back home is the existence, or their awareness of, organisations dedicated to such activities.

AFFORD (2000) have identified a range of developmental organisation engaged in a variety of activities. They are hometown associations, ethnic associations, alumni associations, religious associations, professional associations, development NGOs, investment groups, political groups, national development groups, welfare/refugee groups, supplementary schools, and virtual organisations. The types of activities include community-to-community transfers, identity-building/awareness raising, lobbying in current home on issues relating to ancestral home, trade with and investment in ancestral home, transfers of intangible resources, support for development on a more 'professional' basis, payment of taxes in ancestral home.

The assumption, quite rightly, is that Diasporic connections contribute to a more relevant and sustainable form of development, because people from those areas should know best what is needed (Honey and Okafor, 1998). Certainly, the potential exists for a 'different' approach to development aid. However, a number of key issues remain. First, do Diaspora NGOs simply repeat the earlier mistakes of some development organisations by funding discrete welfare projects whose sustainability and accountability is not guaranteed? Additionally, are these flows strongly partisan and, therefore, divisive and exclusionary? Trager's (2001) study showed that those who were active in the local community organisations, whether *in situ* or via support from afar, tended to be élites with men dominating the decision-making. Hence, it can be argued that such initiatives are participatory in that the initial impetus was not imposed by external development agencies, but such participation is not community-wide. Trager also shows that much of this philanthropic activity relates to improving ones status in the local community and proving what a big success you have become in the city or abroad. Again, such self-aggrandisement, sometimes linked to party-politicking, could be argued to undermine the developmental benefits of such activity.

Related to these issues is the (potential) role of Diaspora NGOs and other organisations in shaping political debate and influencing broader developmental processes in Africa. For example, could the Diaspora use its relative political freedom to make claims on their 'home' governments, the actions of whom may have precipitated the need to emigrate in the first place? Evidence from work on refugees (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser, 1999) suggests that they can play an active role in lobbying and advocacy free from the restrictive human rights abuses of their home countries. In such direct and indirect ways the Diaspora could contribute to international developmental efforts which impact positively on the national and local levels. We return to

these issues in more detail below.

### *Religious networks*

#### **ZACK – CAN YOU ADD ANYTHING?**

A further element of this associational life is that of religious belonging and organisation. Crucially, religious life is not separated off from other parts of peoples' lives (Fuglerud, 1999) and influences economic and political behaviour. However, we do not concur with Chabal and Daloz (1999) that this is re-traditionalisation involving a return to the 'irrational'. Indeed, contemporary religious belief is anything but traditional in that it relates to societies' relationship with globalisation and modernity. For example, Beatrice the Congolese trader in Paris we mentioned earlier, utilises her religious contacts around the world to facilitate her business. That is, "To deal with the problems of doing business and finding her way in strange countries, cities, languages and cultures, she takes advantage of her membership in the Association for the Reunification of the Christian World" (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 101). So, not only is the line between the religious group and the individual blurred but so too is the line between religion and commerce.

Other studies have highlighted the linkages between economic hardship and political turmoil in Africa and the rise of fundamentalist churches (Haynes, 1995; Gifford, 1991; Marshall, 1991; Chabal and Daloz, 1999). What is interesting is that many of these churches are internationally networked and link the diaspora both spiritually and materially. The rise of Pentecostalism in Ghana is emblematic of this. As Akyeampong (2000: 208) writes "The Pentecostal experience has become crucial to the Ghanaian encounter with globalization and modernity...the Pentecostal agenda is a modern one that celebrates the trans-national and the trans-cultural embodied in international mobility and the expression of emotion". Such networks permit the exchange of ideas, commodities and people. Indeed, as Beatrice's case demonstrates, the first port of call for many new migrants is the local branch of the church. From there new social and economic connections can flourish. In addition to ideas and contacts the churches may provide security in country's where racial prejudice can make the lives of Africans uncomfortable or even dangerous.

### *Hybridity and the commodification of 'African culture'*

#### **ZACK – CAN YOU ADD ANYTHING – ESPECIALLY ON AFRICAN AMERICAN 'APPROPRIATIONS' OF AFRICAN CULTURAL ARTEFACTS (Kente etc)?**

As we argued earlier the culturalist leanings of many studies of diaspora produced detailed studies of the survival of African 'traditions' within the diaspora and the degree to which they have been transformed, syncretised and hybridised. Paul Gilroy (1987; 1993a, 2000) has written extensively upon the cultural politics of the African diaspora and, as we mentioned earlier, sees culture as fluid and always in the process of becoming. While he has been criticised for his overly optimistic view of the freedom of human agency and identity formation his work has engaged productively with questions of hybridity which produces cultural forms which are "stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal" (1993b). For example, in discussing musical forms he argues

"Bob Marley' reggae was, like all reggae, a hybrid marked as much by its ties to

American rhythm and blues as by its roots in Mento and calypso...the hip-hop scene formed as the Jamaican sound system culture was adapted to the experiences of urban New York. This expressive sub-culture has in turn been imported into Britain as a style in its own right. Hip-hop revels in the reduction of music to its essential African components of rhythm and voice” (Gilroy, 1987: 172)

In later work he examined traces of certain musical traditions from Africa and their transformation in diaspora. He sees ‘antiphony’, that is call-and-response, as being a central element in which “Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result” (1993a: 138). Such traditions are more open to dramaturgy and innovation which is evident in contemporary styles such as jazz and hip hop. Hence, “If there us a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots)” (Appiah, 1991: 354)

Appiah has also written on the commodification of African culture. In one article he explores the idea of ‘neo-traditionalism’ in African art. He argues that “Simply put, what is distinctive about this genre is that it is produced for the West...Most of this art – *traditional* because it uses actual or supposed precolonial techniques, but *neo*-...because it has elements that are recognizably colonial or postcolonial in reference - has been made for Western tourists and other collectors” (1991: 346). Campbell (1997) also analyses the reasons why such art is increasingly popular and sees it as a response to the failure of modernity. He labels the current fixation with ethnicity as a form of ‘modern primitivism’ which “has acquired cult status in the rudderless West of the 1990s. Only the ethnic is held to be genuinely human nowadays. The argument is that if Western society is to recapture its lost humanity, it must immerse itself in the authentic values of primitive society and dispense with any expectations of modernization and progress” (1997: 14). Such primitivism is not only to be found in art but other cultural ‘sciences’ packaged under various new age banners. These include shamanism, body piercing, and folk rituals. Campbell adds to this various developmental discourses harking back to ‘traditions’ such as grassroots sustainability and participatory appraisal. He states “interpreting African dire necessity as a product of ‘indigenous knowledge’ rather than a product of grinding poverty, the concept of indigenism can then be served up to gullible Westerners as a ‘sustainable’ system that they should be proud to live by” (1997: 50/1). Hence the consumption of African art and culture reflects deep-seated anxieties about the Western capitalist trajectory, but simultaneously commodifies this anxiety and, therefore, can do nothing to break the cycle. Hence, such consumption is unable to break from its own limitations.

### AFRICAN AMERICAN USE OF AFRICAN ART – SPIKE LEE’S SCHOOL DAZE??

#### *Politics in the diaspora and the diaspora in politics*

The discussion of development organisations above made the obvious point that development is not, nor ever has been, a technical matter of getting things right, but is a highly political and politicised process. The implications of this for diasporic activities is made more complex by the deterritorialised nature of their organisation. Indeed, the process of displacement, movement and re-placement to a new locality generates its own peculiar forms of political consciousness (Papastergiadis, 2000). In this sub-section we discuss the politics of and in the diaspora. This involves, first, discussions of nationalism, the (re)creation of homelands and democratisation

and, second, the ideology of pan-Africanism.

The idea of homeland is loaded with gendered metaphors with motherlands suggesting nurturing and fatherlands evoking the patriarchal protector. On top of these metaphors are those which tie populations to their territories, as if by nature, so that biological metaphors such as *lebensraum* (literally 'living space' in German) underpin racial and ethnic exclusivity. A product of and reaction to this purification of space and exclusivity is the longing amongst the displaced for a haven of their own. As Cohen (1997: 106) notes "Just as the evocation of 'homeland' is used as a means of exclusion, so the excluded may see having a land of their own as a deliverance from their travails in foreign lands". So, this political vision is inseparable from a cultural imagination of home and a desire to belong.

One important observation is that "The marginal position of the migrant, and the special qualities of group formation among exiles, seem in general to play a significant role in the formulation of nationalist discourse" (van der Veer, 1995: 5). Evidence from Irish American supporters of Irish republicanism (Cullen, 1998), Jewish supporters of Zionism (Elazar, no date), and diasporic Hindu fundamentalists (Khapre, 2000) suggests that those in exile often have a more idealised and purified notion of what their nation should be. In such cases nationalist organisations in the home country rely, to a large extent, on the financial support of the diaspora. The paradox of many of these extremist and violent nationalist organisations is that the diasporic members support their activities at arm's length, but do not have to live with the realities of paramilitaries and a police state. It is ironic that the US are freezing diasporic Somali bank accounts which they believe may support terrorists while ignoring, for example, the large amounts of funding that the IRA received from Irish Americans or which flows from sections of the powerful Jewish lobby to support undemocratic activities in Palestine. This points to the politics of defining and supporting 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' nationalist aspirations.

An interesting example of the coming together of diaspora, development and national aspirations is the University of Hargeisa in Somaliland ([www.somalilandforum.com/UOH.htm](http://www.somalilandforum.com/UOH.htm)). As AFFORD (2000) note

"Initiated in mid-1997, this effort united Somalis in Somaliland itself with Somalis in the diaspora as far-flung as Australia, Sweden, Kuwait, the United States, and Britain. The project enjoyed support by the government of Somaliland, a territory still without international recognition. A steering committee in London that combined Somali expertise and leadership with British know-how and experience worked in close collaboration with an interim council in Somaliland. Local businesses in Somaliland took full responsibility for rehabilitating the government-donated dilapidated old-school building that was in fact home to over 500 returned Somali refugees. Somalis in Sweden provided 750 chairs and tables; Kuwait-based Somalis sent computers. In the project's second year, the Somaliland Forum, a cyberspace-based global network of Somalis formed taskforces to tackle specific elements, raised money, maintained email groups and hosted real-time e-conferences" (AFFORD, 2000: 10)

For a 'nation' like Somaliland that lacks international recognition the setting up of a national university is clearly of great practical and symbolic importance. Where political institutions lack international legitimacy a university stands for much more than a seat of learning. It embodies the nascent will of the nation and adds to the weight of claims for national recognition. More

practically, a university provides training and education that will hopefully produce skilled people willing to work for the good of the nation. Ultimately it may provide employment opportunities for those educated Somalis who have migrated and were the force behind the university's establishment. The Hargeisa example also demonstrates the power of common identity within diaspora. Somaliland is very much an 'imagined community' and it is the diaspora that is leading the consolidation of this vision. Such collaboration and activism is made possible by the technologies of globalisation, which most commentators analyse with respect to large scale financial interactions or inter-personal communications. The Hargeisa example shows how sophisticated networking between organisations across the globe can bring about tangible developmental benefits in a form of 'globalisation from below'.

A related element of political activity in diaspora is around democratisation and human rights. As some states have entered progressive legitimacy crises they have tended to clamp down on political dissent which can escalate in to violence and murder. In turn this sets up waves of out-migration either as people flee the potential risk of persecution or leave as formal political refugees. While far from perfect their diasporic location may permit them the political space to lobby against repressive regimes; a space which is flatly denied to them at home. For example, current media activity against the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe is being orchestrated from South London and has, allegedly, been supported by the US and British governments. Similarly, during the early years of Jerry Rawlings' rule in Ghana a number of left activists were exiled to London from where they launched anti-PNDC campaigns. In neither case are we arguing for the inherent veracity and purity of these political campaigns, but to make the point that given domestic repression they are only possible from a diasporic location. Indeed, one could argue further that given the geographical and political closeness of the diaspora to the centres of global decision-making in London, Paris, New York and Washington it should be better placed to lobby for changes in development policy towards the continent. So, in addition to supporting African-based civil society movements and political parties the diaspora could bring a more informed political voice to policy-makers in Europe and North America.

The idealisation and romanticisation of home in part underpins the series of pan-Africanist discourses of the last century. However, a striking difference is that in pan-Africanist discourses the 'homeland' is not a discrete nation or nation-state, but an entire continent. In some cases this has been attacked as an essentialist understanding of Africa as home, because it implied that there was some unique essence that united all the people of this vast continent, whether there or in exile. Trying to capture these various understandings of Africa amongst the diaspora is a massive task (Fryer, 1984; Magubane, 1987; Gilroy, 1993a/b; Howe, 1998; Ackah, 1999) and well beyond the purview of this article. The key point we wish to make is that as an ideological discourse and political movement, pan-Africanism was largely a product of diaspora.

As Magubane notes pan-Africanism was a challenge to white supremacy and linked struggles in the UK and America with de-colonisation movements in Africa. Magubane argues that the experience of racism in diaspora generated this form of consciousness because there was a lower sense of rootedness and less social support structures compared with Africa. That is, "Pan-Africanism was one way in which these experiences (of racial exploitation) were translated into terms understandable to people who, because of their experience in diaspora, had been deprived of common traditions, value systems and institutional forms" (1987: 128). The key players of early pan-Africanist movements were elite educated and activist intellectuals as opposed to academics. Even these early movements were infused with problems of strategy, vision and

constituency with, for example, Garvey appealing aggressively to working class blacks and Du Bois attempting more phased reform of key institutions.

It is difficult to assess the concrete effects of pan-Africanist ideas and activities, but they clearly influenced the thinking of a generation of African leaders who were preparing their nations for independence around the time of the Second World War. As Magubane (1987: 135) states by the time Du Bois died "the movement for Pan-Africanism had returned to Africa and had become a profound ideology for continental unity". When African countries gained independence they soon established the Organisation of African Unity which, for better or worse, has worked towards continental integration and a shared response to Africa's marginalisation (Ackah, 1999).

While the formal support for pan-Africanism has waned, there is still a strong, if implicit, belief among many working for development in Africa that certain responses to underdevelopment must be dealt with on a continental, or at least regional, basis. Some of these remain true to the spirit of radical Pan-Africanism such as the numerous campaigns for reparations aimed at compensating Africa for the damage caused primarily by the slave trade, but more generally due to exploitation by the west. Other efforts are less confrontational and work through existing organisational structures. For example, the African Commission on Human Rights argues for the recognition of Africa's unique history in any formulation of rights legislation. This involves acknowledgement of the damaging effects of colonialism and the ways in which African societies are divided along multiple ethnic lines. A final example is an initiative called the National Summit on Africa which is a US-based organisation which aims to educate Americans about Africa and to "further strengthen, energize and mobilize a broad and diverse support for Africa in the United States" ([www.africasummit.org/about/mission.htm](http://www.africasummit.org/about/mission.htm)). One key part of this involves lobbying the US government for an enhanced aid budget, but the list of corporate sponsors and high profile supporters, such as Oprah Winfrey, points to an agenda of investment-led development and the privatisation of aid (Martin, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have seen that the activities of the African diaspora contributes to development in both formal and informal ways. A diasporic analysis brings new actors to the fore and challenges our accepted notions about political territory and cultural belonging. As such, diasporas represent a form of 'globalisation from below' in which 'small' players, as opposed to mega-corporations, make use of the opportunities offered by globalisation. In many senses this is a form of resistance in that the subaltern groups creatively explore and exploit the interstices of a global economy. However, we should avoid over-celebrating and romanticising this condition as Johnson-Odim (2000: 51) warns us.

"People become a part of a diaspora either because they voluntarily migrate or because they are forcibly relocated. Voluntary migration, however, is not as 'clean' as it may first appear - that is, people may often leave 'voluntarily' because of *violent forces*"

For some, mainly those privileged by gender and class, can flourish in the diaspora and make use of the multiple connections in place and around the globe. However, not all migrants are so fortunate and not everybody, indeed only a small minority, have been able to leave Africa to secure a better standard of living. For the vast majority the migration of others is their best chance of securing a precarious livelihood.

All the signs are there that such a diffuse form of political economy will become increasingly important as neo-liberalism, with or without a human face, generates greater exclusion and higher barriers to entry. It is highly likely that with deepening globalisation there will be a series of contradictory forces at work. On one hand, the mobility of people and their ability to communicate and transact has increased so that the developmental potential of diaspora is likely to expand. On the other hand, social polarisation and economic and political exclusion means that there will be increased pressure on the Third World's poor to seek their well-being elsewhere. However, the movement of 'illegitimate' people is likely to be curtailed through restrictive immigration and citizenship procedures. Hence, the activities and lifestyles of diasporic communities may become an ever more important role model for the future.

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