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More than a tribesman: the New African diasporan identity

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Abstract

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Keywords

Diaspora, African identity, immigration

Cover Page Footnote

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More Than a Tribesman: The New African Diasporan Identity

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Current global levels of immigration stand at about 300 million persons; of these, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) estimates that 30 million Africans are in the diaspora. The contributions of diasporic Africans to their communities and to the cultural experiences of the United States are multimodal. To their domiciles, they contribute economically, empowering their families to become more active and less dependent on the state, while transmitting ideas about democracy and better government. At the same time, they contribute to their adopted homelands through social and cultural activities, cultural festivals, and other indicators of cultural connectedness to their motherlands. The African diaspora, of necessity, has to negotiate an identity that finds a home between the residual tribal identities derived from the African national identity, to the often incompatible African American slave history experience. This paper argues that the modern African diasporan has an identity different from the African American one; that they adapt to western modernity but are excluded from the mainstream American and also African American experience. The paper suggests that the diasporan African constructs a new, less-tribal identity with other nationals and African diaspora members. Further, the diasporan is more likely to overcome negative cultural traditions and the associated destructive tribal identity and contribute to the possibility of a new, post-tribal identity while highlighting the best of the African cultural experiences.

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1. Introduction: Borders and Border Studies

Borders, border studies and borderlands have gained prominence, especially in the past quarter century. This importance reflects the essence of the modern-day nation, which is conditioned upon the exclusion of those outside a geographical area, while extending certain privileges and responsibilities to those within the demarcated borders of the state. In the literary sense, the idea of borders, borderlands and border studies are

more complex and nuanced, reflecting the recognition of separation of individuals by physical borders as well as borders not as cartographic divisions, but also as conceptual, ideational.

Borders are often defined as "a place of encounter" (Vila, 2003, p. 236), as "hindrances to progressive politics and therefore...as regressive and in a way, as political illusions associated with the cartographic legacy of measuring location on the basis of geographical distance and territorial jurisdiction" (Paasi, 2011, p. 20). At the same time, even as borders have been a feature of human society—be they language, cartographic or ideational, they are coming under constant and renewed attacks by modernity.

Although borders are intended to keep the "other" outside of demarcated geographical spaces (complete with the benefits and responsibilities such as citizenship) that is the states they denote, there are developments that further complicate but challenge our traditional understanding of borders. Among these are globalization and immigration. Paasi (2011, p. 13) notes as much, arguing that "the perpetually increasing number of state borders, their changing roles and functions in the globalizing world and the international pressure existing in each border area" make political borders - the more traditional borders—complex objects of research.

This research especially concerns itself with the consequences to the ideological borders, crossed by individuals especially in pursuit of socio-political and economic benefits in the realm of the "other." It is evident that globalization has made it possible for individuals to cross borders—especially physical and ideological; the research is especially interested in the experience of the "border crossers," that is, immigrants. It does acknowledge that states do feel "threatened by the crossing of the borders" but also that "people living at borders may also perceive such crossings as a menace to their national identities" (Vila, 2003, p. 320).

The importance of borders and crossing borders cannot be gainsaid, neither can the evident disconnect between the border, the nation, and the different identities be gainsaid. Paasi (2011) reflects that there are about 200 states, 300 land borders between them, and about 600-800 cultural groupings or purported nations in the world. Crossing borders is especially pertinent to this research, because upon crossing borders, the migrants have to establish a new and (or) aggregated identity. In contrast, it is possible that the identity with which the 'border crossers' identify is reinforced once they cross the border.

2. Borders, immigration and identity:

One of the most contentious issues in the conception and negotiation of a national identity in many Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is the place of immigrants in society. The United States is one example, where the issue of individuals of Latin American origin (specifically Mexicans) has radically divided pro- and anti-immigration positions. Further afield, the riots in France in 2005 and 2010 were an illustration of the perceptions of French citizens' (especially those of North African origin) exclusion from mainstream French society. According to the German Chancellor, Germany's "multi-kulti" (BBC News Europe, 2013) – multiculturalism – is perceived to have failed, and left approximately 16 million mainly Turkish immigrants to Germany culturally, economically and otherwise alienated: Unwelcome Germans. Nonetheless, most major economies have welcomed foreigners, sometimes grudgingly, as students, immigrants, temporary or permanent workers. The question of how such foreigners integrate into the host societies is worthy of study.

Their numbers vary. Their contribution, in the form of remittances, to the African continent's economy and the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of individual countries varies equally. IFAD estimates that there are over 30 million people in the diaspora, most of them located on the African continent (intraregional migration) (IFAD, 2014), and they contribute up to \$40 billion to the African economy. The World Bank estimates that "members of the African diaspora sent home \$60 billion in remittances in 2012" (World Bank, 2013).

It is not the intention of this research to claim that the diasporic experience is the same for all Africans in the diaspora. The experiences vary, much as the geographical coordinates, historical circumstances, national and regional differences manifest, origins and destinations differ, and traditional ethnic identity is frequently, continuously deconstructed and reconstructed. A West African, multi-lingual, diasporic citizen migrating to the United States has a different experience from a West African citizen from a former French colony, migrating to France, or Germany, for that matter, or a citizen of the former Belgian Congo immigrating to the United States. The language, history, folklore and opportunities that are colonial legacies—for example, the Anglophone former colonies—may influence the choice of destination, the ability and level to which an immigrant integrates into the chosen new homeland.

The historical circumstances, the construction of the pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary national identity, and how this manifests itself in the diasporic context are critical to understand how Africans construct their identity—or how their identity is constructed by others—in the diaspora. The place of tribe—the primary identity for most

Africans—has the potential to be replicated, or subsumed into other identities upon migration. For the reasons cited previously, it is helpful to examine the construction of the diasporic identity in a country with aggregate cultural experiences and a popular destination for African immigrants, rather than consider multiple states with different histories, cultural traits and languages found in Europe.

African diaspora and diasporic identity can therefore be different, based on the history and patterns of migration, the length of stay, and even the construction of the diasporic identity. Because the cultural practices and conception of identity is different even at the migrant community sources, it is disingenuous to claim that the diasporic identity and experience is similar for all Africans, regardless of where they migrate to. Further, because of the difference in ethnic origin, and the dearth of studies on the adaptation of the diasporic African migrants to their new countries versus their origin, it is not clear that all African diaspora members in any one country have a homogeneous experience. Therefore, this paper especially examines the diasporic identity of Africans in the United States, with the caveat that the identity and experience differ.

3. Constructing the African Diasporic Identity:

The African diasporic identity has much to do with the immigrant's adopted homeland as it does with their origin. The identity bridges the originating past (tribe) and the contemporary / future (diasporan) living in the adopted homeland, where the importance of the tribe is somewhat diminished. Gulliver defines the tribe as "any group of people which is distinguished by its members and by others, on the basis of cultural-regional criteria" (Gulliver, 1969, p. 24). The tribe enshrines the basic identity and kinship ties of the African person. However, Gulliver demonstrates that the tribe is not just some unitary, static basis for identity. Gulliver restates Parkin's argument that among urban people, tribe takes on category, for instance divisions by tribe and class, with more educated persons being less amenable to the tribe and tribal loyalties (ibid). Practically every African—even those in the diaspora—can identify with a tribe, whether or not they are strict adherents to its collective cultural practices. The tribe is therefore largely inseparable from the African's identity.

The tribe, as the unit for identity, has its uses but also imposes constraints in the ability of such societies to organize on a modern scale. Because of the modern organization of the polity, the state has often appropriated tribe to further the goals of the state, for example, of resource allocation. The permanence of tribe is truly a marvel in the construction of most African societies; even education and socio-economic

improvements rarely change the concept of tribal membership. Gulliver explains this, noting that

virtually all urban dwellers in East Africa continue to maintain close links with the rural, tribal areas. Very many are but temporarily in town; and those whose urban careers are more prolonged, even to the expectation of permanence, are still caught up in the pervasive tribal categories, being influenced by them and taking advantage of them when necessary and useful. (ibid, p. 25)

The notion of social and economic organization by tribe and tribal identity is not necessarily unique or confined to Africa. As Gulliver notes, "in its simplest form, one could compare tribalism to the situation in a city like Boston" (ibid, p. 26) with its ethnic neighbourhoods' divisions; "the blacks in Roxbury, the Italians in the North End, the Irish in South Boston, the Jews in...Brookline, the WASPs in the Wellesley suburbs." Gulliver notes that in Africa, there are about 2,000 such neighbourhoods, with different tribes, languages, dialects, culture, traditions and physical features separating these groups (ibid). This, then, is the conceptual identity that the tribesman brings, when s/he joins in the diaspora through transnational immigration.

Global immigration, according to Tetley and Pupilampu (2005), "witnessed an unparalleled intensification of, and expansion in, transnational migration" (p. 3). Immigration to the United States by Africans has mostly taken place in two major ways: Voluntary and involuntary (Elnur, 2002). For the most part, as Arthur (2008) notes, the initial migration was through slave trade: "During the transatlantic slave trade, about 10 to 20 million Africans were forcefully transported to the US in what is now described as the genesis of the black African diaspora in North and South America" (p. 2).

Arthur points out further that between 1900 and 1950, only 31,000 Africans migrated to the US, but over the period of 1820 to 2000, close to 700,000 Africans were legally admitted to the United States. During the same period, Arthur notes that there were a total of 9 million, 17 million and 38 million legal immigrants admitted from Asia, Canada and Mexico and Europe respectively (ibid). These are constitutive of the African diaspora in the United States.

It is important to define the African diaspora. According to Shain and Barth (2003), diaspora is:

a people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious

homeland whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control. Diaspora members identify themselves, or are identified by others—inside and outside their homeland—as part of the homeland's national community, and as such are often called upon to participate, or are entangled, in homeland-related affairs. (p. 452).

Pasura (2010) uses Scheffer's classification of diaspora members as "core members, members by choice, marginal members and dormant members" (p. 105). Some of the classifications are somewhat troublesome: It is not clear if all individuals with their origins in Africa should be considered to be Diasporic Africans—even the African American groups that preceded the second wave of African immigration. Indeed, Tettey and Puplampu (2005) point to this problem of conceptualization, noting the difficulty of determining who qualifies to be designated as African diaspora (in Canada). They write of a "paucity of literature addressing the complexities implied by these contestations. Indeed, not all Africans are Black, nor do all Black people consider themselves Africans," (p. 4).

This notion of the inseparability of place and identity acquires even more meaning when one considers Echeruo's (1999) argument that "the members of a diaspora must have once had a home of their own, a nation if you like, but nevertheless a covenanted forever home, a site from which they may be (for a while) excluded, but which is theirs, inalienably. This home, this land is not important only as a physical place; it is even more important as the source, root, final location for a determinable lineage" (p. 3).

The USA presents an interesting case for study in the development of the African diaspora identity. This is especially because the USA was not a colonial power and apart from the first interaction with Africa in the way of the Transatlantic slave trade, leading to the growth of the African American community in the Americas, there was little contact with the continent in the way of migration until after independence. Africa generally interacted with European powers; this was facilitated better by distance and the constant contact between Europe and Africa. Africans re-established contact, communication and travel through higher education, with reciprocal interest by the US in Africa's natural and agricultural resources (Arthur, 2008).

Who constructs Africa's diasporic identity? The sources of such identity are wide and varied. For instance, Wright (2004) writes that "most western mainstream (and even some academic) depict[ions of] a primitive, homogeneous peoples who are "underdeveloped" in more than an economic sense" (p. 27). Wright further points out how the African

identity—even the Diasporic Identity—has been constructed from external sources - through Hegelian construct. Wright writes that, "because Africa is not Europe, and in Hegel's determination, not the least bit European, it is not reasonable, it is irrational.

The relation between race and the nation is made clear...(thus) determining Africans to be inferior to Europeans by virtue of being stateless and further suggesting enslavement as the only means for Africans to achieve sentience and subjectivity (Wright, 2004, p. 34). This identity construction by the "other," rather than the "self" is widely documented. For example, Elabor-Idemudia (2001) writes that "Euro-American education continues to distort, misappropriate, and misinterpret African people's lives and experiences by using their blackness as a political metaphor for identifying them with the disadvantaged and dispossessed" (p. 234).

It is also important to interrogate the process of "constructing" the African diaspora. Who is included in the concept of African diaspora? Does this reference also include the African Americans in the United States, most of the Caribbean populations with ethnic and genetic origins in Africa, naturalized French citizens who have known no home other than France, and numerous other groups of individuals who may trace their origins to Africa (for example, certain sub-groups on the Indian continent), or does diaspora lend itself to a shorter time period? In that case, who constructs the diaspora, and does diaspora then take on a larger meaning, over and above the mere geographical origin, and become constructed as an identity separate from color or racial characteristics?

Within the African diaspora, are there distinctions between the members of the diaspora, and if so, what are these distinctions? For instance, do refugees, legal migrants, illegal immigrants and other groups form separate identities in the diaspora, or are these *means to diaspora* inconsequential once the populations are no longer within their geographic origin? Do diasporic communities adhere less, more, or just about the same with their cultural traditions, or does the new geographic location dilute aspects of the identity co-located with geography? Even more importantly, to what extent does the African diaspora assume the identity of the newly adopted home, retain their identity based on their country/territory of origin, or do they form a separate identity that is a mix of both the "old" and the "new"?

It is helpful to also compare how other diasporas are constructed, in relation to the African diasporas. For example, if it was the case that African Americans are part of the African diaspora, would the same be said for the non-native Americans who emigrated from Europe and other distant lands? Is the question of diaspora one of constructing the "other"

based on a criteria for exclusion? It is clear the concept of membership of diaspora is far from resolved and this is one of the important issues in teasing out the African diaspora identity and determining how identity is formed, and whether the African diasporic groups are more like their communities of origin (with the attendant tribal divisions), or whether a different, more nationalistic or Pan-African identity is formed once individuals are removed from their homeland.

Is there then, an African diaspora and whom does this diaspora encompass? To speak of an African diaspora makes a number of assumptions. It might be useful to review such assumptions in the context of the concept and determine whether there is a conflation of terms, and whether understanding the terms lends us to a better understanding of Africans in the diaspora.

4. African Diaspora in the US: Authentic African Americans?

Diasporas are created through processes of immigration. It is evident that there are millions of Africans who flock to different foreign countries for different reasons. From available data on immigration from Africa, especially to the United States, the numbers are meagre at best. One of the largest episodes of African migration to the United States, specifically, occurred between the 14th to 18th century through slavery; it is not a stretch to argue that record-keeping was quite poor and, therefore, the numbers of the first wave of migrants are not known.

What might be considered the second wave of immigration by Africans to the United States—and western nations, for that matter—occurred largely after the 1950s. It is important to recall that for most of the latter quarter of the 19th and early half of the 20th centuries, most of Africa was under some form of European colonial rule. Even after the uptick in migration, there are countries, for example Germany, that have more “diasporic members” in the United States than the entire African continent, the two World Wars notwithstanding.

For example, it is instructive that there is no African country featured in the estimates of the Top 20 Diaspora Groups in the United States in 2011 (Migration Policy Institute 2011). African diaspora members come to the United States through immigration, sometimes permanent, sometimes temporary. The Migration Policy Institute, in their computation of their data, defines “immigrant” as people residing in the United States who were not US citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), certain legal non-immigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status, and persons illegally residing in the United States” (ibid).

Figure 1. Immigration from Africa to US

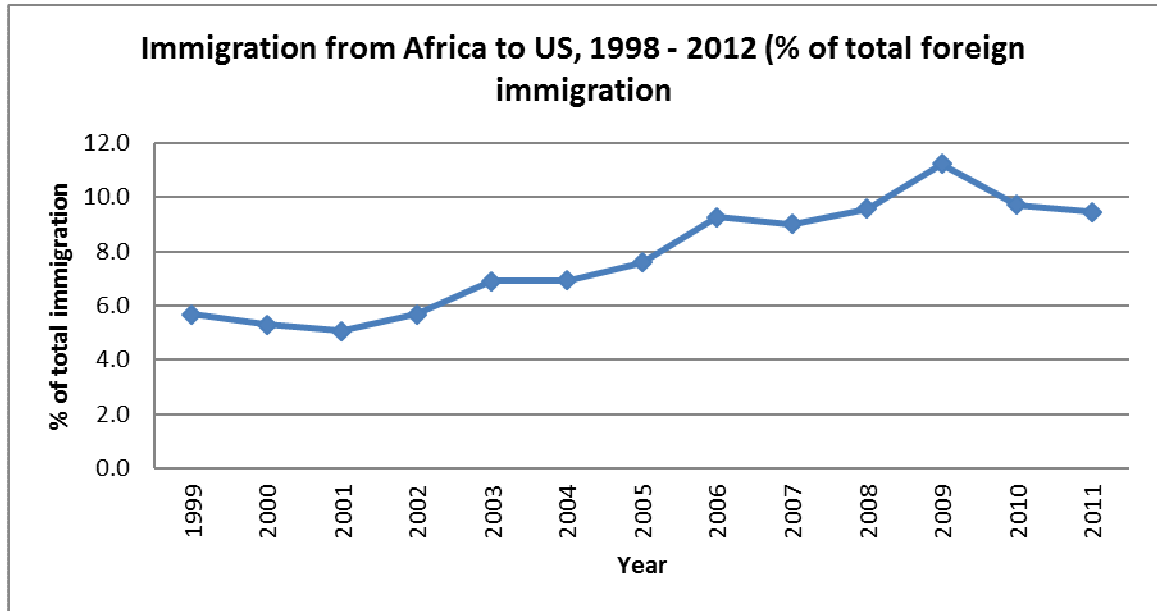
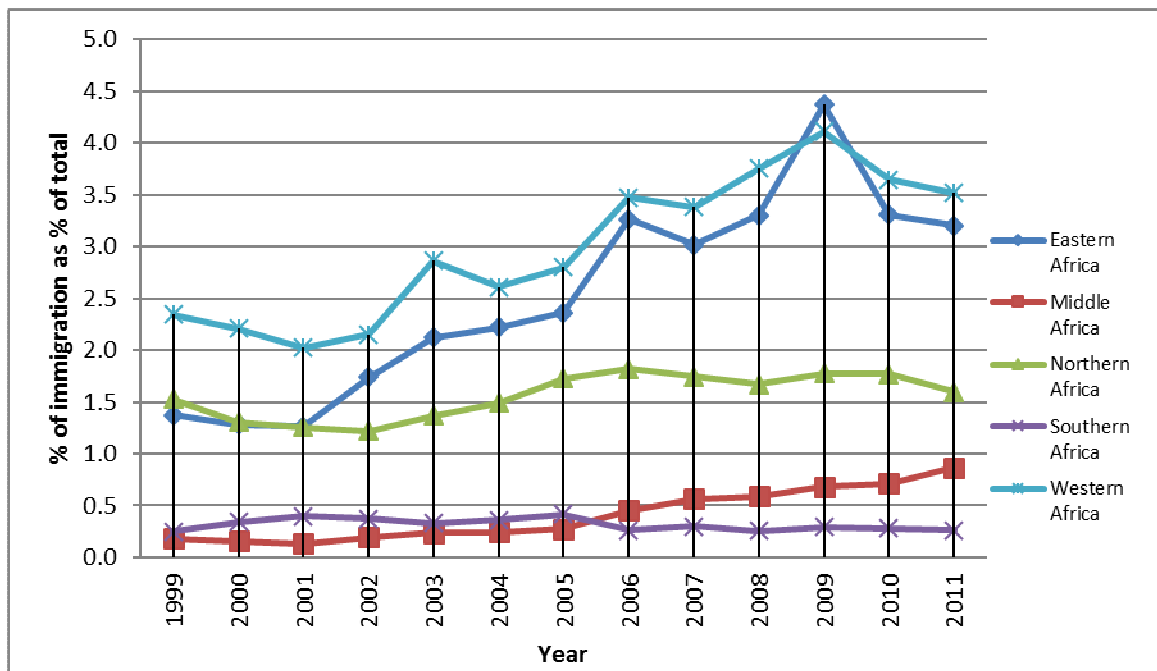
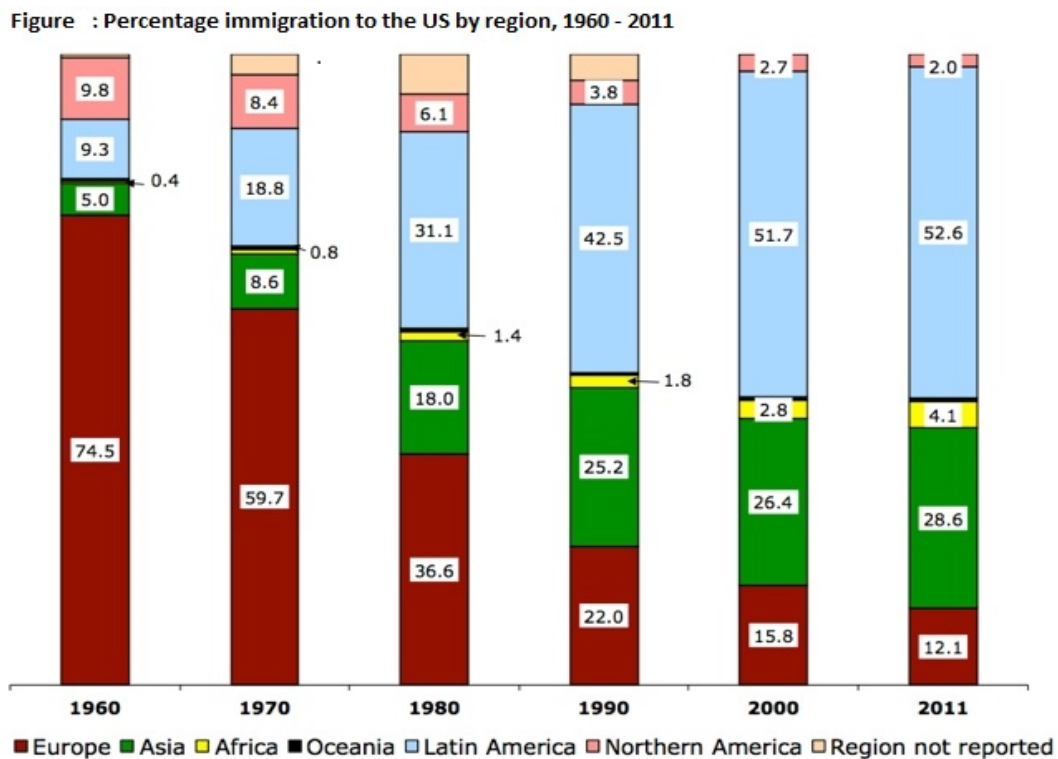


Figure 2: Immigration from different sub regions of Africa



Comparatively, the average immigration to the United States by African groups has been quite marginal, as shown by Figure 3 below (Migration Policy Institute, 2011). For instance, in the decades between 1980 and 1990, the percentage immigration increase was only 0.2 percent of total immigration to the United States.

Figure 3. Immigration to the US



In terms of actual numbers, the groups of African immigrants to the United States have been low both as a percentage of the total and as a percentage of the total US population. It is therefore plausible that their visibility in terms of cultural identity, especially given the diversity of the countries from which they come, may be limited by the numbers. Still, it is important to examine how these populations adapt and conceive of their identity, and whether on average, they are more like their origin, or like the destination countries.

Table 1. African migration to the US (raw, and percentages of total) (Migration Policy Institute 2011)

	2000	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total	31,107,889	37,547,315	38,059,555	37,960,773	38,517,104	39,955,673	40,377,757
Africa	881,300	1,375,676	1,419,317	1,435,996	1,492,785	1,606,914	1,664,414
Africa %	2.83	3.66	3.73	3.78	3.88	4.02	4.12

Among the African immigrants to the United States, about a third of immigrants come from West Africa, with East African immigrants to the US making up 27 percent. A breakdown of the numbers further reveals that 13.1% of the 1.4 million immigrants are Nigerian, 9.6% Egyptian, 9.5% Ethiopian, 7.4% Ghanaian and 5.7% Kenyan. These five countries alone account for almost half of African immigrants (45.3%) (Terrazas, 2013). It is also important to remember that these numbers can be misleading: Individuals who may be in illegal immigration status may not be visible, therefore making the numbers unreliable.

5. Home away from Home: Adapting to Modernity

For purposes of this paper, I will partially adopt the definition of diaspora that is used by Lawal (2008). Lawal (2008) defines an African diaspora as "any group of Africans and descendants of African ancestors who are alien residents, expellees, refugees, expatriates, immigrants, or ethnic minorities sharing spaces with other racial groups outside Africa" (p. 202). Lawal identifies African Americans as members of the African diaspora, arguing that "African Americans are largely descendants of ancestors who were forcibly dispersed from Africa to North America, where they retained a collective memory, vision, or myths about their original homeland (Africa), its history and achievements." Here, I argue that perhaps the conflation that the paper alludes to elsewhere in this paper begins to appear, without sufficient substantiation because it would appear that by becoming citizens post-emancipation, they do not fit the narrow criteria that he identifies.

Historically, Gordon and Anderson (1999) note, the concept of diaspora was not only used to refer to peoples of African descent, but to

Blackness or negroness: that is, a phenotypically constructed and ascribed racial identity indicative of sub-Saharan African territorial origin and simultaneously biological difference from lighter-skinned populations. Outside of "racial" Blackness, for these

intellectuals membership in the Black world was determined by common experiences of racial terror and marginalization based on internationally held racist ideologies of Black Inferiority. (p. 285)

The African diaspora identity is often conflated with that of the African American experience. The purpose of this paper is not to determine whether African Americans are indeed part of the African diaspora, given the rather different path that they took to the Americas, it bears mention that scholarship often discusses Africans in the diaspora in the same context of African Americans. For example, citing W. E. B. Dubois' "double consciousness," which advocated for African Americans to visit the African continent and discover their roots and identity, Lawal (2008), for example, writes that "the thoughts, ideas, lectures and publications of the exponents of Pan-Africanism motivated and are still motivating African Americans and other Africans in the diaspora to assert their African identity with confidence by maintaining regular cultural contacts with Africa" (ibid).

It is even less clear whether, according to such scholars, the diasporic identity in the US of the African American and the migrant African is similar; it is clear from other studies and perceptions that they are not. Indeed, the mostly American-inspired "black consciousness movement" (sometimes identified as Pan-Africanism) is seen to have contributed to the civil-rights movement and eventual decolonization of Africa (Lawal, 2008, p. 203).

The variability of the African diasporic identity is demonstrated in geographic locations other than United States. Writing about the Nicaraguan-Creole Black diasporic identity, Gordon and Anderson (1999) note that "Creoles definitely had a Black diasporic identity. There were Creoles who identified as Black and saw a relation between themselves and others in the Black diaspora, especially Jamaican and U.S. Blacks. Some claimed African origins for the group" (p. 285) and punctuated with attendant myths that mixed history and folklore about their origin. This demonstrates that the African diaspora cannot be assumed to have had the same experiences, or to be currently going through similar experiences and hence the need to narrow down the specifics of the diasporic group being discussed.

One of this paper's arguments is that there is a perception that African diasporic identity is uniform across African American and African-originating migrants. This is not the case; the diasporic identity perceived by the African American diaspora is unitary, considers the African experience as one cultural experience, and the African migrants who form

the newer diaspora appreciate the gender, societal, socio-cultural, linguistic, ethnic and national divisions. This view is supported by Palmer (2003), who argues that "the very term, 'African diaspora' must be used with great caution, underscoring the point that until recent times, those people who resided on the African continent defined themselves solely in accordance with their ethnic group.

Furthermore, it is we who homogenize these people by characterizing them as Africans (Palmer, 2000, p. 57). Jackson and Cothran (2003) illustrate the difference in the African diasporic identity, citing Becker's (1967) research that shows that "in a relationship study of Black Africans and Black Americans on a college campus...there is a basic incompatibility between Africans and Black Americans that leads to mutual rejection" (p. 580). Various other research supports this position and allows for the position that, if these two diasporas are different, the paper ought to concentrate on the African migrant diaspora.

6. African diaspora: Recreating or Overcoming the Schisms?

The (modern) African diasporic identity is therefore a construct; it is separate from that of the African American and may be different from individuals from one ethnic group and country to another. Identity is often inextricably interlinked with cultural icons, artefacts, social and cultural practices and other vignettes that denote such culture. Fenner (2008), for example, argues that "only with an abundance of cultural artefacts can a political entity such as a state or a nation maintain its own identity, especially contrasted with that of its neighbor or whatever sovereign political power may control it" (p. 245).

Cain, Lachicotte, Holland, and Skinner (1998) concur, writing that

cultural artifacts gain a kind of force by connection to their social and cultural contexts, to their figured worlds. These artifacts and people's relationship to them (and) their capacity to shift the perceptual, cognitive, affective, and practical frame of activity - (that) makes cultural artifacts so significant in human life. (p. 63)

It is no wonder then, that some of the most visible expressions of cultural identity are designed to be visible, to remind not only us, but also the "other" of the separateness of the diasporic members.

One of the best examples of the negotiation of diasporic identity, and one that demonstrates the complexity of identity formation for African migrants in the US, is illustrated by Arthur (2008). Writing specifically about the Ghanaian migrant and diasporic identity formation experience,

he begins by defining identity as "an individual's sense of belonging. It is the product of self, the social environment, culture, race, genetics, physical characteristics and kinship connections" (p. 76). Immigrants' experiences, the physical distance from home, and the potential for isolation often magnifies the knowledge of the absence of these connections, and therefore drives immigrants to seek out members of their diasporic identity. Arthur further illustrates the difficulty of identity formation, noting that, although Ghanaians in the United States

may view themselves as a common group from the same national origin, there is no single factor that has been pivotal in shaping the self-identity of the immigrants. Cultural and ethnic pluralism or the co-existence of multiple identities is what describes most Ghanaian immigrants. Self-references and ethnic identification stress first a Ghanaian national cultural heritage, and second, an African-centered continental heritage. In addition, cultural and ethnic identity among Ghanaians is also expressed in terms of ethnic descent (ibid).

These cultural identities are often expressed through language and through festivals, although even individuals from different ethnic groups do adopt festivals from other groups and use them as expression of their diasporic identity.

Africans in the diaspora actively engage in and seek out opportunities that allow them to build and further the diasporic identity. It is instructive too, that the diasporic identity-formation often leads to occupational, economic, entrepreneurial and social outcomes for the groups of migrants. The reverse is also true: Entrepreneurial activities of the economic kind often lead to manifestation of the cultural artifacts and practices in common space, that is, as festivals or other gatherings. For example, Stoller (2003) captures this relationship, writing that "to maximize their economic opportunities to market Afrocentricity, West African traders in New York have constructed long-distance trade networks throughout the United States. These networks enable the traders to follow the cycle of African American professional and cultural festivals" (p. 83).

Here, we see not only a co-optation of West African products into the larger African-American cultural experience (albeit imagined), but also specific actions that seek out the furthering of this formed identity. The African diasporic identity and experience can then be subsumed into a unitary experience, because sometimes the recipients of the products and experiences may not distinguish the source/origin of the festivals and

products. Stoller articulates this, writing that "in the spring, summer and fall of 1994, for example, a crew of four Nigerian traders, Hausas all, spent much of their time circulating among African American festivals in the East, South and Midwest of the United States" (ibid).

Evidently, even though the traders have very specific African tribal and cultural origins, their activities created an aggregate "African" experience, however unrepresentative and disingenuous that experience may be, through sale of "African" merchandise. And they succeed. The adaptation of the African diasporic identity and its artefacts often manifests itself, even in African American communities. Stoller (2003), for instance, writes that

five years ago, brightly coloured hand-woven Kente cloth, brimless Kufi hats, earthy mud cloths from Ghana and Senegal and bone-toned cowry shell jewellery appeared to be a nostalgic way of dressing among African Americans. Instead of a short-term fad, these elements have formed an exciting new trend - the Afrocentric lifestyle. (p. 80)

In view of the fact that the migrants are already uprooted from their traditional domains and are contending with a different set of social, economic, cultural and geographical opportunities and challenges, it is plausible to imagine this as the formation of a transnational, cross-cultural space. Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer (2004) identify these spaces in which the African diaspora members function as "transnational world." Jackson *et al* suggest that transnational cultures encompass

all those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers...occupy(ing) its space momentarily...or for a lifetime. They may have residual affinities to the transnational identities of earlier migrant generations or emergent identities as a result of their own current transnational experiences. (p. 3)

This research's key argument, therefore, is that the African migrant who comes into the diaspora, especially in the United States, becomes a multi-national citizen. They become more than a product of their tribe, their sending nation. Indeed, they become sojourners, navigating a new identity in a complex, modern, western society, a society that already has conceptions about the identity of migrants, of Blacks. They navigate the contested identity of the "Black experience," alienated from the African American experience and also from the mundane issues of poor governance and societal ills in their original domicile, embracing the

benefits of a modern, western, democratic society. The new diasporan acquires new economic power, driven by opportunity unavailable in their domicile of origin.

In their original domicile, the new African diasporans acquire “absent power;” they gain respect by virtue of the geography of place, which is realized upon return to the domicile. The expectation is that they have resources that are often scarce in the home-country. The new diasporans have the ability to influence social, economic and political activities in their homeland, due to the increased economic ability, facilitated by exchange rates that enable meagre incomes in the west to translate into potent economic resources.

At the same time, the new African diasporan experiences isolation, given the difference in the lifestyle compared with their original domicile—possible alienation in a foreign land and the need for community, which is often absent in its traditional form, one that the new African diasporan is used to. As a result, the propensity to seek out sympathetic community—one that understands African traditions in the context of the new world—increases, and often leads to the perpetuation of the African traditions as a way to retain kinship, and also because it is one of the most common areas of interaction amongst the new African diasporas. In doing so, they achieve what Jules-Rosette (1979) characterizes as “creative cultural combinations of old and new that have influenced the larger social, political and economic spheres of the societies in which they occur.”

By their presence in more homogenous communities such as those in the United States, in which their identity approaches minority status, new African diasporas are better insulated from the tribal and ethnic divisions that are characteristic of not only their societies, but also the leadership of such countries. Post-colonial, modern diasporic identities have been and are in the process of being formed, and Wangari Maathai (2009), renowned Nobel laureate, explains that “most Africans didn’t understand or relate to the nation-states created for them by the colonial powers; they understood, related to, and remain attached to the physical and psychological boundaries of their micro-nations” (p. 184).

This attachment has been utilized, and often abused in the formation of the modern African state, so that for the most part, even new African diasporas remain anchored in the experience of the nation-state. Because “African leaders have repeatedly used their (citizens’) identification with a micro-nation to divide their citizens from each other and control them, to the detriment of the larger macro-nation” (Maathai, 2009, p. 185) there is no reason to expect that the diasporas, prior to their migration, should conduct themselves differently in the absence of compelling identity renegotiation in the new homeland.

Even as the new diasporas acquire new identity (for example, becoming members of the Black community) with reinforcement of the same through mainstream discourses on race and discrimination, the prominence of the tribal identity, which is quite visible in the domiciles of origin, is watered down. It becomes quite an exhilarating experience to find a countryman, much less a tribesman, due to the limitations of geography. For instance, speaking a common national language has a bigger unifying quality and subsumes the distinctions that would otherwise magnified in the country of origin. Additionally, in negotiation of their identity and contesting the disadvantage that it invokes, it is no longer possible to leverage the previous strategies that saw Africans “invoke(d) trusteeship, tribe and indirect rule” (Power, 2010, p. 29) to fight the sense of marginalization. Given these circumstances, the previously-shunned national identity takes on new meaning.

However, even as the ethnic schisms appear to diminish in the diasporic geographical spaces, the cultural practices do not necessarily diminish or lose their prominence. Prior research has shown adherence to traditional practices amongst diasporic Africans, even when they are removed from the context and geographical location where such practices are prevalent. Take, for example, the practice of payment of bridewealth upon marriage. Guyer (1981) discusses the traditional role of bridewealth thus:

in many places, bridewealth is still a substantial item in budgets and has a value which varies with others in the same economy ... bridewealth in Lesotho may be due to the need to be married to get independent land rights or to the more straightforward need for income to survive, or to the acquisition of rights in children who will be future wage-earners. (p. 116)

7. Conclusions:

The new African diasporan identity in the United States is complex. It features a post-tribal, post-modern African who is forced, by the constraints—or opportunities—of geography, to adapt to their new homeland, to become more economically advanced, differently socialized, appreciative of post-ethnic politics and recognizes the opportunities of cooperation, not conflict. They generally retain the best of the cultural practices within the legal constraints of the new homeland, and due to globalization, have opportunities to contribute to and influence the positive development of their communities. The new African diasporan is

less tribally fractured and can provide the model for the building of positivistic social and political experiences in Africa.

The propagation of the African Diasporic identity—however that may be conceived—finds its genesis in, and is for the most part driven by individuals and the choices they make, for example, immigrating. Immigration decisions are driven by a number of factors, including educational, social, and economic considerations, for example, the pursuit of jobs. Oftentimes, they are also driven by the need to escape conflict, for example, the Somali, Rwandese, Burundian, and Ethiopian refugees who can be found in different parts of the United States. These personal choices are often punctuated by concerted government and collective policies designed to promote Pan-Africanism and to maintain ties with the diaspora. Laval notes this, writing that

the African Union (AU) has maintained the expected contacts with Afro-descendants in the diaspora, through the Sixth Region Initiative. In the process, Afro-descendant institutions have proliferated all over the world to promote African culture and organize unity conferences that draw together in one forum Africans, African Americans, Afro-Latin Americans, Afro-Brazilians, Afro-French and Afro-Caribbeans. Thus they build bridges for cultural, social and economic development (Lawal, 2008, p. 204).

This research concludes that the modern African diasporic identity is pretty much akin to what Gray (2005) describes (generally) of modern diasporas; he argues that they

are obliged to inhabit at least two identities, to speak at least two cultural languages, to negotiate and 'translate' between them. In this way, though they are struggling in one sense at the margins of modernity, they are at the leading edge of what is destined to become the truly representative 'late-modern' experience. They are the products of the cultures of hybridity...these hybrids retain strong links to and identifications with the traditions and places of their 'origin'. But they are without the illusion of any actual 'return' to the past. (p. 361)

Perhaps it is this “new diaspora” that denotes the basic qualities of the new African diasporic individual. They are economically more advanced and have more opportunities for personal, social and economic development. At the same time, the individual adapts better to modernity and its

attendant characteristics, in part due to the social and legal frameworks of the new homeland (for example, legal consequences for multiple-marriages) and in part due to cost-benefit analyses. This “new diaspora” allows the construction of an identity partially anchored in the best (although not always evidently so) traditions of the African community, such as community, but free from the constraints that have plagued the continent—what Bhattacharya (2009) calls the “centripetal forces” driven by the “hundreds of tribes and thus a lot of inward looking, centripetal groups” (p. 101)—and therefore escape the anarchy that has marked the affairs of the continent for several centuries.

Adapting to a different civilization while still maintaining a socio-cultural connection to their origin, largely driven by the experience of being in the larger African (American) diaspora, and appreciating the implications of loss of identity and cultural roots, cognizant of the short history of immigration to the United States, and therefore the cultural and familial roots to Africa, yet economically empowered to an extent that they can influence—indeed create independent economic conditions that will facilitate transformation of African societies—the new diasporic individual stands at a crossroad to bring out the best, not only to their original homeland, but also by sharing the cultural experiences that the host nation (United States) and even the African diaspora therein can benefit from. This is the new, post-tribal, African diasporic identity.

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