

IN SEARCH OF THE DIASPORAS WITHIN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

In the last twenty years, the term diaspora has moved out of its specialist corner, where it referred to a select set of peoples. Today it often appears to be used to refer to any group of migrants and their descendants who maintain a link with their place of origin. African diasporas are now being identified all over the world and they have become the object of considerable academic interest. While the term diaspora is now in vogue for such groups scattered around the globe, it is rarely applied to African populations within Africa. Ironically, within the growing volume of literature on African diasporas, very little of it is concerned with diasporas whose population is based on the continent. Africa is portrayed as a continent which generates diasporas rather than one in which diasporas can be found. Starting from Cohen's typological criteria for identifying diasporas, this article makes a preliminary examination of the literature in search of signs of diaspora formation and to identify particular diasporas within Africa. It argues that despite the long-standing patterns of mobility across Africa, which might be expected to have created diasporas, relatively few migrant groups appear to have established a diasporic identity that persists into second or third generations. This raises many questions about identify formation and the relations between migrants and host societies and states. These can only be addressed through research looking at diaspora formation in Africa; this is no easy task as it is fraught with conceptual, methodological and ethical difficulties.

¹ I am grateful for the comments and suggestions from Robin Cohen, Charles Piot and the three anonymous reviewers of this article. They have helped me greatly as I have revised the text.

INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, the term diaspora has moved out of its specialist corner where it was used with a capital 'D' to refer to a select set of peoples, each of which had been separated from, but connected to, an historical 'homeland' over many generations. This group of historical Diasporas included the Jewish, Greek, and Armenians. Since the 1960s, the term expanded to include other groups who had been scattered across the globe, including Palestinians, Cubans and Indians (Safran, 1991). Most notably the term the African diaspora came into use from the mid 1960s, generally referring to the descendants of the Atlantic slave trade (Alpers, 2001). In recent years, the term has stretched almost to breaking point and often appears to be used to refer to any group of migrants and their descendants who maintain a link with their place of origin. Hence, today it is easy to find references to diaspora from almost any nation: for example, the Moroccan (de Haas, 2007), Chinese (Cheung, 2004; Ma and Cartier, 2003) and Zimbabwean (McGregor, 2007; Bloch, 2008) diasporas.

The expanding definition and academic interest in diasporas has spawned a massive literature across a range of disciplines. The number of articles on diasporas published in social sciences journals from 2003 to date is double the total of the previous five years (1998-2002), which in turn exceeds the total of the previous twenty years. There has been a similar growth in papers on African diasporas.² In 2008 the long standing journal *Diaspora* is being joined by two new journals focusing on African diasporas: this journal *African Diasporas*, and *African and Black Diaspora*.

The argument of this paper is based on a simple observation: in this vast and rapidly expanding literature on African diasporas, very little attention has been paid to African diasporas within the continent. I present some cases of such intra-African diasporas from the literature, but argue that such examples are few and far between. This raises the important questions of whether a) there are diasporas in Africa which have yet to be the focus of research; or, b) diasporas have not tended to be formed within Africa, which begs the further question, why not? I suggest that answering these questions through empirical research may shed valuable light on our understanding of diasporas and their formation. However, I also argue that such research must be undertaken with caution, as the process of enquiring about diasporas can help in their social construction, thereby bringing them into being.

The next section considers definitions and adopts a set of criteria for identifying diasporas. With these criteria in mind, the subsequent section looks at how the concept of African diaspora emerged in the literature and how it has changed its focus from the general continent wide Africa Diaspora to be applied to multiple African diasporas associated with different national and ethnic groups. However, its focus has remained outside Africa. The following section explores some of the few examples of diasporas that have been identified within Africa. This leads to a discussion of why the cases of African diasporas in Africa are

² Based on searches for 'diaspora' and ('diaspora' and 'Africa*') in as a topic in the social sciences databases on Web of Science <http://portal.isiknowledge.com/portal.cgi> and CSA Illumina www.csa.com.

so limited. This seems puzzling given the frequent references to African mobility and people's attachment to land, which one might expect to create ideal conditions for diaspora formation. It is possible that patterns of mobility and identity formation have retained more of the fluidity of pre-colonial times than the states' current policies of exclusion of foreigners would suggest. Hence people have been able to move and create new identities without looking back to the 'homeland' as a diaspora. The article concludes by arguing that empirical research into diasporas within Africa must be careful to avoid labelling people as members of diasporas and undermining these longstanding patterns of mobility and integration.

DEFINING DIASPORA

Given the rapid multiplication of meanings and usage of the term diaspora, it is important to start with some points of definition. Before launching into any examination of those who might be considered diasporas within Africa, it is necessary to establish a clear view of what is meant by the term. A detailed review of the vast and growing literature on diasporas is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, I restrict my attention to the notion of diaspora as a 'social form' in which 'the emphasis remains upon an identified group characterised by their relationship-despite-dispersal'. I do not explore the wider meanings of diaspora as a 'type of consciousness' or 'mode of cultural production' (Vertovec, 1997). I merely aim to address the question: how can we recognise a diaspora and differentiate it from any other group of migrants or others engaged in transnational practices?

I would argue from the outset that it is important to make this distinction. Many authors appear to use the term diaspora as a synonym for migrants or the descendants of migrants (so called second and third generation migrants). This seems to be an increasing trend, especially in the literature on migration and development, with widespread interest in the scope for diasporas' engagement in development processes.

If the term diaspora is to have any analytical value and also retain its descriptive power, it needs to be reserved for particular people living in distinctive relationships with each other and a homeland. Not all migrants become diasporas and not all diasporas can be considered as migrants (although their ancestors may have been so). Likewise, not all those who engage in transnational practices are necessarily diasporic; they may simply be operating as networks of people with limited relationships to any place (real or imaginary). Nyberg-Sorenson suggests that study of transnationalism and diaspora can be distinguished by their relationship to place:

migrants' transnational practices have been understood to dissolve fixed assumptions about identity, place and community, whereas diasporic identity-making has been understood to evolve around attempts to 'fix' and closely knit identity and community (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2007: 7).

For example, global elites of bankers operating between European capitals and North America could certainly be seen as engaged in transnational practices but not necessarily as part of a diaspora. However, this separation of transnational practices and diaspora does not seem sustainable as diasporas cannot be separated from transnationalism: indeed, diasporas' engagement in transnational practices is one of their defining features. Hence,

transnationalism cannot be said only to be concerned with dissolving assumptions about place and belonging. It seems more useful to think of transnationals – i.e. those engaged in transnational practices – as a broader term which encompasses diasporas and both cosmopolitan groups with no geographical anchor and communities who live in geographical areas cutting across national boundaries (Van Hear, 1998).

To round off the discussion on the relationship between the terms, it is also worth observing that this broad set of transnationals does not necessarily consist exclusively of migrants and many migrants may not maintain transnational activities. In summary, I would suggest that diasporas can be considered as a subset of transnationals and both the sets of transnationals and diasporas intersect with the set of migrants. These relationships are represented in the Venn diagram below (Figure 1). This simple diagram is only attempting to capture contemporary relationships between diasporas, migrants and transnationals. It is important to note that while the concept of transnational presupposes the existence of the nation-state in some form, diasporas may have arisen before the formation of states rather than being a product of state formation.³ Here I am particularly interested in diasporas in the contemporary world, which I take to be defined by their transnational character today, even if their origins lie in times before the existence of the African national borders.

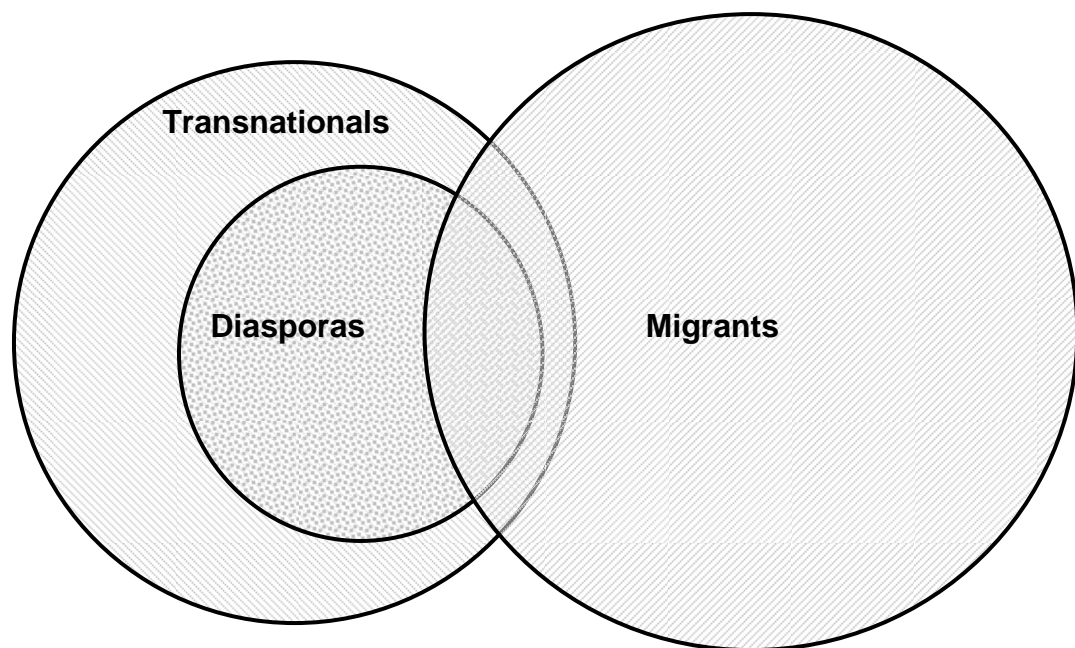


Figure 1: Relationship between sets of diasporas, transnationals and migrants

I leave aside questions about the relative sizes of these different sets and the extent of their interlinkages, which are far beyond the scope of this article. Here I focus only on the diaspora circle and the definition of its boundaries, which are contested. Some argue for a more exclusive definition that defines diaspora in terms of parallels with the experience of

³ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this observation.

exile of the ancient diasporas. Others are more inclusive and are prepared to draw in other groups who do not look back to a traumatic dispersal from the homeland, such as trading diasporas (for a sense of the contrasting approaches see Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1999). Given my focus on the application of the concept within Africa, I will start with a more inclusive definition; if required the circle can be drawn more tightly at a later stage.

Brubaker marks out the circle by reference to three core elements that are included in most definitions of diaspora – dispersion, homeland orientation, boundary maintenance (Brubaker, 2005: 5-6). This is perhaps too succinct for my purpose as it lacks the crucial aspect of ongoing links in between members of the diaspora in different locations and also with the homeland. Brubaker includes these as one aspect of boundary marking, which is concerned with the preservation of a distinctive identity, but it is not one of his minimal conditions.

Cohen is more expansive providing a set of nine common features of a diaspora, which he summarises. He warns that the combination of features found will vary between diasporas and for the same diaspora over time (Cohen, 2008: 17). His features are summarised as:

1. dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically;
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;
4. an idealization of the supposed ancestral home;
5. a return movement or at least a continuing connection;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies;
8. a sense of co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host societies (Cohen, 2008: 161).

In a quest for simplicity and consistency, I will further compress this list of features to offer a set of four criteria, which a potential diaspora needs to satisfy in order to be placed within the diaspora circle.

- **Movement from an original homeland** to more than one country, either through dispersal (forced) or expansion (voluntary) in search of improved livelihoods;
- **A collective myth of an ideal ancestral home;**
- **A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time**, based on a shared history, culture and religion; and
- **A sustained network of social relationships** with members of the group living in different countries of settlement.

No doubt such a definition will be too broad for some and too narrow for others, but it gives a starting point from which to address the question under consideration here: to what extent are there diasporas within Africa?

AFRICAN DIASPORAS

According to Alpers (2001) the term 'the African diaspora' was first used in 1965 at the International Congress of African History at the University of Dar es Salaam by George

Shepperson, who drew parallels between the dispersal of Africans caused by slavery and imperialism to the experience of the Jews. Shepperson adopted a broad definition of the diaspora to include the movement of slaves to Europe before the Atlantic slave trade, the Islamic slave trade, and 'the dispersal of Africans inside [Africa], both as a consequence of the slave trade and imperialism' (Shepperson cited in Alpers, 2001: 5). His examples of events creating such internal diasporas include the formation of Sierra Leone and the dispersal of Africans from Malawi across eastern and southern Africa. Shepperson's focus on the role of imperialism in the formation of diasporas begs the question of whether the term diaspora can be applied to groups that have been dispersed primarily by the activity of Africans.

Shepperson's consideration of internal African diasporas was not widely taken up in the subsequent literature, where the focus initially became fixed on the diasporas formed over the centuries of slave trading across the Atlantic and belatedly on the Indian Ocean (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003). The extended concentration on the Atlantic old diaspora, for whom the location of the homeland cannot be specified below the level of the continent, has resulted in much of the literature continuing to refer only to the 'African diaspora'. There have been relatively few attempts to disaggregate this general diaspora to look at the different experiences arising from particular ethnic groups, regions and nationalities within the continent. Zeleza observes:

It is interesting that, whereas the other diasporas are defined in *national* or *ethnic* or even *ideological* terms, for Africa they are simply called African; whether the referent used is racial or spatial is not always clear. Also common are descriptions of African diasporas as 'black'; rarely are diasporas from other regions draped in colour (Zeleza 2005: 40 emphasis in original).

Among some members of the old diaspora, the idealisation of the African homeland has looked within the continent to focus on a particular location; most notably for Rastafarians who take Ethiopia to be their spiritual home. However, such localisation does not differentiate between different diaspora groups. It simply narrows the focus of the putative origin of the diaspora to one place on the continent: it is still referring to a single African diaspora. Likewise, the links created by the history of returning slaves to Liberia and Sierra Leone are not generally related to the particular origins of the ancestors, except in as far as they came from somewhere in Africa.

Some of the free slaves who came to Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century did feel sufficient 'affinity ties' with south-eastern Nigeria to form an Igbo Union although it is not clear whether they were identifiable as Igbo (Uduku, 2002: 303). Given the trauma of slavery, the long distances and long timescale involved, it is not surprising that such cases of former slaves or their ancestors identifying with a particular ethnic group or location appear to be quite limited.

With the expansion of diaspora studies, the gaze of researchers has shifted from the slave diaspora to other dispersals of many different African peoples. The literature now draws attention to multiple African diasporas arising from migrations from different parts of the continent, differentiated by national, ethnic, religious or other boundaries. Like the general

discussions on diaspora in other parts of the world, it is still beset by the lack of consensus on which of these movements should be seen as forming a diaspora.

Palmer (1998) takes perhaps the broadest perspective, including five different 'diasporic streams' in different historical periods. The earliest of these is the dispersal of early humankind 100,000 years ago from their roots in the Great Rift Valley. The second is the Bantu expansion from West Africa to the east and south of the continent, which started about 5,000 years ago. He describes the third stream as the 'trading diaspora', with people moving to Europe, the Middle East and Asia as traders, slaves and soldiers over 1,500 years from the 5th century BCE. He contrasts these three 'pre-modern streams' with the two modern diasporic movements: the Atlantic slave trade and post-slavery dispersal of Africans (and people of African descent) among various societies from the 19th century to the present day.

It is hard to see how Palmer's first two streams can be usefully conceived as forming diasporas without stretching the idea to breaking point: making diasporas of the whole of humanity in the case of the first, or most of the people of sub-Saharan Africa in the second. In neither case has the dispersal resulted in a group which shares a common ethnic consciousness as required by the definition adopted above. Alpers (2001) points out that Palmer's third group is misnamed as a trading diaspora, when it includes both those moving as traders and those forced to move as slaves. Moreover, the description of the formation of Atlantic slave and modern diasporas fails to recognise the contemporaneous movements of African across the Indian Ocean, first as slaves and then as labourers (often in conditions little short of slavery).

Palmer does raise the question of whether internal movements within Africa should be considered as forming diasporas, but only seems to see this as relevant in consideration of historical movements before a (pan-)African identity emerged.

It is also useful in this context to remind ourselves that the appellation "African" was a misnomer until very recent times. Because, generally speaking, the peoples of Africa traditionally embraced an ethnic identification in contradistinction to a trans-ethnic, regional, or continentally based one, it is more historically accurate to speak of Yoruba, Akan, or Malinke diasporas for much of the period up to the late 19th century or even later. The issue becomes even more complicated when one recognizes that individuals also moved from one society in Africa to another for a variety of reasons including being captured in war. Because an African or transethnic consciousness did not exist, the people who left their ethnic homeland were, strictly speaking, residing "abroad." Should such internal movements of specific peoples in Africa be considered parts of a diasporic stream? Can we speak of an African diaspora before the late 19th or 20th century since the subjects of our study did not define themselves as African but as Yoruba, Wolof, Igbo, or other? (Palmer, 1998).

He seems to suggest that such 'traditional' identities are less relevant today and African is an adequate qualifier for contemporary diasporic movements originating in the continent.

Zeleza (2005) categorises African diasporas by the location of their dispersal, identifying four different groups: Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Atlantic and intra-Africa. He further breaks down the intra-African category to five sub-groups with examples:

- the trading diasporas (the Hausa and Dioula in western Africa);

- the slave diasporas (West Africans in North Africa and East Africans on the Indian Ocean islands);
- the conquest diasporas (the Nguni in southern Africa);
- the refugee diasporas (for example, from the Yoruba wars of the early nineteenth century);
- the pastoral diasporas (the Fulani and Somali in the Sahelian zones of western and eastern Africa) (Zezeza, 2005: 45).

Like Palmer, Zezeza describes 'contemporary diasporas' as those formed since the late nineteenth century. Within this set of diasporas, he refers to three main waves: diasporas of colonisation, diasporas of decolonisation and, since the 1980s, diasporas arising from the era of structural adjustment. In his discussion of these contemporary diasporas, he only cites examples of people moving outside Africa, such as Cape Verdeans in the US, Senegalese traders in New York and Somali refugees in Europe, North America and West Asia. Thus, despite his more detailed elaboration of historical (pre-colonial) intra-African diasporas, when he considers contemporary processes of diaspora formation his view of Africa is eclipsed by the world beyond.

The literature on contemporary African diasporas is continuing to increase rapidly: for example, the edited volume 'New African Diasporas' (Koser, 2003) includes chapters on Somalis, Senegalese, Ghanaians, Congolese and Eritreans as well as regional groups (West Africans) and broad language groups (Francophones). This appears to have been driven in part by the critique from diaspora scholars that the focus on the transatlantic slavery diaspora is too narrow. However, studies that aim to look beyond the transatlantic diaspora seem to share a common blind spot with respect to Africa itself.

The growth of African diaspora literature is also a reflection of its breaking out of its disciplinary boundaries. Until recently the concept of 'diaspora' was seen as the preserve of cultural studies and appeared rarely in development studies (or African studies) literature (Zack-Williams, 1995; Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002). Today it is firmly established in the development lexicon and there is a rapidly expanding literature on the potential engagement of the diaspora in development processes (Nyberg-Sørensen et al., 2002; Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002; Henry and Mohan, 2003; de Haas, 2006; Ionescu, 2006; Davies, 2007). This is in stark contrast to the situation in 1995, when Zack-Williams lamented the spatial focus of development studies on 'developing' states and corresponding 'ostrich-like detachment from issues of race and diasporan concerns' (1995: 351).

Within this new strand of diaspora literature, the concept is used quite loosely; often it appears to be little more than a synonym for migrants. This is particularly the case in much of the work focusing on the links between diasporas and development (for example Ionescu, 2006; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2007). Here, whether such group satisfy the academics that they should be referred to as diasporas is perhaps irrelevant. The term has already become established in both the policy and popular discourse, where it may be abused, but serves multiple functions, including supporting claims on resources, political power and obligations. As Cohen writes,

For better or for worse, the ancient Greeks launched this conceptual vessel, and some may want to repel all recent boarders. However, many unexpected passengers are embarking

whether we like it or not. Scholars of diaspora need to recognise the potency and ubiquity of the term, and to be open and flexible to new experiences and uses, without neglecting the constraints that the history, meaning and evolution of the term impose (Cohen, 2008: 18).

Kleist observes that in the case of Somalis, 'the word "diaspora" has entered the Somali vocabulary' and it brings with it great expectations of the transfers of skills and resources for the reconstruction of Somalia (2007). Such diasporas from developing countries, which include the whole of Africa, are widely portrayed as having responsibilities to support the development of their homeland. For example, the African Union adopted a definition of the 'African Diaspora' in which support for development was a basic criterion for membership:

The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship or nationality, and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union (AU 2005, cited in Ionescu, 2006).

African diasporas are now seen by some as 'a potentially exploitable, if underdeveloped resource' (Davies, 2007: 64). As a result, maintaining, or re-establishing, contact with the diaspora and encouraging its members to live up to these expectations – 'courting the diaspora' (de Haas, 2006) – has become an important policy concern for many African governments. Leaving aside the question of whether such groups really constitute diasporas according to the criteria outlined above (and any doubts about the ethics of regarding them as a 'resource' to be tapped), this literature on engagement of Africa's diasporas in development is almost exclusively concerned with people living outside the continent (Henry and Mohan, 2003; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2007). As Kleist points out, 'the "diaspora" refers to Somalis living in the West and the Gulf States, and not, it seems, to the hundred thousands of Somali refugees in neighbouring countries' (Kleist, 2007).

In all the enthusiasm across various disciplines for identifying African diasporas and exploring how and why they are formed and sustained, there is still very little written about African diasporas within Africa. As Manning observes, references to the African continent in much of the literature appear in the introductions to chapters, but only rarely in the conclusions. The continent 'appears as a place from which people departed, the memory of which becomes progressively, more generalized, rather than as a diverse and changing continent whose inhabitants participated at every stage in creating the world of today' (Manning, 2003: 501).

AFRICAN DIASPORAS IN AFRICA

There are some exceptions to this picture, but they stand out as exceptions that highlight the dearth of other examples. Within the literature, three different types of diaspora within Africa can be identified: those that look to their homeland outside Africa; those that are considered as diasporic mainly as part of a much larger diaspora living in other continents; and finally, those 'indigenous' African diasporas who look to their origins in different parts of Africa and where the majority of the population remain within the continent. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

Manger and Assal's edited volume (2006) *Diasporas within and without Africa* includes a number of cases of diasporas within Africa but they are all groups who look to their origins outside the continent: Lebanese in West Africa, Indian Muslims in South Africa, Hadrami from Yemen in Sudan. Such groups certainly satisfy the diaspora criteria outlined above.

For example, the first Lebanese landed in West Africa in 1860s either deceived into thinking they had arrived in America or by mistake. Whatever the case, they were the vanguard of widespread dispersal that resulted in Lebanese people establishing settlements all over the world throughout the following century. Akyeampong argues that unlike other non-African migrants arriving in the continent, the Lebanese 'came in search of a home and a nationality' (2006: 303). They engaged in business activities, such as the rubber trade in Senegal, and emerged as an important entrepreneurial class in West Africa (Akyeampong 2006: 308). By the time of British decolonisation in the region, many Lebanese families had been established for two or three generations. Despite all the signs of permanence, since they maintained their ties to Lebanon, they were not seen as 'true settlers' by the British, who explicitly rejected the notion of such permanent settlement citizenship for 'non-natives' (van der Laan cited in Akyeampong, 2006: 312-3). This treatment passed on through the generations as the British registered most Lebanese at birth in the non-natives birth register.

The newly independent states of West Africa refused to allow dual nationality and the Lebanese were forced to give up any British or Lebanese nationality and take up the nationality of their African country of residence if they wanted to continue to live there and, perhaps more importantly, retain their businesses. Despite their economic power and their nationality, the Lebanese continue to be seen as outsiders. As a result, they remain largely apolitical, focusing instead on business and philanthropy. With its newfound enthusiasm for encouraging the Ghanaian diaspora to contribute to the 'homeland', the Ghanaian government changed the law in 2000 to allow dual citizenship. This has been taken up with enthusiasm by those of Lebanese origin – but they still travel on their Ghanaian passports to Lebanon (Akyeampong, 2006).

The references to diasporas within Africa that look to African origins seem to be very sparse. For the most part, they are either discussed in relation to a broader diaspora living in other continents or are concerned with a limited set of ethnic groups in West Africa. As already pointed out, the extensive literature on the Somali diaspora focuses on Somalis in Europe, North America and the Middle East, but says little about the huge numbers of Somalis living elsewhere in East and Southern Africa (Kleist, 2007). There is ample evidence that these Somalis are part of the diaspora as they satisfy the required criteria. In particular, they are embedded in a dense network of social and economic relations that cut across both national borders and continents (Horst, 2006; Lindley, 2007). However, the focus of attention remains on the diaspora beyond the continent.

The literature on diasporas whose centre of gravity remains within Africa is even more limited. Even when authors use the word diaspora, they are not always referring to a group that falls within the definition adopted in this paper. For example, Piot (1999) uses the term diaspora to describe the 'dispersed yet dense network of communities and kin' that the Kabre people have formed through their migrations from the north to the south of Togo. Their links to the rural homeland have been maintained over generations by the continuous

coming and going of extended family members, routine fostering of children and the ritual practices. He argues that the diasporic relationship has produced an 'expansion of the ritual sphere' (1999: 160), in which people in the south adapt ritual and practice from the homeland and then convey these subtle changes back to the north, thereby transforming the original: 'the copy preserves the original more faithfully than the original itself' (Piot 1999: 167).

Piot provides a fascinating account of the process of dispersal and ongoing engagement, which serves to embed this 'group of cereal farmers living in the heart of the West African savannah at some remove from today's centres of global commodity production' into the heart of modernity. Although he makes it clear that Kabre are found in Ghana and Benin (as well as Europe and the US), his focus is on the population moving over relatively short distances within Togo; hence, it is uncertain whether the Kabre qualify as a diaspora in the terms of this article. Their qualification might also be cast into doubt by the constant contact and movement of people in and out of the homeland; this suggests that for many people we are not dealing with a 'myth of an ideal ancestral home', but rather a very concrete and practical home from home. The Kabre case appears to be more concerned with *translocal* practices than diaspora formation (within the limited definition I have adopted here).

Among the few examples of African diasporas within the continent, the Hausa are perhaps the most prominent in the literature (Zezeza, 2005; Youngstedt, 2004; Adamu, 1978; Cohen, 1969). Groups of Hausa are scattered throughout West Africa and Sudan and have retained a distinctive Hausa identity, which looks back to their roots in Hausaland of northern Nigeria and south-eastern Niger. Adamu argues that the Hausa diaspora became so extensive because:

one of their first acts in settling down was to take wives from the local communities. The descendants of such marriages continued to claim Hausa ethnic origins even after families had passed through a number of generations of such local exogamous marriages and also even when they could not speak the Hausa language' (Adamu, 1978: 5).

This raises the question of whether diaspora is about sharing a particular history of roots in a particular place or adopting that history. The expansiveness of Hausa identity generated by its strict form of patrilineal descent means there are many who would identify with the Hausa whose links with Hausa culture, language or land is extremely tenuous (Adamu, 1978: 3). However, the same might be said of Jewish matrilineal descent which has brought many generations into the diaspora who could make equal claims of membership of other groups.

It is interesting to note that while Abner Cohen's seminal work on the Hausa describes them as a trading diaspora (1969), Adamu, who is writing a decade later but before the broadening of the definition of diaspora, suggests that the pre-colonial Hausa movements did not create a diaspora because, first, the migrants concerned were not members of the same ethnic group; and, second, the movement only involved a small proportion of the Hausa people. Adamu prefers to describe them as long distance traders or job-hunters, with men looking for work teaching the Qur'an, praying and divination (Adamu, 1978). Such objections do not exclude them either from the broad definition adopted for this article or Robin Cohen's more elaborate definition (Cohen, 2008).

Uduku's (2002) study of the Igbo is unusual in both its geographical and temporal scope. She includes the dispersal of Igbo in the Atlantic slave trade, colonial movements within British administered territory and contemporary post-colonial migrations. Through these movements over centuries, elements of the Igbo diaspora can now be identified across Nigeria, elsewhere in West Africa and in other parts of world. As noted above, the Igbo Union of free slaves was established in Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century by people who identified south-eastern Nigeria as the homeland of their ancestors. Igbo moving within Nigeria in colonial service, to Hausaland and Yorubaland, and those going for education overseas, especially to the UK, established Igbo Improvement Unions. These generally had two aims: the welfare of kin affiliated to the group abroad (especially for transporting bodies for burial); and, the improvement of the home area through projects building schools, hospitals and providing scholarships. Uduku argues that the focus of these unions on local issues of the home area made them very different from the community networks formed by other groups such as the Yoruba, Efik and Hausa, which were more concerned with wider issues of political power.

The Biafran crisis 1966-70 was a catalyst for the resurgence of Igbo identity, as a people were forced to 'return' from other parts of Nigeria to the 'homeland', or move to neighbouring states and overseas (particularly the UK and US). This helped boost the growth of Igbo home town development unions and they were able to invest in capital intensive projects, even including electrification.

'For Igbos in the diaspora within Nigeria their new situation and identification with their host community was seen as clearly temporary or transient. Clearly with Nigeria's shifting geopolitics, one's relationship with one's home town and with other Igbo kin was all that could be assured' (Uduku, 2002 305).

Since the war, Igbos have continued to move back and forth to Nigeria with the fluctuations in the economy. For many staying away from Igboland is seen as a temporary sojourn but in practice it is those who are wealthy – with offshore investments and dual nationality – who are the most likely to return (Uduku, 2002: 306). Among the younger generation, there appears to be a shift towards expectations of permanent settlement abroad.

Uduku's account of the Igbo suggests that they do constitute a diaspora both within Africa and outside the continent. It is difficult to assess where the centre of gravity of this diaspora lies. Certainly, her analysis is weighted towards the Igbo living in Europe and North America.

WHERE ARE THE DIASPORAS WITHIN AFRICA?

These cases show that there are examples of literature on African diasporas within Africa, but they are few and far between. Is it the case that relatively few diasporas have formed within Africa or is this merely a reflection of a pattern of research that has not paid sufficient attention to the continent? I do not have the answer to this question but I believe it is an important area for research. On the one hand, if Africa is included within African diaspora studies and found to hold significant diasporas, it has the large scale and diversity that may help to balance the 'gravitational force' of the North American part of the diaspora (Manning, 2003: 501). It is likely to bring fundamental changes to our understanding of both

African and other diasporas across the globe as the experience within Africa may cast new light on processes of diaspora formation and reproduction, bringing new insights that reach beyond the continent. The wealth of studies carried out by anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists may already contain much of the data required. I have only considered here the literature which explicitly adopts the concept and terminology of diaspora; reviewing existing literature from other fields through the lens of diaspora studies may expose other diasporic groups across Africa.

On the other hand, if there are few diasporas to be found, this raises the critical question: why not? A dearth of diasporas within Africa seems strange when one juxtaposes two persistent themes that often recur in many discussions about Africa: a long history and practice of migration within the continent; and the close attachment of people and place, in particular land.

Africa is often portrayed in both contemporary and historical accounts as a continent of people on the move (de Bruijn et al., 2001). Great migrations figure in the myths of origins for many ethnic groups: for example, the Bantu expansion of movement from central Africa, the 'Hamitic myth' of migration from north to south, and even the Voortrekkers 'Great Trek' in South Africa. While some of these migrations may be little more than hypotheses and lack any historical basis, they all serve an important function in the (mythic) construction of Africa and its people in the modern world (Bilger and Kraler, 2005).

The patterns of mobility were transformed by the imposition of borders by the colonial powers, which laid the foundations for the modern nation states. It is important to note that while the borders did control some migration, they created new forms of migration by reshaping 'political and economic opportunity structures' (Tornimbeni, 2005). While the borders represented an attempt by colonial authorities to control the movement of people and extract their labour or taxes, at the same time they defined the extent of their authority. For those near the borders, rather than fleeing long distances to escape taxation, forced labour or other such impositions, it was merely necessary for them to cross a line. By judicious crossing of frontiers, it was (and to a certain extent still is) possible to get the best, or at least avoid the worst, of both worlds (Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996).

Along with drawing the lines of the national borders, the colonialists also attempted to map the ethnic boundaries between different groups across the continent. The assignment of particular named groups to particular territorial areas played a fundamental role in establishing colonial administration. It identified the ethnic groups which would be recognised by the governments and invested them with power (*vis-à-vis* those groups not recognised) through the incorporation of chiefs and headmen into local political structures. Vail describes this process as the 'invention of tribalism' and showed how the documentation of ethnic groups, their cultures and territories, served to construct and then strengthen 'firm, non-porous and relatively inelastic ethnic boundaries, many of which were highly arbitrary' (Vail, 1989: 11).

The assumption of an essential bond between people and place gave a rationale for the colonial resistance to non-native settlement and the rejection of dual nationality by the newly independent states (see above). These were bound up in the building of nations

around national populations bound by history, culture, language faith and even biology. Black Africans become citizens because of 'their colour and privileged autochthony' rather than as human beings with rights: 'Africa becomes the land of black people ... Everything that is not black is out of place, and thus cannot claim any sort of Africanity' (Mbembe 2002 cited in Akyeampong, 2006: 314).

Within individual states, those of 'outsider' ethnic groups have struggled to gain citizenship and permanent belonging. This can be seen very clearly in the current wave of violence in South Africa where foreigners are being violently attacked. It can also be seen in the resistance to policies of integration for refugees in African states; in the vast majority, the only recognised 'durable solution' within the continent for refugee populations is repatriation. In addition, the Lebanese, for example, also fell foul of this process because as non-blacks they did not belong. Across the continent, many newly independent states denied citizenship to such outsiders. As already noted above, this exclusion of the Lebanese was one of the factors underlying the development of the Lebanese diaspora. However, examples of African diasporas seem far more elusive.

Given these prevalent assumptions about Africans' attachment to land and the policies of exclusion, how is that people have moved across the continent for so long without maintaining those links? For some reason, it is only those who move beyond the sea who are thought to have maintained these roots.

Perhaps the answer lies in the way that people have actually moved and been able to create new identities. The connections to place may be important but in time their significance and meaning changes. New ethnicities are formed; they may acknowledge their history elsewhere but have no affective bond with that historical place or myth of return. For example, the Lunda and Luvale people of North-Western Zambia and eastern Angola look to their origins in the upper Kasai area of DR Congo. They still honour the Paramount Chief Mwanta Yava of the Northern Luunda people, from whose court their ancestors departed as a result of various conflicts. These relationships have been maintained over generations. However, the process of movement (perhaps we might call it dispersal) has resulted in the emergence of new ethnic group consciousness, new languages and cultural variations. The Lunda and Luvale are closely related but distinct from each other and from the Luunda people of their ancestors (Papstein, 1989; Sangambo and M.K., 1984; Bakewell, 1999).

CONCLUSION

Such histories of mobility without the subsequent formation of a diaspora are likely to be repeated countless times across Africa. But where are the exceptions (apart from those noted above)? Moreover, can people today migrate from country to country and still establish new identities in new places in this way? Has diaspora formation always played a part in the process of mobility across Africa? Or are we seeing the emergence of new diasporas as policies and attitudes of exclusion become embedded in African states and societies? These are questions which need to be addressed by further research.

While I believe such research is important and necessary, I conclude by raising some cautionary questions about what it might mean to invoke the term 'diaspora' in the current

political climate, in which the term is being deployed by a range of powerful actors including states, global elites and development organisations, and where essentialist notions of belonging are taking on deadly significance in various contexts (vividly and tragically illustrated by the violence against foreigners in South Africa this year).

There is a danger that in looking for diasporas within Africa we may help to 'invent' diasporas by naming them – following the example of colonialists in inventing 'tribes'. The current enthusiasm for uncovering diasporas wherever there is migration could identify many new diasporas: the Congolese and Nigerian diasporas in South Africa, the Somali diaspora in Libya and so forth. The term diaspora is becoming a bureaucratic label (Zetter, 1991; Zetter, 2007; Wood, 1985) that is often applied by policy makers, international organisations, and some academics to any group of migrants or their descendants. To some extent, this might be avoided by adopting a more rigorous definition of diaspora that does not elide the concept with migration.

In order to recognise a diaspora, we have to consider how people relate to the 'homeland' and each other. This must be a subject for empirical research; it is not good enough to assume the existence of any profound relationship merely on the basis of a common ancestry or history (Assal 2006: 165). This suggestion that people must be connected to the place from which they or their ancestors originally came takes one down a dangerous route of essentialism. There is an important place for self-identification in the formation of a diaspora: a diasporic consciousness has to be mobilised (Cohen, 2008: 13). Those who neither claim to be part of a diaspora nor exhibit diasporic behaviour will not fulfil the definition of diaspora adopted above.

The continued exclusion of particular ethnic, national or racial groups clearly plays a part in the formation of diasporas (at least within the definition adopted here). This may help to perpetuate the myth of the homeland and the maintenance of relationships between transnational diaspora communities, who are similarly excluded – although that also cannot be assumed. However, by describing people as a diaspora, there is an implication that they have this connection with a homeland elsewhere. They can come to be seen as people of a 'deterritorialised ethnicity' living in a territorial space that is a natural home for the indigenous (Anthias, 1998; Assal, 2006: 189). This helps to mark them out and secure their exclusion. Thus, there is a danger that carelessly referring to people as a diaspora may help to bring a diaspora into existence.

This may serve the purposes of some. African states are increasingly making claims on the support of their 'diasporas' for development so an inclusive definition broadens the pool of people to whom they can appeal. The current trend of migration policies in Europe is towards temporary worker programmes that will facilitate circular migration as an acceptable form of non-European immigration. Adopting the language of diasporas in reference to African migrants and their descendants and supporting the work of diaspora groups helps to sustain the connection between Africans and their countries of origin, potentially maximising the likelihood of return 'home'. In an atmosphere of growing hysteria about migration across Europe, it can also help to sustain their exclusion and lack of belonging, as engagement in diaspora activities and transnational practices become grounds for suspicion and raise questions of loyalty. There is a growing body of research which

shows such views are baseless: there is no contradiction between transnational engagement and integration (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008). At the same time, casting people as diasporic may make it more difficult for them to become unexceptional members of different societies should they want to, rather than people with origins elsewhere.

The impact of labelling groups as a diaspora may also have different effects within these groups, which can never be assumed to be homogeneous (Anthias, 1998). To a large extent, the rediscovery of diaspora is a phenomenon which has been generated in and by national and transnational elites for whom geographic mobility is a marker of high status. It is only in recent years that the term diaspora has come to have these positive connotations. Identification as a diaspora can become a release from nationalism for elites, while being related to processes of exclusion and stigmatisation for underclasses. Bangstad notes that such techniques of exclusion were used to great effect in apartheid South Africa, where the state encouraged 'the indulgence in tribal fantasies of imaginary homelands as a strategy of divide and rule' (2006: 37).

Ironically, then, the development of transnationalism, which has enabled the development of new diasporas (as a subset of transnationals) may actually reinforce essentialist notions of primordial belonging to particular territory. Previous generations may have moved on and helped to create new identities in new places. Today people move and are able to take their identity and links with them. The danger is that not only are they able to do this, but they may be expected to so.

Turning the diaspora lens back onto Africa may raise many conceptual, methodological and ethical challenges. However, it may bring to the fore patterns of movement and transnational engagement that have characterised African societies over generations. Uncovering the processes of diaspora formation within Africa is likely to counter the essentialist notions of ethnic groups rooted in particular territories, which still holds sway in many political, social and academic contexts.

Moreover, if the concept of diaspora has any currency in the rest of the world, we have no grounds to assume that Africa will be different. Exploring how diasporas are formed (or not formed) within the continent may expose some of the limitations of the term as currently conceived, in the context of Africa and beyond. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, failing to take up the research challenge of analysing diasporas within Africa leaves the concept open to uncritical adoption by policy makers, which runs the risk of strengthening processes of labelling and exclusion of 'others'.

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