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A Search for Home: Diasporic Encounters, Constructions, and Imaginaries

by

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INTRODUCTION: "What is Africa to Me?"[1]

Encountering the Unfamiliar

I first traveled to the continent of Africa for a community service project in Kenya. It was the summer after my freshman year of college, and I left the shores of North America for the first time with a small group of predominantly African American staff, college students, parents, and children from across the United States. The community service project had been under way for about three years before I decided to join it in the summer of 2006. I was enlisted in this project by one of my extra-curricular group leaders at Wesleyan University. After a meeting one night during the spring semester, he drew me and a few other students aside. Once he had us away from the crowd, he popped the question: "Have you ever thought about going to Africa?" After a brief moment of silence a few of us looked at each other in amusement and mumbled that "Sure, we had thought about it," and eagerly waited for him to elaborate. He described the community service effort in detail and encouraged each of us to give careful thought to participating before giving him a response. Over the next few months—several meetings, countless emails, and numerous conversations later—he persuaded most of us to make the trip.

[1] This title is a direct quotation and reference to an article written by W.E.B. DuBois entitled, *An Official Visit to Liberia* (Drachler 1975) in which he reflects on his identity as both an "African" and an American. This reference will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

As I prepared for my journey, I had many conversations with friends and family about my fears of encountering the unfamiliar. I did not know what to expect and was experiencing a mix of emotions. On the one hand, I was very excited to be leaving the North American continent for the first time and visiting a majority Black region. On the other hand, I had internalized stereotypical views and misconceptions about Africa due to the many inaccurate, racist accounts that I had seen, read, and absorbed, which portrayed the continent as culturally rich but socially, economically, and politically "primitive." My fear of devastating heat, giant bugs, and the possibility of contracting disease were mingled with eager anticipation and a lingering disbelief that I was actually going. After months of fundraising and preparation, I was finally ready to make the trip, and after a lengthy flight, my plane landed in Nairobi, Kenya. I retrieved my baggage, stepped outside the airport, and was surprised by the cool breeze that caressed my face. It was at that moment that I finally accepted that this journey was real.

The day after we arrived in Kenya, several of the other members of my group and I decided to take a walk through the village that surrounded the compound in which we were staying. We had traveled to Kenya in June, at the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the cool dry season. The average temperature was about sixty degrees Fahrenheit during the day. It got much colder at night. We were staying at a hostel in the town of Ngong—a small town in Southern Kenya very near the Ngong Hills and southwest of Nairobi. As we explored the compound, my group mates and I stopped to admire the beauty of the lush green hills, which rose and fell for miles, highlighted by a perfectly rounded sun that blazed a deep orange. Every

now and then we caught glimpses of people moving through the landscape while completing their daily tasks.

We left the compound and entered the village eager to explore our new surroundings. Walking the dirt roads of the village, we passed small wooden storefronts and homes in which people sat and stared, taking us in as we explored their neighborhood.

"Mzungu! How are you?"

We stopped in our tracks and turned around to face a group of small children looking up at my friends and me, their eyes filled with wonder and amusement, their faces lit up with big smiles.

"Hello. I'm well. How are you?" I answered.

The children burst out laughing and ran away, leaving the adults who watched the interaction chuckling and speaking among themselves in Swahili. My group mates and I laughed and kept moving. A few moments later, we heard a small voice yell out to us once again.

"Wazungu! How are you?"

Much to our surprise, the group of children had grown by about three or four. Smiling, we turned to face them, replied that we were well and resumed our walk through the village. From that point on, however, we were accompanied by an ever growing group of children engaged in a repetitive chorus of singing and laughter.

"Wazungu, how are you? I'm fine. Thank you. Wazungu, how are you? I'm fine. Thank you."

As the adults sat in their doorways staring at us and laughing at the children, the situation began to feel uncomfortable. I looked around amid the stares and the uneasy looks on my friends' faces. My group mates and I—brown-skinned African Americans in a spectrum of different hues—were highly visible. We did not fit in. I looked at my clothes—baggy jeans, a hooded sweatshirt, white sneakers, and a small backpack. My skin—light brown in comparison with the rich dark complexions of those surrounding me—made me feel highly noticeable. I did not belong.

After realizing that we had attracted a multitude of followers, we decided to return to the compound. The children followed us up to the gated entrance. At that point we smiled at them and waved goodbye as the guard shooed them away. We walked back to the hostel, reflecting on our experience in the village and wondering what the term "mzungu" meant. With a mixture of confusion and curiosity we entered the hostel. Later on that evening we were to find out that the word "mzungu" (plural, "wazungu") was the Swahili word for "white person" and was often used to mean "foreigner." It would be a term that most Kenyans used to identify us for the duration of our stay.

Our second week in Kenya we traveled to the village of Oloitoktok—a small village near the Tanzanian border—to work in a boarding school for impoverished youth. As our van pulled up to the gate of the boarding school, the children paused from their daily activities and leisure to stare up at us, curiosity all over their faces as they waved and smiled. After unpacking some of our things in our room in the boarding house, my roommate, Janell, and I set out to explore the premises. We admired glimpses of Mt. Kilimanjaro, which appeared occasionally from behind the

clouds, and shivered due to the cool air that was at least ten degrees cooler than the average temperature in Nairobi and Ngong.

The next day, a handful of my group members and I set out with the children on a three-mile hike to a nearby stream. The children were laughing, playing, and asking questions of my group mates as we walked along the red dirt road. I also found myself surrounded by little girls who took turns holding my hands and wanted to know all about my family, friends, and the United States. One in particular, Jane, a pretty bright-eyed little girl of ten years old, listened intently, but largely kept to herself. Farther along in the hike, as most of the little girls moved on to interrogate others in the group, I introduced myself to Jane and drew her into a conversation. I asked her about her favorite subjects in school, her favorite color, and favorite foods. She asked me about my home in America, why I came to Kenya, and if I knew how to speak Swahili. Once she realized my lack of knowledge of the language she proceeded to teach me how to count to ten. After I mastered our lesson, our conversation took a surprising turn.

"Do you like Germans?" Jane asked.

Puzzled by her question I responded, "Sure. Why do you ask?"

"I do not like Germans," she declared, "They are mean people."

"Why do you say that?" I inquired.

"A German woman came to visit my school. She lived in the house where you and your group are staying. She was very mean and would say mean things. She would call us names and would yell at us. She never played with us like you do. She

stayed in the house all of the time and would not come outside. She stayed for a long time. Maybe a month."

"Oh, well, I'm sure not all Germans are mean people. She was just not very nice," I said.

We walked in silence for a few moments and then I asked, "Jane, if you saw me walking down the road and you didn't know me, would you know that I was not from Kenya?"

"Yes."

"How would you know?"

"By the clothes that you wear and the way that you talk. You do not dress like a Kenyan or talk like a Kenyan, and you cannot speak Swahili or any other language from Kenya."

"Well, who would you think I was? Would you think I was white? Would you think I was Black? Where would you think I was from?"

She hesitated for a moment and looked at me as she considered her answer.

"Well, you are not Black because I am Black and maybe Tisha (a darker-skinned member of my group) looks Black and could be a Kenyan, but you are not Black," she hesitated before continuing. "But you are not white either. You are in between. A mix."

"A mix," I echoed and smiled at her. "Do you know that there are Black people in other parts of the world?"

"Yes, I have learned about them in school."

“Well, in America there are Black people of all different colors. In America, I am Black,” I said.

She looked up at me with curious eyes, grabbed my hand and we continued walking toward the stream.

The next evening, my friend Leah and I visited some of the girls in their dormitories before they had to turn out the lights and go to bed. We sang songs together that they taught us, and we taught them some songs that we knew. They asked us question after question, wanting to learn all that they could about our lives across the sea.

“Are there a lot of Black Americans in the United States?” one of the girls asked.

“Yes,” Leah replied. “But they are many different colors.”

“I am Black, and so is Leah,” I said.

“You are Black? And Leah is Black? You do not look Black, especially you,” said one of the girls, pointing to Leah, who had a very light brown complexion.

“But it does not really matter about color,” asserted Francine, one of the older girls.

“Right, what matters is your history and your heritage, and I know that my history and heritage are here. My ancestors came from Africa,” Leah stated.

The girls smiled at us and nodded in agreement.

Diasporic Encounters, Constructions, and Imaginaries

This thesis was initially inspired by my desire to gain a critical understanding of several of the experiences, contradictions, and realizations that I, a young Black woman from the United States, encountered while living and researching in Africa—specifically in Kenya and Ghana. As a Black American woman who had grown to casually accept the notion of Black American connection to Africa (largely on the basis of ancestral origins and phenotypic markers), I was very disturbed when my "Blackness" was questioned in Kenya by those with whom I supposedly shared a profound and innate linkage. Prior to my trip to Nairobi, Ngong, and Oloitoktok, Kenya in 2006, I had never encountered a refutation of my claims to "Black" identity. My experiences navigating race and identity in Kenya problematized my understanding of the African continent as a place that held deep roots and meaning for members of the African Diaspora. The contradictions produced by many of my experiences in the country spurred a whirlwind of intellectual curiosity, which developed over the next two years. It was my second encounter with the African continent, in Ghana, that led to the development of this thesis. In the beginning of 2008, I was given the opportunity to travel to Ghana as an international student—and it was there, largely influenced by my experiences in Kenya, that this project really began to take form.

I lived in Ghana for approximately four months, beginning in January and ending in May. I traveled there with the School for International Training College Semester Abroad program, which is affiliated with the University of Cape Coast. Early on, I became interested in the fairly large African Diasporan repatriate

community in the country. As I struggled to understand how my own identity might intersect with Ghanaian life and culture, I became very interested in learning about how African Diasporans who chose to make Ghana their "home" conceptualized their identities in light of the contradictions inherent in being what I would later refer to as *foreigners at home*. For the mandatory Independent Study period of the program, I wrote a creative extended paper on the influence of Pan-Africanism on African American "return" to Ghana. During the research process, I met with several African Diasporan repatriates and through numerous conversations, interactions, and encounters, I gained insight into this complex and multifaceted subject. This thesis seeks to build on that original project and idea.

In this thesis, I draw upon these interactions with African Americans living in Ghana as a means to explore some of the many factors that contribute to the acceptance of an African Diasporan identity in popular conceptions of Blackness in the United States. I seek to understand some of the complexities within Black American identities in regard to the formation of diasporan consciousnesses and the development of Pan-Africanist thought. I also explore conceptions of "home" in relation to African Diasporan identity construction and its associations with notions of "return" to a homeland or place of origin. In the process, I engage with the stories and perspectives of several African American individuals who have chosen to move permanently to Ghana for various reasons, but most notably due to a declared connection to Africa—the land, the cultures, the peoples, and the heritage. Their stories allow for the exploration of African diasporan identity constructions, imaginaries, and encounters with the African continent and bring up significant

questions of belonging, solidarity, connectedness, and disconnectedness in relation to the contemporary effects of the dispersion of African peoples all over the world as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Much of the writing in this text is presented in a narrative format, as a number of my own reflections on identity and the processes of conducting fieldwork are incorporated into the work in order to further highlight the dynamism of the ethnographic experience.

In her essay *Mapping Transnationality: Roots Tourism and the Institutionalization of Ethnic Heritage,* Kamari Clarke (2006:135) states that the term "African diaspora" is used to signify the scattering of Black peoples from Africa to the Americas and Caribbean. The word "diaspora" is Greek in origin. Its roots, *dia* and *speirein*, mean "through" and to "scatter seeds"; thus, the term is used to mean "the scattering of people's offspring" (Clarke 2006:135). Moreover, in the introduction to *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imaginations*, Genevieve Fabre and Klaus Benesch (2004:xiii) insist that the concept of diaspora has been lastingly "inscribed in the consciousness and imagination of the twentieth century" and has fairly recently emerged as a compelling idea that challenges "modes of thinking and assumptions not only about the unfolding of contemporary cross-cultural or multicultural societies and communities, but also about the past, about power relations, frontiers and boundaries, about cultural transmission, communication and translation, about revolt or revolution" (2004:xiii).

Fabre and Benesch (2004:xv) also contend that the forced migration of Africans from the African continent and their dispersion across the "Western World" as a result of the slave trade continues to be one of the most pervasive images of

Black discourse and writings. Many scholars, such as Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (1994), Kamari Clarke (2006), Paulla Ebron (1999), Michael Echeruo (1999), and Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1996), argue that there have often been ideological attempts to create connections between Africa and the Americas; Black racial and cultural belonging to Africa was a central theme in both nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century formations of Black nationalisms (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xv). Diasporan connection and return to Africa is a concept that has been expressed in many forms such as Back-to-Africa movements, which were organized as a means to escape racial oppression in the United States by several early Black nationalists (Drachler 1975, Moses 1996, Painter 1988), and the popularization of Afrocentricity in the mid twentieth century (Clarke 2006, Ebron 1999, Hosley 2008), both of which will be further explored in subsequent chapters. In this project, I will explore how the myth of Africa as a homeland and a place of ancestral and cultural origin has been a lasting and essential part of diasporan consciousness (Echeruo 1999, Edwards 2004, Tololyan 1995). Whether it be, real, imagined, or symbolic, the notion of return raises several questions about diasporan relation to Africa and has been highly contested and problematized in anthropological discourse on the African Diaspora.

Methodology and Positionality

Most of my fieldwork took place in the cities of Cape Coast, Accra, and Elmina in Ghana. The majority of the African American population in Ghana is

located in these three cities.[2] My field research largely incorporated participant observation and both formal and informal interviews. Initially, the academic director of my study abroad program was instrumental in helping me locate African American individuals living in the Cape Coast and Elmina area by compiling a list of several businesses owned by African Americans. I met many repatriates by going to their places of business, introducing myself, and then asking them if they would be willing to speak with me about their experiences living in Ghana. After our conversations, I often asked for referrals to and contact information for other repatriates in the area with whom I could speak about the same topic.

I conducted eight extensive interviews in total with African American repatriates—three men and five women. I also engaged in several practices as a participant observer, such as attending religious services and entertainment shows, spending casual time with the individuals I had gotten to know, and observing their occupational activities. Although I will not expand at length on this point in this thesis, it is important to note that many of the individuals I met were among the educated Black middle class while living in America and had done much financial planning and preparation before deciding to move to Ghana. Most were able to buy land and properties and live a relatively comfortable life in Ghana. Furthermore, several owned successful businesses that were largely marketed to tourists, such as guesthouses, restaurants, or tour companies, and primarily employed Ghanaians. Both of the individuals who did not work in the tourist industry were involved in

[2] It is important to note that the African American community in Ghana is a part of a larger African Diasporan community in which Blacks from the Caribbean, Latin America, and other Western nations such as the United Kingdom, are represented. The majority of African Diasporan repatriates in Ghana are African American, however, and I focus on this particular community for the purposes of this project. Each of the individuals that I interview in this text identifies as African American.

teaching and education. Many of the individuals believed they were contributing to the development of the country through their business ventures. Of the people I interviewed, all were originally from big cities in the United States such as New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles. There was also a great diversity in age among my interviewees who ranged from about twenty-eight to sixty-five, although the majority of people I spoke with were over the age of forty.

It is very important to re-emphasize that this thesis is not a study of African American repatriates to Ghana and by no means attempts to describe the motives and lives of all African Americans who have decided to move to the country; rather, this project is an exploration of the development of a popular consciousness and understanding of African American relation to Africa and its influence on notions of African Diasporic return. Therefore, in this project I have chosen to highlight three conversations and interactions with three different individuals that provide a significant lens through which to approach the larger topic at hand.

I had initially planned to use a tape recorder for my interviews but I quickly noticed that it contributed to an unproductive dynamic in my interactions with repatriates. Many repatriates interact with international students regularly (mostly by virtue of their involvement in the community and the fact that many African American-owned businesses are geared toward tourists) and are happy to speak with them about their experiences in Ghana on an informal basis. Several people I approached and asked to speak with for the purposes of my project, however, seemed apprehensive, suspicious of my motives, and curious to know how I would use the stories they were sharing with me. The use of a tape recorder often contributed to

heightening their nervousness about being drawn into an unreciprocated exchange. In order to establish a more dialogical situation, I decided not to use a tape recorder for all but one (featured in Chapter 3) of my conversations and was very conscious of my note-taking. I also changed the names of those presented in this work for the purposes of anonymity, as several individuals requested that I do so. It is important to note, however, that many of the individuals that I spoke with adopted African names either in the United States before moving to Ghana or after making the move. I believe this is important to mention because for many it served as personal affirmation of their believed ancestral and cultural connections to Africa. It is also important to note that the Institutional Review Board at Wesleyan University approved my research methodology in May 2008 after I sent in a proposal of this research project for the purposes of writing my thesis.

Finally, I have chosen to use the word "repatriate" in reference to permanent African American residents of Ghana primarily because this was the term, by which most of the individuals that I spoke with referred to themselves. It is important to mention, however, that African Diasporan residents of Ghana are commonly referred to as "expatriates" in many literary accounts of their experiences. The use of the term "expatriate" signifies a departure, withdrawal, or exile from one's native country. It often signifies that one is leaving or has left "home." Rather, the term "repatriate" emphasizes a *return* as opposed to a departure. The word is defined as meaning "to send home." Many of the African Americans that I spoke with saw their decision to live in Ghana as a *return* to their ancestral homeland and not necessarily a *withdrawal* from the United States. Many still maintained ties in the US, occasionally traveled

back and forth, followed and voted in national elections, and claimed to still be a part of an African American community as will be exhibited in the chapters to follow.

A Note on Reflexive Writing

In the first chapter of her most recent book, *Outsider Within: Reworking Anthropology in the Global Age*, anthropologist Faye Harrison (2008) offers a brief and concise explanation of anthropology. She begins by stating that anthropology as a discipline has been characterized by the travel of "European males" to non-Western and often colonially dominated lands with the purpose of studying the "exotic," "primitive" cultures and societies of the peoples who resided there (Harrison 2008:7). Positing the Western World as a societal standard of progress and civilization, anthropologists often constructed "ethnographic exoticism in terms of a radical alterity or otherness," in studying peoples and cultures that were different from their own (2008:9). Harrsion (2008) contends that, in the process, Third World cultures and peoples of color were relegated to the margins of ethnography and anthropological theory, too often as the silent and misrepresented objects of study.

In 1997, eleven years before the release of *Outsider Within*, Harrison called for a critical reworking of the discipline in an effort to address these injustices, in her anthology on the African Diaspora, *Decolonizing Anthropology* (1997). In this text, she reasoned that in the quest for an anthropology that promotes equality, the field must take more seriously "the critiques, constructions, and theoretical deliberations of scholars belonging to neglected, peripheralized, or erased traditions that have long

confronted and challenged colonial and neocolonial structures of power and economic relations" (1997:2). She states:

> In spite of varying attempts at revision and reform, anthropology remains overwhelmingly a Western intellectual—and ideological—project that is embedded in relations of power which favor class sections and historical blocs belonging to or with allegiances to the world's White minority. While these global relations no longer adhere to classical colonial principles or forms, they retain, nonetheless, the basic substance of colonial control….a genuine science of humankind based upon premises of freedom and equality cannot emerge until the anthropology born of the rationalist and liberal intellectual tradition is destroyed (Harrison 1997:2).

In her call to rework anthropology for the global age, Harrison makes an argument for the use of reflexive writing to disrupt this historical practice. She contends that a "native or indigenous anthropology"—theory and ethnography— that comes out of the experiences and struggles of Third World peoples and the "'internal colonies' within the so-called First World" (1997:2) can be used as a means to challenge the Eurocentric and colonial nature of anthropological methodology and theorization (1997:88).

Furthermore, in *Problematizing Blackness:Self-Ethnographies by Black Immigrants to the United States,* Percy C. Hintzen and Jean Rahier (2003:9) state that the field increasingly came under criticism as members of "subaltern populations," who were usually the subjects of anthropological study, began to enter the academy and contribute to the production of knowledge and discourse within the discipline. They contend that the increasing representation of former "subjects" or "subalterns" of anthropological study as researchers has largely contributed to the use of a number of writing styles that are typified by self-reflexivity and "multivocal first-person narratives," which allow the voices of the "subaltern subjects" of anthropological

studies to be heard (Hintzen and Rahier 2003:10). Hintzen and Rahier (2003:10) state that this form of methodology relies upon "intersubjective communication" and out this context emerged *auto-ethnography* as a methodological practice.

In her book *Downtown Ladies: Informal Commercial Importers, A Haitian Anthropologist, and Self-Making in Jamaica,* Gina A. Ulysse (2007:6) asserts that a reflexive approach and auto-ethnographic writing can be new forms of "academic activism." These, Ulysse claims, can lead to an end to statements of ethnographic authority that occur when the focus is placed solely on the subject and not on the impact, influence, and presence of the researcher. As a Haitian anthropologist studying intersections of class, race, and gender in Jamaica, she positions herself within her work and proposes what she calls an "alter(ed)native perspective" to the traditionalisms found within dominant anthropological discourses (2007: 6-7):

> It is *alter* as in other and *native* as I was born in the region and am ascribed that identity…The term connotes an anti- and postcolonial stance, with a conscious understanding that the continuities of history mean that there is no clean break with the past. With that in mind, alter(ed)*native* projects do not offer a new riposte or alternative view; rather they engage existing ones, though these have been altered. Alter(ed)native perspectives are those in which tools of domination are coopted and manipulated to serve particular anti- and postcolonial goals (2007:7).

Ulysse (2007) contends that reflexive projects have tremendous potential for providing spaces in which the voices and perspectives of the populations studied can be heard, along with the subjectivity of the researcher acknowledged through the text. Concurrently, Harrison (1997:88, 2008) argues that before anthropology can be decolonized "native" perspectives on First and Third World cultures must become an "integral" part of the discipline. She maintains that "natives must penetrate and

reconstitute the core of the discipline's discourse by constructing theories premised upon alternative sets of priorities, visions, and understandings. The crystallization of native anthropology (or anthropologies) can contribute to the decolonization of anthropological knowledge and authority, a process that is an integral part of the larger struggle for liberation" (Harrison 1997:88-89).

For the purposes of this thesis, I incorporate some reflexivity into my writing to highlight the complexities and contradictions presented in African Diasporan identity construction that are exhibited through the conversations with the repatriates represented in this work and through some of my own reflections and experiences during my four-month stay in the country. My identity as an African American woman definitely impacted my interactions with the repatriates whom I met and got to know. In many of my interactions with them, the level of my investment in this project was often assumed to be self-evident because of my own phenotypic markers. Moreover, during conversations with repatriates there was often a point when the individual directly or indirectly acknowledged an association between us, often by recognizing a shared, lived experience of being Black in America and experiencing life as a "foreigner" in Ghana. Therefore, I strongly believe that this project would be lacking if conveyed without some of my own perceptions and experiences navigating this topic and interacting with repatriates.

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter of this thesis, "*Whose Africa is Africa?,"* I explore the notion of African diasporan connection to Africa as a homeland and place of origin. I

define the term "diaspora" generally before examining its applicability to the experience of peoples of African descent all over the world. This chapter also brings in several anthropological perspectives on the African Diaspora that challenge essentialized definitions of "Blackness" and examine how it has come to become related to a sense of "Africanness" in popular constructions of African American identity. I begin the chapter with a personal narrative before detailing some of the ways that Black foreigners are perceived in Ghana and the contradictions that arise when diasporic imaginings of Africa as a "home" and "homeland" meet the reality of living as a Black *foreigner* in West African country, Ghana. Also in this chapter we meet two individuals, Chante and Aisha, whose stories and experiences living in Ghana raise several questions in regard to diasporic belonging, connections to, and disconnections from "African" and specifically Ghanaian life and culture.

In Chapter Two, *Pan-Africanism Revisited,* I provide a brief account and analysis of, and historical context for the development of Pan-Africanist thought. I focus on several key figures of early Black Nationalism, namely Edward Blyden, Martin R. Delany, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey and acknowledge their contributions to the development of a Pan-African consciousness among Blacks in the Americas and other parts of the world. This is followed by a larger conversation and analysis of Pan-Africanist thought, ideology, and ideals in contemporary conceptualizations of Black identity and notions of a transnational Pan-African solidarity. I use this chapter to lead into a larger discussion, in Chapter Three of Pan-Africanism and its influence on the popular acceptance of African Diasporan relation to Africa and the legitimization of African Diasporan notions of return.

In the third and final chapter of this work, *Meeting "The Pan-Africanist",* I consider the influence of Pan-Africanism on African American "return" specifically to Ghana. I explore how the development of a Pan-African consciousness in popular African American imaginaries has contributed to increased travel (both permanent and temporary) to West Africa. I also examine how the Ghanaian tourism industry has responded to popular conceptions of African Diasporan connection to Africa through an increased marketing of historical sites, such as the slave castles and dungeons left by European colonizers and Pan-African festivals such as PANAFEST to African Diasporan (though primarily African American) tourists. I begin the chapter with a detailed conversation with a self-proclaimed "African Nationalist," an African American repatriate named Phil, who is deeply involved in promoting a Pan-African consciousness and inspiring other African Americans to recognize their cultural and ancestral connection to Africa. This conversation provides much insight into a larger conversation on the role of Pan-Africanism in influencing African American "return" to Ghana and the effect it has had on the country's growing tourist industry.

Finally, in the conclusion of this thesis, *Contradictory Desires and a Search for Affirmation,* I reconsider some of the ironies, inconsistencies, and incongruities that characterize African Diasporan identities and have influenced countless African Americans to embark on a search for "home."

CHAPTER ONE

"Whose Africa is Africa?"[3]: An Exploration of African Diasporan Identity Construction

Foreigners at Home

After a long flight, I got off the plane in Accra, Ghana and stepped into the humid night air. My plane had parked in an outside terminal and I had to walk inside the airport to the baggage claim to retrieve my things. After picking up my luggage from the revolving belt, I stepped outside the airport into a sea of people. I was trying not to look too confused and to keep a calm demeanor when I finally spotted a sign: *SIT Study Abroad, Ghana.* Relieved, I walked over to the small man holding the sign and joined the other American members of my study abroad group. As I stood and awaited further instructions, a broad, dark-complexioned Ghanaian woman pulled me into a tight hug and whispered into my ear, "Welcome home." I smiled up at her, a little puzzled, but delighted by the warm welcome. Shortly thereafter, I learned that she was the academic director of my program.

My ensuing interactions with Ghanaians did not exactly mirror the welcome given to me by my academic director. Walking down the streets of Cape Coast—a relatively large tourist town on the coast of Ghana—people would often call out to me

[3] (Clarke 2006:139)

"Obruni! How are you?" or "Black American! Bra (come)!" I would smile, return the greeting, and continue on my way. Most Ghanaians in Cape Coast have frequent interactions with foreigners of various kinds, including African Diasporans, due to a large tourist industry on the coast of Ghana. Kakum Rainforest and National Park as well as the Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Castles left behind by European colonizers are located in this region. For this reason, upon seeing or meeting me, most Ghanaians assumed that I was either a Black American or a Black citizen of the United Kingdom. Though I often tried not to bring too much attention to myself, by keeping my mouth shut and trying my best not to act like a tourist, I was highly visible. My clothes, my persona, my light brown skin were all markers of difference.

After a few weeks of living in Ghana, I grew puzzled over the use of the term "obruni" in reference to myself and the other African Diasporans visiting or residing in the country. Similar to the Swahili term "mzungu," the Fante[4] term "oburoni," translates to mean "white man." The following conversation with a Ghanaian friend, Kwame, captures the complexity of the term and its colloquial use in reference to Black Americans and other African Diasporans residing in the country.

"If it means white man, why do people call me 'oburoni?' I'm not white and I'm not a man: I don't understand," I said plaintively.

He laughed. "Ah, No. No. It is a greeting. Greetings are very important in Ghanaian culture. They do not know your name. They call you 'oburoni' to get your attention, to greet you."

[4] Though the official language in Ghana is English, the country has many different ethnic groups and languages. The Fante are an ethnic group primarily located in Southern Ghana. Fante is the language spoken by people who ethnically identify as belonging to this ethnic group. It is commonly referred to as the language of the people who reside in the city of Cape Coast because most of the people in Cape Coast identify as Fante; therefore, it is the most common ethnic language spoken there.

"So people think that I am white?" I asked.

"No, you are not white. You are a Black American," he stated matter of factly. "They do not call you oburoni because you are white. It does not just mean white man, it means 'foreigner.' They call you oburoni because you are not from Ghana—you are not from Africa. You are from the *land* of the white man. Yes. Do you understand?"

I understood. In his essay, *Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Disapora,* Edward Bruner (1996) expands on the definition of the term "oburoni." He writes:

> The situation is full of ironies. When diaspora blacks return to Africa the Ghanaians call them *obruni*, which means "whiteman," but the term is extended to Europeans, Americans, and Asians regardless of skin color, so it also has a meaning foreigner. This second meaning is also ironic, since the diaspora blacks see themselves as returning "home." So the term *obruni* labels the African Americans as both white and foreign, whereas they see themselves as black and at home. A white South African will be called an obruni, but black South Africans as well as blacks from other countries of Africa south of the Sahara such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, or Kenya will not be called an obruni but will be referred to by another term which means 'stranger'….it suggests that in Elmina conceptualization, the entire stream of foreign visitors over the last 500 years including African Americans are seen as similar…[and] are merged by the Ghanaians into a single inclusive category: we are all obruni (Bruner 1996:295).

Futhermore, Bayo Hosley (2008:220) states that the term "oburoni" has become a point of contention between Ghanaians and African Diasporans, who are often frustrated by its use in reference to themselves. She states that in actuality, the term means "those who come from over the horizon" (2008:220). It is not a racial label, rather it is a term used to identify people "by the places from which they come" (2008:220). She writes, "the Americanness of African Americans is quite significant

from the point of view of Ghanaians. For them, African American and white tourists sometimes occupy the same mental space; they are all privileged foreigners" (2008:220).

Indeed, most Ghanaians whom I met in Cape Coast used the terms "Black American" and "African American" synonymously, although, both the "Black/African" and the "American" can have different implications in certain contexts. It was largely acknowledged that African Americans are not white: they are accepted as Black, but rarely seen as "African." According to Paulla A. Ebron (1999:913), representations of African Americans in American popular culture have become increasingly pervasive over the past thirty years. Images of African Americans, especially men as represented by sports figures and hip hop stars have developed into an "international symbol of style—icons of cool, bad, and of oppositional, youth-oriented culture." In Ghana, African Americans' historical and genealogical connection to Africa was often acknowledged on the basis of cultural origins, skin color, and popular conceptions of American Blackness that are heavily influenced by dominant images conveyed by American popular culture, popular music, and media representations; our "Western-ness" adds to an element of exoticism, difference, and hyper-visibility.

Ghana has a fairly large African Diasporan repatriate population.[5] On the coast of Ghana, specifically in Cape Coast, Elmina, and Accra, there is a substantial African Diasporan community. Many of its members own businesses such as

[5] As I briefly footnoted in the introduction, when I refer to the African Diasporan repatriate community in Ghana, here and throughout the text, I include individuals from the Caribbean, Latin America, and other Western nations, such as the United Kingdom. The African Diasporan community in Ghana is very diverse and comprised of individuals from many different regions across the globe. African American repatriates, however, do make up a significant majority of this larger community.

restaurants or guesthouses. Before I left the United States, several friends who had made the trip to Ghana before me gave me a list of places to go and people to see on the Ghanaian coast. Most of them recommended that I visit a restaurant and guesthouse owned by a woman named Chante, to have some good food and meet nice people. Chante had moved to Ghana with her husband—who had passed away in 2007—close to twenty years ago. She was very well known and an influential figure within the African Diasporan community in Ghana. One hot and lazy afternoon, I convinced my friend Larry to accompany me on a trip to Elmina in search of her restaurant.

We took a taxi ride of about twenty minutes from Cape Coast to Elmina. Once we arrived at our destination, we paid the driver our fifty pesawas and began walking up the long dirt driveway to the guesthouse and restaurant. After walking for about ten minutes, we reached a tall, gated entrance. Behind the gate was a large orange house surrounded by smaller living quarters with thatched roofs. The buildings were painted with Adinkra symbols, and woodcarvings lined the walkway to an outdoor patio and kitchen around the back of the house. We followed the path to the back of the house and took a seat on the patio, which was set up with tables and chairs. Larry and I smiled at each other and sat back to enjoy the ambiance. Palm trees were planted all over the property with hammocks strung between them. We looked out over the ocean and could hear the waves steadily crashing against the rocks as the cool sea breeze mitigated the stifling humidity.

Shortly after we sat down, our waitress approached us, smiling. She handed us a menu and asked us for our drink orders. I opened the menu and saw, much to my

surprise, that it offered mostly American dishes. Items such as hush puppies, macaroni and cheese, and barbequed chicken were among the options, along with a number of other American comfort foods. Larry and I excitedly scanned the list as the waitress came back with our drinks. After we ordered our food, the waitress told us that it would take a while to cook and asked if we would like to meet the owner of the restaurant and guesthouse while we waited. We followed her inside the orange house. The front room of the house was made into a museum and library. The walls were covered with photographs, posters, articles, and artwork that reflected African and African American history and culture. Photographs of prominent Black figures such as James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Kwame Nkrumah lined the walls from ceiling to floor. Elaborate African carvings and artwork were strategically placed throughout the room. The library was filled with scores of books by Black authors. Larry and I explored the front room, pointing out interesting artifacts, articles, and photos to each other as we attempted to take it all in.

When we were finished, we sat on a couch in the living room area, chatting excitedly in hushed whispers while waiting for the owner to arrive. She emerged from a backroom—a petite woman with long gray locked hair, glasses, and tanned skin wearing a brightly colored sarong. She gave me a warm smile, pulled me into a welcoming hug, and in an unmistakable New York accent, introduced herself as Chante. Then she immediately asked us where we were from. She told us that she had grown up in New York City, but had lived in Ghana for over twenty years. I responded that I was a student, briefly described my project on conceptions of "home," and asked her if she would be willing to speak with me about her experience

living in Ghana. At first she looked a little apprehensive. She hesitated and then she definitively replied, "Home. Home is wherever it is that I am. Where is home for you?" Her response startled me. As the researcher, I was expecting to be asking all of the questions. I did not expect her to question me.

"I'm still trying to figure that out," I stammered.

"Home," she smiled, "I wrote a book on home, on coming home—to Ghana. It's a very interesting subject. Maybe we can talk a little more about it, later though. I'll let you know" (personal interview, April 08, 2008, notes in possession of author).

I thanked her and asked her if she knew of anyone else in the area who might be willing to speak with me. She rattled off a few names and phone numbers for me to write down. Shortly thereafter, the waitress announced to Larry and me that our food was ready, and we said our goodbyes and went back out to the patio to eat our much anticipated lunch, reminiscent of a southern home-cooked meal.

Chante was one of the first African Diasporan repatriates that I met while I was in Ghana. She was very bold and gregarious, with a strong personality, and she proved to be a little intimidating upon our first meeting. She (and her late husband, Joshua) are very well known in the Cape Coast/Elmina area, as they have made a palpable effort to integrate themselves into the African Diasporan repatriate community and Ghanaian life and culture. I learned that she has been interviewed before by anthropologists and scholars and has often been called on to represent the African American repatriate perspective on Ghanaian political, economic, and social dynamics. She has also written several articles and has finished a book (not yet

available in print in the United States) in which she chronicles some of her experiences and perspectives as an African American living in Ghana.

Walking into Chante's house, I was presented with art, people, food, and an atmosphere that was familiar. I felt the comfort and security of being in a space where I did not have to explain my racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. Through her statement, "Home is wherever it is that I am," she asserted that homes are not found but made. They can be shaped to fit particular ways of being; they may reflect but need not mimic the inherent characteristics of a place or location in which one resides. Chante made her guesthouse and restaurant a place that affirmed the hybridity of her cultural identity. The artwork on the outside patio and around the house as well as in the museum and library emphasized her African roots while simultaneously highlighting the uniqueness and importance of her African American heritage. In earlier years, she and her late husband established an organization that was committed to reuniting African Diasporans with continental Africans. Many of the customers who stay in the guesthouse are African Diasporan tourists. The space provides them with a "home away from home." Customers are able to experience and enjoy aspects of Ghanaian life and culture and then rest in a place that represents a pocket of familiarity in a country that is in many ways foreign to them.

Several days later, I spoke with Aisha Peterson, an individual that Chante recommended I meet. During our conversation Aisha mentioned some of her struggles with adapting to the unfamiliar in a country she was attempting to make her "home." I first met Aisha on the day of my trip to Chante's restaurant. She had come to order food and visit Chante and walked in on our conversation. She was a young

woman with long black locked hair, and she was carrying a motorcycle helmet. Chante introduced her to me and then explained my project to her. Aisha was very friendly, but seemingly indifferent to my project; nevertheless, she agreed to meet with me later on in the week at Chante's restaurant.

I arrived early on the day of our meeting and took a seat on the patio with my notebook and tape recorder. The sound of the sea was very calming, and I became lost in my thoughts until I heard the roar of a motorcycle pulling up in the driveway around the corner. A few moments later, Aisha appeared on the walkway, waved at me, and hurriedly ran into the house to greet Chante. Shortly thereafter she made her way to where I was sitting. We greeted each other, and she asked if we could move to another spot, closer to the water. I agreed, and we made our way past the hammocks and palm trees down to a more secluded area with tables and chairs. She selected a table and we sat down together. I gave her a brief synopsis of my project and told her that I would be asking her questions about her life in Ghana. I then asked if it was ok to use a tape recorder. She looked a little apprehensive, but said yes. I turned on the tape recorder and began:

"Where were you born?" I asked.

"Detroit, Michigan…," she trailed off. "Can I have a copy of that tape?"

"Sure," I said. "It is a digital recorder, though, so I won't be able to make you a copy right away. But when I go back home I will be able to send you a digital copy via email."

"So, I'll have to wait until you go back home until I can get a copy?"

"Yes, because I have to save it to my computer and I don't have a computer here with me," I replied.

"Ok. Well, how are you going to use it? Depending on how you use it that's how I'll answer the questions," she said.

"We don't have to use it. I can shut it off if you prefer that. Would you mind if I took notes?" I asked.

"Yeah, could you shut it off? I don't really like the idea of being tape recorded. I don't mind if you take notes," she explained.

I turned off the tape recorder and we started over.

She restarted by telling me she was from Detroit, Michigan and had moved to Ghana permanently in October 2007. She explained that she had always felt a connection to Africa since she was quite young. Growing up in a very Afro-centric and politically conscious household, she was aware of her blackness and her spiritual connection to Africa early on. She always knew that at some point in her life, she would make the move to Africa. She prepared herself subconsciously through living an "African-centered" lifestyle in her adulthood.

"My spirit planned to be here," she stated, "It was decided before I came."

"Was the adjustment to life in Ghana difficult?" I asked.

"No, adjusting wasn't really a big deal. I lived a very African-centered life in Detroit. I listened to African music, always ate African food, and did lots of African cultural things like dance and art. This [the move to Africa] was the only thing that was missing. I also had a teaching job waiting for me and was really encouraged to come. The hardest part was leaving my family, my kids. They didn't want me to

leave. I offered to take them with me, but they didn't want to come to live here permanently. Africa is too primitive for them." She laughed. "But they knew that I had to come. It was hard on them, especially my youngest."

"What made you want to stay permanently?" I asked.

"I came as a worker for the development of our people. Brothers and sisters that come back have a responsibility to help develop Africa. African peoples everywhere deserve better. It takes people on both sides to help build that bridge and I'm trying to do my part to achieve that from this side."

As our conversation went on, I began to notice that Aisha was very conscious of my taking notes. She would pause mid-sentence and would continuously shoot nervous glances at my notebook as I scribbled furiously in order to jot down all that she was saying. I also realized that I was not contributing much to the conversation. I closed the notebook and began to share with her several of my struggles and frustrations in adapting to Ghanaian life. It was only then that her anxiety seemed to lessen. She began to perceive me not just as a researcher, but as someone who had shared many similar experiences. She started to confide that she did miss many things from the United States. She spoke of missing her family and being able to take water and electricity for granted. She also acknowledged that she still dealt with elements of culture shock—such as the public transportation system in Ghana, problems with sanitation, the corruption of the police, and perhaps most frustrating, people taking advantage of her because she is a "foreigner."

"The taxi drivers are crazy. They drive so fast and I hated being packed into Trotros [public minibuses]. Why do they pack twenty-five people into a twelve-

passenger van? " she laughed. "That's why I got my bike. I had to get around on my own and it's cheaper than buying a car."

"The trotros can be really scary," I agreed, "I've had a couple of bad experiences."

"Yeah, so you know what I'm saying. And they never want to give you change. That's one thing I learned from being out here. Always carry change with you. There's never change anywhere—in stores, taxis, nowhere. I mean, I know they sometimes do it on purpose because they know that we're not from here, so I always carry a pocket of change with me wherever I go. And the sewers really took me a long time to get used to. I just don't understand. Why are they open like that? The smell is so bad. But I think these are all things that brothers and sisters who come back can help with" (personal interview, April 15, 2008, notes in possession of author).

Aisha did indeed consider Africa her "home." She had constructed Africa as a "homeland" and I realized during the course of our conversation that although she lived specifically in Ghana, when she spoke of "home" she never referred to Ghana or Cape Coast or Elmina, but to the African continent at large. According to Khachig Tololyan (1995), an aspiration to return to the homeland is a significant component of the concept of diaspora. This idea of "return" may entail for a few diasporans a physical return or journey back to the homeland, but for many more it results in a symbolic association with the notion and/or reality of the "homeland" and other members of the diaspora through several forms such as art, food, music, tourism, and news media consumption (Tololyan 1995:14-15).

Aisha's African-centered lifestyle contributed to the way that she conceptualized herself and envisioned Africa. She made repeated "re-turns" (Tololyan 1995:14-15) toward her African "homeland center" through her engagement in African culture, enjoying African music and art, and eating African cuisine, which she affirmed all contributed to her abstract conceptualization of Africa as a "homeland" and played a role in her actual physical return to the African continent. Furthermore, it was evident that there was a struggle presented in the ways that she had romanticized Africa as her homeland and the reality of living as a Black *American* in Ghana. Anthropologist Paulla A. Ebron (1999) would refer to this predicament as a "collision" of emotional worlds that provides a rich "example of the tensions that are created when imaginary social worlds collide with present moments" as she states in her article, *Tourists as Pilgrims: Commerical Fashioning of Transtlantic Politics* (1999:919).

Boniface Ochiere (1975) also mentions some of the struggles African Americans experience when traveling to Africa: "Africa is no panacea for the social problems foisted on Afro-Americans by the peculiar social conditions under which they have lived in the United States. Afro-Americans who wish to go to Africa must come to terms with the fact that Africa is very different from the United States. Their disappointment will be compounded if they expect to find a little America in Africa" (Obichere 1975:29). Consistent with this statement, Aisha expressed her frustrations with some of the ways that she was perceived and treated by Ghanaians because she is a foreigner. The ways that she perceived Ghanaians and her difficulty adjusting to

particular ways of life in Ghana was also clearly influenced by her experience having been born and raised elsewhere.

Diasporan Relation to a Homeland

The preceding vignette raises several questions concerning diasporic belonging. The African Diaspora is a significant concept that has been repeatedly problematized in relation to constructions of identity, "home," and issues of belonging in African American imaginaries. An understanding of the term *diaspora* and its relevance to the experience of peoples of African descent all over the world is significant and fundamentally tied to ideas of community, homeland, and notions of Pan-African solidarity.

Traditional definitions of diaspora have focused on several basic principles, namely, migration or displacement from a place of origin. In the introduction to *Rethinking Diasporas: Hidden Narratives and Imagined Borders*, Aoileann Ni Eigeartaigh, Kevin Howard, and David Getty (2007:1) state that fundamentally a diaspora is an ethnic group that permanently resides outside of its homeland. They argue that two processes are essential to the creation of a diaspora: the displacement of a group of people from their original homeland and the formation of a new community in an adopted homeland. This new community is typified by its ability to maintain parts of its original culture while concurrently incorporating the culture of which it is now a part (Eigeartaigh, 2007:5).

Khachig Tololyan (1995:12) in his essay *Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,* argues that several other traits contribute to

diasporan formation. He identifies multiple characteristics of what he terms a "paradigmatic diaspora" (related to how the term is traditionally used in reference to the Jewish and Armenian experience). First, he mentions that the displacement which takes place is due largely to *coercion,* leading to the uprooting and resettlement of large numbers of people or communities beyond the borders of the homeland. He goes on to state that diasporan communities actively maintain a "collective memory" which is an essential element of their distinct identity (Tololyan 1995:13).

Furthermore, diasporan communities sustain contact with their homeland when it exists and it is identifiable. If the homeland is not identifiable, however, diasporan communities display a "will to loyalty, keeping faith with a mythicized idea of the homeland" (Tololyan, 1995:14). Finally, a desire to return to the homeland in some manner is considered an essential feature of the notion of diaspora. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this idea of "return" does not always represent a physical return or journey back to the homeland, but Tololyan suggests that it is rather a "re-turn, a repeated turning to the concept and/or the reality of the homeland and other diasporan kin through memory, written and visual texts…et cetera. The orientation towards the homeland center can be symbolic, ritual, religious" (1995:14-15).

Aoileann Ni Eigeartaigh (2007:6-7) argues that a diaspora is not characterized only by "spatial displacement" but also by an engagement with the questions of identity, memory, and belonging that this displacement produces. The concept of "home" is central to the construction of a diasporic identity. It provides individuals with a sense of belonging and orientation. As an ideal, "home" represents comfort,

security, and affirmation (Eigeartaigh 2007:6-7). Estrangement from "home" presents a sense of dislocation for the diasporic subject. Eigeartaigh states:

> The concept of "home" is problematized when the subject is living at a remove from it. For the diasporic subject, "home" is constructed primarily through memories of a homeland, which often attains a mythical, idealized status: home becomes primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present (2007:6-7).

In essence, a major component of diasporic identity is "contingent belonging"—to be "*in* a place, but not *of* a place" (Eigeartaigh 2007:2). Likewise, Tololyan (1995:7-8) argues that diasporans posses a stateless power that resides in a consciousness of their "multiple belongings" and their ability to wrestle with the ironies and inconsistencies produced by this position. Diasporic individuals possess identities that are different from those of the hegemonic culture of the hostland. In his work on "the Black Atlantic," Paul Gilroy (1993:1-2) expands on this point by arguing that all Blacks in the West experience some forms of double-consciousness. He argues that Blacks in the West exist between two cultural groupings with which they have an antagonistic relationship. This relationship is marked by these individuals' difficulty in navigating, understanding, and reconciling their identities.

Such a model of *diaspora* provides a general framework for approaching the experiences of cultural estrangement (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xiv). Fabre and Benesch (2004:xiv) generally define a diaspora as dependent on the existence of a homeland—either real or "mythic"—with which one seeks to ascertain a new relationship. The "mythic" homeland is usually associated with the memory of the incident that originally caused the separation. Second, "the new life in a foreign environment and the concomitant estrangement, humiliations, and ordeals not only

necessitate a continuous struggle for recognition, equality, and justice but call for the identification of social and cultural forces as yet unknown," (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xiv) and finally, the formation of a diasporic community with an idiosyncratic set of national, linguistic, and ethnic identities, which are united by "collective memory," shared similarities, consciousness, and solidarity. All of this is accomplished through a hopeful and ambitious attempt to work against separation, re-establish connections, and regain lost heritage and identity (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xiv).

Furthermore, Fabre and Benesch argue that a diaspora is not a permanent state or condition; rather, it is a search for identity that is continuously "contested, re-imagined, and re-invented" (2004:xiv). The concept of "diaspora" serves as a tool for comprehensively understanding the experience of forced migration and slavery of peoples of African descent all over the world by inviting "reconsiderations of current theoretical assumptions" (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xiii) and by opening up new ways to address familiar issues such as identity formation, nationalism, colonialism, neocolonialism, and pan-Africanism (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xiii-xiv). Linking the terms "African" and "diaspora" encourages a consideration of whether peoples of African descent who do not live on the African continent have some shared traditional values and cultural behaviors (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xiv).

Finally, they argue that due to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, millions of Africans were forced to leave the continent of Africa and were dispersed across the Atlantic. To the coercively relocated population, the homeland—Africa—was permanently lost. "Real or imagined, Africa is the matrix of the African diaspora, the

lost homeland and center" (Fabre and Benesch:xv). For peoples of African descent removed from Africa, they argue that the continent represents a place of origin and a mythic site to which one longs to return. This "return" has taken on many forms, but has always been a significant element of African diasporic consciousness and raises several questions about diasporan relation to Africa—a concept that is continually explored and re-examined (Fabre and Benesch:xv).

Michael Echeruo (1999) offers a similar argument, stating that a diaspora is possible only when there has been an "acceptance of such an ontological entity" (Echeruo1999:12). In his opinion, it is the notion of return that solidifies the concept of diaspora:

> The idea of communal suffering experienced by its members is at the heart of the condition of the diaspora, yet it is the idea of an eventual Return that is its most fundamental source of sustenance…. No person can claim to be part of a diaspora who cannot, however improbably claim also to be traceable by descent to a lineage and (hence) to a place….The power of the idea lies in the principle of it that a return is possible forever, whenever, if ever. It is this possibility—this inalienable *right to wish* a return, to reclaim connections to a lineage, however fractured, that makes one individual a part of a diffuse and disparate collection of persons we call the diaspora (emphasis mine) (1999:13-14).

Furthermore, Echeruo makes clear that the commitment to return of which he speaks is not an obligation; rather, the significance in the notion of return lies in the diasporic individuals' ability—their "right"—to reclaim connections to a "lineage," heritage, and homeland if so desired (1999:14).

Contemporary anthropological perspectives concerning the African Diaspora emphasize its changing character and complexity in an attempt to problematize essentialist narratives and conceptualizations of blackness. This approach moves

away from traditional definitions of diaspora that focus on a migration or dispersion from a place of origin or homeland, and instead largely perceives diaspora as "a process" that produces subjects through concessions developing from "particular structural and historical conditions that change over time" (Clarke and Thomas 2006: 12-13). In their anthology on the African Diaspora, *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Productions of Blackness,* Kamari Clarke and Deborah Thomas (2006:13) cite Paul Gilroy as the scholar who began this discussion when he argued that black communities are transnationally linked, not by a supposed connection to a real or mythical homeland—Africa—but by a mutual awareness of a shared racial oppression.

Gilroy employs the term "Black Atlantic" (1993) instead of "African Diaspora" in order to suggest a diverse community that challenges "racial essentialism, nationalist narratives of belonging, and ethnic absolutism" (Clarke and Thomas 2006:13). Instead of placing emphasis on initial dispersion and migrations, Gilroy demonstrates how different black communities across the globe were dynamically "made and remade" due to the acclimatization and exchange of the political and cultural resources around them (Clarke and Thomas 2006:13). Both racial capitalism and Western hegemony comprised a vital medium through which many African and Black Atlantic cultures were constructed. Thus, Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (1994) argue that many of the cultural practices that might have survived the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade "could never be the same" in Africa or in the "New World" (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:9).

The concept of cultural hybridity within the diaspora has often been deemphasized in popular academic discourse in the effort to "demonstrate the presence of some pure African essence untouched by commercial or Western influence" (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:9). However, Paul Gilroy (1994) argues in his essay, *Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a 'Changing' Same,* that the hybridity of "Black Atlantic culture" does not invalidate its commonalities or the linkages that allow one to "locate a diasporic identity within difference;" rather its acknowledgement can be an important means used to avoid essentialisms (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:9). Contemporary definitions of diaspora often question the vitality of popular narratives of belonging, community, and home within Black diasporic populations (Clarke and Thomas 2006:16), focusing instead not only on the potential unities that may be able to be forged through the use of the term diaspora, but also the differences and misunderstandings within and among the many communities that fit into this category (Clarke and Thomas 2006:14).

Clarke and Thomas argue that traditional debates concerning the anthropology of the African Diaspora have habitually utilized "nineteenth century biological notions of race as the predominant basis for connection and continuity" (2006:18). "Race-conscious" movements, however, such as Pan-Africanism and Afrocentricity, contributed to a transformation of racial meanings by emphasizing *cultural* politics—rather than biology—as a basis for racial belonging. Considering this alternative Clarke and Thomas state:

> The cultural formation of a new commercial politics of linkage between people in the Americas and those in related "homelands" set the stage for the establishment of a heritage category through which linkages to origins were used to supplement national identity and citizenship. In the social sphere, this

> emphasis on diasporic interconnection redefined prevalent notions of biological race to that of cultural race, here shaped by conceptions of ethnicity, or ancestral heritage. Though it manifested in deterritorialized contexts, this notion of heritage was actually deeply territorial but reflected a historical rather than an ontological or biological notion of race (Clarke and Thomas 2006:19).

Clarke and Thomas (2006:19) state that this "trend" is not limited to the United States and manifests itself differently in different contexts. It is important to acknowledge that diasporic connections are not fixed, nor "universally constituted," rather, they are constantly reconceptualized, altered, and reconstructed. Even the most tentative sense of unity and solidarity among Black peoples in the Americas, Caribbean, Europe, and Africa is socially constructed, incomplete, constantly changing, and contingent (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:7). Diasporic commonalities are being reconceptualized in relation to both historical specificities of particular black communities and current developments that seemingly solidify particular narratives within the diaspora (Clark and Thomas 2006:19, Lemelle and Kelley 1994:7).

In her essay *Diaspora Space, Ethnographic Space: Writing History Between the Lines*, Tina M. Campt (2006) contends that scholarship that theorizes Black communities and their cultural formations is often dependent on dialogue of diasporic connection in which "similarity and commonality are privileged" (2006: 93-94). She argues that dynamics of difference and translation are fundamental elements of the African Diaspora that are often popularly ignored in an attempt to achieve solidarity. Campt (2006) also argues that memory is especially significant in processes of cultural production. It is the shared narratives of belonging, home, and community that maintain many black communities and contribute to an understanding of

diasporic identity and community (2006:95, 96). The "inherited" memories of a diaspora maintain and characterize a sense of connection "among and between communities separated spatially in diaspora" (Campt 2006:96).

Campt asserts that memory is the basis of the "defining tension of diaspora and diasporic identity: the dynamic play of originary and imaginary homes, and the complex networks of relation forged across national, spatial, and temporal boundaries" (2006: 96). She contends that Africa is the signifier of diasporic relation and the site "through which all routes lead as the link between black peoples" (2006:101). For the diaspora, Africa is a symbol that signifies connection. Campt argues that diaspora itself constructs this relation and Africa is "wholly a symbolic vehicle" (2006:101). She emphasizes, however, the limits of diaspora as the theoretical model through which to understand all constructions of black community without considering cultural, geographical, and historical context. There is no universal model that is capable of explaining the cultures and experiences of all Black populations. Instead, the concept of disaspora must be engaged with an acknowledgement of its limitations concerning particular black communities "whose histories and genealogies do not necessarily comfortably conform to dominant models" (Campt 2006:108). She states:

> Relations of diaspora forged on the basis of similar experiences of racialization are not transparent links between black people; rather, these relations are the products of highly constructed processes of cultural reading and interpretations that shape, define, and often constrain our ability to understand the differences between our histories and cultures. Although our experiences of living blackness may in some ways be similar, it is also necessary to consider the differences between our cultures and histories and to recognize how their specificities have come to bear on the ways in which the effects of race are lived and read (Campt 2006:111).

Kamari Clarke (2006:134) agrees, she asserts that one of the important issues in the anthropology of Africa in the late twentieth century has been that of the "invention of Africa" (Clarke 2006:134). She argues that many Blacks in the United States have "reinvented" themselves as both American (through lived experience) and African (through descent or ancestry). She argues that two ideological narratives which emerged primarily from Black nationalist thought in the 1960s continue to influence these conceptualizations of Black self. These narratives are the "slavery narrative" and the "African nobility-redemption narrative" (Clarke 2006:134).

Clarke insists that the "slavery narrative" is founded on notions of common ancestry among Black peoples. It emphasizes the fact that African peoples were forcefully taken from the African continent and enslaved in the present-day Americas and Caribbean. It also accentuates how African slaves were able to produce a diversity of cultures and were able to sustain a connection to their African heritage in spite of the brutal oppression they suffered under the slave system. This narrative describes Black Americans as "surviving incarnations of preslavery African societies, thereby enabling a self-identification of Black Americans as not simply racialized but as fundamentally embedded in genealogies of heritage" (Clarke 2006:133-134). "The African nobility narrative," focuses on the idea that Black Americans are the descendants of an African elite and are not just the victims of slavery. The "nobility narrative" encourages African Americans to embrace "African" traditions in order to reclaim their true selves, heritage, identity, and culture, which were lost to white America. Clarke writes, "this narrative incites black Americans to take control of their destiny by reclaiming their ancestral identities" (Clarke 2006:134).

These two narratives have become a part of popular consciousness concerning black identity in which 'blackness' becomes related to 'Africanness' (Clarke 2006:134). Clarke (2006:134) argues that through positioning Africa as the place of origin and homeland of Black peoples a multitude of cultural, historical, and experiential influences between Africa and the Americas were ignored. This approach to diaspora is problematic because it implicitly assumes that there is an "authentic articulation of black origins" (Clarke 2006:135) and maintains a biological approach to race as the foundation of this relation. Clarke believes that instead, contemporary study of diasporic relation should "demonstrate how, through particular complex interactions between Africa and the United States, diasporic identities and consciousnesses are made, and therefore how narratives of descent are constructed in historically constituted ways" (2006:135).

Futhermore, Clarke asks the important questions: "Whose 'Africa' is 'Africa'? Whose 'Africa' is 'African'? Which patterns of cultural production are 'authentic'? And with what authority do diverse actors speak, judge, and shape the processes of cultural production and the diverse implications these processes have for claiming a 'black' and African and African American raced identity" (2006:139)? These questions are particularly important to consider in regard to Chante and Aisha, their decisions to move to Ghana, and the contradictions generated by being a foreigner at "home." Their believed relation to a Pan-African community and an intrinsic membership in the African Diaspora shaped the decisions of both Chante and Aisha to move permanently to Ghana. They both believe they possess an "African-ness" that is inherently part of their identities by virtue of their racial and cultural origins—

which viably connected them to Africa, Africans, and other Black peoples across the world. The hardships and realities of living as foreigners in Ghana collided (Ebron 1999) with their ideals about a Pan-African community, however, and presented areas of contention. After moving to and becoming settled in Elmina, Ghana, Aisha acknowledged that adjusting to life in the country was difficult for her, but in doing so she never relinquished the hold on the Africa she had constructed as a place of her own. Similarly, Chante created a living environment that was a reflection of her multiple homes and identities, an environment she is able to share with others who may feel similarly.

The ironies and contradictions found in these two stories can be used to highlight some of the complexities of African Diasporan relation to Africa. Kamari Clarke notes "disjunctures in formulations of belonging on both sides of the Atlantic, highlight the complex (and sometimes conflicting) basis upon which membership is forged and the institutional norms through which meanings are understood" (2006:139). Furthermore, as Paulla A. Ebron asserts, there is not a simple formula that clearly outlines the many dynamics of cultural identities, rather, "for African Americans, the question of the politics of identity is fraught, under constant negotiation and continual reframing, not only within contests over citizenship and rights within the United States but also within a diasporic imagination" (Ebron 1999:911).

CHAPTER TWO

Pan-Africanism Revisited: A Brief History and Analysis of Pan-Africanist Thought

The use of the term "diaspora" in reference to Africa's New World descendants arose out of the black intellectual interest in the Pan-African movement that developed in the 1950s (Edwards 2004:5). The concept of Pan-Africanism emerged as a dialogue within black internationalism and was intended to address the political and cultural organization of the interests of African peoples all over the world. Sidney J. Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (1994) quote Bernard Magubane in the introduction to *Imagining Home: Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* to address this issue of origins:

> Pan-Africanism was intended to be an oppositional ideology…the Pan-African consciousness has always been a determined effort on the part of Black peoples to rediscover their shrines from the wreckage of history. It was a revolt against the white man's ideological suzerainty in culture, politics, and historiography (1994:2).

At different historical periods, Pan-Africanism has taken the form of both a political movement and a cultural expression of Black consciousness. Early Pan-Africanist thought attempted to establish intellectual links between peoples of the African diaspora and continental Africans in order to build racial and cultural unity as a

means for developing a global Black liberation movement (Lemelle and Kelley, 1994:3). These ideologies challenged Eurocentric interpretations of African history, emphasized Black cultural unity and self-determination, and reclaimed a pre-colonial African history and past (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:3). A critical exploration of Pan-Africanism as both a concept and a movement is fundamental to understanding factors contributing to the formation of an African diasporan identity and its relation to the concept of "home."

Pan-Africanism has its roots in Black nationalism which dates back to the American revolutionary period. During this period, Black nationalism was largely manifested in Back-to-Africa movements; Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1996:1) defines "classical black nationalism" as an ideology focused on establishing a self-governing black nation-state within specific geographical boundaries—usually on the African continent—and creating the foundation for a concept of a national culture. In a broader sense, however, the concept connotes a spirit of unity and solidarity with the social, economic, and political struggles of people of African descent across the globe (Moses 1996:20). Moses (1996:20) notes that "classical Black nationalism" did imply the existence of some sort of Pan-Africanist consciousness—notions of "pride in a distinct ethnic heritage" and some level of solidarity with Black peoples in other parts of the globe. However, it was not manifested strongly in the popular manifestations of Black nationalism during this time period. Instead the focus was on themes of "uplift" and the "civilizing" of the race, as I will expand on later in this chapter (Moses 1996:20).

"Classical Black nationalism" is believed to have originated in the 1700s and to have reached a peak in the mid-1800s before suffering a decline and peaking again due to the in Garvey movement in the 1920s (Moses 1996:1). The fact that "classical black nationalism" sought to create a national homeland for blacks in Africa (and in some cases other parts of the world) "signified something more than a dissatisfaction with conditions in the United States" (Moses 1996:2) and implied a desire for independence and self-determination. It offered a way of preserving self-worth and dignity in the midst of economic, political, and social domination of whites over Blacks. In essence, Black nationalism was one form of resistance to the oppressive conditions Blacks faced under white American hegemony (Moses 1996:3).

Moreover, Moses (1996:4) argues, at its roots the term "nationalism" carries with it a "belief in consanguinity"—a "myth of commonality or purity of blood"—in which the members of a nation have a common ancestry and organic ties of kinship. It was in the midst of this archetypal understanding of race and categorizations of the human that Black nationalism developed. It was based on the premise that racial membership could function as the basis of national (and eventually transnational) identity (Moses 1996:5). Classical American Black nationalists believed all African peoples to be oppressed by whites and assumed that this common experience of oppression could establish a "pan-racial consciousness" (Moses 1996:5).

It is important to note, however, that there were many debates among black nationalists concerning the desirability and appropriation of Africa as a homeland for American Blacks and the proposition of complete withdrawal from the United States. Black leaders were not consistent or in complete agreement on their beliefs which

often were fluid and ambiguous (Meier 1988:x). On the multiplicity of Black nationalist perspectives August Meier writes:

> At one time they had all focused their efforts on the attainment of full citizenship rights and acceptance into the mainstream of American society. Even when advocating emigration, they did not usually give up that struggle; they were at best ambiguous on whether or not all American blacks should migrate to Africa, and in actuality they opted for a selective migration of a small number of skilled, educated, and dedicated Afro-Americans whose mission would be to end the slave trade and Christianize and civilize (i.e., Westernize) the inhabitants of the ancestral homeland (1988:x).

Black nationalism in the antebellum generation was characterized by claims of ancestral connection to ancient African civilizations namely Egypt and Ethiopia but did not show much interest in the cultural expressions of sub-Saharan Africa (Moses 1996:3). Many classical Black nationalists were not concerned with celebrating indigenous "African" cultures and customs; rather, their objectives were largely economic and political as they were seeking to create a space in which they would be able to sustain their elitist ideals of "respectability" and civilization (Moses 1996:20).

Thus, according to Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1996:20), the primary concern on many Black nationalist agendas was "uplifting" and "civilizing" the race as many defined their goals as a mission to civilize Africa. These missions have taken on many names and forms, but ultimately all shared the goal of "improving" the conditions of African diasporans and continental Africans alike. There were several pioneers and influential figures who contributed to Black nationalism and Pan-Africanist thought including but not limited to Alexander Crummell, Henry McNeal Turner, George Padmore, C.L.R. James, and Adelaide Casely Hayford. In this thesis I will focus on a few who represent a number of different popular perspectives and

whom I believe to be particularly influential in characterizing the formation and popular acceptance of an African Diasporan identity, namely, Edward Blyden, Martin R. Delany, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey.

One of the most influential advocates of early Black nationalism was Edward Blyden. Blyden emigrated to the United States in 1850 from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands with the hope of enrolling in Rutgers Theological College. After he was denied admission to Rutgers, however, as well as two other institutions, he migrated to Liberia under the sponsorship of the American Society for Colonizing Free People of Color (commonly referred to as the American Colonization Society).[6] He became a fervent supporter of Liberia stating in several of his writings that the mission of the Liberian settlement was the "redemption of Africa" and the strengthening of the "African race" (Moses 1996:21). He believed that slavery could be overthrown by the materialization of an African "civilization" and that the people of Liberia were committed to the demise of the slave system (Moses 1996:21). Blyden also controversially believed the enslavement of African Americans to be part of God's divine plan to convert the African to Christianity. For this reason he ardently encouraged free African Americans to return to Africa in order to contribute to this Christianizing mission (Moses 1996:21).

[6] The American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color or the American Colonization Society was created in 1817 by several white slave holders (including Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay) with the purpose of sending free Blacks to Africa as an alternative to the abolition of slavery. The society's constitution stated that it existed exclusively to deport freed people of color and was controlled by anti-abolitionists. For these reasons, many free blacks were opposed to the society's objectives. In 1822, the society founded a colony on the West Coast of Africa that became the independent nation of Liberia in 1847 (Moses 1996:13).

Conversely, Martin R. Delany—another influential Black nationalist figure in the 1850s—starkly opposed colonization to Liberia and the colony's reliance on white Americans and the sponsorship of the American Colonization Society (Painter 1988:159). Delany—a well-educated man who was accepted by Harvard University but forced to leave due to racial discrimination—was very proud of his African ancestry, which became a major factor that contributed to the development of his Black nationalist ideology (Griffith 1975:1). He believed that Blacks deserved liberty and freedom as a human right. He encouraged American Blacks to "elevate" themselves to become skilled workers and aspire toward education in order to "close the gap" (Painter 1988:152) between white Americans and themselves. According to Nell Irvin Painter (1988:152), "elevation" was a favorite concept of Delany's, emphasized in many of his writings concerning the condition of Blacks in America. He defined this term to include "the acquisition of gentlemanly culture and correct speech, of upright morals, independent thought, and 'manly' religion" (Painter 1988:152). It represented a self-reliant strategy for racial improvement as Delany scorned Black people's dependence on white philanthropy.

Delany, like many other Black Nationalists at the time, denounced Liberia as a ploy of the American Colonization Society to get rid of free Blacks in the United States in order to make the institution of slavery more secure; thus, he saw the Society as working toward the needs of white slaveholders and not free blacks (Painter 1988:153). He did consider other options for emigration, however, such as Canada, South America, East Africa, the West Indies, and later West Africa. Delany reflected on the situation of blacks worldwide, stating that people of color were "powerless"

and subject to white authority transnationally (Moses 1996:21). He argued that as a minority in America, Blacks would never be a political force, even if slavery ended, and came to see emigration as the only way American Blacks could gain respect worldwide (Painter 1988:157,159).

Furthermore, Delany believed that free Blacks should emigrate to Africa to establish a self-governing body and assist in "elevating" their African "brethren" (Painter 1988:159). He proposed that the established African nation-state would also work toward improving the plight of the free and enslaved Blacks who remained in America. The major goal of Black American emigration to Africa for Delany, however, was the development and moral, religious, and educational restoration of the "African" people (Painter1988:160). Though many contemporary scholars have labeled him an elitist, Martin R. Delany was extremely influential in characterizing Pan-Africanist thought and Black nationalism as it re-emerged much later with the fight for Black civil rights in the 1960s. His leadership was characterized by his ability to articulate what many Black Americans believed and by his stark opposition to notions of Black racial inferiority (Painter 1988:150, 170-171).

Similarly, W.E.B DuBois is often praised for his intellectual contributions and reflections on race relations in America. Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1996:30) argues that W.E.B DuBois was a not a "classical Black nationalist" in the sense that he never advocated for the mass migration of Black Americans to Africa or the creation of a separate nation-state for Black Americans. He was, however, dedicated to the concepts of Pan-Africanism (Moses 1996:30) and was extremely influential in the transition from "classical Black nationalism" to the Pan-African movement that

emerged in the twentieth century. In his anthology *Black Homeland, Black Diaspora: Cross-currents of the African Relationship,* Jacob Dracher states, "DuBois was the founder and guiding spirit of the Pan-African movement which sought to link black independence forces in Africa with leaders of Negro rights struggles in the diaspora (Drachler 1975:9).

In several of his works, DuBois articulated his difficulty with understanding his identity as a Black American. In the first chapter of his book of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk,* DuBois (2007) states that the "Negro" is born with a "double-consciousness"—he sees himself as he is perceived by the dominant white society in which he lives. DuBois believed that Black Americans would always struggle to find a place in mainstream American society and a space in which he or she was affirmed. In his essay, *An Official Visit to Liberia*, DuBois (1975:78-79) further reflected on his identity as both "African" and American when he asked, "What is Africa to me?" He expressed that he felt a deep connection to Africa—on the basis of culture, heritage, and a common history and experience—that was often difficult for him to articulate. He took pride in his ancestral linkages to Africa, but believed the experience of slavery to be the real kinship tie to the African continent and African peoples. Jacob Drachler (1975) quotes DuBois from *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* [1940]:

> The physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is the social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa (Drachler 1975:77).

He believed it was a shared oppression that formed the basis of his relation to Africa and that discrimination could be eliminated only through the unity of oppressed peoples (Drachler 1975:77).

DuBois was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and in 1919 organized the first Pan-African Congress. He was involved in organizing several more from 1919 to 1945 (Drachler 1975:76, Moses 1996:30). In 1933, he declared that Pan-Africa meant an "intellectual understanding and co-operation" among all peoples of African descent as a means to effect an economic and spiritual emancipation of Black peoples across the globe (Edwards 2004:5). Though his Pan-African conferences did not have much of an impact on the masses at the time, DuBois greatly influenced early Pan-Africanist thought and solidarity and contributed to developing a cultural communication between Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas, and Europe (Fabre and Benesch 2004:xvi). Shortly before his death, DuBois migrated to Ghana and became a citizen as a supporter of the Pan-Africanist vision of the Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah.

Contrary to the success of DuBois' attempts at organizing a collectively active Pan-African movement, Marcus Garvey—whom DuBois despised—was very successful at garnering the support and enthusiasm of the masses (Drachler 1975:77). DuBois and Garvey were engaged in harsh debates concerning their views on the condition of Blacks in America and across the world. Garvey contended that darker skinned Blacks faced discrimination practiced by Blacks with lighter complexions, whom he identified as intellectuals and elites associated with the NAACP. He

condemned Black intellectuals for advocating integration into white American society, reprimanded them for believing Blacks could thrive in a society dominated by whites, and accused them of plotting to eradicate the Black race (Drachler 1975:64). Several nationalists disagreed with Garvey, and DuBois specifically carried on campaign against him in the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis* (Moses 1996:33).

Garvey emigrated to the United States from Jamaica in 1917. He strongly believed that Blacks in America had no future and could not flourish under the oppressive American system. He founded the United Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) through which he sought to bring Black peoples all over the world back to Africa in order to form governments, create their own "home," and contribute to Africa's development (Meier 1971:105). He inspired thousands of Blacks in the United States and in the Caribbean with the vision of an African nation in which Blacks in the diaspora and continental Africans would work together to preserve and maintain a homeland liberated from colonialism and white supremacist hegemony. In his essay *Africa for the Africans*, Garvey (Drachler 1975:67-68) emphasizes the importance of constructing an independent African nation. He states that it is not the goal of American and West Indian Blacks to return to Africa in order to colonize native Africans, but to work together with them to build and develop the continent in the interest of the Black "race":

> It is hoped that when the time comes for American and West Indian Negroes to settle in Africa, they will realize their responsibility and their duty. It will not be to go to Africa for the purpose of exercising an over-lordship over the natives, but it shall be the purpose of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to have established in Africa that brotherly co-operation which will make the interests of the African native and the American and West Indian Negro one and the same, that is to say, we shall enter into a common

> partnership to build up Africa in the interests of our race….in that we are descendants from one common family stock (Drachler 1975:67-68).

Garveyism greatly impacted Black communities and motivated thousands of Black individuals in a quest for self-determination (Campbell 1994:290). The overwhelming response to Garvey's message was a signifier of the vast of opposition to white racial domination and the physical, mental, and emotional violence that Blacks in the West faced under this oppressive system. Through the UNIA, Garvey was able to inculcate the idea that the liberation of Blacks in the West was inextricably connected with the liberation of the African continent (Campbell1994:290).

As is evident above, Black nationalist agendas emphasized a unified effort toward the "improvement" of the condition of Blacks globally and were influenced by several factors, most notably, ideologies of "return" which, as aforementioned, are characteristic of most diasporan communities. Brent Hayes Edwards claims, "If black New World populations have their origin in the fragmentation, racialized oppression, and systematic dispossession of the slave trade, then the pan-African impulse stems from the necessity to confront or heal that legacy through racial organization itself—through ideologies of a real or symbolic return to Africa" (2004:5). Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley contend that Pan-African politics are essentially the "construction and reconstruction" of a diasporic identity and are the result of "racial capitalism, cultural hegemony, and self-activity" (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:2). Classical Black nationalist and early Pan-Africanist thought were deeply rooted in nineteenth-century liberal European ideals which emphasized notions of the goodness

of humanity, the strength of logic, the potential for opportunity, progress, and uplift within the capitalist system, and the advantages of an education (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:2). In his contribution to this debate, Paul Gilroy (1994) believes that "European romanticism and cultural nationalism contributed directly to the development of modern Black nationalism. It can be traced back to the impact of European theories of nationhood, culture, and civilization on elite Afro-American intellectuals in the early and mid-nineteenth century" (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:2-3).

A major feature of early Black nationalist thought was establishing links between Blacks in the Diaspora and continental Africans as a means to emphasize a Pan-Africanist solidarity and build a worldwide liberation movement (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:3). In order to achieve this, Black nationalists—including several of the scholars mentioned previously—sought to establish intellectual links between African history and its connection to "Africans in the New World" through their writing. Their analyses of the matter, however, were often largely influenced and limited by Western epistemologies rooted in a discourse of "Christian rationalism" and its inherent ideals of "advancement" and "civilization" (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:3). With the decolonization of many African countries in the mid-twentieth century, a new wave of thinking spurred a shift in the conceptualization of Pan-Africanism and intellectual understandings of the African Diaspora. Many scholars and activists began to challenge colonial interpretations of African history, instead emphasizing notions of resistance, cultural unity, and the recovery and glorification of a precolonial African past (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:3). Although many writers and thinkers of the twentieth century brought up new ways to think about Pan-Africanism,

Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (1994:3) argue that the rhetoric of this period was still inevitably confined within Western ideals of progress and development. They quote Vincent Mudimbe's *Invention of Africa* (1988):

> Africa as a coherent ideological and political entity was, indeed, invented with the advent of European expansion and continuously reinvented by traditional African and diasporan intellectuals, not to mention metropolitan intellectuals and ideological apparatuses…In other words, the making of a Black Atlantic culture and identity, in general, and Pan-Africanism in particular, was as much the product of the West as it was indigenous to Africa (Lemelle and Kelley, 1994:7-8).

According to Paul Gilroy (1994:94), though the definition of Pan-Africanism has been debated and contemplated, the fundamental concept is that Blacks of the African diaspora are in some way connected to one another and to the African peoples and cultures from which they partially derive. It was a conscious attempt to create unity and cohesion based on a shared history of oppression as a result of the Slave Trade and commonalities in the lived experiences resulting from this history (Lemelle and Kelley 1994:4). In essence, Pan-Africanism acts as the legitimization of a diasporic identity and positions New World peoples of African descent as a diasporan community with a justifiable connection to each other and Africa as a homeland. In the following chapter, I share some of my interactions with a self-proclaimed "African nationalist" committed to the goals and ideals of Pan-Africanism. The chapter explores how his commitment to Pan-Africanism has led him to actively seek out ways to put these ideals into practice and inspire African Diasporans across the globe to recognize their connection to Africa and each other.

CHAPTER THREE

Meeting "The Pan-Africanist": The Influence of Pan-Africanism on Diasporan "Return" to Africa

I had been living in Cape Coast, Ghana for approximately two months before I first heard about "the Pan-Africanist." His existence was casually brought to my attention one lazy evening as my friend Larry and I attempted to find things to do to pass the time. Larry was watching a soap opera that he had come to enjoy on the local television station and I was sprawled out across my bed idly writing in my journal. As we relaxed, Larry's phone rang and he left the room to take the call outside. After he returned, he told me that the call had been from our friend Nikki, an African American student both of us had met a few months earlier. She was stationed about four hours away in Ghana's capital city, Accra, but had traveled to Cape Coast because she and some of her friends were having a meeting with "the Pan-Africanist" the next day. She called to ask if Larry and I would accompany her to his restaurant and guesthouse in Elmina, a nearby town, where the meeting would be held.

"*The* Pan-Africanist?" I responded skeptically.

"Apparently," Larry laughed. "That's all she said."

I smiled to myself as I conjured up images of a young man dressed in army boots and red, black, green, and gold, who expressed himself in rhythmic stanzas and poetic

verse. Larry revealed that he was expecting much of the same. We shared a laugh and after a few more moments of banter—which eventually became genuine curiosity—we decided to join Nikki on her meeting.

The next evening Larry and I caught a taxi with a couple more of our friends to the restaurant in Elmina. We rode on the familiar route from Cape Coast passing several guesthouses, restaurants, and businesses along the way. Each of us was curiously and anxiously awaiting the meeting. All we knew about this man was that he was the owner of a very popular restaurant in the Elmina/Cape Coast area and was supposedly a well-known member of the community. After a short ride, the taxi-driver stopped in a wide driveway. We got out of the car, paid our fare to the driver, and walked up the long dirt road, listening to the growing sound of the waves crashing against the shore, until we reached an open gate. We walked through the gate and onto an outdoor patio that led to the restaurant. It was right on the beach. The capacious outdoor restaurant was very elegantly assembled and covered with a large thatched roof. Several mahogany tables and chairs adorned the dark brown floors and to the left of the restaurant was a large open bar. Tables and chairs were also scattered across the beachfront property. Most of the tables had attached thatched coverings, which provided shade for the customers eating and relaxing beneath them. Palm trees lined the property, and the sound of the waves crashing against the shore created a very peaceful and calming ambiance.

We spotted Nikki with a few others at a table closer to the beach. Nikki had brought a few more of her friends with her. They were already engaged in a conversation with a middle-aged man who I guessed had to be "the Pan-Africanist."

Once we reached the table, they all looked up and greeted us. “The Pan-Africanist” welcomed us with a warm smile, motioned to a waiter to get us some chairs, and asked us if we would like anything to drink. It was then that the man introduced himself as Phil. Phil was a portly middle-aged man with a friendly smile, a rich resonant voice—complemented by the hint of a New York accent—tanned almond colored skin, and a congenial demeanor. His salt-and-pepper colored hair was short and almost completely gray along the edges. He was dressed in cool and comfortable-looking linen pants and a matching shirt, and seemed genuinely delighted to see us.

After we introduced ourselves, Phil and Nikki resumed the conversation that we had walked in on, as the rest of us sat back and listened. I found him very friendly and interesting, and became curious to learn more about him. As the conversation came to a close, I asked Phil if he would be willing to meet with me at a later date to talk more about his experience living in Ghana. He kindly agreed and gave me his phone number so that I could call him to set up a meeting time.

A few days later, I gave Phil a call and we decided to convene at his restaurant. I arrived on a sunny, humid afternoon when Phil’s restaurant was bustling with customers. Ghanaian Highlife, a popular genre of music, was booming on large speakers near the bar, accompanied by the steady rhythm of the waves. Amid the sea of busy waiters and waitresses, I caught a glimpse of Phil eating at a table with several other people. I walked over to him, and he gave me a warm smile and greeting. He introduced me to his wife, Adjua, a middle-aged Ghanaian woman and two other men. The trio left after finishing their lunch and Phil and I were left to ourselves. I briefly explained my project to him, and even though it was a little noisy,

I asked if he would mind if I recorded our exchange. He replied that he did not mind and so we began.

I began with the basics. I asked Phil where he was born and why he moved to Ghana. He told me that he grew up in one of the only African American, suburban communities in Westchester, NY. He made his first trip to Ghana in 1987. For several years Phil served as the headmaster of a cultural institute and school in New York in which they encouraged the study of African history and culture for the students and parents. In 1987, the school organized a trip to Ghana and Phil was a part of that delegation, which consisted mostly of parents and adults. Eventually, the trip evolved to include students, and Phil made 13 trips from 1987 to 1993 to Ghana before moving there permanently in 1994.

When I asked him what it was that motivated him to stay in Ghana, Phil responded that he had always wanted to make living in Africa a reality, and he had come primarily to make a meaningful contribution to the development of Africa and peoples of African descent across the globe:

> It took actually those seven years, the 13 trips, to figure out a way that I could maintain myself here. I grew up always entertaining the idea of returning back to Africa. I considered myself African-centered or an African nationalist—always believing in the principles and ideals of promoting the virtuous things of Africa. I've always had that vision and dream to want to return, but like many African Americans you don't know basically how to begin that journey because what is your choice? After all Africa is a continent not a country. With so many different African nations to choose from, with it being such a vast continent, the diversity becomes a complex issue. It took some time before Ghana emerged in my mind as the place to be and to go. And when I came here in 1987 and went back I was really touched spiritually that this was the place that I really wanted to live out the rest of my life and try to make a meaningful contribution to the development, the advancement, and the liberation of our people. It was nothing new for me to say I'm going to dedicate myself to anything that pertained to the African race but it would be

> the first opportunity to do it from the African continent. And it was exciting, it was challenging, and I wanted to really take it on.

Phil went on to emphasize that Black people in the United States have been struggling since Africans were forcefully brought to the Americas as slaves. He believes that even though progress has been made in some areas, (he specifically noted Obama's successful primary campaign) in many others the road to racial equality is "stagnant, at a standstill, or going backwards." He stated that outside of the early back-to-Africa movements and the "Liberian experience" there has been no significant effort on the part of African Diasporans to return to Africa and make a "meaningful contribution" to the African continent. He believed that until there is a movement comprised of significant numbers of peoples of African descent committed to the redemption of the image of Africa and ultimately "the redemption of themselves," there will be very little substantial progress. He felt that in America there were many progressive men and women working toward this goal and that he could be one of those to return to Africa and try to achieve the same goal from across the Atlantic.

"Was it hard to become accepted [by Ghanaians] into the community?" I asked.

"Yeah, I think in a spiritual sense. In a general sense, no, because here in Ghana, Ghanaians are generally hospitable to anybody, but I think when you get to a more specific level it was difficult, or tedious, I should say, in dealing with the language barrier."

I nodded in agreement. "I can definitely relate to that."

"Yes, I think the more that we tackle the language barrier, the more we will break down barriers. It is an inability to understand the language that continues to isolate us…I think that nobody denies that it's a challenge that remains our own, and we have to try and put more of an effort toward understanding the language of the land. I mean, you have to speak the language of the land to understand the people," he asserted, "and that remains one of the most challenging things in reuniting with our African family here and being accepted and showing an appreciation for the culture."

"So have you gotten it down? Have you learned Fante?"

"Obviously the next question." He laughed. "Well, not as much as I'd like. I've learned it and put forth an effort, and I'm still learning, and still trying, and still putting forth that massive effort."

I smiled and asked, "Phil, how do you think African continental unity interacts with unity across the African Diaspora?"

"That's a very important question," he replied. He then stopped himself, looked around and stated, "The music is too loud, let's move."

Phil got up and I followed him to a table closer to the beach. It was a lot cooler sitting near the shore. The sound of the waves drowned out the music, but unfortunately it also drowned out the sound of my voice. Inconspicuously, I attempted to push my tape recorder closer to Phil as we restarted the conversation. Once we were settled, I raised my voice and repeated my question.

"Yes," he replied, "I think that is a very serious question and one of the things that I am planning on being a part of—a progressive movement on both ends. The fact of the matter is, Africa has been pursuing this idea of African unity for the past

fifty years. When Nkrumah first announced the independence of Ghana he made it very clear that the independence of Ghana was meaningless unless it was linked with the whole African continent and he realized that without African unity we cannot begin to tackle the problems of Africa. We have not unified in those fifty years."

Phil went on to explain that several people have attempted to forge this unity such as Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, and organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU). He emphasized that these leaders understood the political importance of African continental unity as well as unity across and among peoples of the African Diaspora. Many of these efforts were thwarted, however, by the overthrows or assassinations of several of these visionaries. When Ghana became independent in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah became the first Prime Minister. Nkrumah was dedicated to achieving African continental unity and inspired many Black Americans in their fight to achieve civil rights in the United States (Drachler 1975:185). His commitment to Pan-Africanism was instrumental in drawing African Americans' attention to Ghana as he sought their support in his attempt to restructure the Ghanaian political and economic system. He called for American entrepreneurs, businessmen, "teachers and technicians" to seek out jobs in Ghana and contribute to the economic growth and development of the country (Hosley 2008:153, Obichere 1975:25).

He was also a key player in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It was in this context that Nkrumah declared the independence of Ghana meaningless without the complete liberation of the African continent. The OAU was created to be "a political union based on the cultural unity of African

peoples" and "a framework for a new mode of economic development" (Campbell 1994:298). The Organization was formed to help quicken the process of de-colonization, but Horace Campbell argues that the OAU has struggled to maintain and achieve this mission due to external manipulation and exploitation by the United Nations and Western world powers, internal disagreements, class divisions, and difficulty formulating and adopting an anti-colonialist agenda (Campbell 1994:298-299). When several key leaders such as Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah were assassinated or politically overthrown, their attempts to achieve their ideals of Pan-African liberation faltered.

In the United States, Malcolm X was one leader inspired by Nkrumah and the OAU. He was highly influential in spreading ideas of Black self-determination and Black Power. He used Africa as "a symbol in his speeches and in his exegesis of the social, political and economic situation in the United States. He always referred to Africa as home" (Obichere 1975:32). Malcolm X fervently believed in the "liberating role" of a comprehensive knowledge of African history and heritage. He believed it to be a crucial component in the struggle for Black liberation both in the United States and on the African continent. He often compared the situation faced by African Americans in the United States with European colonialism in Africa. He emphasized that the oppression, exploitation, and injustice that Black peoples faced all over the world had "debilitating effects" and acted contrary to the struggle for Black liberation (Obichere 1975:33).

Toward the end of his life, Malcolm X traveled to Africa seeking support from several African "heads of state" for his proposition to bring the plight of African

Americans in the United States before the United Nations as a violation of human rights. He argued that the situation of Blacks in America paralleled those of South Africa and Rhodesia and "should be globally condemned as abuse, flagrant and willful, of international covenants and agreements respecting the human rights of all peoples of the world" (Harlow 1994:169). Malcolm X sat in on a meeting of the OAU during his stay in Africa, and gained their recognition as a leader of a just cause and movement that deserved OAU support. This recognition inspired him to form an Organization for African American Unity (OAAU) in an effort to unify the many African American civil rights groups in the United States and as a way to connect with the OAU in political unity and solidarity (Obichere 1975:33). His efforts were put to an abrupt end, however, when he held a preliminary meeting of the OAAU shortly after he returned from Africa and was violently assassinated as he mounted the podium to speak (Harlow 1994:170).

Phil believed that the frustration of these leaders' visions was a detrimental blow to the materialization of a unified Africa and the Black Atlantic. He emphasized that it would require a collective effort by both sides in order to see this unity "forged." When I asked what he thought was the first step toward building this unity, he provided a substantive response:

> I think the first step is coming up with an agenda—a racial agenda. I think that we as an African people have been blessed enough to have teachers and leaders that have come up with these visions that we haven't pursued. I think we can look at what these scholars have done and written and then if we need to edit them or upgrade them, we should do that, but we don't need to recreate the wheel. Wherever we are, no matter what organization we belong to, we can ask what agendas do we have that speak to the race of our people and that links us to Africa or part of our African family…It's like I say, no politician can go anywhere in America and ask to speak to a Jewish audience in the constituency without them asking their position on Israel…They're going to

> ask all those questions pertaining to their life in America, but they are never going to forget to ask that politician what is their position on the state of Israel. When politicians come to meet us, we ask them about the jobs, we ask them about educational opportunities, we ask them about healthcare, but we always forget to ask them about their position on Africa. Very rarely do we hold them hostage to what their voting patterns have been on Africa… To ask those questions would mean that we have to know more about what's going on in Africa. The more we know about Mother Africa, the closer we are to her and the closer we are to being unified with Africa. Because we will be aware of her needs, aware of her assets, aware of her liabilities, and aware of her situation.

I then asked, "Well, how does a Pan-Africanist agenda mediate the differences in culture, history, experience, and location of Black peoples since the slave trade?"

"By finding the common denominator," he quickly asserted. "Part of Pan-Africanism's objective is to identify those things that connect us and use them as a strength to be able to build a bridge across the things that separate us and our differences. I believe our similarities outnumber our differences. So, we should find our similarities as our strength and use that strength to cross the bridges of our differences."

"So, do you consider Elmina your home?"

"I consider Africa my home", he definitively replied, "and I'm residing in Ghana, in Elmina."

"What is it that makes Africa your home?"

"Well, I think that home is where the heart is and my heart is in Africa. I think more important than me being born in Africa is that Africa was born in me and because Africa was born in me, I claim her. I claim her by spirit. I claim her by mind and I claim her by heritage."

He paused momentarily before continuing, "Although, I do not deny my American experience and I appreciate every bit of it that my ancestors and myself contributed to try and make America what it could be even though it's not what it should be…. I cannot deny that experience and I think it helps to enrich my possibilities of what I can probably offer to Africa through my presence and residence here."

"Does that mean that you also consider America home, too, in some way?"

"Yes, absolutely and without question," he affirmed:

> I think there has been too much blood, sweat, tears, flesh, and bone gone into that [America] to deny it and what we deserve from it and what it has gotten from us. So I live in total acceptance and not denial of the holistic experience of what I am. When I say African American I mean every bit of that. You know, there was no such thing as America before Africans came to join. It was just a New World and we helped build the United States of America…So, we're just as much a part of that as anybody else. I wouldn't deny that experience. We are global people and have always been a global people. But everybody has a center and a base and I consider my center, my base to be Mother Africa. So I always say it this way, my center is Mother Africa, my circumference is the world (personal interview, April 13, 2008, tape recording in possession of author).

Phil had lived in Ghana for over a decade. He chose to move to Ghana for both practical reasons and because of a spiritual connection to the country that he developed over the seven years that he traveled back and forth when he was teaching in New York. The travel enabled him to developed numerous contacts and figure out a way to maintain himself permanently in the country. Over the last fourteen years, Phil had become familiar with many aspects of Ghanaian life and culture, and had successfully integrated himself into his community in Elmina. He was well-known among both Ghanaians and other African Diasporans. He held several roles and many

titles. He worked as an adjunct professor and guest lecturer for the University of Cape Coast, was a restaurateur and businessman, and he acted as a spiritual leader for many in the repatriate community.

Phil was also a current member of the planning committee of PANAFEST—a biennial festival held in Ghana since 1992 with the purpose of promoting Pan-Africanism through artistic and cultural mediums. Nikki, and the friends that she had brought along with her had met Phil when he gave a lecture to their class on Pan-Africanism. Even though, he did not identify himself as "the Pan-Africanist" as she had nicknamed him, he did call himself an African nationalist and definitively declared his commitment to aiding in the betterment of African peoples all over the world. Furthermore, his conviction to the principles and beliefs of Pan-Africanism was one of the primary reasons he decided to move permanently to Ghana and wholeheartedly claimed the African continent as his home. His enthusiastic involvement with PANAFEST highlighted his dedication to the ideals of Pan-Africanism. According to the PANAFEST tour homepage:

> PANAFEST is a cultural event dedicated to the enhancement of the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the development of the African continent. It is organized biennially for Africans and people of African descent as well as all persons committed to the well being of Africans on the Continent and in the Diaspora. Its goals are to establish the truth about the history of Africa and the experiences of the African people, using the vehicle of African arts and culture…The essential thrust of PANAFEST is to enhance development. The festival provides a forum to promote unity between Africans on the Continent and in the Diaspora, and affirms the common heritage of African peoples the world over by defining and promoting Africa's contribution to world civilization. (http://www.panafest.us/ accessed Jan 11 2009)[7]

[7] I accessed the PANAFEST homepage on January 11, 2009. The page has since been removed.

PANAFEST is an especially popular attraction for African Diasporan tourists and also attracts Ghanaians and visitors from surrounding African nations. The festival strives to incorporate both aspects of African cultures as well as cultures of the African Diaspora (http://www.panafest.us/[8], Hosley 2008:162-163). Phil believes that Pan-Africanism was an essential tool, in bridging the gap across the Atlantic between the African continent and the African Diaspora. He believed that PANAFEST was an opportunity to put some of the abstract ideals of Pan-Africanism into practice and could be used to reach out to both continental and "New World" Africans alike. Following in the tradition of early Black nationalist thought, Phil believed that Pan-African unity was essential in order to achieve the liberation of all peoples of African descent.

A Search for "Home"

This conversation with Phil offers significant insight into the role of Pan-Africanism in influencing African American "return" and repatriation to Ghana. As I discussed earlier in chapter one and as Paulla Ebron states, "African American appeals to traumatic collective memory and to sustaining ties to African culture originated in the context of opposition to U.S. national narratives of belonging and tended to be understood as a subversive formulation of identity" (Ebron 1999:911). Ebron (1999:912) further contends that currently African Americans are as intimately concerned with a search for history and memory as they have been at any point in American history. As Phil's story reflects, this search allows African Americans to

[8] Date accessed January 11 2009

rearticulate their identities within "particular narratives" of home and homeland that reaffirm conceptions of Diasporan connection to Africa (Ebron 1999:911).

In her book *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana*, Bayo Hosley (2008:152) writes, African Diasporan tourism and repatriation to Ghana has seen a significant rise over the past few decades. The development of diaspora tourism in particular has been the result of an "extended conversation" between Ghana and sectors of the African Diaspora, primarily African Americans (Hosley 2008:152). She argues that early Black nationalists were instrumental in contributing to the construction of an international Black community. Hosley (2008:152) cites J.E. Casely Hayford in particular as a key figure in the development of cultural nationalism. Hayford was inspired by Edward Blyden, and used the notion of Ethiopianism as an appeal for a global Black unification by arguing that Africa provided Blacks with a cultural foundation (Hosley 2008:153).

This search for unification was echoed by Kwame Nkrumah, who shifted the focus in African Diasporan discourse some decades later from culture to development (Hosley 2008:153). After becoming president of Ghana in 1958, Nkrumah visited the United States and invited Black professionals to move to Ghana and help develop the nation. Hosley writes, "rather than stressing African Americans' connection to Ghana as a result of their African ancestry and forcible removal from the continent through the slave trade, Nkrumah focused on their potential future connections through a commitment to the goal of African development" (2008:153). He believed that the access that African American professionals had to American educational

opportunities could be of great use in Ghana and help to further development in the country (Hosley 2008:153).

Many African Americans responded to this request and even though Ghana never saw a formally organized "back-to-Africa" movement of African Americans, since the late 1950s Ghana has received the most African American repatriates of any African nation through individual travel (Hosley 2008:153). As I mentioned earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Two, many prominent African Americans visited Ghana through this period as well, including Malcolm X and W.E.B. DuBois (Hosley 2008:154). For African American repatriates, this period immediately followed Ghanaian independence and coincided with the American Civil Rights Movement. A "newly independent" Ghana gave African American expatriates hope in the possibility of a free black community and offered an escape from racism in the United States. Hosley states that it may have also fulfilled an "idealized desire for a return to their homeland" (2008:154).

Other African countries such as Senegal and Nigeria focused more heavily during this period on African Diasporan cultural connections in contrast to Nkrumah's focus on economic development. Senegal held the first world festival of "*arts negre*" in 1966, followed by the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held in Nigeria in 1977 (Hosley 2008:154). Hosley argues that locating these festivals in Nigeria and Senegal positioned these countries as "the self-designated homelands of the black diaspora" (Hosley 2008:154). Nigeria still plays a significant role in diasporic notions of an African homeland, as many African-based religious faiths and observances are drawn from Nigerian religions,

and it is considered to be the "*locus classicus"* of African Diasporan studies (Hosley 2008:155, Clarke 2006). Nigeria's political instability, however, has largely deterred African Diasporic travel to and settlement in the country (Hosley 2008:155).

Furthermore, even though French speaking countries such as Benin and Senegal have relics and evidence of the slave trade such as slave castles and dungeons left by European colonizers, many African American tourists and travelers choose to travel to Ghana instead because it is an English-speaking nation and there is less of a language barrier (Hosley 2008:157). This presents a noteworthy irony. According to Hosley, "the grand scale of Ghana's castles coupled with the nation's status as an English-speaking, politically stable West African nation has led to its emergence as a primary imagined homeland among African Americans, despite the fact that it accounted for only thirteen percent of the slave trade" (2008:157). Since political instability has been growing in Nigeria and other countries on the West African coast, Ghana has been exalted as a model of peace and stability in West Africa and as a result has drawn international attention from African Diasporan tourists and settlers (Hosley 2008:157).

Re-routing and Re-writing Home

The dialogue between Ghana and the African Diaspora is one that regularly mobilizes notions of diasporan connection. The link between Africa and the diaspora, however, is usually viewed from the perspective of those in the diaspora. David Scott states (Hosley 2008) that an increasing amount of literature has begun to focus on the many ways that the African diaspora is a community and practice that are

"discursively constituted principally (though not exhaustively) in and through the mobilization of a common possession, namely the historically constituted figures of 'Africa' and 'Slavery'"(Hosley 2008:152). Other scholars have argued that this narrative became especially popularized in the United States after the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots: Saga of an American Family* and its later television broadcast as a miniseries in 1977. Kamari Clarke argues that *Roots* had a huge impact on the development of roots tourism and "the institutionalization of 'Africa' as the homeland for black Americans" (2006:141). One hundred thirty million people worldwide were estimated to have seen it—making it the third most watched program in the history of television (Clarke 2006:141).

Roots made a large contribution to the construction of a collective memory, and over time the dignity of an African past became a major characteristic in the "development of cultural blackness as a heritage identity" (Clarke 2006:140). In popular imagination, *Roots* created a narrative in which the ancestral history of slavery merged with the cultural politics of Blackness, thereby, creating a history that was a not an actual part of the personal experience of African Americans but, as Clarke notes, became a part "of black popular social memory in the United States" (Clarke 2006:140). Clarke states:

> Locating *Roots* as a key force in the shift in black American imaginings of their connection to the African heritage is critical for understanding the establishment of a new commonsense notion of racial categories in heritage terms. The early twentieth-century textual narrative of slavery—that is, Africans being captured, enslaved, and sold to white traders, and suffering at the hands of white plantation owners—were reconfigured with what became a different public discourse about black American connections to African kingdoms. In the late twentieth century, these new constructions of the incorporation of the nobility of the ethnic past did more for the development of a widespread commonsense notion of the African roots of black American

> identities than any other back-to-Africa social movement in the United States. Ultimately, these nobility narratives contributed to the establishment of ideological terms for ongoing black American genealogical roots of African nobility (2006:140-141).

Thus, the mass circulation of *Roots* contributed to the common acceptance of an "African ethnic identity" signified as the by-product of African Diasporan heritage (Clarke 2006:141). The slave trade became a main basis through which numerous African Americans began to view their relation to the African continent. *Roots* provided a more empowering image of slavery and after the initial airing many films were produced and novels written that explored the history of slavery and the slave trade (Hosley 2008:156). Hosley (2008:156) states that with the greater affordability of air travel and the growth of the Black middle class in the United States, Ghana became accessible to a growing number of African Americans who were able to afford to travel to the country once the market responded to their interest with the development of diaspora tourism. The growing popularity of slavery narratives among African Americans was a major reason that the Ghanaian tourism industry decided to focus on the slave trade through visits to Ghana's Cape Coast and Elmina Castles and festivals celebrating the African Diaspora such as PANAFEST (Hosley 2008:156,162).

PANAFEST was created and proposed by the Ghanaian playwright, Efua Sutherland. In January of 1991, a national trial phase was held in Cape Coast. After the success of the trial run, the first official PANAFEST was held the next year in 1992 in Cape Coast and Elmina, and ever since the biennial festival has drawn performers and tourists from across the African Diaspora (Hosley 2008:162-163).

PANAFEST overtly invokes Pan-African connections. It is based on an idea of cultural linkages and associations among Black peoples all over the world (Hosley 2008:163). According to Bayo Hosley (2008), the main features of the festival include a "grand durbar" or a parade of chiefs and citizens in Cape Coast. During this procession, the chiefs march in "full regalia," accompanied by musical performances and indigenous dances. This is followed by the opening remarks given by government and tourism officials (Hosley 2008:163).

There are also several entertainment events, which include concerts of international performers who in the past have included both the Boys Choir in Harlem and the Uthingo Dance Company of South Africa (Hosley 2008:163). The last major component of the festival is the "visual arts exhibition" where vendors can rent booths to sell goods and tourists can buy Ghanaian souvenirs such as clothing, jewelry, and artwork all in one place (Hosley 2008:163). The organizers of PANAFEST have also made a tour of the slave castles a part of the agenda in order to commemorate the slave trade. This addition contributed to an increased interest among African Americans in the slave castles and their preservation as many African American repatriates, Hosley notes, "view the castles as sacred sites" (Hosley 2008:163-164).

These events are primarily marketed to African Diasporans from across the globe, but Ghanaians and foreigners from other African countries also take part in the festivities. Hosley argues that through heritage tours and festivals like PANAFEST diaspora tourism represented a change in the "nature of pan-Africanism in Ghana" (2008:163). While the emphasis of Pan-Africanism in the 1960s and 1970s was the

permanent resettlement of African Diasporans in Ghana, since the 1990s, Ghana has started to see the manifestation of Pan-Africanism also through the temporary travel of African Diasporans (Hosley 2008:163). Moreover, whereas in the 1950s African Americans drew connections with colonialism in Ghana to their struggle for civil rights in the United States, currently the slave trade and a focus on cultural origins has become central to many African Americans' constructions of their relation to Ghana and the African continent at large (Hosley 2008:163).

When considering the effect that Pan-Africanism has had on the formation of a diasporic identity and both African American temporal and permanent return to Africa, Paulla A. Ebron (1999) asks a question that I also wish to consider. She asks "What can be said about identity formation and the specificity of the current moment in shaping identity and political culture" (Ebron 1999:927)? Answers to this question are particularly relevant in regard to Phil's story and his fervent commitment to the principles and ideals of Pan-Africanism. Phil is dedicated to promoting an awareness of Pan-Africanism—both in Ghana and in the African Diaspora—with the hope of fostering a collective Black Atlantic consciousness and inspiring peoples of African descent to become involved in working toward the betterment of African peoples across the globe.

Early in our conversation Phil declared that he had decided to move to Ghana in order to make a "meaningful contribution to the development, the advancement, and the liberation" of Black peoples worldwide. He believed that there were many men and women working toward that goal from within the diaspora and felt that he could be one to meet them halfway from across the Atlantic. He was involved in

several organizations that were dedicated to achieving these goals through the marketing of Ghana as a "homeland" and place of origin for African Diasporans. Phil acknowledged that members of the "African race" are a global people, but he declared the African continent was his foundation on the basis of both cultural and racial origins, and has made it a lifetime commitment to inspire others in the diaspora to draw the same connections, primarily through the marketing of diaspora tourism.

As Kamari Clarke has stated, "the expansion of heritage tourists and the development of commemorative events further propelled the institutionalization of African American heritage identities" (2006:150). Through the workings of global marketing, the African heritage movement has moved from inhabiting a "marginal place of radical black power" to a major industry in mainstream America (Clarke 2006:150). Clarke contends that this has resulted in the development of an newly embraced "counterculture of African-invoked pride and American based protest, the proliferation of films, events, music, consumer goods, and black academic production that emphasized an African heritage" (Clarke 2006:150) and has influenced a critical "rethinking and reworking" of Black racial and cultural imaginaries that is unlike any other earlier form of black nationalism (Clarke 2006:150).

This is exemplified through the stories of Chante, Aisha, and Phil who have each forged their identities in agreement with Pan-Africanist ideals and notions of diasporan connection to Africa. In their own ways, each of them is engaged in mediating their constructions and imaginings of diasporan connection to a distant past, and the ways that this history interacts with contemporary Ghanaian life and culture. In spite of the contradictions produced by their experiences living as

“foreigners at home,” their belief in a relationship to the African continent and Black peoples across the globe is lasting, it is real, and it is genuine.

CONCLUSION: *Contradictory Desires and a Search for Affirmation*

This thesis has been an exploration of African Diasporan identity construction as it relates to the concept of "home" and notions of real, imagined, or symbolic return to the African continent. In this project I have examined some of the ways that African Americans have conceptualized their identities with reference to the notion of the African continent as a "homeland" and place of origin for peoples of African descent across the globe. The popular acceptance of this identity has been influenced by several factors, notably Black resistance to white American hegemonic narratives of Black inferiority and the development of Pan-Africanist thought and movements. I have also examined how the linkage of "Africanness" to popular conceptions of American Blackness has contributed to an increase in African Americans' "return" to West Africa, over the last few decades, in the form of diaspora tourism and permanent repatriation to the region.

Several scholars mentioned in this text, such as Kamari Clarke (2006), Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1996), and J. Martin Favor (1999), have argued that for African Americans the concept of identity and self has always been pertinent in African American art, literature, and intellectual writings. The "double-consciousness" (DuBois 2007) experienced by Blacks in America has resulted in a search for roots, a search for history, and a search for "home"—all of which ultimately translates into a

search for a place in which they are affirmed. In her essay, *Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,* bell hooks (1990) makes a powerful assertion about conceptions of "home" in regard to Black identities. She states:

> Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist…where all black people could strive to be subjects not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in public world (1990:42).

Hooks argues that African Americans have always sought to make a "home" for themselves in the presence of the white supremacist society in which they live. These spaces served as places of affirmation, in which Blackness was respected and valued and were an inherent rejection of notions of Black inferiority. These "homes" have been manifested in many forms, they have been real, symbolic, imagined, and constructed; but they have served as a place of strength and dignity for Blacks in the United States.

This project has been an exploration of the construction of Africa as a "home" and place from which Blacks have drawn ancestral, historical, and cultural affirmation. I drew upon my personal experiences navigating my identity in Ghana while I lived and studied there for four months, and on several conversations and interactions with African Diasporan repatriates to Ghana, to highlight some of the contradictions and struggles that arise when diasporic constructions and imaginings of the African continent (at large) as a homeland collide (Ebron 1999:919) with the

reality of living as a foreigner in a specific African country, Ghana. These experiences highlight the importance that Africa can hold in diasporic constructions, imaginations, and sense of self while simultaneously problematizing Pan-Africanist ideals which emphasize Black unity, solidarity, and connection on the basis of racial and cultural origins; they expose the often overlooked and ignored differences, hybridities, and multiplicities that characterize identities across the African Disapora. Through this project I have attempted to show that although the concept of diaspora definitely produces "liberating positions" (Campt 2006:91) and affirming spaces through its rhetoric of community, it is important to remember that these spaces are complex, contradictory, and multifaceted. According to Tina Campt, "liberating spaces scarcely free everyone completely, or in the same way. The anthropology of diaspora must attend, therefore, to multiple axes of difference and the often contradictory desires they produce" (2006:91).

APPENDIX

A list of interview questions that I asked African American repatriates (when appropriate):

- Where were you born?
- Where is your family from?
- When did you first come to Ghana?
- Why did you come? What were your motivations and expectations for coming?
- When did you decide to stay in Ghana? What motivated this decision?
- How long have you lived in Ghana?
- Where have you lived in Ghana?
- How did your community, family, and friends react to your decision to stay in Ghana?
- Do you travel back to (country repatriated from)? How often?
- Is (current town/village of residence)/ Ghana your home?
- Do you still feel any connection to (country repatriated from)? Do you consider it your home as well?
- How would you define home? What is it that makes a place home?
- Who is part of your home community?
- What do you do in Ghana? What occupations/organization are you involved with?
- Are you perceived as a foreigner? Are you accepted into the community?
- How have you tried to integrate yourself into your community here?
- How has the cultural adjustment been for you? Can you describe any struggles you have had?
- How do you ethnically identify yourself?
- Do you think unity on the African continent interacts with unity across the African Diaspora? If so, how?
- Do you have any questions for me?

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