

The Uses of *Diaspora*

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One of the more vexing problems of recent historical work on black culture and politics in an international sphere is that the term *diaspora*, so attractive to many of our analyses, does not appear in the literature under consideration until surprisingly late after the Second World War. Of course, black artists and intellectuals, from Edward Wilmot Blyden, Martin Delany, and Pauline Hopkins in the nineteenth century to W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté in the early twentieth, have long been engaged with themes of internationalism, but *diaspora* has only in the past forty years been a term of choice to express the links and commonalities among groups of African descent throughout the world. Here I will engage this problem by taking up Khachig Tölölyan's signal call to "return to diaspora": the confusing multiplicity of terms floating through recent work, he argues—including "exile," "expatriation," "post-coloniality," "migrancy," "globality," and "transnationality," among others—make it "necessary to 'return to diaspora,' which is in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category that is taken to include all the adjacent phenomena to which it is linked but from which it actually differs in ways that are constitutive, that in fact make a viable definition of diaspora possible."¹ Both Tölölyan and James Clifford have recently written valuable comparative overviews of uses of the term.² I will limit my consideration here to the politics of "diaspora" in black historical work and cultural criticism, however, as the term marks a quite specific intervention in that arena, one that may not be subsumable into some overarching frame of inquiry.³ I will be particularly concerned with excavating the function performed by the term in the work of Paul Gilroy, as he is the one theorist cited in almost all recent considerations of these issues. The reception of his brilliant 1993 study, *The Black Atlantic*, threatens continually (despite Gilroy's own qualifications) to conflate *diaspora*, and its particular history of usage in black cultural politics, with Gilroy's proposition of that field he calls the "black Atlantic"—a phrase rapidly being canonized and institutionalized in the U.S. academy.

I am not suggesting that one must limit the term's object of study to more contemporary phenomena. On the contrary, I want to excavate a historicized and politicized sense of *diaspora* for my own work, which focuses on black cultural politics in the interwar period, particularly in

transnational circuits of exchange between the so-called Harlem Renaissance and pre-Négritude Francophone activity in France and West Africa.⁴ I am rethinking the uses of *diaspora* more precisely to compel a discussion of the *politics of nominalization*, in a moment of prolixity and careless rhetoric when such a question is often the first casualty. An intellectual history of the term is needed, in other words, because *diaspora* is taken up at a particular conjuncture in black scholarly discourse to do a particular kind of epistemological work.⁵

The use of *diaspora* emerges directly out of the growing scholarly interest in the Pan-African movement in particular, and in black internationalism in general, that began to develop in the 1950s. It is important to recall that Pan-Africanism, referring both to Henry Sylvester Williams's Pan-African Conference in 1900 and to the congresses organized by W. E. B. Du Bois and others in 1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, 1945, and 1974, arises as a discourse of internationalism aimed generally at the cultural and political *coordination* of the interests of peoples of African descent around the world. As Du Bois declared in 1933, in a celebrated piece published in the *Crisis*, "Pan-Africa means intellectual understanding and co-operation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples."⁶

This emphasis on vanguardist collaboration toward a unified articulation of the interests of "African peoples" at the level of international policy is generally considered to have been influenced by a number of popular currents; the most important of these currents included the diverse ideologies of "return" that were so often a component of the African experience in the New World. Indeed, Du Bois would go so far as to claim that the motivations of Pan-Africanism are paradigmatically African *American*. 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. Even toward the end of his life, when he became more directly involved—particularly in Ghana—in what has been termed "continental Pan-Africanism," Du Bois clung to this New World orientation. In *The World and Africa*, for example, he writes:

The idea of one Africa to unite the thought and ideals of all native peoples of the dark continent belongs to the twentieth century and stems naturally from the West Indies and the United States. Here various groups of Africans, quite separate in origin, became so united in experience and so exposed to the impact of new cultures that they began to think of Africa as one idea and one land.⁷

By the 1950s, scholars were beginning to consider this paradigmatically New World impulse, which St. Clair Drake memorably encapsulated with the phrase the “Africa interest,” as a broad force in African American identity formation.⁸ At times the “Africa interest” was inflected toward a *return* to the African continent itself, as in the nineteenth-century colonization and missionary movements, for instance. But in a larger sense, scholarship on the history of the “Africa interest” was a way of coming to terms with the consistent necessity of an ideological “return” to the question of Africa, as a figure for the question of origins—a return to what Edouard Glissant calls the “point of entanglement [*intrication*].” The problematic of “return” in this sense consistently animated black ideologies as diverse as Garveyism, Negritude, and the numerous black New World discourses of “Ethiopianism”; it also animated a great deal of the groundbreaking African American history and sociology in the first decades of the century (by Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Arturo Schomburg, among others).⁹ In the interwar period, these roots were extended in the emerging discipline of anthropology, especially through the influential work of scholars such as Jean Price-Mars and Melville Herskovits on “African survivals” in New World black cultures.¹⁰ These issues of cultural retention were equally dominant in the historical and archival work that followed the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress, work by scholars including St. Clair Drake, George Shepperson, Rayford Logan, Harold Isaacs, James Ivy, Dorothy Porter, Adelaide Cromwell Hill, and E. U. Essien-Udom.¹¹

I will return below to Francophone articulations of *diaspora*, but I want to mention here the specific role of the journal *Présence africaine*, often cited as a fertile ground for diasporic work. On the one hand, it should be recalled that at its outset, *Présence africaine* was not primarily conceived as a diasporic project, focusing on issues of connection and collaboration among peoples of African descent. It was more expressly conceived as an African incursion into modernity. In the mission statement of the first issue, Alioune Diop writes,

Reaching beyond the confines of French colonization, [*Présence africaine*] intends to raise and study the general problem of Europe’s relations with the rest of the world, taking Africa as an example, especially since her black mankind finds itself to be the most disinherited. . . .

The black man [*Le noir*], conspicuous by his absence in the building up of the modern city, will be able to signify his presence little by little by contributing to the recreating of a humanism reflecting the true measure of man. . . .

As to us Africans, we are expecting concrete results from these cultural activities. To enable us to merge with modern society and to identify our-

selves clearly in that society, PRESENCE AFRICAINE, while revealing us to the world, will, more than anything else, persuade us to have faith in ideas.¹²

It should not be surprising that the journal was conceived in the European metropolis by a group of “overseas students” (*étudiants d’outre mer*—more precisely, students from the overseas French colonies, or *France d’outre mer*), who felt following the ravages of the war that they constituted “a new race, mentally mixed [*mentalement métissée*],” and who began to reconsider their position in European discourses of “universal” humanism.¹³ *Présence africaine*, as the title announces, inscribes an African presence into modernity and inaugurates the “re-creation” of the humanist project through that intervention.¹⁴ The aims of such a project are notably different than those announced by interwar Francophone journals in Paris, like *La Dépêche africaine*, which explicitly strove to foster “correspondence” among blacks throughout the world, or *La Revue du monde noir*, which intended “to create among Negroes [*les Noirs*] of the entire world, regardless of nationality, an intellectual, and moral tie, which will permit them to better know each other[,] to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race.”¹⁵ On the other hand, even given the express aims of *Présence africaine*, one should not forget that the translation of Diop’s “Niam N’Goura” quoted above is by Thomas Diop and Richard Wright, the African American writer then living in Paris. Even if *Présence africaine* did not initially aim to theorize black internationalism, it represents black internationalism *in practice*, particularly through its translations¹⁶ and through the international congresses of black artists and intellectuals it hosted in Paris in 1956 and Rome in 1959. Moreover, especially in its “new series” after 1955, *Présence africaine* explicitly espoused an anticolonialist stance and argued that “our common national aspirations” provided the foundation for the “solidarity of colonized peoples.”¹⁷ In the context of independence struggles in Africa, the journal would prove receptive to work on *diaspora* as it emerged in the 1960s.¹⁸

Toward a Genealogy of the African Diaspora Concept

The turn to *diaspora* in the early 1960s marks in no small degree a break from the “Africa interest” orientation, which, as Penny Von Eschen has pointed out, was greatly molded by the exigencies of the Cold War. Even when in collaboration with Francophone scholarship, much of the work emanating from the United States during that period was conditioned by an unrelenting American exceptionalism.¹⁹ Of course, the figurative ele-

ments of the turn were by no means new: syncretic African American slave cultures had found resonance in the Old Testament tales of Exodus, and references to the “scattering” of Africans into the New World were common at least since the work of Blyden in the nineteenth century. But the crystallization of these figurative allusions into a theoretical discourse of *diaspora*, explicitly in dialogue with the long-standing Jewish traditions behind the term, responds to a set of historiographic needs particular to the late 1950s and early 1960s, especially in the work of historians George Shepperson and Joseph Harris.

Although it is often overlooked, the necessity of this conceptual turn is first developed in a work in the growing field of African history, and specifically around the issue of African resistance to colonialism. The 1958 *Independent African*, by George Shepperson and Thomas Price, is a celebrated study of the revolts that took place in British Central Africa in 1915, often considered to be the first in a long series of African resistance movements in the modern period that led in discontinuous eruptions to the independence struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.²⁰ Shepperson and Price, attempting to explain the development of John Chilembwe, the African minister who led the uprising out of his mission in the Shire Highlands in what was then called Nyasaland, spend a significant amount of time considering his trip to the United States in 1897, where Chilembwe became associated with the National Negro Baptist Convention (*IA*, 112), studied at the Virginia Theological Seminary, and entered the ministry. The authors are at pains to come to terms with the influence of that New World context, given the great flux of black cultural and intellectual work that emerges at the turn of the century in the United States in particular: the struggle against U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean and the Philippines, which in part was expressed in the Niagara movement of 1905 (*IA*, 103); the cultural histories of the “African background” that would emerge in the work of Du Bois and Woodson; the histories of black insurrection in the United States and the Caribbean (*IA*, 106–7); and the prevalence of diverse nineteenth-century “return” ideologies and “Back to Africa” projects such as the American Colonization Society. For Shepperson and Price, the explanation of Chilembwe’s intellectual development in this milieu requires an understanding of transnational black influences that would have to diverge sharply from depoliticized, vanguardist considerations of an “Africa interest.”

In an oft-cited essay published in *Phylon* in 1962,²¹ Shepperson extended this work theoretically by reconsidering the uses and limitations of the term *Pan-African*. Attempting to clear a field that had become increasingly crippled by indiscriminate references to “Pan-Africanism” in terms of any consideration of racial organization or black international-

ism, Shepperson broke the term down into its “proper” and “common” senses: “Pan-Africanism” (capital P) indicates the history of the transnational movement itself, the limited parameters of the Pan-African Congress from 1900 on. But another derivation of the term was required: “On the other hand, ‘pan-Africanism’ with a small letter is not a clearly recognizable movement, with a single nucleus such as the nonagenarian Du Bois. . . . It is rather a group of movements, many very ephemeral” (*P*, 346). For Shepperson, the “cultural element often predominates” in this diverse grouping of pan-African movements, but these formations are not at all limited to this focus (this is not a split between “political” and “cultural” versions of Pan-Africanism, as it sometimes has been misread). Shepperson considers the small “p” term to cover both aesthetic evocations and political institutions, such as church organizations, academic conferences and associations, lobbying groups, and various radical pressure groups. Finally, the ideological diversity that falls under the broad rubric including both Pan-Africanism and pan-Africanism, Shepperson argues, demonstrates that Africa itself emerges as a concept only historically, mainly through *external* evocations of “continental unity,” and calls for return (*P*, 349).

I will highlight two components of this revision or splitting of Pan-Africanism. On the one hand, Shepperson rereads the term precisely to make room for ideological difference and disjuncture in considering black cultural politics in an international sphere. He specifically invokes the need to consider the ways black internationalisms have been refracted through the Caribbean, for example, especially through the disproportionate contributions of Caribbean migrants to U.S. ideologies of liberation in the early parts of the century.²² In Shepperson’s view, it is crucial to be able to account for the transformative “sea changes” that Pan-African thought undergoes in a transnational circuit. One crucial instance involves the work of Marcus Garvey, who was often described as a “pan-Negroist” after the First World War even as Du Bois’s Pan-African Congress initiatives were articulated directly in opposition to Garvey’s populist and racist version of “Back to Africa.” Later, though, Shepperson points out, Garvey is factored into the pan-African tradition, especially through the African intellectuals who dominated the movement after the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress, such as Kwame Nkrumah, who expressly cited Garvey’s *Philosophy and Opinions* as one of the main influences in the development of continental African race consciousness and independence ideologies (*P*, 347–48). At the same time, Shepperson claims that many of these discontinuities in “pan-Africanism” and “Pan-Africanism” are rooted not just in ideological disjunctures but also in the linguistic difference that necessarily has crucial consequences for any

consideration of black internationalism. He notes the role of the Liga Africana, the federation of Portuguese African associations, in the 1923 Pan-African Congress in Lisbon (*P*, 355) but considers the most important arena of linguistic difference to arise in French, particularly through French participation in the first and second Pan-African Congresses and through the influence of Negritude after World War II:

Above all, the story of French-speaking African participation in Pan-Africanism and pan-Africanism has yet to be told. Blaise Diagne, Deputy from Senegal, and Gratien Candace, deputy from Guadeloupe, played important roles in the 1919 and 1921 Pan-African Conferences. But their ultimate split with the Du Bois forces was to be seen in their references to themselves as “we Frenchmen,” whereas the English-speaking delegation called themselves “we Negroes.” By 1921, the difference between the two groups was revealed when Du Bois felt that he had to stand out against the flood of anti-Garvey statements from Diagne and Candace and took the unusual step of saying in public that he agreed with the Jamaican’s main principles. (*P*, 355–56)

The point is that Shepperson is attempting to push here toward a revised or expanded notion of black international work that would be able to account for such unavoidable dynamics of difference, rather than either assuming a universally applicable definition of “Pan-African” or presupposing an exceptionalist version of New World “Pan-African” activity. He goes so far as to suggest “all-African” as a “collective term” (*P*, 346) for this wider, more various context of black internationalism. Shepperson closes the essay with a call to consider “All-Africanism in its international context: If it is necessary to study Pan-Africanism and pan-Africanism in a wider African context than the specifically West African, it is of equal importance to look at it in its full international perspective, in time as well [as] in space” (*P*, 358).

In October 1965, Shepperson formalized this intervention with a paper called “The African Abroad or the African Diaspora,” originally delivered on a panel arranged by Joseph Harris at the International Congress of African Historians at University College, Dar es Salaam.²³ It is this paper that is usually credited with introducing the notion of “diaspora” into the study of black cultural politics and history. Shepperson starts by explicitly invoking the “Jewish Dispersion or Diaspora” with a quote from chapter 28 of Deuteronomy (“Thou shall be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth”), then he extends the analogy:

Although it cannot be said that the dark-skinned peoples of Africa, the so-called Negroes, have been dispersed into all kingdoms and countries of the

world, they have certainly migrated to a very large number of them. And the forces which have driven them abroad, slavery and imperialism, have been similar to those which scattered the Jews. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand why the expression “the African Diaspora” has gained currency as a description of the great movement which, according to one estimate made in 1946, has been responsible for creating over 41 million people of African descent in the Western hemisphere. (*D*, 152)

The essay is a rather schematic elaboration of the uses of “diaspora” in a re-visioning of African historiography; it moves by list-making, by enumerating the objects of study that might fall under the rubric of “the African abroad.” Again, Shepperson uses the term precisely to push beyond the ways that “Pan-African” limits the scope of analysis: “diaspora” studies would involve not only attention to the “idea and practice of African unity” (i.e., Pan-Africanism and pan-Africanisms) (*D*, 168–69) but also an understanding of slavery influenced in particular by the historical work of W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James, which considers the slave trade as central to any understanding of Western modernity or “universal history” (*D*, 161); an investigation into the effects of slave trade and subsequent imperialism on Africa itself, and patterns of dispersal internal to the continent (*D*, 162, 170); an analysis of “African survivals” in the black cultures of the New World (*D*, 162–66); and a consideration of the influence of African Americans on the emergence of African nationalism (*D*, 166).

In Shepperson’s usage, in other words, the term is quite flexible: he suggests that the concept of diaspora “can be considerably extended, both in time and space,” and part of the use of the concept is precisely in its extensions (*D*, 152). The “African diaspora” here adheres to many of the elements considered to be common to the three “classic” diasporas (the Jewish, the Greek, and the Armenian): in particular, an origin in the scattering and uprooting of communities, a history of “traumatic and forced departure,” and also the sense of a real or imagined relationship to a “homeland,” mediated through the dynamics of collective memory and the politics of “return.”²⁴ As a frame for knowledge production, the “African diaspora” likewise inaugurates an ambitious and radically decentered analysis of transnational circuits of culture and politics that are resistant or exorbitant to the frames of nations and continents.

The turn to diaspora arises not in terms of black cultures in the New World but in the context of revising what Shepperson calls “isolationist” (*D*, 173) and restrictive trends in African historiography—thus the apposition enunciated by the essay’s title (“The African Abroad or the African Diaspora”). In addition, the “African diaspora” is formulated expressly through an attempt to come to terms with diverse and cross-

fertilized black traditions of resistance and anticolonialism. On a theoretical level, this intervention focuses especially on relations of difference and disjuncture in the varied interactions of black internationalist discourses, both in ideological terms and in terms of language difference itself.²⁵

This is not to suggest that Shepperson is definitively the first intellectual to use the phrase *the African diaspora*. Shepperson has insisted that the use of the expression was “certainly established” in scholarly vocabulary before the 1965 Dar es Salaam conference.²⁶ In his 1982 essay “African Diaspora: Concept and Context,” he sketches the development of the term:

At some time between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, the period in which many African states were breaking away from European empires and achieving independence, the expression *African diaspora* began increasingly to be used by writers and thinkers who were concerned with the status and prospects of persons of African descent around the world as well as at home. Who first used this expression, I do not know; and I wish very much that someone would attempt the difficult task of tracing the employment of the Greek word for dispersal—which, until it began to have the adjective *African* or *black* attached to it, was used largely for the scattering abroad of the Jews.²⁷

I am less concerned here with unearthing the “originator” or first usage of what Shepperson calls “the African diaspora concept.” Etymologies are seductive in part because of the ruse of origin—the implication that one can discover the roots of language use and transformation. They are most instructive, though, in the ways they provide a sedimentation of the social construction of linguistic meaning over time: as something not unlike Raymond Williams’s notion of the “keyword,” which Michael McKeon has felicitously described as an “antithetical structure expressing a historical contradiction.”²⁸ Rather than originary usage, the question is why it becomes necessary at a certain historical juncture to employ the term *diaspora* in black intellectual work. Shepperson himself begins to point toward an answer as he conjectures why the nineteenth-century black intellectual Edward Wilmot Blyden never used the term:

Considering Blyden’s knowledge of Hebrew, his interest in Jewish history, and his sympathy with Zionist aspirations, it is surprising that he did not employ the expression “the African diaspora.”

If, however, Blyden had popularized the expression “African diaspora” in the nineteenth century and it had gained support amongst early African nationalist intellectuals, it could have acquired political overtones which would have rendered it useless for scholars today who find it convenient to

employ in their studies of the too long neglected subject of the African abroad. Without political overtones, it serves as a satisfactory although sometimes fluctuating focus for the various aspects of the African outside of Africa.²⁹

The point is not that *diaspora* is apolitical but that it has none of the “overtones” that make a term like *Pan-Africanism* already contested terrain. In this sense, the turn to *diaspora* as a term of analysis allows for an account of black transnational formations that attends to their constitutive differences, the political stakes of the organization of the “African abroad.” The accepted risk is that the term’s analytic focus “fluctuates.” Like *Pan-African*, it is open to ideological appropriation in a wide variety of political projects, from anticolonial activism to what has long been called “Black Zionism”—articulations of *diaspora* that collapse the term into versions of nationalism or racial essentialism.

Unfortunately, some of the most celebrated work on *diaspora* in the past thirty years has served to undo this complex history of emergence. It is impossible to take on the “African diaspora concept” without a great debt to the work of historian St. Clair Drake, who may be the single intellectual with the most impressive long-term commitment to its elaboration. Still, it is difficult to endorse Drake’s theoretical conclusions in “Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism,” a 1982 essay that offers a historically rich but theoretically misleading overview of the development of “diaspora studies.”³⁰ Without fully coming to terms with Shepperson’s argument about the great diversity of Pan-Africanist and pan-Africanist movements, Drake simply periodizes a split between what he terms “traditional Pan-African activity” (which encapsulates both of Shepperson’s senses of the term)³¹ and a subsequent “continental Pan-Africanism” that develops as a discourse of political unity in Africa itself in independence struggles after the Second World War.³² He then discards the precise sense of diaspora as an intervention in Shepperson’s work, by cataloging “diaspora studies as an aspect of traditional Pan-African activity.” This ends up needlessly conflating the two terms:

A concept of the black world is necessary in defining Pan-African activity. It would include all of those areas where the population is actually black in a phenotypic sense, that is, Negroid, or where the people think of themselves as black despite considerable miscegenation, or where they are so defined by others. For almost a century a conscious and deliberate movement has been developing within various parts of the black world to increase cultural contacts between its diverse segments and to unite them in the pursuit of common interests. I refer to this as traditional Pan-African activity. *For diaspora studies to be considered an aspect of this activity, an aspect operating in the cul-*

tural sector of it, they must contribute toward maintaining and reinforcing black consciousness and must be oriented toward the goal of fostering understanding, solidarity, and cooperation throughout the black world. (Drake's emphasis)³³

Without even engaging Drake's unfortunate reliance on a genetic ("phenotypic") understanding of black identity, it should be clear that this argument for the "parameters of African Diaspora Studies" departs from Shepperson's intervention in significant ways. Here "diaspora" marks a simple continuity with "Pan-Africanism"—indeed, a reduction to its "cultural sector," rather than precisely a means to theorize both culture and politics at the transnational level. Whereas Shepperson uses "diaspora" to break with a depoliticizing emphasis on "unity" and unidirectional return in midcentury black internationalist scholarship, Drake here reintroduces the Pan-African concern with vaguely defined "cultural contacts," with projects of "fostering understanding, solidarity, and cooperation throughout the black world." This results in an elision with severe consequences for the politics of *diaspora* as a term of analysis: in particular, it abandons the insight that *diaspora* becomes necessary partly because of the increased contestation over the political scope of *Pan-Africanism* in the independence moment.³⁴

Joseph Harris and Locksley Edmondson have provided a more convincing historiography of the term. They suggest that we periodize the African diaspora to distinguish between an initial history of migration and "involuntary diaspora" (both inside Africa and through the Arab and European slave trades) and the subsequent transnational formation of a "mobilized diaspora," a phenomenon particular to the twentieth century. Harris defines the latter term by noting that in the early 1900s,

the major cities of the Western powers . . . became loci for the gathering of diverse ethnic and political groups of African origin, facilitating the development of an international network linking Africa to its diaspora; this network may be called a mobilized diaspora. . . .

. . . until the 1960s most Africans in Africa retained a primary ethnic allegiance, while their descendants abroad constituted a "stateless" diaspora without a common country of origin, language, religion, or culture. The strength of the connection between Africans and the African diaspora remained essentially their common origins in Africa as a whole and a common social condition (social, economic, and political marginalization) throughout the world.

It was this combination that paved the way for the development of an effective international network by the mobilized African diaspora, namely, descendant Africans with a consciousness of the identity of their roots, occupational and communications skills, social and economic status, and access to decision-making bodies in their host country.³⁵

My point in resuscitating the history of the term itself, however, is that a discourse of diaspora becomes necessary in the same period that the “mobilized diaspora” is taking shape—indeed, the turn to “diaspora” is precisely part of what allows that mobilization to occur.

At the same time, one might add that Drake’s “Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism” appears in a collection edited by Joseph Harris, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, arising out of the 1979 conference of the First African Diaspora Studies Institute at Howard University. Despite the problems of Drake’s take on *diaspora*, the collection overall might be considered the culmination of the interventionist use of *diaspora*: it includes essays by a wide range of internationally based intellectuals, including Harris, Elliott Skinner, George Shepperson, and Lawrence Levine, among others, and is organized precisely to signal both a politicized sense of the stakes of these definitional issues and room for divergence and disagreement, even around the use of the term *diaspora* as a frame for the conference in general. Moreover, *Global Dimensions* highlights again not just ideological disjuncture but also linguistic divergence as a central issue in any approach to the question: four chapters were originally written in French (by Oruno D. Lara, Daniel Racine, Guerin C. Montilus, and Ibrahima B. Kaké), and there is copious coverage of the divergence of Francophone Pan-Africanism and Negritude cultural politics within the wider frame of the “African diaspora concept.”

Cultural Studies and Diaspora

A more complete genealogy of the uses of *diaspora* in black critical work after the Second World War would have to turn to the institutionalization of black studies in the U.S. academy in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶ That intervention into the Western academy is an epistemological challenge,³⁷ explicitly staked out through a politics of diaspora that rejects Western assumptions about a link between knowledge production and the nation. Invocations of diaspora were central and strategic in almost all of the mission statements of black studies and African American studies departments founded in the late 1960s and early 1970s—though not necessarily in a manner consonant with the earlier work of Harris and Shepperson. For instance, Maulana Karenga’s *Introduction to Black Studies*, like much of the programmatic literature, offers a split conception of diaspora that separates an African past from a U.S. present: it is based on a “diasporan focus treating first African Americans and then all other Africans spread across the world.”³⁸ Karenga explains this privileged division in pragmatic terms:

Just as a point of departure and sound procedure, does not logic demand a thrust which is not over-ambitious, but begins where it is, in the U.S., among African Americans, and then as it grows stronger, expands outward? In other words, is not the study of African Americans the core of Black Studies in the U.S., the study of an African people neglected more than any other, certainly more than the study of Continentals or Caribbeans?³⁹

This begs the question: what are the implications of such a “core” for a black studies project? Wouldn’t such a “thrust” tend to cement an American exceptionalism already prevalent in the U.S. academy, rather than using diaspora precisely to break up that orientation? Or as C. L. R. James put it in a 1970 interview:

The black students believe that black studies concerns them and black people alone. But that is a mistake. Black studies mean the intervention of a neglected area of studies that are essential to the understanding of ancient and modern society. . . . Black studies require a complete reorganization of the intellectual life and historical outlook of the United States, and world civilization as a whole.⁴⁰

The discourse of diaspora, in other words, is both enabling to black studies, in the service of such an “intervention,” and inherently a risk, in that it can fall back into either racial essentialism or American vanguardism.

More recently, this complex history of institutional intervention has been elided by the “internationalization” of the discourse of diaspora developed in British cultural studies. Scholars including Mae Henderson, Wahneema Lubiano, and Sylvia Wynter have expressed fears that the recent “importing” of cultural studies into the U.S. academy often serves to marginalize or even erase the hard-won gains of black studies and African American studies programs.⁴¹ The stakes are not solely institutional but also epistemological, since cultural studies methodology is often portrayed in the United States as offering a “new” focus on issues of diaspora. Certainly, what is often called the “turn to race” in the trajectory of work associated with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham demands to be read equally as a *turn to diaspora*. The scholarship that began to critique the presupposition of an “English” national frame (particularly in Raymond Williams’s development of a cultural studies paradigm) moves to a diasporic register as a remedy to the constitutive links between racism and nationalism.⁴² This strategic move arises, however, as a discourse discontinuous with the invocations of diaspora in African American and African historiographic and cultural work.⁴³ The question of the possible conjuncture between these

different turns to *diaspora*, then, is central to the issue of the uses of *diaspora* for contemporary critical scholarship with a transnational focus.

As in Shepperson's work, a transnational imperative emerges in cultural studies before it is crystallized with an explicit discourse of the "African diaspora" in the mid-1980s. For example, the superb 1978 study *Policing the Crisis*, written collaboratively by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, points toward a nascent diasporic register.⁴⁴ The book is usually celebrated for its prescient claims about the emergence of "authoritarian populism" in Britain politics—which predict the ascent of 1980s Thatcherism in many of its most vicious details—and for its theoretical insight that race should be understood as the "modality in which class is lived" (*PC*, 394). But in the last chapter, "The Politics of 'Mugging,'" the authors turn from their patient and polemical investigation of the social significance of the conjuncture of "moral panic" around race, crime, and youth at a moment of particular ideological crisis in British society at the end of the 1970s and offer a groundbreaking analysis of the overall situation of black "settler" communities in England in the postwar period. In a context of underemployment and racialization, certain cultural features of the "settler colony," particularly the range of activities that fall under the popular term *hustling*, are reconceived as "modes of survival" and even as the potential ground of black consciousness and community resistance, rather than the taint of black pathology and behavioral backwardness (*PC*, 352–53). "The dynamic factor," the authors write,

is the change in the way this objective process is collectively understood and resisted. Thus, the social content and political meaning of "worklessness" is being thoroughly transformed from inside. Those who cannot work are discovering that they do not want to work under those conditions. . . . this black sector of the class "in itself" has begun to undergo that process of becoming a political force "for itself." . . . This qualitative shift has not happened spontaneously. It has a history. It began with the discovery of black identity, more specifically the *rediscovery*, inside the experience of emigration, of the African roots of "colony" life. (*PC*, 381)

Policing the Crisis describes this turn to "African roots" as inherently transnational. The emergence of British black consciousness is never a purely national phenomenon: it is influenced in particular by postwar African independence movements and by the black rebellions of the 1960s in the United States. Indeed, like Shepperson, *Policing the Crisis* expressly raises the question of how black internationalist and liberationist ideologies are *translated* from one "national" context to another. They specifically invoke the "adoption and adaptation of Fanonism within the *black* move-

ment in the United States” (especially through the Black Power movement and the Black Panthers), and they note that this “movement” of black ideological work had a formative “impact on the developing consciousness of black people everywhere, including those in Britain . . . because it suggested that a political analysis, initiated in terms of colonial society and struggle, *was* adaptable or transferable to the conditions of black minorities in developed urban capitalist conditions” (*PC*, 386).

Stuart Hall has extended this work, most notably in his well-known 1980 essay “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,”⁴⁵ which, like the last chapter of *Policing the Crisis*, attempts to theorize the function of difference in a global capitalist mode of production. Here Hall returns more directly to Marx, to excavate a notion of *articulation* that is crucial to any consideration of the politics of “diaspora.” To understand capitalist production on a “global scale,” Hall writes (drawing on the work of Althusser and Laclau), Marx began to theorize

an articulation [*Gliederung*] between two modes of production, the one “capitalist” in the true sense, the other only “formally” so: the two combined through an articulating principle, mechanism, or set of relations, because, as Marx observed, “its beneficiaries participate in a world market in which the dominant productive sectors are already capitalist.” That is, the object of inquiry must be treated as a complex articulated structure which is, itself, “structured in dominance.”⁴⁶

Articulation here functions as a concept-metaphor that allows us to think relations of “difference within unity,” non-naturalizable relations of linkage between disparate societal elements. The functional “unity” of specific and strategically conjoined structures, then, is emphatically

not that of an identity, where one structure perfectly recapitulates or reproduces or even “expresses” another; or where each is reducible to the other. . . .

The unity formed by this combination or articulation is always, necessarily, a “complex structure,” a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities. This requires that the mechanisms which connect dissimilar features must be shown—since no “necessary correspondence” or expressive homology can be assumed as given. It also means—since the combination is a structure (an articulated combination) and not a random association—that there will be structured relations between its parts, i.e., relations of dominance and subordination.⁴⁷

The notion of articulation is crucial not just because it combines the structural and the discursive but also because it has a flip side: such “societies structured in dominance” are also the ground of cultural resistance.

Hall, following Gramsci, contends that ideology must be considered the key site of *struggle* over competing articulations.⁴⁸ In a transnational circuit, then, articulation offers the means to account for the diversity of black “takes” on diaspora, which Hall himself explicitly begins to theorize in the late 1980s as a frame of cultural identity determined not through “return” but through difference: “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference.”⁴⁹

The turn to an explicit discourse of diaspora in cultural studies comes in 1987 in Paul Gilroy’s “*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,” although Gilroy’s fifth chapter, “Diaspora, Utopia and the Critique of Capitalism,” departs in significant ways from Hall’s more strictly Marxist vocabulary of articulation. It is crucial to recognize that *diaspora* functions in this work, written at the height of Thatcherite domination in Britain, in a very different way than in Shepperson’s African historiography. Whereas for Shepperson *diaspora* is a way of coming to terms with transnational circuits of intellectual influence in the development of black internationalism and resistance to colonialism, in Gilroy’s work it is invoked to account for the peculiar position of black communities in Britain during a period when nationalism was being perniciously expressed through recourse to populist racism. Gilroy writes:

Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere. In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctively British experience and meanings. Black culture is actively made and re-made.⁵⁰

Reading this quote, one wonders what is lost in positioning black U.S. and Caribbean cultures as “raw materials” for “black British” expressive culture—such a trajectory would seem to efface the equally syncretic “made-ness” (and the equally transnational sources) of black culture in those supposedly “raw” New World contexts. (Moreover, is “adaptation,” in Gilroy’s terminology, the same process as active “making and re-making”?) But Gilroy’s inattention to the “raw material” metaphor is not surprising when we consider the degree to which his project is shaped by the needs of theorizing black British culture as exorbitant to the nation-state. *Diaspora* is only one of the terms Gilroy uses in attempting to define what he sees as a “new structure of cultural exchange” that in the twentieth century has been “built up across the imperial networks which once played host to the triangular trade of sugar, slaves and capital” (157). He also writes of black culture as “exported” (157, 184), “transferred” (157),

“translated” (194), as “syncretic” (155), as “articulated” in something approaching Hall’s sense (160, 187), even rhapsodizing on the “living bridge” between performance and improvisation in black British popular music and “African traditions of music-making which dissolve the distinctions between art and life” (164). Such slippage among terms, I would suggest, is mainly due to Gilroy’s salutary efforts to identify that “new structure of cultural exchange,” especially in terms of popular musical forms like hip hop, dub, and soul—forms which at that time were just beginning to be investigated in more detail by cultural critics including Gilroy and Dick Hebdige. Still, the chapter is ultimately less interested in theorizing *diaspora* itself than in evading the limiting confines of the British nation. Gilroy turns to “the framework of a diaspora” not in order to specify that space but “as an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in ‘racial,’ ethnic or national essences” (155). He contends that “national units are not the most appropriate basis for studying this history for the African diaspora’s consciousness of itself has been defined in and against constricting national boundaries” (158). The result of this insistence on the evasion of the national (even while, in the quote above, “diaspora” is confusingly defined at least partially *in* national boundaries) is that Gilroy’s use of the term fluctuates, to use Shepperson’s word. One is left uncertain about what “the African diaspora’s consciousness of itself” might refer to—where that self-awareness might be located. “Diaspora” here ultimately functions more as one of the figures for Gilroy’s obstinate anti-absolutism and anti-essentialism than as an elaboration of that “new structure of cultural exchange.”

This discourse of diaspora undergoes a shift in Gilroy’s 1993 *Black Atlantic*, the work that is often made to stand in for this entire complex and discontinuous tradition of intervention—or, indeed, that is sometimes viewed as itself the “origin” of such a transnational focus in black cultural criticism. The issue, of course, is the stakes of the “black Atlantic” as a term that (particularly in the adoption of Gilroy’s work in the U.S. academy) often usurps the space that might otherwise be reserved for *diaspora*. The success of the *Black Atlantic* has cleared space for a wide range of intellectual work in the academy; still, this development makes it all the more crucial to ask about the risks of *black Atlantic* as a term of analysis that is not necessarily consonant with the sense of *diaspora* as intervention that I have described above.⁵¹

It is sometimes overlooked that Gilroy himself is careful to propose *black Atlantic* as a provisional or heuristic term of analysis, more in order to open up a certain theoretical space that would radically dislodge any inquiry grounded in singular frames—whether “race,” “ethnicity,” or “nation”—than in order to formalize that space. For instance, in a telling

passage at the beginning of the book, he writes of “the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world.”⁵² (I read the characteristic tumble and stammer of Gilroy’s adjectives describing the “black Atlantic” as the performance of the category’s heuristic nature.) At the same time, Gilroy often pushes toward something like a typology of cultural politics in the “black Atlantic,” especially in terms of the local and global circuits of production and reception of black music. To this end, he enjoins cultural historians to think of “the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussion of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (*Black Atlantic*, 15). Or as he writes soon thereafter,

the history of the black Atlantic since [Columbus], continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people—not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship—provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory. They all emerge from it with special clarity if we contrast the national, nationalistic, and ethnically absolute paradigms of cultural criticism to be found in England and America with those hidden expressions, both residual and emergent, that attempt to be global or outer-national in nature. These traditions have supported countercultures of modernity that touched the workers’ movement but are not reducible to it. (16)

Gilroy simultaneously signals the importance of the term *diaspora* itself as an equally “heuristic means to focus on the relationship of identity and non-identity in black political culture” (81), and the final chapter of *The Black Atlantic* is a sensitive consideration of the resonances of *diaspora* both in Jewish and in black New World thought, elaborated through readings of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and the work of nineteenth-century intellectual Edward Blyden. This continuing discourse of diaspora begs the question of the introduction of the notion of the “black Atlantic,” which would seem to impose an assumption of geographical specificity (what we might term a *hemispheric* limit) and a “racial” context on a field that might be much more broad and more various.

Gilroy adapts the conceptual unit of the Atlantic most notably from the remarkable recent work of Peter Linebaugh (12-13). But Linebaugh’s scholarship, and his recent collaborations with Marcus Rediker, are explicitly focused on the rise of a working class in complex cultural histories of sailors and vagabonds in ports around the Atlantic basin, who

from the beginnings of the slave trade onward so often resisted being pressed into serving the expansion of capitalist modes of production on a transnational scale.⁵³ This antinomian “proletarian internationalism” is linked to the development of black consciousness and the antislavery movement, for Linebaugh, but at the same time, he does not suggest that we can extract a singular or autonomous “black” transnational circuit of cultural and political exchanges.⁵⁴ Gilroy in any case is more concerned with individual stories of travel (Du Bois’s sojourns in Germany, Richard Wright living in France, the Fisk Jubilee Singers touring Europe in the late nineteenth century) and abstract notions of transnational circuits of culture than with specific ground-level histories of culture in port cities and on ships around the world. The risk here is that *black Atlantic* loses the broad range of the term *diaspora*, without even replacing it with a contextualized history of transnational cultures in the Western hemisphere. Although these questions are not worked through in the *Black Atlantic* itself, Gilroy explained this strategy in a 1994 interview:

First we have to fight over the concept diaspora and to move it away from the obsession with origins, purity and invariant sameness. Very often the concept of diaspora has been used to say, “Hooray! we can rewind the tape of history, we can get back to the original moment of our dispersal!” I’m saying something quite different. That’s why I didn’t call the book diaspora anything. I called it *Black Atlantic* because I wanted to say, “If this is a diaspora, then it’s a very particular kind of diaspora. It’s a diaspora that can’t be reversed.”⁵⁵

I share Gilroy’s concern but find that ironically the terminology in the *Black Atlantic* operates in a nearly inverse fashion: in the work itself, it is the fascination with the Atlantic frame, and its focus on the triangular slave trade in particular, that continually draws Gilroy back into the quagmire of origins, by imposing (as he himself admits) “a tension that gets set up around modernity as a chronological and temporal category—when did modernity begin?”⁵⁶ At the same time, we have started to see a reductive kind of “serial logic” at work in studies of black transnational circuits of culture, in which the “black Atlantic” would have to be set beside a parallel oceanic frame of the “black Mediterranean” or the “black Pacific.” I remain unconvinced that such oceanic frames can be thought of as separate in any consistent manner, and I would argue that it is precisely the term *diaspora*, in the interventionist sense I have sketched here, that would allow us to think beyond such limiting geographic frames, and without reliance on an obsession with origins.⁵⁷

Another way to make this point is to note that a discourse of diaspora functions simultaneously as abstraction and as anti-abstraction. We have

generally come to make recourse unquestioningly to its level of abstraction, grounding identity claims and transnational initiatives in a history of “scattering of Africans” that putatively offers a principle of unity—in Gilroy’s phrase, “purity and invariant sameness”—to those dispersed populations. I am arguing here neither to disclaim this history of dispersal nor to substitute another abstraction (an alternate principle of continuity, like the oceanic frame offered by *Atlantic*) but instead to emphasize the anti-abstractionist uses of *diaspora*. As I have pointed out, a return to the intellectual history of the term itself is necessary because it reminds us that *diaspora* is introduced in large part to account for difference among African-derived populations, in a way that a term like *Pan-Africanism* could not. Moreover, *diaspora* points to difference not only internally (the ways transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language) but also externally: in appropriating a term so closely associated with Jewish thought, we are forced to think not in terms of some closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialization—what Earl Lewis has called a history of “overlapping diasporas.”⁵⁸ (For a specific example, in a history of black internationalism in France between the world wars, *diaspora* points not just to the encounter in Marseille between the Senegalese radical Lamine Senghor and the Jamaican novelist Claude McKay, but also to the collaboration in the French Communist Party between Senghor and the Vietnamese radical Nguyen Ai Quoc, later better known as Ho Chi Minh.) The use of the term *diaspora*, I am suggesting, is not that it offers the comfort of abstraction, an easy recourse to origins, but that it forces us to consider discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference.

Reading *Décalage*

I return in closing to Stuart Hall’s notion of diaspora as *articulated*, as a structured combination of elements “related as much through their differences as through their similarities.” If a discourse of diaspora articulates difference, then one must consider the status of that difference—not just linguistic difference but, more broadly, the trace or the residue, perhaps, of what resists translation or what sometimes cannot help refusing translation across the boundaries of language, class, gender, sexuality, religion, the nation-state. Whenever the African diaspora is articulated (just as when black transnational projects are deferred, aborted, or declined) these social forces leave subtle but indelible effects. Such an unevenness or differentiation marks a constitutive *décalage* in the very weave of the culture,

one that can be neither dismissed nor pulled out. Léopold Senghor, in an important short essay called “Négro-Américains et Négro-Africains,” writes suggestively about the differences and influences between U.S. blacks and African blacks as spun out across such a gap:

Le différend entre Négro-Américains et Négro-Africains est plus léger malgré les apparences. Il s’agit, en réalité, d’un simple décalage—dans le temps et dans l’espace. [Despite appearances, the difference between Negro-Americans and Negro-Africans is more slight. In reality it involves a simple *décalage*—in time and in space.]⁵⁹

Décalage is one of the many French words that resists translation into English; to signal that resistance and, moreover, to endorse the way that this term marks a resistance to crossing over, I will keep the term in French here.⁶⁰ It can be translated as “gap,” “discrepancy,” “time lag,” or “interval”; it is also the term that French speakers sometimes use to translate “jet lag.” In other words, a *décalage* is either a difference or gap in time (advancing or delaying a schedule) or in space (shifting or displacing an object). I would suggest, reading somewhat against the grain of Senghor’s text, that there is a possibility here in the phrase “in time and space” of a “light” (*léger*) and subtly innovative model to read the structure of such unevenness in the African diaspora.

The verb *caler* means “to prop up or wedge something” (as when one leg on a table is uneven). So *décalage* in its etymological sense refers to the removal of such an added prop or wedge. *Décalage* indicates the reestablishment of a prior unevenness or diversity; it alludes to the taking away of something that was added in the first place, something artificial, a stone or piece of wood that served to fill some gap or to rectify some imbalance. This black diasporic *décalage* among African Americans and Africans, then, is not simply geographical distance, nor is it simply difference in evolution or consciousness; instead, it is a different kind of interface that might not be susceptible to expression in the oppositional terminology of the “vanguard” and the “backward.” In other words, *décalage* is the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water. It is a changing core of difference; it is the work of “differences within unity,”⁶¹ an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed.

Is it possible to rethink the workings of “race” in black cultural politics through a model of *décalage*? Any articulation of diaspora in such a model would be inherently *décalé* or disjointed by a host of factors. Like a table with legs of different lengths, or a tilted bookcase, diaspora can be discursively propped up (*calé*) into an artificially “even” or “balanced” state of “racial” belonging. But such props, of rhetoric, strategy, or orga-

nization, are always articulations of unity or globalism, ones that can be “mobilized” for a variety of purposes but can never be definitive: they are always prosthetic. In this sense, *décalage* is proper to the structure of a diasporic “racial” formation, and its return in the form of *disarticulation*—the points of misunderstanding, bad faith, unhappy translation—must be considered a necessary haunting. This reads against the grain of Senghor, if one can consider his Negritude one influential variety of this diasporic propping up. Instead of reading for the *efficacy* of the prosthesis, this orientation would look for the *effects* of such an operation, for the traces of such haunting, reading them as constitutive to the structure of any articulation of diaspora.⁶²

Recall that Hall points out the word *articulation* has two meanings: “both ‘joining up’ (as in the limbs of the body, or an anatomical structure) and ‘giving expression to.’”⁶³ He suggests that the term is most useful in the study of the workings of race in social formations when it is pushed away from the latter implication, of an “expressive link” (which would imply a predetermined hierarchy, a situation where one factor makes another “speak”), and toward its etymology as a metaphor of the body. Then the relationship between factors is not predetermined; it offers a more ambivalent, more elusive model. What does it mean to say, for example, that one *articulates a joint*? The connection speaks. Such “speaking” is functional, of course: the arm bends at the elbow to reach down to the table, the leg swivels at the hip to take the next step. But the joint is a curious place, as it is both the point of separation (the forearm from the upper arm, for example) and the point of linkage. Rather than a model of ultimate debilitation or of predetermined retardation, then, *décalage*, in providing a model for what escapes or resists translation through the African diaspora, alludes to this strange two-ness of the joint. It directs our attention to what I described earlier as the “antithetical structure” of the term *diaspora*, its risky intervention. My contention, finally, is that articulations of diaspora demand to be approached this way, through their *décalage*. For paradoxically, it is exactly such a haunting gap or discrepancy that allows the African diaspora to “step” and “move” in various articulations. Articulation is always a strange and ambivalent gesture, because finally, in the body, it is *only* difference—the separation between bones or members—that allows movement.

Notes

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1. Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking *Diaspora*(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,” *Diaspora* 5 (spring 1996): 8.

2. James Clifford, “Diasporas,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 244–78.

3. Tölölyan comments that African Americans make up a community that “remains exceptional, not least in its formation as a diaspora, and it is both an intellectual and political disservice to cloud that exceptionality by the piety of a solidarity that conjoins all peoples of color in some ethnodiasporan or multiculturalist discourse” (“Rethinking *Diaspora*(s),” 23). Although I follow Tölölyan here in arguing that the intellectual history of an “African diaspora” discourse is singular, it should be noted that my approach breaks with the emphasis on what might be termed “comparative diasporas” exemplified by the editorial policy of *Diaspora*, the journal he edits, as well as with other recent work (some of it quite useful) that reads the African diaspora as only one example in a typology. Other examples are *Diaspora and Immigration*, a special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* 98 [winter/spring 1999] edited by V. Y. Mudimbe and Sabine Engel; Kim Butler, “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,” *Diaspora* (forthcoming); Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1 (spring 1991): 83–99.

4. Brent Hayes Edwards, “Three Ways to Translate the Harlem Renaissance,” in *The Harlem Renaissance: Temples for Tomorrow*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2001), 359–96; and Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2001).

5. In taking up a politics of the usage of *diaspora*, I am foregrounding the analytical function of the term, because (although some recent historical work confuses the issue) *diaspora* has not been a dominant term of political *organization*. When black activists have assembled transnational movements, they have turned to a wide range of terms (including Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism, antifascism, communism, civil rights, Black Power, Afrocentrism, antiracism, anti-apartheid), but seldom and only very recently to *diaspora* as rallying cry or group appellation.

6. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Pan-Africa and the New Racial Philosophy,” *Crisis* 40 (November 1933): 247.

7. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (1946; expanded ed., New York: International Publishers,

1965), 7. For another version of this argument, see J. A. Langley, "New-World Origins of Pan-Negro Sentiment," in *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 17-40.

8. St. Clair Drake, "Negro Americans and the Africa Interest," in *The American Negro Reference Book*, ed. John P. Davis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), 662-705.

9. Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, Va.: CARAF Books/University Press of Virginia, 1989), 26. The original is *Le Discours Antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 36. Arguments of this period that a problematic of "return" shapes both Negritude and Ethiopianism include St. Clair Drake, "Hide My Face?—On Pan-Africanism and Negritude," in *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940-1962*, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 77-105; and George Shepperson, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism," *Phylon* 14 (first quarter 1953): 9-18. Drake comments more generally on "'The Return' As a Pan-African Theme" in his "Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph Harris (Washington: Howard University Press, 1982), 359-66.

10. An excellent introduction is David Scott, "That Event, This Memory: Notes on the Anthropology of African Diasporas in the New World," *Diaspora* 1 (winter 1991): 261-84.

11. Here is a small sampling of the wealth of "Africa interest" work in this period, which focused in particular on black New World projects of return and on African American ideological influences on Africa: Harold R. Isaacs, "The American Negro and Africa: Some Notes," *Phylon* 20 (fall 1959): 219-33; George Shepperson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism," *Journal of African History* 1, no. 2 (1960): 299-312; E. U. Essien-Udom, "The Relationship of Afro-Americans to African Nationalism," *Freedomways* 2 (fall 1962): 391-407; Richard B. Moore, "Africa Conscious Harlem," *Freedomways* 3 (summer 1963): 315-34; Adelaide Cromwell and Martin Kilson, *Apropos of Africa: Sentiments of Negro American Leaders on Africa from the 1800s to the 1950s* (London: Frank Cass, 1969); Essien-Udom, "Black Identity in the International Context," in *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, vol. 2: *Since 1865*, ed. Nathan Huggins, Martin Kilson, and Daniel Fox (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 233-58; Shepperson, "The Afro-American Contribution to African Studies," *Journal of American Studies* 8 (December 1974): 281-301. See also Sterling Stuckey, "Black Americans and African Consciousness: Du Bois, Woodson, and the Spell of Africa," in *Going through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 120-37.

12. Alioune Diop, "Niam N'Goura, or *Présence africaine's* raison d'être," trans. Richard Wright and Thomas Diop, *Présence africaine* 1 (October-November 1947): 190-91. The French original appears in the same issue, 7-14.

13. *Ibid.*, 186.

14. Bernard Mouralis, "Présence Africaine: The Geography of an 'Ideology,'" in *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987*, ed. V. Y. Mudimbe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6. See also the account by Jacques Howlett, the French philosopher who worked closely with Diop on the journal: "Présence Africaine, 1947-1958," trans. Mercer Cook, *Journal of Negro History* 43 (April 1958): 140-50.

15. *La Dépêche africaine*, under the direction of the Guadeloupean Maurice Satineau, began publication in February 1928. The paper's masthead presented it as a "grand organe républicain indépendant de correspondance entre les Noirs et d'Etudes des Questions Politiques et Economiques Coloniales." The quote comes from an editorial by Paulette Nardal and Léo Sajous, "Our Aim" [Ce que nous voulons faire], trans. Nardal and Clara W. Shepard, *La Revue du monde noir / Review of the Black World* 1 (1931).

16. The first issue included Wright's "Bright and Morning Star," translated by Boris Vian, and Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "The Ballad of Pearl May Lee." Wright, working with the journal's editorial board until 1950, was also responsible for *Présence africaine's* publishing Frank Marshall Davis, Samuel Allen, Horace Cayton, and C. L. R. James. Like *La Revue du monde noir* in the early 1930s, *Présence africaine* also published an English edition.

17. "Foreword," *Présence africaine*, new series, nos. 1–2 (April–July 1955): 8.

18. In a sense, the international congresses mark a convergence between the intellectual formations around the "Africa interest" in the United States and the "African presence" in France, culminating in publications such as *Africa Seen by American Negro Scholars*, the volume published in 1958 in a joint venture of Diop's Société africaine de culture and its U.S. cousin, the American Society of African Culture, headed by John A. Davis. See also the American Society of African Culture, *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

19. Von Eschen argues more particularly that the "Africa interest" was not always articulated with the exigencies of decolonization and independence. There were loud silences around the wealth of radical work that was specifically seeking such an internationalization in the period (most prominently, the work of George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, Paul Robeson, Alphaeus Hunton, and the Council on African Affairs). Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 176.

20. George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958) (hereafter cited as *IA*). For commentary on *Independent African*, see particularly Cedric Robinson, "Notes on a 'Native' Theory of History," *Review* 4 (summer 1980): 45–78.

21. George Shepperson, "Pan-Africanism and 'pan-Africanism': Some Historical Notes," *Phylon* 23 (winter 1962): 346–58 (hereafter cited as *P*).

22. *Ibid.*, 356. We now have a definitive history of these dynamics, Winston James's impressive *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998).

23. Shepperson, "The African Abroad or the African Diaspora," in *Emerging Themes of African History*, ed. T. O. Ranger (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), 152–76 (hereafter cited as *D*). It is crucial to note that this essay was first published in *Africa Forum*, the journal of the American Society of African Culture (see note 11 above); in that arena, it marks an explicit intervention into the assumptions of the "Africa interest." The citation (note the inversion of the title: the essay is identical, but this title emphasizes the "diaspora" concept rather than African history) is Shepperson, "The African Diaspora—or the African Abroad," *Africa Forum: A Quarterly Journal of African Affairs* 1, no. 2 (summer 1966): 76–93. For Joseph Harris's comments on the Dar es Salaam

conference, and on the introduction of the “diaspora” concept, see Joseph E. Harris, “Introduction to the African Diaspora,” in *Emerging Themes*, 146–51; and Harris, “The International Congress on African History, 1965,” *Africa Forum* 1, no. 3 (winter 1966): 80–84.

24. See Tölölyan, “Rethinking *Diaspora(s)*,” 12–15.

25. In the “diaspora” articles, both Shepperson and Harris call again for attention to the French influence on discourses of Pan-Africanism and black internationalism. See Shepperson, “The African Abroad,” 167; Harris, “Introduction,” 149–50. The first work to follow up on this call included Immanuel Geiss’s 1968 *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa*, trans. Ann Keep (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974), especially the chapter titled “Nationalist Groups in France: The Roots of Négritude,” 305–21; and J. A. Langley, “The Movement and Thought of Francophone Pan-Negroism: 1924–1936,” which originally appeared in a shorter version in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* in 1969 and was later published as chapter 7 of Langley’s *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900–1945*, 286–325.

26. Shepperson, “Introduction,” in *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 2. I have not yet found an earlier example in print, however.

27. Shepperson, “African Diaspora: Concept and Context,” in Harris, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 46.

28. Michael McKeon, review of *Keywords, Studies in Romanticism* 16 (winter 1977): 133.

29. Shepperson, “Introduction,” 3.

30. St. Clair Drake, “Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism,” in Harris, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 358, 373. But see also Drake’s “The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective,” *Black Scholar* 7, no. 1 (September 1975), which is more tentative in its claims: “The diaspora analogy,” he writes, “like the internal colony analogy, needs constant critical analysis if it is to be a useful guide to research as well as a striking metaphor” (2). Other work has equally moved away from the sense of *diaspora* as a particular kind of intervention: some have framed the term around questions of foreign policy, while others have continued to worry the question of the historical and cultural “unity” of the diaspora, in a vein that might be more properly termed pan-Africanist (e.g., Ruth Simms Hamilton, “Conceptualizing the African Diaspora,” in *African Presence in the Americas*, ed. Carlos Moore et al. [Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1995], 393–410).

31. Drake, “Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism,” 353.

32. *Ibid.*, 358–59.

33. *Ibid.*, 343.

34. In other words, part of the reason for the turn to a discourse of diaspora in the 1960s and 1970s is precisely the growing split in the independence period between “continental” and “traditional” visions of Pan-Africanism (to use Drake’s terms). Although certain explicitly “cultural” projects continued to flourish (e.g., the 1966 First Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal), the Pan-African movement reached an impasse at the Sixth Congress in Dar es Salaam in 1974, when delegates from the Americas and delegates from the African continent itself argued about whether the movement should focus on the concerns of the continent as a unit or on the international connections between peoples of African descent. Drake notes these difficulties (357–59) without reconsidering his con-

flation of *diaspora* and *Pan-Africanism*, however. Also see the essays around the 1974 congress edited by Horace Campbell, *Pan-Africanism: Struggle against Neo-Colonialism and Imperialism* (Toronto: Afro-Carib Publications, 1975); and Joseph Harris and Slimane Zeghidour, "Africa and Its Diaspora since 1935," in *General History of Africa*, vol. 3: *Africa since 1935*, ed. Ali A. Mazrui (Berkeley, Calif.: UNESCO/Heinemann, 1993), 716–17.

35. Joseph E. Harris, "The Dynamics of the Global African Diaspora," in *The African Diaspora*, ed. Alusine Jalloh (College Station: University of Texas at Arlington, 1996), 14. Although Harris does not cite a source for the phrase, the original application of *mobilized diaspora* to the African diaspora appears to be Locksley Edmondson, "Black America as a Mobilizing Diaspora: Some International Implications," in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer (London: Croon Helm, 1986), 164–211. Other foreign policy-oriented work in this vein includes Robert Chrisman, "History of Black Involvement in International Politics," in *The Non-Aligned Movement in World Politics*, ed. A. W. Singham (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence, Hill, & Co., 1977); John A. Davis, "Black Americans and United States Policy toward Black Africa," *Journal of International Affairs* 23, no. 2 (1969): 236–49; Yossi Shain, "Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 109 (winter 1994–95): 811–41.

36. This is also the period when a discourse of diaspora begins to emerge in black popular culture. There is not room here, however, to trace the uses of the term on that level.

37. On black studies as epistemological intervention, see particularly Russell L. Adams, "Intellectual Questions and Imperatives in the Development of Afro-American Studies," *Journal of Negro Education* 53 (summer 1984): 204. The essays of Sylvia Wynter offer the most impressive elaboration of this argument. See, for example, Wynter, "Columbus, the Ocean Blue, and Fables That Stir the Mind: To Reinvent the Study of Letters," in *Poetics of the Americas: Race, Founding, and Textuality*, ed. Bainard Cowan and Jefferson Humphries (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 148–49.

38. Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993), 13.

39. *Ibid.*, 492.

40. James, "The *Black Scholar* Interviews C. L. R. James," *Black Scholar* 2, no. 1 (September 1970): 43. St. Clair Drake has often pointed out the role of *diaspora* in the institutionalization of black studies: see his "Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism," 380–84, and his more recent "Black Studies and Global Perspectives: An Essay," *Journal of Negro Education* 53 (summer 1984): 226–42.

41. See Mae G. Henderson, "'Where, By the Way, Is This Train Going?' A Case for Black (Cultural) Studies," *Callaloo* 19 (winter 1996): 60–67; Wahneema Lubiano, "Mapping the Interstices between Afro-American Cultural Discourse and Cultural Studies: A Prolegomenon," *Callaloo* 19 (winter 1996): 68–77; Manthia Diawara, "Black Studies/Cultural Studies," in *Borders, Boundaries, and Frames: Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mae G. Henderson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 202–12; Wynter, "Columbus, the Ocean Blue, and Fables That Stir the Mind," 193–94, n. 34.

42. The most obvious sources of this critique are *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in '70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson/Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1982); chapter 2 in Paul Gilroy's "There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Stuart Hall's essay "Culture, Community, Nation," *Cultural Studies* 7 (October 1993): 349–63.

43. In his discussion of Blyden in the final chapter of *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy does cite Shepperson's essay "African Diaspora: Concept and Context" but without taking up the introduction of the term itself. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 211.

44. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978) (hereafter cited as *PC*).

45. Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (UNESCO, 1980), reprinted in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16–60.

46. *Ibid.*, 33.

47. *Ibid.*, 38.

48. Other work touching upon the importance of the term in Birmingham cultural studies includes Jennifer Daryl Stack, "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 112–30, and the interview with Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation," 131–50, in the same volume. Fredric Jameson offers a more idiosyncratic genealogy of the term (in his review essay "On 'Cultural Studies,'" *Social Text* no. 34 [1993]: 30–33) but elegantly notes the ways the term implies a "poetic" between the structural and the discursive (32).

49. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 235. This approach has been extended by theorists, including Kobena Mercer and Hazel Carby, who have considered the ways diaspora as an articulated structure of difference is constituted not only by race and colonization but also by representation, sexuality, gender, and cultural production.

50. Gilroy, "There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack," 154. On the next page he writes that "this chapter introduces the study of black cultures within the framework of a diaspora as an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in 'racial,' ethnic or national essences."

51. Indeed, one measure of the book's influence is the number of formidable scholars who have felt the need to contest Gilroy's more provocative propositions in print. Some of the more significant critiques of *The Black Atlantic* are Neil Lazarus, "Is a Counterculture of Modernity a Theory of Modernity?" *Diaspora* 4 (winter 1995): 323–39; Ronald A. T. Judy, "Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* and the Place(s) of English in the Global," *Critical Quarterly* 39 (spring 1997): 22–29; Laura Chrisman, "Journeying to Death: Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*," *Race and Class* 39 (October–December 1997): 51–64; the reviews by Brackette F. Williams and George Lipsitz, *Social Identities* 1, no. 1 (1995): 175–92 and 192–220, respectively; and the essays collected in *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4 (winter 1996), particularly Joan Dayan, "Paul Gilroy's Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor," 7–14.

52. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 3.

53. See Peter Linebaugh, "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 10 (autumn 1982): 87–121; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The

Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3 (September 1990): 225–52.

54. For cautions in this vein concerning the notion of the “black Atlantic,” see Colin Palmer’s review in *Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (September 1998): 24–25, and Alasdair Pettinger, “Enduring Fortresses—A Review of *The Black Atlantic*,” *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 4 (winter 1998): 142–47. Philip D. Curtin, among others, has argued that the Mediterranean must be considered coextensive with the Atlantic in terms of the development of the slave trade. He goes so far as to argue for the “Mediterranean origins of the South Atlantic system”; see Curtin, “The Slave Trade and the Atlantic Basin: Intercontinental Perspectives,” in *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, vol. 1, ed. Nathan Huggins, Martin Kilson, and Daniel Fox (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 75–77.

55. Tommy Lott, “Black Cultural Politics: An Interview with Paul Gilroy,” *Found Object* 4 (fall 1994): 56–57.

56. *Ibid.*, 75. Gilroy comments, “If I were going to write the book again, I would not use modernity as the framework for it.” He notes that in the book he is interested in a “particular history of modernity,” the one “generated through and from the systemic and hemispheric trade in African slaves.” That “hemispheric” focus—the Atlantic, in other words—implicitly leads to the work’s concern with modernity and the question of origins.

57. Indeed, there is a prior model for precisely this kind of work through the “diasporic” lens I have been espousing: see Joseph Harris’s “A Comparative Approach to the Study of the African Diaspora,” in Harris, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 112–24, which attempts to consider both the African American presence in Sierra Leone and Liberia and the histories of African communities in India, Turkey, the Middle East, and Asia. The main source on the latter part of the African diaspora is of course Harris’s unprecedented *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

58. Earl Lewis, “To Turn As on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 765–87.

59. Senghor, “Problématique de la Négritude” (1971), in *Liberté III: Négritude et civilisation de l’universel* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 274. The translation is my own.

60. Historian Ranajit Guha is one of the few scholars writing in English who regularly makes recourse to the term *décalage*, using it to indicate a structural overlap or discrepancy, a period of “social transformation” when one class, state bureaucracy, or social formation “challenges the authority of another that is older and moribund but still dominant.” Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13, 157. See also Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 173, 330.

61. *Ibid.*, 278.

62. My emphasis on diaspora as a discursive tradition echoes David Scott’s suggestion that the African diaspora be read less as a culturally unified continuity than as “embodied disputes” among black populations throughout the globe about the very meaning of “Africa,” slavery, or black identity. Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcolonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 123–24.

63. Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” 41.



