

Africa: Moving the Boundaries

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The Past Never Dies: Historical Memory of the Slave Trade and Relationship between African Americans and Contemporary Migrants from Africa to the US¹

Dmitri M. Bondarenko

*Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences &
Russian State University for the Humanities
dbondar@hotmail.com*

Abstract

The article is based on field evidence collected in seven states in 2013–2015. It shows how differences in the historic memory of African Americans and African migrants influence their mutual perceptions and relationship. Both groups' collective memory and mass consciousness of the transatlantic slave trade is most important in this respect. The slave trade is the event that gave rise to the very phenomenon of Black Americans and to the problem of the "Black world" and its historical unity. This article argues that the historic memory of the slave trade, slavery, and the fight against it is of key importance to African Americans' historic consciousness. This memory is also important to Africans; however, not to the same degree. Secondly, Africans see the slave trade differently, not as a history not of Blacks' betrayal by other Blacks, but of exploitation of the Blacks by the Whites. Significant differences in the perception, estimation, and importance attached to the slave trade, slavery and anti-slavery struggle separate these two groups of the Black population rather than unite them in the face of "White" America. The lack of the sense of historic unity alienates African Americans and African migrants from each other spiritually and mentally, thus contributing to the establishment of an ambiguous and complicated relationship between them.

Introduction

From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, in most countries of the New World, the European slave trade resulted in the formation of large communities of people whose ancestors had been forcibly removed from Africa, mainly from her west coast. In the United States in particular, these Africans and their descendents have become an unalienable part of the nation's historical, ethno-cultural, and socio-economic landscape from its early days. According to data for 2013, African Americans amounted to 12.6% of its population, 39.9 million of its 316.1 million people (Anderson 2015).

Africans' voluntary migration to the Western Hemisphere, including the US, began about the same time as the end of slavery – in the 1860s. The first voluntary migrants from Africa to the US were natives of the Cape Verde islands (Halter 1993; Wibault 2005). However, for more than a century, voluntary migration from sub-Saharan Africa to the United States was

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limited. Voluntary African immigration increased only in the 1980s, about 20 years after *The Immigration and Naturalization Act* of October 3, 1965, which abolished the discriminatory quota system for non-Europeans, as well as Southern and Eastern Europeans. In the 1990s (Dixon 2006; Terrazas 2009; McCabe 2011), this immigration accelerated as many Africans lost hope for a politically stable, socially just and economically prosperous society in their own countries. As a result, in recent decades more people resettled from Africa in the US than were displaced forcibly for the entire period of the slave trade (Dodson & Diouf 2004; Roberts 2005; Clark 2006; Arthur 2010; Curry-Stevens 2013). In the twenty-first century, the US has become the major recipient of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (Capps *et al* 2012). The stream continues to increase; natives of this region form one of the most rapidly growing groups among all the immigrant communities in the US.

Three quarters of Africans residing in the US came to the country no earlier than 1990 (Terrazas 2009), 61% of them in the twenty-first century (McCabe 2011; Capps *et al* 2012; Zong & Batalova 2014). Between 2000 to 2013, the number of African migrants in the US increased by 137%, from 574,000 to 1,400,000 people, including a 13% increase during a four-year period, 2010 to 2013 (Zong & Batalova 2014; Anderson 2015). Nevertheless, they still form just 4% of US residents who were born abroad (Zong & Batalova 2014), 3.2% of black residents of the US and 0.4% of the total US population (Anderson 2015). Interestingly, Africans arrived in the US from all the countries of the continent. Nevertheless, English-speaking countries and states beset by civil war remain the main nations of origin. Half of American Africans are natives of Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia or Somalia (*ibid.*). By 2000, Africans lived in all fifty states of the country and the District of Columbia (Wilson 2003). Today most of them reside in New York, Texas, Maryland and California, with at least 100, 000 Africans in each (Terrazas 2009; McCabe 2011; Zong & Batalova 2014). About 95% of Africans in the US are city dwellers, mostly residents of large urban agglomerations, led by the New York City and Washington, DC areas, each also home to more than 100,000 (Takyi, Boate 2006; Terrazas 2009; Reed & Andrzejewski 2010; McCabe 2011; Zong & Batalova 2014).

Today in the United States, these two communities with sub-Saharan Africa genetic origins – African Americans and African migrants – exist side by side, but have different histories and occupy different positions in contemporary American society. Black residents of the US whose ancestors were brought from Africa as slaves hundreds of years ago are called “African Americans” in this article; the majority of this community’s members recognize this name as most correct, a judgement generally accepted throughout the wider American society and academia. Contemporary black voluntary migrants from all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and their children are called “Africans”. African Americans and African migrants form different communities, not a single “black community”. Many respondents told us that these communities will not integrate in the future either because, ‘Africans and African Americans are too, too, too different’, although some admit that it might be possible with the Americanization of the African migrants’ children. Despite the common roots, significant “social distance” persists between black communities, and in particular between African Americans and Africans (Iheduru 2013). Given major differences in their histories, this distance makes sense. On the other hand, it contradicts mythologies and ideologies of several powerful intellectual and political schools that began to spread among African Americans, Africans and African Caribbeans in the middle of the 19th century. Such schools of thought as Garveyism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, and Afrocentrism argued, and still argue, for the

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common cultural and spiritual basis of all black people – that is, a specific spiritual and mental life no matter where they were born. According to this view, the global “black brotherhood” requires joint action by all those of the “black race” in a world ruled by whites.

At the same time, the absence of “black unity” does not mean that the relations between the black communities are hostile. They cannot be characterized unambiguously at all, not least because they are not quite the same in different age, social, and educational groups, in megacities and in rural areas, or in the country’s different historical and cultural regions. It was not by chance that our interviewees from both communities described the relations between black Africans and African Americans in the widest possible range from ‘excellent’ to ‘antagonistic’. Between these extremes, we heard a range of assessments: ‘good’; ‘friendly’; ‘respectful’; ‘generally positive’; ‘normal, but not close’; ‘more or less decent’, and; ‘not bad but that could be better’. On the one hand, some assessments included: ‘not brilliant’; ‘superficial’; ‘cold’; ‘cautious’; ‘strained’; ‘suspicious’; ‘watchful’; ‘bad’; based on ‘mixed feelings’; ‘misunderstandings’; ‘lack of mutual understanding’; ‘wrong perceptions’; ‘prejudice’, and; ‘mistrust’. The relationship between African migrants and African Americans resembles the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of two magnets. They both understand that among all the ethno-racial communities in the country, they, along with African Caribbeans, are the closest to each other; for many non-black Americans, the communities often merge into one. They also recognize common roots and similar problems in a society in which racial division is so important. But their many cultural differences arise immediately when they interact because of mutual attraction; those differences are then “translated” into the “language” of images of the other culture, causing mutual repulsion. There is no reason to disagree with one of our interviewees who noted –

It’s still very hard for Africans to accept African Americans. Also for African Americans to accept Africans – they see Africans, a lot of African Americans see Africans as just any other foreigners.

A variety of factors lead to this sort of perception and the relationships that consequently develop between African migrants and African Americans. Among them are differences in collective memory of the most important events of the past; these differences strongly shape mutual perceptions between members of these communities. They become especially apparent when comparing the typical views of African Americans and Africans on the history of the Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath.

Theoretical Background and Collected Evidence

In this article, we focus on historical memory of the two black communities in the US. Such memory largely shapes any group’s collective identity, just as collective identity shapes people’s attitudes towards cultural “others”. Historical memory is not a “verbatim quote”, a “cast” or a “photo” of real history. Rather, any historical memory may be inaccurate or simply false, because ‘contrary to history, memory is an emotional experience related to a real or imagined recollection and allowing all kinds of manipulations, changes, displacements, oblivions’ (Filippova 2011, p. 75). However, the product of the historical memory is not necessarily a lie or fib. Even if a particular memory is historically inaccurate, the cultural myths generating that memory may give an accurate measure of a phenomenon or even an epoch. These images and myths will also make sense to the people who believe them and, therefore, influence their worldview and behaviour. Constructed and reconstructed by

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various ideologists on the one hand, and passed through a filter of popular mass consciousness generation after generation on the other, in a group's historical memory, events can become refracted or even distorted.

Historical memory thus reflects the everyday creativity of individuals or groups of people, depending on the socio-cultural context in which they currently live. This is why history, created, modified and stored in historical memory, requires an attitude to itself as a Durkheimian "social fact" (Durkheim 2009) of today, rather than a true or false transmission of past events. Historical consciousness always correlates memory of the past with the present. People reconstruct what happened in the past according to what is important for the group and how it supports group identity in the present (Repina 2014). As a result, collective historical memory concentrates on key moments in a community's history, reassesses the past depending on the socio-cultural changes in the present, and helps reshape the collective worldview. Thus, historical memory defines "us" and "them", as well as the nature of the relationship between "our" and "other" socio-cultural groups. The latter is especially evident in the way African Americans and recent African immigrants in the United States perceive and relate to each other.

This article is based on the field evidence collected by the author and his associates. The field evidence was collected from 2013 to 2015 in seven states (Alabama, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New York and Pennsylvania), thirteen towns and cities ranging in size from 8,000 (in Guntersville, AL) and more than 300,000 (St Louis, MO), to the bigger cities of Boston, MA, and Minneapolis, MN, and the megacities of Chicago, New York and Philadelphia. The methods of structured, semi-structured, non-structured interviews and observation were used. In total, we recorded 196 interviews and conversations of different duration and degree of structuring with African Americans, natives of twenty-three African countries, and people from other communities who have experience of communication with them. We made notes of observations of many events in the lives of African Americans and African migrants. We analysed 806 original photos, flyers and business cards of African establishments and enterprises, brochures of political and cultural organizations of African Americans and African migrants, Sunday prayer brochures of 'black churches', museum booklets and so forth.

We believe that the scope and quality of this collected evidence allows us to draw valid conclusions about the cultural and anthropological aspects of mutual perception of and, therefore, the relationship between African Americans and modern migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to the US in general and with regards to the present article's topic, in particular.

Slave trade and its aftermath in African American and African historical memory

The differences between African Americans and African migrants in interpreting the slave trade and its aftermath are especially profound and critically important for their relationship. Given the slave trade era was black history's "bifurcation point" at which it divided into the history of Africa and history of Africans and their descendants overseas, historical memory of it impacts powerfully on African Americans and Africans' perception of each other and their relationships. In the view of many respondents, in the history of black people –

nothing is more important than "slavery". The reason is because it is the

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one thing that ties all black people together the world over.

As Zain Abdullah writes –

While the historical past of American slavery joins Africans and blacks at the hip, their separate imaginings of this event and its horrors result in a new type of divergence between them. (Abdullah 2010, p. 67)

In the words of an African American interviewee –

physically our [Africans and African Americans'] DNA is similar, but spiritually and emotionally we are different because the trauma that affected us is different.

The slave trade gave birth to the black experience in America – the very phenomenon of “black Americans”. It would also lead to the ideas of a “black history” of all black people and of an “African cultural tradition” in both the Old and New Worlds. The African American community itself emerged from the centuries of humiliation, suffering, and struggle that began with the slave trade and slavery. The memory of that struggle still to a large extent determines African American attitudes and social behaviors, regardless of social status (Akbar 1990; Eyerman 2001; 2012). This comment was typical of how many respondents felt –

Nobody can doubt that what we, blacks in this country, had two hundred years ago is less [freedom] than what we are having now. But are we truly free? I don't think so. Is our mindset free from the memory of enslavement? No. The “slave” is still affecting our society... I think that mentally, not physically, the blacks here are still “enslaved”, still lack a strong voice to be heard.

Some scholars even suggest that the trauma of slavery, with all of its social humiliation, makes African Americans feel superior to African migrants and, therefore, keep social distance from them on the basis of “interiorized racism”. The latter means that they unconsciously mimic the white oppressors' attitudes toward Africans (Iheduru 2013). As Bernard Lategan's (2013) study has shown, historical memory can strengthen individual and collective identity by emphasizing links with the past, but without creating a basis for the perception of change. In such cases, identity is often used to justify entrenched positions, to reinforce existing stereotypes and to resist change, blocking the ability of individuals and groups to see themselves as part of a positive future. The pain of a past in which they were enslaved also appears in the reluctance of many African Americans to talk about the subject, as well as in Afrocentrists' increasing insistence on replacing the word “slaves” with the more accurate “enslaved” in the public sphere.

The enduring inflammation of the historic memory of the slave trade and slavery in African American mass consciousness among both black and white Americans, has resulted in the opening of new monuments, memorials, museums, and exhibitions, as well as a wave of radio and television programs, web sites, novels and popular science books (Oostindie 2001; Horton & Horton 2006; Gallas & Perry 2015). The solemn opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, by President

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Obama in September 2016 became a culmination and apotheosis of this activity. For Africans, the slave trade, both European in West Africa and Arab in East Africa, also symbolizes the subjugation of black people; however, they consider it more a historical event than an element of personal identity. Because they are not descendants of slaves, and because they now live in sovereign African states, they experience the slave trade as far less powerful in their historical memory and mass consciousness. More so, sometimes Africans look down on African Americans because they are descendants of slaves and allegedly still carry the ineradicable stigma of “slave mentality”. The Africans who share such views wonder –

Why should I care about them [African Americans] and the Transatlantic Slave Trade...? What does this have to do with me? I realize that their ancestors originated from my neck of the woods but so what?

As noted above, most African Americans continue to see themselves as second class citizens in the only country they have ever known, a country that their ancestors were instrumental in forming. As the US First Lady Michelle Obama said in her speech at the Democratic National Convention’s opening night in July 2016 referring to the White House, ‘I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves’ (Washington Post Staff 2016). Our respondent, an African American woman, who lives in one of Philadelphia’s most respectable black neighbourhoods, spoke vividly about it –

During the four hundred years of enslavement we helped to build this country. And we were not even allowed to use a bath. So that’s trauma.

Another black citizen of the “City of Brotherly Love”, from the lower middle class, answering the question of which historical figures are most prominent for America, said, ‘to me, black people who were brought here as slaves – we built America.’ The historical memory of that period is so alive in black Americans’ consciousness that our respondents unselfconsciously identify with the black slaves who contributed so much to their country, using the term “we” when speaking about them. History and the present form an indissoluble symbiosis. So many African Americans think of their ancestors not merely as heroes deprived of glory, but as their comrades-in-arms. The ‘time of slavery negates the common-sense intuition of time as continuity or progression; then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead’ (Hartman 2009, p. 431). Projecting the past onto the present is a characteristic feature of African Americans’ consciousness; this is not peculiar to Africans.

Black Africans and African Americans are unanimous in glorifying victims of slavery and celebrating those who fought against the slave trade and slavery. In the words of an African respondent, ‘[t]he great men and women who have led the movement for emancipation are many and they provide great interest’. Among the most outstanding figures in American history, members of both communities often named those who contributed to this struggle, which legally ended 18 December 1865 with adoption by the US Congress of the 13th amendment to the Constitution proclamation that abolished slavery and involuntary servitude (except as punishment for a crime): Abraham Lincoln, Richard Allen, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. The slave trade unites blacks as a common symbol of oppression in the face of whites; however, it is not strong enough to create a feeling of historical and cultural unity. For one thing, a feeling of unity based on dissimilarity to some third party, rather than of shared sameness, will be fragile. For another, the slave trade is interpreted differently in

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the historical memory of African migrants and African Americans. It occupies a different place in their consciousness.

The attitude of African Americans to Africans is determined to a large extent by the important part played in their collective memory by the true historical fact that Africans themselves supplied white traders with slaves. As a result, black Americans not infrequently look at Africans as descendants of those who sold their ancestors into slavery. This sentiment is so strong that Godfrey Uzoigwe, a US-based Nigerian historian, sees no prospect of rapprochement between the two black communities if the African Union (AU) will not offer African Americans an official apology for complicity in the slave trade (Uzoigwe 2008). Once again, events that occurred more than 200 years ago have become so powerful in African Americans' historical memory that contemporary Africans seem responsible for centuries-old atrocities. In some ways, African participation in the slave trade resembles Original Sin; it has no statute of limitation, passing from generation to generation, extending to every African and to Africans collectively.

Of course, such charges often offend African migrants though some try to treat this situation with understanding. Africans (and African Caribbeans) sometimes invoke the trauma of slavery to explain the negative personality traits and behaviour they characterize as typically lower class African American, such as aggressiveness, rancor, suspiciousness and so forth. According to an Ethiopian interlocutor –

Africans in America are doing well because they have a different culture than that of African Americans; their ancestors were not slaves, and they are not fixated on the problem of racism, which does not allow African Americans to rise socially and culturally.

Certain African Americans also justify some of these behavioural problems as products of their oppressed past. Furthermore, the wish of some African Americans to nurture a “free” African identity so that they can feel part of the “great African civilization” is caused by their conscious desire to get rid of the trauma of slavery – the feeling of inferiority of their own socio-cultural identity and the humiliation of living in a society that still looks at them as at descendants of slaves. For some African Americans, African immigrants enjoy the benefits that they have not earned. Most African Americans thinking this way are poorly educated but some are well educated. African migrants, the logic goes, owe the very possibility of enjoying these benefits to the suffering and the struggle of African Americans, whose torment and humiliation was partly caused by Africans. This position reflects a widespread, specific feature of such people's outlook –

African-Americans may think, ‘oh, you are attacking our part of the American portion’. You know, because in their mind they think a certain part of America is for Caucasians, a certain part is for Latin Americans, a certain part is for African Americans, a certain part is for Asians. So, when Africans are coming, then the same African Americans with this kind of mentality think, ‘oh, you are coming to take our part, to take what we already have’, and this creates some tensions.

From this perspective, the events in Washington, DC, in 2005 are instructive. The migrant

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Ethiopian community applied to the city administration, asking that the part of the Shaw neighborhood in which they lived be officially named “Little Ethiopia”. The administration was ready to meet the request, but Shaw’s African American community rejected the project. That community considered the project an attempt to capitalize on growing commerce and an influx of tourists that resulted from victories in the struggle for civil rights, created by African Americans rather than recent African migrants (Kedebé 2011; Oray 2013). Many of those we spoke with presented this conflict as a purely ‘economic issue’, ‘a story of “this little pie”’ of public goods which could not feed everyone (see also Crary 2007). Still, the socio-cultural component seemed undeniable. In fact, the organizers of the protest openly confessed to it in the press. Speaking of the Ethiopians –

They haven’t paid their dues, said Clyde Howard, 71, a retired postal worker and longtime Shaw activist. ‘Where were they during the [1968] riots? They’re Johnny-come-lately. What gives them the right? Just because you opened a store?’ (Schwartzman 2005)

This story is not unique. In Philadelphia, African American hairdressers tried to prevent hairdressers from Africa and the Antilles from working, on the grounds that they did not have the necessary permits. Also in Philadelphia, as well as in Chicago, African Americans demanded that city authorities stop accepting green card lottery winners from Africa. Even during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections when Barack Obama enjoyed broad support from African Americans, some members of this community did not vote for him because his father was a Kenyan from Africa, not an African American (Williams 2008; Sundiata 2015). Because Obama and his ancestors had no experience in the suffering and humiliation at the heart of the African American experience, some blacks viewed him as an outsider (Sarmah 2007).

At the same time, as mentioned above, some African Americans try to cope with the trauma of slavery by cultivating “a spirit of Africa”, positioning themselves as primarily African. Some of them start wearing “African” clothes, change a “white”, “slavish” name for “African”, “return” to Islam – allegedly ‘the way of life they [Africans] took with them to America as slaves’ (Winters 1985, p. 56), or even to ‘African’ ancestor cult (Williams n.d.). Generally, they strive to feel, think and behave in ‘the African way’, as they understand it. For example, as the coordinator of the St Louis annual African festival, an African American herself, told us, although she manages to involve some African migrants, the vast majority of participants are African Americans seeking their cultural roots. Among those participants, she listed performers of African dances, manufacturers and sellers of handicrafts in the “African style”, and cooks of African foods at the festival, as well as visitors. Usually these people are from the lower middle and middle classes. They began doing so in the 1950s and 1960s in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement (Paulun 2012). To “real” Africans, and not only those living through the sale of attributes of “Africanness” (clothes, bijouterie, souvenirs), such people seem comical and even unintelligent.

However, among the more affluent and educated African Americans, including those in the upper middle class and wealthy celebrities, the desire to restore the link with black Africans has taken other forms. To a great extent, those forms are shaped by the socio-political context of the time. Until the “black revolution” of the 1960s, African American music contained no themes of “Mother Africa”; ‘the African American was thinking of him- or herself as a

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resident of America’, but in the ‘60s African American unity, Mother Africa, struggle for the rights and freedom are the main themes’ (Zaitsev 2004, p. 128, 130). African American writer Alex Haley’s novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* played a particularly important role. *Roots* tells the story of several generations of the author’s ancestors – from enslavement in Africa and forcible resettlement to America in the mid-18th century until emancipation a century later. It was first published as a novel in 1976, with a TV mini-series based on it, broadcast in 1977.

Roots – and the idea of restoring both personal connection and the continuity of the black world’s culture – inspired many members of the African American community of the time. The African American elite and upper middle class began taking DNA tests to discover the African ethnic groups from which they came (Nelson 2008; 2013; Clay 2011). For example, the famous TV personality Oprah Winfrey found out that she is a descendant of the Kpelle from modern Liberia, and the actress Whoopi Goldberg, that her ancestors were from the peoples of Papel and Bayot in the present-day Guinea-Bissau. Actor Isaiah Washington’s test showed that his ancestors on the maternal side were the Mende and Temne from Sierra Leone, after which he not only became actively engaged in charity work in that country, but also got his citizenship. His ancestors on the paternal line, according to the DNA test, were the Mbundu from Angola. Ancestors of the father of the founder of Afrocentrism Molefi Kete Asante, as it turned out, were the Yoruba, while his mother’s were the Nubians. One of our respondents turned out to be a descendant of the Cameroonian Bamileke. The well-known Cameroonian anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh even found it necessary to write and post on the Internet an ethnographic overview of his people, the Tikar, especially for those African Americans who found their origins in that ethnic group (Nyamnjoh 2007). Other African Americans, who cannot afford a DNA test, now refer to the website ancestry.com. That website often has little valuable information or does not have it at all, but can be accessed free of charge. Ironically, African Americans who learned the ethnic group or modern nation from which they came generally continue thinking of themselves as Africans ‘in general’, so strong is the habit of thinking in terms of race, the typical African American logic of cultural thinking.

Wealthy African Americans also began taking advantage of “roots tourism” with non-profits and special travel agencies organizing such tours (Zijlma n.d.). Black tourists from the US and other countries of the New World would go to sites connected with the slave trade. There, in restored architectural monuments, recently created museums, reconstructed ceremonies, and the stories of guides and local residents, they find history waiting for them, presented to match their ideas about it. Even when historical facts are distorted, the experience retains its power to terrify and otherwise move these tourists emotionally. President Obama and his wife gave additional impetus to such tourism in July 2009 when they visited Cape Coast castle in Ghana, one of the main sights from the slave trade era.

However, in Africa all American citizens are perceived as Americans, regardless of skin color. At home, these tourists had created origin stories, partly because they found it impossible to be “just Americans”. Accustomed to considering themselves as African Americans, in Africa they are merely “Americans”. For the most part, residents of the African countries they visit perceive black Americans as strange but wealthy Western tourists who would pay handsomely for this “roots” experience. In Ghana “non-African Africans” are called *oburuni*, which once meant “European” or “white person” and now means any

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“foreigner” in the Twi language (Lake 1995; Mwakikagile 2007). In East Africa, the same semantic transformation happened with *mzungu*, the Swahili word for “European” or “white person”, which is also now used in relation to black Americans. An elderly employee of a museum of African American history in Boston sadly told us about her experiences in Africa. Considering herself an African, she went to Africa and saw that for natives, black Americans are not ‘brothers and sisters’, as they were for her, just wealthy tourists from a prosperous country. Or consider this story, told by another elderly African American, who calls Africa “sweet home” –

I have convinced them [Africans] I am not wealthy; you know, they think everybody, every African American that comes is wealthy, they think you live in a big house, you have a lot of cars and TVs, you have the like. Actually, I had to save money for years to make this trip. I stayed myself and no one sponsored me. I had to eat tuna fish for months! They mustn’t say that [I am wealthy]! They don’t have a concept of that! They think this is America, that money just flows [in America]! They didn’t know how much I sacrificed! So I think understanding is not that easy, and I had to convince them not to treat me like a tourist, for, you know, they think you are a sack of money!

African states also see black Americans as a potential source of income and make considerable efforts to attract them as investors and tourists, even providing opportunities for “homecoming” – moving to their countries for permanent residence. Ghana is especially active in this effort (Pierre 2013) since the time of her first President, Kwame Nkrumah. (One of the most prominent proponents of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah was motivated by ideology, rather than “mercantile” reasons to support black Americans’ repatriation [Gaines 2006; see also Alex-Assensoh 2010]). Other West African states are trying to keep up. In particular, since the early 1990s, Benin has sponsored a complex of measures to provide a “proper” representation of the history of the slave trade that would produce social capital, to be used as both a political instrument and source of income (Araujo 2007). As one knowledgeable African American respondent told us –

I think it [resettlement to Africa] is [a chance] for those who want to go and have a true love for it [Africa] and want to be immersed in it, not just to come in and stay in it. And lots of the African Americans that talked to me, they see it as business – the potential of business. And that concerns me. That concerns me seriously because they think only how make a profit and things like that. And African governments, for example, of Ghana, in their turn, try to attract African Americans as investors, not like brothers; they see it as money, this does not go from the heart. But what they also want is to make them very hummable. They see we come with money but they believe we could, being black, be more trustworthy and the government think we can be more appeasable than anybody else. ...and that’s the fear of the day: they have this belief that African Americans can be trusted more; they ignore how Western we are in one sense. We may be the same in color but we still value, you know, what takes over people. So, the same happens in South Africa; lots of African Americans went to South Africa after apartheid. And lot of recruitment Ghana did, but South Africa

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did it even more.

Still, our respondents showed us, over and over, that the vast majority of African Americans and African migrants, as well as black Caribbeans, find a mass “return” of black natives of the New World to Africa unnecessary or at least unrealistic. Contrary to many black thinkers from William Blyden to Kwame Nkrumah, adherents of Afrocentrism do not insist on it either (Khokholkova 2014). In the words of a respondent, today ‘[t]he world has gone far beyond this type of thinking’. Most African Americans are entrapped in ‘double marginalization’ – in the white socio-cultural mainstream and with regards to the African ‘motherland’ where, they admit, they are unable to return either physically or psychologically (Elliott n.d., p. 8–12). Nevertheless, small communities of “homecomers” do exist, in particular in Ghana. The depth and strength of feelings experienced by these people at “coming back home” to Africa, to the “land of ancestors”, is so intense that it is difficult to describe. These feelings are vividly expressed in the book of such a person, Seestah Imahkus, a US native now permanently residing in Ghana (Imahkus 1999). But the position of the homecomers in local society often becomes very complex. Many of them feel cultural dissonance with their new compatriots, have problems with the state authorities, or feel disappointed that they did not receive a much warmer welcome (Lake 1995; Mwakikagile 2007; Jalloh & Falola 2008; Schramm 2008; 2009; 2010; Alex-Assensoh 2010; Forte 2010; Delpino 2011). In the words of a Liberian woman residing in the US for many years –

I could be wrong, but this is how I see this thing after long being with the African Americans now. This is their home and I’ll see that anticipation of all that desire to go and to learn what that [African] heritage was – for them, this is heritage. Those African Americans, who moved to Africa, for example to Ghana, complain of being not welcome cordially there because they want to impose their culture on the people.

As a young African wrote on an Internet forum –

Nobody wants African Americans to return to Africa because they will be foreigners; they are better off where they are [now]. And our ancestors stayed behind [economically] because they were probably weaker, but we are where we are supposed to be [their home in Africa].²

Nonetheless, those African American respondents who see themselves first and foremost as Africans, usually did not rule out the possibility of resettling in Africa, even if only when they retire. Yet, many African Americans from all walks of life feel their American identity so deeply that they are not interested in returning to their African roots, either personally or as members of the ethno-racial community. They do not feel anything special, either good or bad, about Africans, and treat them as any other immigrants. Outside major urban communities this indifference is enhanced by the fact that relatively few African migrants live there, limiting their personal contact.

While African residents often see African American “roots tourism” as an opportunity to capitalize on the eccentricities of rich Westerners, our African migrant respondents see it

² <http://neoafricanamericans.wordpress.com/> [accessed 07.12.2014]

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differently. They sneer at those African Americans ‘who try to be more African than Africans’, seeking ‘real Africa’ without leaving their home country. They are equally disdainful of those who wear pseudo-African clothes or buy souvenirs that have very little to do with real folk art. Immigrants are also negative about the “fashion” for DNA testing. At the same time, many Africans believe that DNA testing will help African Americans realize that Africa is not culturally homogeneous; as noted, Africans find the image of ‘Africa in general’, widely spread among African Americans, inaccurate and condescending. Moreover, when rich and renowned African Americans take a DNA test, immigrants dismiss it as personal self-promotion, even if after taking the test they begin to invest in their ‘countries of origin’. After all, the amounts invested are an insignificant part of their total wealth. However, African immigrants unanimously support roots tourism, as well as other kinds of trips to Africa. Such trips increase the amount of genuine knowledge African Americans have about Africa, encouraging them to abandon negative stereotypes and promoting better relationships between African Americans and African migrants in the US.

While the transatlantic slave trade and slavery are crucial for African American respondents’ historical memory, its value for African migrants is different. For one thing, the slave trade is not a primary factor in the identity of Africans. For another, Africans think of the slave trade less as the betrayal of some black people by others, as of the exploitation of black people by whites. Paradoxically, Africans emphasize the racial aspect of slavery more forcefully than African Americans. Be that as it may, the collective historical memory of the slave trade within these communities separates them more than it integrates them as they face “white America”.

Conclusion

Fundamental differences in perception, estimation, and evaluation of the slave trade and its consequences make a significant contribution to the establishment of an ambiguous and complicated relationship between African Americans and Africans in the present. The impact of not only events of the past but also of the memory of them on mentality and behaviour of the African Americans and Africans, on their mutual perception and relationships is realized by many intellectuals from both communities. In the words of the residing in the United States Nigerian scholar and diplomat Femi Ojo-Ade, between African migrants and African Americans, ‘whether we like it or not, there is a divide, a deep one, a dangerous one...’ (Ojo-Ade 2011, p. 14) The other researcher, Msia Kibona Clark, half Tanzanian, half African American, characterizes the relationship between Black communities in the US as ‘dysfunctional at best and hostile at worst’ (Clark 2006).

At the same time, one of the central points for ideologists of all the “black nationalism” teachings is the postulate that all those whose skin is black and roots are in Africa are “brothers and sisters”. Among our numerous respondents, there were those who agreed with this statement. Some of them took it with specific reservations. According to one of the interlocutors, Africans and African Americans share the same historical background-

We were exploited. So, if you go back to that historical experience we share, we should be calling ourselves brothers and sisters. But if you wanna know from political point, the way we treat each other is not like brothers and sisters, though from the historical point, we should.

Another respondent believes that Africans and black Americans are brothers and sisters, ‘but

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Martin Luther King said: “don’t ever call a man your brother unless he acts like one”. For most African Americans and especially Africans, the postulate about pan-black brotherhood sounds as nothing more than an ideological slogan, wrong and even absurd. Uwah (2005) stated that, ‘I have come to believe... that for the most part, our shared sense of identification and affinity begins and ends with the awareness of the commonality of skin color’ (p. 24). Kalu Ogbaa (2003), a Nigerian scholar and writer residing in America, asks himself a question and answers it: ‘For example, both groups are victims of racial profiling by the police. Does that then mean that their intergroup relations are good and smooth all the time? Certainly not’ (p. 111). As a respondent said–

I do not believe we are brothers and sisters just because society classifies us based on skin color and on the fact that all black people suffer some form of social discrimination. We are not brothers and sisters just because all Blacks get their roots from Africa. Brothers and sisters should care for one another.

Thus, the “magnetic poles” of the black communities both attract and repel them; the differences in historic memory of African Americans and recent African migrants in the United States do play a significant role in determining the nature of their relationships.

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