

The African Diaspora

What is meant by the concept of the African diaspora?

-The African diaspora is based upon a globalized notion of blackness—the African diaspora as community and identity

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-Those who identify as “black” and see a relation between themselves and others in the Black diaspora

Definition:

“Diaspora” is a Greek word meaning “dispersal”

African diaspora—a label that is used to describe the dispersed people removed/exiled from a common territorial/geographic origin, Africa

-Over the years, there have been various manifestations that have been associated with what we call the historical dimensions of the African diaspora:

- 1) Back-to-African movement initiated by Garvey
- 2) Pan Africanism
- 3) Black Nationalism (60s and 70s)
- 4) Afrocentricity (80s & 90s)

-the actual term: African diaspora, emerged in the 1950s that was used in scholarly debates.

→much of this early scholarship on the African diaspora examined

- 1) the dispersal of people of African descent,
- 2) their role in the transformation and creation of new cultures, institutions, and ideas outside of Africa, and
- 3) the problems of building a Pan-African movement across the globe

-but, at its most basic level, the characteristics of the African diaspora are based upon a number of things:

- 1) a notion of a common origin (and consciousness of that origin)—from Africa
- 2) common experiences of racial terror (slavery, colonialism, racism,)

- 3) Global Black marginalization based on internationally held racist ideologies of Black inferiority.
- 4) commonality of identification on the part of those presumed to be part of the international community of Blacks.

***-importantly, in the formulation of the African diaspora, Africa serves as the key symbol for the ROOTS of black identity globally

-the African diaspora—as it has always been conceptualized—is ultimately based upon a shared Black identity created through processes of racialization on a global scale:

hence, the belief of commonality on racial grounds (but the notion of race here is highly contested)

→and because of this highly contested notion of race within the “racial” identity that Blackness implies, various scholars have tried to re-conceptualize the basis upon which there:

- 1) is an African diaspora (is there one?) and;
- 2) is a sense of community—like culture, history, etc.—among Black peoples throughout the world

-but what is significant—and despite these debates (which have been occurring for decades)—is that from its beginnings, the African diaspora as a theoretical concept used to examine globalized Black experiences, has always been a **politics**.

Now, what do I mean by that?

-the idea has been taken and used as source of political action

→as a Black worldwide movement against injustice, racism, and colonialism

-it was constructed in opposition to still vital racist/racialist ideologies that depicted Africans/Blacks as inferior: a people without

culture, significant history, or national/territorial connection (i.e. Black people in the diaspora had no “roots,” no “homeland”)

-contemporarily, the African diaspora is still battling racist ideologies, but in different terms: current dominant ideas about African American and African diasporic cultures that either depict them as inferior or exoticize them

yet, many questions remain—especially theoretically—about the concept of the African diaspora. A couple of which include:

- 1) what are the criteria that can serve as the basis for Diasporic identity: is it race, history, culture, etc.?
- 2) who, exactly, is included in this community known as the African diaspora?

Ultimately, I think that there are two ways understanding the idea of an African diaspora:

1. as a conceptual tool—a term that references/talks about a specific group of people with similar histories

-thus, the HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION of the African diaspora *must* be emphasized!

2. as a politics—a term that references a kind of identity formation, i.e., the feeling of belonging to a community that transcends national/cultural/historical boundaries. (a “politics”)

**in actuality, the two usually work together because historically, the very development of the African diaspora as a conceptual tool has been a part of a larger political project of creating solidarity among peoples of African descent

Now, thinking about this concept of the African diaspora, what purpose do you think the article on Africans, African Americans, and the killing of Amadou Diallo serve?