



THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN CANADA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY & BELONGING

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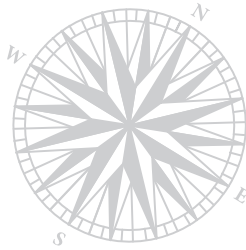
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BORDER CROSSINGS & HOME–DIASPORA LINKAGES AMONG AFRICAN–CANADIANS: An Analysis of Translocational Positionality, Cultural Remittance, & Social Capital

Wisdom J. Tettey and Korbla P. Puplampu

INTRODUCTION

SIGNIFICANT SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS in this era of globalization and internal political strife have pushed many people out of their countries of origin to explore possibilities for survival in other places. Concomitant with these transnational movements are innovations in the field of technology that attenuate the barriers posed by time and space – what Giddens (1985) calls *time-space distanciation*. As a result of these processes, some observers contend that there is no longer the need to draw a distinction between temporary and permanent migration. In advancing this view, Richmond (2002, 713) opines that “globalization has facilitated worldwide network linkages with friends and families in the former country, and with the international labour market.” Consequently, *transilience*, which he defines as the ability to move back and forth between two or more countries and cultures, has become a fact of life. A corollary to these processes of shifting locations and attachments is the reconfiguration of

people's identities in ways that are anti-essentialist and that transcend fixed notions of self, location, culture, ethnicity, and citizenship.

These understandings of the ethos of people in motion have been at the basis of the concept of hybridity. A key contribution of this concept has been to pursue analyses that help to "overcome the victimology of transnational migrants, empowering them, linking the past with the present" (Anthias 2001, 620). To capture the multiple complexities that characterize immigrants' *in-between* status (Bhaba 1998) and to give the concept of hybridity a more encompassing essence vis-à-vis issues of belonging, otherness, and identity, it is important that we explore other dimensions of immigrants' experiences. To advance this purpose, Anthias (2001) proposes the idea of *translocational positionality* that allows us to interrogate other constructions of difference (beyond culture) based on various identifiers and signifiers. Such a tool makes it possible to look beyond immigrant communities as homogenous groups bound together by a collective identity in relation to others. It opens up analytical insights into different narratives of belonging and otherness, not only in the context of the host society, but of the societies of origin, as well. As Anthias (2001, 633) argues,

[c]ollective identities involve forms of social organization postulating boundaries with identity markers that denote essential elements of membership (which act to *code* people), as well as claims that are articulated for specific purposes. The identity markers (culture, origin, language, colour, and physiognomy, etc.) may themselves function as resources that are deployed contextually and situationally. They function both as sets of self-attributions and attributions by others. By focusing on location/dislocation and on positionality, it is possible to pay attention to spatial and contextual dimensions, treating the issues involved in terms of processes rather than possessive properties of individuals. (see also Dirlik 1999)

In the following discussion, we use the framework of translocational positionality to analyze the multiple ways in which first generation African-Canadians connect with their communities/countries of origin in spite of the spatial distancing that their location in Canada imposes. The rationale behind using this framework stems from the fact that it allows us to escape the constraints of a binary division between subjectivity, on the one hand, and cultural determinism, on the other. Rather, what we have is a dialectical approach that facilitates the appreciation of the multiple, simultaneous, fluid, and sometimes conflictual, positions occupied by individuals and groups as they negotiate their sense of self and consequent attachments to cultures, ethnicities, places, and nations.

We must acknowledge at the outset that connections to home and our perceptions of it also reflect different experiences, interests, and rationales. As

Shami (1998, 633) observes, “even with the formation of collective approaches to the homeland, people who journey back and forth, their motivations, aims, representations, and the kinds of landscapes they construct as they travel these circuits vary significantly.” It is in this respect that Shain and Barth’s (2003) distinction among core, passive, and silent members of the diaspora is useful to keep in mind as we discuss the relationships between African-Canadians and their home countries, especially within the public sphere. While core members are at the forefront of articulating their connections to the homeland and mobilizing their compatriots, passive members tend to be on the margins but are ready to make themselves available for purposes initiated by the core. Silent members are generally not involved in diaspora affairs, but they may respond to the needs of their communities of origin in times of crisis, whether in Canada or at home.

Related to these distinctions is how individuals and groups define *home*. The extent of one’s involvement in both a geographical and deterritorialized home is partly determined by his/her definition of the term. Home, in the context of this chapter,

is where one best knows oneself – where best means most even not always happiest. Here, in sum, is an ambiguous and fluid but yet ubiquitous notion, apposite for charting the ambiguities and fluidities, the migrancies and paradoxes, of identity in the world today ... [B]eing at home and being homeless are not matters of movement, of physical space, or of the fluidity of socio-cultural times and places, as such. One is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one’s identity best mediated – and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed. (Rapport and Dawson 1998, 9–10)

As they construct and interpellate a sense of belonging, home, location, and dislocation, the experiences of African-Canadians are based on a concept of place that traverses the physical boundaries of a particular state, though it incorporates it. For them,

[p]lace is at once a physical construct and a mental imaginary. Thus, while people may be separated from the physical construct of home as a result of immigration and other forms of geographical mobility, they tend to retain their attachment to that space through mental connections and outward practices that invoke that geographical location. This is the case even though signifiers of their cultures of origin are adapted to their new settings, new cultures, and by new generations. (Tettey 2004, 129, see also Svas̆ek 2002, 497–98)

BORDER CROSSINGS: IDENTITY, HYBRIDITY, AND THE REPLICATION OF HOME CULTURES

The literature has been divided between those who emphasize the assimilating capacities of host cultures and those who contend that the impacts produced by contact between immigrants and host cultures result from complex processes of negotiation, adaptation, and reinvention (see Faist 2000, 215). As a result of these processes, immigrants retain elements of their cultures of origin even as they adjust to the norms and practices of their new environment. Williams (2002) examines how the intersection of physical and social space affects the sense of identity among immigrants and their daily practices. He argues that diaspora life is characterized by a definitive and situated culture. Consequently, immigrants practice familiar rites in new settings and give new meanings to familiar practices and rituals, which are then exhibited during interactions among compatriots.

In this section we explore various means by which African-Canadians engage with their cultures of origin as forms of national, ethnic, or racial expression, as well as manifestations of resistance to mainstream Canadian society. We draw on the theory of *cultural remittance* to examine the practices, imaginings, nostalgias, and yearnings that link African-Canadians to the countries and communities from which they have journeyed. Burman (2001, 277) defines cultural remittance as:

Gestures sent to an elsewhere (often conceived as home but not the only home), exceeding goods and money sent. Such gestures join points within a diasporic sphere that are not necessarily spatially contiguous, and bring to the fore imagination as social practice ... with transformative potential. Cultural remittances play out in, and transform, diasporic locales ... and they are often addressed to both the elsewhere evoked and the mainstream context [of the host countries in which immigrants are located].

Before analyzing the phenomena transferred through cultural remittance, it is important to clarify how culture is being used here. We base our analysis on Anthias' (2001) three dimensions of culture – (1) culture as content or product; (2) culture as process or mechanism; and (3) culture as form or structure. The first refers to cultural attributes and artifacts that are linked to particular locales or communities and provide an illustration of their symbols and practices. The second dimension pertains to the understanding of culture as an expression of a world view. It serves as the basis on which culture as content/product is built, but it is distinct from it. Finally, culture as form or structure refers to the patterns of knowledge and actions that characterize a society, and to their institutionalization within defined structures and processes. Aberrations from these patterns lead to the application of relevant sanctions. Far from being

assimilated into mainstream Canadian society, African-Canadians are engaged in an “extraordinary process of periphery-induced creolization in the metropolis” (Patterson 1994, 104) as they manifest elements of the three dimensions of culture enunciated above.

Many African-Canadians, irrespective of how long ago they immigrated, appear to have a stronger connection to the cultures of their homelands than to mainstream Canadian culture. An online poll of South Africans living abroad, including those in Canada, bears this out (see RainBowNation n.d.). Part of the reason for the nostalgia that Africans feel for home is the fact that it offers the best cognitive environment for their routines and for their assertions of self. These feelings also stem from their marginalized location within Canadian society and the perception that they are second-class citizens. Many well qualified professionals end up in low end jobs that underutilize their skills and potentials (Tettey 2001). Abusharaf (2002) documents the case of the Sudanese exile community in North America that shows how engineers have become taxi-drivers, and teachers and lawyers have had to survive as gas station attendants. Consequently, many struggle to maintain a sense of self-worth based on the status and respect they enjoyed in their countries of origin, and they long for the benefits derived therefrom. This process can be at once emotionally soothing and painful, as they try to resolve the dissonance produced by the differences in their diaspora and home positionalities.

A fundamental value of African cultures is the link to ancestors. Africans maintain this connection by being buried in their ancestral homes. The desire to be in the midst of one’s forebears has been at the base of efforts on the part of a significant number of African-Canadians to spend the twilight years of their lives in their country of birth (see White 2002). To accomplish this goal, many people invest a lot of resources in putting up buildings in their home countries where they hope to retire. In response to this desire, Africa-based real estate companies are making forays into Canada to woo potential clients. In July 2003, for example, a huge housing exhibition was organized by Ghanaian real estate developers for their compatriots in the Toronto area (Ghanaweb 2003a).

While the evidence seems to suggest that many of these people will not end up retiring to their home countries, the desire to build at home nevertheless continues to motivate many. There is constant concern with what most Africans consider to be the deplorable social and psychological state many elderly people in Canada find themselves in as they spend their last days in old peoples’ homes. They contrast these homes, in particular, and the perceived anomie and loneliness of old age in Canada, in general, with the imagined emotional succor that elderly people in Africa enjoy through the constant flow of interactions with friends and extended family. It is worth acknowledging that the reality in Africa is slowly shifting away from this ideal, nostalgic image ingrained in people’s minds as *modernity* creates changes in African social

structures, and as families begin to experience trends similar to what these African-Canadians are worried about (see Charlton 1998; Apt 1996).

Theorists of intercultural communication argue that there are differences in time orientation among different cultures, and they categorize African societies as being among those which adhere to a non-linear, or polychronic, concept of time (Hall 1994). This attitude towards time, which does not dwell on strict schedules, continues to be a defining characteristic of diaspora Africans when they operate outside of the institutions and cultural parameters of mainstream Canadian society. It is not unusual for events to start behind schedule, ostensibly because both organizers and participants are operating within the framework of *African time*. The notion of African time is characterized by a tendency not to put much stock in scheduled start times. There is a belief that nobody really shows up on time, and that one should allow some time between the advertised starting time for a program and when it actually gets underway, in order not to have to wait unnecessarily. The following story illustrates the extent of this attitude and its carry-over into transnational settings:

Last week [18 October 2003], for instance, international journalists in the UK were kept waiting by the king of Ghana's largest ethnic group who was visiting Alexandra Palace in north London at the climax of a Ghanaian trade exhibition, Ghana Expo 2003. The journalists had been informed that Otumfuo Osei Tutu II from the Ashanti would arrive at the exhibition at 1100. The time was changed to 1400, but the king did not show up until two hours later when the journalists had already packed and left. (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] News 2003)

The transposition of the concept of *African time* to the specific milieu of African diaspora activities is fascinating, because members of the diaspora adhere to the mainstream concept of time in their workplaces and in dealings with institutions outside their socio-cultural environment. The fact that they are able to apply appropriate time schemes to particular contexts is an indication of the dialectics of continuity and discontinuity that characterize the *in-between* spaces these communities occupy.

Africans organize several activities that enact rituals and events back home. These activities are, in Dabydeen's words (1988, 40), a "living link to ... ancestral history, our means of keeping in touch with the ghosts of *back home*." They include celebrations of national holidays, funerals, and child-naming ceremonies. Independence Day celebrations provide an opportunity for African-Canadians to reiterate their connections to the political histories of their countries of origin. For some, these occasions are an opportunity for anti-colonial resistance in the context of their new homes. It reminds them of the oppression, racism, and discrimination that their nations suffered under colonial rule and how that has shaped their circumstances in their contemporary locales. These perspectives on

Independence or Republic Day celebrations highlight the relationship between antecedents of contact and the current positionality of these immigrants. The way they are viewed by the larger society, irrespective of their standing in the context of their host societies, is largely a product of the colonial relations and the representations that they spawned. These representations become ingrained in the consciousness of members of the dominant society in Canada, who then relate to the Africans through the lenses of the images carved by the colonial and postcolonial experience.

Festivals, such as *Afrikadey* in Calgary, provide opportunities for Africans to share their cultures with the rest of the community. The essence of these festivals is not only to showcase the cultural traditions of the continent to other Canadians; it also serves the purpose of building bridges of cultural understanding among citizens. The following observations describing West Indian carnivals in the diaspora are applicable to the celebrations and observances within the African community in Canada:

[They offer] a kind of social therapy that overcomes the separation and isolation imposed by the diaspora and restores to West Indian immigrants both a sense of community with each other and a sense of connection to the culture that they claim as a birthright. Politically, however, there is more to these carnivals than cultural nostalgia. They are also a means through which West Indians seek and symbolize integration into the metropolitan society, by coming to terms with the opportunities, as well as the constraints, that surround them. (Manning 1990, 35)

The observation of various rites of passage constitutes an important dimension of the home-diaspora connection for a lot of African-Canadians. In Africa, funerals are community events, and every member of the community is expected to help bereaved families organize a fitting burial for their departed relatives. This social obligation stems from a moral economy that requires reciprocal support from community members. The obligation is even more pronounced with members of the deceased's extended family, irrespective of where they may be resident. The same sense of community obligation that surrounds these activities in Africa is replicated by some Africans in the Canadian context, as well. Thus, it is not uncommon to see Africans organizing funerals for their relatives who have died in their home countries. These funerals are supported by compatriots who live in the cities where the event takes place, even though they may not know the deceased. Cash donations are made to help the bereaved person meet his or her obligations to kin in the country of origin. The sense of communal mobilization to support the bereaved in the Canadian context is heightened by the fact that relatives who are resident abroad are usually expected to bear a significant part of the funeral expenses, particularly if they are the children or siblings of the deceased. Their compatriots, understanding

the onus that this responsibility places on the bereaved, do the best they can to offer their support.

Events and celebrations, such as those discussed above, provide opportunities for these African-Canadians to display their material culture, which constitutes the most visible marker of their connection to the African continent. As they dress themselves in the most elaborate apparels of their cultural groups and feast on traditional cuisines, they assert their pride in their cultures of origin and their continuing attachment to them. One very strong manifestation of Africans' desire to transfer their indigenous rituals and institutions, as well as attendant regalia, is the replication of chieftaincy among Ghanaians, especially Asantes (see Asanteman Council of North America (ACONA) n.d.). In an interview for the Asanteman Council of North America (ACONA) website, the chief of Asantes in Houston explains how the institution, in its diasporic incarnation, is legitimized:

Traditionally Asante Chieftancy is by matrilineal inheritance, but here in the U.S., elections decide who becomes the next Asantefouhene [that is, chief of Asantes]. Permission is duly sought from the Royal Palace, (Manhyia), Kumasi, Ghana. A representative of the Asantehene [King of the Asante] is delegated to represent the Golden Stool to perform all the royal rites on behalf of the Asantehene. This legitimizes the elected Asantefuohene. (Asanteman Council of North America n.d.)

Like their compatriots in the United States, Asantes in Montreal and Toronto have *chiefs* whose role, while mainly symbolic, involves providing leadership in mobilizing members of their ethnic community for development projects at home. They also help organize cultural events, in addition to providing guidance and support to community members in a variety of areas.

Canada has become an important destination for the export of traditional African cultural products. Several businesses are springing up in large Canadian cities that provide these cultural items and cater, not only to the African population, but to other Canadians, mainly Blacks, who are interested in those items. These businesses sell African crafts, clothing, hair products, and food. The bulk of the inventory held by these establishments is food items. These developments reflect the pattern of ethno-specific cultural establishments among some ethnic groups in Canada (see Qadeer 1998). Access to familiar culinary ingredients and other cultural products has been described as a "powerful force influencing the processes of immigrant settlement, acculturation, and identity development" (Tsang et al. 2003, 372). Such access makes it possible for these immigrants to express their identities and cultural orientation in ways that recreate their cultures of origin in a foreign land.

Pendakur and Subramanyam (1996) found that family-based video watching seems to be of critical importance in helping Indians in the diaspora to

reproduce their home cultures abroad. The impact of videos as a link to home countries does not, however, appear to be significant among African-Canadians at this point, even though some of the shops mentioned above do sell videos, for example, those coming from the nascent West African film industry. There are several reasons for this. The major one is that most of the videos on the continent are produced in PAL-format, whereas most North American homes operate on the NTSC system. This lack of compatibility discourages African-Canadians from patronizing the industry to an extent similar to their Indian counterparts. Efforts by vendors to address the problem by converting the original tapes into the NTSC format for commercial purposes affect the quality of the images, thereby reducing their market value.

Television programs that feature African stories or events are, however, a big draw for diaspora Africans. It is not unusual for Africans to phone one another to tune in to Canadian or American television programs or stories that touch on their continent. Positive stories or documentaries evoke nostalgia and a feeling of pride, whereas negative portrayals of the continent and its people either elicit complaints about negative stereotyping in the media or revulsion against those whose actions generate the negative representations carried by the media. There was general pride among Africans about the coverage given the 1994 multi-racial elections in South Africa and the success of Cameroon and Senegal in recent FIFA World Cup tournaments. On the other hand, the depictions of ubiquitous abject poverty (e.g., in World Vision ads), the devastation of HIV/AIDS, civil conflict, and political corruption create feelings of shame or critiques about the slant and accuracy of coverage. As pointed out earlier, the representation of the African continent in colonial and post-colonial times affects African-Canadians' ascribed identity. They cannot, therefore, escape connections to their home continent even if they choose to, because who they are in mainstream society is largely related to where they come from.

The fact that many Africans are glued to their television sets during international sporting events featuring their countries or an African representative (e.g., FIFA World Cup; Rugby World Cup; Cricket World Cup; African Cup of Nations) is evidence of their emotional attachment to their homelands. The Internet provides a unique opportunity for African-Canadians to keep abreast of developments in their home countries, as well as engage with one another and with others in the diaspora via online chat rooms, news sources, and so on (see Tettey 2002, 2004). Both online and offline social networks provide forums where mores and values that Africans consider to be fundamental to who they are, are validated and reinforced, particularly when they do not dovetail neatly with mainstream values. This attachment to a geographically distant, yet psychologically and emotionally proximate, space is a fundamental part of what defines most African-Canadians' sense of their Africanness. The above discussion bears out the assertion that "a new technology can be used to

cognitively connect with what is a symbol of primordial essence” (Adams and Ghose 2003, 415). Music cassette tapes and compact discs (CDs) also provide a major and popular cultural link to the continent. Many African-Canadian homes have some form of indigenous African music or hybrid varieties from the continent reflecting transmutations that resulted from the blending of traditional African music with influences from elsewhere, particularly genres from Western popular culture. These tunes are the highlight of social gatherings and cultural events.

Beyond popular culture, the emergence of *African churches* in the diaspora has been identified as a growing phenomenon in the process of transnationalization (see Hepner 2003; Gerloff 2000). African-founded and led Christian churches are becoming a common sight in Canada’s big cities (see Afro Drive n.d; Ghanaweb 2003b). Some estimates put the number of *Ghanaian churches* in Toronto alone at over sixty (*ExpoTimes* 2002). Even though they welcome people from all backgrounds, their core congregation is African. Part of the reason for their growth is the fact that they offer a spiritual environment their mostly African members can identify with. Members find the services in mainstream Canadian churches too sedate. They are therefore attracted to the African churches where the atmosphere replicates the exuberance, patterns, and forms of worship (e.g., dancing and drumming) common to Christian groups at home. As Hepner (2003, 270) notes with regard to Eritrean churches in the United States, the growth in these organizations is due largely to the fact that they “help maintain cultural patterns (religious belief systems and values, language, gender roles, dress, and socialization of youth).” Religious bodies also bring to the fore important questions about diaspora mobilization via religion and its implication for socio-economic and political developments at home. Furthermore, they respond to the spiritual vulnerabilities that are specific to the African community. For example, witchcraft and the fears that it generates are still a very big concern among Africans in Canada, even though they function in a society where these superstitions and the metaphysical trappings of this phenomenon do not hold much, if any, sway. African churches are able to address these concerns in ways that mainstream churches cannot.

Some of the Canadian churches are affiliated with churches in Africa and operate under the authority of the home churches. A recent development among some Ghanaian churches in Toronto illustrates these home-diaspora linkages:

In a bold move to reverse the disturbing trend of Church divisions and multiplications in the Ghanaian-Canadian communities, the leadership of the Methodist Church have [*sic*] taken some positive action to re-unite the various factions of the Church starting with the factions in Toronto, Canada’s largest city. Throughout the weekend of December 7 to 8 the leadership of the Ghana Methodist Church of Toronto and the Ghana Calvary Methodist United Church of Toronto met behind

closed doors in marathon negotiating sessions. These were under the spiritual guidance and supervision of the Presiding Bishop of the Ghana Methodist Conference, The Most Reverend Dr. Aboagye-Mensah and the Lay President of the Ghana Methodist Conference in Ghana, Mr Ato Essuman. (Ghanaweb 2003c)

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE TRANSNATIONAL MORAL ECONOMY

Remittances from sojourners abroad have, for over a century, been a critical link between immigrant communities and their places of origin. Their purposes and impacts have been varied. Fenianism in Northern Ireland derived much of its financial backbone from the Irish diaspora in the United States; the formative years of modern Greece are said to have been facilitated by its *absentee bourgeoisie*; the contribution of New York's *Little Italy* to the Italian tax roll exceeded that of several poorer provinces at the turn of the twentieth century; and Polish-Americans' contributions to the independence movement in their homeland earned them the accolade "fourth province of Poland" (Shain and Sherman 2001). Globalization processes and technological advancements have increased the role of remittances even more at the beginning of the twenty-first century, not only in relation to national-level endeavours, but at the meso- and micro-levels of communities and families, respectively. Richmond (2002) notes the importance of remittances in the relationship between immigrants from developing countries and their families in home countries. For example,

such transfers were the only means of income for between 70 and 80 percent of the Somali population. It is estimated that in an average year, a staggering US\$200 million to \$500 million is transferred to Somalia through the hawalad system. By contrast, just \$60 million was injected into the Somali economy last year through international humanitarian aid. (Africa Action 2001)

Official estimates of Somalis living abroad in 2001 stood at just under 400,000. Of these, Canada had 70,000, the second largest number after the Gulf states, which had about 120,000 (Africa Action 2001). It is reasonable to assume that the contributions of these Canadian residents to the remittances mentioned above will be significant.

National and ethnic associations have provided avenues for disbursing social capital, as well. What is significant about these, as well as continental, associations is that their formation has a lot to do with adaptation to a different environment in which these migrants share a collective position as subalterns within the dominant Euro-American culture. In such an environment, solidarity with others of similar racial, ethnic, or geographical provenance becomes a key ingredient for cultural adaptation and integration. The relational character

of identity is borne out by Cusack's (1999) analyses of ethnic creation in Africa. In twentieth century Nigeria, processes of modernization led to rapid migration into large urban centers characterized by isolation and difference, which in turn, spawned the mobilization of an Igbo ethnicity. He also argues that being away from home played a major role in mobilizing migrant labourers along ethnic lines in Southern Africa. Similarly, Africans in a North American context, defined largely by the racialization of identities, are willing to subordinate the fragmentations that characterize their relations at home to a unity of purpose at different levels – ethnic, national, regional, religious, and continental (see Leblanc 2002). Abdusharaf (2002) describes Sudanese associations that transcend ethnic, religious, and regional differences as they juxtapose themselves vis-à-vis other groups in North America.

The objectives of ethnic associations are tailored towards meeting the needs of specific sub-national groups in the diaspora and at home. Contrary to the view that cultural differences will be eliminated in the era of modernity, there is a significant body of scholarship that contests the argument that “mobilization along ethnic lines dissipates with modernity” (Paul 2000, 25). Based on the extent of ethnically-based diaspora organizations, the evidence seems to suggest that ethnicity retains its ability to act as a catalyst for collective identity and mobilization. Individuals who share common backgrounds see their identities and their obligations, not only in relation to their host societies, but to their communities of origin and ethnic groups, as well. Hall (1999) points out that the process of globalization has intensified commitments to the local.

The local, as far as the African diaspora is concerned, is not only the physical here and now, but also an imaginary or *distant* local. This imaginary local is defined by cultural affinity and shared origin, and though groups or individuals may be physically removed from their communities or ethnic groups, they nevertheless maintain ethical, cultural, and pecuniary obligations and linkages. They exhibit these through mobilization of their social capital towards specific projects to benefit their compatriots. (Tettey 2004, 131)

Examples of such mobilization abound in the African-Canadian community. In November 2003, members of the Agona Association of Canada, representing a particular area in Ghana, presented 3.3 million cedis (about CAD\$500) to a local hospital in their hometown to defray the medical expenses, and hence secure the release, of a nineteen-year old man who had undergone surgery for a typhoid perforation. The association took the initiative after learning on the Internet that hospital authorities had detained the man because he and his family could not settle his medical bill (Ghanaweb 2003d). The connection between this action and the Internet is instructive. It shows how sojourners in the new physical ecology that has resulted from transmigration are taking advantage of the space-time compression capabilities of the new media ecology

represented by the Internet to meet their obligations within the framework of a moral economy. The above example supports Faist's (2000, 196) assertion that "communities without propinquity link through reciprocity and solidarity to achieve a high degree of social cohesion and a common repertoire of symbolic and collective representations."

An intriguing phenomenon among some African-Canadians that sustains their links to families at home is the reverse of the *satellite children* phenomenon.

The *satellite children* or *satellite kids* phenomenon is a result of a relatively new pattern of migration. The term *satellite kids* was first used in the late 1980s to describe children whose parents are Chinese immigrants to North America, mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan, who have returned to their country of origin after immigration. The typical pattern is for the father to return to the country of origin to pursue economic advantages while the mother and the children try to settle in the new country. There are also cases of the mother returning or both parents returning. The family is divided by immense geographical distance, although regular visits are not uncommon. (Tsang et al. 2003, 360)

In the context of African-Canadians, economic necessity, the multi-step process of migration in some cases, and a desire to raise children in an environment and with values that are less permissive than is perceived to be the case with mainstream Canadian values, lead to people coming to Canada without their nuclear families. Thus, unlike the Chinese pattern described above, children and/or spouses (usually wives) stay back in Africa while the parent/partner makes a sojourn in search of better opportunities. In situations involving political refugees, an individual is compelled to leave his/her country without the family, and it may be a while before they re-unite.

Another dimension of the *astronaut family* (Tsang et al. 2003) arrangement involves cases where spouses choose to stay behind in the home country because they have good jobs which they are not willing to sacrifice in hopes of gaining commensurate or better positions in Canada. The discussion above regarding the deskilling and frustrations that many professionals have to deal with (Tettey 2001) discourages such people. They would rather get together regularly in Canada or their home countries than be subjected to the vicissitudes of life abroad. Many people in mainstream society have difficulty understanding how families can be separated by a vast ocean, sometimes for extended periods of time, when couples are still *together*. In some cases, there are perceptions that Africans involved in these arrangements are not committed to their families. These observers do not comprehend the complex economic, cultural, or political rationales behind these arrangements.

Interpersonal communication via e-mail and telephone also makes it easier for African-Canadians to be in touch with their friends and families and to be involved with issues and activities at home. This interaction is not only initiated from the diaspora, but originates from home countries, as well. The expansion in telephone services across the African continent and the springing up of Internet cafes in many urban areas in the last decade has made this possible. The downside of these technological advancements for Africans in the diaspora is the increased pressure that the ease of access imposes in terms of financial and other solicitations from friends and family, and the inability to escape the customary social obligations that continuous familiarity with events at home demand. Many African-Canadians acknowledge that there was less pressure in the period before the mid-1990s, when collect calls could not be made to Canada from many African countries. This meant that their physical distance shielded them from all but the most important occurrences in their home communities and within their families. As Dahan and Sheffer (2001, 85) observe, “the growing sophistication, availability, low costs, and ease of utilization of distance shrinking technology” have significant value for home-diaspora engagement.

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS AND THE DIASPORIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

While much has been written about civil society, the analyses have tended to dwell on domestic groups (see Hepner 2003). Where cross-national civil society has been addressed, the focus invariably tends to be restricted to transnational groups mobilized to address issues with global resonance, such as the anti-globalization movements. Not much attention has been paid to the emerging phenomenon whereby civil society activities pertaining to particular states are being *diasporized*, that is, how political engagement by citizens are being deterritorialized as a result of migration. To deal with the undertheorization of this phenomenon, Hepner (2003, 286) proposes “the concept of transnational civil society to address the specificities of such interventions for particular national communities and nation states.” This concept allows us to explore processes of negotiation, contestation, power production and reproduction, and identity construction, as well as notions of belonging emanating from engagements between diaspora communities and their states of origin. It also provides insights into how diasporas are appropriating and applying discourses of transnational civil society (such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law) to the specific realities of their territorialized homelands.

Whilst African-Canadians may be spatially removed from the discursive tensions that characterize their societies of origin, they are not immune from its manifestations in spite of the centripetal tendencies that their *otherness* and mutual experiences might engender. What happens, then, is a carry-over

into Canada of ethnic tensions and suspicions, as well as political divisions that attend inter-group relations in the home countries. Rwandan Tsutsis in Canada were, for example, outraged at the decision by a Quebec court in April 2001 (later upheld by a federal court of appeal in September 2003) against the deportation of Leon Mugesera, who had been accused of giving a speech that incited genocide against Tsutsis. They considered the judge's ruling that Mugesera should not be charged with crimes against humanity a travesty of justice. In response to the verdict of the federal court, members of PAGE-Rwanda (Parents and Friends of Victims of the Genocide in Rwanda) appealed to the federal government to contest the decision of the court by taking the case to the Supreme Court of Canada. Together with other Rwandese associations in Canada, the group organized a demonstration in front of Parliament Hill to register its protest and to submit a petition to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration demanding that the case be pursued at the Supreme Court (see PAGE-Rwanda 2003). It should be pointed out that, whilst this response was ostensibly supported by Pan-Rwandese associations in Canada, it appears to represent mostly Tsutsi voices. This is not surprising, since they were the ones who suffered the most from the genocidal actions of the Hutu majority. The literature points to the importance of memory as a crucial element of identity and ethnic mobilization. Esman (1994, 14), for example, contends that "[e]thnicity cannot be politicized unless an underlying core of memories, experience, or meaning moves people to collective action". It is worth mentioning that in November 2003, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced that he will appeal the federal court's decision at the Supreme Court.

In similar instances of transnationalization of domestic politics, some members of the Sudanese community have been accused of being agents of the government in Khartoum (South Sudanese Community Association 2003). They are alleged to have engaged in a campaign designed to sow seeds of discord among their compatriots in Canada in order to stymie any coordinated opposition to the interests of the ruling regime. These *agents* are also perceived to be spies who report on the activities of political exiles.

The insertion of home country politics also tends to threaten national mobilization in the context of the diaspora and has implications for the viability of national associations there. Political conflicts are based, not only on differences in vision and policy regarding how social capital should be mobilized for home and diaspora purposes, they also flow from questions regarding who the beneficiaries of such activities would be vis-à-vis the politics of ethnicity and distribution that define the home country. As Hepner correctly observes, actors and beneficiaries are seen "as representatives of political positions, ethno-regional communities, social classes, or kin groups ... [e]mpowering individuals implied empowering specific collective identities over others" (Hepner 2003, 276). What is at play here is the retention of tensions and perceptions of hierarchy and power that attend relations among different groups in the countries

of origin. The consequence is a weakening of national associations through internal strife (see Leblanc 2002).

Transnationalization of national politics and the diasporization of civil society provide a means whereby the African diaspora participates in, and influences, the domestic politics of their countries of origin. There are overseas branches of political parties, and African politicians make stop-overs in Canada to confer with, and solicit support from, members of their political parties or groups. Even though most Africans in Canada are not allowed to vote in national elections, they nonetheless serve as an attractive cohort for politicians who can count on their financial support to pursue their agendas. The following provides an illustration of how the diaspora inserts itself into the political processes and institutions of their homelands:

The Network for Patriotism & Progress, the Montreal-Canada Chapter of the ruling New Patriotic Party has celebrated Three Years of the NPP administration with a Dinner/Dance in Montreal, Canada. The Community Center at 451 Ogilvy in Montreal's Parc Extension was festooned with the NPP slogans, party colors and a large portrait of President John Agyekum Kufour for the occasion ... Local Chapter Chairman, Nana Asumadu Duah recounted ... "that our government has delivered on all fronts and in fact it has over-delivered in just three years in power ... We have so far made steady progress but more needs to be done. We need to recruit more members for the task ahead of winning a second term next December and beyond in 2008." (Ghanaweb 2004)

Political contestation and negotiation sometimes involve diaspora communities demanding participation in political processes of their home countries and recognition of their status as bona fide citizens, even though they may be domiciled elsewhere. Itzigsohn (2000, 1141), for example, describes how Dominican, Salvadoran, and Haitian diasporas have demanded an extension in political space so that they can engage politically with their countries of origin. He argues that diaspora communities usually constitute "a third sector able to monitor and influence the activities of the state and private sector" (Itzigsohn 2000, 1136). Political interest groups within the African diaspora have lobbied host governments to support their causes.

In some countries such as Canada the pro-democracy movements have worked with other organizations under an umbrella known as the Working Group on Nigeria. The groups bring together a diverse community of activists to strategize their work on Nigeria, and also relate with the Canadian government ... Canada more than any country has made more public comments against the military junta of General Abacha. (Shettima 1999)

As noted above, ethnicity is not just a means for primordial appeals of common origin. It can also serve instrumental purposes, whereby it can be used for different types of competitive mobilization, as well as be constructed for particular causes (see Paul 2000). Consequently, diaspora communities have appealed to ethnicity or nationalism as a means of mobilizing financial, political, and diplomatic support for causes in their homelands. Kurien (1999), for example, notes the massive contributions made by Hindus abroad to Hindu nationalism under the rubric of an intense Hindutva discourse. In Canada, Southern Sudanese groups have organized events and forums aimed at drawing the attention of the larger Canadian society to political developments in their home country. This is meant to galvanize pressure that can be brought to bear on the Canadian government to adopt a strong stance against the Sudanese government. In May 2003, the South Sudanese Community of Ottawa issued a statement condemning the visit of Sudan's Foreign Minister to Canada. It stated, *inter alia*:

- 1) - If Canada wants to play a neutral role in the search for peace in the Sudan conflict as a mediator, it should accord equal chances to both parties; the Government of Sudan and the *SPLA*. We see the visit of the Sudan Foreign Affairs Minister to Ottawa as an *impediment to peace talks*.
- 2) - Canada should clearly *denounce* the double standards applied by the Sudanese government of trying to negotiate peace with the *SPLA*, on one hand, while committing atrocities on the innocent civilians of Darfur Region at the same time. (South Sudanese Community 2003)

It is worth noting that the focus of political actions and protestations is not limited to the governments of the countries of origin. They are, in some cases, directed at the governments of the countries of domicile. This occurs when the latter governments are seen as pursuing policies that do not advance the interests of particular segments of the diaspora community. This was the case in February 2000, when the Federation of Sudanese Canadian Associations (FESCA) organized nationwide protests against the Canadian government's decision not to sanction Talisman Energy for its activities in the Sudan. Drawing from the Harker Report, FESCA argued that, by such an act of omission, the Canadian government was supporting the activities of an oppressive regime. It opined that

[t]he exploitation of oil in Sudan is widely acknowledged to be an important factor in the brutal civil war in Sudan. This was confirmed in the recent Harker mission report! Yet the Canadian government is refusing to use its powers to prevent Calgary-based Talisman Oil from operating in the region. (Federation of Sudanese Canadian Associations 2000)

Diaspora political activists have also targeted non-state actors whose activities bear on the domestic politics of home countries. Project Sudan, for example, credited sustained campaigns by various civil society groups and individuals against Talisman Energy for the decision of the company to stop operations in the Sudan. In a release issued by the group, it contended that

[t]he impact of human rights activism against Talisman has clearly affected Talisman's share price and Talisman's credibility. Our persistent pressure over the past four years has been recognized by Talisman as a factor in their decision to sell. In Talisman's October 30 press release, Jim Buckee, Talisman CEO, states: "Talisman's shares have continued to be discounted based on perceived political risk in-country and in North America to a degree that was unacceptable for 12 percent of our production," he said in a release. "Shareholders have told me they were tired of continually having to monitor and analyze events relating to Sudan," Buckee said. (Project Sudan n.d.)

Similar activism was visible during the struggle of the Ogoni people of Nigeria against political repression by the government of Sani Abacha and the dangers posed by the exploitation of oil resources in the country's Delta region by multinational corporations. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Canada took a lead role in sensitizing the Canadian public and government about the atrocities being committed against the Ogoni people. It organized public lectures, memorial services, benefit concerts, and protest marches.

HOME AND THE DIASPORA: EXPLORING THE TENSIONS AND DIALECTICS OF BELONGING

Many African-Canadians tend to think that because of the above-mentioned linkages with their countries of origin, they are as much in tune with the realities and lifestyles of those places as those who remain there. In reality, the situation is different. In fact, the diaspora community has been changed in ways that differentiate them in significant ways from their compatriots at home. It is therefore not surprising that a lot of African-Canadians come back from travels to their home countries with much frustration and trepidation about attitudes and behaviours that they consider unacceptable. There are, for example, complaints about lax attitudes towards work, corruption, absence of the rule of law, etc. The extent of culture shock that these sojourners experience in their countries of origin attests to their location in an *in-between* space and the *double consciousness* (Gilroy 1993) that results from being located in that space. While they feel a strong attachment to their home countries, they realize that they may no longer belong to those places in the sense that they

are not really at home in the physical environment that their imagination and antecedent contacts make them think they share a lot in common with.

As pointed out earlier, Africa is undergoing significant socio-cultural changes. These changes can be shocking to African-Canadians, because at the same time as they try to exhibit, and inculcate in their children, *traditional* African values, continental Africans are imbibing Euro-American cultures at an alarming rate. Cultural globalization, or more appropriately, the cultural synchronization that is reflective of the significant influences of Euro-American culture, has led to the emergence of new cultural attitudes, values, and practices. This creates a double alienation for African-Canadians whose cultural preferences seem to be threatened on both sides of the Atlantic. The fact that children on the continent are imitating lifestyles that parents in the diaspora condemn and claim is un-African creates cognitive dissonance for their children when they visit their homelands. It also creates credibility problems for parents back in Canada, because they cannot claim an ideal African lifestyle worthy of emulation by their children.

Another area of cultural disconnect pertains to the excessive formality, in the African setting, of interactions in public institutions and the conspicuous display of status. Many African-Canadians who have adopted some of the informal attitudes of Canadian society find that their attitudes are not appreciated when they go back home. Many have recounted experiences in African organizations where they have not received the necessary attention from, or have been ignored by, officials, presumably because they do not look *important enough*. How they are attired becomes the marker of their status and hence, of the kind of service they get. The diaspora Africans, on the other hand, think it is ridiculous to dress in a suit and tie, for example, in the generally sultry African weather. However, in situations where there is no racial difference between the diaspora and the continental African, other non-verbal markers, such as appearance, are key to determining status, however inaccurate. Interestingly, White persons who dress as casually as the diaspora African are not subjected to the same criteria for determining status, because there is an implicit acknowledgement that their *Whiteness* makes them important and deserving of special treatment. Of course, this discriminatory treatment in their own countries of origin angers returning Africans and creates conflicts with their compatriots. The racialized nature of North American society has made African-Canadians sensitive to an extent that is far more intense than is the case with most people in their countries of origin, with the possible exception of South Africa because of its peculiar racial history. Diaspora Africans, having encountered discrimination and racism in their host society, are therefore critical of the perceived pandering to *White* visitors that is displayed by their compatriots.

African states have realized the contributions of the diaspora to socio-economic development and its potential as a huge asset to be tapped. At the same

time, there is a strong desire among Africans domiciled abroad to retain their rights of citizenship vis-à-vis their home countries. These factors have given the issue of dual citizenship and its attendant rights a significant place in the discourse of the contemporary African diaspora, including those in Canada. Africans abroad argue that if they are expected to fulfill certain obligations to their countries of origin, then they must be accorded the rights and privileges that come with those obligations, even if they are not physically resident in those countries. Ghanaians abroad, for example, argued that since their remittances of about US\$400 million constitute the fourth largest contribution to the national economy each year (Tettey 2002), they deserved recognition as bona fide legal citizens, even if they held other citizenships. So far, only a handful of countries have ceded to the demands of Africans abroad and allowed dual citizenship. Within this small group, only Ghana, South Africa, and Egypt have passed legislation recognizing such a status. It is worth noting that, even in these cases, beneficiaries of the laws may still be constrained in the kinds of rights they are able to exercise from abroad. For pragmatic and political reasons, these individuals may not be able to vote in national and sub-national elections from their current places of residence.

Despite some movement in the direction of granting dual citizenship on the continent and the fact that “in many countries of settlement a significant proportion of newcomers who get naturalized currently keep their former citizenship as well” (Faist 2000, 210), most African governments are reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. The *Citizenship of Zimbabwe Act*, for example, prohibits dual citizenship and requires that someone with dual citizenship renounce his/her foreign citizenship in order to retain Zimbabwean citizenship. Even though this act was amended in 2003 to allow for some exceptions, those exemptions only apply in cases related to member countries of the Southern African Development Community. The government embarked on policy changes on the issue in 2001, with the aim of tightening regulations regarding citizenship:

The official Ziana news agency also said the government was cutting to five years from seven the time in which a citizen could stay out of the country “without lawful excuse” before losing Zimbabwean citizenship. It quoted a government spokesman as saying President Robert Mugabe’s ruling Zanu-PF party – which faces an unprecedented challenge sparked by a severe economic crisis – had been forced to tighten the rules to sideline opponents hiding under dual citizenship.

“There are concerns that those with dual citizenship are behind efforts to discredit the government[sic] to use diplomatic and other means to topple the Zanu-PF. Lines of credit, aid, and other forms of assistance have been systematically stopped over the last couple of years to pressure the government,” added the state-run *Sunday Mail* newspaper. (Chinaka 2001)

Concerns about the political agenda of citizens abroad are not limited to Zimbabwe, where it might be attributed to the paranoia of a dictator like Robert Mugabe. It is shared by other governments who worry about the potential for nationals with dual citizenship to engage in political destabilization of various sorts, hoping that they could retreat to the safety of their second country of citizenship if things go sour. Furthermore, governments believe that dual citizenship takes away their control over their citizens, because the latter can always avail themselves of the options provided by the other country if they are not satisfied with what their countries of origin provide. Finally, there is the argument to the effect that citizenship comes with certain responsibilities, such as paying taxes, which most Africans in the diaspora do not fulfil. Those who are against dual citizenship argue that diaspora Africans cannot claim rights and privileges, because only those who meet their obligations to the state can claim these.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding discussion, we used the concept of *translocational positionality* to interrogate the engagement that African-Canadians have with their societies of origin. This allowed us to explore linkages that extend beyond the cultural and enabled us to examine other dimensions of the diaspora experience, such as the transnationalization of civil society, the transfer into foreign climes of traditional differences, and the building of social capital for collective purposes. We argue that African-Canadians maintain a significant level of attachment to their countries and communities of origin. These linkages take a variety of forms and occur at differing levels of intensity for particular individuals and groups. The Internet and other communicative tools, such as music CDs and audio-visual broadcasts, also provide a *bridgespace* (Adams and Ghose 2003) that help Africans in the diaspora maintain an affinity to their compatriots and cultures of origin.

Some of the home-diaspora engagement occurs in the public sphere through conspicuous and affective displays of traditions – cultural remittances from the places of origin. As Nurse notes with regard to the Trinidadian Carnival in North America, these celebrations and observances as cultural activities are “not just about merriment, colourful pageantry, revelry, and street theatre. [They] are born out of the struggle of marginalized peoples to shape a cultural identity through resistance, liberation, and catharsis. It is these values that have facilitated [their] replication wherever the ... diaspora is found. [They] have acted as a bond between the diasporic community and those at home” (1999, 662). Other linkages derive from a sense of obligation to places of origin that flows from a moral economy framework and the attendant mobilization of social capital for development initiatives at home. These occur at the individual, inter-personal, and group levels in the form of financial remittances and development-focused

community initiatives. As Faist (2000, 191) observes, “[t]he concept of transnational spaces covers diverse phenomena such as transnational small groups, transnational circuits, and transnational communities. Each of these is characterized by a primary mechanism of integration: reciprocity in small groups, exchange in circuits, and solidarity in communities.”

The evidence also shows that the imaginary home that serves as the basis from which the African-Canadian derives his or her sense of identity, and for which there is a constant longing, may be changing at the same time as it retains *traditional* elements and practices. It is, therefore, not the exact replica of the essentialized ideal on the basis of which the diaspora notion of home is constructed. On the other hand, the diaspora community, while it prides itself on its Africanness, is not identical to its home communities, because it has adopted ways of life that do not dovetail with the expectations or practices of their compatriots. Consequently, at the same time as we see evidence of solidarity and a sense of oneness between these groups, we also acknowledge that there are areas of difference and tension due to the dynamic experiences within these two locales. In recognition of this process of hybridity, Thompson (2002, 417) argues that “we may be entering a new, postmodern epoch in which the idea of a single, nation-state based identity is giving way to a more fragmented and hybridized spectrum of cultural identities.”

“Diasporic activities and influence in the homeland, despite their international location, expand the meaning of the term *diaspora politics* to include not only politics inside the state but also inside the people” (Shain and Barth 2003, 451). It is clear that African-Canadians, like other diasporic communities, are engaged with political developments in their home countries. These include involvement in political activity on behalf of home-based political parties or governments, and mobilizing for particular interests vis-à-vis home and host states. While some may be passive or silent, all nevertheless share common interests with regard to issues around dual citizenship and the ramifications of the decisions that their home governments make regarding it. Corporate entities located in host societies, whose activities impinge on the domestic politics of countries of origin, are entangled in diaspora politics, as well. The discussion above about transnational politics and civil society enriches our understanding of “how differentiated transnational social fields become sites for the simultaneous reproduction and contestation of state-produced hegemonies within a deterritorialized civic sphere” (Hepner 2003, 288). The resulting strains have implications for the capacity, or otherwise, of various groups to work together in ways that are beneficial to the diasporic community as a whole and to the countries of origin. Finally, the discussion draws attention to an interesting phenomenon regarding the contestations that surround citizenship. The focus of much of the literature on migration and integration has been on difficulties that immigrants encounter as they seek full citizenship – both cultural and political – in their host countries. But as revealed above, there are many cases

where immigrants are locked in conflict with their societies of origin on this same question, as governments, and indeed some compatriots, deny “political and cultural citizenship to the migrant on the grounds that emigration is inevitably accompanied by distancing and degeneration from the culture of origin” (Dirlik 1999, 107).

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