



THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

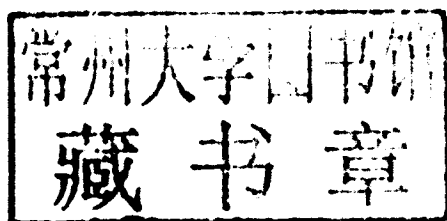
Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization

TOYIN FALOLA

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 UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER PRESS

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For Professor Tunde Babawale, for his excellent
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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book connects the history of slavery, the transatlantic slave trade, contemporary migrations, and their legacies, and speaks to the broader issues of the African diaspora in relation to previous and ongoing struggles of black people for rebirth, progress, justice, and racial uplift. It focuses on the African diaspora in the Americas, notably the United States. While some of the concepts and frameworks are surely applicable to other contexts, the book does not make the claim of constructing a blanket history for all diasporic experiences.

The book has four components: First, the power and identity structures created by the Atlantic slave trade; second, the diaspora as a function of this slave trade; third, the diaspora created by a large number of contemporary voluntary migrants; and fourth, the identities that members of the African diaspora have created for themselves from these modern day migrations. In the following thirteen chapters, the historical themes of racism, slavery, domination, resistance, and resilience are framed as the context for understanding diaspora history, linking the past with the present in ways that contribute to discussion of contemporary issues such as the eradication of poverty and the preservation of traditional practices and values.

This work represents a contribution to constructing a longer causal history of the diaspora and its impact on the modern world. It connects black history with black identity and politics. In this long-term history, the book shows the new and old African diasporas and the resulting ideological and cultural differences between the two. In this way, it establishes political and existential histories for members of the slave diaspora, first- and second-generation migrants, migrants from different African nations, exiles, and transnationalists. Finally, the work contextualizes the African history of the diaspora in global networks to correct gaps in African nationalized pedagogies.

For thirty years, I have privileged the writing of history from below. While not ignoring the state and major political actors, I have always been interested in the experiences and responses of people

themselves: how policies affect ordinary men and women, how everyday people seek dignity and fight back against power, and how weaker nations respond to stronger ones. In this book, my interest in agency continues: the agency of Africa as a continent within a powerful wider world; the agency of the displaced, enslaved, and free; and the agency of the poor. Power, resistance, and nationalism are the three organizing principles that arrange the data and present the analyses. The conversational tone has been retained for effect, as in chapter 5 where it is crucial to underscore the assumed linkage in identity between the speaker and his audience, and where an academic subject connects to ongoing politics and cultural nationalism.

Various public lectures gave birth to this book, and I am indebted to a rather long list of committed scholars, engaged students, vibrant intellectual settings, and genuine academic spaces where there was a lot of interest in remaking Africa and the world. In 2008 the rise of Barack Obama, the first candidate in the long battle for an African American to win the nomination of the Democratic Party, energized academic discussions of the African diaspora and provided several points of interest to anchor some of the key issues in this book. I must also give credit to Ben Weiss, my undergraduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, who proofread the first draft and checked the endnotes, and who pointed out some aspects of the work that students and the general readers may find difficult. Dr. Shennette Garrett-Scott, a historian, graciously read the entire draft and made editorial suggestions.

The list of institutions and individuals worldwide that assisted me in various ways is indeed long. Let me begin with the students and faculty of the University of Texas at Austin, where there has been ample intellectual space for a focus on the diaspora that blends perfectly well with my three decades of interest in African studies. The constant references to diaspora issues pushed me not only to complete this book but also to add my voice to a theme that has commanded attention as a subfield in the last quarter century. My wish to provide a strong interdisciplinary foundation for undergraduate students led to the creation of a popular course, "The United States and Africa," that sparks intellectual curiosity among my students and keeps my focus intact and my passion for diaspora issues strong. My intellectual journey has been enriched by faculty who focus on diaspora issues, creative scholars who are generous with their wise counsel. I am deeply grateful for their collegiality.

I also thank a long list of friends and associates who offered strong words of encouragement. Dr. Vik Bahl is always there for me, in spite of his commitment to his young family. Vik and his wife, Seema, are first-generation migrants from India. Living in the diversified cities of Seattle and Phoenix, they are now witnessing the growth of a third generation who aspire to maintain a connection to Indian culture and values. Their son Ayodele's life illustrates in many ways the contents of this book. By birth an American citizen, and a second generation Indian parent, Ayo is being inserted into multiple worlds. Vik and Seema, in spite of their insertions into American society, are embedded in Indian communities. The celebration of their marriage and the child-naming ceremony for Ayodele were non-Western. I am the chronicler of an interesting experience. Ayodele is a Yoruba name, one that I bestowed on him with a formal ceremony presided over by Professor Simon Ottenberg, who was a professor of African studies for many years at the University of Washington, Seattle. Ayodele as a name, even aside from the naming ceremony, is a reflection of the complex nature of interactions in an age of globalization.

Professor emeritus A. B. Assensoh of the University of Indiana, Bloomington, always has encouraging words of wisdom and engaging stories. He represents the best in collegiality. Fondly known as "Brother A. B.," Professor Assensoh is steeped in that dying Renaissance tradition of encyclopedic knowledge combined with generosity and sharing. Dr. Moses Ochonun of Vanderbilt University posed tough questions that led to new thinking and fresh interpretations. In the same vein, Dr. Bessie House-Soremekun, Public Scholar in African American Studies, Civic Engagement, and Entrepreneurship, and professor of political science at Indiana University–Purdue University in Indianapolis, is a gentle critic who routinely checked on the progress of my work and health. Her remarkable friendship is a gift that I value immeasurably for always demanding acknowledgment of the the practical values of knowledge, demonstrating her unique ability to turn historical narratives into more accessible scholarship.

I have benefited from the support and comments of various professors from different corners of the world. I am especially grateful for the comments, friendship, and encouragement of colleagues in Nigeria, notably Professors Okpeh O. Okpeh of Benue State University, Aderonke Adesanya and Ademola Dasylva of the University of Ibadan, and Professor Ayo Olukaju, formerly of the University of Lagos but now the president of Caleb University, Nigeria. These

scholars are all advocates of my work and committed supporters of my “nationalist” and “Pan-Africanist” approaches. As the book took shape, I received critical insights from great minds such as Reverend Attah Agbali as well as Professors Akin Ogundiran, Niyi Afolabi Wilson Ogbomo, and Augustine Agwuele.

The collegiality of the campuses where I presented many of the ideas in this book is impressive, and I can hardly repay the debt of affection and hospitality I owe to hundreds of people, many of whom I met for the first time. In Brazil, where I spent the summer of 2006 lecturing, I am most grateful for the invitation and red-carpet treatment offered by Professor Maria Antoneta Antonacci of the History Department at the Catholic University of São Paulo. Maria showed an unstinting support and kindness, so rare to find anywhere. Maria and her two students, Silvia Lorenso and Nirlene Neponuceno, formed a trio that took care of me daily and sustained an unusual interest in all the lectures. Also in Brazil, the guru at the Federal University in Bahia, João Reis, organized a major university lecture for me with an overflowing crowd beyond the hall. In Bahia, the faculty and students of the Steve Biko Institute were wonderful, and they shared their big hearts and brilliant minds with me. I have been back into Brazil on other occasions, at the invitation of UNESCO and the Center for Black Arts and African Civilization, under the dynamic leadership of Professor Tunde Babawale.

In Africa, I enjoyed the hospitality of colleagues in Accra, Cape Town, Cape Coast, Cairo, Makurdi, Kaduna, Ile-Ife, Ede, Calabar, Gombe, Abuja, Nsukka, Ondo, Ile-Ife, Akungba, Lagos, and Ibadan. At the University of Ibadan, where I gave a keynote address in June 2008, the English Department treated me lavishly, including an elaborate drama performance. In 2007 Dr. Akin Alao devoted an entire week to transport me to five universities to present lectures to large crowds. He and his wife Ireti demonstrated the richness of Nigerian hospitality in all its details and indescribable lavishness. At Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin, Mrs. Nike Ajayi handled a university lecture with competence and affection. Professor Okpeh O. Okpeh and Dr. Ademola Babalola, both based in Nigeria, have had to log hundreds of miles in moving me from one location to another. These are two great friends of outstanding human qualities. In May 2012 I returned to Ibadan to give two lectures. I gave the J. F. Odunjo Memorial Lecture at the University of Ibadan, where Professor Philip Ogundeji and his team were very hospitable. At Lead City University,

Professors Jide Owoeye and Ayo Olukotun prepared a hero's welcome and an auditorium-size audience. The Nigerian connection was further cemented by the most generous funding provided by Professor Tunde Babawale of the Center for Black and African Art and Civilization, who hosted an elaborate UNESCO conference on slavery in Calabar in March 2012, as well as the Toyin Falola Annual Conference in July of the same year. Both provided great opportunities to discuss various aspects of this book. Professor Ayandiji Daniel Aina, the vice chancellor of the new Adeleke University, Ede, invited me to give the 2012 Distinguished University Lecture, which generated discussions on migrant networks in globalized spaces.

In the United States, I cannot thank enough the various universities that generously invited me to give public lectures. The list is rather long, but the memory of some are forever implanted in my mind: the University of Illinois, the University of Maryland at Eastern Shore, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Florida International University, Kennesaw State University, Cornell University, the University of Georgia at Athens, Indiana University, Temple University, the Pennsylvania State University, Delaware State University, Norfolk State University, James Madison University, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Rice University, Texas State University, Johns Hopkins, Tennessee State University, the University of Vanderbilt, the University of Indiana at Indianapolis, Xavier University of Louisiana, Central Connecticut State University, Bowling Green State University, Colgate University, Langston University, Kentucky State University, and Marquette University in Milwaukee.

A number of academic associations were gracious in their invitations to me to deliver keynote addresses, notably the Canadian African Studies Association, which held its annual conference in Queens in 2009, where Professor Marc Epprecht served as the excellent host. I must also thank Dr. Jamiane Abidogun, who invited me in 2008 to deliver the keynote address at a conference in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Abidogun is a scholar who has turned Africa not only into her home but also into a commendable passion, both in the generosity of her spirit and the grandness of her affection.

In Europe, my gratitude goes to the African Studies Program at Hannover; the German Anthropological Association, which invited me to Halle; the Casa Africa in Gran Canaria, Spain; the Wilberforce Institute at Hull and the Department of History, Warwick University,

the United Kingdom; and a host of other organizations in Germany and Spain. In France, I cannot thank enough the generous hospitality of Dr. Jean-Luc Martineau and the late Dr. Brigitte Kowalski. Dr. Marisa Pineau of the Department of History, Universidad de Buenos Aires, facilitated an enjoyable trip to Argentina. Professor Paul Lovejoy is always gracious in hosting me in Toronto once a year. His library, one of the best in the world, supplies me with an endless stream of ideas.

I am happy to acknowledge this large intellectual and social debt to the aforementioned institutions and scholars, the majority of whom I met only once in my life. Indeed, I cannot write a book of reflections such as this one without incurring innumerable debts. I have had to draw from the scholarship of various generations of scholars since the nineteenth century, many of whom will go uncited but remain as part of this blanket acknowledgment. My apologies to anyone that I have failed to recognize.

The University of Rochester Press believed in my projects. Suzanne Guio, their former editorial director, was meticulously committed to every manuscript from the proposal stage to the book in print. I am very gratified by my association with the press, and I thank everyone for their constant encouragement and support.

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Finally, I am grateful to my family for their support and love. Bisi, my wife, has been a major source of support for three decades. My three children, Dolapo, Bisola, and Toyin, add to the joy of living.

Toyin Falola
University of Texas at Austin
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Introduction

The Old and New African Diaspora

This book pulls together three dominant themes in the history of Africa and the African diaspora since the fifteenth century—slavery, migrations, and contact with the West—to reflect on their cumulative impact over the years. The consequences of the interactions of Africa and the West transcend the boundaries of Africa itself and extend to locations where black people have been scattered over time and are now labeled as the “African diaspora.” Some other labels have emerged, such as the “black Atlantic” and the “Atlantic World,” incorporating the four continents of Europe, the Americas, and Africa: all localities united by contacts, interactions, migrations of peoples, and exchanges of commodities, and all made possible by the use of the Atlantic Ocean to move goods, peoples, and ideas. The diaspora addressed in this book is in the Americas, and most examples are drawn from the interactions between Africa and the United States. The chapters focus on the relationships between and among people; the postscript points to the relations between states, which shape the future of migrations and transnationalist projects.

To be sure, the African diaspora extends far beyond the United States; there are also communities of African origin in the Caribbean, the continental South and North America, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. While there are commonalities in the experiences of these various diasporic communities, there are also important differences set in the context of regional histories, economics, and politics. In a recent essay, the historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza has warned against the danger of imposing our knowledge of the African American representatives of this diaspora onto our understanding of other diasporic communities in such places as Iraq and India.¹ Before him, the historian Pier M. Larson noted how the Atlantic scholarship dominates

our understanding of the African diaspora in spite of the evidence that millions were also forced to migrate to the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.² The caution by Zeleza is borne in mind, although my work extends the point made by Larson about the centrality of the Atlantic. In both past and present histories, the focus and examples are drawn mainly from West Africa and the United States without losing sight of other relevant cases.³

The three issues of slavery, migrations, and contacts are united in terms of how they were all instigated by the expanding and extensive power of Europe (and also the Americas) in creating dynamic global forces of interactions, and of how Africans have had to respond to many circumstances, some of which they were able to control, some beyond their control. In these interactions, Africans have served as subjects (when they were dominated), as agents (when they shaped the events), as victims (in the case of forced migrations), and as the instigators of their own miseries that have given rise to the wave of contemporary immigrations.

The generations of African migrants in the years of the transatlantic slave trade are different from contemporary migrants. Although now homogenized as “black” people, the history of the individuals of the successive waves of migration is not the same. Thus, this book focuses on the diaspora created by the Atlantic slave trade (now called the “Old Diaspora,” which led to such identities as Afro-Brazilians, African Americans, Afro-Cubans, and the like) and of the diaspora of individuals of the contemporary period, known by various names as the “transnationalists,” “recent migrants,” and the like, of the “New Diaspora.”

With respect to the Old Diaspora, this book deals with a history of misery and reflects on the burdens of slavery, racism, and domination, but also resistance and the collective genius of survival. The dispersal of Africans to other parts of the world created a black diaspora, studied as part of the “Atlantic World,” “world history,” the “black Atlantic,” and a host of other labels that link space, time, and people together to explore the history and forms of interactions in different continents. Slavery, in whatever form, involves the punishment of a powerless victim captured by acts of violence and kept in bondage. Racism was about persecution, using the “color line” to separate human beings, and to enable those of “superior” color to abuse and degrade those of “inferior” color. This book is also about the lingering impact of displacement brought about by the slave

trade, which relocated Africans against their will to the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Part 1 examines the formation of identity and identity politics in the context of the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation complex.

The colonial conquest and the insertion of Africa into the consciousness of the Western world after 1885 and the Berlin West Africa Conference added significantly to displacement; millions of Africans left as voluntary migrants. A “new diaspora” had been created, which forms part 2. The number of voluntary migrants has increased since the 1980s and is currently estimated at over ten million Africans scattered in different parts of the world. A larger percentage of these migrants maintains connections with Africa,⁴ thus strengthening the forces of globalization. A new set of knowledge is being generated to understand this “new diaspora,” including established and new literary works on the tropes of alienation, abandonment, suffering, and new opportunities.⁵

All diasporas have to be managed once they have been constructed by the migrants, slave traders, owners, and host societies. To be managed they have to be imagined, which involves complex networks and relations between Africa and the various places that have a black presence. The loss of actual location becomes the profit of reflection, the ruptures of dislocation are turned into the value of network formation. The consequences of the diaspora are enormous and long-lasting. Distance and space are overcome in such a way that the past (history) informs the present (politics). If the West traumatized Africans in slavery and conquest, the African diaspora keeps the memory of slavery alive in the politics and practices of black solidarity. Therefore, part 3 is the formation of identities in response to displacement.

The generation of knowledge about Africa and the African diaspora has equally been influenced by issues of slavery, race, exploitation, and domination. There is an intellectual coherence to the study of Africa and blackness as units of identity, space, and boundaries. Knowledge has made it possible to point to areas of domination and exploitation in different historical eras and places. An opportunity has been provided to generate nationalism, thus making Africa and the African diaspora both a category of analysis (academic knowledge) and of practice (politics, actions, and nationalism). This book reflects the unity made possible by the historical circumstances that connect Africa with the places where the Africans have migrated.

In analyzing the representation of Africa, a myriad of issues and social processes are crucial. Whether related to slavery, colonialism, or race relations, scholarly thinking and social actions tend to be combined. The “modernity” constructed by Wilmot Blyden, one of the most prominent African scholars of the nineteenth century,⁶ cannot be understood without also regarding his theories as political. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, was not just operating as a theoretician of Pan-Africanism, but also as a political activist.⁷ K. O. Dike, a historian of the post–World War II era, was not just writing academic history, but was also advancing the agenda of nationalism and nation building.⁸ Knowledge about Africa, as this book makes clear, is not disconnected from the real world of politics.

Knowledge about the diaspora is connected with African history. Ideas spread in a transatlantic and transnational manner. An intellectual connectedness has delivered ideas on race and slavery from Bahia in Brazil to Accra in Ghana, and ideas of cultural nationalism (e.g., *Négritude*) from Harlem in New York to Lagos in Nigeria. The concept of blackness, the phenomenon of race, and the “invention” of Africa are part of a package of ideas that have been circulating for over one hundred years. This package is analyzed in some of the following chapters as a history that enables us to connect the past with the present, and also develop it as a political idea that allows us to understand how society is constructed through the prism of identity and the consequences of the intervention of the West in Africa.

Some of the diverse topics in this book include slavery, the impact of Africans on American cultures, the linkages between the diaspora and Africa, and the emerging ideas on the new generation of African immigrants that I call the “transnationalist diaspora.” The themes are organized around an older history and an emerging one. I will make brief comments on the old and new diaspora, using knowledge that is familiar to many readers to frame the overarching context.

The Old Diaspora: The Atlantic Slave Trade and Identity Issues

Slavery and the slave trade connected Africa to the world economy and to global history. The grand narratives of world history cannot be accurately written without including the slave trade, and an understanding of the global economy and politics since the fifteenth century cannot omit the role played by Africans. Africa was

an integral part of the Atlantic World and played a crucial role in the history of early modernity, the industrialization of Europe, and the plantation economies in the Americas.⁹ If the beginning of the new field of Atlantic history is dated to the fifteenth century, then it means precisely the beginning of the connections between Europe and West Africa and the subsequent extension to the Americas following the “discovery” voyages of Columbus in 1492. If the end of Atlantic history is dated by some scholars to the abolition of the slave trade during the nineteenth century, a very contested position since connections to the slave trade continued into the twentieth century, Africa was still integral in terms of the stoppage of the slave traffic. Thus, for four hundred years Africa was connected with a larger world, being shaped by and also shaping that world.

The areas along the sea were profoundly affected, and the impact reached far into the interior where economies and politics were restructured to meet the demands and pressures of the Atlantic World. Africans were linked to the Atlantic World in their greater role as slaves, cheap labor that was used in various aspects of the economy and society. Those who left Africa could not have imagined the long distances they were to travel to their new destinations. They took with them ideas and cultures. Those left behind received imported items, new food crops, and new cultures. Diseases were also exchanged. Africans in the interior used the new products of the Atlantic World even though most were unlikely to have any idea where the products came from, giving them generic names that associated the makers with a race different from their own.

The improved capacity to navigate the world drew Africa into a huge Atlantic economy from the fifteenth century onward. In 1444 the Portuguese pioneered the slave trade, forcefully capturing some Africans at the mouth of the Senegal River. Not only were Europeans now able to travel south of Cape Bojador, which had been the limit of navigation for years, but Africa was also to be connected to the large development of the plantation systems in the Americas. The ability to navigate the sea was linked to the European desire and search for commodities, and the extensive production of sugar and the labor to produce it. Europeans competed with one another in a so-called spirit of mercantilism that sought resources from other lands using means that were both ethical and unethical. Members of the political class sought wealth and control, while merchants and entrepreneurs did the same. Piracy was considered