

# tourists as pilgrims: commercial fashioning of transatlantic politics

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In the opening chapter of *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy notes the centrality of the journey in the formation of African diasporic identity and cultural history. The dispersal of Africans taken from the continent to the New World has left its mark on the very tropes of heritage and identity. Gilroy's idea offers a point of departure for my discussion of the ties contemporary African Americans forge with Africa as they remap the exit routes from Africa centuries ago. I describe and analyze a corporate-sponsored African American homeland tour to explore both the context and the specificity of contemporary transatlantic imaginings in African American cultural politics. In particular, I argue for the critical importance of an analysis of the relationship between identity formation, global politics, and the culture of capitalism. Through an explication of the tour, I illustrate the processes through which *culture* becomes a commodified object. I explore how commercial campaigns can provide deeply felt subjective identities. At the same time, I ask about the relationship among multinational capital, local marketing schemes, and African American participation in contemporary global marketing visions.

At the heart of the debate among contemporary cultural analysts are concerns about analytic approaches for the study of local and global processes (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Keith 1997; Tsing 1993, n.d.). To study social phenomena as simultaneously local and global is not simply to place old things under new glass, with "local" objects merely positioned in "global" discussions; rather, methodological tools must reveal the global histories and socioeconomic processes at the very heart of local cultural commitments. They must also assay the particularities and local positionings of the most global claims (Castells 1997). Appadurai (1990:296) suggests a model of multiple scapes—ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, and finanscapes—that put into play simultaneous processes crucial to the constitution of global phenomena. His model offers a beginning for an analysis of local global processes; still, it is necessary to pull these—and other—imaginative fields of global articulation into closer ethnographic range. How are particular scapes composed in a given place? Rather than decide this question in advance, as if the five scapes were universally applicable, I will examine how African American transatlantic imaginaries create *history* and *memory* scapes. These underline Appadurai's point about the transnational importance of the imagination at the same time as they

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*In this article, I ask how a site of history gets made into a successful tourist destination of a remembered past. I focus on a U.S. corporate-sponsored homeland tour to Senegal and the Gambia (the region of Roots) aimed toward commemorating sites especially momentous for African American tourists. Through the lens of global "scapes," I analyze the multiple aspects necessary to create and sustain this place of meaning. Of interest are the ways in which culture can be produced as a commodified object and, in the process, made available for ritual framing and reappropriation. [commodity culture, tourism, pilgrimage, identity formation ritual]*

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crosscut and confound the scapes he distinguishes. To localize global imaginings requires attention to the agents and distinctive legacies that forge their distinctive differences. Sometimes such attention yields evidence of unexpected identifications and oppositions.

In this article, I follow a McDonald's advertising campaign that rather successfully swept a group of African Americans into reformulated diasporic identities. These identities emphasized the collective removal from Africa centuries ago during slavery and nurtured the contemporary return of a homeland tour. I argue that the McDonald's African American homeland tour I analyze here was successful in producing deep feelings and a sense of transformed identity because it mobilized familiar images, symbols, narratives, and artifacts to stage events that could function as a transformative personal experience.<sup>1</sup> The commercial campaign began this process by bringing together the group and formulating their common project. But this was not enough. The tour itself appeared as carefully crafted as a Turnerian "ritual process" in which stages of separation, liminality, and reintegration produced social transformation (Turner 1969). In the case of this tour, participants were pressed to rearticulate their identities within particular narratives of family and homeland—narratives that allowed the participants to reaffirm their sense of being successful American consumers, but with a culturally privileged difference.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the wealth of familiar and powerful public imagery concerning slavery as well as African culture employed during the tour came together with the materiality of the tourist visit to produce a sense of personal involvement. The tourist as pilgrim, produced as a frame of experience, in turn enabled the trope of collective memory—the central trope of African American identity discourse—as both oppositional creed and American affirmation (Fabre and O'Meally 1994; Roach 1996).

In many places around the world, McDonald's has become a symbol of U.S. imperialist commercial domination; yet in tours such as the one I describe here, McDonald's has become an enabler of minority cultural identities. This contradiction pushed me to consider how sponsored culturalisms enter corporate strategies of global expansion. In various ways, communities based on identity are implicated in the complicated and contradictory practices of multinational corporations (Frank and Weiland 1997).<sup>3</sup> In what forms do minority cultural identities thrive under corporate sponsorship? This question can be addressed through a close examination of a specific instance—in this case, of how the McDonald's tour moved the tourists and refashioned them as pilgrims.

At the center of cultural politics lies a question of power. Self-consciously alternative identities perhaps challenge but may also reinforce dominance; both invigorate discussions of the new antagonisms that are breaking the hyphen between nation and state (Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1996), the dilemmas of identity politics of all kinds (Bhabha 1996; Hall 1996), and the passion and terror of the global spread of "long-distance nationalisms" (Anderson 1992, 1994; Clifford 1997; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996).<sup>4</sup> There is no simple formula that clearly delineates the power dynamics of cultural identities. For African Americans, the question of the politics of identity is fraught, under constant negotiation and continual reframing, not only within contests over citizenship and rights within the United States but also within a diasporic imagination.

Key to the problem of this article is the ironic fact that the very success of certain culturally oppositional formulations of African American identity has become the basis for a consumerism tied to commercial (rather than political) critique and commentary. African American appeals to traumatic collective memory and to sustaining ties to African culture originated in the context of opposition to U.S. national narratives of belonging and tended to be understood as a subversive formulation of identity. Today, however, those appeals are most obviously seen in mainstream television and in magazine advertising.

What is the political status, then, of such appeals? It would be a mistake simply to dismiss them as superficial marketing tools. An explanation of the current state of affairs necessarily begins with the question of why the association of commodity and identity seems so awkward,

even troubling. African Americans are as deeply involved now in the search for history and memory as they have been at any period in U.S. history. Stories of collective trauma and of African cultural healing move people very deeply, even if they take the form of advertising jingles. Deep subjective experience and commercial marketing campaigns are not necessarily mutually exclusive from this perspective.

One answer to the question of how commodities and identities are joined lies within notions of identity formulation itself. African American cultural nationalists have long maintained that African Americans must return to African spiritual identities in order to escape the grip of Western materiality and commercial greed. The search for African roots, in the formulation of many of its most famous advocates, is the dichotomous opposite of consumerism (Asante 1987; Karenga 1982).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this dichotomy comes to life as more than a mere opposition of equivalent forces. The search for a self that is deeper than materialism is embedded in many mainstream American formulations of religious piety, community distinctiveness, and personal identity. Such quests are inherently critical of materialism, in their common assumption that identity is something that precedes the market, not something sold. It follows that commodified identities are somehow less authentic than one's real self. Identity and by extension one's membership in a community must be gained through one's own careful, private, and self-searching endeavors. We often look in different directions to think about deeply felt personal identities, on the one hand, and commercial campaigns, on the other. We may not see them as dichotomous, but rarely have we searched for their mutual constitution.<sup>6</sup>

The heritage tour brought 96 U.S. citizens, 89 of whom were African Americans, to Senegal and the Gambia in the summer of 1994. Participants ranged in age from nine to early nineties, but most were between the ages of 30 and 45. The overwhelming majority were women. Visits to a 15th-century slave fort, contemporary markets, an orphanage, and villages all framed the experience, inducing for many an emotionally charged experience of reflection and immersion. Travel routes in such contemporary "return" journeys to the continent are maps of collective memory; to participants the visit becomes a "revisit," tending to the trauma of capture—the capture of Africans taken to the New World as slaves. Yet it was difficult for participants to forget the sponsorship of the giant hamburger chain, McDonald's, which played the role of financial backer and cultural broker. The most intimate memories of reunion with the place many African Americans imagine as "Mother Africa" were moments anticipated by clever marketing strategies—moments that helped create what McDonald's has called in another context "McMemories, TM." In the context of the tour, transnational trends and ideas about culture and identity converged with the strategies of multinational capitalists, the dreams of diasporic communities, and the income-generating plans of African national governments to produce Africa as a commodified cultural object of global significance. In this process, Africa became sacred and commercial, authentic and spectacular.

Heritage tours like the one I describe here merge familiar stories of slave journeys with the contemporary physicality of Africa, thus creating a subjective sense of remembrance. At the same time, the tours provoke varied and complicated responses among participants; the experience can prompt cultural crises and contradictions even as it carries the participants through the rites of passage that allow them to experience Africa as home. In the liminal space created by this particular tour, notions of self and community were called into question and, at least momentarily, sedimented ideas about Africa's meaning. As these emerged, Africa became a site for critical engagement and reassessment of the participants' divergent histories.

Personal transformations must be seen within a broader context in which a variety of influences help to shape one's notion of self. My discussion helps illuminate, in particular, the relationship between commercialism and subjective experience. The tour I describe below represents, perhaps, an ironic twist in which past and present converge, and culture and economy merge neatly. While 17th-century merchant capitalist interests brought Africans to

the New World, here at the end of the 20th century their journey back is again sponsored by capitalist interests—this time by a multinational corporation seeking to reunite African American tourists with their homeland. This tour illustrates one kind of complex interaction between culture and economy: culture made into commodity for transnational consumption.

### advertising and the aesthetics of identity

In global terms, U.S. commercial culture has set global trends for advertising since World War II (Frank 1997; Nava et. al. 1997). The impact of the social movements of the 1960s helped African Americans challenge and resist their exclusion from the repertoire of positive images in corporate advertising. A glance at television commercials and ads in African American magazines today indicates that in the 1990s, by contrast, companies have identified the lucrative potential of African Americans as consumers and promoters of commercial products. Susan Willis (1994) points to the pervasiveness of African Americans in American popular culture—in television sitcoms and advertising more generally. African American sports figures and rap stars offer a striking contrast to the relative absence of positive images of African Americans 30 years ago. Now African American images, especially of men, have become an international symbol of style—icons of cool, bad, and of oppositional, youth-oriented culture. Another trend, particularly evident among advertisers in African American magazines, has been the evocation of African American discourses of cultural identification with Africa.

The discursive placement of Africa within narratives of home and family is especially prevalent in the advertisements circulated during the annual African American History Month (February). One McDonald's commercial depicts animated African sculptures dancing around a room decorated with a *mélange* of cross-continent textiles, including Malian bark cloth and Ghanaian kente cloth. Another advertisement features Hannibal the general in a Budweiser beer promotion designed to celebrate great moments in African American history. More recently, in 1998, Heineken (the beer producers) promoted a trip to Ghana during African American History Month. Each of these efforts capitalized on the possibility of selling identity and community along with company products. Through the representation of family and community, these ads exploited the perceived connection between Africa and the United States from the perspective of African Americans. (African American advertising agencies have played an important part in this effort.) Manufacturers of products as diverse as automobiles, cosmetics, food, and film frequently pull a piece of an imagined and aestheticized Africa into their marketing schemes in an effort to captivate African American consumers.<sup>7</sup>

As a particularly concrete example, consider an advertisement by Polaroid (Figure 1). Against an antique map of Africa is tacked a photo of two African American children dressed in Africanized clothing and standing in a room perhaps meant to be a museum of African art. The caption begins: "Go back in history for an instant. Black History Month is a perfect time to explore the rich heritage of ancient Africa. Discover the legacy of its timeless culture." In this nexus of global commercialism and identity-making projects, Africa is framed as a site of meaning for Polaroid's rapid recovery of history through the production of a commercialist subjectivity. It is outside of time, in a frame marked by culture. This is a place that can be accessed through the click of a camera shutter.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar effort to attract African American consumers, in 1994 McDonald's provided the financial backing for a "homeland" tour for African Americans to travel to Africa in search of their roots. The tour was inspired by Alex Haley, author of *Roots* (1976). Initially a book and soon after a television docudrama series, this story helped create a narrative of kinship ties between African Americans and Africa that seemed more tangible than the fragments of memory pieced together in many ordinary family histories. Haley's encounter with West African *griots* (performers renowned for their role as oral historians) resulted in a genealogical narrative that

Go back  
in history  
for an instant.

Black History Month is a perfect time to explore the rich heritage of ancient Africa. Discover the legacy of its timeless culture. Go back in history for an instant, and make it last with Polaroid Instant Photography **Polaroid**

**CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY**

For a 16" x 25" instant version of an Antiqua map of Africa, call 1-800-454-MAPS. A \$2 charge will appear in your next long distance phone bill. Offer valid from 1/11/83 - 3/11/83. Quantities limited.

Figure 1. Advertising "the rich heritage of ancient Africa."

not only captivated the attention of African Americans but also garnered considerable international attention. *Roots* remains one of the most widely circulating accounts of African American history. David Wolper, executive producer of the television version, suggests that *Roots* had two elements that broadened its appeal to mainstream U.S. audiences: first, it was the story of a powerful underdog overcoming enormous odds to succeed, and, second, it showed the power of family (interview in Riggs 1991). *Roots* was an immigration story, a Horatio Alger story, and an assimilation narrative—themes that appealed to many Americans because of their own family

histories. Indeed, the tropes used by Haley were central in constructing an American identity at the same time that they helped build an African American identity. For McDonald's to base a tour on *Roots* was not just an incidental choice; it was a reaffirmation of the American identity of African Americans even as it brought them to Africa.

McDonald's represents a common hybrid in today's multinational culture. Its corporate strategies promote universalist Fordist production standards and work culture at the same time as its marketing strategies appeal to distinctive cultural communities (Watson 1997).<sup>9</sup> If globalization is the corporate search for universal markets, with its necessary dream of a united globe, its best tool is still the marketing campaign that appeals to particularistic cultural identities. Many scholars have observed this tie between corporate dreams of globality and their uses of localism (e.g., Wilson and Dissanayake 1996), but few have followed the effects of particular campaigns into the identity politics of consumers. Attention to the localizing practices of a multinational corporation contributes to an analysis of the ethnographic life of capitalism at the same time as it illuminates aspects of specific group formations.

### traveling dreams come to life

Most of the travelers on the tour were winners of a contest sponsored by McDonald's during African American History Month. Radio campaigns had been launched in selected cities, and varied strategies were used to gather contest winners. Some contestants were required to answer questions about African American historical figures, while others were asked to explain why they wanted to go to Africa. Still others were randomly chosen as part of a phone queue. Forty-one winners, each of whom could bring a guest, were eventually selected. The winners came from Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and elsewhere; notably, all of the white participants, of which there were seven, came from small towns in Mississippi, North Carolina, and Oregon. The selection process provided a cross section of age, class, and racial-group distinctions among the participants.

Not all of the travelers were winners of the contest. Also along on the tour were members of Alex Haley's family, a member of the original *Roots* cast, and a biographer of Alex Haley who was making the trip to meet informants connected to his *Roots* research. In addition, the group included members of the major Chicago-based African American advertising agency that had helped to arrange the contest (they came along to facilitate the logistical aspects of the tour), and an editor from a popular African American women's monthly journal. A colleague and I—both of us having previously conducted research in the Gambia—traveled along with the tour but without the sponsorship of McDonald's. I joined the tour almost accidentally. In the course of inquiring about a magazine advertisement for a trip to the Gambia, I was informed by the travel agency of the McDonald's tour. The agent asked if I was one of the winners of the contest. I had no idea what she meant. She explained the details and suggested that this was the trip I should take. Once I understood the possibility, there was little question that the tour might provide an important contribution to my longer study of Gambian history, performance, commercialism, and the international circulation of Gambian culture.<sup>10</sup>

The ten-day trip was facilitated by Alex Haley's son William Haley, who undertook the project as an entrepreneurial venture. When I inquired how McDonald's had become involved in this particular trip, Mr. Haley explained that, in response to a discussion at a McDonald's executive board meeting, a proposal was drafted and accepted calling for the corporation to sponsor a contest during African American History Month with the prize of a trip to West Africa. Haley added that McDonald's had agreed to an initial commitment of sponsorship for three years and that the details were to be handled by a prominent Chicago-based African American advertising agency.

From the perspective of the majority of the tourists, the most striking aspect of the tour was the immediacy of Africa; the tour allowed travelers to experience Africa, in all its sensual texture, with awe and wonderment. From my perspective as a long-term researcher of African culture, the most striking aspect of the tour was the way it enabled travelers to see exactly what they already believed Africa to be: a poor, struggling, hot, spiritual, creative place, full of sound and color. The Africa that travelers experienced was an Africa of news reports, tour brochures, television, films, coffee-table books, and African American magazines. The tour created photo opportunities into which travelers could insert themselves, thus reproducing familiar images to enhance the personal intensity of experience. For most of the travelers, this was their first actual experience with Africa, but this Africa had already been scripted by media-generated images and stories. Furthermore, the tour itself played an important role in structuring the perspectives of the travelers by shuttling them with care and efficiency from one impressive and vaguely familiar site to another. In the following pages, I recapitulate the stops along the tour to illustrate how they helped to shape the subjectivities of the travelers, including myself. My aim here is to convey this encounter with Africa within a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1966:48) that produced a longing for place and identity. In the concluding section, I consider how the tour was designed to produce a distinctively American longing for place and identity even as it staged encounters in the realm of African culture.

To my eyes as an anthropologist, the tour itinerary described below seems strikingly parallel to the classic rites of passage as described by Van Gennep (1960[1909]) and interpreted in several works by Victor Turner (1969). This structure was deliberately designed by the organizers. As I recount aspects of the tour in an effort to suggest the multilayered dimensions of the "return" journey, as in a Turnerian ritual process, I also analyze the ways temporal and spatial disjunctures experienced by participants (including myself) throughout the journey were resolved at the end of the trip to create a sense of transformation and reintegration—again anticipated by Van Gennep and Turner.<sup>11</sup>

As Rosaldo argues in the course of his critical rethinking of the concept of culture, rituals form "crossroads," "busy intersections" of multiple perspectives (1989:20). The Turnerian structure of ritual as well as commercialism help establish the course for a discussion of diasporic dreams and desires. Still, the tour as ritual would have been less satisfying had it not brought together a rich and sometimes contradictory set of images, exceptions, aspirations, and self-making projects that went beyond commerce. The travel encounters could not be contained by the plans of the tour guides. No interpretation would be satisfying that did not take into consideration some of the conflicting aspects of the participants' experience. By including particular participants' activities in my description of the tour, I show how the tour worked—both in and beyond the intentions of its planners.

### **a pilgrimage, not a safari**

"You are on a pilgrimage, not a safari." These were the welcoming words of our tour guides upon our arrival in Senegal. The guides, from Heritage Tours, were well accustomed to traveling with tourists from the United States and Europe as well as from other countries within Africa. The phrase "pilgrimage, not a safari" carved a distinctive regional niche in the more common representation of travel to Africa, which often takes the form, in imagination and practice, of a safari venture.<sup>12</sup> But this opening greeting would come to assume a deeper significance. Repeated almost like a chant over the ten-day period, it prompted us to be mindful of the perspective proper to this tour—as well as the difference between this trip and other journeys. The phrase also seemed to embody the exasperated sentiments of our tour guides when they had reached their limits with the group's behavior.

This tour was marked by moments when many of us revealed ourselves to be capable of becoming stereotypical “American tourists.” Many of the travelers experienced an overwhelming sense of consumer dissatisfaction when things did not go as expected; in addition to providing a constant undercurrent of tension, this had the remarkable effect of causing the tour officials to offer meals not part of the package as gifts to appease disgruntled customers. The tour guides quickly grew agitated by the rumblings of what appeared to them to be a group of privileged Americans.

The first task of the tour organizers—which began before we left the United States—was to offer us a sense of common purpose: the recovery of our sense of our historical ties to Africa. Participants needed the proper orientation toward Africa. This was not the imagined place of wild jungles; rather, it was the site of a great civilization. As students of African heritage, we needed to be respectful of this legacy and of the great kingdoms (as well as what some have called “queendoms”) that framed this vision. There was no better place to convince participants of this splendid heritage than the Schomburg Cultural Center in Harlem, New York, the site of one of the major archives of African American culture and history. It is a place where culture, at least to some, can be considered in a context of high reverence—a fitting place for the trip’s beginning.

The evening before our scheduled departure to Dakar, a reception was held for the travelers at the Schomburg. This send-off reception was the first meeting of the tourists and provided a chance for the group—with their diverse individual experiences—to receive an initial tutoring session to create a shared meaning of Africa. The reception was an elaborate affair, with musical performances and speeches dedicated to wishing us a safe journey. The guests were carefully dressed; the mood was festive, yet subdued. This event set the tone for the journey; Africa in this imagined space was a place to be revered. The African culture and homeland we were about to discover should be approached with mature humility and respect. To chronicle their impressions and personal experiences of “home,” winners were presented with imitation kente-cloth covered travel journals.

Most of the travelers I spoke to were indeed impressed by this elaborate send-off party; some were made uncomfortable by it. Although it provided an initial cohort-forming moment, many of the participants with whom I spoke said they left the opening ceremony with mixed feelings about what was expected of them. Some of the people I spoke to afterward felt intimidated and even alienated, comparing the event to a gallery opening for an exclusive art show. One of the contest winners expressed her sense of discomfort and wondered why she had been asked to attend: “It seemed like just another high art event at an exclusive club that I wasn’t a member of.” The reception was an effort to make a unifying event. Yet, cultural capital, exposed through class and regional differences, was highlighted; these and other differences would surface repeatedly for members throughout the trip, despite the organizers’ best intentions to create a unified community. At this early point, indeed, much deeper displacements were required before the group could begin to feel unity in the pilgrimage.

The following morning we boarded an Air Afrique plane in New York. We arrived at JooF International Airport, in Dakar, Senegal, in the afternoon. When we disembarked in Senegal, most of the tourists stood at a distance from each other. For many, this was a first trip to Africa, and few of those who had traveled to Africa previously had visited Senegal. Indeed, comments such as “I’ve been to Africa” often lacked national specificity and the distinction of place. The range of particular travel sites—including Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, and Egypt—melded into a single representative site: Africa. The very process of being a tourist was also a new experience for many. It drew us together, although at times in bizarre and ironic ways.

We skimmed through immigration with the privilege of an organized tour group from a powerful country. Then, however, we found ourselves stranded together, waiting for our luggage in the dim light of the airport lobby. Pensively, some of us wondered what would happen next.





Figure 2. Welcome to Africa.

Soon an enormous mass of suitcases began to arrive. Suitcase after suitcase, forming a daunting pile to our travel hosts; the sight certainly implied a stay much longer than ten days. The bags later seemed like magic trunks, revealing an amazing collection of objects: wide-brimmed straw hats; clothes for every occasion, however casual or formal; full-size irons; accouterments and accessories to dress up ordinary wear; presents to exchange and supplies to give; and much more—even food prepared by one of the travelers just in case the meals did not measure up to her accustomed standards. This could only seem like heavy freight to the baggage handlers, yet the comforts of home were not to be left behind. The weight and contents of the luggage would later become a source of laughter as we were struck by the convergence of packing styles that had led to this oversized heap. Obviously, no one wanted to be underprepared. Someone quipped, "Is this our African heritage?"

Two Senegalese guides from a tour company were at the airport to greet us. Video-cameramen paced around, eagerly stalking the McDonald's winners to record their first impressions of what it felt like to be "home." One person seemed especially unprepared for these questions, and perhaps understandably, since for most people an airport waiting area is hardly the place to conjure up images of home. Soon the guides offered their official welcome: "You are on a pilgrimage, not a safari." The reminder was first a subtle suggestion; as it was repeated throughout the course of the trip, it became like an advertising jingle, a collective prayer, as well as our hosts' desperate plea that we remember the distinction between this tour and an ordinary tourist jaunt—a reference to self-privilege and culturally insensitive behavior. Even in the moment of becoming tourists with our bodies and baggage, we were called upon to be more than tourists; we were to be pilgrims.

After the welcoming speech offered by the guides, we were taken by bus to the hotel. As the tour bus approached the hotel entrance, a glance at the building again reminded us of our sponsor. One large banner overhead read: "Welcome. The Haley family adventure to the homeland" (Figure 2). Another proclaimed: "McDonald's and Novotel welcome the Alex Haley family." This was not the only reminder of the commercialization of homecoming. As we exited the bus, we could scarcely pass the door without meeting other greeters. "Hello, my brother, my sister, welcome home," the vendors said, showing us full displays of trinkets and souvenirs.

These “instant kin” evidently saw little difference between expressions of kinship and offering good deals. At this first welcome, we did not know how to receive either kinship or good deals; most of the travelers were uninterested in such deals after the long journey from New York. Within a few days, however, many had learned to bargain more fully.

Once we were registered in the Novotel, the hotel representatives offered a small reception of welcome. Much of this moment of hospitality is familiar and standard fare for tourists who arrive as part of a group; yet the constant references to home and family reinscribed the importance of this tour as a special kind of journey. Later in the day, gazing out the hotel window high above the streets of Dakar, a few of us noticed the island of Goree—known to some of us because of its significance in slave-trading history. At a distance, its appearance through the mist conjured the eerie first soundings of what we later came to experience as collective “memory.”

### **crossed expectations in the contests over home**

Our tour of Senegal began the next day with an early visit to the U.S. embassy. To the people on the tour with whom I had by now made a brief acquaintance, this embassy visit appeared curious: what reason would we have to visit the U.S. embassy? There was, after all, “so much of Africa to see!” One traveler wondered aloud, “Why would we waste our time visiting Americans?” This visit, however, helped illuminate some of the cross-purposes and assumptions intimately wrapped up with the tour. Our tour guides thought it fitting that we be introduced to representatives from the United States; they brought us to greet our countrymen as any proper host might do. In contrast, for many of the pilgrims, this journey represented an opportunity to distance themselves from the United States, to find a more significant home.

The cultural misunderstanding that plagued the framing of this event only deepened as the visit unfolded. Our African tour guides assumed that the American hosts would—of course—provide some refreshments for their compatriots. Yet the U.S. Foreign Service staff did not provide what the tour guides saw as a proper welcome. “Not even drinks,” one of the guides commented, marveling at the poor hospitality. Was this an intentional affront? From the perspective of many of the tourists, however, this was the least significant issue raised by the visit.

Many of the American guests, troubled by having to visit a U.S. office while in Africa, wondered aloud what American officials could possibly contribute to an understanding of African heritage. We were ushered into a small and soon overly crowded room and asked to listen to another welcoming speech. This speech, however, did not emphasize the uniqueness of the tour group and the meaning of the “homecoming”; instead, the American hosts explained the conventions of proper behavior in Senegal. The expressions on the faces of the tourists in no way showed enthusiasm for this lecture. Many sat with a bored gaze, looking as if they were listening to a junior high school teacher explaining the basic rules to follow on the class trip.

The age and race of the hosts did not go unnoticed. Many of the tourists later said they found it disconcerting to have to listen to two young white men introduce Africa to a primarily African American audience. In the context of race relations in the United States, it was not an easy leap to accept the embassy representatives’ introduction to local conventions in West Africa as a helpful gesture. The collision of these emotional worlds provided a fertile example of the tensions that are created when imaginary social worlds collide with present moments. The group grew restless with a sense of exasperation at the self-presentation of the white men as authorities on Africa, and that exasperation peaked as one of them began to explain the current political situation on the streets of Dakar: “Today, around noon, there is going to be a political rally, and there will be soldiers around the streets. If you see a crowd, just go in the opposite direction.” At this point, one elderly man rose from his seat and assertively asked, with indignation in his

voice and yet with what I heard as well-practiced restraint, “Why do we care about this? We are here on a homeland tour. We are not here to listen to you tell us about political problems. What has this got to do with a homeland tour!” Some of the tourists seemed embarrassed by the directness of the confrontation, but for many others, he had verbalized the cause of their restlessness during the entire presentation. To them, the details of contemporary Senegalese politics seemed irrelevant, even antithetical, to a voyage of self-discovery and nurturance. The speaker’s response was nervously to explain his reasoning for providing the information and to conclude shortly thereafter.

This encounter suggested that the African American travelers were part of another discussion altogether. As the elderly gentleman’s point suggested, we were on a pilgrimage to Africa. Such a journey takes place in mythical time; in this case, it involved a temporal displacement of the current moment in which the international representation of an actual place, Senegal, and contemporary African political culture could only be (at worst) a Eurocentric distortion and (at best) an irrelevant waste of time.

There are important ironies here. The erasure of current events in Senegal was sealed by their conveyance to us within a U.S. racial politics in which white men, once again (as some of the tourists might have said), became the experts. The African American tourists thus resisted the information on cultural propriety in Senegal even though, under different circumstances, they might have wished to know it. And yet, even within a matrix of erasures and overdetermined insensitivities, African American efforts to create cultural ties with Africans do still sometimes succeed, if not always in the ways the pilgrims imagine, in bearing significant fruit in the form of culturally rich and innovative entrepreneurial alliances—such as this tour.

## **making memories**

The trip to Goree Island was the next day, and it became the first symbolic marking of the difference of this part of the journey and the events of the previous day. This segment provided the first inkling of the distinction between tourist and pilgrim, the deeper meaning of the tour. It was our first stop of “homeland” significance: a trip on the ferry to the renowned site of the slave fort on the island. And Goree Island was a name already known to some. Poet Nikki Giovanni writes:

It is all but impossible to be a Black American and not know Senegal. So many of us made our way to the New World through Gori Island. Through a fort and a hole in the ground where even yet one hears the moaning of the captives. What made those people survive, to replicate themselves—to live? It had to be indomitable spirit that would not be cowed by the cold from the ocean journey or the cold in the hearts of their captors. What warmth they would find together, not as members of different communities, not as members of different religions, but as people of the same color from the same continent with, admittedly, the same problems—and more significantly the same possibilities. [1991:v]

Historically, Goree’s importance lies in its critical place in maritime history. Spice traders, explorers, and missionaries found the island a convenient transit lounge while en route to the Orient. The island, first called Palma by the Portuguese, changed stewardship several times; the 16th century found the Dutch in control of it; by the 17th century, the French and British contested over the region (Barry 1998). The island was then renamed Goree; its location made it a strategic military base. As a point of transit and later a military post, the island also played a role in the transfer of slaves in vessels traveling to Portugal. This coincided with the development of sugar cane as a lucrative crop in the Americas (Haardt 1992). Today, historians debate the role Goree played in the slave trade.<sup>13</sup> To some historians, the evidence is that the fort at Goree played only a minor part in the slave trade; however, this site and numerous others have become symbolically significant for African Americans as well as tour company ventures.



Figure 3. The House of Slaves, Goree Island.

In part, this symbolic charge has to do with more recent developments in the island's history. In the 19th century, Goree Island became an administrative and educational center for West African students. In the 20th century, people like the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. M'Bow, became interested in preserving the island because of its architectural heritage. He sought and received commemorative status for it and, as a result, Goree Island is now included on UNESCO's list of historical monuments as a world heritage site—a place set aside for restoration and preservation. The island's slave trading history is invoked in development and planning literature on the site: "Goree holds memories of the infamous trade that once condemned thousands of the sons and daughters of Africa, if not to death, then to an exile from which none returned" (M'Bow 1985:11).

Yet we did return. The process of homecoming began on the short distance we traveled by ferry. The physical space we had to cover to reach the island seemed representative of the distance many of us had begun to feel from our state of mind at the time of our arrival. This excursion offered an opportunity to establish a sense of "home," the place where all the fears about the past as well as the hope for its renewal were invested. In reading about the island later, I discovered a statement that rang true to my own experience of the place: "A visit to Goree is a journey through space and time" (M'Bow 1985:55).

The walk from the ferry provided several apprehensive moments and perhaps even a sense of awe brought about by the meeting of the myths of our African home with the material site, the slave fort, the place where it all began. The group solemnly proceeded through the town passageways. Soon we entered the great doors of the *Maison des Esclaves*, the House of Slaves. Once we entered, the doors closed behind us, keeping all those who were not a part of our newly forming community outside of the courtyard. Our group wandered about the two levels of the imposing structure.

The ground floor had several small rooms that fanned around a staircase leading to the upper rooms (see Figure 3). The heat of the day drove many of our group to seek respite on the top floor, where the large paneless window frames overlooked the Atlantic Ocean and offered a comforting reprieve from the tropical heat. The circular staircase ascends to rooms big enough to accommodate several large pieces of European furniture. We were quickly reminded that

this top floor would not have been our place in history, however; these rooms were reserved for merchants as well as traffickers in slaves. The spatial expanse of the rooms drastically contrasted with the small cubicles on the bottom floor, which, we were told, had housed numerous African men and women for several weeks at a time, chained to one another while they were held as captive cargo to be shipped to the Caribbean and the United States.

After a period of time in which we wandered about in this contained space, gathering first impressions, Mr. Ndiaye, the curator, appeared at the top of the opposing staircase and began narrating the history of the fort in French, which our tour guide translated into English. In contrast to the earlier encounter at the embassy, the group listened attentively while the curator told us about the organization of the fort. In a dramatic rendering that evoked the heaviness of the moment, Mr. Ndiaye spoke of the capture of people to be taken to the New World. Many of the pilgrims were plainly sobered by this story, silenced by the realization of the significance of this site. Distress settled in as Mr. Ndiaye's account compressed the present against the past, recreating the horrors of the slave trade. Many group members, both men and women, were moved to tears. His narrative was becoming our "remembered" history. Again, I cite the historical account of UNESCO to convey a sense of the representations of Goree:

In damp, dark cellars, or torture cells for any who rebelled, the importees languished for weeks, waiting for the voyage from which there could be no return. And here, when they were put on board, each slave was branded with the mark of his owner. Then the slaves were crowded into the holds, where many were doomed to perish before they reached their destination. [M'Bow 1985:11]

The curator's narrative of the history of Goree Island confirmed a sense of collective history for those participants whose ancestors had been taken to North America: we were once again "home." Many members of our group wandered around the building a second time now, again entering the small rooms on the ground floor. Something had changed after hearing the presentation. Although we were a large crowd in a small space, there was a hush. Many people took photographs as if to capture the memory of this moment. A freelance photographer was also present in case any of the many cameras brought by the pilgrims failed. Some pilgrims filled empty film canisters and small bags with the sand inside of the fort as a material memento of the journey. Bill Haley offered a prayer and poured libations for those who had come before, including a tribute to the memory of Alex Haley, who died in 1992. We were then urged by the museum curator to enter a small room where the walls displayed chain irons that had been used to imprison humans. Log books of the slavers, cataloguing the movement of thousands of people, were also on display in a dark room. Certificates—written verification of our visit to Goree—were available for purchase.

The mood, now dreadfully solemn, remained subdued for several hours after the visit. After exiting the fort we approached a church, and some people prayed. We stayed on the island for roughly four hours afterward, and people were now moved to speak more freely with each other than many had previously. This bonding experience proved exceptionally potent in creating a deeper connection. Yet the pensive and reflective period was disrupted by the swarm of peddlers that surrounded the group once we were no longer protected by the walls of the fort. The historical return met present time, and we were urged back into our tourist status: "Hello, my brother, hello, my sister, won't you buy this; it is cheap." The parade of entrepreneurs offering the same items was overpowering; some of us were distracted from our former mood and purchased souvenirs.<sup>14</sup> We were expecting a performance that was eventually cancelled; it was billed as a tribute to slaves. Crossed disjunctions and connections filled the long wait.

As pilgrims we had now taken our first step in the collective experience of regenerating an emotional connection to what had only previously been a more distant set of fragmentary semblances. Images of ship hulls packed with Africans are African American memories in part because artists and filmmakers have rendered these images for us so concretely. At Goree, we

were transported back through time; through our ancestral connection, we were once again there.

Confirming or creating an identity that is reunited with the African past is an integral part of the pilgrimage tour. Theoretical discussions about cultural identity and diaspora emphasize the semblance of images and diverse forms that come together to shape diasporic subjects. Stuart Hall writes: "The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past,' since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break.' It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (1990:226).

One such critical site for framing the African experience in discourses of U.S. African American culture and history is the Middle Passage, an event that signifies the moment of severed ties, the voyage that transported Africans, made into commodities, to the New World. Pictures of rows of African bodies chained together without room to move for weeks at a time have helped shape a contemporary memory of that voyage.

The horrors of the Atlantic slave trade have led some African Americans to claim this as our holocaust.<sup>15</sup> It is an image of travel that repetitively figures difference between Africans and other immigrants, impressing upon us the uniqueness of the status of Africans. Africans arrived in the New World not as immigrants, migrants, or explorers, but as captured bodies. The Middle Passage also creates the point of origin for African American history as a collective project of memory, trauma, and healing. It serves as a reminder of the physical and psychic separation from "home."<sup>16</sup> The return to Goree Island, then, called up images of the Middle Passage that were readily available for many people on the tour. It invoked imaginings of the horror, the trauma of that experience that had everything to do with the ways people understood their own relationships to self and community. The journey to the slave fort filled the abyss of memory and tied it to the narrative of history; it resonated with an already strong African American "structure of feeling" (Williams 1966:48).

The tour and the rendering of the slave experience into a narrative conspired along with the heat of the day, the small windowless rooms, and the chains on the walls to convey a sense of experience, a filling-in of memory. Because of the strength of already cogent images of the Middle Passage, the trip to Goree Island seemed to prick the unconscious, (re)calling the trauma of slavery and the reuniting with "Mother Africa," the mother lost centuries ago and longed for since. The gathering of sand as a memento was an effort to hold on to the experience in a tangible way once we departed. Almost anything, even sand, could serve as a token of remembrance.

The participants' sense of self could not go unaffected by this experience; we were transformed by the experience of "being there." A sense of the past was created by the interplay of already familiar images of slavery and those material objects, views, and stories that bring these to life as "memory." The power of a visit to Goree Island, then, relies on the senses: the material feel of the visit, the sensory experience of public discourses of slave history, and the ability of these, taken together, to provoke the possibility of a curative of community ills.<sup>15</sup> At once the multiple spheres of significance come to the fore. Horrors remembered so close to the body can lead to a collective rededication.

### **"come to Senegal, gateway to Juffrey"**

Interestingly, although this tour was a *Roots*-like homeland journey, it did not start at Alex Haley's destination—Juffrey, Kunte Kinte's village. We visited Juffrey in a reverse order of the departure of Africans for the New World. Much of the tour took place in Senegal, and, in retrospect, perhaps this reversed order served a critical symbolic purpose: to begin at the place

of the dispersal of Africans to North America centuries ago and then to work one's way back "home." This explanation serves the logic of tour as rite of passage, but there are other equally plausible explanations. The tour organizers, as Senegalese, were able to make use of the competition for tourist attention between Senegal and the Gambia and in the process to construct a border-hopping evocation of our history as Africans without loyalties to a single modern nation but with responsibilities as continental citizens. This was nationalism of a different sort—a cultural nationalism familiar to African Americans, one in which nation, as a geographically localized space, is not the way the world was framed. In this spirit, the tour brought us through ceremonies of kinship and maturation and blurred present-day distinctions of African ethnicity, nationality, and regionalism.

After the excursion to Goree Island, our tour group continued its introduction to our newly reclaimed African kin: we visited markets and artisan cooperatives; we were entertained at an evening banquet; and many moments were felt deeply even as they were punctuated with commercial engagement. Everywhere we were accosted by the kinship invocations of the ever-present street vendors: "My brother, my sister . . ." Without a sense of national difference, we traveled from Senegal to the Gambia, an eight-hour bus trip that many travelers found difficult.<sup>17</sup> Some of the travelers found the commentary offered by our tour guide an annoying interruption to their own conversations. One young woman on my bus wondered aloud, "I wish he'd stop talking; he's getting on my nerves." The tour guide's description during the long excursion interfered with the conversation the tourist wanted to have with her friends. His running commentary, delivered over an amplified system, left little space for interactive, competitive storytelling, which was intergral to the trip. Others around me in the back of the bus said they regretted they had chosen a seat in the back. For from the back, passengers cringed at the bus driver's fast speed and vehicular gymnastics around roads familiar to him but not the rest of us.

We arrived in Banjul, the capital of the Gambia, with barely enough time to prepare for the evening's events—a banquet followed by a "naming ceremony" which was to become a moment of symbolic regeneration. After a meal of nondescript tourist food, a griot welcomed us and told us of the significance of naming: "When a child is born, he is not named for seven days and then a name is given to the griot, who announces the name to the crowd." African adults are not ordinarily celebrated in naming ceremonies by being given names, but we were not (yet) African adults. Thus, we were each offered an African name. The name was given in a whisper and then announced to the group at large. Grumblings from those who had already taken African names livened the conversation at various tables. The idea that every one of the travelers was a neophyte with respect to reclaiming Africa and African history and culture was upsetting to those who had long ago changed their names; this ceremony allowed little room for acknowledging mutual reception and appreciation. While some of the tourists saw this meeting as a mutual bond that bridged the gulf between Africans and African Americans, the tour organizers evidently saw it as part of a standard itinerary they provided for tour groups—not just African Americans.<sup>18</sup> To those in charge, the distinctions among tourists seemed irrelevant. We were constructed as a mass, and American at that. The naming ritual made sense to me as a rite of passage, conferring our new identities and signifying rebirth as changed beings. What seemed less clear to those immediately taken aback by this new status was our place as initiates. As perceived by tour organizers, we were—as Turner suggests in his discussion of the liminal phase—*tabulae rasae*. Still, for most participants the process of transformation had begun. We had faced the trauma of departure, and we were ready to receive once again our birthright and place. By shedding our former identities, we continued the process of returning home. Also present at this evening event was an elderly woman, a distant relative of Alex Haley and, by extension, Kunte Kinte. We were told that she would travel along with us the next day to her village, Juffrey, the village made famous by Alex Haley's search for his roots.



Before we proceeded to Juffrey, however, another important stop was on the schedule. The day following the naming ceremony included a visit to the S.O.S. children's orphanage. Prior to coming on the tour, group members had been instructed to bring old magazines and school supplies for the orphanage children. Here again lay a moment of disjunction between story and reality. The idea of African *orphans* seemed unreal to many of us, who had grown up with the notion that African people were never without family because, it was said, all Africans are part of an extended family.<sup>19</sup> And, indeed, this was one of the explanations used by African Americans to distinguish slavery in Africa from slavery in the New World. The notion that we were going to visit children in the institutionalized setting of an orphanage was also arresting because the mythic time of the tour seemed to exclude the current political realities of Africa—including refugees. Yet it was precisely within this imagined sense of Africa that the tour participants experienced the orphanage as moving. Who were the real orphans—these children, or we African Americans with no family to remember us here? As group members brought out the school supplies we had carried across the Atlantic for these children—including Ronald McDonald's school kits (a ruler, pencil, and eraser in a Ronald McDonald plastic bag)—we rededicated ourselves to our "African families." We could now become family members through reincorporation in Turner's sense of the term. With reincorporation comes responsibilities. This invitation offered an instructive moment, in which those of us estranged from our African families could learn what the expectations and responsibilities of family members might be. As we toured the children's dormitories, we were told of the disciplinary regime of order and religious instruction, no doubt included to impress Western tourists who might want to know how their donations were being spent. This account seemed designed to prove that the orphanage experience would build strong moral character and a sense of responsibility in the children of the village home.<sup>20</sup>

After a day in the capital of the Gambia we traveled up-country, at last, to the village of Juffrey. During this leg of the trip, T-shirts featuring pictures of Alex Haley and copies of *Roots* were distributed to the travelers, adding to the other tokens of the tour. Once we arrived in Juffrey, children met the bus with a chorus of calls: "*Toubob, Toubob.*" (*Toubob* means "white person" or European, but no one translated the word into English; thus, most of the tourists remained blissfully ignorant of what might otherwise have been a point of deep confusion and alienation.) We were then brought into the village, where the story of the kin of Alex Haley was told by the griot. Drummers and town dignitaries greeted us and ushered us to the *bantaba* (town meeting place). There Binta Kinte, the *imam* (religious leader), and the *akaloo* (village head) delivered prayers and speeches welcoming us home, offering thanks for our safe arrival and kind thoughts for our future journey.

Juffrey, like the orphanage, provided another moment for us as tourists and pilgrims to be instructed on the meaning of kinship—specifically, on how to stay connected to our newfound relatives. In a message delivered in Mandinka and relayed through an interpreter, a village official said: "It is very nice of you to visit us here and to travel this far to get here. We want to welcome you home. We hope your stay will be very pleasant. But you must remember that we would like to visit you, too. You must make it possible for us to travel to the United States to visit you." In fact, U.S. immigration policy greatly hampers the easy family visits one might want to initiate. This was another intervention of contemporary realities into the mythic frame of the retreat. But the gradual process of moving from the slave fort and the historical departure of Africans to this place of receiving present-day responsibilities fit within a context of the neophyte moving toward responsible adulthood.

The trip to Juffrey was another moment of deeply felt emotion, again filling the place saved for an African home with the details of an actual site—a village, an event—from which memory and meaning could blossom. As in the case of Goree Island, some pilgrims found a cathartic



release in this visit and in the thought of being home; others listened attentively as the dignitaries told of the importance of this return journey.

As we walked to an adjoining town, Alberta, encumbered by children pressing for our addresses (a familiar part of the tourist experience), some touched a well-worn stump, part of a tree referred to as the "freedom tree." We were told this was the place of freedom: if one managed to escape while being taken on board the ships bound for the New World and could swim to shore and touch this tree, that person would have gained his or her freedom. Somehow the idea that there were rules in this contest between life and death, family and expropriation, prompted a weird moment of reflection. In the background were old, deteriorated colonial buildings that had once served as the quarters of the colonial officers. Historically laden, the setting was a very powerful one. We had moved from the horror of captivity to an appreciation of freedom in the context of broken kinship ties, now rekindled. As North American singer and songwriter Tracy Chapman suggested after her visit to Goree, "Things can change" (see note 16). Here we were offered the hope of new, responsibly connected lives.

Yet even the most moving moments of deep immersion in the pilgrimage tour seemed to be followed by breaks; high emotional moments were tempered by opportunities to shop for souvenirs. Soon after the trip to Juffrey, we were in Senegal again, lodged in a resort for our final days together. We went unrecognized by the resort employees; there was no welcoming of kin here. In fact, some travelers felt that some of the hotel employees courted the white guests, treating them more cordially. Back in Dakar, the vendors followed us everywhere: "My brother, my sister . . ."

The effort to sell and buy culture marked the journey with a constant counterpoint; no experience could lie outside of the marketing of anything possible. In moments that I experienced with extreme embarrassment, the instant kinship was reciprocated in the crudest of "American tourist" ways: one of our travelers, for example, successfully offered the sweaty shirt off his back in exchange for local crafts; a bargain is a bargain, after all. Shortly after this, one of the tour guides lost his shirt as he intervened in an altercation between a tourist and seller as we waited for the ferry. After the tourists recovered from the jet lag of the first day, the tour was plagued with entrepreneurial contests between buyers and sellers, and an endless competition ensued over who could get the best deal. I wondered how far this competitive strategy might have gone if the bargainers had converted their C.F.A. to U.S. equivalencies and realized the meager sums to which they had reduced the traders' prices. Additionally disturbing were the assumptions made on the basis of images of Africa generated by the U.S. media. Misconceptions about Africa were framed within a narrative of underdevelopment; the idea that Africans lacked business sense was used to explain the poverty of the continent. Once again abstracting Africa out of contemporary geopolitical realities, the mythic space of recuperation and rebuilding failed to provide a frame wide enough to accommodate an understanding of the conditions of life in Africa.

On the final day, there was one more banquet. The tourist-pilgrims were urged to wear their newly tailored African clothes to the final festivities. This was the evening of our departure, and the celebration was much like a graduation ceremony, with musicians and speeches. We were each individually invited to the stage and congratulated on completing a difficult journey. We could now return to our homes with the knowledge—properly feted—that we could carry the strength of this process of rebirth with us for the rest of our lives. Clearly, this tour was meant to be a life-changing experience. We were given certificates by the tour convener, William Haley, attesting to our completion of the homeland journey. People exchanged addresses and said goodbye as if we would not be traveling together back to New York later that evening. Yet this, too, was a process already figured in Turner's analytic frame—the process of reincorporation.

At the end, everything seemed possible: memory, solidarity, regeneration. All of the cultural misunderstandings that framed the ironies of the trip seemed full of productive potential: stories of reunion that blurred distinction; a moment of growth for both African and African American makers of selves and livelihoods. On the one hand, so much of what was there at that final ceremony was what we had brought with us—even our African clothes. Many of the travelers had brought African clothes made in New York in those voluminous suitcases. In this sense, much of the Africa we had managed to appreciate was not so different from the U.S.-made Africa already a part of many people's lives through the tailors and hairdressers of our urban centers. On the other hand, we had tapped a vein of West African entrepreneurship, eager to present to us the marketers' Africa. Our experience at least had the advantages of reverent attention and heartfelt—if transient, privileged, and awkward—solidarity. Perhaps something would come of it. And yet one may still ask about the visions we pilgrims carried with us.

### **the domestication of dreams**

What can be said about identity formation and the specificity of the current moment in shaping identity and political culture? What of these "sponsored identities" (Davila 1997) that generate a particular relationship to concepts of self and community within globalization? The transatlantic reunion sponsored by the McDonald's homeland tour united places and peoples normally dispersed and helped create what was for many of the U.S. participants a deeply moving experience. At the same time, it is important to ask about the limits of this vision. The corporate sponsorship fostered a view that, as my informant responses indicated, helped contain and frame those encounters in specific ways. Informal conversations with a few of the travelers suggested they felt that what Africa needed was economic development. Such assumptions mirror the dreams of modernization. And yet some of these same people noted the economic development failures of their own communities in the United States. Less clear was their analysis of the historical and larger structural factors that keep Africa in a precarious position in relation to the world economy. And yet some of the responses of the tourists seemed to indicate an openness to understanding the effects of global capitalism. But how is this knowledge gained at this historical moment of liberal capital in contrast to the 1960s, for example? Their localized view of the causes of poverty reminded me of the ways, today self-improvement and atonement are held out as the stuff to fill the gap between poverty and success.

In contrast, many African American cultural nationalists of the 1960s movements defined their projects as attempts to build an alternative vision outside of a U.S. politics and logic. Many claimed new identities by rejecting family names—what were referred to as slave names—and by taking on "African" names; many opted for "African" spiritual alternatives to Christianity. Cultural nationalisms of various forms seemed to suggest there was some place of opposition outside of the regime of the West—and for many, that place was Africa. I was not surprised that there were moments of annoyance on the part of some of the older tour participants when their efforts to reconnect to Africa prior to this journey seemed to go unrecognized.

Indeed, there is a deep sense of continuity between these early "alternative" identity makings and the contemporary search for roots. Yet the current moment of identity making is also distinctive. In striking contrast to the political organizing of this earlier period is the current proliferation of autobiographies and self-help books that now take up a great deal of space in bookstores and in African American book sections. Social organizing around the recent Million Man March in 1996 and the Million Women March in 1997 mobilized large numbers of African American men and women in gender-segregated rallies, the explicit focus of which was atonement and community development through self-reflection. What was less clear in these events was an understanding of something larger than a collection of individual selves. In

contrast to the critique of imperialism and global expansion that would have been a part of an earlier moment of mobilizing, there is now a domestication of dreams—a vision that turns inward rather than challenging corporate strategies and logics. Oppositional identities no longer appear to be autonomous from global commerce, even to their most radically passionate adherents; instead, they are inescapably intertwined. The business of identity is a productive strategy for corporate gains.

This brings us back to Turner's model of ritual process which emphasizes the ways ritual helps create and sustain group cohesion. Certainly, the tour I have described created a strong sense of unity. Yet perhaps it is also useful to consider this ritual solidarity in relation to its self-conscious production, that is, in relation to commercial strategy. From this perspective, ritual takes on some of the features of ideology—one powerful commitment within many. Maurice Bloch's dialogue with Turner is relevant (Bloch 1989); ritual is not the only expression that might come from a given community. Ritual can be repetitive, inward-looking, celebratory of the powers that be; there are other alternatives.

In considering African American homeland tours, how might ritual serve the purposes of a powerful corporation? Frank (1997) persuasively argues that the very strategies that framed oppositional culture and rebellion against conformity and suburban life are now the things businesses actively seek to market. The rhetoric of individuality and choice circulate throughout ad campaigns, presenting mass-market goods as unique and even subversive choices. Furthermore, the images and ideologies of powerful advertising campaigns insert their presence globally. "Local development" projects struggle for the notice of corporate sponsorship where philanthropic organizations and international agencies once provided support. Prominent in this corporate advertising are images of African Americans, which figure boldly in selling "America's" global dreams. These images are transmitted not just to African American consumers. Their stylish attitudes of opposition-as-consumption are marketed with products around the world. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, consumers can now witness the entertaining antics and passionate identity struggles of African Americans in search of the perfect product. These images sell American goods and American style, not just African American causes. To the extent that African Americans absorb themselves in the inward-looking rituals of identity making within this commercial context, we become icons of American corporate expansion.

Even as anthropologists respect the power of diasporic collective memory, the McDonald's tour and other corporate-sponsored dreams prompt an important caveat: it is crucial to think about the political visions and translocal collaborations they make possible and impossible. The McDonald's tour I have described brought participants into an identity journey that blocked out much of contemporary politics, both African and American, even as it gave us a sense of connection. I have tried to craft my description of the tour to evoke this journey of community and self-discovery: its deliberate, measured rhythm; its ability to keep participants focused on the journey itself; its creation of an imagined community of pilgrims outside of the space and time of African or American debates and differences. This discussion highlights the limits of a ritual return to the past as a way to forge ties between Africa and diasporic communities. I suggest that one must be attentive to the conditions that help finance and facilitate these "return" journeys.

If, as cultural analysts, our study of the politics of identity formation is to offer a sense of the simultaneous and contradictory aspects of these projects, we must tack back and forth between large scale theories of transnational processes and the specific projects in which these transformative elements are thought to land. Models for the study of global processes, particularly those that foreground disjuncture, such as Appadurai's *scapes* (1990) or Castells's (1997) or Hannerz's (1996) theories of networks and global connections, also require attention to the rituals that shape critical aspects of late 20th-century subjectivities.

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1. Joan Scott's (1991) essay on experience makes the important point that the process by which experience is formed cannot be taken for granted. Hall (1990) points to the intricate process of memory in identity formation in diasporic communities. Subjective experience as described in this article refers back to the implications of Appadurai's (1990) model where "experience" is constituted through various kinds of media.

2. Victor Turner's discussion of the process of ritual and *communitas* lays some of the ground work for an interpretation of the tour, but this interpretative frame seemed already a part of the tour guides' toolkit. It is the movement through various stages, of ritual markings of place and time, that became integral elements to the tourist journey. Rituals enliven events; they perform moments of social history by tying practice and performance into a kind of structure of feeling that can generate a transformative effect. Although a great deal of Turner's work addressed the ritual processes in pre-capitalist societies, in later years Turner also turned his lens to analyze what he refers to as spontaneous communities. A spontaneous community, he offers, is a "phase, a moment, not a permanent condition" (1969:138). What one seeks is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being. Obviously moved by moments of deep encounter with "remembered" pasts, many people on the McDonald's tour expressed a sense of belonging.

3. For a discussion of contemporary business practices and the modelling of needs and wants by corporate strategies, see Frank and Weiland 1997.

4. Clifford (1997) also insightfully explores the intellectual and political debates about diaspora. This interrogation forces cultural analysts to explain what one is referring to when discussing the concept of diaspora. When I conducted research in the Gambia at an earlier period, people often thought that *African American* referred to Africans who had recently migrated to the United States. Thus the activities of black Americans with long ancestry in the New World fit into an older formulation of the Black Atlantic. As Clifford's work implies, this raises the need for further discussion about the various meanings and communities within diaspora.

5. To collapse all nationalisms into one category blurs the distinctions in the variety of nationalisms that are grouped under the rubric of black nationalism. The ideologies informing Garveyism in the early part of the 20th century and contemporary U.S. black Muslims, as just two examples, are not in tension with capitalism. The nationalism of the Black Panthers and Congress of African People, two 1960s-based nationalisms with a global perspective, actively critiqued capitalism and turned to other places—Tanzania, Mozambique, Cuba, and China, for example—for models of alternative political visions. While all of these share a privileging of race, there are differences in the ways politics was imagined. Also, these nationalisms must be seen within dominant national identity formulations that generated exclusionary practices to which these "minority" nationalisms were articulated. For an extensive discussion of the ways Africa and ideas of gender figured into the cultural politics of African American nationalists, see White 1990.

6. Some scholars actively challenge secular-sacred and commercial-spiritual dichotomies in their descriptions of pilgrimage. Delaney (1990), for example, expands the notion of a particular kind of pilgrimage, the *hajj*, to discuss the yearly secular return journeys of Turkish émigrés to their natal villages. She argues that people familiar with Muslim sacred journeys draw on it as a model readily available to them in their secular travels home. Similarly, Reader and Walter's (1993) collection of essays on secular pilgrimages also expands beyond a dichotomous relationship between sacred and secular. Pilgrimages to sites such as Elvis Presley's grave incorporate elements more frequently associated with religious journeys. At the other end of this discussion, scholars have examined the sacralization of consumerism and the secularization of religion (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). My focus overlaps with these discussions on the way commercial pilgrimage blurs the boundaries of categorial distinction.

7. Johnathon Briggs's (1996) undergraduate thesis on figurations of African Americans in advertisements illustrates the important role of African American advertising companies in generating and promoting images of African American life. Here we see that more is at work than corporate inclusion; the active presence of image managers in the form of African American advertising companies plays a central role in generating representations of African Americans and their associations with particular products.

8. The connection between commercialized subjectivities and histories is not a new aspect of capitalist culture. Thomas Frank's (1997) study of advertising and youth consumerism offers an insightful history of the long relationship between marketing and the "culture" of targeted groups. His particular interest is American 1960s counterculture groups and the ways capitalism shaped them. Frank's analysis is helpful in relation to my own argument in that he focuses on the strategies of businesses in creating oppositional images, rather than reading the images as self-evidently anti-commercial.

9. For a sense of how McDonald's inserts itself locally, see Watson's 1997 edited volume on McDonald's presence in Asia.

10. Financial support for my participation was provided by the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University. Tour organizer William Haley graciously granted me permission to travel with the group.

11. While correcting the final version of this article, I discovered that Olga Idriss Davis (1997) also analyzes Goree Island as a Turnerian pilgrimage site. She sees Goree as a place ripe for the transformation of self, and her analysis traces the rhetorical ways the tour captures African American's need of (re)connection to Africa. The coincidence in our use of Turner confirms my assertion that the tour guides promoted this *homeland* site as a ritual place, strategically aimed at creating a powerfully moving experience for African Americans. It is the use of the trope of the ritual return journey that is compelling to me, at once a marketing tool as well as an effective strategy for confirming a sense of identity.

12. The recent popular interest in homeland tours has carved a particular ethnic niche that is distinct from conventional tours. Edward Bruner (1996) has written about the development of tourism and diasporic imagining in Ghana.

13. In the context of a long debate over the number of people taken in the slave trade, historian Philip Curtin has argued that Goree never amounted to one of the significant sites (see Magner 1995); however, Barry (1998:61–65) argues that Curtin ignores the symbolic significance of Goree to African diasporic history.

14. Each of the winners received \$1,000 in prize money. One of the winners, however, refused to spend her prize money during the tour. She held tight with the hope of paying off her bills once she returned to the United States.

15. Gilroy (1993) and Bauman (1989) note the significance of the slave trade and holocaust to the very idea of modernity. The parallels between African Americans' discussions of historical recovery and memory and Jewish histories of the horrors of life during the holocaust are striking especially in terms of their categories and narrative conventions (e.g., Antze and Lambek 1996; Hartman 1997).

16. The textual figuring of Goree Island as a place of significance in African American stories can be seen in the textual exchange between novelist Alice Walker and musician Tracy Chapman, who use their "memories" of slavery and the power at that site to inspire their campaign against violence against women:

AW: Here we are, sitting on the steps of what is called the House of Slaves, and I wondered what you have been thinking about and what you've been feeling about genital mutilation?

TC: Coming to this place probably felt like the end for so many people; there must have been so much uncertainty and fear. It just makes me think about what's been done to women and that they're being mutilated. . . . I stand here as a free person as much as it's possible in this world, and it's possible that things can change. [quoted in Walker and Parma 1993:346]

Alice Walker's efforts to render Africa in various forms—in fiction and in human rights campaigns such as the film *Warrior Marks*—raise a number of questions about representation and the place of African Americans in global debates between African Americans and Africa. Walker uses Goree Island as a place for African Americans to imagine both an enslaved past and a freer future. The removal of Goree from its contemporary West African context does not weaken its symbolic significance; on the contrary, it strengthens it.

17. The white participants were even more awkwardly positioned after the visit to Goree. Two white tourists sat in the back of the bus, attempting perhaps to show their solidarity with the majority of the tourists. This was not easy since all of us had just traveled through something that left us emotionally drained—and that connected African Americans in a way that for a time, at least, excluded white Americans. The remaining five white Americans sat in the front of the bus. There were other signs of strain from the emotional stress of the trip. During one of the stops, for example, one of the minority white passengers fell to the ground. Some people offered to help him to his feet, but he rejected their efforts, evidently preferring to struggle on his own.

18. The itinerary, indeed was followed by a number of tour agencies. For example, Spector Travel is an agency in Boston whose itinerary is quite similar to that of the McDonald's tour.

19. *Abandoned Baobab* (1992), by Ken Bugel (a pseudonym) is a compelling "factional" autobiography of a Senegalese woman estranged from her mother and (eventually) her entire family. In the novel, she moves to Europe and longs to address her sense of loss of home and family. In an important way, this work captures emotional tensions of separation and loss expressed by some African Americans.

20. The tour was much like excursions to demonstration factories in China and Turkey, each accompanied by a tourist relations staffperson who anticipates all questions and demonstrates the excellence of the conditions provided for employees.

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