



Between the African Diaspora's Broken Genealogy and Memory Lag: The Impossibility of Creating a Collective Memory



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Abstract

The dispersion of the African diaspora has engendered a dissonance among the various African diasporas, so much so that creating a collective memory becomes a conundrum. This paper offers an insightful analysis of the memory lag between continental and diaspora Africans regarding the collective memory of slavery. It emphasizes the politics and processes of blackwashing and whitewashing that have led to a difference in the sentimental attachments to the historical injury of slavery. Drawing on Woodard's *Slave Site on Display* and Achille Mbembé's "African Modes of Self-Writing" as theoretical works and Morrison's *Paradise* and Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* as fictions, the essay analyzes the nuanced ways historical traumas are remembered and experienced differently across geographical and cultural lines, particularly within the context of the African diaspora.

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1 Introduction

When discussing slavery in his essay “African Modes of Self Writing,” Achille Mbembe makes the argument that continental Africans and Africans of the diaspora don’t share the same memory of slavery. He argues that there is, on the side of continental Africans, “a significant ablation” (20). Achille Mbembe poses his argument in these terms:

First, between the African-Americans’ memory of slavery and that of continental Africans, there is a shadowy zone that conceals a deep silence: the silence of guilt and the refusal of Africans to face up to the troubling aspect of the crime that directly engages their own responsibility. For the fate of black slaves in modernity is not solely the result of the tyrannical will and cruelty of the Other—even though the latter is well-established. The other primitive signifier is the murder of brother by brother, ‘the elision of the first syllable of the family name’ (Lacan), in short, the divided city (20).

This “shadowy zone that conceals a deep silence” gives rise to a dissonance that hinders the creation of a collective memory between the continental African and his diasporas. Indeed, to create this space where collective memory can emerge, the African diaspora and the continental African must answer the obligation to memory since, as Derrida argues, in “On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness,” if we were to blame each other for all the crimes against humanity that the world has seen, no nation or people would be innocent enough to be either judge or mediator since “We are all heir, at least, to persons or events marked, in an essential, interior, ineffaceable fashion, by crimes against humanity” (29). Therefore, admitting one’s answerability can open up this space wherein dialogues and healing can occur. Answering the obligation to memory is not only cathartic, but it can also unblock the confusion between the African diaspora and continental Africa.

In other words, answering the obligation to memory can harmonize or narrow the degree of dissonance caused by the dispersion of the African diaspora. By the obligation to memory, I mean the willed desire to embrace the historical truth and to create a healing space where forgiveness can be called for, reparations or political reorientations, and reconciliations be made. Answering the obligation to memory is then illuminating for the future. Therefore, the failure to answer the obligation to memory widens the confusion and makes louder the dissonance between the unencumbered heirs of slavery - the African diasporas - and the continental Africans.

The dissonance caused by the dispersion of the African diaspora makes complex the legacy of slavery both inside the continent and in the diaspora. That’s why Woodard writes, “I believe that the legacy that slavery leaves us is the way in which we view things beneath the surface, around the edges, and in the interstices” (9).

Answering the obligation to the memory of slavery requires a critical engagement with the “archive fever” (to use Derrida’s term) or “the colossal failures in the archival records” (4), as Woodard points out. By the “archive fever,” Derrida means that the archives are inherently selective. By “the colossal failures in the archival records,” Woodard implies not only the selectivity of the archives, but also the authenticity of historical records and historical edifices like slave sites and other museums. To answer the call to the obligation to memory, what Hartman calls “the ethics of historical representation” (19) has to override the biased and self-exculpatory discourse.

I draw on Woodard’s *Slave Sites on Display*, which examines the issues of authenticity in slave sites, which I analyze as historical edifices that can greatly participate in reconstituting the historical truth and leading us to the obligation to memory. And Mbembe’s essay “African Modes of Self-writing” revolves mainly around the ideology of blackwash and its consequences in creating a genuine space for dialogue and healing. Morrison’s *Paradise* and Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River* are the two pieces of fiction that I will focus on. Morrison’s *Paradise* engages directly not only with fixing a broken genealogy but also with the issues of repressed and conflicting memories about slavery and the dilemmas of remembering and forgetting. *Paradise* also deals with the suppression of home. Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River* fictionalizes the dispersion of a community, and the dissonance and memory lag it can engender.

2 The Origins of Memory Lag:

In *Slave Sites On Display*, Woodard presents slave forts as both historical artefacts and geopolitical spaces. Woodard sums up the twofold dimensions of slave sites in these terms:

I contend that conflicts between purveyors of a traditional archival, historical past and propagators of a symbolic memory for the present appropriately begin with slave forts in Africa and morph outwardly to slave sites elsewhere in the global community. In this capacity, they express the tenets of a virulent, cyclical slavery and offer new ways to rethink its meaning in the modern world (21).

As a theoretical framework, Woodard's book can rightly shed light not only on the issues of authenticity around the slave forts and the conflation between history and memory, but also the manipulation and appropriation of the archives. As she asks when scrutinizing Gorée, Senegal's slave fort, quoting Carolyn J. Mooney, "...Who governed the memory about what happened at that fort, and who is officially charged with archiving that memory" (31). Sandra Richards sums up the interplay of various historical narratives operating at slave sites in these terms:

Third, slave sites are potentially contested spaces where a variety of historical narratives and ideological agendas are enacted. For some, slavery is one, albeit painful, chapter in a much longer, more glorious human history; for others, the memory of slavery is not quite history but rather a catalyst to unleashing concerns about contemporary powerlessness; and for still others, though slavery - and specifically African complicity in the trade - cannot be denied, more important is the forging of economic bonds between African- descended peoples in the United States and Africans on the continent (11).

The enactment of these various historical narratives and ideological agendas is what renders the creation of a collective memory almost impossible. I analyze these various historical narratives and ideological agendas as a direct result of the difference in the sentimental attachments to historical injury of slavery. If a community went through a trauma as complex as slavery in which some people are perpetrators, others victims, and still others bystanders, their sentimental attachments to historical injury can't be the same. Therefore, creating a collective memory requires embracing the archival truth. Halbwachs in *The Collective Memory* explains here the complex diversity inherent in collective memory:

While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. While these remembrances are mutually supportive of each other and common to all, individual members still vary in the density with which they experience them. I would readily acknowledge that *each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory*, that this viewpoint changes as my position changes. (*Emphasis added*) (48)

To make each memory converge toward the angle of the collective memory, the cultural inheritors of the trauma must surrender to the obligation to memory. Halbwachs' claim that "each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory" is relevant since the cultural inheritors of the trauma experience and react to the trauma differently depending also on whether they are unencumbered victims, perpetrators, or bystanders. In other words, each group carries its own memory of the trauma in its unconscious mind. And it is this contrast of memories of the same trauma that I call memory lag or "memory décalage."

The memory lag, or memory décalage, also implies that the sentimental attachments of the cultural inheritors of the trauma to the historical injury diverge. I deliberately use the French word décalage because of its plurality of meanings and subtle nuances within these meanings. Markus Nehl in "Transnational Black Dialogues", quoting Edwards, defines décalage as "the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that refuse to pass over when one crosses the water" (49). He further explains that "décalage refers to an incongruity, a fissure in time or a gap in space" (49). To these meanings, I can irrefutably add: delay and distance. In the light of this theoretical framework, if there is a décalage in a community's experience of the same trauma, then there is a gap, fissure, or distance in their sentimental attachments to historical injury. The transatlantic slave trade epitomizes such an event. The continental African and his diaspora don't share the same sentimental attachments to the historical injury of slavery. This fact is brought to the fore when Woodard contrasts the continental Africans' attachment to slave forts with that of the Africans of the diaspora. She writes:

Many visiting diaspora slave descendants overlook the impoverished condition of local inhabitants and focus instead on the fort's connection with slavery, while those in surrounding communities, struggling to improve their lives, ignore both the slave forts and the slave descendants that gather there (29).

Woodard underscores here that the sanctity and attention that the diaspora slave descendants have toward to slave forts differ from that of continental Africans. In Woodard's quotation, the attention of the continental Africans to the slave forts is deflected by poverty. And yet behind this poverty that seemingly hides the continental African's lack of devotion to the slave forts lies a deep décalage/lag in historical injury. This décalage/lag in historical injury, due to a break in continuity between slavery as experienced, learned, and taught on both sides of the Atlantic, cannot be equated with amnesia, but with a repressed memory. As a victim of trauma, our memories can't be put aside, and if we succeed in doing so, we will suffer critically, searching for our true being and identity. Indeed, mourning is a healing process that never ends; only its intensity decreases. In this respect, Patrick Hutton reminds us in his essay

“Recent Scholarship on Memory and History”, “Remembering is a strategy of mourning, of letting go of a particular past, but slowly, critically, respectfully of how it served us, for good or ill”(543). In light of Hutton’s assertion, we can argue that the continental Africans and the Africans of the diaspora have a different historical memory of slavery. The latter, as unencumbered heirs, still hold a firm retention of the past, while the former, occupying a limbo status and suffering from the consequences of default states, consciously or unconsciously let a *décalage*/ lag set in between them and that past. The sentimental attachments to the historical injury of slavery being different, the continental Africans and the Africans of the diaspora can’t have the same memory of slavery since, as Mbembe argues, “the temporalities of servitude and misery” (20) differ greatly. Also, continental African faced with the turmoil of democratization, are driven to put the memory of slavery at the margins.

Therefore, this ruptured continuity accounts, in part, for the difference in the sentimental attachments to historical injury of slavery. To have the same consciousness and memory of slavery, the continental Africans and their diasporas have to endure the same suffering or severing, trauma, absence, and loss. And Woodard’s portrayal of the continental Africans’ attachment to the slave forts in contrast to that of Africans of the diaspora underscores such a *décalage* in memory and consciousness of slavery. There is an untranslatability of memory since the Africans of the diaspora still endure the sequels of slavery in their transplanted soil, while for the continental Africans slavery is more or less part of a distant past that they still have to reconcile themselves with.^b Consequently, the memory of slavery of the Africans of the diaspora and that of the continental Africans move poles asunder. The poverty that Woodard identifies as the plague that makes the slave fort inhabitants ignore them and the forts is rather a symptom of blackwash than amnesia. There is a dissonance between the two; a dissonance that recalls the African father and his three children in Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*. I turn here to fiction to exemplify the issue of memory *décalage*/lag since creative art is an efficient device to articulate the inarticulable.

When analyzing the relationship between the African father and his three children, in “Haunting the African Diaspora”, Maria Rice Bellamy writes, “While the father’s words attempt to provide an explanation for his actions and give meaning of the suffering of his children, the reader is left with the realization that he speaks into the void, to children who cannot hear him” (129). Similarly, the dispersed three children can’t have the same memory of the event as their father once they reach the far bank of the river. Also, as time passes by, there will be a memory *décalage*/lag between the African father and his dispersed children. Phillips’s *Crossing the River* can help better explain the encounter between the diaspora slave descendants and the continental Africans that Woodard describes at the slave forts.

Also, another narrative of blackwash around slave forts that engenders a memory *décalage*/lag is the inability to get access to the historicity of slave forts. There is a narrative of blackwash that obscures the debates, academic or public, about the authenticity of slave sites. About Senegal’s slave fort, various contesting ideologies defend or reject the fort as a site for the slave trade and deportation. Was the slave fort built to house the concubines of European slave traders? Was it a major or minor holding cell for enslaved Africans? Or is the slave fort just a myth? Answering these questions, which raise irrefutably other strings of questions, requires a researcher’s lifespan. On top of these questions, there is a wave of business tourism around slave sites that enacts its own political and ideological agenda. How to get access to the historical truth in the midst of these opaque archival narratives? In the midst of this archival opacity, slavery becomes open to appropriation and manipulation by its various stakeholders. Because of these various political and ideological agendas, slavery becomes a heteroglot opinion that recalls what Bakhtin labels “heteroglossia,” defined as conflict of voices in a text. Another metaphor that captures the heteroglossic ideology around slavery is Halbwachs’s claim that “History indeed resembles a crowded cemetery, where room must constantly be made for new tombstones (52).

In the light of Bakhtin’s theory of “heteroglossia,” slavery becomes a heteroglossic ideology that people can appropriate, regardless of the archival truth, to feed their political and ideological narratives. I mean these various narratives about slavery show that memory is being historicized to the point that it has jammed the archival narratives, thereby superseding history. The memory *décalage*/lag of slavery between continental Africans and Africans of the diaspora results particularly from this enactment of slavery that renders memory historic.

But by historicizing memory to the detriment of archival narrative, all chances of creating a collective memory narrow down to impossibility. The collective memory endeavors here to piece together individual memories that move poles asunder. The historicized memory of slavery transmits a historical narrative of slavery that is not utterly inaccurate but incomplete in many regards. The historicized memory of slavery enacts the historical truth. In this respect, Woodard talks about the performance of Joseph N’Diaye (Gorée’s legendary curator) at the slave site of

^b Yet, it has to be reckoned that part of Africa’s underdevelopment is caused by slavery and colonization as Walter Rodney exposes in his thorough analysis of the abiding repercussions of European colonialism on the continent in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

Gorée in this passage:

The fort's role in the Atlantic slave trade, in tandem with the sojourner's mission, is inextricable from N'Diaye's performance, because he has inured himself in the historicity of the slave past. Without his very presence and the narrative that he dispenses - or that of his successor - the site stands as a fixed symbol, an immovable object (33).

The narratives about slavery that N'Diaye dispenses lie between historicized memory and archival narrative. The visitor to the site is not provided with archival documents to engage critically with N'Diaye's historicized memory narrative.

At the slave forts, history tends to be oralized to the point that the historical truth becomes a theatre. This theatricality of the historical truth leads further to a confusion and disjunction between the continental African and his diaspora. And thereby damages the cultural inheritance. That's why both Derrida and Woodard pit the archives as a pre-occupied and contested space that they approach with interrogative and interrogating voices. Indeed, in the midst of these politics and processes of blackwashing and whitewashing, the first thing to be damaged is the ethics governing the archives, which participates in reinforcing the memory *décalage/lag* of slavery between continental Africans and Africans of the diaspora.

Woodard points out that in the continent whenever slavery is referenced in school curricula, "discussions about slavery heavily favor the point of view that befits colonial domination" (28). This politics and process of annihilation creates a *décalage/lag* in the sentimental attachments to historical injury of slavery between the continental Africans and the Africans of the diaspora.

Also, Woodard's assumption that inside the continent "discussions about slavery heavily favor the point of view that befits colonial domination" (28) coheres with Halbwachs' point that "each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory" (48).

The point of view of memory of the continental Africans is one-sided. This one-sidedness is a whitewash enabling the African education policymakers to circumvent African accountability. By refusing to openly debate slavery even in the school curricula and African literature, the continental Africans pass on the memory *décalage/lag* to the heirs of slavery on the continent. That's why Woodard, quoting Vamik Volkan, talks about "the infusion between the transgenerational transmission of injured selves with the memory of the ancestors' trauma" (116). Therefore, the sentimental attachment to the historical injury of slavery between the continental African will diverge from that of the diaspora.

Indeed, literature, in opposition to history, is the most suitable medium to relate wounded histories. In this respect, Nancy Peterson writes in *Against Amnesia*:

Wounded histories are written as literature, or fiction, and not as history, for only literature in our culture is allowed the narrative flexibility and the suspension of disbelief that are crucial to the telling of these histories (7).

Woodard draws our attention to the difference in the slave narratives between continental Africans and their diaspora. Yet since literature allows room for the suspension of disbelief, the historicity of the memory of slavery should not be repressed in African fiction. Murphy, in *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature*, articulates how slavery is rather metaphorized in West African literature. Indeed, as Murphy contends, "Metaphors package a traumatic past in a way that is digestible, communicable, and comprehensible. They turn literal pain into images that transmit the memory of suffering through the generations" (21). The metaphorical account of slavery in West African literature is a form of repression.

This repression of slavery in African literature is a blackwash that further reinforces the memory *décalage/lag* of slavery between continental Africans and Africans of the diaspora. In the same vein, some Africans of the diaspora suppress not only their memory of slavery but also of their homeland.

3 The Suppression of the Homeland:

In "African modes of Self-Writing," Achille Mbembe informs us that in some parts of the New World, the descendants of African slaves repress their memory of slavery. In this respect, Mbembe writes:

In certain parts of the New World, the memory of slavery is consciously repressed by the descendants of African slaves. The tragedy at the origin of the drama that constitutes their existence in the present is constantly denied. Because it is denied, this tragedy can never produce, by itself, any law or foundation. To be sure, this denial is not equivalent to forgetting as such. It is simultaneously a refusal to acknowledge one's ancestry and a refusal to remember an act that arouses feelings of shame. Under such conditions, the priority is not really to re-establish

contact with oneself and with one's origins. Neither is it a question of restoring a full and positive relationship to oneself, since this self has been humiliated beyond any limit. The narrative of slavery having been condemned to be elliptical, a sort of ghost persecutes and haunts the subject and inscribes on his unconscious the dead body of a way of speaking that must be constantly repressed. For in order to exist in the present, it is considered necessary to forget the name of the father in the very act by which one claims to ask the question of the origin and of filiation. This is, notably, the case in the Antilles (20).

The question we may then ask is: is such a repression of memory healing? And what kind of identity comes out of such a repression? The fictional work of Morrison *Paradise* provides some answers to these questions, particularly the discussion between Patricia and Reverend Misner regarding the Negro history curriculum.

Before coming to the discussion between Patricia and Reverend Misner related to the Negro history curriculum, let us set the context. Patricia has a history project that she holds dear and near. Through Patricia's history project, Morrison provides answers to the questions of who is naming or recording history and also what makes a history legitimate or illegitimate. These themes are inextricably interdependent. Patricia's history project consists of writing down the genealogies of each family in the town of Ruby, an all-black town. Let us just start by quoting this long passage that lays out Patricia's history project (and at the same time, we will highlight some key sentences):

Pat climbed the stairs to her bedroom and decided to while away the rest of the evening on her history project but was nothing of the sort now. It began as a gift to the citizens of Ruby -- a collection of family trees; the genealogies of each of the fifteen families. Upside-down trees, the trunks sticking in the air, the branches sloping down. When the trees were completed, she had begun to supplement the branches of who begot whom with notes: what work they did, for example, where they lived, to what church they belonged. Some of the nicer touches ("Was Missy Rivers, wife of Thomas Blackhorse, born near the Mississippi River? Her name seems to suggest...") she had gleaned from her students' autobiographical compositions. Not anymore. Parents complained about their children being asked to gossip, to divulge what could be private information, secrets, even. After that, most of her notes came from talking to people, asking to see Bibles and examining church records. Things got out of hands when she asked to see letters and marriage certificates. The women narrowed their eyes before smiling and offering to freshen her coffee. Invisible doors closed, and the conversation turned to weather. But she didn't want or need any further research. The trees still required occasional alterations - births, marriages, deaths - but her interest in the supplementary notes increased as the notes did, and she gave up all pretense to objective comments. *The project became unfit for any eyes except her own.* It had reached the point where the small *m* period was a joke, a dream, a violation of law that had her biting her thumbnail in frustration. *Who were these women who, like her mother, had only one name? Celeste, Olive, Sorrow, Ivlin, Pansy.* Who were these women with generalized names? Brown, Smith, Rivers, Stone, Jones. Women whose identity rested on the men they married --- if marriage applied a Morgan, a Flood, a Blackhorse, a Poole, a Fleetwood. Dovey had let her have the Morgan Bible for weeks, but it was the twenty minutes she spent looking at the Blackhorse Bible that convinced her that a new species of tree would be needed to go further, to record accurately the relationship among the fifteen families of Ruby, their ancestors in Haven and, further back, in Mississippi and Louisiana. A voluntary act to fill empty hours had become intensive labor streaked with the bad feelings that ride the skin like pollen when too much about one's neighbors is known. The town's official story elaborated from pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremony speeches, had a sturdy public life. Any footnotes, crevices or questions to be put took keen imagination and the persistence of a mind uncomfortable with oral histories. *Pat had wanted proof in documents where possible to match stories, and where proof was available she interpreted - freely but, she thought, insightfully because she alone had the required emotional distance.* She alone would figure out why a line was drawn through Ethan Blackhorse's name in the Blackhorse Bible and what the heavy ink blot hid next to Zechariah's name in the Morgan Bible. *Her father told her things, but he refused to talk about other things.* Girlfriends like Kate and Anna were open, but *older women - Dovey, Soane, Lone, DuPres, - hinted the most while saying the least.* "Oh, I think those brothers had a disagreement of some kind." That's all Soane would say about crossed-out names of her great uncle. And not another word. (187-189) (emphasis added)

This passage that captures Patricia's history project is very significant since it raises important questions, such as can we write down history without any dose of subjectivity? And if we add or interpret some elements under whose eyes is this version of history legitimate? And can we recover a history when some elements are missing? Or when the witnesses are gone or reluctant to speak up? And what is the instrument that allows us to distinguish "official history, story" from "oral histories, stories"? Based on these questions that Patricia tries to provide an answer, we can argue that Patricia's history project is in fact Morrison's. Morrison discusses here the question of what and who legitimizes a history. The passage that describes Patricia's history project informs us that Patricia's history project is not deemed legitimate in the eyes of many people in Ruby. A missing thread in the string of questions raised in the

quoted passage of Patricia's history project is: Is forgetting about the past healing or redeeming?

Beloved answers this question through the ghost Beloved that comes to haunt the present. For Morrison, the past is in the present, meaning the present bears marks of absences, silences, and ellipses that make the past dog the present. For example, Patricia's history project has instances that illustrate how the present contains the past. Patricia asks when she encounters these elliptical names, "Who were these women who, like her mother, had only one name? Celeste, Olive, Sorrow, Ivlin, Pansy" (187). It is these ellipses and silences, which you can't hide or silence, that blend the past with the present.

History is indeed, for Morrison's characters, a long string of atrocities, disappointments, betrayal, and retroversions (turning back or resurfacing). To avoid the stigmas and effects of history resurfacing, Patricia's father and the elder women in Ruby refuse to speak out. Each of the genealogical questions that Patricia asks is a history that conjures a historian or historiographer. But Patricia's father and the elder women of Ruby don't want to act as historians or historiographers. They are barely acting as oral historians. Morrison equates this feigned amnesia of the past with some sort of death for the whole community of Ruby. This forced or feigned amnesia is not healing at all; it causes a "rewound," a term I coined in juxtaposition with Morrison's neologism "rememory." "Rewound" is a wound that refuses to heal. This feigned amnesia of the past of the inhabitants of Ruby captures the refusal of the Antilles to embrace their ancestors: it is a kind of blackwash. Therefore, to paraphrase Mbembe's argument in the quotation opening this section, we can argue that the same refusal of Africans to acknowledge their answerability in the slave trade because it arouses feelings of shame and powerlessness is akin to the refusal of the Antilles to embrace an ancestry that awakens the same feelings.

In discussing the Negro history curriculum, about the education of black teenagers, with Reverend Richard Misner, the latter says to Patricia, "If you cut yourself off from the roots, you'll wither. Roots that ignore the branches turn into termite dust" (209). Patricia wants to dig up the history of Ruby and rewrite it without any subjectivity. And yet, there is a part of her own history that she doesn't want to dig up, identify with, or understand. Patricia, as a history recorder, wants to recover only the side of history that means something to her. As she says in her dialogue with Reverend Richard Misner: "Pat," he (Reverend Richard Misner) said with mild surprise. "You despise Africa." "No," I don't. It just doesn't mean something to me" (209). The reader is shocked by Patricia's response about Africa. How can she recover the history of her community, Ruby, if she overlooks the origin of their history? As a historiographer, Patricia is being selective. Reverend Richard Misner replies to Patricia in this passage:

"Africa is our home, Pat, whether you like it or not...^[LSEP]"We live in the world, Pat. The whole world. Separating us, isolating us - that has always been their weapon. Isolation kills generations. It has no future" (210).

Reverend Richard Misner's argument that to ignore the past creates a vacuum that kills generations connects well with the idea that forgetting the past leads to a "rewound." A vacuum is a void in space, and a wound is a void in the body, and a "rewound" is a regeneration of a healing wound. In both case scenarios, there's a fracture, something missing, or malfunctioning. Patricia, unlike Reverend Richard Misner, can't see this void if Africa is erased from African-American history. Patricia can't draw a connection with a distant homeland that her great-grandparents are said to be snatched from if she hadn't been taught about that homeland. Africa has been missing in US history curriculum. Africa has been omitted; that's what Reverend Richard Misner alludes to when he says, "Separating us, isolating us - that has always been their weapon" (210). To break this vicious cycle of isolation, Reverend Richard Misner talks to Patricia into including Africa in the curriculum so that the current and future generations of black teenagers won't feel the same home-rejection that infects Patricia. In another passage, Reverend Richard Misner insists on the significance of home:

"This is their home; mine too. Home is not a little thing."^[LSEP]"I'm not saying it is. But can't you even imagine what it must feel like to have a home? Not some fortress you bought and built up and have to keep everybody locked in or out. A real home. Not some place you went to and invaded and slaughtered people to get. Not some place you claimed, snatched because you got the guns. Not some place you stole from the people living there, but your own home, where if you go back past your great-great- grandparents, past theirs, and theirs, past the whole of Western history, past the beginning of organized knowledge, past pyramids and poison bows, on back to when rain was new, before plants forgot they could sing and birds thought they were fish, back when God said Good! Good! - there, right there where you know your own people were born and lived and died. Imagine that, Pat. That place. Who was God talking to if not to my people living in my home" (213).

Yet, despite Reverend Misner's insistence on home, Patricia can't seize the importance of home. Breaking the vicious cycle of isolation that Patricia is bundled up in is not easy. Patricia is piecing together historical documents

so as to understand the history of Ruby, but the big piece of the puzzle that links her and the Ruby inhabitants to their origin is missing. This explains why, after compiling and writing her history compendium, she burns it. She doesn't know what to make of it not because her history book is not legitimate before the eyes of the Ruby community, but because the missing bridge that would connect the dots and make the project complete and meaningful is home: Africa. In other words, Africa is the dot linking home to the transplanted home. Patricia is not conscious of this missing bridge. She doesn't know much about Africa and is not interested in knowing about it, let alone let her students study Africa. About including Africa into the curriculum, she says, "I don't limit anything. I just don't believe some stupid devotion to a foreign country - and Africa is a foreign country, in fact it's fifty foreign countries - is a solution for these kids" (210). Patricia's stance about history matches that of diaspora slave descendants of the Antilles that Mbembe describes as people who utterly reject their origin.

Patricia lacks substantial knowledge about Africa as she raises one question that puzzles both the reader and Reverend Richard Misner. Her question can be paraphrased as such: "Are there other homes than Africa?" As she puts it:

I'm really not interested, Richard. You want some foreign Negroes to identify with; why not South America? Or Germany, for that matter. They have some brown babies over there you could have a good time connecting with. Or is it just some kind of past with no slavery in it you're looking for?" (210)

Patricia's claim that there may be a home or another home other than Africa explains why she is completely lost to the point of burning her history book. There is no referent or starting point at all for her. And almost all of Reverend Richard Misner's answers to Patricia's questions point to the starting point, the referent, as his reply to Patricia's claim that there are probably other homes than Africa illustrates: "You're wrong, and if that's your field you're plowing wet. Slavery is our past. Nothing can change that, certainly not Africa." (210) Morrison's description of Patricia's stand to history befits the denial of diaspora slave descendants of the Antilles (West Indies). Such a repression of memory and history is not healing at all. It leaves the diaspora slave descendants more disoriented. Maybe that's why Patricia ends up burning her history project. But what does Patricia's burning of her history project mean other than the fact that there is a crucial missing dot? The project is incomplete, but it has much accurate information. Does this mean that only a history that is complete and accurate deserves to be archived? Can't another historian finish up the project? When we try to answer these questions within the framework of the suppression of the home of diaspora slave descendants of the Antilles, it becomes clear that Morrison grounds Africa as a root or foundation from which grow the various diaspora slave descendants, including the Antilles, for better or worse. That's why Morrison lets Reverend Richard Misner insist that "Slavery is our past. Nothing can change that, certainly not Africa" (210). In other words, Reverend Richard Misner is telling to Patricia that Africa is like the North Star that assisted runaway-slaves find their direction to freedom. Africa is such a North Star without which the African diaspora loses a sense of direction. And as *Invisible Man* informs us in the epilogue in Ralph Ellison's eponymous novel, "Perhaps to lose a sense of where you are implies the danger of losing a sense of who you are. That must be it, I thought- to lose your direction is to lose your face" (577).

Daniel Maragnes, in his essay "Identité et le désastre," where he analyzes the repression of memory of the Antilles and at the same time compares the Jewish and Black diaspora, describes the Patricia-like suppression of memory in the Antilles in this passage:

Nothing much like the Antilles (West Indies). Everything really happens as if a perfectly reverse movement was taking place, placing memory on the very margins of existence, as its outcast. The slavery foundation is thus properly denied, and the memory of the constitutive drama is exactly lost. (My translation)^c

As Daniel Maragnes highlights here, the Antilles put the memory of slavery at the margins. Such a denial of one's ancestry, which tends to render the origin untraceable, leads Maragnes to ask the question: why does slavery and its terrible pangs not illuminate the present of the communities that were formed, woven by them? He explains that this is in part due to the fact that contrary to the Jewish diaspora, which is bound together by a nationhood and a book, the African diaspora is really diverse and at times divided against itself. Daniel Maragnes sums up the contrast between the Jewish and Black diaspora in these terms:

The exit from Egypt is a positive for the Jewish foundation: this liberation from Pharaoh, which will result in the birth of a people. The "exit from Africa" of the black slaves is an opposite movement where a new people is founded in the silent history of the holds. (My translation)^d

^c Rien de semblable aux Antilles. Tout se passe véritablement comme si s'effectuait un mouvement parfaitement inverse, posant la mémoire dans les marges même de l'existence, comme son exclue. La fondation esclavagiste est ainsi proprement niée, la mémoire du drame constitutif exactement perdue. (2)

^d La sortie d'Égypte est une positivité pour la fondation juive, cette libération de Pharaon qui va fonder un peuple. La « sortie d'Afrique » des

As Maragnes implies here, the division of the black diaspora results in “the silent history of the holds”. The suppression of memory of slavery in the Antilles falls into this category of “the silent history of the holds”. Much the same is true with the muted rationales that have engendered the difference in the sentimental attachments to historical injury of slavery among the diaspora community. Therefore, we can elaborate on Maragnes’ argument that the divisive dispersion of the black diaspora comes first from the place where slaves were kept before deportation; I mean slave forts. Woodard frames this issue around the authenticity of slave sites.

4 Conclusion

On balance, in the midst of all these silences around slavery that Mbembé, Woodard, Phillips, and Morrison raise, it is not surprising that the African diaspora, as exemplified by the Antilles, unable to break through this opacity of silence and thereafter build the obvious clarity of a lineage, decides, like Patricia, to ignore their ancestry. In the Antilles, history is mute, but politico-ethical and historical imperatives demand that these silences be broken so a collective memory can be created. In Morrison’s narrative, Patricia’s rejection of her ancestry leads her to be lost to the point of burning her book. In the case of the Antilles, this thickens the shadowy zone of silence between Africans in the diaspora and continental Africans. This means that the collective memory of slavery can’t serve as a particular mobilizing criterion for the Black diaspora. Then racial and political consciousness will not be identical across the Black diaspora. Yet, we are all, whether Africans on the continent or in the diaspora, carrying the legacy of the black dispersion.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declared that (s)he/they have no competing interests.

Statement of authorship

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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