The 'X' in Alex Haley: reflections on 'roots', race, and kinship

Pels, P.J.

The 'X' in Alex Haley

Reflections on *Roots*, Race, and Kinship

Peter Pels
Leiden University

> Afrocentricity could not have existed without *Roots*. (Appadurai et al. 1994: xi)

> I have always said that once in my life I have to go to Africa. It is like Muslims who once in their life go to Mecca … I'll be complete. (Herby Goedhard, cited in Van Stipriaan 2013: 209)

The phenomenon of 'roots' – the celebration of identity on the basis of a real or supposed origin in some place or culture – is a major determinant of today's identity politics. Coupling 'roots' to 'routes', diaspora studies complicated the idea that one is where one comes from – not least by including global travels that produced both European colonialism and chattel slavery and their afterlives in the present (Gilroy 1993; Moore 1994; Hall 1995; Clifford 1997). It may therefore be illuminating to return to a book that has been credited with bringing the term 'roots' into popular African American discourse, Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976; Moore 1994: 4, 7; Howe 1999: 108; Weil 2013: 181). This becomes even more relevant once we acknowledge that – in a peculiar twist of James Clifford's *Returns* (2013) – it triggered heritage tourism by African Americans in West Africa. Such a 'return to Africa' was prefigured by Malcolm X, who was welcomed by West African nationalists not long after he dictated his *Autobiography* to Haley, who published it to great acclaim after Malcolm's assassination (Payne and Payne 2020). While this connects earlier Black activism to the publication of *Roots*, this essay is less interested in the historical roots of Haley's 'Africa'. Instead, I suggest that Malcolm's 'X', the letter that indicated his refusal to accept a kinship category – a surname – imposed by owners on enslaved Americans and their descendants, shows that African American

Etnofoor, Roots, volume 35, issue 2, 2023, pp. 17-34

roots, routes, and returns may generate theoretical reflections on kinship, race, and the kind of belonging we today discuss as 'heritage'.

I became interested in these issues when trying to understand how 'Africa' was used in political discourses on East African colonisation and decolonisation (Pels 2004). The politics of such classifications and their cognates (such as 'Black') seemed insufficiently understood without re-embedding them in histories and genealogies of slavery and colonialism – without, in other words, investigating transatlantic essentialisations of 'Africa' and their contribution to (ongoing) violence against people of colour. Moreover, these politics also questioned ways in which anthropology shied away from issues of racism and race, at least until the last decade of the twentieth century. Reflections on the anthropology of (racial) classification confirmed, firstly, that such reflections needed to take their bearings from African (diaspora) intellectuals, and secondly, that they should inquire whether 'a discourse or position that does not operate on the basis of an essence' is possible (Nahum Chandler, cited in Pels 2022: 93). Which forms of essentialisation emancipate rather than discriminate people? As both my epigraphs show, *Roots'* conception of African heritage had an impact far beyond Haley's African American home. Neither Afrocentrism nor the idea of 'roots' pilgrimage seem necessarily essentialist, but the impact of Haley's book on the tourist economies of several West African states shows that it did generate peculiar forms of exclusion and alienation – not least those having to do with 'times of slavery' specific to, but not generalisable beyond, African American experiences (Hartman 2002). Was the heritage promoted by Haley based on an essentialisation of 'Africa'? Or should we instead interrogate the tendencies of modern thought – anthropology included – to affirm such essences?

In that light, the observation that in anthropology, kinship is rarely connected to race seems critical. Thinking through forms of 'social death' that enslaved Africans underwent in the Americas shows that enslaved wombs were turned into capital assets (Hartman 2016; Morgan 2018; Patterson 1982). It generated enslaved peoples' common experience of racism, cutting one's relations to parents through sale, rape, or both – theorised in terms of an 'X' in reflections on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois (Chandler 2014). Kinship and race are historically associated because nineteenth-century anthropology *biologised* both – a racist period that many disciplinary historians of anthropology circumvented with embarrassment. Both race and kinship promised to uphold nineteenth-century North Atlantic superiority by grounding science in biological 'realities' – as William Edwards fused history and biology in a 'raciological synthesis', and Lewis Henry Morgan distinguished indigenous 'classificatory' from so-called 'real' biological kinship (Trautmann 1987; Blanckaert 1988: 19). This biologisation of human difference can be traced back to the double determination by transatlantic colonialism and slavery on the one hand, and the 'biopolitics' of modern states caring for the life of citizens on the other (Foucault 1980: 135-145; Stoler 1995; see, for example, Pels 2022: 87). This essay, however, focuses less on the history of racial and kinship classifications, as on the way that theorising the 'X' illuminates how classifications of race and kinship both affectively select specific

lines of descent – and thereby seem to affirm a typically modern desire for 'identity'.

In the following pages, I first describe the prehistory of *Roots* in Haley's career and in the book's gestation before I turn to a second section about the popular and academic responses to the 1976 book and the 1977 television series. The third section discusses the 'X', which I define as a structure of material intermixture of human bodies that racial purification renders absent and unknown. Haley's genealogies both refer to and deny their material constitution by an X. Genealogies work, of course, on kinship material, even if anthropologists ignored their commodified manifestations until recently. The pivotal role of *Roots* in the democratisation and commercialisation of genealogy in North America therefore challenges Daniel Miller's late twentieth-century prognosis that consumption will replace kinship at the core of anthropology (Miller 1995: 153). Instead, the kinship terms of both *Roots* and its transatlantic 'heritage' tourism both fueled and were fueled by commodification and consumerism. The penultimate section discusses how the 'X' is once more denied by the ways in which African American 'pilgrimage' tourism recreates kinship – intimately, but also by alienation – when selectively opposing White agents of enslavement to unblemished 'African' tradition, and affirming the latter by invented ritual. Throughout, I try to show that affective relationships that determined race and kinship historically carry over into today's forms of emancipation. While prejudiced concepts in human sciences tend to marginalize them, they are now partially affirmed in Afro-descendant tourist 'returns' to West Africa. However, an awareness of the 'X' in both race and kinship seems to call for further steps in the undoing of assumptions that seem central to the colonialities of modernity (Quijano 2007).

Alex Haley discovers 'Africa'

Haley concluded *Roots* with a short autobiography, which anchors the book's genealogy in a historical reality. It starts with the young Alex listening to grandmother Cynthia's tale of how her family's African ancestor rejected the slave name 'Toby' by insisting he was 'Kin-tay' instead. Son of two well-educated African American parents, Haley joined the US Coast Guard, served in World War Two, and started to write to fight a sailor's boredom. Promoted to a journalist position when his stories got published, his early retirement at 37 in 1959 allowed him to become an independent journalist and writer. The decidedly 'middlebrow' publications *Reader's Digest* and *Playboy* made his name (Moore 1994: 8), not least after publishing interviews with jazz icon Miles Davis and Black activist Malcolm X. Ghostwriting Malcolm's *Autobiography* raised Haley's interest in Africa, and becoming acquainted with the Rosetta Stone and its role in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs suggested to him that linguistic research might unlock his African ancestor's past (Haley 1976: 668). Going back to his elders, Cousin Georgia blessed him with the task of recovering the truth of deceased Grandma Cynthia's oral history (1976: 671). The Africanist historians Jan Vansina and Philip Curtin suggested that 'Kin-tay's' language was Mandinka, and that he was captured at the Gambia river (1976: 672-3). Haley recruited a Senegambian student for his

first trip to West Africa and heard from the latter's family that people in 'Kinte-villages' in Gambia kept detailed family genealogies. Returning to the USA, he devoured literature on African history, embarrassed to find that 'up to then my images about Africa had been largely derived or inferred from Tarzan movies and my very little authentic knowledge had come from only occasional leafings through the *National Geographic*' (1976: 675).[1] A generous co-founder of *Reader's Digest* persuaded its editors to fund Haley's travels for a second trip to Gambia to find the *griot* – a French term for West African praise-singers – whom his former contacts located in Juffure, on the bank of the Gambia, which led to a 'peak experience' which nothing in his life could transcend (1976: 676).

Haley's peak experience resonates with later events during the rise of African American 'pilgrimage tourism'. That Haley felt like a tourist is suggested by his description of a 'minisafari' to Juffure (having to employ interpreters and musicians) and of feeling queasy about being appraised 'as merely another pith helmet'. Yet he also wanted to 'flail an ax' through the ruins of the St. James slave fort (1976: 676). Arriving in the village, his interpreters descended on the so-called *griot* while the village children descended on Haley. Trying to make sense of a 'visceral churning' inside him, he realized that he had never been among a crowd 'where *every one was jet black*' (1976: 677, emphasis in original). Being told that the children stared because they had never seen a Black American hit even harder. Haley was even more impressed by the 'biblical style' recitation of the detailed genealogy of Karaiba Kunta Kinte, a Mauritanian marabout who settled in Juffure. Haley's 'blood seemed to have congealed' when the so-called *griot* confirmed that Karaiba's grandson Kunta Kinte, Haley's enslaved African ancestor, had disappeared. After an interpreter publicly read out Haley's grandmother's story about the latter, a crowd danced around him and asked him to hold one, two, then twelve babies, a ritual identified by Haley as 'the laying of hands' – the crowd telling him he is one of them. Returning by Landrover, villagers on the road greeted him as 'Meester Kinte' (1976: 678-681). On the plane home from Dakar he decided to write a book and entered into a decade of historical research that tried to trace Kunta Kinte's fate and that of his descendants in the USA, starting from Kunta's arrival on a slave ship at Annapolis in the second half of the eighteenth century.

In the penultimate section of this essay, we shall see that many of these elements return among today's African American tourists: the profoundly moving experience of arriving in Africa, being torn between an alienated yet intimate sense of kinship on the one hand, and anger about the atrocities of slavery on the other; the charm of an almost biblical African tradition unblemished by slavery, and the accompaniment by dance and drums of the performance of being accepted into a 'tribe' or 'family' through ritual. Some of those elements were also visualized in the *Roots* television series screened in 1977 (see the photographs in Moore 1994: 4, 17), and reappear in commodified form in pilgrimage tourism to Gambia (Ebron 1999; Bellagamba 2009). What made *Roots* into a 'world-foundational text', however, is perhaps less these reenactments of Haley's experience of an assumed return to Africa, but its model of identity: its 'narrative of origin and descent' (Moore 1994: 10). For that, we have to turn to the reception of *Roots*, and the text itself.

The writing and reception of *Roots*

This life-changing trip to Juffure took place in 1966, and, throughout the decade before *Roots'* publication, Haley successfully employed his commercial skills to sell his project, anticipating its translation into many languages and a motion picture from the start (Weil 2013: 193). Both the publisher and television network gambled on the book's and TV series' 'instant success', despite worries about how a 'saga … told from the black standpoint' would be received (Havens 2013: 34-5; Malcolm Diamond, cited in Havens 2013: 40; Weil 2013: 194). Nevertheless, *Roots'* astounding success, both in print and on TV, in the USA and worldwide, caught many observers by surprise.

Salamishah Tillet (2012: 8) suggests that the book's success must be understood in the context of a new, 'post-civil rights' moment in African American history: protests against Jim Crow laws, race segregation, and anti-racist agitation had affirmed African Americans' legal citizenship, but still made them feel the 'civic estrangement' of a lack of cultural or substantial citizenship. In the 1970s, African American citizens still confronted the absence of American sites commemorating the heritage of enslavement, especially glaring after UNESCO listed several West African slave sites as World Heritage in 1975, 1978 and 1979. Pan-African identities had been undermined by Cold War persecution of African American figureheads like Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois and official efforts to disrupt their relations with African nationalists (Von Eschen 1997; Williams 2021). Malcolm X may have pushed Black Power to revive Marcus Garvey's 'Back to Africa' movement, but these revolutionaries lost momentum by the early 1970s. However, a rising and increasingly wealthy Black middle class experienced its own cultural flourishing, perhaps best epitomized by the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival – many of its attendants finding the simultaneous national achievement of Apollo 11 putting the first man on the moon less important (see Thompson 2021). Into this mix, Alex Haley dropped his invitation to seek out one's African ancestor (Tillet 2012: 99). This signaled a new form of estrangement from 'the ideal of whiteness' (Tillet 2012: 9; compare to Du Bois 1994 [1903]: 1), but, as we shall see, may also be explained by appeals to White American guilt and fear.

Conversely, the book's relatively 'unchallenging politics' (Moore 1994: 8) made it acceptable to a large audience. The beginning sequence on Kunta's life in Juffure is one long romance of African traditional life, ruptured by shorter sequences depicting Kunta's capture and Middle Passage, his escape attempts, and, after being crippled by his captors, Kunta's transformation into 'the African' who marries one of the domestic slaves of the Waller household. A subsequent section of eighty pages shows Kunta impressing their daughter Kizzy with his desire for freedom and memories of Africa. Kunta then disappears as protagonist, as Kizzy's gruesome sale to and rape by her new master Tom Lea shifts Haley's narrative: while she impresses their son George with Kunta's memories, George, in turn, imbues his descendants with Kunta's desire for freedom. After George's descendants are sold and renamed once more, they are led by Tom Murray and his 'Cherokee' wife to freedom and their own 'promised land' in Tennessee. The section ends with Haley's birth and autobiography.

Roots was, at times, significantly retitled: not a 'saga', but the 'triumph' of an American family.[2] The focus on lost origins in an imaginary Africa untainted by slavery, on house-and-barn slavery rather than the cruel exploitation of field hands, on Kunta's rebellion and never-ending quest for freedom, and on the triumph of a hard-working family turns Haley's subjects 'into an ethnicity like any other in America' – a class issue not lost on African American left-wing critics when the book appeared (Moore 1994: 8-9).

Such African American critics were rare: many agreed with James Baldwin's praise on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* (1976; Baldwin's prophesies, however, were ignored: see the conclusion). A symposium at a Black Southern university lambasted commercial TV for reducing African American history to sex and violence, but its religious and academic authorities both praised the 'monumental impact' of the book and TV series on coming generations (Ambrose 1978: 125, 126). Other recent African American experiences may also explain its success: Kunta's silent shouts to 'kill the *toubob*' as he lays chained to the slave ship's deck are translated on TV into a collective shout that resembles Black Power's call of 'Kill Whitey' (Havens 2013: 41). The book hopefully presents such violent resistance by, among other events, repeated references to the Haitian revolution (Haley 1976: 350, 362, 380, 401, 412). Indeed, Kunta's anger and resistance may have confirmed the 'powerful emotional need for inspiring models of strength, dignity and self-creation' that African Americans also saw satisfied by Malcolm X (Gerber 1977: 100-101). The television series provided Black pride to Blacks, but also much viewer learning about slavery to Whites (Fairchild et al. 1986). The appeal of the 'roots movement' and American fears of late twentieth-century threats to 'family' may explain Haley's cross-racial success (Gerber 1977: 105). At the same time, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants' guilt about failing to live up to their own ideals, Americans' love for the democratisation of 'White' genealogies to include every migrant's ethnicity, and American television's global hegemony likely played a role too.[3] However, the TV series did not resonate as much in the Deep South (Fairchild et al. 1986) where memories of slavery and its afterlife were most fresh.

However, people rarely asked socio-historical questions about *Roots*: historians and historically-inclined journalists mostly challenged Haley's facts, arguing that Juffure was not a pastoral idyll but a hub in the Mandinka slave trade (Rose 1976; Wright 2011: 296), that his so-called *griot* Fofana was unreliable (Ottaway 1977), that his American genealogy invented sources that supported him and neglected those that contradicted what he wrote (Mills and Mills 1981), that his *griot* did not descend from Mandinka *jail* hereditary praise-singers, and that Haley made a series of methodological and chronological mistakes that demolished his historical identification of Kunta (Wright 1981). Such historical critiques may miss the point, since *Roots* was meant to inspire an experience of a 'universal' family history (Weil 2013: 197). This led François Weil to argue that '*Roots* inaugurated and symbolised an important disjunction between history and heritage' in American culture in which 'heritage aimed at *providing faith*, not truth or critical reappraisal' (2013: 198, emphasis added). Earlier historians expressed similar unease with 'heritage', seen as the

emergence of memory in historical discourse (Lowenthal 1985; Klein 2000). It may be hard to understand a heritage of race and kinship, however, by separating faith from critical reason (see the conclusion).

Literary critics mostly ignored this 'watershed in the depiction of slavery in American culture' (Bordin 2014: 4). While *Roots* sold more copies than any other African American book by 1994, the Modern Language Association's database showed not a single scholarly article focusing on the book since 1986. Overviews of African American literature did not dedicate a single word to either book or author. This may be explained by *Roots*' middlebrow status, situating it between 'serious' attention to high culture on the one hand and the study of the 'raw material' of low culture on the other (Moore 1994: 8) - and, one might add, tarring it with the commercial brush of *Reader's Digest* and *National Geographic*. But my purpose in piggy-backing on David Chioni Moore's literary analysis is broader: the genealogical structure of the book, which makes 'the return to the source, or the essence-in-origin that Alex Haley has described' into 'the absolute central metaphor of the text' (1994: 11) shows how *Roots* rooted the roots movement. Firstly, Haley's 'offering' of his genealogy 'did not merely claim one sure ancestor for his own family tree, he claimed an entire continent for an entire unmoored people' (Moore 1994: 10). Secondly, the violent emotions that accompanied critiques of the book's inaccuracies and possible plagiarisms (Weil 2013: 196) seem to indicate that people saw it as a 'sacred text' demanding one to '[reject] symbolic truth and [insist] on the *literalness* of the scripture' (Moore 1994: 10, emphasis in original). Moore's literary critique of *Roots*' narrative of 'essence-in-origin' therefore crosses over into religious metaphor, kinship, and heritage.

Genealogy, kinship, and the matter of the 'X'

The appearance of kinship diagrams in a literary critique (Moore 1994: 12, 14) indicates this broader relevance. They underscore Moore's central critique of *Roots'* genealogies: citing Haley's wish, at the book's autobiographical finish, that all Black Americans should be blessed to 'know *who* was either the paternal or maternal African ancestor or ancestors, and about *where* that ancestor lived when taken, and finally about *when* the ancestor was taken', Moore juxtaposes it to the fact that 'the farther back one can trace a single ancestor, the *less* and *less* that ancestor represents you, except … by a process of retroactive and selective affiliation' (Moore 1994: 13, 15, emphases in original). Most nationalist and nativist versions of 'heritage' replicate this process because they are governed by a binary rhetoric of 'home' and 'away' (Ahmed 1999). Seeking out a singular ancestor contradicts the fact that Karaiba, the grandfather of Kunta Kinte, represents only 1/256th of Haley's present-day person. Haley's 'selective affiliation' subordinates his White and Cherokee ancestries because it is overdetermined by cultural and social codes that forced *all* Americans to choose between being Black or White by the 'one-drop' rule that identified any visible Africanness as Black (Moore 1994: 15-16). However, the 'logic of unending ancestry' does not permit 'any final ancestral percentages' (1994: 17-18).

This reiterates that diasporas only think roots after having travelled routes, and that heritage labels are

based on a 'faith' that arbitrarily and wishfully selects past elements, which supposedly distinguishes heritage from history (Weil 2013: 198). However, Moore's hint at the 'one-drop' rule, and his statement that Haley's ancestry was mostly 'consensual', *'rape excepted'* (1994: 15, emphasis added) suggests deeper, more violent kinship layers. After all, George, the son of Kizzy and her White rapist and owner Tom Lea, was both classified as Black and enslaved to Master Lea by a practice that was legalised by the 1662 Virginia Law of *partus sequitur ventrem*, 'that which is born follows the womb' (Morgan 2018). It decreed that children of enslaved women would be born a slave, 'negating kinship', guaranteeing that White rapists of their enslaved women would not be denied ownership of the child, and thus 'conscripting' the enslaved womb as a 'factory of production' (Hartman 2016: 168, 169). Moore's argument that 'the whole plot structure [of *Roots*] is traced along a genealogical line' (1994: 14) does not explicate that this line is punctuated by sale, mutilation, and rape, making, among other things, two of the book's main protagonists – Kunta and Kizzy – prematurely disappear from both narrative and genealogy by capitalist forms of violence on the human body. Placing Moore's kinship diagrams next to Haley's narrative shows, moreover, that each violent break – Kunta's capture and mutilation, Kizzy's sale and rape, George's sale, and his descendants' sale – are accompanied by *changes in names* that signify *both* ownership *and* a kind of abject kinship – forcing proprietors' family names on their enslaved. This kind of kinship seems less 'negated' by, as much as *transformed into* race: the new name incorporates the enslaved in the owner's family but excludes them from the company of white citizens *in the same cultural gesture*.

Such selective presenting and absenting of multiple genealogical lines can be seen as the essence of kinship itself: as we know since David Schneider's *American Kinship* (1998), Western nuclear family ideals are as cultural as any other, and rest on a fetishisation of a biology initially offered as a 'North Atlantic universal' (Trouillot 2002). This fetishisation should be interpreted in terms of the emergence of what David Theo Goldberg called 'the central irony of modernity': the simultaneous institutionalisation of the discursive practices of human equality and of racial hierarchies. The paradox can be traced to the loss of legitimacy of selective genealogies of birth and religion (a leveling assiduously practiced on monarchs, aristocrats, and clergy by late eighteenth-century American, French and Haitian revolutionaries). This required new categories for legitimating hierarchies between human beings – a 'biopolitics' of 'species', among others expressed by racial classification – not least to explain and defend the economic and cultural prominence of plantation slavery and colonialism (Foucault 1980: 139; Goldberg 1993: 4; Stoler 1995). This fetishisation of biologised identities also happened in the nineteenth-century anthropology of race (Blanckaert 1988), and we credit Franz Boas and his pupils with initiating the early twentieth-century process of removing the question of human difference from biology. However, they opposed 'race' to 'culture' in a way that failed to recognise W.E.B. Du Bois's contemporary and more radical *culturalisation* of race (Visweswaran 1998). Twentieth-century efforts to remove nineteenth-century biological legitimations from race and kinship met with limited success (Lentin 2004; Visweswaran 1998).

If race and kinship are historical affines, the *partus*

law shows they are even more profoundly related, by a gendering that turned kinship into race. Jennifer Morgan (2018) leaves no doubt that the practice, which created a distinctly North American meaning of race, was legally inscribed well before scientific racism arose in North Atlantic intellectual circles. Discussions of the mutual determination of 'race' and 'nation' tend to focus on Europe (Balibar 1991), but the *partus* law fuels the decolonial idea that, long before a so-called 'Golden Age of racism' came about in Europe, stretching from 1870 to 1914 (Lentin 2004: 430), the plantation colonies of the Americas forged more intimate relations between race, nation, and citizenship by incarcerating kinship in a racial binary. The genealogy of William Edwards, pioneer of French ethnology and author of its 'raciological synthesis' of biology and history in 1820, suggests emerging scientific racism is related to slavery across only a single generation: Edwards' father fled from his Jamaican plantation to France in fear of the slave revolt that became the Haitian Revolution (Blanckaert 1988: 20). I submit that it is this cross-Atlantic forging – and forgery – of multifunctional imagined communities which connect kinship to race that makes 'reproductive labor … central to thinking about the gendered afterlife of slavery and global capitalism' (Hartman 2016: 167). The after-effects of Alex Haley's selective affiliation to his male African ancestor demonstrate the validity of Saidiya Hartman's observation.

This becomes particularly clear once we contrast Haley's genealogy to what Nahum Chandler calls 'the figure of the X'. Chandler discovered it in an earlier, more culture-critical genealogical effort: W.E.B. Du Bois's autobiographical use of his own family tree in the 'pivotal chapter', significantly entitled 'The Concept of Race', of *Dusk of Dawn* (Du Bois 2007[1940]: 49-67; Chandler 2014: 80). Chandler's interpretation of Du Bois's project diametrically opposes Haley's attempt to find a singular African ancestor: instead of confirming 'a self-possessive and self-possessed narrative subject', Du Bois seeks to illuminate, by auto-ethnographic example, a 'structural domain' that shaped race by the denial of intermixture (2014: 81). *Dusk* positions Du Bois's paternal genealogy, marginalised earlier in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois 1994[1903]), alongside the matrix of maternal kinship that motivated his 'Negro' activism (Chandler 2014: 97). The ancestral example of Dr. James Du Bois's enslaved 'common-law wife', born in Jamaica, whose name is unknown to his descendants, suggests to Chandler an absence, an 'X' that co-constitutes Du Bois's identity (2014: 101), precisely because Dr. James's son, Alexander, was forced to seek refuge with his Afro-descendant family members when his father's premature death denied him his ('White') paternal family's wealth (Du Bois 2007[1940]: 53-4). Chandler associates Du Bois's 'avowed reserve towards his paternal line, which buried this originary disavowal of the slave mother, his great-grandmother' not only with Du Bois's early identification with 'Black Folk' in *Souls*, but also with the selective practices of the one-drop rule and *partus* law. Du Bois's juxtaposition of his paternal and maternal genealogies allows Chandler to interpret the later description in *Dusk* as a radical gesture of 'strategic affirmation' that 'effects a denial' of this original disavowal (2014: 110). Du Bois thereby demonstrates that a 'structure of intermixture remains operative and functioning' despite the fact that 'its irreducible difference, its X' is predominantly sedimented

in a space of imagined racial purity (2014: 106). This allows Chandler to read Du Bois as critically resisting 'the reduction of the subject of historicity to a figure of the simple same' – a singular identity – in favor of looking at ourselves 'in a radically *other* way. This is the figure of the X' (2014: 111).

Put differently, Du Bois employed genealogy in *Dusk*, not to assert identity, but to *undo* it – because that quest for a singular identity is, in the way it requires to simultaneously affirm an 'other', also what weds modern culture to racial classification. Nahum Chandler associates the undoing of identity by the X, not only with the 'X' of a 'chromosomal kind' which refers to the absent great-grandmother, but also with the signature available to aspiring yet illiterate freedmen who, at the abolition of slavery in 1865, 'could mark only X for a name' (Chandler 2014: 102) – thus associating nescience of paternity to slavery's *cultural* practice of forced illiteracy.[4] Its post-emancipation afterlife appears where African Americans refused a slave name, either by adopting an 'X' like Malcolm, or by adopting Muslim or Swahili names (like Muhammad Ali or Amiri Baraka) – bringing in the contradictions accompanying most such conversions.[5]

Du Bois, therefore, *criticised* American genealogies even before they were democratised by, among others, Alex Haley. This suggests, firstly, that the singular identity offered by Haley overshadowed, when popularised by the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries' North Atlantic politics of recognition, Du Bois's deconstruction of the modern, Eurocentric and nationalist doctrine of singular lines of descent. Secondly, it shows that the irreducible presence of an 'X' in African American genealogies fuses kinship, race, and heritage together into a pattern of modern cultural politics – despite its relative neglect by anthropologists.

Return to Africa?

The association of kinship, race, and heritage as typically modern constructions of singular descent was confirmed by *Public Culture* editors stating that 'Haley, Malcolm X and others wanted to use Africa in this crucial manner in order to shield the American Black against the ego deficiency produced by White racism' (Appadurai et al. 1994: xiv) – affirming the 'civic estrangement' that Salamishah Tillet (2012) diagnosed. However, this essentialised '*the* Black Public Sphere', not least because it failed to take a consistently transatlantic perspective. Africans did not always welcome *Roots*, some of whom, at least, regarded it as 'Afrokitsch' (Manthia Diawara, quoted by Howe 1999: 110). Ironically, African American tourists encountered 'civic estrangement' in Gambia or Ghana too – whether aware of it or not – when their African 'family' greeted them as 'White people' (*toubob* in Gambia; *obroni* in Ghana). What 'return' to Africa did *Roots* and its essentialisation of origins allow? What role can the 'X' play in trying to understand it?

The explosion of literature on African American tourism to West Africa since the 1990s prohibits any overview in this essay (but see, among the more significant: Araujo 2010; Ebron 1999; Holsey 2008; Schramm 2016). I will focus on Juffure, the village where Haley 'found' his ancestor, to demonstrate, firstly, new phases in the reconfiguration of kinship

and race, this time by commodifying a past rather than an enslaved body. Secondly, it shows how selective affiliation remade popular transatlantic history and created it anew. That process, thirdly, produced a new modern hybrid: African American 'pilgrimage tourism' (Ebron 1999), which recreated African American 'civic estrangement' in a 'home' away from the USA, and invites us to scrutinise 'heritage' as a lineage that reproduces the affects of kinship and race against the background of the structure of intermixture of the 'X'.

Donald Wright visited Juffure on many occasions, but recorded, in particular, what changed between 1981, after he first published his critique of Haley's historiography, and 2005 (Wright 1981; 2011). Adding the Gambian experiences of Paulla Ebron (1999) in 1994 and Alice Bellagamba (2009) in 2000 completes the picture of twentieth-century returns of *Roots* to Gambia.[6] In 1979, Gambian authorities had not yet recognised the village as tourist heritage (Harrell-Bond and Harrell-Bond 1979: 85). When Wright visited Juffure in 1981, however, square houses with corrugated-iron roofs had been replaced by traditional-style round houses, thatched and freshly painted (Wright 2011: 306). In 1998, after Gambian governments had invested in a 'Roots Homecoming Festival', Wright visited the newly established Slavery Museum at Albreda, next to Juffure, with a tour guide who had earlier accompanied a Roots Homecoming Group of tourists (Wright 2011:306). Wright liked the Museum because its 'obligatory section' on Kunta Kinte that summarised Haley's story was 'brief' and 'inconspicuous' and focused more on the slave trade than on *Roots* (2011: 308). Alice Bellagamba, however, noted that it represented slavery as a transatlantic phenomenon, and expunged references to Mandinka slavery and the fact that many contemporary West Africans still relate to each other as masters and slaves (Bellagamba 2009: 460). Wright's 1998 tour guide first emphasised Juffure villagers' poverty and need for help before a young 'Kinte family member' recited the story of *Roots* in front of a photograph of Haley with 'his' Kinte family (departing from Haley by replacing the British slavers with the Portuguese and inventing witnesses who saw Kunta heroically resist capture; Wright 2011: 309). The latter not only affirmed Haley's kinship but credited him – rather than Gambian tourist officials – with supplying Juffure with water and electricity (2011: 310). Back in Banjul, while confessing to doubts about Haley's story, Wright's guide nevertheless said: 'But the story has been very good for The Gambia. Very good' (2011: 312). Another guide, Ali, accompanied Wright's last recorded trip in 2005: he shows some signs of historical learning but is 'a virtual fount of misinformation' who elaborates creatively on a newly established 'Roots Trail' – which stands in for the 'doors of no return' of African Americans' Ghanaian slave fort experiences – and swaps Haley's account of how Kunta got to North America for another (2011: 315).

Paulla Ebron (1999) and Alice Bellagamba (2009) add significant dimensions to Wright's story of how 'one book' affected Gambian amnesia about transatlantic slavery (Wright 2011: 297). While Ebron approaches 'pilgrimage tourism' from an African American angle, Bellagamba also talked with Gambian villagers who provided tourists with welcoming ceremonies. Ebron joined McDonald's 'African American homeland tour' of 1994, partly organised by Alex Haley's son William.

It brought winners of a McDonald's contest during Black History Month – in line with McDonald's new marketing strategies targeting emergent cultural segments – together with Haley family members, an original member of the *Roots* television cast, and a biographer of Haley (Ebron 1999: 915; see Pels 2023: 281, 314). Ebron highlights that its guides sold this tour by stating 'you are on a pilgrimage, not a safari' (1999: 916) – an image reinforced, on arrival in Dakar for a visit to the island of Gorée's slave dungeons, by a banner emphasising kinship: 'Welcome. The Haley Family Adventure to the Homeland' (1999: 918). The site visits strongly affected the pilgrims. They were angered by (White) American embassy personnel giving directions on how one should travel in West Africa, yet remained ignorant of the meaning of Juffure youth's greetings of '*Toubob! Toubob!*' – all experiences indicating 'civic estrangement', if in relation to different racial-national cultures (1999: 919, 925). Alice Bellagamba adds a significant visit of African American college students to 'Medina' – a Jola, not a Mandinka village – in 2000, to be 'initiated' as 'African' family. Like Ebron's pilgrimage, it included a naming ceremony and a ritual of family incorporation. However, this disillusioned both villagers and American visitors: on the one hand, the former complained that their remuneration (70 US dollars and a pile of used clothing) even failed to pay for the dancers at the ceremony; on the other, the latter could not escape the impression of having received a 'fake initiation' (Bellagamba 2009: 468). Indeed, the return 'gifts' show how estranged the visitors were from their 'family's' socio-economic situation, while both ceremony and tribal affiliation were inauthentic when measured against both local standards and Haley's story. The spirituality of this pilgrimage, based on the selective purification of Haley's ancestral line and its subsequent commodification of 'heritage' by American (tourist) companies, was under threat by the 'X' of intermixture: a nescience of ancestry – not least, about its colour-coding and ethnicity – that was not just genetic or chromosomal but extended into socio-cultural and historical realms. Considering the American embassy's 'local' expertise and West African perceptions of visiting 'kin' as belonging to another race/ethnicity shows the ritual attempts at forging 'family' to result in mutual civic estrangement.

Conclusion: On *Roots* returning the 'X'

The return of the 'X' to West Africa was viscerally brought home to me during my last visit in 2017 to Elmina, Ghana, where we encountered, in a dark side dungeon next to the Castle's 'door of no return', two vividly coloured wreaths, most likely placed by mourning African Americans. Unlike the 'unknown soldier' memorialised by modern nation-states especially after World War One, this equally unknown 'X' struck me intimately, like a family burial. It pushed me into addressing the affective 'elephant in the room' of heritage studies (Smith and Campbell 1015). Even when one recognises the impossibility of African American tourism effecting a 'return', one should acknowledge that this mourning 'exceeds tourism' so that its grief 'might be a form of critically engaging with the past' (Hartman 2002: 769). This refutes earlier views that, on the one hand, explicitly ignored mentioning *Roots*, but, on the other, also seemed to implicitly refer to it

by opposing African American nostalgia to critical memory (Baker 1994). Instead, one can see 'mourning' as a public expression of grief that 'insists that the past is not yet over' (Hartman 2002: 771). Once we identify such nostalgia as *aspirational*, aiming at different futures – as 'spiritual strivings' (Du Bois 1994[1903]: 1) – the multitemporality to which a pilgrimage triggered by *Roots* gives rise can be interpreted as an intimate *critique* of the civic estrangement experienced by African Americans in the USA. However, its invention of African tradition by a Juffure untainted by slavery also spells a new kind of alienation towards West Africans' past of colonisation by *toubob* as well as its afterlife in the present. In conclusion, I want to sketch several ways in which the declassifying of (racial) identity by an 'X' may help to undo such alienation.

Firstly, one should note how capitalist culture contributes to the alienating work of 'identification': the fact that African American 'pilgrimage' to West Africa cannot do without tourism, nor without Haley's exploitation of commercial circuits to promote *Roots*. This shows how mistaken Daniel Miller was in arguing that kinship would be replaced by consumerism at the heart of anthropology (1995: 153). Instead, consumerism *amplified* African American kinship by displacing it to West Africa as tourism. Moreover, the histories to which the 'X' in *Roots* refers when compared to their manifestation in *Dusk of Dawn* suggest that the simultaneous identification of kinship and race under slavery was also determined by commodification and 'consumption', but this time not of ancestry but of the bodies of the enslaved. In short, certain forms of identity politics seem to share a form of commodification of 'race' that alienates people from their bodies as well as from their ancestry despite that both are materially based in reproductive intermixture.

Secondly, *Roots* set in motion a democratisation of genealogy, oral history and 'heritage' away from elite standards of (White) pedigree that seems to counter a 'silencing of the past' (Trouillot 1995), at least in the USA. Making people worship Kunta Kinte as their ancestor seems to restore historical justice when measured against White Americans' ancestor cults that sought out 'first family' pedigrees or refused Thomas Jefferson's children of colour a place in history (Weil 2013: 185-6, 208-9; Chandler 2014: 23-9). However, if *all forms* of determining pedigree or ancestry can be haunted by 'unnameable' intermixtures of a figure of an 'X' (Chandler 2014: 102), such ancestor worship raises serious questions about how we, as academics as much as citizens, draw boundaries between history, heritage, and self-serving narrative. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995: 26, 82) shifted the drawing of such boundaries from pure methodology to politics when he argued that the Haitian Revolution was long 'unthinkable' in Western thought because it could be silenced *at all levels* during the creation, assembly, retrieval, and signification of historical facts. If the figure of the 'X' can be seen as a metaphor for the inevitable undermining of *any* form of selective affiliation that silences (parts of) the past, this means that we should expect 'inventions of tradition' in archives as much as oral history, in history as much as heritage, under colonialism as much as among its critics.[7] When and why, to invoke one of the earliest critiques of colonial anthropology, can we justifiably reclassify reverence for deceased elders as 'ancestor worship' (Kopytoff 1971)? This is not just valid for Africans, but even more for

rethinking the worship of Europe's colonial ancestors (Balkenhol 2020).

Thirdly, invoking ancestor worship questions how both academics and citizens acknowledge the affects that determine heritage and ancestry – and therefore kinship and race. 'Experts' in history often dismiss heritage by religious metaphors, as 'faith' or 'scripture', banishing, like many modern secularists, things they don't like to a non-modern place (Pels 2023: ix, 21). The post-1945 international doctrine of colour-blindness, with its conceit that race is atavistic prejudice, is a case in point (see Lentin 2004). However, this should serve as a reminder that inventions of tradition are not equally positioned and cannot be judged relativistically. They have mutated vis-á-vis each other in differing phases of unequal and non-binary power relations that cannot be captured by the simple dichotomy of Black and White. Dismissing affect as atavistic, 'faith' or 'scripture' may also be a gesture of temporal politics, displacing it to an epoch 'we' should leave 'behind'. But Saidiya Hartman reminds us that the affect of mourning is a universal that shows that the past is not past, and that affective relationships to a past may go beyond 'mere' tourism, or historical reason.

In this sense, the 'X' – stretched, as Nahum Chandler indicates, beyond biological reproduction into sociocultural realms – can be seen as critically undermining a structure of suffering by offering an as-yet underdetermined space of hope. This is the prophetic register that James Baldwin – characteristically – employed when reviewing *Roots*: 'I am speaking of the beginning of the end of the black diaspora, which means that I am speaking of the beginning of the end of the world as we have suffered it until now'. Baldwin perceived fellow-writer Haley as 'the world's first genuine black Westerner' (Baldwin 1976). Twenty-first century experiences suggest, so far, that this was more prophecy than prediction. But it shows a transformation of mourning into a faith in a future that may undo the identity politics that so far keep such futures from arriving. That transformation may be indispensable to any form of activism working towards a better world. If *Roots* perpetuated forms of selective affiliation that reinforce some of the more problematic aspects of modern identitarianism, it may also hold out a promise that is difficult not to share.

E-mail: pels@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Francio Guadeloupe for feedback and generous encouragement, and to two anonymous reviewers from *Etnofoor* for comments that made this into a much better text.

Notes

1 Anthropologists, however, have since questioned the values of *National Geographic* reporting (Malkki 1992; Lutz and Collins 2014).

2 It is unclear whether the TV network retitled it as such (Havens 2013: 29-30), or the *TV Guide* merely used the phrase as advertising copy (see 'Roots', the miniseries that changed America, turns 40 (northjersey.com) (accessed on 26 October 2023).

3 For WASP guilt, see Havens (2013: 42-3; compare to Du Bois 2007 [1940]: Ch.6. For Jewish American contributions to democratising White Americans' 'first families' pedigrees, see Weil (2013: 192, 198, 202).

4 Cultivating nescience of paternity was a common strategy of settler colonial racism, when forcibly removing Indigenous children by either Australia's adoption policies or Canada's infamous boarding schools.

5 About to adopt the name of Muhammad Ali, heavyweight boxing champion Cassius Clay snubbed former friend Malcolm X as the latter separated himself from The Nation of Islam. Ali regretted this gesture later (Payne and Payne 2020: 447; on Malcolm's tenuous conversion, see Diawara 1994). Baraka preferred his Africanized name over 'LeRoi Jones'.

6 The Juffure site was only listed as World Heritage in 2003 (Bellagamba 2009: 457).

7 See Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Hamilton (1998). Personally, I had more reason to trust oral history I collected about an 1950s anti-colonial revolt than the secretiveness and obfuscation maintained by British colonial records (Pels 2002), but that seems difficult to compare to the praises sung for Haley.

References

Ahmed, Sara

1999 Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2(3): 329-347.

Ambrose, Margaret Styles

1978 Roots: A Southern Symposium. *Callaloo* 2: 124-126.

Appadurai, Arjun, Lauren Berlant, Carol Breckenridge and Manthia Diawara

1994 Editorial Comment: On Thinking the Black Public Sphere. *Public Culture* 7(1): xi-xiv.

Araujo, Ana

2010 Welcome the Diaspora: Slave Trade Heritage Tourism and the Public Memory of Slavery. *Ethnologies* 32(2): 145-178.

Baker Jr., Houston A.

1994 Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere. *Public Culture* 7(1): 3-33.

Baldwin, James

1976 How One Black Man Came to Be an American: A Review of 'Roots'. *New York Times Book Review,* September 26. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-roots.html (accessed on 13 June 2023).

Balibar, Etienne

2005[1991] Racism and Nationalism. In: P. Spencer and H. Wollman (eds.), *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Pp. 161-72.

Balkenhol, Markus

2020 Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands. In: M. Balkenhol, E. van den Hemel, and I Stengs (eds.), *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan. Pp. 195-216.

Bellagamba, Alice

2009 Back to the Land of Roots. African American Tourism and the Cultural Heritage of the River Gambia. *Cahiers d'études africaines* 49: 453-476.

Blanckaert, Claude
1988 On the Origins of French Ethnology: Willliam Edwards and the Doctrine of Race. In: G. W. Stocking Jr. (ed.), *Bones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Anthropology*. Madison WI: The University of Wisconsin Press. Pp. 18-55.

Bordin, Elisa
2014 Looking for Kunta Kinte: Alex Haley's *Roots* and African American Genealogies. *Iperstoria* 4: 3-8.

Chandler, Nahum Dmitri
2014 *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Clifford, James
2013 *Returns*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
1997 *Routes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Diawara, Manthia
1994 Malcolm X and the Black Public Sphere: Conversionists versus Culturalists. *Public Culture* 7(1): 35-48.

Du Bois, W.E.B.
2007[1940] *Dusk of Dawn. An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. New York: Oxford University Press.
1994[1903] *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Edition.

Ebron, Paulla A.
1999 Tourists as Pilgrims: Commercial Fashioning of Transatlantic Politics. *American Ethnologist* 26(4): 910-932.

Fairchild, Halford H., Russell Stockard, and Philip Bowman
1986 Impact of *Roots*: Evidence from the National Survey of Black Americans. *Journal of Black Studies* 16(3): 307-318.

Foucault, Michel
1980 *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.

Gerber, David A.
1977 Haley's *Roots* and Our Own: An Inquiry into the Nature of a Popular Phenomenon. *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 5(3): 87-111.

Gilroy, Paul
1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.

Goldberg, David Theo
1993 *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Haley, Alex
1977[1976] *Roots. The Saga of an American Family*. London: Book Club Associates.

Hall, Stuart
1995 New Cultures for Old. In: D. Massey and P. Jess (eds.), *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*. Oxford, UK: Open University/Oxford University Press. Pp. 175-211.

Hamilton, Carolyn
1998 *Terrific Majesty: the Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Harrell-Bond, B.E. and D. L. Harrell-Bond
1979 Tourism in the Gambia. *Review of African Political Economy* 6(14): 78-90.

Hartman, Saidiya V.
2016 The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors. *Souls* 18(1): 166-173.
2002 The Time of Slavery. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4): 757-777.

Havens, Timothy
2013 *Black Television Travels. African American Media Around the Globe*. New York: New York University Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger (eds.)
1983 *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Holsey, Bayo
2008 *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Howe, Stephen
1999 *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and Imagined Homes*. London: Verso.
Klein, Kerwin Lee
2000 On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse. *Representations* 69: 127-150.
Kopytoff, Igor
1971 Ancestors as Elders in Africa. *Africa* 41(2): 129-142.
Lentin, Alana
2004 Racial States, Anti-racist Responses. Picking Holes in 'Culture' and 'Human Rights'. *European Journal of Social Theory* 7(4): 427-443.
Lowenthal, David
1985 *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lutz, Catherine, and Jane Collins
1991 The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographic*. *Visual Anthropology Review* 7(1): 134-49.
Malcolm X and Alex Haley
2015 [1965] *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Bronx, NY: Ishi Press International.
Malkki, Liisa
1992 *National Geographic*: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees. *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1): 24-44.
Miller, Daniel
1995 Consumption and Commodities. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24(1): 141-161.
Mills, Gary, and Elizabeth Shown Mills
1981 "Roots" and the New "Faction": A Legitimate Tool for Clio? *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89(1): 3-26.
Moore, David Chioni
1994 Routes. Alex Haley's *Roots* and the Rhetoric of Genealogy, *Transition* 64: 4-21.
Morgan, Jennifer L.
2018 *Partus Sequitur Ventrem*: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22(1): 1-17.
Ottaway, Mark
1977 Tangled Roots. *Sunday Times,* April 10.
Patterson, Orlando
1982 *Slavery and Social Death: A comparative study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Payne, Les, and Tamara Payne
2020 *The Dead are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X*. New York: Liveright Publishing.
Pels, Peter
2023 *The Spirit of Matter. Modernity, Religion, and the Power of Objects*. Oxford: Berghahn.
2022 Classification Revisited: On Time, Methodology and Position in Decolonizing Anthropology. *Anthropological Theory* 22(1): 78-101.
2004 *Het Uitzonderen van 'Afrika': Naar een Antropologie van de Moderne Politieke Verbeelding*. Leiden: Inaugural lecture Leiden University.
2002 Creolization in Secret. The Birth of Nationalism in Late Colonial Uluguru, *Africa* 72(1): 1-28.

Quijano, Aníbal
2007 Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality. *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3): 168-178.
Rose, Willie Lee
1976 An American Family: A Review of Roots, by Alex Haley. *New York Review of Books* 23, November 11.
Schneider, David
1998 *American Kinship. A Cultural Account*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Schramm, Katharina
2016 Slave Route Projects: Tracing the Heritage of Slavery in Ghana. In: F. de Jong and M. Rowlands (eds.), *Reclaiming Heritage. Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa*. London: Routledge. Pp. 71-98.
Smith, Laurajane and Gary Campbell
2015 The Elephant in the Room: Heritage, Affect, and Emotion. In: W. Logan, M. Nic Craith, and U. Kockel (eds.), *A Companion to Heritage Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell. Pp. 443-460.
Stoler, Ann Laura
1995 *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's* History of Sexuality *and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Thompson, Ahmir (Director)
2021 *Summer of Soul (…Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)* [Documentary]. Los Angeles: Searchlight Pictures.
Tillet, Salamishah
2012 *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Trautmann, Thomas R.
1987 *Lewis Henry Morgan and the Invention of Kinship*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Trouillot, Michel-Rolph
2002 North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492-1945. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4): 839-858.
1995 *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
Van Stipriaan, Alex
2013 Roots and the Production of Heritage. In: R. Zwijnenberg, K. Zijlmans and J. Thissen (eds.), *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Art and Humanities Research*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Pp. 206-213.
Visweswaran, Kamala
1998 Race and the Culture of Anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 100(1): 70-83.
Von Eschen, Penny M.
1997 *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Weil, François
2013 *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Williams, Susan
2021 *White Malice: The CIA and the Covert Recolonization of Africa*. London: Hurst.
Wright, Donald R.
1981 Uprooting Kunta Kinte: On the Perils of Relying on Encyclopedic Informants. *History in Africa* 8: 205-217.
Wright, Donald R.
2011 The Effect of Alex Haley's *Roots* on How Gambians Remember the Atlantic Slave Trade. *History in Africa* 38: 295-318.