DRAFT COPY. Not to be quoted.

Spinning an African Academy into the World Wide Web: the Liberatory and Democratic Potential of African Scholarship in Cyberspace

Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome
Department of Political Science
Brooklyn College,
City University of New York

ABSTRACT

Contemporary globalization generates migrations from African countries beset by deep economic crisis to countries with buoyant economies. "Real time" connections are facilitated between African peoples in emergent transnational communities that connect Africa and its Diasporas. The communications that bind Africa and its Diasporas together are found in chat room discussions, instant messages, electronic mail, WebPages, and more tentatively, electronic journals. They provide a wealth of information on Africans' scholarship and popular articulation of their collective and individual experiences.

Through electronically disseminated scholarly and popular discussions and publications, Africans are woven into a connective web of political, economic, and social life. These include epistemic communities of experts with specialized knowledge who can contribute to scholarship and academic analyses. Communities are emerging in the absence of propinquity, challenging the assumptions that close proximity is required for a community to exist. These communities are not predominantly male, challenging the assumption by some feminists that being derived from logos, epistemic communities will be male-dominated.

This paper will draw upon the author's experiences as co-editor (with other African women) of two online peer-reviewed scholarly journals and from the use of information from web- based discussion groups and electronic databases, to make a case for the liberatory and democratic potential of emergent transnational African scholarly communities. It will argue that while the technology divide remains a challenge, new forms of scholarly communication and collaboration could contribute to intellectual enrichment and revival of the African academy and make a positive impact on the global production of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION
"If you're offline, you're lost."

Sibiya Benedict Tawanda, Zimbabwe

"The first day I logged onto the internet it was like having the planet earth in my hands"

Bwalya Joy, Zambia

"If you are not on line, you do not exist."

Patrick Ayumu in Ghana[1]

Contemporary globalization generates population movements from African countries in the throes of deep economic crises to countries with buoyant economies. It also facilitates "real time" virtual connections between immigrants and those in the African continent, with African immigrants in the various contemporary Diasporas, and with Africans from older Diasporas. Consequently, new transnational communities, some of them epistemic, are being created. The changes wrought by globalization thus impinge on the lives of ordinary people in new but remarkable ways. Among these changes, the communications that bind Africa and its Diasporas together are manifested and deployed in various ways, including discussions in chat rooms, instant messaging systems, electronic mail, WebPages, and electronic journals. They provide a wealth of information for scholarly research on globalization and contribute to our understanding of the antinomies of globalization from the perspective of ordinary people. We can also focus upon how people articulate their experiences and give meaning to their lives. Immigrants and populations in their home countries are constantly woven into connective webs of political, economic, and social life in cyberspace. Thus, communities are developed in the absence of propinquity, challenging the assumptions that for a group of people to form a community, they must live in close proximity to one another (Pfeiffer, 1999).[2]

Before turning to the main objective of this study, it is appropriate to inquire who has power within these communities, and to what effect. Power is here defined as the ability command obedience; to determine the agenda; to participate in the community as

2

a full member with the capacity to voice one's opinions; engage in discussion, debate, and a variety of other activities that generate social capital; and ultimately, to participate in developing shared norms, values, principles, and institutions that shape the nature and processes of everyday life.

The primary focus of this paper is to explore and explicate the liberatory prospects of gender relations within the burgeoning African immigrant virtual communities. Gender is an important consideration due to the pervasiveness of the assumption that there is a gendered technological divide as a consequence of which those with better and privileged access to technology (often assumed to be either male, more affluent, better educated, and/or white) can essentially capture the power to shape the nature, form and type of relations within the virtual communities spawned by the new technologies.

Howard, Rainie & Jones contend that more men than women use the World Wide Web (2001). As well, it is documented that more young than old people, more affluent and educated than poor and uneducated people also use the World Wide Web.[3] If the assumption that more privileged, and relatively better access to the World Wide Web is monopolized by African immigrant men than women holds true, then, it stands to reason that there will be a domination of male over female voices in the communications and relationships that develop, and consequently, that men have more power than women in these virtual communities, and also that they dominate the epistemic communities and their influence. Is this the case? This paper will explore the issue.

What is a cyber community? According to Kazmer and Haythornwaite, who studied an online community developed out of an internet-based library science course,

the markers of an online community are much the same as those for real-life communities. They include the provision of social support, companionship, major emotional support, sociability, where there is shared activity, shared space, and shared technology.[4] The activities, people, and tasks involved in the online community are the foci of participants' thoughts when trying to describe or explain what they do in the community to others.[5] For Ben Anderson and Karina Tracey, the internet plays a rich and varied role in people's lives, and the diverse manner in which it affects social, economic, and political interactions is difficult to pinpoint in an exact manner.[6] Howard Rheingold categorically propounds and embraces the idea that communities can be developed virtually that are as vibrant, complex, and multidimensional as real-life ones.[7] Does this mean that cyber communities are as robust as communities that are composed of individuals in close proximity with one another, who have face-to-face interaction with one another?

How does an epistemic community differ from an ordinary community? According to Peter M. Haas, "epistemic communities are channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments, as well as from country to country."[8]

> An 'epistemic community' is a network of professionals with recognized
> expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative
> claim to policy-relevant knowledge within domain and issue area.

Shared policy-relevant knowledge; expertise, beliefs on cause and effect, evaluation criteria, and shared norms distinguish epistemic communities from other kinds of community. This makes epistemic communities particularly influential in the determination, prioritization and analysis of policies and their impact.

The power exercised by epistemic communities could have an impact on state policy in various ways, including through the offer of suggestions and opinions on the possible effects of given policy options, particularly during crises; providing analyses of the intricate relationships among issues, events and policies, as well as pointing out the pitfalls and opportunities presented by given policy circumstances; definition of national and sectional interest, and assistance with policy definition and recommendation of optimal policy. Epistemic communities are likely to have even more of an impact in the information age than in the past due to the increased complexity in the international arena from huge amounts of information, and the advantages accruing to those who have privileged access to information and are also able to draw upon technological innovation and technical skills to manipulate the information. Since epistemic communities are reputed to have both qualities, and they are respected by policymakers as somewhat objective and capable of superior analysis, their ideas gain currency and influence decision makers' understanding of the world. Potentially, they also have the capacity to shape popular production of knowledge. The specialized knowledge that resides in epistemic communities means that they can provide alternatives that are believed to be more viable at times of crisis, and where there is a fear of the unknown. They are also able to gather information, build consensus, facilitate information dissemination to bureaucrats and policymakers (in public and private sectors), and encourage policy formulation. However, epistemic communities themselves are not immune to the politics of power within the group, a factor that could limit their cohesiveness and possibly, their effectiveness, and their influence could be limited by lack of state power to execute the policies they recommend. [9]

Is Diaspora an appropriate concept to use in an analysis on the emergence of virtual communities that include contemporary African immigrants and those that I classify as belonging in the old Diaspora? Clearly, there are many definitions of Diaspora. Speaking of the Black German Diaspora, which, due to German constructions of blackness, is a Diaspora composed of people of African, Asian, and Arab heritage, Tina M. Campt reminds us that the concept has been used coterminously with dispersal, migration, displacement, and "complex relationships between real and imagined communities in the homeland and places of settlement." Diaspora also carries connotations of desire, of longing for community and belonging, and of a desire for access to artifacts and cultural products that are associated with the original homeland. It also has been used to describe the kind of positioning that a community uses to craft a sense of belonging through "psychic, symbolic, and material communities and "homes" in the places of settlement."[10] Unlike most other Black Diasporas, the Black Germans do not share a common narrative of origination. Therefore, shared ethnicity and cultural pluralism fail to capture the nature of this community in a manner that challenges orthodox understandings of diversity, pluralism, and cultural difference.[11]

Edward L. Alpers gives an extensive review of the emergence and use of the concept, as well as the contestation over its relevance and applicability. Drawing on Ibrahim Sundiata's thought, Alpers contends that there are many African Diasporas. These various Diasporas may also overlap and intersect to forge new African identities that do not necessarily remain constant over time. As well, he argues that there is an internal African Diaspora that is as much a result of forced migration as the Diasporas that were created outside Africa, as well as Diasporas that emerged as a result of trading

relations.[12]   From Robin D.G. Kelley and Tiffany Ruby Patterson, he draws the idea that

Diasporas are essentially constructed and reproduced, in the scholarly and intellectual

imagination. However, he modifies Kelley and Patterson's privileging of the intellectual

sources of Diasporic consciousness by incorporating the idea that popular sources of

Diasporic consciousness are equally important. For Kelley and Patterson, the idea of

Diaspora is created in a manner that obscures differences and emphasizes sameness,

producing different and shifting understandings among Africans about Africa, Africans,

and the Diaspora itself.[13]

Chivallon makes a distinction between two definitions of Diaspora. The first is

the classic definition, which is applied to people dispersed, not through their volitional

action, but through the maintenance of a sense of unity, consciousness, and an imaginary

or real bond with the original home country from which they were dispersed. The

community that forms in the post-departure period is assumed to be unified, to exhibit

solidarity and maintain a memory of the source/origin. The second definition focuses on

the hybridity of the Diaspora, and sees no unitary community, but one based on multiple

origins, multiple influences, and a highly changeable community based on a mobile and

highly variable network of ties and exchanges.[14]

Diaspora has also been deployed to describe the transformation of an identity

shaped by a community's pariah status, homelessness and rootlessness, loss of dignity,

displacement, and ethnic marginalization, to a positive expression of an idealized status

as the chosen people, through the creation of a political community that fashions this

identity based on being the select, in order to reclaim their dignity and rights, thereby

acquiring power in a world where there is no impartial international authority to defend

and protect them.[15] For DeCosmo, this kind of imagined community can be found among dispersed Africans, including the Rastafarians that she studied, as it was by Weber and Arendt among European Jews earlier. The political community that emerged among the Rastafarians drew from Marcus Garvey's ideas and the notion that Black people are transplanted Africans who must struggle for social justice and acquire political power through an ideology of upliftment and enlightenment.[16]

Anna Everett in a paper that deliberately considers the interplay between the African Diaspora, Afrocentricity and the digital revolution, argues that Africans created a "virtual diasporic consciousness of intercultural kinship structures and new languages in which to express them" in the bowels of the slave ships that transported them into slavery. This was in an effort to bridge linguistic and cultural divisions imposed by "European body snatchers" who transported them through the middle passage into the "new world" to power the engine of the of the imminent industrial revolution.   The existence of this initial virtual consciousness provided the basis for these Africans to take the lead in the experience of modernity. Everett argues that Blacks have historically had a thirst for technology and that they tend to adopt and master technology relatively early. This characteristic continues into the contemporary era, and can be observed in cyberspace, where consequently, education, politics, race and representation are affected profoundly.[17]

Are recent immigrant Africans to be considered Diasporan Africans? Clearly, there is no generally accepted definition of Diaspora, and recent African immigrants were not subjected to the harsh inhumanity of being ripped away from Africa by those termed by Everett as "European body snatchers," neither did they have to endure the ordeal of the

Middle Passage. Yet, Jayne Ifekwunigwe contends that it is not far-fetched to consider

recent African immigrants Diasporan; particularly because there is a great deal of

unevenness in the distribution of the fruits of global capitalism causing those peopling

more affluent, economically buoyant regions of the world such as Western Europe and the

United States to create impregnable fortresses that are difficult to breach by those fleeing

dire economic conditions and unrelenting impoverishment. She observes that these

dynamics cause a direct correlation between the control of borders and the people

trafficking trade. There is also the paradoxical racial politics of exigency and exclusion.

To a greater degree, Eastern Europeans are more welcome than Africans, who are rebuffed

consistently and relentlessly. Therefore, one observes refugee discourses that project

xenophobia and racialized policy. Under these circumstances, it is possible to imagine

connections between these new African migrants and older African dislocations of the past,

which are commonly believed to involve less volition than these new dislocations.

Ifekwunigwe argues that they are more volitional for a select few, and less so for the

majority of African migrants who will risk life and limb to escape from the continent, as is

`witnessed by the bodies of Black Africans that steadily wash ashore the beautiful coasts of

the South of Spain, particularly Malaga. As a result it causes tremendous distress for those

with finer sensibilities that want to keep the beaches pristine for the tourist trade.

    We hear ad infinitum, neo-imperial rhetoric about saving Africa from itself, but

the necessary complex North-South dialogue on how the North's affluence directly

connects into the causes of Africa's marginalization is avoided.[18] No doubt, there is a

process of re-colonization underway in Africa that may not necessarily involve the use of

force to remove people from the continent and use them as slave labor in the United States

and Europe, but the essence of globalization is that it is deeply marked by antinomies that create both affluence and poverty. Ifekwunigwe's point is that contemporarily, many people leave Africa "by any means necessary," compelled by the force of circumstances created by being on the losing side of the calculus as globalization progresses. Being so compelled, there is not only an absence of volition for many who flock out of the continent, but a constant outflow of Africans into the affluent parts of the world to be recruited into the underground economy to serve as menial labor, or as bodies in the sex industry.

This paper is based on information gathered from primary research focused upon online groups engaged in discussions of political, economic and social issues on the World Wide Web. It will show how a regionally and linguistically diverse African community that is also diverse in its socioeconomic class origins perceives its role in shaping the political economy of an increasingly globalized world. What emerges is a complex and rich story about the use of technological tools (some of the positive effects of globalization) to communicate and ultimately, to build communities, by ordinary people, most of whom were pushed to emigrate from their home countries by economic and political crisis (some of the negative effects of globalization).

Contemporary out-migrations from the African continent are a crucial part of the population movements caused by globalization in the global political economy. These population movements are caused, in particular, by changes in the global division of labor. The out-migrations in turn shape the nature, form, and process of globalization in ways that impact upon the migrants and immigrants, as well as the political economies of their countries of origin, and their host countries. When they involve large numbers, the out-migrations also cause changes in the social structure and the nature of social

relations; particularly in a manner that affects gender, race, and class relations. Consequently, African immigrants and migrants become transnational, and they are absorbed into the labor pool in the global North but maintain their roots in the African continent.

As labor, contemporary African immigrants can either be skilled or unskilled. The skilled are desired and courted by capital, and by their host country for skilled technical and professional employment. The unskilled is often repulsed and reviled by the host country's unfriendly policies, which may transform them into become undocumented immigrants, subject to gross exploitation by capital. Some begin their labor force participation as laborers in the informal and or underground economy, and when lucky, work their way up in the socio-economic ladder. For this second category of African immigrants/migrants, the likelihood of being stuck in a vicious cycle of perpetual informalization and under-remuneration for their labor is also high. Paradoxically, skilled workers and those with technical skills may also enter into the global North as undocumented workers who begin their labor force participation in the informal economy as underpaid, underemployed, and over-exploited workers.

Diasporan African women and men experience many of the same challenges, but there are also challenges that are peculiar to women. In the first place, it is a well-documented fact that there is a gender wage gap that negatively impacts all women.[19] According to the Census Bureau, on the average, women make 74 cents for every dollar that men make. The difference is attributable to both social and economic factors, since labor markets are highly segregated by gender, and the jobs dominated by men attract higher salaries than those dominated by women. This differential has also been

documented in Europe, and other parts of the world.[20] The glass ceiling (the inability of

women to break into the highest echelons of top management in the corporate world) is

another well-documented barrier to women's parity to men in the labor market.[21]

Diasporan African women are affected by both the wage gap and the glass ceiling. They

also face other challenges that other women may not necessarily face as a consequence of

racial discrimination, bias, and in the case of the new immigrants among them,

xenophobia. It is well-nigh impossible for most new immigrant women to compete on an

even footing, or even to participate equally with women citizens or legal residents of their

host country until most of them secure a firm toehold in the economy, something that for

may take years of sweat, blood, and tears, and of course, the inevitable exploitation.

Some of the contemporary population movements from the African continent are

caused by pervasive war and internal conflict, others by punitive government policies

against critics and dissidents, yet others by the harsh economic conditions detailed above.

These movements generate refugees, exiles, and immigrants. While many countries in

the global North have policies of supporting exiles and refugees, these policies are

unevenly applied and subject to politicization. The very rules on designating refugees

and political exiles may not necessarily recognize many who fall under these categories

as such, particularly, when they have no passports and other travel documents.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the total number of Black or African

Americans in the United States is 34,658,190. In this group, 16,465,185 are male, and

18,193,005 are female. Those who are Black or African American in combination only

are a total of 1,761,244, with 850,148 males and 911,096 females. Those who are Black

or African American alone or in combination are a total of 36,419,464. Of these,

17,315,333 are male, and 19,104,101 are female.[22] African immigrants in the United

States number a total of 1,781,877. This figure excludes Africans of Arab descent. West

Indians number 1,869,504.[23] Unfortunately, the figures for African and West Indian

immigrants do not provide information on gender. In addition, this data does not tell us

whether or not undocumented immigrants are included.

The jury is out on whether globalization is a positive or negative force. There is

also serious contestation on whether or not the internet has negative or positive

consequences.[24] However, there is no doubt that most of the countries in the African

continent are in the throes of deep, enduring economic crisis. These crises are caused by

the nature of African countries' participation in the global political economy, since

majority of countries have low export earnings, and high, unsustainable debts, causing

the imposition of economic liberalization and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

(by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)) as a long-term mechanism

for integrating African economies into the global economic system. Such policies inflict

substantial pain upon citizens, migrants, and immigrants in African countries that initially

generate the deployment of alternative modes of survival such as taking multiple jobs or

taking the entrepreneurial option when possible, participation in the informal economy to

augment earnings from the formal economy, the emergence of a growing underground

economy that involves the smuggling of drugs, people, and goods. In many countries,

there is increased social tension. Many countries also experience considerable political

tension as a result of the problems that accompany persistent economic crisis. Out-

migration and immigration are mechanisms that politically and economically embattled

populations deploy to enhance their survival. These out-migrations include both men and

women, although there are cases when women follow spouses who depart earlier to secure a toehold in the buoyant labor markets of the West. When this is the case, the women sometimes face subtle and not so subtle pressures to maintain a subservient stance vis-à-vis their earlier arriving spouse or lose immigration status, and face deportation. Even without this kind of duress, a woman often has to combine whatever job she is able to secure with household and family responsibilities. This may create time pressures that curtails or even prevents any kind of meaningful participation in either virtual or real life communities, except in the case of the real life communities, when services like food preparation or cleaning prior to, during, and after social events are required.

On balance, globalization has not yielded substantial gains to the African continent, particularly when one considers the growth of out-migration as a survival strategy.[25] However, there are scholars that point to the possibility of transforming this disability into an asset through the remittances that immigrants send to their family members back home,[26] as well as through use of the innovations in communications technology, made available as a result of contemporary globalization, to create connections that were formerly impossible. This paper considers the extent to which communities without propinquity are being established. It considers the nature and form of these communities and whether or not they are epistemic in nature. It also seeks to develop an understanding of these processes through the eyes of the participants themselves, African immigrants in the old and new Diasporas, and Africans in the continent.

THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES: OLD AND NEW DIASPORAS

The focus of this paper is to consider the emergence of transnational communities formed by African migrants and immigrants as one of the ways in which African immigrants negotiate the challenges of their dislocated or re-located lives in the burgeoning Diaspora. It is useful to emphasize that there is an old African Diaspora that was formed as a result of the enslavement of Africans and their use as coerced, un-free labor in the 16th century. This inhuman process created an African Diaspora in the then "new world," today's North and South America and the Caribbean. It also created an African Diaspora in Asia. While this paper does not consider the enslavement of Africans as a process of "forced migration", it contends that the creation of both the New and Old Diaspora are caused by globalization. The contention that globalization is a causal agent for the formation of the various African Diasporas also incorporates the argument made by Tiffany Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelly on the role of ideology in engendering the construction of the Diaspora.[27] Similarly, the notions that an African Diaspora, or various African Diasporas exist are taken to be ideologically driven. Information technology, particularly those aspects of it that facilitate communication such as the World Wide Web, contribute in no small measure to the ideological construction and strengthening of the Diaspora(s).

In both the past and present eras of globalization, African labor was, and is extracted from the continent into the "New World" and into today's global north, as a result of what Okpewho, Boyce Davies and Mazrui describe as the "Labor Imperative"

and the "Territorial Imperative".[28] I argue that while both imperatives drove the creation

of the old Diaspora, the creation of the contemporary African Diaspora is being driven by

the "Labor Imperative". Of course, imperialism is still very much with us, but it is taking

on new forms, since today's imperialism does not entail the physical presence of the

imperialists on the soil of the empire. Instead, neo-colonial relations of power maintain

the same imperialistic domination through the extraction of economic and financial

resources, through the extraction of labor, and its uses in new ways in the peripheries of

the empire. Today's imperialism, unlike the old, is not necessarily driven by the direct

action of states, but predominantly by those of transnational capital, predominantly the

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) that are located in the global north, supported by

state policies in both the North, and the newly liberalized global South that is being

compelled to integrate more rapidly into the global economy. This indicates a significant

and fundamental change in the nature of globalization.

By creating the old African Diaspora, the old imperialism resembles the new in

the global political economy, which created new African Diasporas. Both imperialisms

caused the emergence of transnational populations, with the old African Diaspora

maintaining its connectedness with Africa through social practices, aesthetics, religious

ritual, and the literary and the scholarly imagination. The process of maintaining

connectedness with Africa was, and remains, as much social as ideological. Further, the

new Diaspora, being in formation, is dynamic. I date its emergence from the period after

the second world war, but its most rapid growth was experienced in very recent times,

coinciding with the growth of economic crises, unsustainable debt, and the use of policies

of SAPs as corrective mechanisms in the African continent.

This paper contends that the new transnationalization of the African Diaspora creates new linkages between the old and new African Diasporas. It also strengthens the existing linkages between the new Diaspora and the old. The most vibrant of these linkages are those depending on the ideologically driven construction of an African identity. This process at the same time creates tensions that Watkins Owens characterizes as intra-racial ethnicity, a concept that describes the condition where groups that may be seen by those outside their group as belonging to the same race, but within the group, there are fine distinctions made based on differences in ethnicity and national origin, that prevent unity, collaboration, and coalition building to solve common problems.[29] To a significant extent, nationality rather than racial identity still drives, and substantively divides the various African Diasporas, one from the other, creating tensions, and subverting the promise of Pan- Africanism that the continent is an integral whole, and that its progress can only be achieved if a united front is built to ensure that the governance and creation of wealth in Africa are taken over by Africans for Africans.

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Mazrui recommends/suggests that Diasporan Africans should interact with and infiltrate the economic and cultural hinterlands of the West by using petrodollars to finance their economic inroads. To penetrate into the center of Western culture, they are to use the trans-Atlantic traffic in education as their primary mechanism. Migrant African intellectuals would then represent Africa in the West as spokespersons, and as emissaries who build linkages with African Americans to strike back at the core/imperial centers of power that formerly exploited and dominated them. They would also revive

the moribund and tenuous connections between mother Africa and her widely dispersed children who were scattered as a result of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It is easy to extend this vision into a scenario where Pan-African proactive and conscious effort generates the development of Africa into a world power.[30]

For Edward Said, exiled intellectuals from the Third World are the elite vanguard of forces that can engage the West intellectually in order to liberate the world from the forces of oppression. These elite soldier-intellectuals are in a state of existential flux, being located between cultures, homes, and nations.[31] According to Said, Third World intellectuals are involved in a voyage into the heart of the old metropoles. He describes this voyage thus:

> The voyage in, then, constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work. And that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logos dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed, from east to west, or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up. (295)

Thus, Third World migrant intellectuals are particularly well-situated to challenge the empire from within by striking at its very heart, thereby transforming history, and the nature of the world as we know it.

Appadurai speaks more directly to my concerns in this paper. For him, the contemporary global era is characterized by both mass migration and electronic communication in such a manner as to create a new global cultural economy. The fixed temporal world has become irrelevant, replaced by dynamic and mobile landscapes that contain ideas, technology, finances, images, and people who do not necessarily identify with one and/or any nation states. As a matter of fact, the existence of these communities and landscape does not depend on the pleasure or desire of states. Their existence indicates the development of new kinds of nation. Their actions respect no territorial boundaries and cannot be subjected to them. Among the variety of post national communities that can be formed, are Diasporas that transnationalize religion, ethnicity, race and identity.

Appadurai's transnational communities are not immutably positive and progressive. They can unite to change the world in a positive manner. These communities can also implode when constituent groups or individuals attack and decimate one another. They can also explode against forces that are external to their imagined communities. More than the imagined communities of the pre-industrial and industrial ages, these imagined communities are moved by ideas, images, and financial resources that are transmitted instantaneously to millions of people in the world in a manner never before experienced by humanity.[32]

For Zeleza, African migration is driven predominantly by the imperative of survival. It is also shaped by the dynamics of the international capitalist political economy. African migrants are not only cultural intellectual warriors; they are also economic migrants who are buffeted by the storms and gales of

international economic exchange. Zeleza also directly addresses the question of whether African migration is good or bad for the continent, and its intellectual community. Like this paper, Zeleza's community includes African intellectuals in the continent's universities, in its research centers, and those in the contemporary migrant Diaspora. He argues that ongoing collaboration, contacts and conversations must be undertaken by all these communities for the migrant intellectuals to be able to live up to the promise of being "productive and progressive for Africa"[33]

If we take network theories of migration seriously, social networks would be understood to develop as a result of migration that connects current migrants with past ones. These connections bring together kinfolk, friends, and acquaintances in home countries and host countries in relations of friendship, kinship, and other social interactions. These linkages produce succeeding flows of migrants because the networks provide information, support, and an enabling environment. Essentially, these networks stand in the gap between harsh economic and political realities and broad structural forces and the individuals that make decisions on how to navigate the realities that confront them. The networks operate in a manner that builds a generational structure of familial migration from one person's original decision to migrate.[34]

According to institutional theory, increased migration causes an accompanying proliferation of institutions that emerge just to service documented and undocumented immigrants. Such institutions include religious, humanitarian, non-governmental and governmental organizations. An informal, sometimes

illegal economy also develops to support undocumented immigration. The criminal facet of this economy smuggles people into the labor markets of the North and might even offer menial, low wage labor and sex work as part of the repertoire of opportunities that this migrant population must undertake as survival mechanisms.[35] Under such a scenario, the ability to form or join a community would substantially reduce the harshness of being in a new, often hostile environment. The World Wide Web provides one more avenue to the achievement of community formation and or participation. However, the contention that there is a digital divide points to the possibility that the women, poorest, and least technologically savvy, may well be unable to take advantage of this new innovation.

The theory of cumulative causation contends that migration changes the social, political, economic and cultural landscapes such that past migrations influence contemporary flows, which in turn influence future flows. Because migration tends to affect regional patterns of control over the means of production, political, social, economic and cultural relations change to reflect new understandings on how to read and decode migration, work and citizenship. While for those in the source countries of migration, there may be a normalization of migration as part of the rites of passage, for receiving countries, the immigrant is pathologized as undesired and undesirable. Over time, the condition of being a migrant may become normalized as pathology in the host country. Migrants consequently are defined as those who take menial, undesired jobs, those who are always discreditable as plagues upon the land, and those who practically "ask for"

being discriminated against. Because there is a pool of jobs that native born populations refuse to take, it is guaranteed ad infinitum that immigration will be perpetual. Capital takes advantage of this situation with its interest in keeping costs low, and profits high. So do immigrant workers who use these jobs as stepping stones to better ones where possible.[36]

Transnationalism is considered in immigration literature as the process through which geographical, political and cultural boundaries are breached by new immigrant-created social relations. The existence of these networks challenges existing conceptions of migration, citizenship, ethnicity and culture. This community is bound together by the volitional or coerced action of immigrants who move from one locale to another.[37] Host and source countries of immigrants respond to the changes in the nature of transnational social relations among migrant communities by devising new policy responses and strategies that seek to domesticate and discipline the transnational communities and access as well as control the resources that they generate, whether these are financial, informational, social, or political.

Sending countries may, as Nigeria and South Africa have done, extend dual citizenship to their immigrant indigenes. They may, like Jerry Rawling's Ghana, extend dual citizenship to Africans from the old Diasporas.[38] The immigrants may campaign for an extension of these and other rights to them, as the members of the Uganda-North American Convention did in 2000 with respect to the demand for dual citizenship.[39] These kinds of policies are sought after by transnational immigrants, who seek to extend their power vis-à-vis the state.

There is also agitation for increased ability to participate in the politics of their home countries through voting in elections, running for political office, being gadflies who critique government policies, and push for changes thereof, increasingly using the World Wide Web as a means of communication.

Communications in African transnational networks have not reached their full potential but they occur, and they are significant. They can be seen in the news groups, discussion groups, signature drives, organizational, business and individually owned websites, e-journals, e-newsletters, and commercial advertisements that are created and maintained by the new and old African Diasporas. The business-owned websites are incredibly diverse and extensive. Food, books, clothing, home decorations, information, and even match-making services are offered in cyberspace, with increasing capacity to deploy these services to targeted populations being enabled by an information mining technology that tracks, analyzes, and stores the habits, purchases and proclivities of cyber participants. In spite of these exciting, sometimes curious, and sometimes promising developments, both the old and new Diasporas are yet to fully take seriously the Pan-Africanist mission by building on old forms of transnational linkages. Unfortunately, there are enormous barriers still, to the formation of such linkages. There is mutual distrust, and discrimination, due to the colonial and imperial legacies in both the old and new Diasporas and in the continent. There are also negative ramifications of the politics of competing for the same slice of the economic pie by old and new African Diasporas who draw upon the same pool of professional, academic, and trade jobs.[40] As well, there

persists significant lack of information of each Diaspora of the other's history and struggles.

Like new transnational linkages, the old operated in the realm of ideas, the former for Africa and Africans' independence and liberation from imperialistic exploitation and oppression, the latter to assault and challenge new forms of imperialism. Old transnational linkages among Africa's Diasporas also espoused the need to foster and strengthen the development of cultural intellectual, political, and economic capacities of Africa and its Diaspora. The Pan- African Congresses from 1919 to the mid-20th century was a significant institutional manifestation of this effort. Also tremendously important were linkages among individuals who moved back to Africa from the Diaspora. The more prominent of these include Christian missionaries, scholars, intellectuals, politicians and business people. More invisible but equally significant were people who were brought together by filial ties, the practice of African indigenous religions, and fictive kinship.

Of course, in the realm of literary imagination and in the scholarly production of knowledge, the old Diasporas of Africa actively engaged the continent, its history, culture, and political economy. Research and publications as well as novels and other forms of artistic expression demonstrate the importance of the connections between Africa and its Diasporas on many different levels. The new Diaspora shows a great deal of preoccupation with the politics, economics, and societies of the several home countries of its members. The preoccupation resembles that of the old Diaspora in the sense that it generates

corpus of literary, poetic, political, economic, and sociological expressions, analyses, and critiques of Africa, its peoples, and its Diaspora. However, these engagements tend to be either bounded by the geographical divisions between nations and regions in the continent or between Africa and its old Diasporas. There is some cross fertilization, but it falls far short of the Pan-Africanist ideal of fostering African liberation from oppressive imperialists. Given the characterization of the economic aspects of contemporary globalization as a re-colonization of Africa by some scholars, the call for Pan-Africanism takes on increased urgency before Africa's total integration into the burgeoning McWorld.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE LACK THEREOF: EFFECTS ON TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

In negotiating the social, economic, and political relations of their re-located and dislocated lives, contemporary African Diasporan communities engage in networks of communication that use old and new technologies to communicate. Old technologies include communications tools such as letters, now commonly referred to as "snail mail," telephone, telegrams, radio, and television. Communication and exchange of information in the pre-information age also utilized paper books, journals, newsletters, and magazines. In the information age, electronic "real time" virtual connections are used for communications between immigrants and those left behind in the African continent, with African immigrants that are scattered in the various contemporary Diaspora, as well as with Africans from older Diaspora. Such communication

utilizes electronic mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, web pages, as well as open discussion fora that operate as news lists. Cable and satellite communication has also revolutionized media such as television, radio, and even electronic mail and web communication. This is because of the effect of cable and satellite-based broadband communication systems on making electronic communication faster, cheaper, and more reliable.

For some, information technology provides the exciting opportunity of building communities that contribute in no small measure to the creation of social capital.[41] The effect of inexpensive, faster and more reliable technology should not be over-stated. The existence of a technology divide is widely acknowledged.[42] As with many effects of globalization, access to information technology is determined by what I call the antinomies of globalization.[43] There are clearly fundamental contradictions integral to the process of globalization. While many scholars assume that the process has positive consequences, it is obvious that it also has negative consequences on the lives of majority of people in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and even in parts of Western Europe and North America. Furthermore, the negative and positive consequences of globalization often relate to each other in a dialectical manner. In consequence, affluence is created in the global North, poverty in the global South. It is also possible to have regional differentiation in poverty and affluence within the same country's borders.[44]

In terms of the technological divide, one sees the operation of antinomies in graphic relief. At one and the same time, there is widespread availability of information technology and all the exciting possibilities that it presents to those who can afford it, and

who have reliable electricity, telecommunications connectivity through telephone lines, or broadband technology.[45] On the other hand, majority of the world's population, particularly in the global south can neither afford nor use this technology.[46] This is obvious in the statements made by African respondents to the BBC inquiry: "Do you need a Computer?" Even within the United States, a country that is on the cutting edge of the new information age, and one which in many ways, leads the trends, it is widely believed that there is a technological divide determined by race, class, and gender. As such, non-whites, those low on the socio-economic scale, and women are assumed to be under-represented in the usage of, and access to information technology.[47] The unequal access to information technology is a typical example of the antinomies of globalization. To focus specifically on gender, the operation of antinomies implies that women have less presence, voice and power in this medium. However, it is also possible for the new medium to be used in a counter-hegemonic manner that challenges entrenched power interests and structures of inequality. First because it offers anonymity, and thus, it is easier to transgress; and second, because the cost of access is relatively inexpensive, and it is possible for even those who cannot have private access to use internet cafes in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe (to a greater extent than in North America) and for them to use public libraries in North America. With such access, asynchronous and intermittent use is possible, but those who have full-time, broadband access may well dominate discussions, negotiations, and the process of agenda-setting.

Antinomies are integral to the process of globalization because counter-intuitively, this same phenomenon causes diametrically opposite effects, and paradoxically, each effect occurs as a logical consequence of the operation of antinomies.

As argued above, it is routine for globalization to produce wealth in some parts of the world or in regions within countries. It is also normal for it to produce poverty in some countries and within given regions. Ability to afford, gain access to, and to use technological innovation is as much a consequence of globalization, as is the lack of access to, inability to utilize, or to afford to purchase technology. As a result of globalization, many countries in the Third World have become no more than labor reserves for the more affluent, post-industrial countries of the global north, which have become magnets that draw migrants and immigrants that seek an end to the problems of unmitigated poverty, social and political conflict, unemployment and underemployment.[48]

Despite the existence of a digital divide, the transnationalization of African Diaspora communities has produced complex webs of relationships. These include social, political, economic and intellectual linkages that take the nature of epistemic communities. An epistemic community is one that has a network of colleagues who maintain close ties, have shared beliefs that influence the positions they take on social problems and issues, shared ideas on what is valid, use similar approaches and methods in their work, desire common policy outcomes, and exchange information. These communities, if they are composed of people who have a significant amount of name recognition and stature, will make an impact in the theory and practice in areas of their expertise.[49] The amount of time that a scholar has to devote to non-essential or non-work related communication and collaboration may determine how much and how well she/he can participate in the formation or strengthening of an epistemic community. Those with more seniority, more job security, and more time will dominate such communities.

Because the top echelons of higher education are dominated by men, more men than women will probably have hegemonic power within the community. More research should be undertaken to evaluate the extent to which this is categorically true or otherwise. However, initial research on internet usage suggests that there are more men than women who regularly use the medium.[50] Everett provides some intriguing arguments that challenge this assumption because there is indeed some level of automaticity to assuming women and Black people's technophobia. Instead, she contends that there is significant, and yet to be generally acknowledged Black technophilia.[51] Everett's analysis, thus, suggests that the information technology and the communications it fosters offer significant liberatory prognosis. The African online communities not only exist, they proliferate constantly, and demonstrate technophilia, challenging the temporally bound notion of the nation, community, and relationships. They also demonstrate how formerly marginalized individuals and groups can use the technology to subvert and resist oppression and domination. As a case in point, Naijanet, a Nigerian virtual community, was fashioned to transcend Nigeria's plethora of ethnic divisions, but it maintained the tendency to marginalize women, which of course, was resisted by the women, who decamped to form an independent virtual community. To use more examples of Nigerian World Wide Web communities, the following inquiry was made of the moderator of Naija-women, Dr. Omolola Ogunyemi: How many members does the Naija-women group have? How many are women? How many are men? Is it really possible to tell if a member is male or female? Who communicates more, men or women? Would you characterize the Naija-women group as a community? If so, why?

. It generated the following response:

> Naija-women has 254 members. It's impossible for me to tell how many
>
> are women or men or who on the list is a woman or man aside from those
>
> I know personally. Naija-women was set up as a list primarily for
>
> discussing issues of importance to Nigerian women and membership was
>
> made open to women and men interested in this. Naija-women started out
>
> as a small mailing list based out of UPenn at inception; there were mostly
>
> women on the list (at least, people who had identified themselves as
>
> women on the Naijanet list and were fed up of sexist attitudes on that list),
>
> and it was a community in the sense that many members actually got to
>
> know each other outside of cyberspace (I and other netters hosted a U.K.
>
> netter when she visited the U.S.; we knew her only through her
>
> contributions to the list); I got advice for my thesis defense from other
>
> netters who had already been through the process, Naija-women netters
>
> contributed funds to various Nigerian causes through the list, etc. Once
>
> the list grew to more than 100 people, it became a lot more impersonal;
>
> most of the pioneering members from 1994 are no longer on the list.[52]

The same inquiry went out to the moderator of the general group, Chat Afrik, Martin

Akindana, who responded that the groups were a community because there were both

virtual and real life interactions between members, and while it is impossible to

categorically determine whether participants are male or female, there are more male than

female contributors to the discussions in the general groups and that several efforts were

being made to encourage women's participation, including establishing women-only groups. What does it mean if indeed more men than women participate? Are women less interested in virtual communities? Do they have less time on their hands than men? Are the issues being discussed uninteresting and/or irrelevant to them? Are these communities being patterned on real-life communities where some issues are believed to be the special preserve of men? Are the communities perceived as hostile to women? Without broader, in-depth research, no conclusive answer can be offered. However, the case of Naijanet and the women members' refusal to be intimidated by the male members and their formation of an autonomous virtual community suggests that the answers to all the questions but that which focuses on women's lack of time is a resounding "Yes".

There is evidence that epistemic communities are being created in a manner that links old and new Diasporas of Africa. For example, I began research on African Immigration to the United States in 1995. At that time, a search on the internet, in electronic and physical databases revealed that very little was being published on contemporary African migration outside the continent. Today, such a search produces massive multiples of bibliographic sources. This shows evidence of a concerted desire to study, research, and write about the contemporary immigrant experience by people who are recent immigrants and by people who are members of Africa's old Diasporas. One also sees research projects on the subject of contemporary African immigration, and conferences that seek to study both old and new Diasporas. As well, new virtual databases are being created that document the work of these research projects.

E-JOURNALS, E-NEWSLETTERS AND VIRTUAL CYBERCOMMUNITIES

The creation and maintenance of e-journals, e-newsletters, and virtual cyber communities is ongoing among African intellectual and wider immigrant communities. These efforts are relatively new but very significant. Some examples are *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*, founded by Andrew Offenburger, who is also the editor.[53] Africa Resource Center,[54] founded by Nkiru Nzegwu, a woman who is also general editor of four of the five journals published by the Center publishes *JENDA: A Journal of Culture & African Women Studies; African Philosophy: Journal on African Philosophy; ProudFlesh : New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness; W.A.R: West Africa Review;* and *IJELE: Art eJournal of the African World.* Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome and Bertrade Ngo-Ngijol Banoum are women co-editors of Ìrìnkèrindò*: A Journal of African Migration*, which was founded by the former.[55] GWS Africa: Gender and Women's Studies for African Transformation, [56] a Ford Foundation project at the University of Cape Town, South Africa is headed by Amina Mama, a Nigerian women immigrant to South Africa. The program has a new e-journal titled: Feminist Africa.[57] Seven of the eight journals above have women as founders and co-editors. This challenges, but does not entirely eliminate the assumption that cyberspace is dominated by male intellectuals. As we move further into the information age, more women will participate in such ventures, even though they may still have to juggle multiple familial and professional responsibilities. These journals are a useful addition to the process of the production of knowledge on Africa. For them to succeed and thrive, they need the dedicated sacrifice of committed scholars who contribute as editors, submit papers, and collaborate in acquiring funding. Given the constant breadth and depth of the adoption of information technology, these e-journals

and e-newsletters will prove to be more important than their paper counterparts in the future, although it seems unlikely at this point in time, that the world will become entirely paperless anytime soon.

The claim that new epistemic communities are developing should not be taken as an indication of the adequacy of these communities in numbers or in the range of subjects and issues that they engage. Indeed, the promise of intense, consistent, fruitful transnational collaboration is yet to be fully realized.[58] It is worthwhile to consider why thus far, the African Diasporan scholars have not intensively utilized information and communications technologies to foster enduring linkages with their peers in the continent. Such linkages, if properly deployed, would yield the development of collaborative research that adds significantly to the production of knowledge on the continent, its people, and its Diasporas.

Zeleza presents this as a problem involving the lack of vision, absence of will, and the lack of resources both in the continent and the Diaspora. Tettey contends that this problem arises from capricious and punitive decisions by African governments that favor foreign expertise and repulse indigenous expertise in the African Diasporan scholarly community. The refusal to consult with and draw upon the knowledge base of African experts in the Diaspora is also imposed by conditions that are attached to foreign "aid." There is also the passivity of African based professionals who often wait to be "discovered," government policies that create barriers to the acquisition of computers and information technology through the imposition of high tariffs on the importation of these goods. Consequently, neither scholars nor universities can afford them.

Finally, there is gross inadequacy in the exercise of what Tettey describes as the "Diaspora Option" through the use of new information and technological innovation to build communities of knowledge.[59] The yet-unexplored possibilities that Tettey identifies include the establishment of joint economic initiatives by cyber groups that connect "credible individuals who use the internet to establish networks of mutual trust on the basis of which to launch economic ventures and under undertakings whose ultimate mission is tailored towards the development of their countries." These networks can connect African intellectuals in the continent with those in its Diasporas to produce knowledge, wealth and power.[60]

Zeleza rightly contends that unsustainable debt, consequent economic crises, political conflict, including war, and the dislocations that attend these phenomena, particularly from the 1970s, led to the decimation of the research and development capacity of the universities. He also argues that African intellectuals in the continent have become integrated into the global political economy as captured peons of Northern philanthropic and NGO sectors, whose agenda, whims, and fads drive the research projects. Zeleza states but underestimates the power of the antinomies of globalization in forcing both Diasporan and continentally located African intellectuals into either migrant or home based labor that is drawn from increasingly segregated and impoverished labor reserves and made into wage slaves in and/or for the North.

African Diasporan intellectuals in the North remain low in the pecking order of Northern hegemonic intellectual structures and networks. Many work in institutions where teaching, rather than research is the focus, or in Historically Black Colleges and Universities that like the teaching universities are under-funded. These scholars also

have not as a group, accumulated a sufficient amount of social capital to access the biggest and most prestigious grants that enable predominantly white Northern intellectuals to dominate the enterprise of producing and reproducing knowledge on Africa and Africans. Lacking access to significant research funds, and to the pipelines and gate-keepers that manage the enterprise of scholarly publications, Diasporan African scholars are also in the main, unable to engage in the poaching-type, patron-client relations that often exist between African and Northern scholars on the one hand, and between African intellectuals and Northern grant makers on the other to produce studies that homogenize the products of research projects on Africa and Africans.

Zeleza suggests that African intellectuals in the Diaspora and those in the continent must build transnational bridges that assault and destroy old orthodoxies that stymie the production of socially and politically conscious, relevant and timely knowledge on Africa. For him, such a radical break from the past is only possible with institutional, financial, ideational, and scholarly commitment to building epistemic communities. In the effort to accomplish these goals, scholarly networks that collaborate in teaching, research, publication and the dissemination of ideas through the use of old and new technologies are crucial. While some such networks exist, majority remain dependent on patronage from the northern intellectual market. Such research centers are under-funded They are also under-supported by intellectual exchange from colleagues in Northern "Babylons," and as such, can only do but so much. Being strapped for cash, lacking access to innovations in technology and telecommunications, such research centers are ripe and ready for colonization by those with purchasing power that is denominated in "hard currency."

The tools exist that would enable the bridging of the divide between the better endowed few African intellectuals in the continent and its Diasporas, and the majority of impoverished, marginalized wage slaves that other African intellectuals have become in the era of Structural Adjustment. To focus on the possible, many African intellectuals in the Diaspora have access through their universities, to new instructional technology. They can at the very least, either establish or join news groups and mailing lists that help the operations of transnational epistemic communities. All that is needed in this regard is the will to act, through the development and cultivation of face-to-face linkages that are nurtured by streams of communication. Many African intellectuals in the North can also apply for institution-to-institution collaborative funding for exchange programs between Northern Universities and their African counterparts to be not only possible, but affordable. Unfortunately, most of the funding for collaborative research across continental boundaries goes to Northern scholars. In spite of the significant difficulties involved, efforts must be made to bring Diasporan immigrant and African continentally-based scholars into close intellectual contact with one another, with students, and with African societies. Collaborative relationships will be strengthened and enriched through the use of instructional and telecommunications technologies. Tragically, many African countries are still on the negative side of the information divide. There are not enough computers, telecommunications links, and definitely, there is not enough money to purchase new, and sometimes, even old technologies.

There is increasing evidence that vigorous efforts are underway to create virtual communities with the express intention of reversing the brain drain. Some of these include the Digital Diaspora Network Africa, an organization established by a group of

technology firms, nonprofit organizations and United Nations Agencies to undo the negative effects of Africa's brain drain by harnessing skills that have been lost to the continent.[61]

Scholars are also able to use virtual technology to conduct discussions. H-Net, the Humanities and Social Sciences Online community is one that includes scholars of Africa who may be Africans in the continent, Africans of the old Diaspora, and Africans of the new Diaspora. It also includes Africanists who may be North or South American, European, and Asian. H-Net describes itself as:

> An international interdisciplinary organization of scholars and teachers
>
> dedicated to developing the enormous educational potential of the Internet
>
> and the World Wide Web. Our edited lists and web sites publish peer
>
> reviewed essays, multimedia materials, and discussion for colleagues and
>
> the interested public. The computing heart of H-Net resides at MATRIX:
>
> The Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online,
>
> Michigan State University, but H-Net officers, editors and subscribers
>
> come from all over the globe[62]

As part of the H-Net community, there are the following Africa-specific groups: H-Africa, H-Hausa, H-Luso-Africa, H-West Africa, H- SAfrica, H-Afrlitcine, H-Afrarts,

There are numerous African and African Diaspora discussion groups on the World Wide Web. Ackee.com is an example of a Jamaican online community. The community's discussion in response to an article on Black students in the top U.S. colleges was categorized under the heading: "Mekwitalk 'Bout Ev'ryting,"[63] was very immediate and extensive. Most of the respondents disagreed with the premise of the

article, which cited Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., chairman of the Department of African American Studies and Professor Lani Guinier of the Department of Law at Harvard University. They claimed jmarthe??what is this word? had a Google search for the words "African discussion groups" that returned 894,000 listings. Not all these listings will be active and there is bound to be some duplication, but nonetheless, the number of groups may very well be multiples of the Google number because some of the listings are also directories. A sampling of the first page of the Google listing shows a diversity of groups, engaged in a disparate number of issues. Some are academic databases, some commercial, and some social.[64] A researcher has an infinite set of possibilities to explore in accessing materials for studies on Africa.

It is in chat rooms and discussion groups, among people who meet in cyberspace forums, where there have anonymity, and there is a presumption of the equality of all participants that the most engaging conversations and communications are occurring. As indicated previously, there are thousands of African discussion groups on the World Wide Web. I will just give the example of one. Chat-Afrik (is it Chat- Afrika?) advertises itself as a group that is open to all Africans, but majority of its members tend to come from the Nigerian immigrant and home-based communities. The communication that occurs in these discussion groups include information on lectures by scholars and public intellectuals on Afrocentric issues; discussion on African, African American and to a lesser extent, Caribbean politics on topical issues at any given point in time; comparison is made between African and African American social and political values. Such comparison tends to lead to a valorization of what is presented as authentic African values. It appears as though Nigerians form the core of the group, and according to the

moderator, they live all over Europe, North America and Africa. Nigerian issues tend to dominate in the forum. Another group, moderated by the same individual, claims that it is an information dissemination group. A sample of one day's digest is provided in the endnote.[65] Due to the repetitive nature of the digests, some subscribers, particularly those who use their office e-mail, ask to be un-subscribed.

Increasingly, there are new services that closely resemble or replace real life interactions. Many news groups and cyber-communities provide dating services, various opportunities for social interactions not just online but face-to-face, rapidly becoming alternatives or supplements to traditional modes of socializing. Parties, conferences, reunions, town hall meetings, political rallies, and other get-togethers are advertised, promoted, and broadcast on the World Wide Web in the various groups and communities that proliferate daily. Rich, thick communications linkages are being formed by these and other groups. They will prove to be a wealth of information for scholars and researchers who want to undertake cyber-fieldwork on African immigrant communities.

CONCLUSION

There is an intensification of community interactions among old and new Diasporas of Africa and Africans through telephone conversations, faxes, increasingly in chat rooms, as well as through the use of instant messaging systems. These communications are massive and largely undocumented in any systematic way. However, for one to be able to access such communication, they provide a rich, vibrant database for research. To use the example of a few internet news groups, one sees a concern for, and discussion of contemporary political economy, and of social relations.

There is also the development of relationships of friendship and mutual respect, as well as those of dislike and mutual derision. These groups in essence, create virtual communities where people are able to have either intense or superficial discussions about matters of mutual concern. Information is exchanged, and some web- based discussion groups are established for this express purpose. Celebrations and social events are advertised. There are also signature drives in furtherance of Global Justice initiatives. One prominent example is the drive to support Amina Lawal, the Nigerian woman who was sentenced to death by stoning by a Shari'a Court. Many of the groups that undertook the signature drives are women's organizations. However, the Nigerian women's group, Baobab for Human Rights, which spearheaded Amina's defense was largely ignored and in the signature drive, thus foreclosing to a great extent, some cross-fertilization and more importantly, accurate information on the situation on the ground in Nigeria by those who had first-hand information and knowledge of the case. To underline the cruciality of access to technology, Ayesha Imam, one of the members of the group in North America, eventually provided some accurate information and also argued against the signature drive tactic due to the misinformation being propagated by some of the well-meaning "friends of Amina" in the West.

Due to the innovations in technology, it is possible for advertisements and calls for action to reach people all over the world that in the case of news and discussion groups, both have access, and are members. Becoming a member of the discussion group is as easy as subscribing for most, and for some, only by recommendation. Thus, the arguments that revolutions in information technology create transnational communities that are not restricted by geographical boundaries, and cannot be subjected to state

control, are valid. The existence of these communities is in and of itself creating revolutionary changes in the concepts that we use to construct meaning. When communities are formed of people who may never have met one another, and may never meet, who is a stranger? Who is a citizen? What constitutes community? What are the rules of the game? Clearly, the world as we know it is changing before our very eyes. These changes occur in a manner that impinges on the lives of ordinary people in very new but remarkable ways.

In physical and temporal terms, new ethnic minorities are being created, and/or increased, new ethnicities are being formed, new identities are being asserted, both in the immigrants'/migrants' country of origin, and in the host country.[66] Also, there are new and growing increases in transnational transfers of financial, intellectual and material resources, new trade and business relations, new cultural interactions between sending and receiving countries. New tensions are also developing between ethnic minorities who are indigenous or "native born" in the parlance of migration studies, and those who are relative newcomers. There are even tensions among old-timers and newcomers within immigrant populations that originate from the same country. For African migrants and immigrants, there may be subtle and not too subtle tensions that arise from differences in class, gender, language, culture, religion, and national origin.

In virtual terms, old social constructions and the effects of socialization may well inform the ideas and sensibilities of members of communities, but the lack of face-to-face contact removes or restricts the ability to identify and or classify people as belonging to a particular race, class, or gender. Virtual relationships also develop into physical ones. This could include social, economic, political, and professional relationships.

Particularly among the younger generation, dating and social friendships develop from virtual relationships. For the older generation, these interactions are also possible, given the proliferation of internet dating services, the ubiquity of chat rooms, and the growing use of the World Wide Web as a global mart, although professional relations may well dominate.

Misinformation and disinformation are possible with sole reliance on information from the World Wide Web. At this point in time, it is better to depend on the websites of research institutions and bodies, peer-reviewed e-journals, scholarly groups, libraries, established non-governmental organizations, and universities. Even government sites can misinform. The researcher must also follow standard and established rules of verification, by conducting due diligence in verifying citations. Through library database-driven research, scholars and researchers can also access information on African communities, particularly in the form of papers that result in the findings of scholars on a given subject. These sources of information are tried and true, as well as reliable. These sources, which are also increasingly digitized, can be used to verify if possible, information that is available on the Web.

There are an increasing number of web-based journals that will probably ultimately replace our paper journals if the paper-free world of the information age is ever actualized. Increasingly, there are journals solely dedicated to African studies on the Web. Such journals too provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and debates by scholars. These exchanges still privilege populations in the global North to the disadvantage of groups in Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of North and South America that are categorized as belonging in the global South. It is unbelievably difficult to

engage in instant communication when one is dealing with power failures and unreliable Internet Service Providers.

The digitization of books, oral histories, folktales, songs, festivals and other popular spectacles, using multimedia technology, would go a long way toward the broadening and deepening of the databases available to scholars, students, policymakers, bureaucrats and popular consumers. Women are a significant part of creating and using these databases in furtherance of the creation of knowledge. Their work can be made even more significant if they are given logistical, financial and technical assistance as well as time.

Cyber communications and Cyber communities are arenas where one can hear the cyber voices of African Diasporan communities. In considering these communications and communities, it would be remiss if we do not consider questions of power. Who has voice and presence in these arena? Who sets the agenda? Who establishes the rules? Who shapes the consciousness of the members of the community? Who forces, and/or imposes the silences? The promise of these transnational networks is that they would seem to give voice to all comers in a democratic manner. The reality is that access to technology, to wealth, to ideas, and to political power would naturally privilege some and disadvantage others. As things stand, populations in most of Africa are grossly disadvantaged in these networks. Their disadvantage cannot be assumed to be permanent, but its erosion will be sped up by the conscious, consistent, proactive action of Africans in the continent and its Diaspora. The ability to build communities that are unrestricted by lack of propinquity and the ability to communicate in a manner that builds

and sustains epistemic communities would stand African peoples in good stead as they

strive to compete in the information age.

[1] "Do you need a computer?" *BBC News Online* http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4784087.stm accessed on Tuesday, August 15, 2006, at 3:57 pm

[2] Mark Edward Pfeiffer "Community", Adaptation, and the Vietnamese in Toronto."
http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/community/pfeifer2/pfeifer2chapt7a.html

[3] Philip E.N. Howard, Lee Rainie & Steve Jones, "Days and Nights on the Internet: The Impact of a Diffusing Technology," *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 45, no. 3, (November 2001) p. 387.

[4] Michelle M. Kazmer & Caroline Haythornwaite, "Juggling Multiple Social Worlds: Distance Students Online and Offline." *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45:3 (November 2001) , pp. 510-529. The discussion of community relations were drawn from pages 514 and 511.

[5] Op cit. 526. Ben Anderson and Karina Tracey,

[6] Ben Anderson and Karina Tracey, "Digital Living: The Impact (or Otherwise) of the Internet on Everyday Life," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45:3, (November 2001), pp. 450-475.

[7] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*. http://www.rheingoldvc.com

[8] Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination" IO, 46:1, Winter 1992, p.27.

[9] Peter M. Haas, "Banning Chlorofluorocarbons: Epistemic Community Efforts to Protect Stratospheric Ozone" in Peter M. Haas ed., *Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1992.

[10] Tina M. Campt, "Reading the Black German Experience: An Introduction" *Callaloo*, 26:2, pp. 288-294, (2003), p.289

[11] ibid, p. 290-291. See also Tina M. Campt, "Converging Spectres of an Other Within: Race and Gender in Prewar Afro-German History" *Callaloo*, 26:2, pp. 323-341, (2003).

[12] Edward A. Alpers, "Defining the African Diaspora," Paper presented to the Center for Comparative Analysis Workshop, October 25, 2001, pp. 22-26.

[13] Ibid, pp. 19-21.

[14] Christine Chivallon, "Beyond Gilroy's Black Atlantic: The Experience of the African Diaspora," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*," 11:3, pp. 359-382. See especially, pages 359-361.

[15] Janet L. DeCosmo, "Pariah Status, Identity and Creativity in Babylon: Utopian Visions of "Home" in the African Diaspora," Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research," 2:2, pp. 147-156.

[16] Ibid, pp. 149-155.

[17] Anna Everett, "The Revolution will be Digitized: Afrocentricity and the Digital Public Sphere," *Social Text* 71, Vol. 70, no. 2, (2002), p. 126-127

[18] Ifekwunigwe, Jayne, "An Inhospitable Port In The Storm: Recent Clandestine African Migrants And The Quest For Diasporic Recognition," Paper presented at the Conference on Imagining Diasporas: Space, Identity, And Social Change University Of Windsor , Ontario, Canada, May 14-16, 2004.

[19] "The Gender Wage Gap: Progress of the 1980s Fails to Carry Through" *Institute for Women's Policy Research Fact Sheet*, IWPR Publication #353, http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/C353.pdf; Hilary M. Lips, "The Gender Wage Gap: Debunking the Rationalizations," http://www.womensmedia.com/new/Lips-Hilary-gender-wage-gap.shtml

[20] "Towards Closing the Gender Wage Gap in Europe?" *European Industrial Relations Observatory Online* http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2002/12/Feature/NO0212103F.html

[21] Linda Wirth, *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management* Geneva: ILO, 2001. http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/publ/online.htm; Martha Fetherolf Loutfi, Women, Gender and Work: What is Equality, and how do we get there? Geneva: ILO, 2001.

[22] US Census Bureau Census 2000 PHC-T-8. Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin by Age and Sex for the United States: 2000, Summary File 1, Table 3. Black or African American Population, by Age and Sex for the United States: 2000. http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t08/tab03.pdf

[23] US Census Bureau American FactFinder QT-P13: Ancestry 2000.
http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=D&-
qr_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_QTP13&-ds_name=D&-_lang=en

[24] Ibid., pp. 385-386.

[25] See Piotr Stryzowski, "The effects of Brain Drain on Economic Growth," http://idea.uab.es/jamboree2004/stryszowski.pdf, for an argument that the effect of the brain drain is positive for developed receiving countries while the phenomenon has ambiguous consequences for developing sending countries.

[26] Oded Stark and Yong Wang, "Inducing Human Capital Formation: Migration as a Substitute for Subsidies," Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, http://www.ihs.ac.at/publications/eco/es-100.pdf; Adrian Cho, "A Foot in Each Country," Science Vol. 304 (May 28, 2004) pp. 1286-1288. http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/reprint/304/5675/1286.pdf?ijkey=nHqSBu3w.TU3I&keytype=ref&siteid=sci

[27] Tiffany Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelly "Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World" in *ASR* Vol. 43, no. 1 (April 2000), pp. 11-45.

[28] Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999.

[29] Irma Watkins Owens *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996.

[30] Ali Mazrui *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* London: Heinemann, 1978.

[31] Edward Said Culture and Imperialism First Vintage Books, 1994, pp. 332-333.

[32] Arjun Appadurai Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

[33] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza "African Labor and International Migrations to the North: Building New TransAtlantic Bridges," (n.d.) http://www.afrst.uiuc.edu/SEMINAR/AfricanLabor.doc.

[34] Ivan Light, Parminder Bhachu, and Stavros Karageorgis "Migration Networks and Immigrant Entrepreneurship" UCLA, Institute for Social Science Research papers, vol. 5, paper 1 http://repositories.cdlib.org/issr/volume5/1/

[35] See Zeleza, 18

[36] ibid

[37] ibid

[38] "President Praised In Harlem ..Hints On Dual Citizenship For Americans Of African Decent" (sic) *Ghanaian Newsrunner* October 21-25, 1995 http://www.newsrunner.com/archive/NW241095.HTM

[39] Dual Citizenship Beneficial *New Vision* (Kampala) December 30, 2000. Reproduced by AllAfrica.com on the web on January 2, 2001 http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200101020422.html

[40] Francis N. Njubi "African Intellectuals in the Belly of the Beast: Migration, Identity and the Politics of Exile" *Mots Pluriels #20,* February 2002 http://chora.virtualave.net/brain-drain5.htm

[41] Andrea L. Cavanaugh & Scott J. Patterson, "The Impact of Community Computer Networks on Social Capital and Community Involvement." *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 45, No. 3: November 2001, 496-509.

[42] U.S. Government, Office of Educational Technology "Digital Divide" http://www.ed.gov/Technology/digdiv.html

[43] Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome "The Antinomies of Globalization: Causes of Contemporary African Immigration to the United States of America." *Ìrìnkèrindò: A Journal of African Migration* vol. 1:1 (September 2002) http://www.africamigration.com/m_okome_globalization_01.htm
"The Antinomies of Globalization: Some Consequences of Contemporary African Immigration to the United States of America." *Ìrìnkèrindò: A Journal of African Migration* vol. 1:1 (September 2002)
http://www.africamigration.com/m_okome_globalization_02.htm

[44] op cit. Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome "The Antinomies of Globalization: Causes of Contemporary African Immigration to the United States of America."

[45] Keith Hampton & Barry Wellman, "Long Distance Community in the Network Society," *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 45, No. 3: November 2001, 476-495.

[46] *Bridging The Information Technology Divide In Africa: Hearing Before The Subcommittee On Africa Of The Committee On International Relations House Of Representatives One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session* http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa72637.000/hfa72637_0f.htm

[47] op cit. U.S. Government, Office of Educational Technology "Digital Divide" http://www.ed.gov/Technology/digdiv.html

[48] op cit. Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome "The Antinomies of Globalization: Causes of Contemporary African Immigration to the United States of America."

[49] Peter M. Haas "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and the International Policy Coordination." International Organization 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992): 1-36.

[50] Howard, Rainie & Jones, op cit. p. 387.

[51] Everett, op. cit., pp. 132-140.

[52] Date: Tue, 17 Feb 2004 09:24:33 -0800 (PST) From: Omolola Ijeoma Ogunyemi; Subject: Re: question To: Mojubaolu Okome

[53] Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies, http://www.safundi.com/

[54] Africa Resource Center's Journals can be accessed at http://www.africaresource.com/index.htm

[55] *Ìrìnkèrindò: A Journal of African Migration* is available at http://www.africamigration.com.

[56] Gender and Women's Studies for African Transformation's web address is: http://www.gwsafrica.org/

[57] *Feminist Africa* http://www.gwsafrica.org/e-journal/index.html

[58] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza "African Labor and Intellectual Migrations to the North: Building New Transatlantic Bridges"; Wisdom J. Tettey, "Africa's Brain Drain: Exploring Possibilities for its Positive Utilization Through Networked Communities." *Mots Pluriels*, February 2002 #20.

[59] Tettey, op cit, p. 12

[60] ibid, pp. 12-13

[61] Gumisai Mutume "Reversing Africa's 'Brain Drain': New Initiatives tap skills of African Expatriates," Africa Recovery, Vol. 17, no 2, (July 2003).

[62] H-Net can be found at the following address: http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/

[63] Sara Rimer and Karen W. Arenson, "Top Colleges Take More Blacks, but Which Ones?" The New York Times, June 24, 2004 Section A, p. 1 http://www.ackee.com/mekwitalk/read.php?f=1&i=98213&t=98213

[64] Google can be accessed at the following address: http://www.google.com. The search in question was done on 11/22/2002 at 8:46:44 AM. Subsequent searches will probably yield more entries.

[65] 17 Nov 2002 08:27:21 -0000
FROM: AFRIK-INFORMATION NETWORK

Disclaimer:
_____

There are 7 messages in this issue.

Topics in this digest:

1. Details on NIDO

2. One-Day Conference : "Reform & Privatization of the Nigerian Electricity Sector."
3. Re: One-Day Conference : "Reform & Privatization of the Nigerian Electricity Sector."
4. ANA Scholarship: Extension of Deadline
5. Job Openings On Capitol Hill CONGRESSIONAL STAFFER NEEDED
6. Nigerians In Diaspora Organisation Europe (NIDOE) : First Inaugural Meeting
7. It's happening tonight Yoruba Oscar Nite

[66] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza "African Labor and Intellectual Migrations to the North: Building New Transatlantic Bridges" (n.d.) p. 7.