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Diaspora and Imagined Nationality

USA-Africa Dialogue and Cyberframing Nigerian Nationhood

Koleade Odutola

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
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This book is dedicated to Nigerians who toil day and night on the various websites and home pages.
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Series Editor’s Preface

The Carolina Academic Press African World Series, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola
University of Texas at Austin
Preface

The text is home to thoughts and its context the rudder steering readers from flaws. The text is voice inscribed in cold print, readers with mental tools can decode signs, symbols, & codes within. Texts respond to texts, linking writers with a past not seen. The inter-text, hidden between the lines only the alert can bring to life.

The Internet is fast becoming an extension of life. The virtual nature of the spaces inhabited by individuals addressing multitudes without the slightest knowledge of who is receiving the information and how, has changed the way human beings connect with and stay in touch with each other. The communication universe is constantly transforming itself through the agency of owners, designers, and users. Apart from politics, pornography, and religious institutions, academia has been a major beneficiary of instant communication and wide dispersal of knowledge(s). A scholar like John Berger posits that in certain instances subjectivity is treated as private. In online forums “there is space for the social function of subjectivity” (Berger, 2002, pg. 55). This is in contrast to the highly touted concept of objectivity purportedly practiced in mainstream media. An acceptance of subjectivity as the norm online is to be expected, since identities are in constant flux. According to Erik Chia-Yi Lee “Identity becomes infinitely plastic in a play of images that knows no end. Consistency is no longer a virtue but becomes a vice; integration is limitation” (1996, INET Proceedings). In effect, those who express their views in online forums are not particularly held to high standards of objectivity but to moral standards of honesty and clarity.

A noticeable observation of online forums is that a new generation of knowledge producers, commentators, and critics is experiencing multiple transitions. The most talked about in the literature of the subject is the transition from
one geographical location to another or the constant migration of intellectuals from developing countries to Western industrialized capitals. Those who left their various “homes” under different conditions later created home pages on the Internet for purposes of communicating, debating, and at times facilitating social change in their countries of origin. The transition from street activism to computer activism has not received as much attention as it should from researchers. The position of Kevin Hill and John Hughes should not be discounted. They observed that “if computers change the way people communicate, they will also inevitably change how people engage in political dialogue” (1997, pg. 3). This book is not just about the emergence of a transformed usage of computers in political dialogue but goes on to look at one of the intellectual products of dialogue. One of the objectives of Diaspora and Imagined Nationality: USA-Africa Dialogue and Cyberframing Nigerian Nationhood is to bring together the multiple transitions by attending to one of the fruits of this technology-driven mode of communication and knowledge production. This book does not pretend to be universal; it instead focuses on what a small group of intellectuals of African descent and their friends talk about, gripe about, and try to grapple with.

To understand (at least partly) the internal dynamics of online discussion groups as sites for social enquiry or scholastic curiosity, it is imperative to first imagine a community where faces are unknown, just as spaces of interaction are not saloons or conference halls but screens interconnected by invisible wires and cords floating in ether. The individuals who provide the substrate for studies and analyses are known sometimes by their names, affiliations, or writing styles. In this community, there are no streets and institutions where a researcher can visit in the process of gathering information and constructing notions about the people and their lifestyles. Instead of a narrow tunnel view of what is happening, Margaret Mackey suggests that a “thick description of reading attends to the contributing roles of reader, text … and a context [which] includes not just the immediate interpretive situation but also broader social, cultural, commercial, and technological consideration” (2003, pp. 405). In effect postings submitted for moderation online take the place of physical activities, while physical violence is replaced by violence in text. In essence, the traditional ethnographic techniques are supplanted by virtual ethnography made popular by scholars like Christine Hine (2000) and Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000). In this kind of research, texts written and read are both means to various ends and ends in themselves. Instead of words spoken by people and the various nonverbal cues that surround such interactions, virtual ethnography observes texts against the background of the context of production and at times the inter-text built into the narrations.
Once your process of imagination is in place you are welcome to the virtual community which I participated in, and studied for a number of years. As you may know, a virtual community is in stark contrast to offline communities only in regards to known faces and the nature of trust developed over time with “informants” who help researchers in navigating the terrain. In this case, the virtual terrain is technology-defined in an unobtrusive way. There are scholars who argue that there are not many differences between online and offline communities. Leighton Evans argues that “online communities have become a fundamental, rather than exceptional, part of user’s experiences and lives, and that differentiating in this manner is mistaken” (2010).

In most academic or polemical activities, a combination of profit and pleasure can be found at the root of the activities. The initial cost of setting up physical forums for intellectual discourse determines the quality of participants and the duration of the event. However, in most online forums, where the capital outlay is almost zero, pleasure and not profit appears to be the driving force for participation by the main moderator/founder and others who take time to contribute or initiate discussions. The pleasure derived can be converted into social capital at a later date. In addition, the pleasure/gratification goes beyond postings made by the participants since there is evidence to show that certain issues at hand demanded offline actions and financial contributions. Samples of some actions taken by participants are available but are not the focus of this book.

This book focuses around the online information exchange forum founded seven years ago by Toyin Falola, a Professor of History at University of Texas. To casual observers this forum is just another virtual site where scholars, activists and artists meet to specifically deliberate on media-related happenings on the African continent as a whole and in the world in general. On the contrary, the forum is fast becoming a testing ground for ideas and a resource for teachers and policy makers in search of further clarifications on complex issues and themes. It is a virtual space, which, in opposition to Neil Postman, has been inducing “the capacity to think” (1985, pg. vii). It is essential to point out that a new media now makes up for the gap in previous mass media forms. Critics point out the structural deficiency in television programs, especially their insistence on entertainment and lack of capacity to carry out critical thinking. In the case of the old newspapers it was common to edit or reject a reader’s feedback. Observations of online forums show that contributions made do not only add to news stories, they sometimes rewrite products of “lazy journalism” (Morrow, 2001). There is data to show that USA-Africa Dialogue is an active site; Anthony Agbali notes that the intention of the moderator of the site was “to construct a dialogic arena using the Internet and computer technologies to
mediate and facilitate cogent discourses pertaining to American and African interests” (2010, pg. 451). The arena created has produced both spectacle in the form of flowery writings and spectacular instances in the form of hot exchanges that have been documented. Unlike the products of the dialogue, which have received wide ranging attention, neither the thought process nor condition of production or even of its creation have received much attention for reasons linked to how virtual communities operate and are constituted.

The origin of the site is invested with a stamp of an organic farming-like concept in opposition to man-made farming interventions. The metaphor of an organic farm allows nature and natural forces to play the role of fertilizers as opposed to externally induced artificial growth stimulants. In USA-Africa Dialogue there is no “unseen hand of God” controlling and dictating the issues for discussion. Real life situations, as they are reported or witnessed, dictate what is on offer from time to time. This variety of constant reflection and intellection goes beyond citizen journalism. The rational interventions (sometimes very passionate) appear to be a cross between academic treatise and letter to the editor. The forum to a great extent has provided a space for academics in the diaspora to constantly voice their opinions to a wider audience and at the same time receive feedback on emerging ideas. According to Falola, the service provided by USA-Africa Dialogue “has enabled the African voice to be heard, for alternative ideas to spread, for debates to be centered on our concerns, for Africans in Africa to present their positions to the world, and for those in the diaspora to communicate their views to their colleagues in Africa” (2010, pg. 142).

When the views of Agbali and Falola are taken together, a picture of a virtual communicative space begins to develop but does not speak to the constitutive nature of the interactions, especially in the manner in which themes are introduced and how they develop. Even if an observer does not realize the non-linearity of the debates as conditioned by differences in time and space, an observer who stays long enough will quickly notice the non-sequential order of the postings and the lack of closure of debates. The non-closure of discussions is not unusual and goes to show the open-endedness of the forum. The functions of the moderator are “backstage” and hardly visible online. One function is certain and known to every participant: the function of approving postings and new members. There have been a few instances when the moderator had to caution those who breached the established code of interaction and decorum. Over a period of time, those who engage in discussions develop some sort of camaraderie that allows for communication to continually take place. As the interactions grow, there are political questions that must be asked about the impact and influence of the materials produced on this site and how
both the process and the outcomes affect individuals at one level and the diaspora community at another level.

There are two other metaphors that capture the nature of *USA-Africa Dialogue*. These metaphors will help readers form a mental picture of how a country and a continent can find space in a crowded virtual world to engage each other in meaningful exchange of ideas and reproduction of knowledge. One of the metaphors alludes to *USA-Africa Dialogue* as one of the horses of globalization, helping to bring the past to the present and carefully mixing the present with the past in a bid to create hybrid forms. The hybrid forms created depend mainly on archival materials for their production. Discussions and debates will be impossible without quick access to previous threads saved in the archives.

At another level, it is possible to see the forum as a site for the organic farming of ideas. The reasoning behind this second metaphor is to present the self-producing nature of the forum. It is not a forum that has issues dictated to it like a non-organic farmer would spray fertilizer on the farm. Here ideas grow in a natural way without external intervention by a researcher or the moderator of the group. It can be said that virtual ethnographers do not leave traceable footprints in communities they study over a period of time.

In the real world of bricks and mortar, each time a researcher visits a location, the seed planted and harvested from that community represents an abundant helping of hope—hope that the intervention by the research will yield results and changes made will not be reversed. There is an assumption that whichever direction the river of hope flows, life continues for all those who participate in such projects, cerebral or manual. The search for locally produced knowledge about nation, nationalism, and nationality remains an endless enterprise of which this book hopes to make a contribution.

One of the contributions of this study to academia is the suggestion of a naturalistic research method in monitoring user preferences of news items. Members of electronic discussion groups, of their own free volition, search for information and news items relevant to perceived needs of the group. The information and news stories then form the basis of conversation, discussion, and sometimes debates. At other times the discussions then yield to well informed opinion articles that are circulated widely online. At some other times, home-based newspapers publish opinion pieces deemed newsworthy and in line with their editorial policies. The search for meaning of nation, nationhood, nationalism, and nationality remains an endless enterprise of which this book hopes to make a contribution.
Roadmap of the Study

The procedural order of this study started with a comprehensive background and justification for the research and then related the various concepts to the objective of the study. It now continues with an understanding of the extent to which a geographically dispersed people rely on online reports from their national media and to a lesser extent on reports from other sources. The sources, as anticipated, contribute to the creation of critical conversations/discussions and narratives about physical space, governance, leadership, and normative expectations for an imagined state (or in some cases, nation). A detailed look at selected postings was carried out so as to uncover the level of pre-existing background knowledge included in the posting or contribution. Postings and contributions are read with a view of establishing the extent of opinion/sentiment indicators in them.

The next chapter is an extensive literature review of previous works relating to the subject of this research. The literature review leads to a main research question and a few interrelated questions. Once the research question is established, the chapter that follows undertakes a philosophical view of the research by stating the methodology and the subsequent research methods. The choice of research methods help to formulate the nature of data and their collection. The next two chapters contain the data and analyses. The last chapter discusses the data and draws a conclusion in relation to the guiding questions of the research.
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Background and Justification of the Study

*USA-Africa Dialogue* and other online groups have created possibilities for interactions between scholars of different nations, and are becoming sites of knowledge production and circulation. To fully engage these sites, this study sought out postings generated during ‘natural’ online interactions among geographically dispersed/diasporic Nigerians, containing ideas (from various intellectual sources) needing further interrogation. A few of the ideas encapsulated within these postings were brought to the fore, discussed, and analyzed. The consequent search for the presence of indigenous knowledge within the postings produced a promise, not a substantial product, that can be circulated within the discipline of new media studies.

The chosen method of analysis subjected online conversations and reflections to close readings aimed at extracting contextual and intertextual meanings. This study also expands on the fundamental question raised by Misty Bastian in relation to how absence of physical constraints (and therefore, of potential violence) is reflected in nationalist discourse. I argued that freedom from physical constraints and potential violence has been replaced by norms and the novelty of virtual spaces, and that the dominance of Western paradigms and epistemological shackles imposed by technology now act as barriers to nationalist cyber-discourse. Textual analysis reveals that Nigerians draw extensively from a broad spectrum of ideas, but most significantly from notions emanating from Europe and America. In addition, Western notions like nationalism, nationhood, and state can hardly be differentiated in the consciousness of some contributors. This study presents traces of the hegemony of Western ideas in postings and conversations online. Nigeria’s presence as a postcolonial nation (or nation space) is established online through various activities of citizens at home and in the diaspora. These communicative activities and political activism have led to a wide range of scholarly interrogations and interventions in media, communication, and migration studies against the backdrop of globalization, democratization, and modernization theories.
It has been amply documented that communication and social interaction produce ideas that can be evaluated along the lines of deliberative democracy. These approaches have produced outcomes without the benefit of the complex debates, dialogues, and disagreements that come with popular participation and creation of variegated knowledge by a collective.

I conclude that the concept of nationhood is not fixed but is a symbolic construct that evolves through unstructured conversations, sharing, and intense debates.
Visual Representation of Nigerian Online Communities

Web email forums
- NaijaPolitics
- TalkNigeria
- Nigeria Today
- Naijanet
- ChatAfrik
- ‘Moderators’
- Circle Yahoo group

Websites
- Nigerianworld
- NigerianVillageSquare
- Nigeriansinamerica
- Gamji
- Nigeria.com
- chatafrikarticles.com
- Nigeriannews.com
- Nairaland.net
- NaijaPost.com
- Kwenu
- Arewa-online
- Odili.Net
- Osondu

Weblog
- NigerianMuse-
- * SaharaReporters
- * Pointblanknews
- * Elendu Reports
- * The Times of Nigeria
- HuHuonline.com
- Dawodu.com
- Omoigui.com
- thelongharmattan
- season.blogspot
- ukpakareports.com
- okebadan.blogspot
- survivinginbiafra.

Weblogs
- NigerianMuse - "That the world may know"
  http://naijalive.net/nigerianblogs/
  Has the longest list of blogs.
  NaijaLive is a free spirited attempt to build
  a network of different types of Nigerian-focused websites. See the blogroll below
  for what we have managed to do so far :D

* Nairaland.net for Nigerians and Friends of Nigeria
  This website has a special site for 419
* Nigeria is a country of 150 Million People, 250 Languages, 36 States, and only one Nigeria.com!
Diaspora and Imagined Nationality
Chapter 1

Introduction

When the words Nigeria and Internet are coupled together in an emerging statement, the inadvertent associative word in the minds of many people may be scam or fraud. According to Daniel Smith’s anthropological account, “the global expansion of the Internet delivered evidence of Nigerian fraud to the e-mail in-boxes of millions of people around the world, in the form of scam letters seeking bank account numbers and advance fees in schemes that are premised on Nigeria’s worldwide reputation for corruption” (2006, pg. 1). It is on the record that the phrase “a nation of scammers” (French, 2004, pg. 35) is attributable to General Colin Powell, a former Secretary of State of the United States. The appropriateness of his pronouncement is not the interest of this book but its recall provides a canvas for the justification of this study. As perception of other nations goes, the image of Nigeria may not be unjustified if the onlooker takes on an episodic reading of a multiethnic and multicultural nation-state like Nigeria. By episodic reading, I mean a fragmentary and non-contextualized reading of events and happenings.

In this chapter, a comprehensive background to the study is followed by a discussion on issues of nationalism and networking involved in the research. Since Nigeria is the focus of the entire work, the geopolitical space is reviewed bearing in mind the effect of colonialism and the present times when ethnic conflicts appear to be a permanent item in the news. In addition, various academic concepts within the study are elaborated upon. Finally, the chapter fo-
C H A PT E R 1 · I N T R O D U C T I O N

cuses on the theoretical framework on which the study is predicated. This study
is neither in defense of the Nigerian online community nor the nation and her
peoples but an attempt at redirecting attention to Nigeria’s evolving cyber-
presence as both a communicative space and a new media space for knowl-
edge creation. Nigeria’s presence is registered in almost all digital forms and formats
ranging from online print versions of local newspapers, to radio and television
stations which webcast in real time, to electronic listservs/websites where
debates and conversations are constantly ongoing. It should be noted from the
outset that the texts from these postings form ongoing conversations which
are accepted not just for message/information transmission but as ways of com-
ing together in “fellowship and commonality” (Carey, 1989, pg. 7). The study
of conversations online or in print has received its fair share of attention from
scholars. Conversations that take place online reflect some of the different
models listed by Dietram Scheufele (2000). He makes an academic distinction
between talk and opinion exchange. There may not be much scholarly inter-
est in mere exchange of opinions, but talk and its subdivisions into political talk
and sociable conversation are referenced in the Scheufele’s study of online in-
teractions and conversations. My own study shares the notion of James Carey’s
ritual approach to communication and the notion of “exchange of information
that is relevant to the understanding of and participation in political processes”
(Scheufele, 2000, pg. 728) as the conceptual frames for analyses of these media-
induced online conversations. In each of the cases, news media reports play a
role in the fellowship, commonality, and the exchange of information that aid
memory and understanding of ongoing sociopolitical events in the homeland
and beyond.

My primary research interest is to make explicit the intellectual ideas buried
within texts that constitute a selection of postings generated during ‘natural’
online interactions among a group I have identified as composed of geo-
graphically dispersed/diasporic Nigerians. (Justification for selecting this group
of Nigerians is discussed later). The reference to ideas is both a scholarly search
and an ideological pursuit. Clifford Geertz made reference to “large ideas, ca-
sually inherited from Western philosophy and political theory” (2004, pg. 578)
that must be reexamined. My interest also comes partially from the Marxists’
correlation of ideas of the ruling class transforming itself into the ruling ideas
of an epoch. There are two other Nigerian intellectuals who pointed attention
to the place of ideas in the ordering of human life. Chinweizu states that “[i]deas
rule the world; not only is one generation ruled by ideas from preceding gen-
eration, but some ideas rule for centuries” (Chinweizu, 2005, para. 2). Two
years after Chinweizu’s article was published in a national newspaper in Nige-
ria, a contributor to the Nigeria Village Square website narrowed down the im-
portance of ideas to the actual basis of what he calls “white power.” He argues that it is the widespread dissemination of ideologies that serves “white” interests, as well as the acceptance by non-“white” elites of most (if not all) of the components of these ideologies (IsT, 2007, para. 1). These contributions go to underscore the need to search for ideas by a particular group of people wherever those can be tracked and analyzed.

Since it is impossible to track every idea thus generated online I decided, during what Marilyn Strathern (1999) refers to as ethnographic moments, to focus on the contextualization and meanings of interrelated concepts of nation, nationalism, and nationhood. Maureen Fitzgerald offered her own definition of an ethnographic moment as “that critical incident, moment, experience, event that evokes a quest for knowledge or understanding (meaning) or sudden insight into a phenomenon of interest” (2006, Electronic version).

The question can then be posed why I decided on the complex notion of nationhood of all the other issues discussed online; why these particular ones and not something else? I will attempt a more detailed response to this logical question in the chapters on discussion and analysis of data, but suffice it to say for now, the concepts of nationhood, nationality, and nationalism demand deep reflection and a measure of intellection from contributors. To lend credence to the choice made, Dominic Boyer and Claudio Lomnitiz argue that “the social formation of knowledge, should be understood as a central dimension of the (re)production of nations and nationalism both inside and outside of states” (2005, pg. 105). The issues of nationhood and nationalism also touch on collective identity, patriotism, and constant reconstruction of memory and reconfiguration of the future by those who live outside their countries. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza is of the opinion that “[n]ationalism is one of the great intellectual and ideological forces of modern African history” (2008, pg. 37). Based on postulations such as this it becomes evident that the choice to focus on the subject did not just appear in vacuum but through a series of events online which lent themselves to the question of what is going on here. Zeleza states further that “[c]ontemporary Africa is simply incomprehensible without understanding the role and impact played by nationalism” (2008, pg. 37). As a consequence, to understand Africa is to understand nationalism in reality or as part of discourse.

Impact made by any idea is not an event but an unending process that reverberates from the past to the present. There are events and actions which

4. In this book, “IsT” and other acronyms are used instead of the authors’ real names. For ethical reasons, authors’ real names are avoided except when they appear in published documents.
still resonate in the present. These strings of observable events led my enquiry to question the sources of ideas that influence thoughts generated in the online comments and contributions emanating from Nigerians in the diaspora. This question bears relevance to Daniel Dayan’s inquiry when he sought to uncover “the particular type of knowledge mobilized in the construction of a group’s identity” (1998, pg. 103). Harris-Lacewell invokes the argument of Karl Mannheim which states that “knowledge is from the beginning a cooperative process of group life, in which everyone unfolds his knowledge within the framework of a common fate” (as cited by Harris-Lacewell, 2004, pg. xvii). Provision of likely answers to such questions will not only make available pointers to group identity formation/definition, but it may also provide a basis for constructing a tentative Nigerian intellectual history online. The concept of a people’s intellectual history provides a window into how they think individually and collectively. Leo Spitzer asserts that “[i]ntellectual history, according to its broadest definition, deals with the history of thought” (1972, pg. 113). Thought, online, is reflected in text preserved in publicly accessible archives and other online resources that can be consulted. Apart from tracking the conversations and interpreting the ideas, this study contributes to the fast-growing literature on nations and the Internet in the same way as Ananda Mitra’s case study of Indians online (1996), Daniel Miller and Don Slater’s presentation of the online presence of nationals of Trinidad and Tobago (2000), Brenda Chan’s focus on how the Chinese imagine their nation online (2005), and Thomas Eriksen’s reflection on nationalism and the Internet (2007).

The objective of tracking ideas of Nigerians online, supported with textual evidence, aims to garner sufficient materials which can also be used in response to issues raised by Adebayo Williams’ contention that “[n]o one is even sure whether there is an intellectual class on the continent that approximates the Western notion of the term” (1998, pg. 287). A closer look at Williams’ text, produced over a decade ago, brings out one of the many problems of African intellectuals. It is possible to point to a problem of limited circulation of their ideas globally. Aside from limited circulation of ideas, Raphael Njoku’s position on how to classify the African intellectual class on the continent introduces another perspective to the issue. He argues that “[t]he distinctive feature of the African intelligentsia is that it is often difficult to differentiate between an individual who has merely received a Western education and one whose mental activities merit respect reserved for those who assume the position of leader of thought” (2002, pg. 255). The term “intellectual,” as it will be encountered in this book, refers to individuals who devote time and mental energy to the production and dissemination of knowledge. African intellectuals are in the same mold, as Toyin Falola’s (2001) exposé shows. However, unlike
Falola's blending of “the analysis of actions with the reflections that preceded and accompanied them” (2001, pg. xvii), the preoccupation of this study is with online texts, which are contents of the postings made by participants during their online encounters. There are a few instances when offline actions followed after such online conversations; those may be mentioned but are not the main objects of focus.

My close reading of the texts in the postings show that there are individuals who can be referred to as Nigerian intellectuals who are making use of what Dayan refers to as “particularistic media” (1998, pg. 103), or what is commonly known as alternative media forms (Spitulnik, 2002, pg. 177), to engage others in debates and discussions on various issues. These online engagements crystallize into multitudes of ideas; they can be brought together to produce a sort of “textual inscription” of a nation in the similar way, as Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi’s reflection on where and how the African continent is recollected (2002). In the case of particularistic media, those who participate, according to Dayan, tie them to a national center. “But this center is not necessarily political. Often it is no more than a founding myth, enshrined in collective memory” (Dayan, 1998, pg. 107). The founding myth takes the form of various narratives that can be analyzed as products of intellectual minds influenced from different geographic locations. In place of a founding myth which is mostly driven by the political elites, there will be a discussion on foundational national myths in chapter 5, where the data collected will be scrutinized with greater attention.

This study carries the burden of posing a challenge to one of the conventional wisdoms and calls to action. Christopher Oyakhilome submitted that, “[m]ost African countries are built on ideas and ideals of yesterday’s philosophies. We need today’s thinkers for tomorrow’s visions” (Oyakhilome, 2007, pg. 16). If by yesterday’s philosophies Oyakhilome means pre-modern or traditional ideas, the empirical data generated for this study are sufficient in providing an alternative viewpoint. That alternative viewpoint introduces what I prefer to label as a time-dimension on a third level, if ideas are to be placed on a time scale. By third-level time-dimension, I mean ideas that are neither solely of the past nor of the present but which are genuinely hybridized/transnational sets of ideas aided by the advantages of global flows of ideas, data, and people. In the questioning words of Mudimbe-Boyi, “[h]ow can we articulate and re-conceptualize particular social and cultural identities in a time of global and cultural economy?” (2002, pg. xiii). A response to Mudimbe-Boyi’s question can be found in how marginalized people devise ways of circulating their views and ideas. Hwang, Schmierbach, Pack, and Shah found that the more a people’s worldview “differed from mainstream media portrayals, the more
motivated they were to use the Internet as an information source and discussion channel” (2006, pg. 462).

If Oyakhilome’s perspective is subjected to more careful reading, it will be discovered that it poses a pertinent question as to what constitutes the nature and source(s) of ideas of Africans in general and Nigerians in particular. Understanding what influenced a particular idea or set of ideas gives a better grounding for the concept so derived. For instance, Roy Douglas (1973) traces Adam Smith’s concept of non-interference in economic activities to Smith’s exposure to ideas of the physiocrats of his day. In this era of post-modernity and globalization, is it possible to isolate the sources of ideas that feed into the body of knowledge produced by a people? If not, the search for an answer, no matter how tentative, may lead to a possible understanding of how information from different sources form part of a people’s knowledge base, especially during what can be said to be ‘everyday talk.’ In addition, it will be possible to seek answers to what influences the ideas of Nigerians in the diaspora as it relates to the definition/framing of nationhood at a time Crawford Young avers that “the discursive energies mobilized by the struggle for independence had dissipated, and that nationalist thought appeared moribund” (2004, pg. 5). Young should not be faulted for his casual observation of an apparent decline in public and scholarly discourse on issues pertaining to nationhood, nationalism, and national identity. What may not have been visible to him, and to other scholars whose sphere of interest/attention does not include Internet research, is that the discourse on subjects like nationalism is gradually shifting from purely academic conference halls into virtual discussion groups and websites. Hwang et. al. attribute the increasing use of the Internet for expressing one’s views to media alienation (2006, pg. 462). In the year 2004 and prior, the Internet, in its different manifestations, had been providing a ‘home’ for discourse on various issues like nationalism, ethnicity, and group identity. According to Prividera and Howard, nationalism “is a communicative process in which citizens participate rather than a product behind which citizens rally” (2007, pg. 4). Citizens from various nations, especially those in the diaspora, have created such virtual spaces for themselves on the Internet.

Going back to Young’s observation above, the year 2004 for Nigerians in the diaspora cannot be said to be a milestone year when compared with other years like 1999 when, in May of that year, the then military administration in Nigeria conducted an election that heralded another opportunity for the political class to experience democratic governance. In 2004, for instance, Naijanet (one of the sites that Internet-savvy Nigerians frequent) recorded a total of 4,746 postings (an average of 13 postings per day). Another site, soc.culture.nigeria (a Google discussion group), recorded 1,103 postings that year.
But in truth, the number of postings tells us little. What will confirm or refute Young’s observation is a textual review of the ideas within the corpus of texts produced online during that period and beyond. In deciding on duration of study of online communities, Emily Ignacio, who studied identity formation in the Filipino cultural community, emphasizes that those interested “in meaning-making must rigorously analyze each conversation for lengthy periods of time, pick out recurring threads, and make note of the contexts in which threads recur” (2005, pg. 11). On that premise this study chose a time frame of May 1999 to May 2009 as its general period of interest. In line with the concept of ethnographic moments, attention will be paid to specific dates which have significance to the study. These specific dates are focused upon because of the nature of discussions that occurred or the significance of the date to the interest of this study.

Apart from duration and object of study, this research operates within multidisciplinary parameters. In a bid to make sense of the activities of Nigerians online, it became logical to situate this study within the interlocking universe of a number of disciplines, among which are communications, sociology, political economy, and cultural studies. The province of new media studies provides the canvas on which this study is drawn out. Tangential but pertinent issues of politics of technology and its effect on “promoting freedom and changing social and political norms” (Mazarr, 2002, pg. 1) were also engaged. Perspectives in phenomenology helped shape the research design and choice of pertinent methods. According to John W. Creswell (1994), (quoting Dukes and Oiler), phenomenological studies “involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationship of meaning” (1994, pg. 12). Once data were collected and analyzed, the task of making sense and drawing reasonable conclusions benefited from cultural studies’ set of analytic principles, especially Stuart Hall’s (1980) concept of encoding-decoding textual materials. Hall’s model helped create a “margin of understanding.” In effect, the search for meaning is accorded prominence and the social location as well as economic background of the interpreters must be factored into the analysis.

As a Nigerian who presently lives and works outside of Nigeria, it should be stated from the outset that I am immersed in this subject and object of study, but I endeavored to be both an objective observer (of the text and context of conversations) and a participant who maintained a critical public distance in

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5. I slipped a few times, especially in one of my responses to the contributor who wrote an article titled “How to Build a Nation.”
ongoing online conversations about the geopolitical space called Nigeria. I aligned myself with one of anthropology’s field principles of accepting “knowledge not preconfigured in one’s starting paradigms” (Brunt, 1992, pg. 71). I had to sacrifice my Western preconception of what a nation is and how it should be represented in text. The ethnographic observer-participant technique was adopted and deployed in this study for the purpose of understanding a specific concept: nationhood outside of the Eurocentric perspective as a possible way of not falling prey to “the European/ American model as the best or the touchstone by which everything is judged” (Ojaide, 2007, pg. 5). During the study, it was imperative to give accommodation to the point of view enunciated by Keyan Tomaselli that “cultural studies provides a way of not only analyzing power but engaging it for democratic outcomes” (1998, pg. 395). The democratic outcome possible in this study is the recovery of Nigerian voices and an alternative to Daniel Smith’s image of Nigeria on the Internet as “a bastion of bribery, venality and deceit” (2006, pg. 1).

In essence, dipping this study into the fount of cultural studies provides an outcome that will eventually be of service to the producers and consumers of the corpus of text under study. In no way will the end result generalize what diasporic Nigerians as a whole think about nationhood, but will theorize how this particular group, at a point in time, frames and imagines (or refuses to imagine) nationhood, and to what ends such a frame is deployed in other areas of everyday living. Online communities have been known for their social networking capabilities but have hardly been framed as sites for vigorous intellection where different kinds of ideas are generated, circulated, and codified. Samuel Wilson and Leighton Peterson submit that “the Internet has facilitated the rapid emergence of online interactions of dispersed groups of people with shared interests” (2002, pg. 449). What appears to be left is how to harness the outcome of online interactions. The following section discusses Nigeria in the context of a postcolonial nation-state including its present geographic structure.

Structure of Nigeria; Representation and Types of Nationalism

“Nigeria is a centralized federation with thirty-six multiethnic states together serving at least three regions and dozens of prominent peoples who display distinct, often conflicting, interests (Rotberg, 2004, pp. 4–5). The thirty-six states are further subdivided into 774 local government councils for ease of development and growth. Since socioeconomic development cannot be evenly attained,
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disparities and inadequacies often lead to tension and conflicts. These conflicts have played out in religion, politics, and even in a civil war. As expected, the roots of these conflicts have a history which predates Nigeria as a nation. The colonial legacy and the intervention of the military in the affairs of the country are two very important historical factors which are considered responsible for the present situation of the country. On that premise, any historical contextualization of postcolonial nation-states can only partially address the complex issue of a nation’s identity. Ulf Hannerz argues that the growing national identity can be read as a function of time. He posits that some postcolonial nations “have become more nation-like, and at least some of the varied currents of meaning flowing through their social structures, and hardly insignificant ones, can now well be described as national” (1987, pg. 548). Apart from time spent together as a nation, Michael Billig (1995) identifies national languages (which he refers to as vernaculars) and territorial factors that facilitate social relationships as key elements in nation-building. The social relationships that ensue are not so explicit in that “the construction of national identities takes place through seemingly banal processes that constantly re-inscribe in people’s consciousness their national belonging” (Boczkowski, 1999, pg. 93). To capture the essence of this perspective, Billig introduces the term “banal nationalism” (1995). The term covers “those unnoticed, routine practices, ideological habits, beliefs and representations which make the daily reproduction of nations in the established states of the West possible” (Yumul and Ozkirimli, 2000, pg. 788). This term will be extrapolated to a fragile state like Nigeria since the concept of nationhood is driven by representation of sorts.

The issue of representation brings to the fore the question of who among the many competing social actors has the legitimacy to re-imagine the nation and/or by what means the nation can be (re)imagined. According to Yumul and Ozkirimli (2000), the political class in most nations is pivotal in the reproduction of nations and their national identity. Since the political class is no longer location-specific, those outside the country will have to be included in the process of national identity formation. Geographically dispersed citizens who take more than a passing interest in what is going on in their countries have been said to practice “long distance nationalism” (Anderson 1983), which at times could be dangerous to their home countries. Certain roles of those in the diaspora have been known to hurt their homelands while in other cases their contributions have led to positive political changes. One such example, cited by Michael Peter Smith, is the role of “Mexican communities abroad in changing the political culture of contemporary Mexico” (2003, pg. 16). The process of the changes credited to social movements and their networks still has to be studied in more detail. Such studies become more difficult when states are factored into the change-resistance equation.
The state with all its resources is at an advantage to circulate its ideas through educational, sociopolitical, and cultural institutions. The state apparatuses of ideology and coercion seem to take charge of official narratives which circulate within the geopolitical space where such forces have direct influence. Ian Buruma avers “[a] nation, in the modern political sense, not only needs common institutions of government but common mass media, where issues of shared interest are reported and discussed freely in a democracy, or as a form of indoctrination in a dictatorship” (1999, pg. 10). Buruma’s perspective is in line with Benedict Anderson’s concept that “in the minds of each lives the image of the communion” (1991, pg. 6). Government-controlled media have been ready instruments for national mobilization. In addition to the state-controlled apparatuses, social institutions like the private media, in alliance with local or transnational corporations, also contribute effectively to the re-imagining of national communities, sometimes to the exclusion of the toiling majority. Private media have been accused of laying emphasis on entertainment, to the detriment of political communication. Political communication has implications for the society. According to Niall O’Dochartaigh, “forms of communication have played [a] central role in the formation of national identities and national consciousness” (2001, pg. 1).

The central role of communication has been further accentuated with the arrival of cheap and effective ways of networking. The effectiveness of the online interaction translates into a form of bonding and transnational solidarity among geographically dispersed citizens who share a common language, culture, and history. Hiller and Franz identified three types of online relationships among diasporic people which lead to “developing new ties, nourishing old ties and rediscovering lost ties” (2004, pg. 731). Each of these ties identified will be negotiated over time, online or offline. Another consequence of improved information and communication technologies is the ease with which states and the media are being constantly challenged from within and beyond the national space. Kahn and Kellner address how the use of new information and communication technologies have aided “oppositional cultural and political movements and provided possibilities for the sort of progressive sociopolitical change and struggle that is an important dimension of contemporary cultural politics” (2005, pg. 76). The challenge or opposition often revolves around issues of political economy, ecology, and ethnic repression and domination. These are co-determinant issues that shape how a nation is perceived or imagined. One such group actively participating in circulation of ideas on various issues is a non-institutionalized group of geographically dispersed Nigerians who will be interchangeably referred to as Nigerians in the diaspora. The term “diaspora” has been institutionalized in various non-governmental or-
ganizations. One such organization is the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization (NIDO). The section below briefly discusses issues of nationalism and other ancillary ideas in relation to this study of how geographically dispersed Nigerians discuss the issues of nation, nationhood and nationalism during their online interactions.

Issues of Nationalism and Networking Involved in this Research

The issue of how nationhood is constructed or negotiated by citizens of a country like Nigeria cannot and should not be studied outside of how the nation’s intellectuals and the media produce and reproduce representations of a nation’s past, present, and possibly future using various frames and perspectives. The justification for selecting intellectuals (a term used in its loose connotation) as the arrowhead of this study is both historical and sociological. Looking at the past, there are evidences to show that “[d]iaspora intellectuals have often played prominent roles in the formation of national revival and independent movements” (Kostantaras, 2008, pg. 700). Thandika Mkandawire presents a vivid interconnection between intellectuals and pan-Africanism on one hand and nationalism struggles on another. He states that “[t]he relationship between African intellectuals and pan-Africanism and nationalism has been both symbiotic and a fraught one” (2005, pg. 1). Apart from Mkandawire’s activist linkage of African intellectuals to the struggle for independence and integration of the various nationalities on the continent, Cyril Obi, a Nigerian scholar, ascribes a more cerebral role to intellectuals. According to Obi, intellectuals have “always played critical roles in the construction of nationalism(s).” According to him, “[i]t is the intellectuals who have control of the architecture of the ideology of national resistance, and the construction of a political-territorial space of refuge hinged upon a national identity” (2004, pg. 1). I would argue that the ready access intellectuals enjoy in articulating their views in print makes them come across as architects of ideologies when compared to the rest of society. It is documented that those who are literate in most societies contribute more to the content of newspapers than those who cannot read or write in the official languages of their countries. In this regard, present-day intellectuals can be likened to those that John Lonsdale identified as “communicators of political ideas between organizations wider than the locality and the people” (1968, pg. 120).

Furthermore, to properly situate the real geographical location attached to the virtual sites mentioned in this study, a dynamic profile which represents the
situation of the geopolitical entity attached to the study is essential—more so for a country like Nigeria that has a poor representation in the global press. Nigeria as a geopolitical space should not be studied using only current global and local images in circulation; other qualitative data sets must be sought and pressed into service. The one-dimensional portrayal by the Western press regularly frames Nigeria as a multiethnic, conflict-ridden nation, approaching either disintegration or collapse (Maier, 2000). This framing is generally articulated without context (Wu, 2000, pg. 110) or a deep appreciation of the multiple factors that shape single events. It has been established that invisible causes for conflict are rooted in historical, cultural, economic, and political conditions in most developing economies which are at a disadvantage in the global commons. These implicit reasons carry the burden of properly situating the fragile and conflict-ridden nature of postcolonial nation-states as part of the discontents of global capitalism.

Hannerz observes that “Nigeria comes across as an artifact of British colonialism, with inevitable conflicts among its heterogeneous population” (1987, pg. 548). What he fails to take into consideration is that the conflicts are not just based on expansionist tendencies nor on ethnic intolerance but on deep economic polarities exacerbated by white supremacy and globalization. A reading of the history of Europe in the nineteenth century shows that ethnic struggles and conflicts are not unique to Africa or Nigeria. Indeed a cursory look at the literature of nation formation clearly suggests otherwise. Ali Mazuri submits that “the consolidation of the sovereignty of European states too, was forged partly in the fire of inter-European conflicts” (1998, pg. 4). On the same subject of conflict before stabilization, Emerich Francis identified three phases of European history. He mentions a time when “ethnic nationalism aiming at the inclusion of each major ethnic society into one state of its own” (1968, pg. 338) was normal. According to Craig Calhoun, “claims to nationalism are often rooted in a rhetoric of pre-existing ethnicity” (1993, pg. 214). Since it is possible to deduce from literature that ethnicity obstructs national identity it should be possible to track elements of this proposition in relation to online discourse.

There are various schools of thought on the root causes of ethnic conflicts on the African continent in general and in Nigeria specifically. On the one hand, accounts illustrate that previously independent city-states, ethnic groups, and nationalities who nursed no intention of forming a union were put together like bricks to co-exist within the same geopolitical space (Soyinka, 1996; Martin and Meara, 1995). This perspective is challenged by J. F. Ade-Ajayi, who posits that “Nigeria is a product of history, not of the artifice of colonial rulers” (1994, pg. 66). Ade-Ajayi supports his uncommon position by arguing
that the country of Nigeria would have still been founded despite the British or any colonial interventions. This position is supported by Manuel Castells who asserts that “nations are pure ideological artifacts, constructed through arbitrary manipulations of historical myths by intellectuals for the interests of social and economic elites” (2009, pg. 32). If taken together, these two assertions raise fundamental questions about how a nation’s history is constructed and upon which sources the writers depend in the reconstruction and representation of the textual product. In response to these issues, Robert Bjork’s work provides two possible contenders as writers of a nation’s past (1994, pg. 13). He points to professional historians and the general public, leaving out professional information managers like journalists, filmmakers, and artists. The omission revalidates the position of media scholars who see the media as part of the large pool of resources available to professional historians and sections of the general public who engage in reconstruction and representations. It is the role citizens play in the framing of nationhood, national identity, and national history that is the interest of this study. According to Anderson (1991), both mass communication in its local and global variants and mass migration are factors that shape nationhood and the politics of nationalists. Ananda Mitra expresses it succinctly when he asserts that “nations are produced and represented by media and there emerge specific media formations which can be called national media because they represent the principal cultural practices of the nation” (1996, pg. 45).

To better understand how the local and the global interact in Nigeria’s situation and what Hanmerz refers to as the “interplay between imported and indigenous cultures” (1987, pg. 546), it is necessary to reevaluate the history of social engineering embarked upon by colonial powers and its effect on the “national conception of history” (Bjork, 1994, pg. 11) by intellectuals, the national media, and other Nigerians. It will not be a surprise that each group defines and imagines the nation differently. The professional historian is said to “try and simplify findings from newly ventured and highly specialized areas of historical research” (Bjork, 1994, pg. 13). Journalists, as representatives of the media, have been known to use different discursive devices in the process of constructing reality in print and visuals. Jenny Kitzinger makes allusion to the use of “media templates” (2000, pg. 61) which help readers and writers make sense of news reports. Unlike the professional historian and journalist, the general public, especially immigrant Nigerians, are yet to be categorized in terms of their framing strategies.

The conception of a nation’s history has been documented to have fundamental implications for ethnicity, national identity, and the developmental progress of postcolonial nation-states, especially in an information age. To
some scholars the information age connotes a period when transnational capital, labor, and ideas readily cross borders (Evans, 2000; Weber 2002) without recourse to national restrictions. For instance, one scholar posits that the present advancement in capitalism owes much to the rapid development of communication and information technologies (Castells, 1996). In addition, during this historical moment, knowledge commingles with power in the reformulation of socioeconomic relations. Beatriz Santana rightly observes that “this new era not only places knowledge at the forefront of economic competitiveness, but also calls for a whole new model of production and management” (1997). The new mode of production demands new kinds of workers and encourages constant movements of labor aided by innovative transport and communication technologies in unprecedented and unpredictable ways. Some of those attracted to the world’s thriving industrial centers come from developing economies where their services and resources are also needed. Their arrival, settlement, and integration present different issues of loyalties, security, identity, and relevance in their host countries. Most migrant workers also seek to be relevant in the politics of their homeland (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003) but have to deal with shifting meanings of nationality, identity, up-to-date information, and politics of culture.

If we set aside the role they play in politics, Zeleza argues that “African academic diaspora in the United States plays and can play [a role] in African knowledge production” (2004, pg. 261). By extension, this implies that Nigerian intellectuals do have roles to play in the generation and distribution of knowledge. The question is what kind of knowledge do they collectively or individually generate? Is the knowledge linked in any way to “the debate over the nature and history of the nation” (Ranger, 2002, pg. 670) which Terence Ranger (2002) terms the key debate in contemporary politics? This debate also resonates in fields such as media studies to the extent that scholars are interested in how the media represent national identity and nationhood.

**Concepts within the Title of the Study**

In the term “cyber-framing,” the prefix before “framing” connotes a practice or action which takes place in cyberspace. Cyber-framing in this sense implies a multi-mediated practice that conflates media and audience frames as if both were one and the same. This unity of communicator and message, according to Robert Wicks, helps a researcher to “understand the dynamics that take place when citizens process and interpret media” (2001, pg. 90). However, when framing is approached from the different sides of production it will be
appreciated that media framing, as a standalone, has the propensity of “getting beneath the surface of news coverage and exposing the hidden assumption” (Tankard, 2001, pg. 96). Media frames have both cognitive and affective effects on the audience in ways different from what a biased news report can have on their reception of the news. Audience framing depends on prior knowledge during the construction of meaning. Synthesizing different definitions in literature Robert M. Entman defines framing as “selecting and highlighting facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (2004, pg. 5). At a first reading it might appear as if framing is carried out sans agency. As will be seen, framing can be a procedural process done by individuals or by agents of institutions. Scheufele theorizes four key processes for the identification of framing processes: “frame building, frame setting, individual level processes of framing, and feedback loop from audience to journalists” (1999, p. 103). If framing is defined as a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events/processes and from there to the development of a core issue (London, 1993; Pavlik, 2001), it means that the operative search will be for the sources of organizing ideas and how sense-making is assisted. Framing according to Entman (2004) resides in the text and not in the mind of the consumer of text.

One conceptual problem inherent in framing is in understanding the concept individuals use in prioritizing events and issues which when applied make one issue or event relevant and another less so. Some scholars are of the view that news stories do not have any inherent characteristics that allow one to be framed differently from the other. The important instrument of identifying frames lies in the universe of interpretation and not the province of information. Frames provide “a broader, interpretative answer or definition to ‘what is going on’ or should be going on’” (Benford and Snow, 2000, pg. 611). In the case of news, Scott London asserts that “[t]o identify frames, the informational content of news reports is less important than the interpretative commentary that attends it” (1993). If this is true, it implies that the Internet offers a fertile ground for the harvesting of interpretations written by readers, who also double as writers. Cyber-framing, therefore, provides the possibility for capturing the cognitive processes of individuals whose information-seeking behavior is above average and who possess the time to comment on materials read, as they share their thoughts. Individuals who post comments and articles on the Internet play up innocuous cues and reference points found in news stories, using their own interpretive tools and schemes as they make sense of events, issues or values. In an information age, events being commented upon could be local while reports about the events are accessible globally, thereby separating writers from readers. For frames to be meaningful, it is assumed that
both writers and readers are more likely to be located within the same geographical space. When readers and writers are located in different parts of the world, differences in interpretation and opinions are more likely to arise. Some scholars will argue that it is not differences in location that account for differences in interpretation, but lack of exposure to shared knowledge and ideas that drive differences of opinion and interpretation.

To examine the source of political knowledge and subsequently the interpretation given to the text, I have chosen the text-driven heaven of the Internet as my sphere of study and specifically selected the construction of Nigeria’s nationhood as the particular theme of interest. The section below provides a historical lens through which I and others ‘read’ Nigeria in relation to the public sphere and rational discourse. This phenomenon allows one to ask if the online exchanges created and maintained by Nigerians can be analyzed as a normative public sphere where rational discourse occurs.

Theoretical Framework

As stated earlier, “[t]he inter-text, hidden between the lines, only the alert can bring it to life.” The life alluded to in the line above is the life of meaning and understanding of the trinity of text, context and sub-text. If the metaphor is further extended, a reader may also need certain theories as lenses to ‘see’ deeply into what is really going on in the complex world of Nigerians in the diaspora as they navigate the media landscape producing and consuming relevant information for others they can only imagine are in existence.

One of the theories that would possibly assist a reader or researcher make sense of how Nigerians in the diaspora use different media forms is the media system dependency theory. The section that follows details the history and relevance of this theory and others to the virtual ethnographic study on which this book owes a debt.

Media System Dependency Theory

Seeking to understand why peoples in the diaspora turn to various media outlets for information can be helped by applying the uses and gratifications theory (Katz, 1959). But this may not totally explain the complexities of transition from an anomalous state of knowledge (Belkin, 1980) to a transient, assured state of knowledge constructed from a staple of media forms. There are researchers who point to the relationship between gratifications derived and the
The active choice of media made by individuals (Herzog, 1944; Rubin, 1994). The need of individuals has been analyzed from both socio-psychological and systems perspectives and the conclusion reached is that satisfaction of needs establishes “the potential of the individual for self-realization” (Severin and Tankard, 2001, pg. 293). It was also uncovered that the needs of individuals are influenced by various factors, the primary of which is the social structure. Other factors like age, personal values, and condition(s) which brought about their needs for information are also cited as shapers of needs. However, Elliott and Rosenberg appear to disagree, based on their own empirical data. They conclude that “media gratifications are primarily the result of the social situation and background factors and may depend more on habit than on internalized need states” (1987, pg. 687). As can be seen from the assertions above, media dependency theory is a theory of media power and it has its roots in uses and gratifications theory; it considers audiences active rather than passive consumers of media but goes a step further to locate them within an interconnected system. According to Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, there is “the idea that individuals’ needs and interests affect what they select out of an environment to perceive” (1998, pg. 6). When this theory is viewed from the large systems perspective it becomes obvious that the composite units within the systems reinforce and regulate each other with a view of reducing instability/ambiguity. Like every parsimonious theory, there are spaces that still need to be filled. For instance, if we can explain why individuals select certain media over others, can the same argument explain why some individuals contribute intellectual resources to the media?

The lacunae notwithstanding, this theory has been applied to what determines Internet news use (Yang and Patwardhan, 2004), to different political situations. Pablo Halpern (1994) applied it to how the Chilean Left survived political persuasion and negative media representation. Chang and Yu (2001) applied the theory to how changes in China’s social structures impacted on audiences and on media transformation in a new political environment. According to them, the dependency model allowed them to explain “why Chinese readers prefer a particular kind of news and why the Party organs, especially the newspapers, are losing ground to more market-oriented mass media” (2001, pg. 200). Applied to geographically dispersed citizens who need reliable sources of information, especially during crisis in the homeland or when personal values are under attack by out-group forces, the media system dependency theory helps in shaping the description of how media is mobilized to stabilize the social upheaval.

In effect, for this study media can be taken collectively as the bridges between the concept and imagination of nations, and narratives that are gener-
ated during discourse. The narratives generated in a virtual space are limited to those who have access to the Internet and possess the needed writing skills to be able to contribute to ongoing conversations online. This set of people is constantly reflecting on the past and imagining a future for their homeland based on influences from their host country or on information acquired from media sources. In the process of these reconnections and reconstructions, most authors need specific forms of information that either meet their preconceived notions of the homeland or provide them with information that can clarify fuzzy notions. Media reports have been identified as one of the sources geographically dispersed people depend upon for (re)connection with the homeland. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s media system dependency theory helps to understand the importance diasporic citizens attach to specific media reports and how their perception of homeland in relation to the rest of the world is (re)formed. The theory, though criticized for its high descriptive but low predictive powers, in essence proposes a tripartite system of audience, media, and society when the subjects of study are within their national territories. The third leg of the trio changes slightly when an audience is outside of their society. However, according to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, the degree of dependence by the audience is “a key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings, or behavior” (1976, pg. 5). The geographical or social location of the audience appears not to be one of these factors.

During the course of this study it was observed that media organizations focusing on the homeland (Nigeria) cull some materials produced for websites or written during exchanges in the various forums and publish them without permission from the authors. Though the impact of such activities has not been researched, it presents possibilities for interpreting the likely effect such transnational flows may have on national integration from the perspectives of citizens living outside of the country but still connected at the level of ideas. One theory that helps in explaining the practice is the agenda-setting theory. The section below reviews the theory and its applicability.

**Agenda-Setting Theory**

Two important aspects of agenda-setting theory are the influence the media have on the reading and viewing public by calling their attention to news reports, and the importance the public attaches to such information derived from how the media frame or play up the story. In effect, the “agenda-setting function of the media refers to the media’s capability, through repeated news coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the public’s mind” (Severin
and Tankard, 2001, pg. 219). The theory focuses on ways the media as a social institution impact on public life and public policy. The sheer pervasiveness of the media makes their presence difficult to ignore but makes impact on behavior empirically and qualitatively observable. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), the scholars credited with the first use of the term, designed a study that focused on 100 undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, during the 1968 presidential elections. The objective of the study was to demonstrate that the issues voters rated as important coincided with those the local newspapers in Chapel Hill selected as important. Their hypothesis anticipated media content having effect on perception of voters, especially those undecided members of the electorate during political campaigns. Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller (1980), in a review of the study, posit that the sample was drawn from a single community and at a single point in time. There are possibilities that a single locational study may have its limitations due to inherent factors like demography and socioeconomic status, but the correlation between the variables was still strong enough to make the kind of deduction that was made. The statistical results notwithstanding, it is accepted in the discipline of statistics that correlation does not inevitably prove causation. On that premise, I agree with Joseph Thomas Klapper, who observed that “[m]ass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences” (1960, pg. 8). Lutz Erbring et al. also share this position in their study of front page news and real-world cues. They concluded that “secondary diffusion of problem salience through networks of informal social communication is shown to eventually override early news impact” (1980, pg. 16).

Agenda-setting theory recognizes two different effects on individuals. Erbring et al. differentiate between media exposures which lead to attitudinal changes and political cognitions. Attitudinal changes, according to these researchers, are “characterized by evaluative direction and affective polarity” (1980, pg. 16). Political cognitions relate to issues that have to do with value judgments by readers. For example, governmental corruption or racial issues were considered as belonging to this category.

There have been various developments to the agenda-setting theory in terms of reconceptualization and applications. Dearing and Rogers (1996) carried out longitudinal studies spanning a period of twenty-five years and affirmed the linkage between public concern and issue saliency in the media. At the level of theory application, Kiouiss, McDevitt, and Wu applied agenda-setting theory to the process of political socialization. Their research design does not rely solely on media reports but considers other reinforcing characteristics such as “influence of school intervention exposure, news attention, discussion, and
information integration” (2005, pg. 756). The study breaks new ground and adds to the corpus of works that link agenda-setting to dynamics of news frames, schema, and priming. David and Pavlik applied the theory to how the media in 2003 covered SARS, a potential pandemic, and concluded that “media tend to shift focus from other relevant issues and instead of disseminating useful information … spread panic among audience” (2005, pg. 12). This study brought to the fore an information science perspective on the relationship of reader preference and news frames. The authors suggest that the agenda-setting role of the media is located along the functional continuum of information provision and rhetorical sophistication deployed in persuasion and reinforcement of selected ideas. These various studies have implication for research design and analysis of data. Since data collection directly results from observation, it is imperative that the theoretical framework underlying online interactions and activities should be explicated. The two theories focus on the individuals and the media but the next section focuses on how meaning is derived from what is read or communicated to others. It helps address the issue of socialization of meaning and communication. In effect, it speaks to how collectives rather than individuals decide on meaning of concepts during interactions.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic interactionism is part of the interactional tradition which proposes that “communication and meaning are unabashedly social” (Littlejohn, 1999, pg. 155). Implicit in the theory is an understanding that meaning is not outside the interaction of social groups. Alan Bryman puts the idea succinctly when he avers that “[s]ymbolic interactionists view social life as an unfolding process in which the individual interprets his or her environment and acts on the basis of that interpretation” (1988, pg. 54). It can then be deduced that the theory does not fix knowledge but presents it as an evolving process (Rock, 1979, pg. 8). The term “symbolic interactionism” is credited to Herbert Blumer and focuses attention on how human beings arrive at social meaning. The conceptual framework and intellectual antecedents of the theory are based on George Herbert Mead’s study of group life. It is not a theory given to easy articulation. Paul Rock, in tracing the intellectual trajectories of the theory, states that “its hostility to detailed explanation reflects a reasoned aversion to certain forms of rationality” (1979, pg. 5). Blumer also agrees with Rock’s position when he posits that “there has been no clear formulation of the position of symbolic interactionism” (1986, pg. 1). In making up for the lack of an articulated statement on the theory’s methodological position, various scholars,
including Blumer, agree to certain principles inherent in the nature of the theory. Blumer, according to Stephen W. Littlejohn, “believed above all that the study of humans could not be conducted in the same manner as the study of things” (1999, pg. 156). This was suggested by Blumer’s having articulated three fundamental premises:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meanings of such things are derived from, or arise out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.
3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things one encounters.

It is generally understood that “things” as used by Blumer has a wider connotation than just inanimate objects; it is a representation of physicality in its wildest imaginative essence. Things as objects can be categorized into three types, “physical (things), social (people), and abstract (ideas)” (Littlejohn, 1999, pg. 159). In essence, the three principles stated above privilege meanings over other psychological factors that may be responsible for human or social actions. In effect, “[t]he self is the fundamental concept of symbolic interaction, regardless of level of analysis employed” (Manning, 2001, pg. 153). In accordance with Dennis Wrong’s (1961) explanation, meaning-making speaks to one aspect of the concept of socialization, and over-socialized views of human beings must be avoided. The unfair separation of the trio of “social meaning, embodied self, and the surrounding material world” (Puddephatt, 2009, pg. 90) must be avoided in analysis.

Most social scientists, it is reported, tend to misread the emphasis on meanings and interpretations by social actors to “imply a need for participant observation” (Bryman, pg. 55). Bryman further asserts that the taken-for-granted linkage between social interactionism and the ethnographic method of observer participant can be argued to the contrary. To buttress his assertion he makes reference to the 1979 and 1980 intellectual debates between Clark McPhail, Rexroat, and Blumer. The core of the contention was whether “Mead’s epistemology was closer to the natural science model than Blumer has typically allowed” (Bryman, 1988, pg. 56).

The usefulness of symbolic interactionism to this study is in the choice of methods, reading, and interpretation of texts. Understanding ‘self’ as a composite of biology and sociology allows for the application of a concept like social constructionism. Individuals are seen as actors who are shaping social actions and are constantly shaped by their actions and interactions. On this premise, texts produced during online debates and interactions are not read as
products of the mind of single individuals. The texts become integral parts of complex systems of signs and signification. The texts produced by the various participants in online forums are taken as the units of analyses. It is the meaning and interpretation derived from these texts that will help provide answers to the research questions which are generated as a consequence of the literature review found in the section below.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Review of Previous Nigeria-Related Studies

There are many tributaries that make up the mainstream of this book. Each of these can be traced in the work of media and cultural studies scholars, especially those interested in the presence of nations in cyberspace, either for the creation of identity (Omoniyi, 2007) or the creation of transnational spaces for long distance nationalist struggles and relevance. Farooq Kperogi fused media and migration studies in his examination of “Guerrillas in cyberia” (2008). This study focused on a selected number of online newspapers run by Nigerians in the diaspora. Other disciplines have not been left out of nations and Internet research. For instance, Misty Bastian’s study (1999) reconstructs Nigeria’s cyber-presence from an anthropological perspective. Her contribution ruptures the master narratives of nation and the unidirectional perspectives of globalization in terms of the interlocking ideas of imagination and immigration. She posits that the manner in which citizens away from home conceptualize home is directly related to the nature of government in place. Her research was carried out during the twilight days of Major-General Sanni Abacha, onetime military ruler of Nigeria, whom commentators (Badmus, 2006) on discourse frame as one of Nigeria’s worst military dictator who gave very little room for opposition at home and abroad.¹

Bastian’s observation of the interaction between Nigerians in the diaspora and politics of home points to Benedict Anderson’s concept of long distance nationalism.² Though this concept was not explicitly labeled in her study, she instead raised the issue of ambiguity and questioned the praxis of immigrants who are away from their countries but who still make time to engage their homeland from the comfort of their host countries. This observation presents

¹. Sesay and Ukeje (1997) give a detailed account of Major-General Sanni Abacha’s reign.
both a contradiction for, and an expectation of, citizens who nurture a commitment to their fatherland. As part of the conclusion of her study, Bastian named into being a ‘virtual Nigeria,’ which, according to her, represents a safe zone for immigrants who are temporarily dislocated from the ‘real Nigeria.’ Virtual Nigeria becomes the significant other of ‘real Nigeria’ or what can be called a symbolic nation which exists mainly in the imagination of its creators.

Bastian’s research tangentially addressed the issue of diverse forms of media usage (not just the Internet) by geographically dispersed citizens with the purpose of understanding the culture they represent and the views they disseminate to others and within the Nigerian group. Her research focus was more on the form of media and not the content. As expected, her social location as an outsider to the sociopolitical conditions was questioned by some Nigerians who read her work but her findings were not invalidated. Bastian’s findings were debated online by intellectuals who disagreed with her historical reconstruction of how Naijanet, one of the premier online discussion groups, came into existence.\(^3\) The brains behind the idea, and the social events that bestowed visibility and acceptability on the fledging electronic list, thought otherwise. In conclusion, she predicted that “the moment when virtual Nigeria becomes open to real Nigeria, there is the possibility of a new synthesis, a drawing closer of the electronic world of the brain drain diaspora and the real worlds of both material diasporic experience and Nigerian quotidian life” (1999, para. 36). The anticipated synthesis has materialized in the recent past (especially during 2002–2007), but with yet-to-be studied measurable impact on the Nigerian society.

The paucity of studies on how the Internet is impacting the Nigerian nation notwithstanding, there is yet another work that extended Bastian’s anthropological study. Ben Moran (2000) focused on how identities are expressed in one of the virtual spaces specially created by and for Nigerians. His research is from an African studies perspective and theoretical departure point of social ecology of change and its impact on who people conceive themselves to be in a virtual environment. Social ecology, though not referenced as such by Moran, implies that changes are not just additions within interconnected social structures like urbanization, print culture, and colonialism but that the impact of changes do have rippling effects. What becomes evident is that one small change

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\(^3\) A posting of August 6, 2001, by Bee Alkay (a pseudonym) reacted to Bastian’s account of how Naijanet started. Deploying a proverb, Alkay wrote that “the lion and the hunter have different tales to tell, he who must have a balanced history must read both tales” http://groups.Google.com/group/soc.culture.nigeria.
in any of the sub-sectors has the capacity for greater impacts in others. Moran drew his theories of identity from disciplines as far flung as postcolonial studies, communications, and media studies. He deduced an inter-media connection in terms of cross-sharing of information between Internet groups and local media organizations that found the materials useful for publication. According to him, “separate media interact, so that Usenet can contribute to content in newspapers, or information can cross from e-mail into radio broadcasts” (2000, pg. 7). He was able to use various online and offline exchanges to illustrate an African country’s presence in the global sphere of electronic networks. The active production and consumption of information in virtual spaces indicates, in the words of Chuck Odili (one of his respondents), “we are part of the Internet and the Internet is a part of us” (ibid., pg. 200).

Though the personal pronoun ‘we’ in Odili’s statement may appear unproblematic to a casual reader, Moran’s study re-establishes the multiple identities of an average Nigerian online or offline. Ethnicity, gender, professional status, and a few identities can be implicated in the shaping and re-shaping of an individual’s perception of what his or her nation is or ought to be. Moran followed discussions at different online forums and for his analysis he selected genres that pointed to how multiple identities can feature in one individual. These multiple identities need not be in completion, depending on which type of identity is in operation. Moran identified contact as one of the essential conditions that influences identity formation. He posited that “emphasis on contact as the heart of identity shifts the viewpoint away from individual actors surrounded by external social forces, and forces consideration onto the kinds of contact that occur” (ibid., pg. 103). The openness of Internet forums is contrasted with other media forms and the impact of this openness on the nature of dialogue and message develops during the interaction. In conclusion, Moran argues that “[e]conomic and political entities such as the Nigerian state still play the most significant role in the shaping of identity” (2000, pg. 110). A perspective steeped in the knowledge of the conflictual nature of the relationship between Nigerians and the state will come to a different conclusion. For instance, Peter Ekeh argues that “[i]t is an indication of the stress and turbulence of our times that Nigerians are everywhere reexamining the purpose of the Nigerian state and the relationships between their ethnic groups and the Nigerian federation” (2001). To Ekeh and some of those whose words are used

4. An asynchronous exchange between Madunagu, a newspaper columnist who lives in Nigeria, and Emeguali, a Nigerian based in the United States of America, illustrates this point. See complete exchange in Appendix A.
in this study, it is the ethnic nationality that shapes their identity and not the state. It would not be out of place to infer that there exists an ambivalent relationship between the majority of Nigerians and the state.

A third study carried out seven years after Moran’s study focuses on identity formation from a sociolinguist’s perspective. Tope Omoniyi, a Nigerian professor based in the United Kingdom, constructs a continuum from the past to the present information age. He contextualizes the present use of cyberspace as part of the space for socialization. This he compares to the time when Africans in rural areas used village squares and market squares for socialization functions within the society. According to him, the village square “was an arena of social engineering, a meeting place for friends, acquaintances, lovers, traditional professionals, etc. up to the 20th century and beyond” (2007, pg. 27). Though he goes on to make a sweeping statement that “[c]ybercafes especially in the cities and e-mails and chat-rooms have become part of the social and cultural reality for a growing number of new ‘elite’ Nigerians” (pg. 28), his assertion can be used only as one of the anecdotal evidences of the role of discussion groups during the complex process of identity formation. As a study focused on how real people discuss concrete events and conditions which directly relates to their homeland, his conclusion proves to be very pertinent to this present study. It adds to the complex issue surrounding issues of research ethics. Though in obedience to his pledge to keep the main participants anonymous, I was still able to identify a few of the postings he used in the study which had direct bearings to my past activities. Proper names were changed but the incidents being referred to remain unchanged and recognizable to the participants.

Unlike Omoniyi’s study, Kperogi (2008) focused on Nigerian diasporic Internet-based investigative media in a bid to establish a news-sharing connection between the home-based media and this present crop of ‘muckrakers.’ He was also able to show that the federal and state governments are paying attention to online investigative journalism. Kperogi further states that this brand of citizen journalism can be credited with an emerging transformation and complication of “normative notions of news and cultural flows. In the recent past, it used to be the case that Nigerians in the diaspora relied on the online content of their domestic newspapers for news about homeland” (2008, pg. 74). The present situation shows that some news outlets rely on diaspora-run news outlets.

Using these studies as guides it is possible to argue that the concept of nation can neither be homogenized nor made Eurocentric in essence. To buttress this position, Calhoun asserts that “[a]ll of the available essentialist definitions are unstable and inherently contestable, … not only because they
bias usage for or against various political claims, but because they are based on qualities which putative nations or nationalist movements share with admitted non-nations” (1993, pg. 216). There are critical questions asked across cultures and time about the what, when, and how of nations. The discourse about, and debates around the concepts of nation, nationhood, and nationalism can no longer be pushed onto the back burners of media studies scholarship. The issues of news imperialism, nationality, identity formation and cultural politics as it relates to people in postcolonial states have been the subject of commentary by numerous authors and scholars from different fields (Soyinka, 1996; Szeman, 2003; Lim, 2004). Apart from those in the literary field with interest in the literary intersection of nationalism and colonialism, other disciplines focus on the effects of globalization on nation-states. Sarah Ives notes that “[m]any geographers have incorporated the idea of the nation, and indeed all scales and boundaries, as imagined, recognizing the nation as a fluid battleground for meaning” (2007, pg. 155). Furthermore, unlike geographers, the core of the discourse of media and information scientists can be summarized as the impact of global information networks on nation-states.

Frank Webster, in reviewing the position of writers on the subject, restated their fear of the atrophy of nation-states, recalling the writings of political scientists during the Cold-War era. The justification this time for the fear that the state will wither away is that “frontiers are irrelevant to electronics flows and, accordingly, marketing, production and distribution are increasingly conducted on a world stage that undermines national boundaries” (Webster, 2002, pg. 101). When these transactions and interactions across national borders are subjected to historical contextualization, though, it seems that “[t]ransnationalism (as long-distance networks) certainly preceded the nation” (Vertovec, 1999, pg. 447). These two mutually exclusive positions raise issues, such as the origin of nations, interaction between nation and state, and the processes of state legitimacy. Among these issues, the origin of nations will be briefly discussed below by first drawing from a universal knowledge pool and later returning to location-specific ideas from the geopolitical region of interest.

In reflecting on the origin of nations, Anderson (1991), drawing from extensive Southeast Asian experiences, describes differences in the nature of nationalism and the nationalist politics of various communities. He differentiates anti-colonialist nationalists’ movements from the anti-imperialist nationalists’ movements in Asia. Anderson also links the development of print technology

to capital formation and concludes that the logic to mass-produce printed copies and ability to read in one language across a wide area improved profitability and also aided imagination and national consciousness. The idea of reading the same material in different locations helped create a unifying cord that existed only in their minds, materials, and memories. In Anderson’s view, the individuals who claim nationality of a space may never meet face to face, but “in the minds of each lives the image of the communion” (1991, pg. 6). Imagination can be taken as a “process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (Wenger, 1998, pg. 176). The cognitive process of imagination is not constrained by a need to physically interact or communicate in a face-to-face mode. Mediated communication and interaction within and beyond a community displaces the need to see others in a population.

The concept of imagined political communities has not been without its fair share of criticism, especially where multilingual, postcolonial nation-states are concerned. Partha Chatterjee raises the question of whose imagination forms the national community when colonial authorities are known to have already set into motion the structures of governance, resulting in the state as a fait accompli which lags behind nation-building efforts (Chatterjee, 1996, pg. 216). The conceptualization of nationhood for colonized nations then follows Eurocentric models that hardly fit the asymmetrical power relations that exist in the colonized states (Chatterjee, 1993, pg. 5). The Eurocentric model has various implications. Anthony Giddens (1987) makes reference to one of these implications when he observes that the existence of geographical entities as states under colonial authority and power prior to their becoming nations or embarking on the enterprise of nation-building shapes their history and their future. This misstep has been argued to partially account for the apparent national dysfunctionality prevalent in most postcolonial nation-states and a general lack of consensus among their ruling elites. It is my assumption that a general lack of consensus among the ruling elites has consequences on how the political community is imagined and how such vision is disseminated to the rest of the public. Aside from the lack of consensus among the elites, Young reminds us that “[m]any of the leading students of nationalism, such as Anthony Smith or Walker Connor, dismissed territorial nationalism in Africa as inauthentic, lacking the ultimate ethnic origin around which the constitutive myths of shared history and ancestry took form” (2004, pg. 5). This historical perspective cannot be easily discounted; it has to be recognized as part of any discussion of nationhood where postcolonial nations are concerned. In extending the tools needed for understanding a work such as this, the next section gives a brief context to various terms in the study. It defines diaspora
in relation to Nigeria, examines postcolonialism, and reviews construction of national identity.

**Diaspora in Literature**

A corpus of literature exists on how different groups use mass media as sites for the exchange of information and social interaction, and as launch pads of nationalistic struggles (Brookes, 1999; Yumul and Özkirimli, 2000). Michael Schudson goes further to state that “[t]he mass media are probably more potent in creating solidarities than in breaking them” (2002, pg. 482). Like traditional media platforms, it has been documented that new information and communication technologies play similar roles in bringing people together. Pablo J. Boczowski observes that “émigrés have increasingly used various forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to accomplish this goal [of remaining in contact]” (1999, p. 86). Aaron Koh (2005) examined the role of the media and national education in imagining Singapore’s nationality and identity and concluded that both institutions are ideological state apparatuses playing different functions. Unlike state-controlled media, there are specific studies on the role of the Internet on self-determination, political organizing, and advocacy. Human agency is what makes such political changes possible. The internet is one of many technologies available to citizens who need to function below the radar screen of national governments. Nira Yuval-Davis puts it succinctly in her allusion to groups she terms “committed diasporas.” In her words, “[o]ne cannot imagine the continued nationalist struggles of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), for instance, without the financial, political and other help of the Irish diaspora communities, especially in the USA” (1997, p. 18). If the imagination cannot capture the struggles of the IRA’s nationalist fervor, reconstructing the role of the Jewish diaspora has been made easier with the works of scholars like Gabriel Sheffer, who studied Jewish diaspora communities against the backdrop of “current national, regional, and global politics” (2003, p. xi). He established a complex tripartite relationship involving diaspora communities, their homeland, and the host country. In his study, it is not difficult to see similarities among various diaspora communities. He surmises that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the constantly expanding processes of globalization are responsible for the interest in diaspora studies. Apart from the intervention of diaspora communities in the sociopolitical affairs of their homeland, Adrian J. Pantoja (n.d) explores in his study of the Dominican diaspora the involvement of the group in shaping certain foreign policies of the United States government toward the Dominican Republic. He
concludes that the Dominicans are involved in direct political participation in their homeland.

An impression of national coherence is what emanates from some studies. For instance, Liza E. Tsaliki focuses on the notion of “Greekness on the Internet” (2003, p. 162). Similarly, the study of Filipinos online by Ignacio (2005) concludes that though there is unity in diversity and an imagined thread still binds the different regions together, what holds a country like the Philippines together is cultural and historical with different groups coming to the loom with different resources. The study of the peoples of the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago by Miller and Slater (2000) adds to the body of works which present how people in different locations redefine and renegotiate nationality. The interaction online by those abroad and those at home dissolves the dichotomy of homeland and diaspora and calls for a reformulation of the concept. An idea of such a reformulation appears to be happening in some discussion groups. For instance, a discussant, whom I shall simply identify as AaA, on one of the Nigerian online forums disagreed with the use of the term “diaspora” for Nigerians. AaA, relying on Internet sources to define the term, posits that sticking to such a term is mere delusion. Unlike AaA, UN, another prolific Internet pundit, looks toward William Safran (1991) in the construction of his argument about the dichotomy and distrust which exist between “diasporans and homeland Nigerians.” In essence, the competition and alterations become understandable when the term is framed as “a process, a condition, a space, and a discourse” (Zeleza, 2004, pg. 262). Zeleza further submits that there are historical differences among diasporas which sometimes lead to intimate competition and differences in communicative practices.

There are scholars who reduce the complex term diaspora to simply refer “to the dispersal of any group of people from their original country to other countries” (El-Aziz, et al., 2005, pg. 3). What is not obvious from the definition is how it homogenizes the term “diaspora.” This term, as some scholars believe, is embedded in ambiguities in that it “has been stretched to cover a varied assortment of social phenomena, transnational relationships, cultural endeavors, and identitarian orientations and disorientations” (Safran, 2003, pg. 438). Scholars who prefer to set a time frame for their definition of diaspora make reference to new and old diasporas, especially in the case of recent African im-

6. The main point in the article, written and circulated, June 19, 2007, is that “diaspora” as used by Nigerians is an opportunistic political term. AaA prefers the term “Nigerians living abroad” instead of “Nigerians in the diaspora.”

7. The article was posted online and later published on May 13, 2007 in one of Nigeria’s newspapers, The Daily Independent online.
migrants who left their homeland of their own free will (Okome, 2009). Apart from time of leave-taking, David Chariandy introduces the concept of postcolonial diasporas. According to him, “postcolonial diasporas would then mark a (not-so?) new disenchantment with nation-based articulations of postcolonialism” (2006, pg. 2). Postcolonialism can be both a theoretical and historical construct that maps the various trajectories of resistances before a nation is formed or imagined. Avtar Brah (1999) suggests a necessary distinction between diaspora as a theoretical notion and the historical experiences of diaspora. In her opinion, not all émigrés nurse the ambition of returning to the home they left. F. W. Riggs (2000) introduces another dimension to the situation of those away from their homeland. He identifies those leaving home and those staying in touch (2000, pg. 3). This position is shared with Roza Tsagarousianou, who posits that “diaspora should be better seen as depending not [so] much on displacement but on connectivity” (2004, pg. 52). As if to complicate the concept, Moran raises the issue of diaspora as one which cannot be an exclusive preserve of those outside a country. He makes reference to internal diaspora by citing the example of “[t]he founding of the Ibo (sic) Union in Lagos in 1936,” which could pass for Igbo diaspora among Yoruba people (Moran, 2000, pg. 14). The location is not the essence but rather the various links forged with the homeland.

On the premise of connectivity, Riggs explains further that some in the diaspora never left their homeland, because they were born and raised outside of their homeland. Brah avers that “the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a homeland” (1999, pg. 180). Her definition introduces the binary opposition of homeland and abroad and the conceptual changes that have been visited on the term by new realities and possibilities of imagination. The Internet is one such reality. As rich as the literature on the subject of diaspora is, the meaning of the concept can be derived from the community of users. The debate and disagreements about the term can only lead to further clarity. The Internet is one of the many spaces where these discussions go on. The section below interrogates both the social and technological aspects of the Internet.

Review of Social and Technological Aspects of the Internet

The Internet is creating new possibilities for imagination, interaction, and communication with a promise to redefine culture and politics (Poster, 2001).
These possibilities are most prominent in the areas of identity construction, community formation, and economic (dis)empowerment within and among nations. Since individuals make up nations, it is easy to observe that extensive usage of the Internet encourages the construction of new knowledge and poses a challenge to hitherto accepted social concepts and norms (Kanuka and Anderson, 1998). For instance, users of the Internet have reconfigured the meaning of Anderson’s notion of imagined communities and at the same time are constantly redefining the notion of nationhood through diverse narratives. It appears that nations, like stories, are frames constructed by a class of citizens who enjoy unlimited access to, or own, the media. Sheila Croucher, invoking several scholars (Anderson 1991, Brubaker 1992, and Breuilly 1993), submits that “governing elites and intellectuals play a central role in shaping this sense of community” (2003, pg. 2). In this century, however, access to and ownership of the media are no longer restricted to a particular class (King, 2003, pg. 179). Apart from socioeconomic status, Murray Turoff and Starr Roxanne are of the opinion that “no restriction separates information providers from information receivers” (1998, pg. 116). The apparent nonrestrictive potentials of the Internet have not gone unchallenged by other media scholars. Abdul Alkalimat (2001) submits that “digital divide” is the concept being used to denote the emerging disparity between information’s rich and poor. However, Lisa J. Servon (2002) believes that the divide is not just an issue of access but also one that presents questions of social inequality and injustice. In addition, Mary E. Ebeling maps the digital gaps along what she refers to as “the global fault lines of inequality” (2003, pg. 97). Applying Marshall McLuhan’s four laws of media, Eriksen submits that the Internet “intensifies the development of new class divisions (the haves and the have-nots in the information maze)” (1996). Scholars argue that a digital divide exists along national, class, racial and gender lines. According to Norris, “[a] global divide is evident between industrialized and developing societies. A social divide is apparent between rich and poor within each nation. And within the online community, evidence for a democratic divide is emerging” (2001, pg. i). In effect, the comparative cost of access between developing and developed nations cannot be ignored (Ebo, 1998).

Fragmentation of societies and groups notwithstanding, fortunate Internet users appear to be (re)framing the discourse on nations in cyberspace for purposes still uncertain. In the spirit of this uncertainty, Tony King argues that “[t]here is certainly no evidence that the presence of national groups on the Web...

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8. The word fortunate is coupled with Internet users to connote the fact that there are some users whose access is dependent on their profession, vocation, or privilege in society. Individuals of equal social status may not be equally fortunate.
CHAPTER 2 · LITERATURE REVIEW

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somehow adds to their strength in reclaiming or carving out sovereign, political entity, as opposed to simply keeping in touch” (King, 2003, pg. 179). Keeping in touch is not that simple, in that it intersects sociology with technology. It brings to the fore entire components of social networking, which, according to Barry Wellman, “are not the densely-knit small groups that groupware tries to support” (1992, pg. 123). Geert Lovink would rather argue that “[t]he aim of the networks is not transportation of data but contestation of systems” (2005, pg. 11). The challenge to the system could be political, economic, or cultural, depending on the balance of forces and how quickly the forces can dominate the public domain with their discourse and circulation of meaning.

Taking all these perspectives together, the notion assumes that there are different sides and questions to the discourse on the impact of the Internet on individuals and societies. Bosah Ebo, using a religious metaphor, raises a pertinent question: “Is the Internet a messiah or a demon?” (2001, pg. ix). There are as many imagined as real answers to Ebo’s question. According to Wilson and Peterson, “early literature surrounding the Internet regarded the new technology as revolutionary in both its technical innovation and its broad social and political implication” (2002, pg. 450). Some optimists adopt a similar rhetoric of revolution, and attribute liberatory and democratic roles to the Internet.” (Rheingold, 1993; Soukup, 2004). Meanwhile, a scholar like Tom Brignall III compares the Internet to Bentham’s panopticon “because the dissemination of power and control is in the hands of the ‘jailers’” (Brignall, 2002.). In addition, Brignall raises germane questions when he asks about the type of liberation attainable from a technology that allows for exchange of information and whether such unbridled dissemination can lead to social revolution. What will be made clear later in this study is that the unbridled dissemination of information is not the main focus of the aftermath of the evolving social revolution but the strengthening and empowering of virtual voices online.9

Wellman and Gulia, in a review that takes various perspectives under its critical wings, conclude by categorizing four different camps: “Manichean, presentist, unscholarly and parochial” (1997, pg. 167). According to this arbitrary categorization, ‘Manicheans’ are said to argue on both sides with one group positing that the Internet has a constructive effect while the other maintains that it has a corrosive effect on community foundation. Whatever changes the use of the Internet brings upon the character of communities as presently constituted or constructed, the nature of communication at interpersonal,

9. Ananda Mitra and Eric Watts (2002) deal with the issue of voice in Internet discourse from a humanistic perspective. According to them, the “human voice announces one’s immediate relation to, and inseparability from, the world and others” (pg. 481).
inter-group and international levels will also be fundamentally affected. Wellman and Gulia cited Barlow’s prophetic statement that “[w]ith the development of the Internet, and with increasing pervasiveness of communication between networked computers, we are in the middle of the most transforming technological event since the capture of fire” (1998, pg. 167). The metaphor of fire in this prediction has a dual connotation of heat and light, and constructive and destructive tendencies.

To anchor this dual metaphor with empirical data entails a perspective which suggests that the use of the Internet can encourage national integration as typified by the case of the Philippines (Ignacio, 2005) and Trinidad and Tobago (Miller and Slater, 2000). In addition to national integration, other trends are developing toward national transformation or renegotiation of power and identity for various nationalities. A tentative reading of the present case study of online discussions among Nigerian immigrant communities appears to represent a scenario of ethnic promotion over national identity.

Based on areas covered by the literature review, the section below poses a few research questions that will guide the collection of data and their subsequent analyses.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the main themes of online postings made by Nigerians? Are nation, nationalism, or nationhood topics engaged by Nigerians? How is nationhood discussed in the postings among geographically dispersed Nigerians? Where do the ideas which influence these concepts come from?

2. To what extent do news media reports from the homeland reinforce (or displace) previously held notions of nationhood and nationalism when immigrants relocate to Western countries, or are the shifts influenced by Western dominant ideas and media?
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter deals in part with the philosophical underpinnings of the methodology of this study while not neglecting the actual methodology. Details of the procedural steps taken for data collection are discussed in the next chapter. This chapter focuses on the parameters which guide how data should be and are collected in a qualitative research design and the various methods chosen for the research. The chapter then elucidates the rationale for this study. According to Emily Ignacio, there should be no dissonance between research questions and the methods chosen. She opines that, “[a]s in other sciences, the research questions one asks should guide the practitioner to the methods used, and no one method is considered to be the ‘best’ form of inquiry; however, scholars must carefully choose the method which will enable them to best answer their research questions” (2005, pg. 11). Watkins and Swidler, while introducing their form of ethnography, also observe the interconnectedness of theory and methods (2009, pg. 162).

Since the main objective of this research is to understand how citizens frame or define a concept or generate knowledge about the concept, it does not require a general universal law as its outcome but involves an approach that focuses on meaning bestowed on a phenomenon. This is what Mark Smith, relying on authorities like Wilhelm Windelband, Max Weber, and others, terms “methodological individualism” (1998, pg. 143). It implies that my methodological position accepts the relationships and interactions of individuals as the basic unit within a society or a collective. In effect, the search for meaning of concepts like nationality, nationalism, and nationhood will be derived from postings of individuals with an understanding that each posting is a result of textual interactions from different sources. Once a methodological position was established the next logical turn was the consideration of possible methodological options by which data would be collected and analyzed.

There are many methods of finding out what a people think about specific issues or ideas. One method is to directly ask the people concerned using open-ended or structured interview instruments that can probe deep into their minds as they reconstruct their thoughts on the subject of interest. To be able to conclude that the study represents an approximation of what the collective thinks,
it is paramount that the survey should reflect the demography as well as be a representative sample of the population. This technique reflects some perspectives in James Surowiecki’s treatise, “The wisdom of crowds” (2004). In Surowiecki’s opinion, seeking knowledge from a broad-based audience produces better results than asking a few experts about a topic of interest. There are a number of assumptions and limitations in this kind of quantitative research technique. One of the assumptions is that the research instrument will be interpreted the same way by each of the respondents and that the reconstruction of their past can be relied upon by the researcher as valid statements which eventually form part of the data deployed in the final analysis and conclusion. According to Cass Sunstein, “[i]t is well-known that statistical answers from groups of sufficiently large sizes tend to match the views of population-wide samples” (2006, pg. 23). An alternative method to statistically driven studies will be what C. George Boeree terms present orientation, which involves “observing (or introspecting) what is happening now” (1998). This kind of study implies locating where the group regularly meets online or offline, and, in the social science tradition of ethnography, the researcher interacts with, and observes, postings made by the cyber-community on a regular basis. To ensure credibility and reliability of data it is imperative that notes and important information (especially the context of the notes) are kept while participation in the discussions is kept to a minimum to avoid distortion. In this study, I opted for the participant observation method and was sensitive to an observant-participant status in most of the online groups I selected for this study. My major activity, like Bogdan (1973) suggests, was “characterized by a prolonged period of contact” (pg. 303) with the constant production of text and following the context that gave rise to each thread.

In this section, I lay out the thoughts which informed the research design of this study against the background of the knowledge gained from the extensive literature review in the preceding chapter. In the study of this phenomenon, I make the assumption that my objects of analysis, which are derived from individual reflections and reactions, can be deployed as “concrete things with a definite structure or, alternatively, are constituted by a set of components accessible to some procedure of knowing” (Smith, 2003, pg. 1). In effect, the everyday talk of participants at various online forums lends themselves to a

1. R. Bogdan (1973) defines qualitative data as “data which are rich in description, understanding, and detail but not subject to quantitative procedures” (pg. 302).

2. Everyday talk in this sense connotes “a mixture of spontaneous and planned written communication” (Thimbley, 1996, pg. 4). This kind of everyday talk occurs in different spheres of life.
valid construction of knowledge and by extension memory of very recent past. The objective of the study is to systematically (albeit qualitatively) analyze various postings and threads of diasporic Nigerians online. The analyses carried out for this study used a (re)construction of what Nigerians in diaspora are expressing about concepts such as nation, nationhood, and nationalism. The choice of these concepts comes from both the literature review and my interaction with various Nigerian online sites. I also considered the attractive injunction of Cameron and Kulick that “[w]e cannot understand the significance of any word unless we attend closely to its relationship to other words and to the discourse (indeed, the competing discourses) in which words are always embedded” (2003 pg. 29).

As an observer-participant (and an observant participant) it became evident that one of the preoccupations of citizens outside of their geopolitical space, is their homeland. This is in line with the expositions of Michael Billig (1995) on banal nationalism—the notion that citizens, especially those away from home, constantly reflect on the notion of nationhood and their place in it. According to him, “[t]o have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood” (1995, pg. 8). If ‘talk’ is not to be limited to speech alone, voice encoded within written text can be part of valid data in the understanding of how citizens think about their nation and their national identity. Billig also suggests a possible operationalization of identity. He argues that “a number of critical social psychologists have been emphasizing, [that] the social psychological study of identity should involve the detailed study of discourse” (1995, pg. 8). This suggestion shapes the design of this study, the kind of data collected, and the websites they were collected from. The units of analysis are postings voluntarily made by Nigerians online. By postings, I mean texts, sounds, and images, written, copied, or taken by Nigerians and sent to discussion groups or websites, or distributed by e-mail for the consumption of others. The collection of data begins with a detailed reconstruction of the number of posts on a monthly basis followed by a careful reading of individual postings so as to register where the news reports contained therein were obtained. To put these numbers in context a general description of the main features on the website was embarked upon. The understanding of the sites’ architecture and layout made the search for keywords a rewarding experience. For instance, on the Nigeria Village Square (NVS) site, I used the very effective search engine on the website to locate stories that included words such as nation, Nigeria, nationalism, and nationhood within hundreds of postings sent to the site on a regular basis by Nigerians and friends of Nigeria. The articles or news materials sent to NVS are moderated by the site’s owners. Unlike feature articles which are moderated, general comments are not subjected to such
Participant Observation Method

As previously stated, the units of analysis are the postings made at the different virtual locations where I constantly visited as an unobtrusive observer-participant. There were a few times when I was more of a participant than a mere observer (or “lurker”). For instance, I registered on the Nigerian Village Square website using Waomo as a pseudonym in December 2006, and I monitored the website till the last month of 2008. During the period of this study I made a total of 141 postings on various topics. A pseudonym was taken in order to allow me maintain an acceptable social distance from some familiar Nigerians on the site. I contributed to discussions and got responses based mainly on what I submitted and not my reputation as a former activist and a photojournalist in Nigeria. In a similar spirit, in this book I have substituted acronyms for the real names of people whose postings I use, so as to de-emphasize the identity of who wrote what, and instead focus more on the text.

To monitor the thread of discussions I opted to continually archive important or significant topics which participants showed great interest in. The decision was made retroactively as it was not possible to know ab initio which topic would generate interest. In addition to the archived postings I maintained what can be termed a field note by contributing ideas to issues I considered germane to this study or topics I had alternative sources of information to.

On the discussion groups sites it was not possible to maintain my anonymity because of the nature of the registration protocol. A valid e-mail contact is necessary for membership registration. As of the end of 2008, I was a member (both passive and active) of one Google discussion group (USA-Africa Dialogue) and 28 Yahoo discussion groups. As if to deepen my participation and expand my understanding of how the discussion groups function, I was conscripted on September 16, 2007, as a moderator of one of the Yahoo cultural discussion groups, NijaExcel, on October 5, and about eight months later (April 8, 2008) I was upgraded as a moderator of the African Business discussion group. My responsibilities included approving messages sent by members or deleting what the owner of the string of Yahoo groups considered as purely commercial information, approving membership, and at times delisting mem-

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3. There are regular checks on our activities and reprimand is send by e-mail if any posting deemed to be a commercial is approved by any of us. There are guidelines on what
members who wanted to discontinue participation in the group. By virtue of my responsibility as a moderator, I became a member of the Moderators’ Circle and Moderators’ Square at about the same time. The two groups provided me with firsthand backstage information on how decisions are made.

Apart from following the trend of discussions and contributing, I was also constantly on the watch for articles or information that had to do with Nigeria as a nation or the role of Nigerians in the diaspora. To fully understand the objective of the sites, I analyzed the groups’ self-description (a statement required by Yahoo) written by the groups or the founder of the discussion group. In other cases, those who started the group sometimes sent out guidelines for participation. In the data analysis section of this book, some of these self-descriptions will be analyzed in tandem with the guidelines for participation, where available. The methods and techniques utilized for this study were moderated by a set of theoretical perspectives which I discuss below.

The participant observation technique shares perspectives with Nancy Baym’s 1993 study of the soap opera fan community and Christine Hine’s (2000) concept of virtual ethnography. Miller and Slater also carried out an ethnographic study of “what Trinidadians find in the Internet, what they make of it,” and concluded that “one can use this particularism as a solid grounding for comparative ethnography” (2000, pg. 1). My primary objective is to understand how Nigerians express themselves online and how online news stories influence their discussions and choice of themes. The choice of virtual ethnography as the technique for this study is based on the assumption that online participants are evolving a culture and practice of interaction that needs understanding in a setting as near natural as possible. On the one hand, Hine opines that “[c]ultures are studied in their natural state, rather than as disturbed by survey techniques or experimental scenarios” (2000, pg. 42). On the other hand, Lovink raises a caveat that “[t]he study of the ‘everyday life’ of net culture has been useful, but nowadays seems incapable of providing us with a bigger picture” (2005, pg. 6). The bigger picture for him is a combination of overlooked areas of “changes at the level of infrastructure, software, interface organization” (ibid.) which are beyond the scope of this study. A picture that is within the frame of this study is that of “bringing research back from cyberspace and virtual reality into geographical, social spaces, to address a variety of issues” (Wilson, 2002, pg. 453). Once I collected both numerical and textual data, making sense of the content and constructing threads was the next logical step. The section below focuses on my framing of text and its analysis.
Textual Analysis of Postings

The term textual analysis (or analysis of text) can be defined in multiple ways. Textual analysis, in the words of Norman Fairclough (2003), “is seen as not only linguistic analysis; it also includes what I have called ‘interdiscursive analysis; that is seeing texts in terms of different discourses’” (pg. 3). However, in the simplest terms, “[t]extual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world” (McKee, 2003, pg. 1). The information gathered is a means to an end. The end is that of systematically reconstructing informed opinions from the text against known backgrounds. To make that informed opinion from texts it must be accepted that texts are representations of the world of the writers. The written word reflects and represents ideas from different sources, moments and worldviews. Each of the sources, moments, and worldviews is marked within the text and can be recovered. According to Ian Parker, “[w]ords and phrases do not come ready packaged with specific delimited meaning that a researcher can be sure to know as if they were fixed and self-contained” (1999, pg. 2). In this regard, texts are not just mechanical containers of meaning; they are communicative events that do things (de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981; Eskelinen and Koskimaa, 2001). The communicative events of interest to this research fall under Rom Harré’s notion of informal social episodes (as cited by Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network, 1999, pg. 30). As will be demonstrated, most online forums are informal asynchronous communicative events. The informality of the episodes imposes a particular kind of reading of the texts. The happenings on the sites are “more than just visible behaviour, they also include the thoughts, feelings, intentions, plans, and so on of all who participate” (Harré and Lanenhove, 1998, pg. 4). It implies that the various postings online have richer clues that can help in reconstructing the thinking behind the text. This cannot be done in a vacuum; there are guidelines that must be followed. For instance, Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter (2000) suggest that understanding what texts mean is theory-dependant and context-driven. What texts mean can follow different perspectives. There are perspectives on the writing of text and also on the reading of text as part of a social practice or as an academic exercise. There is the literary theory which focuses on the nature of text as the source of its meaning. Within the literary category is also Stanley Fish’s reader-response theory, which focuses on what the text does rather than what it means. Fish privileges the reader of a text as the creator and constructor of meaning. However, from a poststructuralist perspective of textual analysis, the sole objective is not meaning derived from measurement of reality but an uncovering of specific ideas inherent in naturally occurring textual conversations. Alan McKee submits that
“[i]n post-structuralist textual analysis, we do not make claims about whether texts are ‘accurate,’ ‘truthful’ or ‘show reality.’ We don’t dismiss them as ‘inaccurate’ or biased” (McKee, 2003, pg. 17).

**Rationale for This Study**

This section of the book also details how the theoretical frameworks shape the philosophy which underlies the choice of methods employed in the study. This section makes explicit some of the assumptions behind an interpretive naturalistic research design. The interest of this study is the uncovering of how Nigerians in the diaspora frame concepts as nebulous as nation, nationalism, and nationhood. Concepts such as these are language- and context-driven. Should a quantitative research model be considered for this kind of study, it implies an intention to generalize into the target population of interest. According to William M. K. Trochim, positivism “is a position that holds that the goal of knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena that we experience” (2001 pg. 27). Going along such a positivist path denotes a concurrence with the assumption that outcomes of social inquiries should be value-free and objective. The root of this kind of proposition, according to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, is located in the idea that “social observations should be treated as entities in much the same way that physical scientists treat physical phenomena” (2004, pg. 14). To ensure reliability, reproducibility, and validity, physical scientists rely on instruments for measurement and collection of data. The data are collected in this mode by the researchers in accord with scientific codes and conventions. In addition, legitimacy and respectability are conferred by the research community and the disciplinary field once data are collected in a “randomized, prospective, double blind study” (Runciman, 2002, pg. 146). The data so collected are expected to be subjected to mathematical calculations as a way of determining significant differences, eliminating flukes and computing the (correlation or) relationship between dependent and independent variables. Interpretation of data is deductive and based on the empirical evidence so generated. This mode of making sense of the world is not without its limitations. For instance, it is difficult to “measure how much of something there is before we know what it is we are looking for” (Moran, 2000, pg. 45). During the phase when the ‘thing’ being researched is still fuzzy, scientific procedure insists that “[a]n a priori hypothesis is required; this may limit the chance of a truly new finding” (Runciman, 2002, pg. 146). New findings have been known to result from paradigm shifts and challenges to disciplinary conventions within logical reason. Viewing the argument from a postmodernist perspective, Liu and Liu
posit that the “modernist search for natural laws and unified theory using impartial methods is undermined by the postmodernist critique that reality is socially constructed” (1997, pg. 159). In addition, the entire quantitative research process can be charged with putting faith in nonhuman parameters which are expected neither to be location-bound nor culture-specific. An experiment performed in one part of the world is anticipated to be able to produce similar results within a set margin of error in other parts of the world. The outcomes of most quantitative processes give semblance of universality and broad-based generalization with high explanatory and predictive powers. But understanding the nature of specific cultures, instances, or moments, helps shape our collective understanding of the global. In effect, most researchers “often study individuals, but usually we are interested in generalizing to more than just the individual” (Trochim, 2001 pg. 27). The study of the local is important for the appreciation of the global, just as the study of the individuals allow for projections into a population. There is an axiom that “understanding always falls back on the idea that meaning is constituted in an interplay between parts and the whole” (Larsson, 1998, para. 18).

The ultimate goal is to fully understand the whole of life, but the many holes in life makes such an agenda too ambitious. One approach that focuses on locals, groups, and subgroups is the qualitative research model. The model is based on diametrically opposed sets of values when compared to the quantitative model. Yet they are not mutually exclusive; one can reinforce the other in a mixed-method design. Each method speaks to different objectives in relation to how social change occurs and continuity is promoted. The charge that qualitative research is extractive and distant still holds true in many cases. Extractive studies allow researchers to maintain the subject/object binary opposition during the process of study without giving much back to the community. To take the edge off the charge, scientific researchers are said to provide the bedrock of human progress. True as the defense may be, it can also be argued that science cannot lay equal claim to the grounded development of human spirituality, identity, and sensitivity to nature. Wheeler, Ampadu, and Wangari “consider the spiritual essence to be the critical missing factor in explanations of life-span development relevant to people of African descent” (2002, pg. 71). Their definition of spirituality links community, identity, and nature. Observing attributes such as spirituality, identity and sensitivity to nature call for a different empiricism, values, and mode of enquiry.

The qualitative research approach operates from an interpretive standpoint; it is not a search for the truth but truthful explanation to aspects of everyday living. Bryman lists a number of intellectual undercurrents which provide qualitative research with its peculiar way of knowing. He mentions “phenom-
enology, symbolic interactionism, verstehen, naturalism, and ethnogenics” (1988, pg. 50). Staffan Larsson instead traces the roots of this system of knowing to hermeneutics, ethnography (a product of social anthropology and sociology), and finally phenomenology, a philosophically related endeavor (1998, para. 10). It may be trite to restate that reality is constructed rather than discovered. Qualitative research aims at not only giving meaning to everyday occurrences in ways that human beings can understand but at building a framework for societal transformation. It is a research model that is performative in practice and transformative in essence. According to Larsson, “[t]he word [qualitative] originates from Latin, ‘qualitas’, which means character, feature, kind. Qualitative method, thus, is systematized knowledge about how to describe something in a way that presents character” (1998, para. 9).

The choice of qualitative techniques is determined by many factors, principal among which is the nature of problem to be addressed. “It may be particularly useful where problems are ‘complex, contextual and influenced by the interaction of physical, psychological and social factors’” (Runciman, 2002, pg. 14). The nature of this mode of research calls for engagement in a natural setting as opposed to contrived laboratory experimentations. It anticipates minimal intrusion from the researcher during the process of observation and data collection. However, there are various social science methods that engage subjects of their studies as part of the process. For instance, ethnography makes room for a balancing of observation and participation and thereby opens the doors for critics who raise issues of subjectivity and critical distance or insistence of logic over feelings (Moi, 1988, pg. 105). Subjectivity, according to the critics, has a potential of introducing personal bias into the process of study while lack of critical distance robs the researcher the needed disinterestedness for a balanced view based on reason as opposed to raw emotions. These are justified concerns that can and must be accounted for during the representation phase of the study. The charges hardly stand in the face of postulations of fields such as “dialectical anthropology which brings together the study of structure, cultural process, and human agency” (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc, 1994, pg. 10). According to the authors, dialectical anthropology makes a case for the endless possibilities of divisions found during field work. Ultimately the prize is how to gain in-depth knowledge within a subgroup, one that a researcher may be involved with, in an intimate yet scientific way (Arweck and Stringer, 2002).

On the one hand, Hair and Clark cite studies which refer to ethnography “as a set of methods, a research strategy, a paradigm, a frame of mind, while a number define ethnography by its means of writing” (2003). On the other hand, Allen Johnson defines ethnography as “a descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of
what people actually do” (2000, pg. 111). In this case what the subjects are doing is communicative in essence. The physical location of the subjects gives context to the text generated. In effect, the virtual nature of the ‘location’ provides an emerging practice that allows for a different kind of observation of, participation in, and data collection from online communities. To be able to respond to the research questions, it is expedient to choose a research method that provides the opportunity to experience at close range the flow of discourse and debates online. Of the different methods, an adopted form of ethnography appears the best fit.

The general consensus is that the virtual ethnographic approach is an adaptation from anthropology. According to Christine Hine, “[t]he idea of virtual ethnography was to find a way of taking seriously, as a sociological phenomenon, the kinds of things people did on the Internet” (2004, para.1). The objective of ethnography is the development of an enriched sense of the “meanings of technology and the cultures that enable them and are enabled by it” (Hine, 2000, pg. 8). Added to this is the use of one of the gap-bridging features of the Internet to study textual exchanges between groups that may hitherto not have been in contact with each other. These perspectives have implications for studying aspects of the Internet. Instead of physically living among chosen subjects, websites, weblogs and home pages become the sites of study. In a similar study, Moran posits that “[i]t is the understanding and familiarity with the research setting gained by the months of observation that (hopefully) allows a measure of insight into the dynamics of discourse within the group” (2000, pg. 52). The familiarity results from what Hine refers to as “a process of intermittent engagement” (2004, para. x). It will be noticed that on any typical web forum there could be hundreds of posting per month.10 Constant presence on the sites gives one the capability to track and evaluate important moments which are relevant for discussing the research questions. Like physical locations, websites and weblogs have unique features that help contextualize the dynamics of the group’s interaction and textual exchange. For instance, the Yahoo groups have a message history that gives a statistical picture of a number of posting by month and year. It is also possible to obtain the number of members and the identity of the group, complete with ground rules for engagement. In addition, details such as location, gender, and vocation are possible on most of the sites. Virtual ethnography does not have the problem of informer exaggeration since the data are collected in form of text. The collection of information has a potential for creating ethical problems if not properly addressed. Ethical issues such as informed consent, invasion of privacy, and secret collection of personal information have been addressed in literature.

Problems are wont to arise while forging functional relationships between the ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’ on the field. Some of these problems are linked
intricately to a series of ethical issues, among which are “important issues regarding observation, recording and reporting online” (Elgesem, 2002, pg. 195). Apart from these issues, Capurro and Pingel identify ethical problems arising from studies online to “the tension between the proper object of research, i.e. online existence, and bodily existence. The borderline between these two phenomena is the interface [of] communication itself” (2002, pg. 190). This tension, according to the authors, arises when virtual ethnography is compared to how the issue of authenticity is negotiated during face-to-face communication studies. It is possible within reason and by use of methods of triangulation to reduce deceit in face-to-face studies. However, the Internet, with its promotion of anonymity and multiple personalities, poses a challenge where personal details are needed in a study.

Virtual ethnography as practice forms one of the main planks of this study by virtue of the location of the research subjects on the Internet. The virtual terrain will be treated as a composite part of a broader media system located within communication ecology. It will be argued that online communities do not stand alone; they are interlinked to different sets of networks. Understanding the media interconnections helps to configure how social events are represented in text and how the reports form the core of debates or reflections online. Since text is the unit of analysis and the link between the concept and the online contributors it is imperative to focus on its impact on methodology and on textual analysis. In addition the section below will describe observer-participation for the duration of the study.
Chapter 4

Data Collection

This chapter details the procedure for data collection. What was done and how it was done in each of the situations is explained for each data set. In addition, it states the philosophy behind data collected. The data collected for this study are not a representative sample of texts within postings produced online mainly by Nigerians in the diaspora. The data collected are guided by outcomes of literature review, constant interaction, and limited participation on some of the websites and discussion groups. This idea of seeking out what a segment of the community has to say is in contrast to the study carried out by Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart and reported in their book on “The discursive construction of national identity” (1999, 2009). In their case they set up focus groups and used targeted interviews to find out what Austrians think about nationhood. According to the authors they decided to use focus groups and in-depth interviews because they hoped that these techniques will allow them to “observe the processes through which important concepts like ‘nation’ are being ‘co-constructed’ during an ongoing discussion” (2005, pg. 3).

In my situation the decision to collect data from two discussion groups specifically was mediated by findings in the literature review. Collecting data from Naianet, for instance, was decided upon because it was mentioned in previous studies by Bastian (1996), same for the discussion group soc.culture.nigeria, which was mentioned in Moran (2000). In addition, the decision to collect data from some of the other sites was predicated on their mention on other sites and comments left about them by participants who frequent the forums. In other cases, search engines on the websites that I either participated in or observed brought up useful leads. To make sense of the vast virtual landscape of websites and discussion groups, I categorize them below. The typology is based on the nature of the site architecture and nature of information contained on the sites. I chose to categorize Nigerian-related sites into four distinct types, namely:

1) Discussion Groups

There are a number of discussion groups which started first as mailing lists but later evolved into asynchronous web-based forums where postings can be
accessed and archived. In this study, postings from these forums are observed in greater detail. By discussion groups, I accept the definition provided by Nancy Baym (2002). In her view, “discussion forums [are] organized by topic and distributed to subscribers through e-mail” (pg. 62). These e-groups can be further subdivided into moderated and nonmoderated groups. For instance, Naijanet is both a Yahoo discussion group and also a website run independently by a webmaster. In its self-description, it states simply that it is a “[l]ist for Nigerians from all walks of life and in the diaspora.” There are many more Yahoo discussion groups than those listed above. Most of the groups are moderated and monitored on a constant basis. Here is a sample of Yahoo discussion groups which cut across, cultural, ethnic, political, and national issues.

**Social Groups**

- AriyaInStyle.com
- ChatAfrikArticles.com
- GeleStyles.com
- AfricansBookClub.com
- ChatAfrikReview.com
- edo_global@yahooogroups.com
- Esan_Community@yahooogroups.com
- afenmai@yahooogroups.com
- Yorubas-Community@yahooogroups.com
- afenmai@yahooogroups.com

**Politically Oriented Groups**

- NaijaElections.com
- NaijaPolitics@yahooogroups.com
- ConcernedNigeriansgroup@yahooogroups.com
- edo-ciao@yahooogroups.com
- nidocanada@yahooogroups.com
- OmoOdua@yahooogroups.com
- TalkNigeria@yahooogroups.com
- Nidoa@yahooogroups.com
- Naijaintellects@googlegroups.com
- AfricanTalk@yahooogroups.com
- NaijaExcel@yahooogroups.com
- ChatAfrikPinnacle.com
- NaijaExcel@yahooogroups.com

**News-Oriented Groups**

- Naijanet@yahooogroups.com
- NaijaBusiness.info
2) Online Magazines

Web-pages which encourage well thought out feature-like articles and also have provision for instant feedback and contributions by participants who make the effort to subscribe to the site. I participated in a number of the conversations which took place on websites such as Nigeria Village Square (www.nigeriavillagesquare.com) and Nigerians In America (www.nigeriansinamerica.com). But more than the ones I participated in, I visited these others just to experience firsthand what was going on there. Sites such as Gamji, Odili.net, Nigeria Muse, and Nigeria World post interesting articles periodically.

3) Blogs

There are weblogs devoted to independent investigative-type journalism and personal diaries that range from lifestyles to travelogues. Sahara Reporters, judging from cross-postings by other websites, appears to set the benchmark for this type of investigative citizen journalism. There are evidences to show that newspapers in Nigeria often times publish some investigative news from the site (Kperogi, 2008). Similar sites mirror the Sahara Reporters model, but these will not be included in the data collected.

4) Radio and TV

Internet radio and television stations based outside Nigeria. These are mentioned but do not form a part of the study. Their presence expands the number of sources from which Nigerians in the diaspora obtain news and entertainment. The section below shows data collected from each of the sub-categories starting with discussion groups.

Data from Discussion Groups

A number of discussion groups fit the objective of this study and can provide data that can respond to the research questions, but only four of such groups will be presented in detail. The main criteria for choice of which sites to visit, observe, and participate in were the activity on the site and the will-
ingness of subscribers to keep bringing up issues. *Naijanet* appears to be the pioneer discussion group established as a Yahoo website. It was founded January 19, 1999.\(^1\) A look at the archived data showing the number of postings per month indicates that its migration to Yahoo was in 1999 (Table 4.1).

*Naijanet* has one of the shortest textual descriptions of its activities on the opening page. It simply states it is a “[l]ist for Nigerians from all walks of life at home and in the Diaspora.” However, hidden out of view as part of the files section is a comprehensive 17-page document on the rules of the listserv. Though the rules and expectations guiding interactions on the site were uploaded on February 14, 2000, it was revised in October 1998. They spell out the nature of the group, membership structure, and other obligations of membership. A detailed textual analysis of this document is in the next chapter. The section below presents data collected from the website.

As of June 15, 2008, when these data were collected from the site, there were 1,285 members subscribed to the site. It is not possible to know the real identity of the members or their geographical locations because the list moderator did not make the list of members public. Information such as this can be obtained from reading the texts, as they often reveal who their authors are and where they are contributing from. Judging from the 406 postings from January 2008, it appears that the most active participant obtained news reports from the online version of the *Punch* newspapers published in Nigeria. There are a total of 149 news reports covering a range of issues such as activities of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and local and national political activities such as the conflict situation in oil-rich Niger Delta.

The tables below show the breakdown of sources from which postings were obtained for the months of January (Table 4.2) and June 2008 (Table 4.3). Both tables present sources from where the news reports appearing in the Yahoo group were culled from, and the number of times each publication appeared.

*Soc.culture.nigeria* is a part of the Google discussion group network. The Nigerian forum was founded over ten years ago. It is one of the many Usenet newsgroups found on the Internet. As expected of every discussion forum, there are stated objectives or a brief description of what the forum stands for. *Soc.culture.nigeria* is described as a group for “Nigerian affairs, society, cultures,

\(^1\) See a comprehensive reconstruction of Naijanet’s history in the chapter on discussion (Chapter 6).
Table 4.1. Number of Postings per Month on the Naijanet Yahoo Discussion Group  
Data collected June 14, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>Jul</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>1,998</td>
<td>3,230</td>
<td>1,818</td>
<td>1,964</td>
<td>2,503</td>
<td>2,728</td>
<td>2,822</td>
<td>2,712</td>
<td>3,175</td>
<td>2,496</td>
<td>2,225</td>
<td>1,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,346</td>
<td>2,162</td>
<td>2,731</td>
<td>2,322</td>
<td>2,090</td>
<td>2,847</td>
<td>3,221</td>
<td>1,457</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>1,199</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>23,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>1,082</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>10,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>1,005</td>
<td>1,303</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>9,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>4,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>6,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>3,791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>5,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,485</td>
<td>8,154</td>
<td>9,369</td>
<td>7,330</td>
<td>8,408</td>
<td>8,973</td>
<td>9,587</td>
<td>8,050</td>
<td>6,399</td>
<td>7,574</td>
<td>6,213</td>
<td>6,591</td>
<td>95,133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and peoples” (1994). The table below gives a picture of the activities of the group from inception till June 19, 2008, when the data were collected.

In January 2008, soc.culture.nigeria recorded a total of 41 postings, of which twenty were from the same participant. The others either had little to do with Nigeria or were just spam. However, ten different postings had information about military activities in the oil-producing region of the Niger Delta.

As of June 21, 2008, when postings for the month of June were collected, there were only five postings. One post was an announcement for a proposed digitalization of Nigerian daily newspapers to be housed in university libraries across the nation. Two other postings were about activities of the Nigerian military, while the remaining two postings were spam.

USA-Africa Dialogue series is one of the vibrant discussion groups started around 2006 as a “Pan-African listserv [sic] that reaches the entire world, and focuses on issues of importance to Africa and its diaspora.” This is a moder-

### Table 4.2. Breakdown of News/Information Sources for the Month of January 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Nigerian Online Papers Posted January '08</th>
<th>Foreign Sources</th>
<th>Other Sources</th>
<th>Number of Contributions from Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punch</td>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>PRONOCO</td>
<td>Okala 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnewsonline</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Press Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribune</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>2 nigeriabem.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>African Women Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>1 United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Nigerian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>Odili.net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>Int’l Journal of Social &amp; Mgt Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Trieste Science Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THISDAY</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>spiegel.de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>299</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3. Breakdown of News/Information Sources for the Month of June 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Nigerian Online Papers Posted June ’08</th>
<th>Foreign Sources</th>
<th>Other Sources</th>
<th>Number of Contributions from Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punch</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>PRONOCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The News/PM News</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ghana.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnewsonline</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Press Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribune</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>nigeriabem.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>African Women Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian (update)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Nigerian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Obama speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THISDAY</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>democrats.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reuters Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Trust</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>AFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>USAfrica online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>USA Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guardian, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ated group, which means those subscribed can post messages but the messages will have to be approved by the managers of the site. This group is mirrored on the University of Texas website under the supervision of Toyin Falola, a professor of History. In the introductory message to potential members, objectives and expectations of the series were enunciated.²

². See the full statement in Appendix C.
Table 4.4 Number of Postings per Month on the soc.culture.nigeria Discussion Group
Data collected June 19, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>Jul</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>193</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>154</td>
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<td>193</td>
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<td>1,142</td>
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<tr>
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<td>670</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>95</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>2,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,217</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>1,442</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>12,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>888</td>
<td>1,301</td>
<td>1,687</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>1,311</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>1,606</td>
<td>1,504</td>
<td>1,306</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>14,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1,936</td>
<td>2,365</td>
<td>2,062</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>1,421</td>
<td>1,690</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>1,464</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>19,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>2,418</td>
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<td>2,733</td>
<td>3,686</td>
<td>3,007</td>
<td>2,412</td>
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<td>1,535</td>
<td>1,660</td>
<td>1,505</td>
<td>27,529</td>
</tr>
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<td>1,438</td>
<td>1,614</td>
<td>1,018</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>1,812</td>
<td>1,621</td>
<td>2,111</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>2,328</td>
<td>16,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,692</td>
<td>1,583</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>2,021</td>
<td>1,672</td>
<td>1,515</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td>1,624</td>
<td>1,143</td>
<td>1,423</td>
<td>1,401</td>
<td>1,345</td>
<td>17,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>9,922</td>
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<td>10,038</td>
<td>9,867</td>
<td>8,369</td>
<td>8,614</td>
<td>8,718</td>
<td>117,014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As of June 21, 2008, when these data were collected, there were 1,351 subscribed members. During my interaction on the site, I noticed that membership is spread across Africa, America, Asia, and Europe. Though the membership list is not open to the public, it is possible to deduce the location of some participants from their email address or from the electronic signatures that accompany their email messages. The USA-Africa Dialogue series is included in this study because Nigeria appears to be one of the African countries that features prominently on the site and also because of the robustness and maturity of discourse. Table 4.5 shows the number of postings per month for the three years of the discussion group’s existence on the Google platform.

Table 4.5. Number of Postings per Month on the USA-Africa Dialogue listserv

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>301</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the mirror site at the University of Texas, the archives indicate a total of 1,608 messages. However, on the Google platform a total of 8,210 messages are archived. The tables below show the breakdown of activities for the months of January (Table 6) and June 2008 (Table 7). They present the sources from where the news reports mentioned in the postings were culled, and the number of times each publication appears.

Apart from numerical data collected, data in textual form representing critical moments were also collected. In a particular instance an innocuous signature by one of the contributors to the forum resulted in a debate about the structure of the Nigerian nation. Summaries of the postings are produced below while the complete data is in Appendix B. Names of the discussants have been slightly changed to protect their real identities.

The chronology of the USA-Africa debate on “Job prescription of SSA, SA and A.” [MISSING TEXT HERE?]
### Table 4.6. Data Collected from *USA-Africa Dialogue* for the Month of January 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Nigerian Online Papers Posted January '08</th>
<th>Foreign News Sources</th>
<th>Other Sources</th>
<th>Number of Contributions from Some Active Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunnewsonline</td>
<td>Guardian, UK</td>
<td>Ghana.com</td>
<td>9 HTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian (Update)</td>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>Zelza</td>
<td>10 TF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>Pambazuka</td>
<td>6 MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THISDAY</strong></td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>nigeriabem.com</td>
<td>1 AK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nation</td>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>Press Release</td>
<td>1 VOTT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribune</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>0 US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Odili.net</td>
<td>0 MEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The News/PM</td>
<td>Observer, UK</td>
<td>African Women Cancer</td>
<td>0 JI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>Nation (Kenya)</td>
<td>0 Ook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Nigerian</td>
<td>Reuters Africa</td>
<td>Book by Falola &amp; Ihonvbere</td>
<td>0 TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>Half a Yellow Sun</td>
<td>0 SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Trust</td>
<td>Times, UK</td>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>0 KH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>Monograph: Analysis of criminalizing policies</td>
<td>0 QS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punch</td>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>UNDOC</td>
<td>0 PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0 AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRONOCO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0 Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>107</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>341</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.7. Data Collected from *USA-Africa Dialogue* for the Month of June 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Nigerian Online Papers posted June ’08</th>
<th>Foreign News Sources</th>
<th>Other Sources</th>
<th>Number of Contributions from Some Active Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ThisDay</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Guardian, UK</td>
<td>53 TalkNigeria Yahoo group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>2 The East African Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The News/ PM</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>12 Chronicle Reporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guardian (Update)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>22 <em>The Entrepreneur</em> Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Nation</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>8 Press Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tribune</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>1 New Era (Namibian publication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>1 ZNet commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunnewsonline</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Observer, UK</td>
<td>8 Mercury News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vanguard</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>VOA</td>
<td>2 Green Left Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Nigerian</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Reuters Africa</td>
<td>1 The International Socialist Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Age</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daily Trust</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Times, UK</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compass</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punch</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AFP</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Telgraph</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Foreign News Sources: 116

Number of Other Sources: 6

Number of Contributions from Some Active Members: 484
Summary of a Particular Thread

This thread commenced on December 11, 2007, and what appeared to be the last word came in on Saturday, December 15. A total of 36 contributions came from 19 contributors. Dr. Saul Amdee (not his real name), who inadvertently became the issue, had six postings in response to what others had to say. A number of key issues and themes resulted from the conversation, and sometimes debates. The entire thread can be categorized into three parts, for the sake of convenience: Perception of the problem(s) with Nigeria from within the system, the country, and in the diaspora; diagnosis of the problem(s) from within Nigeria; and suggestions of how to remedy the problem(s). In the process of these spontaneous discussions, issues arose such as who should criticize, and from which space should criticism be rendered? Questions were raised about the value of criticism in nation building. The tension of long distance nationalism (Anderson, 1983) is played out in the form of those in the diaspora and those at home. In the process a brief exposition on the inner workings of state and its many failures are exposed. A few solutions were offered for participation in aid of nation building. The solutions all come in the form of how to have a voice in the construction and renewal of the Nigerian project. Table 4.8 is a graphic representation of the summary of the actual discussions that took place. It shows postings and turn-taking patterns. The summary of the text forms part of Appendix B.

The salient points and my interpretation of these data are in Chapter 5. There the implication of the number of postings and the sources will be explained further. As a way of contextualizing the spontaneous discussion that resulted about one of the contributor’s electronic signatures, time will be spent on textual analysis of the postings.

The next section takes a look at feature articles written specifically to address certain issues. The writers sometimes base their articles on media reports or on ideas they wish to reflect upon.

Discussion groups present a different kind of data than websites that encourage participants to submit feature-like articles to the webmaster before they are posted. Once posted on the sites, there is provision for subscribers to the site to express their opinions on the article. One of the most popular and frequently updated sites is the Nigeria Village Square (NVS), which members prefer to identify as the flagship of online forums for Nigerians. It has about 215 contributing authors to its website and an unknown number of visitors to the site. As expected, the contributions vary in quantity and quality.

The website has a very efficient search engine that helps in locating articles by theme or topic. In the same category is the Nigerians in America website. As
### Table 4.8. Date, Time, and Number of Turns per Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial Numbers of Postings</th>
<th>Number of Contributions</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post 1 Name 21</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 11, 2007 2:55:20 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 2 Name 7</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 11, 2007 2:55:20 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 3 Name 5</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Tue, 11 Dec 2007 21:29:19 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 4 Name 7</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Wed, 12 Dec 2007 09:41:26 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 5 Name 20</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>13 Dec 2007 08:34:27 +0000 (GMT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 6 Name 5</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 07:19:07 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 7 Name 10</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 12:36:59 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 8 Name 7</td>
<td>3rd turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 08:41:48 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 9 Name 10</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 10:27:55 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 10 Name 19</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 09:59:55 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 11 Name 10</td>
<td>3rd turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 13:35:43 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 12 Name 18</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 11:51:47 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 13 Name 7</td>
<td>4th turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 11:54:10 -0800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 14 Name 11</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 19:44:44 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 15 Name 7</td>
<td>5th turn</td>
<td>Thu, 13 Dec 2007 21:06:28 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 16 Name 12</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 12:04:28 +0100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 17 Name 9</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:30:24 +0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 18 Name 4</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 08:21:39 -0600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 19 Name 8</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:31:06 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 20 Name 16</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:38:44 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 21 Name 15</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:51:46 EST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 22 Name 14</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 16:58:54 +0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 23 Name 4</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:11:24 -0600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 24 Name 13</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 09:47:00 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 25 Name 12</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 18:50:34 +0100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 26 Name 11</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 10:39:34 -0800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 27 Name 10</td>
<td>4th turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 14:21:47 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 28 Name 9</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 21:51:15 +0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 29 Name 8</td>
<td>2nd turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 17:41:27 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 30 Name 7</td>
<td>6th turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 15:47:18 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 31 Name 6</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 22:57:28 -0600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 32 Name 5</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Fri, 14 Dec 2007 21:40:15 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 33 Name 4</td>
<td>3rd turn</td>
<td>Sat, 15 Dec 2007 10:00:30 -0600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 34 Name 3</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Sat, 15 Dec 2007 17:45:02 +0100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 35 Name 8</td>
<td>3rd turn</td>
<td>Sat, 15 Dec 2007 14:14:25 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 36 Name 1</td>
<td>1st turn</td>
<td>Sat, 15 Dec 2007 15:15:55 -0800 (PST)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of August 23, 2008, the website had a total of 234 writers who had contributed to the site at one time or the other. Capturing the energy of, and contributions to, the NVS site is a very daunting task. I formally registered on the site in December 2006 under a pseudonym to allow me contribute to some of the discussions without my true identity distracting readers from the issues. I acted as an agent provocateur in some instances. There were two methods of data collection used for this site. One was to use the search engine on the site to locate articles which included the word 'nation' in its title. Included also in the data were the number of hits (meaning those who viewed the article) for each article. As of Friday November 23, 2007, when these data were collected, there were about 68 articles with the word nation in the title. A few of these articles will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Nigerians appear not to be bothered when fellow Nigerians express negative opinions about the country, but when someone or an institution perceived as an outsider engages in casting aspersion on the collective integrity of Nigeria and Nigerians, the Internet community is set abuzz. There are a few instances of such outbursts. One was when CNN produced and presented a documentary on criminals with Nigerian nationality. A posting with the title “CNN (sic) Attacks on Nigerians in Houston & Why Nigeria's Image Matters,” posted on the NVS website on June 4, 2006, illustrates this point. A series of online and offline activities sought redress for the perceived shame brought on the collective. The community demanded and obtained an apology from CNN. The thread will also be discussed in the following chapter.

There are also times when the discussion is turned inwards for the benefit of other Nigerians. The discussion group “TalkNigeria” was set up seven years ago (December 1, 2004) to discuss current affairs as they relate to Nigeria and the world. One instance from TalkNigeria will be used to illustrate how Nigerians recall and revisit the history of the country.

Apart from passionate discussions that involve personalities and ideas, sometimes a contributor takes on an idea of concern and reflects upon it. One such posting, titled “Our nation awaits it’s (sic) creators,” was posted online on June 22, 2007. The writer of this article opines that Nigeria as a nation is still a prospect, not yet a reality. Contrasting with this is the article “How to build a nation,” which was published on the NVS website on July 21, 2007; it gives another perspective on how Nigerians think about the concept of nationhood. It was written by a Nigerian who lives in Texas, U.S.A. This posting is included also to illustrate the role I played on the site—I submitted a response to it. The article and my response will be analyzed in the next chapter. The writer of this article focuses more on the state and the leadership as opposed to the nation. It says little about how to build a nation or what nation connotes in the
Nigerian context. In addition, I will note a few others by Nigerian intelligentsia who constantly share their reflections on the concept of nationhood as it relates to Nigeria. Three prominent ones form a part of this study in one way or other. One is a lecture delivered by Wole Soyinka in March 2009, on “Between nation space and nationhood.” This lecture, unexpectedly, did not attract many responses from Nigerians. Two major reactions to the lecture were published in one of Nigeria’s online newspapers. The other two articles were written by a contributor (“PA”) who regularly posts his thoughts to Internet discussion sites. He titled it, “Orile ede: Preliminary reflections.” It was posted on the USA-Africa Dialogue discussion group on March 30, 2009, and cross-posted to a number of other sites, as is common practice. The third article is called “Project Nigeria: The struggle for meaning” (May 10, 2009). It was also written by PA. In all these articles by individuals, certain perspectives that can be traced to the media in Nigeria emerged. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Using the method of textual analysis in a naturalistic design allows a researcher the opportunity to recover the thoughts of participants on issues without reverting to the writer for clarifications. An example of this is how participants on the NVS website think about the website and other members. A posting on September 13, 2007, gives such an opportunity. It reads like the history of the site from the perspective of one of the early contributors. It lists and reviews the works of other active participants on the site. He submits that he found out “the uniqueness and ‘flagshipness’ [sic] of the Nigerian Village Square—the market place of ideas.” Another active member posted a piece on “Segun Adeniyi and the village square trap” (“UN,” September 23, 2007). This contribution represents one of the many articles that self-examine the performance of members of an emerging Nigerian Internet community. It is also a summary of how the writer sees the function of various Internet sites and how information they distribute can be assessed.

Collecting the second type of data involved taking note of specific articles that spoke directly or tangentially to the topic of the study, especially when it looked like there was an ongoing dialogue between the parties involved. One such instance was an exchange between a home-based (i.e., located in Nigeria) Nigerian public intellectual and a Nigerian university professor based in America. The issue at stake revolved around who has a right to express opinions in the emerging transnational public sphere. In total, there were nine articles of differing lengths, each responding to an initial idea. Below is a table of titles of the nine articles, initials of their authors, date of posting, and the number of hits as of June 12, 2009. The main core of the circulatory dialogue begins with an article written by one of the home-based public intellectuals, who commentators felt was defending or creating an “exculpatory space” for
a fellow elite. The postings bring in other issues as the conversation progresses. It started well before May 11, 2008, and the last article I tracked was published on December 29, 2008. These series of exchanges speak to other texts written by others. In about four days, the home-based public intellectual, who was at the center of the textual interchange, responded in an attempt to clarify issues. He pleaded for a “robust public square and reasoned discussion” ("PU," 2008) that was devoid of sentiments and emotions. Four days after his 235-word release, he wrote a lengthy defense of his initial position. His response takes on the issue of participants in Nigeria’s public sphere and how they are (mis)treated.

Table 4.9. Titles of Articles, Acronyms of Writers, and the Dates of Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Article</th>
<th>Author of Article</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pat Utomi’s Unraveling</td>
<td>MEO</td>
<td>May 11, 2008</td>
<td>1,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re: Utomi Faults FG On $462m AFC Probe</td>
<td>PU</td>
<td>May 15, 2008</td>
<td>1,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria’s Public Space And Reason Embattled</td>
<td>PU</td>
<td>May 19, 2008</td>
<td>1,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Utomi and Reuben Abati in Nigeria’s Public Discourse</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>May 21, 2008</td>
<td>1,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reproach from Mount Olympus: Pat Utomi, Moses Ochonu, and the Burden of Reason</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>May 26, 2008</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Space And The Discipline Of Honest Engagement</td>
<td>PU</td>
<td>December 27, 2008</td>
<td>1,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utomi And His Glad Cry Of Triumphantalism</td>
<td>TT</td>
<td>December 28, 2008</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Utomi, Anti-Corruption, And The Public Good</td>
<td>MEO</td>
<td>December 29, 2008</td>
<td>1091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Utomi’s Syncretism</td>
<td>KE</td>
<td>December 29, 2008</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) “Pat Utomi’s Unraveling,” by MOE, May 11, 2008

Summary of this feature article: It uses an individual’s reaction to public debate as a take-off point to reflect on what he terms “public intellectualism and activism” in the service of nation building. This is also another dimension to the debate of who among intellectuals at home or abroad possesses the legitimate right to criticize the nation.
2) “Re: Utomi Faults FG on $462m AFC Probe,” by PU, May 15, 2008

PU takes the opportunity to defend himself against the charges raised by MOE in his May 11th article and uses the forum to restate his democratic credentials.

3) “Nigeria’s Public Space and Reason Embattled,” by Pat Utomi, May 19, 2008

This is a longer piece compared to the very brief but succinct one written May 15th. In this piece PU talks about Nigeria’s public sphere and why some people will not participate in it. He takes the challenge to the “Diaspora based internet warrior raining down vituperations from the comfort of American suburbia.” It must be noted that of the six individuals he made reference to, three are foreign authors. He starts with Dante’s *Inferno* and later brings in Bob Garratt, ending with a reference to Spiro Agnew. Analysis of the implication of this reliance on Western authors will be in the next chapter.


This posting starts with a definition of who a public intellectual is, using an African thinker’s perspective. He then bemoans the dearth of public intellectuals and the need for rigorous and versatile public discourse. His posting is a reaction to PU’s article and the perceived tone of the article.


This is another reaction to the perceived tone of PU’s article. The author establishes what the ethos of the public sphere should be. In his words, “[t]he ethos of the public sphere, however, forbids you from ignoring the fundamental difference between talking to and talking at your interlocutors.” He further avers that “[w]hat the new modes of knowledge production and instrumentalization in academia impose on us is the responsibility to unlearn our privileges.” He even rhetorically asks how the subalterns in Nigeria imagine the nation, the state, and the leadership.

6) “Public Space and The Discipline Of Honest Engagement,” by PU, December 27, 2008

In this third attempt, coming about seven months after the initial articles, PU admits to a semblance of an Internet war brought about by a misinterpretation of his words. He restates his position: that he has earned a moral right to speak down on commentators who “in the comfort of suburbia, thousands of miles away, take on people on the firing line who risk limb and life, in the self-righteous manner that some of our internet warriors do.” These exchanges
help to articulate the question on who has the moral authority and legitimacy to comment on issues affecting the motherland.

7) “Utomi and His Glad Cry Of Triumphantism,” by TT, December 28, 2008

This writer also responded to the article written by PU. He calls him a “gangster-leader.” It is a well worded attack on the person and past of PU. TT spares nothing in his castigation of the initial writer.


MEO responds to the issue of moral authority in PU’s article. Nearly all ideas in PU’s article come under microscopic analysis. His article attracted about 80 commentators.

9) “Pat Utomi’s Syncretism,” by KE, December 29, 2008

The first issue taken up by this writer is that of the moral authority of commentators. In the nature of online conversations, KE reflects on the writings of others who have written about the subject. He concludes his article by stating that the “Internet has democratized public discourse and will continue to give power and influence to more people now and in the future.”

The third and final method simply used search engines to recover archival materials which appeared relevant to the research questions. The success of this method depended on the choice of keywords. Using nation as the keyword on the soc.culture.nigeria discussion group turned up a thread on someone (“CTA”) seeking to know if the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria could be called a nation. Below is a summary of the thread from the question posed to the final conclusion.

Newsgroups: soc.culture.nigeria
From: CTA
Date: 2000/01/12
Subject: Why is Yoruba a Nation?
The participant introduced what he was doing as “a project on Nigeria at the university.” He wrote that he had read a few articles stating that Yoruba is a nation, and some referring to the group as a tribe. He states his own position, that he thinks that Yoruba should be referred to as a nation. He is confused about these concepts of nation and nation-state. He then threw his inquiry open to anyone on the list who is familiar with the concepts.

Newsgroups: soc.culture.nigeria
From: OKQ
Date: 2000/01/13
Subject: Re: Why is Yoruba a Nation?

Speaking in historical terms one could legitimately identify entities such as Yoruba Nation(s), Igbo Nation, etc., from amongst the different ethnic groups which make up modern Nigeria. However, in modern times there is nothing that could legitimately be construed as Yoruba nation, Igbo nation, etc., since the sovereignties of all the component ethnic groups of Nigeria were usurped when Nigeria became a colony of Britain and following independence in 1960 when the country became a republic.

The current noise about Yoruba nation, Igbo nation, etc., are heard only from the corners of those who claim to be fed up with the current make up of present day Nigeria and from those who are longing for the day when they could live in their own independent or autonomous ethnically homogenous enclaves or “nations” to be named O’dua Nation, Yoruba Nation, Igbo Nation or Biafra, etc. In my own humble opinion, this is not going to happen.

I will advise that you stick to the current recognized definitions of what constitutes a “nation” and a “nation state” in your assignment since in my own opinion the term nation is best reserved for a sovereign state!

The Yoruba constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, along with the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani amongst a total of over 250 other smaller ethnic groups.

The Yoruba, a people with a distinctive language and proud culture constitute the overwhelming majority of people who live in or originate from the Southwest region of Nigeria. The Yoruba are also to be found in the Republics of Benin and Togo and are widespread in the new world in such places as the USA, Cuba, Brazil, the Caribbean (especially Trinidad and Tobago) and other parts of South America!

The Yoruba constitute one of Nigeria’s major ethnic groups; they do not constitute a “nation” in the true sense of the word, regardless of the popular rhetoric from certain quarters!

Nations are entities that are for the most part self governing! As I see things none of Nigeria’s ethnic groups constitute self-governing entities.

All Nigerians belong to regions, zones or one of the 36 states constituting the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

There is only one nation in Nigeria—it is the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

Bye, OKQ
Newsgroups: soc.culture.nigeria
From: CTA
Date: 2000/15/12
Subject: Why is Yoruba a Nation?

I am sending this e-mail to thank all those who have used their precious time to respond to my question on “nation”, “nation-state” and “tribe.” I received so many definitions, analogies, critiques and comments which have so far enriched my understanding of what the concept “nation” means. I found out from the plethora of responses, that a nation may mean one, two or more of the following:

1. A people who have claim to a common ancestry, language, history—in this case, a nation is a thing in itself because of its primordial nature.
2. A nation can be a social construction made into a reality by a group of people. In other words, when a phenomenon is made real, it definitely becomes real in its consequence.
3. Interestingly, a nation may exist without being “bounded”—community without propinquity, as in the Jewish case, nations of Islam (thanks for this XXX!).
4. There is an “imagined notion” of a nation, as in the incorporative practice of those people of the Yoruba in the Diaspora across the world, especially in the Americas.

In conclusion, I discovered that there is no “all encompassing” definition of the concept “nation.” It is an abstract concept like “state”, “society”, “social system” which may even be more difficult to define than “nation.” The problem with a concept “nation” lies neither with the concept itself nor with the “social reality” (as espoused by those who respond). The point is that any particular nation, “out there” (wherever it may be), may not exactly match our concept, which is a general problem with abstract concepts. Because of a problem like this, some social scientists make use of the “ideal type” (Max Weber, the Swiss/German sociologists was reknowned [sic] for this), which is an abstraction of reality. Ipso facto, ideal-typical nation exists only in the analyst’s mind; one will never find it in reality. These findings will in hopes let me know more about the Nigerian societies, and without your help, this would not have been possible. And finally, based on your various expositions, and my further research, the word “tribe” cannot be applicable to a society like Nigeria. It does not seem like there is a tribe out there, the word is nothing but a typology, which has now assumed a racist connotation.
Finally, thanks so much for the valuable time you all expended to respond to a question that seemed pedantic but meant so much to me to know. Good night.

A search engine (Google) also brought up a few articles written by commentators based at home. These articles eventually form a part of what Nigerians think about the concept of nationhood. The various published articles draw from different sources in the construction of their ideas.

The table below shows the titles of the articles and the publications in which they are found.

Table 4.10. Titles of Articles Focused on Nationhood Published in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref No.</th>
<th>Title of Article</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>A nation in doubt</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>April 27, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Nigerianhood in question</td>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>May 09, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003</td>
<td>Again, the national question</td>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>September 23, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>Limits of the Yar’adua doctrine</td>
<td>Vanguard</td>
<td>September 30, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005</td>
<td>The Media and National Patriotism</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>July 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>Newspapers and Politics</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>July 20, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

Data Analysis

This chapter focuses on detailed analyses of the data collected, and the implications and interpretation of the tables and texts constructed from different sources. It allows for a construction of the trend in the data and an explanation of what the data connote in regard to the subject of study. As a way of setting the tone and presenting a picture of the extent of the sample size, Table 2 details the number of postings per month on Naijanet, one of the foremost discussion groups on the Yahoo platform. Its history predates its present virtual abode. According to M. Ene, “its present home at egroups.com allows only subscribers to post and receive e-mails” (nigeriaworld.com, 2000). The implication of this statement is that Naijanet existed elsewhere on the Internet before migrating to its present location. It was known in the mid-1990s as a bulletin board where “any issues relating to Nigeria, immigration, and social topics of interest to Africans were discussed” (Bastian, 1999). An informed participant on a few of the online discussion groups reflected on his experience and said that “[t]hroughout the Abacha era, the famed Nigerian newsgroup, Naijanet, was very vibrant” (Ene, 2000).

Unfortunately there are no perceptible traces of the early years of the vibrancy alluded to by Ene. The number of postings available for 1999 does not in any way represent the true account of what was happening, as it was a period of transition from one platform to another. The figures for year 2000, however, paint a different picture that raises one’s curiosity. There are two noticeable peaks in terms of postings to the discussion group. In March there were 3,230 postings, and in October there were 3,175 postings. Reading these numbers could lead to a tentative conclusion that with October being the anniversary of Nigerian independence, such a peak is not unexpected. There may not be a particular reason for the peaks except there are indications within the text to show why traffic increased at certain times. Whatever the reasons, it can be safely noted that in the years 2000–2003 Naijanet witnessed a high volume of postings. This is of course in line with the history of Naijanet as constructed by Misty Bastian’s (1999) study of Nigeria’s online presence.

Since the number of postings reveals very little, Table 2 (Chapter 4) represents a picture of the content of 406 postings in January 2008 while Table 3
looks at the month of June 2008. The results show that in January, local news predominated by a very wide margin. There were 299 local news reports from Nigerian newspapers compared to 54 from foreign sources like the BBC, the New York Times, CNN, the Financial Times, and others. In June of the same year, the same trend is noticed in that there were 55 local news reports from Nigerian newspapers compared to 22 from foreign sources. In the two months (January and June) it was observed that direct contributions from members (meaning postings which originated from participants) were just 14 in January and 40 in June 2008. These figures are not unexpected considering that the primary objective of the group is to exchange news reports about happenings in the homeland. It should be of interest why they chose these news items to post on the site. Unfortunately, this aspect of participants’ information sharing behavior is not one of the concerns of this study.

One stated objective of this study is to establish the source of knowledge of diasporic Nigerians. Ignacio avers that to carry out such a task of studying “the production, maintenance, and re-conceptualization of knowledge, sociologists have paid close attention to language and patterns of communication” (2005, pg. 11). In essence, this study seeks to know where the ideas that influence some Nigerians in the diaspora originate. The assumption here is that a person is deemed influenced by an idea if within such a person’s writing or contribution there are indications of internalization or ownership of an idea. In most cases, ownership of the idea appears as a hybrid or synthesis of the initial idea. My questions then will be: are contributors to the online conversations influenced more by (or exposed to more) foreign news stories or local news reports from the homeland? It is possible to surmise that most contributors to the various discussion threads draw from a pool of knowledge, especially from American and European sources. I must admit that this is not as simple as it appears. The question and its answer are complex and need further interrogation. However, the question of what influences the local news media is outside the scope of this present study, but should be kept in mind for further studies.

Soc.culture.nigeria is on the Google platform and in comparison with the other discussion groups appears to have richer sources of data. Table 5 shows the number of postings per month for most of the fifteen years the discussion group has been in existence. The discussion group commenced in 1994, during which there were very few postings for the months of June to December of that year. The following year was no different, but from 1996 to 1999, the data show that the discussion group recorded more than 1,000 postings per month. This was the period when General Sanni Abacha ruled the country (November 1993 to June 1998) and Nigerians in the diaspora organized various pro-
democracy activities within and outside the country against Abacha’s regime. By 2002, just as the situation within the country changed, so too did the online activities take a new turn. As can be observed in Table 5, there was a steady decrease in the number of postings per month. One likely interpretation of these data is that online activities coincided with the post-transition period of democratic experiment in Nigeria (1999 to 2002). The next period of 2003 to 2007 coincided with the second term of the former president of Nigeria, Obasanjo. Subsequently there was another democratic election in 2007 to usher in new civilians. The lull can be attributed yet again to happenings back in the homeland and also to the fact that more interactive discussion groups with broader perspectives emerged. One such group is the USA-Africa Dialogue series on the Google platform. In the self-description of the listserv found on the homepage, it is written that it reaches the entire world with a focus on issues of importance to Africa and its diaspora. The claim that the listserv reaches the entire world is very difficult to verify. Which entire world is this referencing? Does the statement refer to the entire world of Africans or the entire world of all those with access to computers? This is solely a textual analytical study and the answer, if possible, can only be obtained within the text produced by participants. As I seek to locate apt responses to questions, the section below discusses the implication for the number of postings to the group over a period of three years and offers a snapshot textual analysis of a particular instance which allows for a window into the nature of the contributions.

A steady increase in postings to this discussion group is noticeable over time. The postings rose from about 3 postings in the month of February 2006 to a record high of 744 postings in May 2008. If these figures do not express much to a person interested in the content of the postings they at least point to a vibrancy that demands closer attention. To appreciate the dynamics of the discussion group, Tables 7 and 8 give a breakdown of news sources and self-written contributions of a select number of active participants. By self-written contributions, I mean thoughts expressed by participants in their own words or as reactions to some other person’s ideas as opposed to postings which were just culled from other sources. Those I term active participants are participants who frequent the discussion group more than once and make their views known on subjects which interest them or which they have knowledge about. Unlike Naijranet (see Tables 2 and 3), where most of the news reports emanate from local news reports from the homeland, a higher percentage of news on USA-Africa Dialogue comes from foreign news sources. For instance, in January 2008, there were 99 news stories and reports from foreign sources, compared to 20 from local newspapers. In June (as of the time data was collected) there were 116 news items from foreign (Euro-American) news outlets with
Britain’s Guardian topping the list with 53 news reports, features, and opinions. During the months chosen for the snapshot views, an individual who lives in Holland (“HTH”) posted the most often. In January 2008, she posted 68 items, while another participant (“TF”) posted 37 items. In June, HTH posted 60 items against TF’s 49. Apart from cut-and-paste news reports there were also asynchronous conversations that were posted on the site depending on the flow and direction of the topic.

As an observant participant on this virtual discussion group I noticed the robustness of exchanges among the participants. I define robustness in terms of the range and span of what interests the contributors and the diversity of intellectual sources used in the construction of their positions. There is hardly any issue that is sacrosanct which could not be, and has not been, discussed in the discussion groups (though the moderator admits to minimal editing and elimination of certain postings). It is not possible to predict what could interest the group at any given time. There have been times when events from the homeland in Nigeria (or any other place on the African continent) triggered off heated arguments or what read like well-researched position papers. There were other times when socio-cultural institutions within the country were subjected to critical appraisal. This model of conversation fits what Michael Schudson terms “the sociable model of conversation” (1997, pg. 299) as opposed to the problem-solving model. The sociable model, which is “spontaneous and free” (Schudson, 1997, pg. 298), can be illustrated with an instance which took place December 11, 2008, when a very active contributor to Nigeria’s emerging Internet community (referred to as “SOA” in this study) wrote a three-part article on Nigerian journalism using one of the country’s newspapers as a departure point and later focused attention on a particular columnist in the same paper. The first article on “Nigerian journalism and the Guardian newspaper” was written April 6, 2008. Then on October 21, 2008, he published “The Guardian newspaper: Ungrateful and insensitive.” The third article, which led to a heated debate on an issue which had nothing to do with the practice of journalism, was written December 11, 2008.

Lori Kendall (1999) offers a prescription for understanding how conversations develop. She suggests that the context or background to the conversation must be established. So before focusing on the exchange (conversation) that occurred on the USA-Africa Dialogue discussion group, for the sake of clarity and contextualization, I revisit the main points in SOA’s three articles (mentioned above) on the press in Nigeria and subsequently reflect on how he frames his relationship to the homeland. In his opinion, one option for analyzing a nation is through its institutions. The state of some of these institutions and those who work in them can be used as a barometer to judge the
health of the nation. On this premise, SOA links the fate of the nation to the nature of its journalism. He goes even further to characterize journalists, members of the judiciary, and the intellectual class as the moral custodians of a nation. Once these groups are found wanting, the salvation of the nation is in jeopardy. According to him, “both [the nation and journalism] are going to the dogs” (SAO, 2008). This sense of disappointment in the state of affairs of the country/nation appears to be a common position taken by Nigerians, at home or in the diaspora.

Apart from the issues mentioned by SAO in his three articles about the press in Nigeria, a contributor (“Name 7”) added to the sentiment that most writers at the newspapers have lost touch with public intellectualism and social discourse. The points he adduced were not in contention, but the electronic signature attached to his messages raised an alarm with another participant (“Name 5”). The electronic signature included a string of titles and affiliations. “Name 5” wanted the bearer of the titles to explain the job description of a Senior Special Assistant and the other titles attached to the electronic signature. Considering this to be an innocuous question, “Name 7” attempted to respond using his personal experience as a backdrop. In what appears as a way to validate his perspective on the matter, “Name 7” went on to compare the Nigerian organizational structure with America's. As is usual in asynchronous conversations, “Name 20” went back to the issue of the newspapers and their responsibility to the society before commenting on the long electronic signature. This contribution refocused attention on the cost of running the present democratic arrangement where about four officers each of the 360 House of Representatives and 109 Senators were allowed to employ personal staff. The implicit concern here is the waste taxpayers are made to bear on behalf of the political class. This comment takes the discussion closer to how the country is being run and sets the tone for binary oppositions of those in power and those who are not.

Unlike in face-to-face conversation, in online forums each contributor just jumps into the discussion going back and forth depending on what they have to say. “Name 5,” who was the first to raise the alarm about the electronic signature, returned for a second time. He made reference to the explanation offered by “Name 7” but did not agree with it. He was concerned with the unnecessary financial burden borne by the generality of Nigerians. As an aside, he talked about his own personal predicament as an academic in the diaspora, adding that there was a time the country was run better than what obtains today. This contribution brings in the psychological pain of the immigrant and the heavy burden of memory of a past. According to Omoniyi, “memory features as a central tool in the construction and validation of an identity that
is rooted in a different space” (2007, pg. 29). Both the validation of self and construction of what an immigrant has become away from home can be gleaned from the narrative of “Name 10.” In giving a context to his contribution, “Name 10” narrates how he joined the pro-democracy movement built around the events of June 12, 1993, when the military regime annulled an election that was deemed the freest in the country. Asides such as this are not just superfluous but help (re)construct for readers how an immigrant remembers home.

Since the main focus of this study is to uncover how Nigerians in the diaspora define nationhood in their conversations it becomes pertinent to call attention to important statements that bear relationship to the study. On that premise, the past of a people and their origin always has a role to play when issues such as nationhood and state are on stage, but this discussion moves from the past to the present. “Name 7,” who is the central focus of the contributions, reveals that he is at present on the soil of the United States of America, where most of the participants are located. The reason for that revelation is to forge a connection between what is happening in Nigeria with the situation in America. This revelation further makes the concept of insider-outsider perspective problematic. He is abroad speaking about home. So he speaks as an insider who is temporarily located abroad. It is within this complex spatial positioning that he throws light on the working of the government. He explains the reason for the staffing needs that were a bone of contention in the spirit of imagining a new Nigeria and by extension a new nation. To him, service should be paramount. He explains further that it is for efficiency in governance and not just ‘jobs for the boys’ that lead to what appears like wastage of scarce resources by the political class. For the first time reference is made to the ideas of Edward Said about intellectuals who are policy oriented and their possible immersion in the illogicality and “immorality of the hegemony.” Said is invoked as a way of justifying his involvement in governance. What may not be very explicit in this line of reasoning is the aversion Nigerians in the diaspora have for the political class. Corruption within the government is held responsible for the media reports about decay of social infrastructure in the homeland. The media at home functions both as the eyes and ears of those in the diaspora. There are some dangers in over-reliance on media reports as pillars for basing one’s perspectives and positions. There have been a few cases in which debates and discussions have been held based on incorrect reporting of events.

State, structure, and nature of governance became sub-themes in the ongoing conversation which started as an appraisal of the nation through one of its institutions. On this premise “Name 10” returns for the second time to reinforce some of the points made about the unnecessary retinue of staff who at-
tend to members of the political class. He goes into details about the lack of budget for the officers and the positions they hold. Since discussions here are unstructured, issues flow in, are sustained, and are discarded at will. As a sub-sub-theme, “Name 10” reintroduces the talk about what was known in most online forums as the third-term agenda. This is a debate that revolved around changing the Nigerian constitution to allow for more terms for the (now former) president of the country. With the third-term agenda in the background, “Name 19” comes into the conversation with a critique of other contributors. He thinks they are cynics who see nothing good in working for government. Again the comparison is with America and not any country on the African continent or Europe. This participant goes back to the initial topic of discussion about the Guardian newspaper and its sordid labor relations. He condemns the double standard and the cynicism of some of the contributors to the conversation.

A rereading of the exchanges to this point will leave one with a perception that Nigeria’s inability to forge a nation out of its many constituent parts is traceable to internal leadership deficiencies and a totally weakened civil society. There is hardly any mention of the role of outside forces or the effect of neocolonialism in the weakening of integrative forces. Though this particular conversation cannot be generalized to represent the tone and direction of other conversations, it typifies the thinking of Nigerians in the diaspora who live within the boundaries of most of the imperial powers. If there is any linking cord which connects the majority of Nigerians to the nation (or nation space) it is the disdain for the political leadership and political elites. One of the engines which drive nationalist pathos can be traced to this internalized anger against individuals and the institutions they lead.

As noted above, not every contributor to the issue of leadership takes the same position. On another forum where the issues of leadership and nationalism come up as part of a larger discussion, a contributor to the TalkNigeria Yahoo “egroup” links both the followership and leadership as responsible for the present state of anomie in the country. The contributor in a frustrating tone notes that “Nigerians have been making so much noise in the cyberspace, giving the impression we have problems because we have diabolic entities and evil mongers as leaders in Nigeria” (January 31, 2005, message #431). To this contributor, leadership is not the only problem that plagues the land but the dearth of Nigerian nationalists working in concert for the progress of the country should be factored into the equation.

One of the characteristics of “egroups” is that contributors sometimes reflect previous submissions in their own as the thread progresses, taking the liberty to add or go off topic at will. This characteristic was properly documented and
discussed in Moran’s study of the USENET newsgroup. He stated that the discussions “were deliberately designed to be center-less: rhizomic in character, horizontally organized and not hierarchically dependant on any particular part” (2000, pg. 106). There are times contributors make use of archival materials to reinforce or disagree with what others expressed. For instance, a contributor like “Name 10” returns for the third time, but this time decides to first evaluate what others have written before making his own points. The painful issue of flawed elections in the country soon becomes a part of the bouquet of issues that have previously come up for discussion. At this stage of the conversation it is treated as one of the indicators of the inability of the political class to conduct credible elections.

Apart from ‘serious’ issues (meaning non-personal issues), it is not unusual for friends to occasionally drop a line to register their presence. The contribution of “Name 18” can be interpreted along such a preposition. She congratulated “Name 7” on his new job and then asked for a position paper she had read about citizen’s diplomacy. That was her own way of re-establishing connection with a friend. This particular posting may not have added much to the direction of the conversation, but it at least presented information about the foreign policy direction of the country. “Name 7” responds for the fourth time. This time he takes on those who have expressed opinions on his participation in the government. To him, some contributors are comfortable with pessimism and would rather not participate in the process of change. He frames the present time as birth-time for the country and states that all experts are needed to ensure problem-free delivery. The symbolism of the choice of this metaphor raises more questions than it possibly answers. For instance, who are the parents of the nation, and in what womb is the nation encased? To whose hands will the nation be delivered? Questions such as these arise when human metaphors are used in framing concepts such as nationhood. The questions also bring to consciousness the agency needed to midwife a nation from prior seeds supplied by the colonial masters.

In the spirit of birth and rebirth, “Name 11” links the virtual with the real and avers that the ongoing online conversations bear semblance to how political debates are conducted in Nigeria. After setting the scene with a few remarks he then zeros in with a personal observation of what he witnessed at the local government level where young graduates just hung around their principals doing next to nothing. In conclusion he disagreed with the comparison of Nigeria’s system with that of the United States of America, especially in the area of knowledge production/consumption of the various think-tanks and other sites of political knowledge construction. Apart from this, he brings in the hierarchical cultural difference between the two countries. Thus far Nige-
nia as a nation or nation space is imagined in relation to a significant other (in this case the United States of America). The tension between those in the diaspora and those within the country gradually emerges as the conversation progresses.

“Name 7” for the fifth time returns to defend his position by addressing some of the points raised in previous contributions. In analyzing the problem of nationhood he identifies a crisis of citizenship as “the failure of ownership of the nation.” His analysis then turns generational. He posits that the younger generation has not shown the courage to wrestle the nation from those he termed as the charlatans. In a previous posting he used the metaphor of birth and rebirth to characterize the country but during this turn (post 15, turn 5) he opted for the word patrimony. It is of interest to note the linguistic difference between the choices of both ideas. The one (birth) implicitly envisions growth while the other (patrimony) is a gift handed over to another generation. The question then arises, in what form or shape is Nigeria being handed over to the next generation? His conclusion that citizens must get engaged in the art of making Nigeria a nation, according to him, marks the difference between him and those in the forum. In short, Nigeria is a work in progress which historically was delivered to the hands of nationalists by colonial masters. As can be noted, the idea of what a nation is or can be is gradually emerging in this conversation.

Anger at how the political leadership in the country conducts its affairs is common currency in most articles and reports about Nigeria. Post 16 is not different in that “Name 12” brings up the issue of anger and then castigates the celebratory attitude of some commentators concerning the defeat of the attempt of the president to extend his stay in office. This posting is definitely a reaction to previous contributions. He does not think there is a need to locate entry points into the system before change is effected. He does not subscribe to the notion that it is only government insiders who can make changes. The implied notion here is that those in the diaspora can also play a role from their various stations outside the country, and “Name 12” brings up a number of names to support his position.

One more issue (that of the African high command—AFRICOM) is added to those already on the table. The context of this issue is that most African leaders rejected the idea of an American-led military command in Africa but during the visit of Nigeria’s president to the White House he sort of reversed the joint decision. It was on this premise that “Name 9” wanted to know how much of “Name 7’s” contact and connections “define the quality of policy paper” handed to his boss, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and why the president reversed himself.
All through the discussion hardly any of the participants bothered to define what a nation means, but judging from the way Nigeria as a country with all its imperfections is discussed, one cannot miss the passion each of the discussants has for the country. What is missing is any attempt to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism, not necessarily an academic treatise on one or the other. Maurizio Viroli in his book makes a similar observation. He begins with a remark that “in scholarly literature and common language, ‘love of country’ and ‘loyalty to the nation’, patriotism and nationalism, are used as synonyms” (1995, pg. 1). Viroli is not advocating for a scientific definition but a deep understanding of what both concepts mean in the minds of those deploying the terms. In Viroli’s perception, “the primary values [for patriots] is the republic and the free way of life that the republic permits” (1995, pg. 2).

In the data collected from the USA-Africa Dialogue series, patriotism and nationalism were freely used during the conversation, especially in posts 23, 26, and 33 (see Appendix 2). In post 23 it comes as a reaction to a perceived threat to freedom of speech, and this led to an assertion that what is in contention is not shades of patriotism measured by participation or co-optation. To “Name 4,” his role as a critic of government should also be rated as part of his civic responsibility. Along this same line of reasoning “Name 11” also takes exception to the tendency to equate participation in government as patriotism. Finally, “Name 4” returns to reinforce his earlier position that the talk of sacrifice, patriotism, and nationalism is just expedient rhetoric. When this and Viroli’s definition of patriotism are considered in tandem, it is tempting to conclude that the conversations are not rigorous academic exercises but the everyday talk of a people. Though it might not have been explicitly stated during the conversation, Viroli’s list of enemies of republican patriotism such as “tyranny, despotism, oppression, and corruption” is in agreement with sentiments expressed in most of the comments by contributors. There are no parallel ideas in the conversation when enemies of nationalism are listed. Viroli mentions “cultural contamination, heterogeneity, racial impurity, and social, political, and intellectual disunion” (1995, pp. 1–2) as obstacles to nation building. So Viroli makes a distinction between patriots and nationalist writers. Nationalists, in the opinion of Viroli, work toward the spiritual and cultural unity of the people. Though these may appear as mutually exclusive positions, they are not, because both patriots and nationalists love their country or the idea of it.

In the spirit of triangulation, the next section focuses on some randomly selected articles from the Nigeria Village Square website, with the word nation as part of their titles. Using these randomly selected articles is one way of establishing the presence of the theme on different threads and discussion sites. The method may not be methodologically sound but it serves to restate the fact
that nation, nationhood and nationalism are not just side occurrences but one of the major interests of Nigerians.

When these articles were collected on Friday, November 23, 2007, about 68 of them had nation as part of their titles. As a general guide I ask the question: How do the writers of these articles frame the concept of nationhood and nationalism? It will become evident that not all the articles explicitly had anything to do with the concept. For instance, the article written by VED toward the end of the year was more an evaluation of the passing year and a lamentation of the tragedy the country was experiencing at that time. This kind of narrative is inspired by the way the news media from the homeland constantly analyze socioeconomic conditions prevailing at the time of publication. The narrative of a failed state is a constant one.

One of the 68 articles I randomly searched was a talk delivered to one of the ethnic majority groups during an event in Boston, Massachusetts in 2003, with a title “Intellectuals as nation builders.” My expectation was to encounter the lecturer’s perception of nationhood. Instead, the author focuses on who an intellectual is and how problems of the country can be solved using intellect and imagination. What is left unsaid sometimes casts a light on what is spoken. Scholars have deliberated on tribulations such an intervention can cause for those living and struggling within the country. For example, moving from a Western country back to one’s own country has its own burdens. In solving the problem of the nation from the outside, Dean J. Kostantaras avers that “[n]ational revival movements from early modern times to the present have often drawn intense support from those dwelling outside the nation” (2008, pg. 701). It implies that both groups must find ways of working together as a means of achieving the desired transformation of the nation. The concept of nation building deploys a mechanistic metaphor of an engineering construction which needs parts that have to be assembled before the final product emerges.

In the case of Nigeria, the parts in relation to the whole can be gleaned from an article written by SAO in July 2004 on “The Nigerian Presidency and the Igbo Nation.” To put this title in context it should be understood that the Igbo people represent one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, yet the writer conceives them as a nation within the national geopolitical space called Nigeria. In the same article, mention is made of “Nigeria and her myriad nationalities.” The terms nation and nationality appears to connote deeper meanings among Western scholars. For instance, Austrian scholar Ludwig von Mises submits that “[t]he word and concept nation belong completely to the modern sphere of ideas of political and philosophical individualism; they win importance for real life only in modern democracy” (2006, pg. 9). It may seem that the term has a universal meaning applicable to all cultures and countries,
but according to Joshua Fisherman, “‘Nation’ signifies something different for Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Eastern Europeans, not to mention Africans and Asians” (1968, pg. 39). The implication of this observation is that one should not expect the same definition of the term from different people. An article (“Nigeria: A Nation without Heroes?”) written by SAO in 2005 addresses the linkage between nation building and intellectuals. He brings up the case of “a budding pool of pseudo-intellectuals” who speak ill of Nigeria’s nationalists on the Internet. In my own interpretation of this article, the word nation could as well be substituted for country with no difference in the overall meaning. It will be safe at this point to tentatively conclude that nationhood as a concept comes across as self-evident and needs little interrogation or reflection by commentators.

The same conclusion cannot be reached for defining a patriot or the attributes of patriot. There were about six feature articles dealing with these topics posted on the *Nigeria Village Square* website between 2003 and 2009. The 2003 article will not be considered because it is in response to a group in Nigeria that goes by the name The Patriots. The article by AO reflects on “Nigerian ‘patriots’ and their righteous tirades” (June 13, 2006). It is a response to an earlier article by a home-based commentator who felt those outside the country simply criticize without proffering solutions to the problems of the country. AO opines that the act of articulating, either from within or outside the country, what is wrong with Nigeria is an important task that must be done by someone. Almost seven months after AO’s article, MFE posted another, “Fake intellectuals, useless patriots.” The article starts on a philosophical note about the subjectivity of views and how one is not superior to another. The use of the word “we” becomes very noticeable in the first nine paragraphs of this article and its collective tone gives a feeling of representing a larger community beyond the writer. It gives a long list of what is wrong with politicians, and in particular a generation “born into, the era of criticizing.” As is usual with Nigerian Internet commentators, personal views are presented as if they represent that of the collective. There may not be any concrete idea in this article, but it presents the reader with the pain and passion of an average Nigerian, especially the debilitating impact of ethnic divisions within the country.

This ethnic (or tribal) division is the subject of another contribution on the NVS website by RO. His contribution is titled, “Of patriots and tribalists” (April 21, 2007). This writer takes a stand from the outset that the idea of Nigeria as a nation has expired and sooner or later the country will break up into its constituent parts. The subtext of this piece is a response to those the writer thinks are patriots. It brings to the fore the lack of a linking cord between the various ethnic groups. He argues that the poor in one corner of Nigeria cannot
imagine what links them together within Nigeria. In his words, “has the poor man in Akure the same notion of Nigeria as the poor in Bauchi to sufficiently bring them together and fight alongside each other for the overthrow of this (sic) rapacious elites found in every ethnic group?” This raises the question of the relationship of parts to the whole, the place of ethnic groups in a nation. RO takes a position of mutual exclusiveness. In his view only one identity at a time is permissible; the idea of multiple identities at different times appears unattractive to him. There are scholars who have argued that you can still be a member of an ethnic group and be a nationalist or a patriot at the same time. It comes down to how these concepts are defined and from which social location the writer is writing from.

The article “We are all patriots” written by MEO and posted on the NVS site on May 31, 2007, can be said to be written from the point of view of an academic able to keep his emotions in check. He outlines four attributes of patriotism in the course of the essay. According to him, patriotism “is a progressive emotional evolution towards the love of country.” In effect, patriotism can be framed as a growing relationship between citizens and their country. What is left unexpressed are the necessary conditions within the country that can drive such growth of emotion. In his opinion, no matter how strong a feeling one has for the nation-state it cannot be expressed in absolutes. It can be “expressed in degrees.” The degree of expression, as expected, should differ from individual to individual depending on how pleased such a person is with the situation of the country. MEO argues further that “patriotism usually follows from a sense of gratitude and pride.” The corollary of this position is that patriotism is hindered when citizens feel a sense of shame about their country or nation. As improbable as that may appear at first, the idea is not without disciples. For instance in an interview, Benedict Anderson responded to a question about his affinity to the various nations he has claim to, through his parents and his own research studies. He said that “If you feel no shame for your country you cannot be a nationalist. And, shame can be contagious” (2005). If left unchecked nationalism soon spreads like a disease which is in competition for the mind of citizens. Along the same lines of thought Liah Greenfeld posits that “investment in national prestige necessarily gives rise to an endless international competition” (2005, pg. 327). The competition comes in various guises, especially where neighbors to one’s country are involved. This kind of international competition can be observed in text or speech when a Ghanaian is in dialogue with a Nigerian. In other instances Nigerians defend the name of the country when it has been unjustly impugned. Finally, MEO compares patriots and nonpatriots when he reasons that “patriots are optimists, sometimes unrealistic optimists, while so-called non-patriots are pessimists.” In
both cases he is able to show that there is an intersection where both parties meet and that that emotional intersection is unbridled love for one’s homeland. The dividing line is not ancestry or affiliation but how each group reads the history and the present condition of the nation.

In all the articles thus far reviewed, it is apparent that these Nigerians are able to express love for country and take time to reflect on the nature of their relationship to the place. Some feel and express pride and optimism in the way the country is run and others express their disappointment in the negative projection of the country within the continent of Africa and globally. The representation of the situation is expressed differently. IsT, who posted an article on June 22, 2007, posits that Western ideas dominate the internal landscape to such an extent that most “conceptual castles” are designed and distributed from the same “poison-emitting source.” At another end of the perspective are those who are so totally unhappy with the situation that they employ a strategy of disassociation. To illustrate this point, DO posted an article in NVS on October 2007 with a provocative title that screams “I don’t care what you all say, I am not a Nigerian.” This story illustrates what it means to love one’s country and be able to communicate the feeling to others. To DO, a person’s “nationality, pride, and patriotism are dependent on his heart and not geographical location.” There appears to be an emphasis on the subjective rather than on reason (locative).

The frame of “love of one’s country” is one of the very simple frames used in discussing Nigeria. This frame comes up a number of times, especially when Nigerians suspect a smear campaign. Looking at the text produced during a CNN broadcast which most Nigerians online felt was unfair, a few issues came to the fore. The coming together of Nigerians online is not just for information exchange or creation of knowledge. The forums are used for quick mobilization of “virtual Nigerians” to defend the name of the country whenever its integrity is at stake. In this particular case, the community (at first only a few people, then a town hall meeting) was reacting to misrepresentation of a people. One of the planks of the argument against CNN was that if the chief executives of Enron could be found guilty of fraud and treated as individuals why can’t the media also treat Nigerian criminals, who have been found guilty, as individuals as well. In the words of the writer of the June 4, 2006, article, “Why did CNN focus on a few Nigerians in Houston despite the Enron catastrophe in Houston? Is this just a matter of perception and perspectives?” In making the case, the writer spent time on the Enron fraud as a way of showing that crime has no nationality. The call was for all Nigerians to “write protest letters, phone calls and emails to CNN to debunk CNN’s claim to the effect that forty percent of Nigerians in America are into frauds and crimes.”
The message of mobilization originated from a newly-formed Nigerian Leadership Council which is an umbrella organization of twenty-five Nigerian associations based in the United States of America. This umbrella organization in the press release of September 19, 2006, specifically indicated that it was formed to “battle the CNN ‘how to rob a bank’ report in which CNN falsely implied that about 40 percent of Nigerians in the United States were involved with fraud.” The militant tone and urgency of the press release cannot be missed. It was more like a call to arms. The umbrella organization demanded and received a letter of apology from CNN as a result of a town hall meeting it organized.

Prior to this intervention by Nigerians in the diaspora, the government of Nigeria issued a statement on the matter stating its displeasure with CNN’s “unflattering portrayal of Nigerian citizens” (June 12, 2006). The various commentators to the thread on the NVS website identified with the government’s stand. One of the contributors wrote “This is what we expect from FGN and should take it further by banning CNN reporters from Nigeria.” Another participant (#2) expressed surprise that the government actually attacked “the Western media for negative depiction of Nigerians.” To this contributor, CNN is a symbol of Western media and as in war he is pleased that the Nigerian government attacked in retaliation. Not all contributors are completely satisfied; participant #4 was unhappy with the snail-speed of the government’s response. To this participant, it proves the inefficiency of the government in Nigeria. However, participant #5 changes the tone of the discussion. The contributor wants to know if in truth a large percentage of Nigerians in the diaspora are involved in crimes. No one responded to the contributor but participant #7 thinks there is a link between the White House and CNN. Misconceptions such as this, coupled with a misunderstanding of the relationship between government and the media in America, are common during spontaneous online exchanges, and continue to appear unless someone spots it and points it out. In the view of this participant, Nigeria’s state-funded television station is “pathologically inept, unimaginative, incompetent, inefficient, and absolutely hopeless.” This posting, as with so many others, is a reflection of the general displeasure of Nigerians in the diaspora about the way certain institutions are run in the country. Participant #8, still in the symbolic battle mood, informs others that he/she is in possession of newspaper reports that implicate Westerners of frauds perpetuated within their country. The implication of this information is to further drive home the point that CNN is selective in its reporting. The participant also thinks it is a cultural struggle against the largest black community in America. There is a suggestion that the state-funded TV station should retaliate by doing a documentary to show “such big time Western rip offs that [were] committed by the fatcats at Enron for a change.” It is im-
Important to state that the feelings expressed in this thread are not unique. In a few other instances Nigerians online have taken up symbolic arms against negative reporting directed at Africa or Africans as a whole. For instance, a feature article written in May 2006 on “Images from and about Africa,” by SAO, attracted a full-length response by another online participant. In the article a contributor to SAO’s article was said to have expressed the following words: “If Africans want to stop negative depiction of us then we should be prepared to mobilize and rebut any false reporting of the continent. Africans have this passive and subservient posture when dealing with anything Western that they feel it must either be right or cannot be any other way.”

The tone and language of the CNN incident of misrepresentation of Nigerians in Houston is framed as a battle between the largest black community and one of the symbolic representatives of Western powers. It is also cast as a cultural war of subjugation by a member of the global/Western press. The combatants on both sides have a history of similar battles. The role of the United States of America during the era of New World Information and Communication Order should also be put into its proper context just as the state system Africans inherited from Europeans must be brought to bear in understanding the reactions of the Nigerians in the diaspora. Coincidentally, Mazuri and Mazuri draw a linkage between fighting external wars and promotion of unity within a geopolitical space. Taking a long historical perspective, Mazuri and Mazur submit that African nation-states “were nurtured in the bosom of calculation, conflict and war” (1998, pg. 4) and that to strengthen the nation-states calculation and conflict become the inevitable stimulus. It is no surprise then that the virtual is a mirror of a historical reality. The way the campaign to obtain redress from CNN was organized and implemented appeared more like a war fought by words and offline organizing instead of with bombs and guns. The language and metaphor at every turn became that of us versus them. It may be safe to deduce that the aftermath of the media misrepresentation was a fleeting unity of the various ethnic groups in the diaspora and an emerging hope to take the newly found patriotic fervor back to the homeland. In the words of the press release by the umbrella organization formed in the wake of CNN’s onslaught, “it is now abundantly clear . . . that there is a growing sense of Nationalism amongst generations of Nigerians in the Diaspora.”

Just as the nationalistic fervor is palpable, there are also a few who feel strongly that Nigeria as a country needs to be split along linguistic/ethnic lines (discussion on this issue is in Chapter 6). One such proponent posted a seven-part article on the possibility of dividing Nigeria into different units. The first part was a rejoinder to a posting by another participant who was reflecting on the despicable existence immigrants in Western capitals have to endure be-
cause of the socioeconomic state of their homeland. The initial article, written by UN, also hinted at the imposed lack of voice of immigrants in the host country’s mainstream media. The rejoinder by BE, written on July 13, 2007, with the title “A battle cry to reverse the poor state of the Nation,” presented the plight of immigrants in Russia through a personal narrative. A tangential issue to the personal narrative that captured my interest was the analysis for the reason of mass migration. This issue developed into a critique of the nation-state. In the conclusion BE articulated his perception of what a nation ought to be. According to him, the ability to collaborate along shared visions separates a nation from a country. “In a nation, majority of the people share common goals, values and aspirations and they work very hard together to achieve their goals” (July 13, 2007). The question this position raises is what agency of state will be charged to mobilize the people to work hard in the realization of their goals. By what process such common goals, values, and aspirations will evolve is not included in the article.

Thus far major attention has been on news and its coverage; the analysis has focused on what was observed online and the various exchanges that took place. In a few instances I also had to participate by responding to postings. One such posting was sent by e-mail to a select group of readers of a columnist who sent us an advance copy of his weekly article. My intervention was occasioned by a certain paragraph and the continual reference to Nigeria as a nation. The author wrote, “Nigeria is a nation that lives on ever thinning hope. It is a fractured edifice, a nation sold down the river by too many of its citizens, especially those who presume to be its leaders. Born by British fiat and thus branded by the stigma of bastardy, it remains, in many respects, a fictional construct. Some twenty years ago, the novelist Chinua Achebe told me in an interview that Nigeria as a nation was yet to be founded. A fledging reporter at the time, I was scandalized by the dourness of his statement. Today, however, Nigeria strikes me as farther from, not nearer to, being founded” (e-mail, March 6, 2007). After reading this e-mail, I sent my plea to the list without knowing the identity of those on the list. An excerpt of the questions I raised is as follows: “What I want to know is how/when is a nation founded? What are the elements that one must look out for? I understand the term country, I understand state formation but this ambiguous term of nation, and its fellow family members; nationality, nationalism, nationalist, and so on confuse me.” The only response was from VC, who attempted to throw some light on my questions. He said “In our context, founding a nation means believing in that nation the cost notwithstanding. It is synonymous with patriotism. It is evident that the spirit of patriotism among Nigerians is below zero level at the moment. Nigerians do not believe in Nigeria! I can only vouch for our patriotism when Nigeria is in-
volved in a soccer match, even then it does not subsist when our players are doing a bad job. We switch instantly to the better side.” This intervention goes to show that when a direct question is posed to a Nigerian about the concept of nationhood, one is bound to receive a response. It is not farfetched to categorize the attitude of Nigerians as situational nationalism. Meaning nationalism based on a case by case basis.

The other intervention was on NVS where an article titled “How to build a nation” was published on July 21, 2007. It was written by a Nigerian who lives in Texas, U.S.A. My response to the article captures how I felt at that stage of the study. Apart from mine there was just one other response to the article. The first respondent was more interested in a structural make-up of the country as opposed to building a nation. In my own response, I was disappointed by what I referred to as a sophomoric understanding of the subject matter. I pointed out the confusion between a nation and a nation-state which was apparent in the article. A part of my contribution reads thus: “A country is the physical space from where a nation arises. Yes, there are nations without states and states struggling to build a nation. The act of nation building is more cognitive than physical. A nation is built when the minds of the people are developed. Things like roads, food, security, education are means to various ends. The most difficult aspect of nation building is in getting citizens like the writer of this piece to appreciate the value of reason and objectivity. Nations are not built when all the people do is look back into events that divide them. There is something in nation-building called healing process and process of healing.” For reasons not too clear to me, there was no other contributor to the thread after mine. My intention was to invite other commentators but it did not succeed. There is no need psycho-analyzing the situation but instead I will subject strands of the article to positions taken by intellectuals.

The concept of nation-building is one that has occupied the attention of political scientists. Bohdan Harasymiw defines the concept as “the sum of polices designed to promote national integration” (2002, pg. 204). To be sure that this task is not without agency, Harasymiw explains that the task of national integration is state-driven. In some other countries, the media, either privately owned or state-sponsored, has been known to take up the task of national integration. Apart from the media, certain institutions of state like schools, libraries, theaters, and museums constantly share the burden of creating and sustaining environments for nation-building. The aspect of dualities mentioned by Harasymiw appear to be absent in debates and discussions held by Nigerians. He lists territorial and ethnic, “civic-territorial and ethno-national components to nation building” (2002, pg. 205). As an active participant in a number of discussion groups, I did not encounter such divisions of the nation-building task.
To conclude this chapter on data analysis, I devote space to reviewing the three articles written by members of the Nigerian intelligentsia whose ideas should not be ignored. One by Wole Soyinka represents the very familiar framing of Nigeria as a “mere geographical expression,” which was made popular by one of Nigeria’s nationalists, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The metaphor of Nigeria as a mere geographical expression sends the message of a country that exists on a map as opposed to one that has created that rare geographical impression in the minds of the citizens. One of the arguments of this lecture is that a nation “is brought into being through the political—and inclusive—will of its citizens” (2009). He too does not accept the fact that Nigeria has attained the status of a nation but asserts that there is a need to work on the Nigeria project. This idea of Nigeria as a project fits into the global notion of nation-building. A concept such as this speaks to the complex humanist process of nationhood as if it were a mechanical object that can be put together. The framing in turn will desire a design on which the project will be realized, and a set of builders and maybe engineers and a quantity surveyor to ensure that the final project meets local or global standards. Harasymiw also queries the notion of building nations by design. In his words, the “question of whether nations can be built by design, as in the architectural analogy suggested by the concept, are in dispute” (2002, pg. 205). As with every framing, Nigeria as a project bears its own burden of connotation and signification. As every building comes with a price so too does nation-building come with its own cost. James Silk states that “[t]he pressures of nation building are also viewed almost unanimously as factors contributing to Africa’s poor human rights [record]” (1990, pg. 294). This aspect of human cost as it relates to nation-building is absent in most of the exchanges I observed, or if present it was hardly explicit. Yet it is not too difficult to understand the linkage between forcing all the various nationalities with their different histories into a union. The alternative framing concept that has not been used much in literature is the process of nation formation. This model is what most media studies scholar use when discussing nation formation. The notion of the media as nation builders is current within media studies discipline. Silvio Waisbord avers that “[m]edia studies can make a valuable contribution to nationalism studies by understanding how the media continue to articulate nationalistic sentiments” (2004, pg. 375). The next step in this proposition is also to track how readers deliberate on the nationalistic sentiments articulated by the media. It is one thing to read a text; it is another to interpret and internalize the content.

Aside from the framing of Nigeria as a project, Soyinka also defined a nation within the parameters of what it is not and what it is. “Nations do not exist as mere abstractions. A nation is a material implantation, and the build-
ing block of that growth is the human entity” (2009). In effect, people make the nation and in the co-deterministic perspective it is safe to extrapolate from his position that nations make the people what they are and what they may become. This aspect deals with a people’s identity and how they see themselves in relation to others. Though Soyinka argues that nations do not exist as mere abstractions, it is possible to postulate that nations start as abstractions in the minds of the political elites who then work with others to ensure the concretization of the mere abstractions. As if to concretize the linguistic abstraction that nationhood has become in the minds of most postcolonial subjects, who are struggling with cultural alienation occasioned by the inability to move between official and indigenous languages, an online commentator who shall be known simply as PA posted an article titled “Orile ede: Preliminary reflections” (March 30, 2009). In this contribution he attends to the likely cultural equivalent of the word nation in various local languages and dialects. Using the Yoruba language as a point of departure he constructs various layers of complexities and contradictions inherent in such a conceptual enterprise. It appears there is hardly any word or phrase that can adequately explain the meaning or notion of nation in the Yoruba language or any of the other Nigerian languages. From the standpoint of metalanguage studies, this is not an isolated problem when dealing with translations of modern (or Western) terms to other cultures. But beyond the limitation of finding the most appropriate code to express the idea of nation in Yoruba or any of the other 250 languages spoken in Nigeria, there is first the absence of conditions necessary for the effective formation of a nation. He alludes to the conditions enumerated by Ernest Renan in his seminal lecture titled “What is a nation?” These conditions, which can be summed up as commonality of origin, values, and heritage, are definitely absent in the Nigerian nation space.

On the Nigeria Village Square website there were nine responses to PA’s article. Most of those who responded were unable to deal with the substantive issues in the article. The first person who responded was concerned more with the fear of national disintegration. The second person’s contribution read more like a comic relief, since it added nothing substantive to the initial contribution, while the third contributor simply commended the writer. Contributor #4 reintroduced the issue of the inability of multiethnic societies to come to agreement or reach consensus in any matter. He takes the externalist perspective to history, following after the notion that colonialists are the source of Nigeria’s problems. The tone of contributions slightly changes with #5 who wrote, “My heart pains (sic) as I think about the direction of this country and about the future of the Yoruba people in general. I do not have anything against other nations or culture, I just fear for the direction of our people.” This is another case
where a contributor thinks nationalism and ethnicity are mutually exclusive. The position of Harasymiw commands recommendation to Nigerians. Harasymiw posits that “[t]here is nationalism from above and nationalism from below. Then there is nation-building as government policy and as individual choice of identity, which cannot be assumed to follow automatically” (2002, pg. 205). The final goal of nationalism is the production of a nation brought to life by the will of a collective. The strategy is dependent on the historical condition in which the constituent parts exist and choose to relate in time and in space.

The other contribution from PA, “Project Nigeria: The struggle for meaning” (May 10, 2009), speaks eloquently to one of the objectives of this study in that it focuses attention on how a people’s imagination defines for them reality and concepts that give meaning to their existence. This objective at first glance may appear political but it helps in a deeper comprehension of the textual data collected. The article also raises a few questions on national myth-making and its circulation. According to PA, “[t]here is no nation without a foundational national myth. When that myth commands the attention and respect of the citizenry, it garners legitimacy and hegemony” (May 10, 2009). He also goes further to assert that a national myth is what marks one nation from the other. What this article does not share with the readers is what makes the difference between analysis of a societal problem and practical steps to improve the situation.

The comparison of national myths and how the elites control the struggle for meaning presents to the discussion forum two historically important Western countries that have interesting roots in democratic struggles and a long track record of public opinion management. These two Western countries, France and the United States of America, are held up as examples of countries that have been able to create myths and circulate them widely among the populace. The article does not say how such myths became part of popular consciousness and usage. Since the United States has featured more prominently in this study, I will focus on, and fill the gap in knowledge about the United States’ idea of the “American Dream.” The origin of the phrase is both an individualized and personally held notion of imagination and a derivative from the constitution of the country. The term is attributed to James Truslow Adams, who, according to Jim Cullen, first used it in the book titled *The Epic of America*, published in 1931. Though the origin of the term “American Dream” may be in dispute, what is not arguable is the role the term plays in the identity of the average American and how this idea also slipped into popular usage.

In PA’s article, he derides the term “national cake,” which, according to him, is how Nigeria represents its national myth. What the article inadvertently omits is how the term “national cake” came into the public domain and who
should take responsibility for introducing the phrase. The term is attributed neither to the government nor to media organizations; it is a term, according to the article, that does not uplift the vision of any nation interested in using symbols and semantics to mobilize the people as loyal citizens. The highly popular idea of Benedict Anderson is that nationhood can be summed up as belonging to the realm of imagination, connection through text, and making of meaning by citizens in a geographically contiguous space. This idea of linking the imagination of citizens through text appears to have become a mantra that finds rendering at any and every opportunity it can be dropped into an article. Further away from Benedict Anderson’s idea, PA gives vent to a personal anger as if it were collective: “[o]ur semantic concessions have consequences that are real and impact on lives and national destiny” (May 10, 2009). Unfortunately, there is no document where Nigeria’s national destiny is articulated in popular imagination. The profusion of lamentations and pain makes it almost impossible to create and circulate a vision and definition of nationhood that can be owned at a national or continental level. The notion of meaning-making has a lone advocate. He is a former journalism teacher in Nigeria but now writes a weekly column from his base in America. He writes in an online Nigerian newspaper. In one of his weekly articles he started with a preposition: “[h]ow we define an issue or a problem—framing, as communicologists call it—can have profound consequences” (Dare, May 26, 2009). In this article, the writer’s focus was on the Niger Delta region, where local militants have taken up arms against the state. The solution to the problem, he claims, has a lot to do with how the issue is framed in the first instance in the minds of those consuming the reports or attempting to resolve the issues. If the militants are framed as criminals they will be treated as such but if they are framed as fighting for justice and resource control the resolution of the issue will be along the lines of seeking justice for the fighters. He further highlights the disparities between media frames and frames of those in authority. According to the article, the media constantly framed the militants as freedom fighters while the military framed them as criminals.

The question still remains how do Nigerians frame or define a “strange” concept such as nationhood? To confirm that the notion is not entirely alien to the consciousness of the journalists who contribute ideas to the public domain, I did a random search for the term online and found a number of articles which speak to the issue, but I chose to focus on six of the articles for no particular reason. In fact any of the articles would have served the purpose of understanding how the writers conceptualize nationhood in their writings. The chosen articles were looked at from a textual analytic perspective and with the aim of uncovering the source(s) of influence. What the articles express and
what they leave out will be pointed out. The antecedents of the writers will be
demphasized as much as possible so as to privilege the meaning over the
writer.

In a 2006 article titled “A nation in doubt”, the writer (ref. #001) paints a
picture of a citizenry who lives in doubt of the government and whose imagi-
nation is conditioned by abject poverty. The life of the individual, ref. #001
argues, reflects the manner of living of the collective and subsequently that of
the country. He stated further that an apparent disconnect exists between the
aspirations of the people and the government, which leads to stunted growth
and development. Underdevelopment to him is a symptom that has its roots
in the military interregnum. The writer argues that the experience of military
involvement in politics “will forever define the Nigerian nation or non-nation
as it were” (ref. #001). The military alone is not to blame because “[e]ach time,
one ethnic group excludes the other on the grounds of religion or indigeneity,
what is being said is that Nigeria is not yet a nation” (ref. #001). This article
takes an internalist perspective to the problem of the nation but leaves out
the epochal impact of colonialism or the recent debilitating effect of economic
globalization. If these two ideas are taken in tandem it can be deduced that a
nation’s definition is dependent on its historical condition, nature of gover-
nance, and ethnic relations (if it is a multiethnic state). The idea of how to
deal with ethnic relations within a multiethnic state is one that features many
times during online discussions.

In another article, “Nigerianhood in question,” the writer (ref. #002) re-
frames the question of identity from the abstract to the concrete when she asks
who a Nigerian is. It is not difficult, the text says, to observe how citizens can
identify with the nation during sporting events or by virtue of the national
symbols of legitimation and identification each citizen is made to obtain especially
for the purpose of international travel. Aside from leadership challenges which
many Nigerians (judging from the postings online) are convinced are respon-
sible for the present perilous state of the nation, this writer introduces an eco-
nomic class dimension and how this affects patriotism. According to the
argument in this text, “Nigeria has not melted naturally into the pot of na-
tionhood” (ref. #002) because of the wide gap existing between various socio-
economic classes. The notion of economic class division transcends ethnicity

1. The writers of the articles in Table 11 found in Chapter 4 are referred to by the use
   of a ref. # assigned to each article and the date of publication. NO Table 11 in Ch4
2. There are two perspectives in relation to the challenge of underdevelopment in post-
colonial nation-states. One attributes the situation to external factors while the other
attributes it to internal conditions.
but refocuses attention to the evolution of nationhood in relation to the mode of production and those who control it. Likewise, it is said that those who control the means of production also control the means of social reproduction. The media and other social institutions are the very active sites of reproduction of social values and ideas for national integration spearheaded by the elites in the society. According to Mahmud Ali, “[n]ations are an inevitable product, an inevitable form, in the bourgeois epoch of social development” (1976, pg. 18). This perspective is not very common among Nigerians.

Illustrating how the state promotes the “non-nationness” of Nigeria, an article titled “Again the national question” (ref. #003) details the lopsidedness observed in appointments to certain strategic national institutions. The price to pay for excluding a part of the country from the benefits of power, according to the text, is “a fundamental lack of emotion that connects the new Nigerian with the idea of Nigeria” (ref. #003). The lack or presence of emotion is what other writers have discussed under the terms patriotism or nationalism. Almost seven days after the article above appeared, the same writer, in an article titled “Limits of the Yar’adua doctrine” (ref. #003), focused on the making of the nation-state. In battle-like parlance it makes mention of a needed truce between the intellectual class and the state, and, according to the text, the minister of foreign affairs delegates the task of imaging a Nigerian mythos to the intellectual class. In the intellectual tradition, the text avers that “nation is a religion. Its theology is the idea of a shared and connected past” (ref. #003). Reading between the lines it becomes obvious that the spirituality (or sacredness) of nations is not a new or original concept; the writer borrows it from Ernest Renan, who is often credited with the idea that “[a] nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle” (1996, pg. 41). Mentioned as conditions needed for creation of a nation are the following: the political and intellectual classes and the generality of the people. The missing but connecting piece is the media. It is the media that shoulder the responsibilities of promoting ideas by reaching out to people. Thus far there have been three distinct but interrelated classes within the society that are responsible for what a nation becomes or how it is perceived. They are the leadership, the (economic) elites, and the interrelating ethnic groups.

An article on “The Media and National Patriotism,” published in Sun news online, on July 13, 2008, reiterates the role of the press in the making of a nation. The writer draws upon ideas from American authors and institutions as the arguments are made. From a highly functional perspective, the writer is of the opinion that “[n]o matter what Governments may think or feel, the media exists to promote democratic ideals, mould and shape the destiny of
the State and set agenda” (ref. #004). The concern here is for the state but when the civil society comes into the picture the media become a conduit that allows communication and dialogue. This article in a very simplistic mode promotes the social responsibility model of the media without the necessary historical contextualization.

However, the July 20, 2008 article titled “Newspapers and Politics” continues with the comparison of the Nigerian situation with that of other Western countries. According to the writer, “[u]nlike in the West, and resulting directly from the colonialist and imperial history of Nigeria, the origin, growth and development of the mass media in Nigeria (especially the print media) is intricately linked to the Christian religious influences” (ref. #004). Just as religious influences shaped media growth, it can also be postulated that Euro-American ideas contribute in no small way to how views of randomly selected columnists are shaped.

It appears that ideas like country, nation, and state can hardly be differentiated in the consciousness of the non-academic contributors of some of these articles. The name of the country is both a signifier and referent. Nigeria is the nation and the nation is Nigeria. Once Nigeria is defined and its meaning understood by writers and readers it can be said that a part of the search is fulfilled. As postcolonial subjects, it may not be necessary then to go after such fine details such “as Hans Kohn [recognizes] in his seminal distinction of ‘Western’ from ‘non-Western’ forms, but the tendency to make such distinctions is virtually ubiquitous” (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997, pg. 9). The path to a conclusion is to combine what Nigeria as a social space of habitation and a space for interaction means to those who constantly contribute ideas online and elsewhere in the process of their everyday “talk” and periodic conversations.

The next chapter develops the connecting cords between the theory, methods, and the data collected from the study of how Nigerians frame nationhood online.
Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary research interest of this study is to uncover by making explicit, intellectual ideas buried within texts that constitute a selection of postings generated during “natural” online interactions among a group I identified as geographically dispersed/diasporic Nigerians. On that premise, this study focused attention on archival and ongoing online conversations initiated by these individuals, who because of technological innovation, geographical distance from the homeland, and other factors, creatively utilized the freedom from state restrictive policies and political reprisals to recreate what can be termed virtual people’s parliaments similar to Europe’s seventeenth-century literary and public spheres but different in fundamental ways. The virtual spaces created have some of the elements of the public sphere as described by Jürgen Habermas (1974) but also bear the stamp that distances them from a typical Habermasian space. Orji Nkwachukwu’s concept of an “ethnicized public sphere” fits the virtual spaces where Nigerians constantly interact. At another conceptual level, this virtual space can be seen from Schudson’s perspective because it encourages “private persons to come together without the sponsorship or surveillance of government to discuss public issues” (2002, pg. 483). The data collected and analyzed support this notion that Nigerians and friends of Nigeria discuss a range of issues from the personal and private to the public—no topic was sacrosanct (see fig. 1) for a graphic representation of themes discussed. At a theoretical level, it is implicit that understanding the meaning of nationhood is not possible outside the interaction of social groups. Meaning can be located within the text produced in accordance with the perspective of symbolic interactionism. The theory explains how human beings arrive at social meaning in a constitutive way. Meaning is not predetermined or preconditioned by individuals. This concept allows us to understand the nature of the outcome of the various dialogues and conversations. Each participant feeds on what others have written in the production of new arguments or ideas that were not initially his/her own. Nationhood is not a set term but a constantly evolving idea that is shaped by citizens who subscribe to the notion of nationhood.
Judging from the data collected on news-related postings it is safe to propose that there is a noticeable reliance on online media news. These reports often acted as triggers for discussions and debates almost in line with the agenda-setting theory. The position taken by Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980), when they differentiated between media exposure and change of attitude, resonates with this study. The veracity of the news reports notwithstanding, the effect on the dynamics of the discussions that ensued and reflections produced could be observed in the various postings that form part of the data in Chapter 4. These news reports from both local and global sources and knowledge gained from within educational institutions affected the outcome of which frame is available for use by the discussants. The reason for this can be explained from the point of view of James W. Tankard, who presented framing as an active process that demands “getting beneath the surface of news coverage and exposing the hidden assumption” (Tankard, 2001, pg. 96). The difficult part is getting beneath the surface to expose hidden assumptions in news reports. To be able to deconstruct news reports a reader must be media literate and capable of multiple readings of texts. On the same premise, Entman defines framing as “selecting and highlighting facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (2004, pg. 5). Though there were hardly ideological wars, enough markers were left within the text to show the level of educational sophistication or otherwise. There were times when externalist perspectives held sway over internalist perspectives. The externalist perspective tends to view problems of postcolonial nation-states as externally driven and that solutions to the challenges must factor in elements of global inequalities.

Apart from the media frame used, Schudson points out two other effects news information could have on public discourse. There is the effect of the information conveyed and the effect of the legitimation conferred on the source and the channel from which the news is disseminated (2002, pg. 482). Information that can be classified as negative either from foreign or local news media within the country had the most spontaneous effect on the participants, judging from the text produced as commentaries to the media news.

There were a few cases when the veracity of news sources was called into question. A particular case was expressed by a contributor who warned that “it is always important to ascertain the veracity of certain Nigerian media news report (sic)” (NaijaElections, January 26, 2007, message #396). This posting was in reaction to a damning news report about the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), who was alleged to have forged certain school certificates. The report first appeared on one of the websites devoted to investigating malfeasance by government officials. It later was published in
a Nigerian news magazine. This, to be sure, is not just a one-off event but a constant staple within the Nigerian Internet community. It is worthy of note that Nigerian (online and offline) consumers of news media reports have an ambiguous relationship with media organizations, especially the print media. A few media scholars score the print media low in their performance; Lai Oso, for instance, observes that “[t]he Nigerian press generally supports and advances the hegemonic project of the ruling class albeit in its fractured and rancorous state” (2001, pg. 273). The fragmentation observed has not made it possible to articulate the group interest of the post-independent Nigerian press. This confusion of identity is best seen in a July 1993 edition of *The Media Review*, which, according to Ayedun-Alumma, focused on how eight Nigerian newspapers reported the abortive presidential elections of June 12, 1993. The newspapers reviewed were described with a total of seven adjectives: private, elitist, independent, populist, state-government-owned, partly-federal-government-owned, and fully-federal-government-owned (1996 pg. 47). The newspapers are framed as conduits that convey messages to willing and unsuspecting consumers of their products. What is not visible to the consumers is internal politics in most newsrooms and how the politics shape how and what news is presented to the public. It is apposite to reflect briefly on the nature of the media in Nigeria.

The conditions of the media enterprise in Nigeria demand taking liberties with an elitist quote which makes reference to fools contesting for forms of government, but forgetting that performance rather than system, should determine what is best for them. In this parody, when government is replaced with media, in the aphorism it becomes ‘for all forms of media, let the fooled consume, that which is personally produced is best. The personal, as the feminist movement made popular, is also political. So in essence each contesting power bloc in Nigeria should be encouraged to produce their own media and rebuild society as units that can interrelate on equal basis. The limitation of this model is that it creates a gap at the center, which calls for national coordination of information. My response is that we need as many citizen-media produced by individuals and groups without patrician agenda before truly national media agencies is encouraged and established. What Nigerians in the diaspora have done is to create safe spaces where information can be exchanged without fear of the state.

Available data (collected for this study) show that geographically dispersed Nigerians contribute to what the media focus attention upon just as online news stories appear to determine the agenda for discussants in most online forums (Kperogi, 2008). The co-deterministic perspective is a factor in the relationship most immigrants in the diaspora have with their homeland. The assumption is that as news media content is influenced so too will government
policies be impacted. It can be deduced that perspectives displayed in the postings and knowledge about various issues Nigerians have is therefore partially moderated by what the homeland news media (especially those with online presence) and other sources frame, promote, and publish as important. For instance, in one of the discussion groups there were a total of 299 news items from local online newspapers as against a total of 54 from foreign newspapers (see Table 3 for a breakdown for January 2008). In the month of June 2008 there were a total of 55 news items culled from Nigerian news sources against 22 from foreign sources. A look at the USA-Africa Dialogue series presents a contrast in that there were 99 news reports culled from foreign news sources compared to just 20 from Nigerian online papers. The scale in this instance weighs heavily on the side of foreign news sources.

The implication of these figures leads to a conclusion that media sources play a role in what is discussed online. A closer look at the nature of the news items and the discussions that follow, reveals that negative news, especially those that expose state dysfunctionality, are predominant. This is not surprising, in that “[o]ur knowledge of the world comes from various sources, of which the two most important are personal experience and the mass media” (Okigbo, 1995, pg. 107). During this study there were a few situations when reports not drawn directly from the online press still led to robust discussions. One such example concerned dynamics of governance and the working of the state. A case in point is what I, using a fake name, refer to as the Dr. Saul Amdee\textsuperscript{1} episode (summary in Appendix B).

In essence, the collected data for this study are textually analyzed to tease out hidden meanings and make explicit the sources that could have influenced the text. Data collection was ongoing and interactive, based on my knowledge of the flow of events online. Constant monitoring and archiving e-mail alerts on each posting helped me make decisions and follow patterns of discussions as they emerged. These discussions or contributions were “voluntarily carried out by free citizens without any specific purpose or predetermined agenda” (Kim, Wyatt, and Katz, 1999, pg. 362). The conversations (postings) had the ring of political conversations to them since the discussions were spontaneous and sometimes very passionate too. There were hardly summaries or conclusions in most cases.

To fully appreciate the ongoing online activities, I argue that the emerging conversations are spontaneous everyday talk which can be interpreted using

\footnote{1. I followed the various exchanges that led to what I call the Dr. Saul Amdee episode. The posting started on a different issue before someone noticed the long signature attached to Dr. Amdee’s name.}
Hartmut Mokros’ constitutive theory of communication. The conversation “attempts to move past strategic, outcome-oriented and informational senses of communication so as to consider how the doing of communication invariably produces and engenders social spaces” (2003 pg. vii). The participants in the social spaces also construct and consume knowledge about others and a distant nation that exists in their memory/imagination. There is a noticeable tension between home-based Nigerians and Nigerians in the diaspora when issues concerning the state and fate of the nation are discussed or written about. The home-based Nigerians feel discussing Nigeria is their preserve while those in Western countries have lost such rights (there are textual evidences to support this proposition). One of the issues of interest for this study was to uncover how the discussants come to know what they know about nationhood and the role played by online newspapers and other sources of information in mediating their eventual construction of reality.

The construction of reality cannot be in vacuum; it is a part of a process, one part of which is communication. According to Sheila Steinberg, “contemporary theorists regard communication not only as an interactive process of exchanging meaningful messages, but as a transaction between the participants during which a relationship develops between them” (2007, pg. 40). Included in the twin concepts of meaning and identity formation, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1979) suggests that the process of conversations leads to understanding between two people. Of course, not every form of interaction that takes place between two or more persons can qualify as a conversation. Conceptually there are various perspectives on what constitutes conversation. For instance, Zali Gurevitch links conversation with “either the mediating vehicle of language or by immediate crossing looks, touch, or expressed and received emotion” (1998, pg. 25). This perspective conceptually opens up the nature of conversations to social restrictions of language and the ambiguity of non-verbal communication. Simon Garrod and Martin Pickering also add the unpredictability of conversations. According to them participants in conversations cannot pre-plan the direction of the conversation (2004, pg. 8).

One outcome of conversations (postings) that has been of interest to scholars is how individuals and communities construct knowledge about the world, their national and personal identities. At a general level, how do human beings occupying the same location know what they know about the social world, with or without mediation? At a more specific level, by what processes do geographically displaced citizens build (or deconstruct) knowledge about (an imagined) nation, reclaim cultural vision, and develop social interaction in virtual spaces whose geographical location exists within industrialized capitals of the world? It has been established that the formation and suste-
dance of nation states depend on narratives produced and distributed by the elites of the country. Is it also possible that the dismembering (or disintegration) of the connecting ideas of a nation state can start from virtual conversations held in cyberspace? This study has data to support the notion of deeply rooted animosity in the minds of those who subscribe to the concept of ethno-nationalism and those opposed to the idea. The real effect on the homeland of what happens during textual exchanges online is one of the issues for future research. But for this present study a set of research questions were offshoots of previous studies and extensive literature review.

The first research question of this study is in two parts; one part was to articulate the main themes of postings made by Nigerians online. The research focus also included discerning how nationhood is discussed in the postings and searching for sources that influence ideas on nationalism expressed online.

1. What are the main themes of postings made by Nigerians Online? How is nationhood discussed in the postings among geographically dispersed Nigerians? Where do the ideas which influence these concepts come from?

The main themes of the postings revolve around sociopolitical conditions in the homeland and around the world. A sampling of websites and discussion groups revealed a broad range of issues Nigerians online are passionate about. One feature of Nigerian discussion groups is that contributors constantly review what other participants are contributing. One such example is a participant who for the purpose of this study shall be known as IRI. In a collective tone, IRI posted his views on why a number of Nigerians took to the Internet to express their disappointment with the military. “We were mostly idealistic individuals who believed at the time that the problem with Nigeria was a lack of structures, of robust structures that would define our collective morality and ensure the survival and prosperity of our nation” (Nigerians in America website, December 11, 2005). It was not unusual on the websites I studied to find reflections of individuals as part of their postings. One contributor to the Nigeria Village Square website (NVS) wrote as part of a longer posting that, “[o]n a daily basis, issues of social, economic, political and cultural importance are introduced to the village square by the teeming NVS independent writers and contributors” (Nigeria Village Square website, September, 2007). Another writer, reviewing his own contributions on NVS, starting with the most controversial piece he did, painted a picture of how passionate the readers are, especially when the topic has to do with ethnicity. A panoramic view of his choice of themes can be taken as an indication of the kind of issues that interest participants to the site. He com-
mented on one of his own articles, written on the perceived blunders of a particular traditional leader in the southwestern part of the country. He then chose another one, from the 100 articles he had posted so far, which focused on the lapses of a member of the political class, then another on one of the growing ethnic militias in the eastern part of the country. He also wrote about another member of the political class. Among the seven examples he cited, only one was about another West African country. He wrote a two-part article on “The Ivorian political tragedy” (published on the website on April 16 and 17, 2007). The article focused on the connections and the importance of the Ivory Coast to Biafra and Nigeria. The comparisons with Nigeria in the stories are implicit but cannot be missed even by a casual reader.

Moving beyond these two individuals and what they perceive to be the main issues discussed by the emergent Nigerian Internet community, we come to my own representation of notable issues I observed during the study. The graphic below presents a list of themes and sub-themes I collated from the subject headlines of the e-groups. The graphical representation of the themes is not a hierarchical but a one-dimensional view of how the issues are interrelated. The way the themes below are represented, starting from politics, indicate that the other issues have some connection to politics in one way or another.

Figure 6.1. List of Themes in Graphic Form

Politics

- Elections
- Governance Issues/Democracy
- Leadership State Matters/Local

Politics is one of the themes that capture the imagination of the participants. Discussions revolve around national and local elections and most recently a series of electoral re-runs in some states of Nigeria. In no statistical order or ranking, issues of cultural matters also feature:
Culture, in its broadest connotation, is another theme that constantly comes up for discussion. Subsumed under the general topic of culture are sub-themes such as religion, language, and marital affairs. Religion is one of the potential issues on which Nigerians do not often agree but it features frequently in discussions. Scholarly articles about the country indicate that Nigerians are divided along religious lines, which at times leads to violence and intolerance within the country (Figure 6.3).\(^2\)

Various issues come under the main theme of nation. Issues such as the near collapse of the educational sector, human rights abuses, and the state of infrastructure (especially electricity supply, communication, health, and the deplorable road networks) are some of the topics that come up for discussion regularly, depending on the news flow (Figure 6.4).

On June 29, 2009, Nigerians in major cities around the world organized peaceful protests to demonstrate against the killing of a young man during de-

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Figure 6.3 List of Themes under Nation

These are not statistically ranked.

- Education
- Human Rights
- State of Infrastructure—Electricity Supply, Communication, Health, and Road Networks
- Sovereign National Conference
- Oil/Militancy
- Party Politics

Figure 6.4 Different Forms of Advocacy

These are just two examples to illustrate how the Internet has been used for advocacy.

- Global Protest Against the Inhumane Killing of Osamuyiwa Akipitanhi
- Boycott of British Airways and the Founding of Respect Nigeria Advocacy Group
Portion. Apart from the signing of petitions, discussions about how to register the anger of Nigerians were constant features on most of the sites. The same occurred following the ill-treatment of Nigerian passengers on a British Airways flight. In both cases the inefficiency of the nation and the imperfection of the external affairs personnel were highlighted. An excerpt of the notice mass-mailed by the Concern for Nigeria group expressed the feeling of most Nigerians.³ It read, “The time has come for us as Nigerians to say out loud to the whole world that we would no longer accept these types of treatments that has (sic) now become commonplace against our fellow citizens” (Nigeria Village Square website, June 27 2007). The note of collective identity cannot be missed (Figure 6.5).

### Figure 6.5 Representation of Ethnic Issues

![Ethnic Issues Diagram](image)

If there is one issue that Nigerians online are passionate about, it is that of the Nigerian civil war, when a part of the country wanted to secede to create the Republic of Biafra. It is a theme that crisscrosses various topics. There is hardly any issue that the contributors cannot connect to the Biafran war. For instance, message #79 of November 7, 2006, links the leader of the defunct Republic of Biafra to the situation of the Nigerian Army. He reminds readers that the leader of Biafra warned military officers never to take orders from their juniors. The context of this discussion derives its background from a news media report in a local newspaper published online. The article has a headline that reads, “IBB Destroyed Military Integrity– Akhigbe.” (IBB is how

³. There are close to 3,000 signatories to the petition protesting British Airways' treatment of Nigerians.
the media refer to one of Nigeria’s military heads of state and Akhigbe, to whom the saying is attributed, is a retired naval officer who was part of the 1999 military regime that conducted a democratic election.) The contributor signed off as a citizen of Biafra. In support of message #79, another contributor in message #84 thinks history will absolve the leader of the defunct republic. His position is that the leader was attempting to restore order to the Nigerian military. As in every debate, some participants presented oppositional views in very strong terms, just as message #85 expresses that the leader of the Republic of Biafra is a coward and an inept commander. Even by the time the context changed, message #164, posted on November 28, 2006, still brought the Biafra dimension to the topic.

As usual, the discussion was triggered by a report in one of Nigeria’s newspapers. The headline of the story called attention to the state of one of the federal highways in the southwest part of the country. The story informed its readers about the lack of funds to repair such an important road. The contributor found a way to relate the issue to the larger national question and, applying a subtle conspiracy theory, argued that the center had an ulterior motive in also not fixing roads leading east. He warned those on the list who were rooting for a breakup of the country to desist. He argued, “but some of you who want Nigeria to be divided along ethnic lines have not told me how we are going to survive with these many disunities among us, the Igbos” (message #164, NaijaElections, 2006).

One more example from message #369 (January 17, 2007) goes to show that Biafra as an issue occupies a central theme in the minds of contributors who have roots in the former Biafra. The context for this thread is also a news report on the 2007 general elections. In this contribution the writer is strain- ing to explain the connection between two of the major ethnic groups in relation to the larger national entity. He avers that “[t]he Biafran struggle on which you base your ‘Igbos did their best in the 1960s’ was again for the Igbos not for the Edos, the Yoruba or any of the other nationalities; not even for the Ogonis and the Ijaws who (sic) they sought to take along with them into the sovereign [sic] state of Biafra” (Message #369, NaijaElections, 2007). As the thread developed it became apparent that each contributor saw Nigeria (or the nation) through a sub-regional ethnic lens. The implication of this is that most arguments are framed along ethno-nationalistic lines and present a fragmented picture of the Nigerian geopolitical space. To better appreciate what is happening, message #370 provides three frames on which the national question is approached by contributors. The author lists regionalism, true federalism, and a rejection of both as total disintegration.

Contributors sometimes utilized their postings to clarify issues as they perceived them. Message #397 tried to separate Biafra and Igbo as terms some-
times used interchangeably during the discussion. He submits that “there is a world of difference between Igbo and Biafra. While the Igbos are people with distinct cultural, historical and traditional traits, the same cannot be said of this contraption called “Biafra” that suggests the lumping of the Ijaws, the Efiks, and even the Lagosians under this enterprise called “a Biafran state” Shouldn’t we be mindful of creating another “Nigeria” in the East or some weird geographical coinage? (NaijaElections, January 27, 2007). This posting gives a hint as to what this particular contributor thinks Nigeria is. It is a geopolitical space inhabited by different ethnic groups that are so different from each other.

One advantage of the Internet that facilitates knowledge construction is the capability for cross-referencing and quick comparison with archived ideas. The contributor above tried to make a distinction between Igbo and Biafra but in a posting on the Nigeria Village Square website three years earlier a contributor had posted an article with the title “Igbo 101: Facts little told” (January 5, 2004). In the article he first recognizes the various channels of education that can be held responsible for miseducation of Nigeria. He listed certain disciplines within educational institutions and the mass media as places where incorrect information is circulated. On the question why Igbo people call themselves Biafrans, he submits that there “was a kingdom of Biafra that ruled most of the ancient world about 50,000 years ago. Unfortunately, nobody talks about it, for whatever reason” (NVS, January 4, 2004).

On another thread the ubiquitous concept of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined political communities” comes up while discussing how a Yoruba person perceives the issue of nationhood. In message #403 the contributor reacts to an earlier posting in which the writer described his ethnic group as “our imagined Yoruba nation” (January 26, 2007). Before his own position was stated on the subject he expresses the logic that will guide his contribution. He states that “[a]s you know, if the premise of an argument is wrong, much of the logic that is built on it will be wrong also” (NaijaElections, message #403, 2007).

The earlier posting brought in the Eurocentric perspective of nation formation and declared that the model is not apt for Nigeria. The writer of message #403 argues that though Europe was not colonized the way Nigeria (or any African) country was colonized, it must also be recalled that Britain was colonized by Rome and the United States was colonized by Britain. The essence of this information, in my opinion is not to discount the role of colonialism and its effect on nation building but to reassert that the facts of history can be used as a basis of mobilization, as they were by European nations and the United States. The differences between these two contributions come from their interpretation of history. The earlier contributor brings up the United States as a place where ethnic minorities have been integrated into the national
system, but the sender of message #403 is of the opinion that “the United States was not formed by welding together the nations that were the historical occupants of that geographical space that is now known as America. On the contrary, the original nations were systematically exterminated and cleared out by the English/European settlers” (NaijaElections, message #403, 2007).

In the spirit of dialogue, the writer to whose views message #403 reacted also made a comeback to clarify some points he disagreed with. In message #410 he started by stating that “the term nation has different connotations and it will suffice for us Yorubas as a cultural and social unity” (NaijaElections, message #410, 2007). Further in his posting, he identified routes to nationhood and warned that these do not lead to positive ends. He mentioned Hitlerian lines and portions of it. He warned that the Bismarck model in Germany led to too much bloodshed and should be avoided. On the premise that Britain was colonized by Rome, he countered by stating that the nature of that colonization is incomensurable with that of Nigeria. He added further that, the “current British royalty is German in origin and are from the House of Hanover. The Yoruba city-states, less than 100 years ago did not hanker over a pan Yoruba identity that you so gloriously peddle today” (NaijaElections, message #410, 2007). The thread continued with two other messages, #417 and #420, adding to the discussion on nationhood using one ethnic group as their point of departure. The two postings draw upon the richness of the Yoruba language and culture as their rhetorical device. Each contributor also displays a firm grip of global history and personal interpretation of local happenings. A contributor on another discussion site exhorts that the “more African nationalities assert themselves, the more the world will know and understand us better. I believe other black-Africa power-houses, e.g. the Yoruba, the Asanti, the Zulu e.t.c, (sic) should feel unashamed of being themselves” (NVS, January 4, 2004).

If the above represents the analysis and how some contributors perceive Nigeria (in relation to other Africa countries) as a nation, the writer of message #405 is of the opinion that “[w]hen a government becomes totalitarian or tyrannical in nature, it becomes peoples’ duty to overthrow [sic] such administration and another formed in its place” (NaijaElections, message #405, 2007). This posting, if read as a solution, must also be read as conflating the state and the nation. In my view and from readings done on the subject, a government is just a part in the representation of a nation. States with their different manifestations of authorities are not the nation and changing the government may not be a solution to creating the needed nation. But how did the contributors to online discussions come to their knowledge of what a nation is or what it is not? I now consider the second part of the research ques-
tion which states “Where do the ideas which influence Nigerians in the diaspora come from?”

The search for origin of ideas is not new in ethnography. Jonathan Glassman (2004) lists a number of scholars who have shown interest in uncovering the source of particular ideas held or circulated by African intellectuals. He notes that “the emergence of a new literature that seriously engages with the thought of African intellectuals who debated the public good in ethnically specific discourses … were once dismissed as ‘tribalism’ or ‘sub-nationalism’” (2004, para. 17). The issue of ideas for this study is pivotal in many ways. It helps to develop the notion of “knowledge nationalism,” which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. By knowledge nationalism, I mean people of the same nationality helping to circulate ideas propounded by intellectuals from their nation. It is a concept derived from Mazurui’s linguistic nationalism. Ideas (either universal or regionalized) shape our views of the world. The ubiquity of the media in the lives of individuals has been documented by scholars and revealed to play active roles in the way social relations are constructed, issues are framed, and opinions consolidated. To uncover the source of ideas or news which affect Nigerians in the diaspora, allows for a partial understanding of what feeds into certain concepts that show up during discussions. Glassman (2004) indicated that there could be multiple sources for the influence. The data collected in Chapter 4 and subsequently analyzed in the next chapter give a mirror of the news sources that are posted on the egroups. The interesting point to also note is that there is a preponderance of cross-posting to other sites. In fact this issue of cross-postings resulted in one contributor’s screaming subject-line, asking, “IS CROSS POSTING KNOWLEDGE/INFORMATION AN ABOMINATION??” (capitalization in original) (NaijaElections, June 23, 2009). The consensus was that the practice should be tolerated as part of the main objectives of discussion groups. The assumption that consistent exposure to news reports can influence the perspective of readers (who also act as producers) and affect the tone and direction of their contributions has been debated by some media scholars. John Zaller in his chapter in “Political persuasion and attitude change” submits that “[s]ome recent research does find important media effects, but researchers have remained circumspect in the claims, often emphasizing subtle and arguably second-order aspects of media influence rather than direct persuasive effects” (1996 pg. 17). It should be understood that the researchers are not suggesting that there is no effect but that the effect should not be unduly exaggerated. The data collected for this study points to the direction multiple effects have on the attitudes of the contributors. By multiple effects I propose that not just one social institution should be held responsible for what is observed in the texts produced.
Table 2 in Chapter 4 shows a breakdown of news/information sources for the month of January 2008. There were 406 postings in January 2008. Table 3 shows the number of posting during the month of June 2008. The table shows there were a total of 55 news reports from the local media and 22 from foreign-based papers. The results show that in January 2008, local news predominated by a very wide margin. There were 299 local news reports from Nigerian newspapers compared to 54 from foreign sources like the BBC, the New York Times, CNN, the Financial Times, and others. In the two months (January and June 2008), participants in the discussions made direct contributions in their own words, either derived from the news stories or totally unrelated to the news. There were just 14 in January and 40 postings in June 2008. These figures are not unexpected, considering that the primary objective of the group is to exchange news reports about happenings in the homeland. Apart from the source, the content of what is also culled from the news stories helps us understand the likelihood of how media exposures shape opinion. The message of most of the media reports tends to be on the negative side, if one takes news items about conflicts, hunger, and death as representing negative news items. Stories on killings, conflicts, corruption, immigrant news, and other social upheavals that make quick headlines form the bulk of the news items. There have been studies on how newspaper headlines sway the judgment of readers by catching their immediate attention. F. T Marquez concludes in his study of the accuracy of headlines in relation to their content that “[m]any newspaper readers may read only headlines and thus form their opinions of the day’s events based on those headlines alone” (1980, pg. 30). This study did not extend to the issue of why some headlines were shared online with the group and not others found on the same day.

The picture of what influences ideas becomes sharper when the stage is expanded to include non-Nigerians. In USA–Africa Dialogue, membership is open to a wider range of interested participants. According to one of the postings circulated by the moderator, participants in the forum were made to understand that the moderator intervenes minimally (if at all) in policing who can join the group. Tables 7 and 8 show a preponderance of foreign news sources over local news sources from the homeland, but in terms of contributions the members come across as very active in their contributions to the group. In the contributions I reviewed, participants (most are academics or professionals) appear to be comfortable with copiously citing Western authors as the main planks of their arguments or as providing the leading quotation to their article. When Western authorities are not being cited, Western sociopolitical institutions become models for comparison with Nigeria. In the case of “Dr. Saul Amdee,” used to illustrate content and form of discussions online, it was apparent that Western
influences in the form of concepts can be tracked in what contributors post (see Chapter 5). This is not unexpected, since most of the participants function within Western institutions where such ideas/authorities are important for their survival. Reinforcing this observation, Maurice Maumba avers that “[t]here is no denying that an African who has been exposed to classical Western philosophy as the basis of his philosophical training will always be influenced by the thought categories and patterns of that way of thinking” (2007, pg. 31).

The exposure to news media materials must have a similar effect on the minds of some of the participants in the discussion groups. Since this is a textual analysis and not a psychological analysis, a closer look at a few articles and the source(s) of ideas on which their main arguments rest is logical. The examples highlighted in this section represent a trend I noticed during my observer-participation sessions. A binary opposition of home-based and North American-based is used more to mark locations than as a referent to something symbolic. For instance, while reviewing a textual exchange between a home-based Nigerian public intellectual and a Nigerian university professor based in North America, I observed the ease with which each of the Western-trained contributors made use of Western codes and conventions. In one case, of six individuals referred to, three are foreign authors. On the one hand, the article started with Dante’s *Inferno* and later Bob Garratt was introduced before concluding with reference to Spiro Agnew. The implication of this reliance on Western authors does not create confusion for those familiar with the authors and their works. On the other hand, in the article written by the Nigerian professor based in North America, reference is made to the texts of other commentators in the spirit of intertextual dialogue and extension of ideas. The issue of dysfunctional governance is the implicit subtext of this narrative. The vision expressed in the article is that of a citizen of a country with weak administrative structures. The text does not cite authors unknown to a casual reader.

It is the May 19, 2008, response by the home-based Nigerian public intellectual that brings to the fore how Western ideas embedded in the works of non-Nigerians (or non-Africans) shape conversations. Coincidentally, Dante’s *Inferno*, referred to in the article, is casually mentioned by Asante in his discussion of the “Afrocentric idea in education” (1991, pp.170–180). Asante uses it as an example of the centrality of European ideas in the teaching of African-American students. In the article by the home-based professor, Dante is deployed in an off-handed way to illustrate the dilemma of those who wish to contribute to national discourse but are scared away by long-distance nationalists who misrepresent the facts. The professor is of the view that staying away does not absolve them from the moral burden. As innocuous as this off-handed refer-
ence at the beginning of an article may first appear, its effect in setting the tone cannot be ignored. Dante’s voice co-mingles with the narrative voice of the professor to an extent that one gets a universalist reading of the text. As the narration continues more and more Western authors are included as scaffolding to support the entire text. When Nigerians are referenced it is not for what they wrote but for actions taken. It is possible to argue that these references are imperative and cannot be avoided in a highly globalized world where the flow of funds follows the flow of ideas with a very subtle hegemonic agenda.

To be sure, this is not just an observation limited to those in the homeland; I also looked at an article written on May 26, 2008 by PA in response to the home-based professor’s article. By the fourth paragraph the writer introduces Descartes without a reference to Africa’s response in Mbiti, the philosopher who argued that for Africans it is a case of “I am because we are” (1969, pg. 109). This philosophical perspective makes a direct linkage of the individual to the immediate community in terms of identity and spirituality. To readers who are familiar with the philosophy of Descartes but are not aware of the critique that followed his worldview, a portion of the nuances of the text will be lost, as also for the other five other names mentioned in relation to the exposition on alienation.

The concept of alienation may be accessible to those in academia but can the same be said for those whose vocation is not knowledge production? This very article asks the question of how the subalterns in Nigeria imagine the nation, the state, and the leadership but the writer infuses in the body of the work thinkers that are promoted as universal, those whose ideas should be acceptable to all cultures and to those of differing socioeconomic conditions. At another point in the article, it is the “ways of seeing the world” that John Berger presents in his work that is offered to prop the Benedict Anderson concept of a cross-section of society imagining their nation into being. Understandably, the constraints of a popular medium impose certain limitations, and the views of Berger are omitted. But it is John Berger who argues that “the relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled” (1993, pg. 7). The text, though, does not assist the reader to understand the symbolism of Berger and how sight (observation), orality, and knowledge are aligned in a linear or nonlinear fashion. Had this been done, the writer, in calling on those without voices, would have helped them to base their imagination on what they see and what they say among themselves as valid points in the construction of nationhood or any other concept outside of their cultural reach. This omission is not as simple as it may appear in that not all cultures precede knowledge construction with sensory-driven observations; some base their observation on divination (magic) while others base theirs on intuition. The placements and introductions of Western authorities
have sure impacts on how concepts are transmitted using a popular medium like newspaper articles or postings to discussion groups.

The whole of PA's sixth paragraph contains a personal narrative, a methodology, identification of various unofficial sites of knowledge production, and the importance of the knowledges produced in aid of national understanding. But Berger's singular idea tends to take the credit for holding up the many streams in that paragraph alone. The conclusion in the next paragraph is both a commentary on this study in general and on the research question specifically. PA posits that “the discursive imagi-Nation of Nigeria among beer parlour pundits in the aforementioned subaltern spaces is not in any way inferior to the parallel imagi-Nations produced in cocooned, elitist, and alienated spheres” (May 26, 2008, NVS, para. 6). By extension, “marginal” ideas generated by a people at the fringe of society and outside the purview of academic codes and conventions are as important as ideas/theories that are in circulation presently.

The perspective alluded to by PA is in alignment with what Watkins and Swidler call “Hearsay ethnography” (2009, pg. 162). It is a method that goes beyond the settled and stable sample sizes recommended in the humanities and social science disciplines. They instead rely on “conversational journals kept by cultural insiders that permit access to the multiple and ongoing discourses through which meaning is made in situ” (2009, pp. 162–163). The text produced by ordinary folks who keep notes as part of their daily existence becomes useful data that can be analyzed in a search for meaning. The relevance of PA's suggestion and Watkins and Swidler's proposition lends credibility to the search by the present study to seek out how Nigerians in the diaspora frame nationhood (and its ancillaries) online in their “everyday talk.”

The ideas which influence Nigerians in the diaspora come from a variety of sources, as can be seen from the discussion above. The foreign news media, notable authors, and authorities located and approved by the Western academy leave traces within texts produced online. In a non-codified form allusions are made to ideas from the margins of society in Nigeria. The Internet privileges media organizations that have a presence online, yet there are still a few in Nigeria that do not have active links to most of the websites Nigerians in the diaspora frequent. Knowledge about the homeland is heavily influenced by media organizations that are known to a cross-section of Nigerians in the diaspora. Those who are not exposed do not have the same opportunity to influence their thoughts and imaginations. The concluding part of the research question focuses on how nationhood is discussed in the postings and in the discussion threads among geographically dispersed Nigerians.

As earlier stated in this chapter, there are three frames by which nationhood is discussed. They are regionalism, true federalism, and a rejection of both
frames. The regional frame privileges ethnic nationalism while true-federalism is still a work in progress. There are those who are totally frustrated with the Nigerian project and cannot come up with alternative frames but instead canvass for the dissolution of the country into tiny units. From the third frame, there are those who wish to convene a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) to discuss and negotiate the basis of Nigeria’s nationality. The process and procedure of the conference has been exhaustively discussed online and offline. The summary of the conference amounts to resistance to, and insistence on, holding the conference.

The above should not be taken as if nationhood, nationalism, and national identity are the only primary concerns of Nigerians who spend time in discussion groups. From my reading of the postings it appears the primary interest of most participants is discussion of how the country can become as functional as the countries of the West they live in. Next in the line of interest is how the political class misgoverns the country, as exemplified by cases of corruption, the collapse of social infrastructures, lack of security, and occasional human rights abuses. Textual data collected for this study do not give one the confidence to conclude that great differences exist in the way geographically dispersed Nigerians and Nigerians still living within the country discuss the notions of nationhood, nationalism, and national identity, but there is a confluence in how both groups express pride in the name of the country. The main locus where this outward show of affinity for the name of the country is prevalent is in personal blogs or entertainment sites (which were not a part of this study). The official name of the country has also been shortened to Naija or 9ija.4 This shorthanded way of writing and referring to the country is in defiance of constituted authorities. It appears to be one of the ways young people have reclaimed a part of their patrimony. If Nigeria is a name given to the country by an outsider, Naija on the contrary was coined and circulated by the country’s youth with active connivance of the media.5 A good example is a song rendered in pidgin English and written by Sammie Okposo (2010) to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Nigeria’s independence. The accompanying musical video depicts artists from different ethnic groups singing in praise of a united nation. It makes reference to a nation that will stand tall in unity and purpose. The song goes further to proclaim that the nation will not scatter.

The media in Nigeria which influence both publics (at home and in the diaspora) conflate nation with state and interchange nation with country. Stuckey argues in his book on nationalist theory and the foundation of Black America that “African ethnicity, [is] an obstacle to African nationalism in the twentieth century” (1987, pg. 3). This is one of the prevalent ways in which nationhood is discussed among Nigerians in the diaspora. There is talk of an Igbo nation, a Yoruba nation, and nations of all the other nationalities that make up the geopolitical space. A part of the data from the year 2000 with the subject heading “Why is Yoruba a nation?” frames the concept of ethnic nationality in historical terms and concludes that in modern times this concept could not legitimately exist. The contributor was silent on how legitimacy is conferred on a space for the Yoruba people to become a nation. Nationhood, as far as this contributor is concerned, resides in the state. This position is evident when the author states that “the sovereignties of all the component ethnic groups of Nigeria were usurped when Nigeria became a colony of Britain and following independence in 1960 when the country became a republic” (OKQ, 2000, soc.culture.nigeria, para 2). In 2004, four years after this authoritative statement was made online, another Nigerian posted an article which repeated the idea of an Igbo nation. The same idea was repeated in message #739 on the OmoOdua discussion site. The presenter of the speech gave an overview of the Yoruba nation and took a position that comes across as Eurocentric in essence. The posting returned legitimacy to the people when it stated that “a nation is a people who see themselves as a nation” (GD, November 30, 2007, OmoOdua, message #739). This view is in agreement with that taken by Soyinka in his March 2009 lecture. GD lists certain elements of a nation. These include “a common ancestry, shared heritage, language, identifiable and distinct arts and culture” (Message #739, para 6). These ideas by GD bear certain similarities to those adduced by J. V. Stalin in his 1954 treatise on Marxism and the national question. Stalin submits that a nation is “a historically constituted [but stable] community of people” (pg. 303). He goes further to also list differences between state and national communities. Included in the list a common language is one but not an exclusive requirement for nationhood. Added to a common language is a common territory, a common economic life and economic cohesion. These commonalities and shared values notwithstanding, the idea of what a nation is, appear not be easily resolvable.

6. Geertz (2004) has an essay in Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics, in which he asks, “What is a country if not a nation?” This is not a conflation of country and nation.
In one of the postings, a contributor asserted that Nigerians have common shared values just like any other people in the world (November 28, 2008). The response to this assertion was to ask for substantiation of the claim that a majority (not all) of Nigerians subscribe to any known practice or observance like Americans do during Thanksgiving ceremonies. The point of the posting was to establish the dissimilarities among Nigerians as opposed to a common thread linking the disparate regions. Earlier in the exchange, a contributor had called for the dissolution of Nigeria because it lacks shared values. Coincidentally, the initial posting serves as the conclusion of this issue. The contributor of message #93104 argues that “[w]hat is abundantly clear to me is that as the nation converges and people move into the states from allover,[sic] we will start to see a bigger emergence of a national cultural identity” (NaijaPolitics, November 14, 2007, message #93104).

Disintegration, as earlier stated, is the third frame which Nigerians, especially those in the diaspora, apply to discussions. For diasporic Nigerians, this position is not unexpected because the most consistent message from the press in Nigeria is that of a failed or failing state. The same narrative appears in other Western media outlets. But once in a while alternative perspectives are debated among interested participants. June 21, 2008 saw one such. The exchange started with a presentation titled “The folly or wisdom of disintegration.” The first presentation stated in unequivocal terms that dividing “Nigeria up into contiguous sovereign countries makes no sense within current global realities” (Nigeria Village Square website, June 21, 2008). The global realities being alluded to in this statement are the different parting of ways by constituent parts of a once thriving nation. The country that is readily used as an example is the USSR. This position is in contrast to that made by UN in his seven-part article, where he called for the possibility of dividing Nigeria into different units.

A different debate, I found out, was held three years before, in 2005, on the TalkNigeria website. Unlike the preconditions for national formation always adduced by scholars, the discussants on the TalkNigeria discussion group argued strongly that without justice for the people (as opposed to for the elites) there is no basis for nationhood. Using a comparative historical frame, one of the participants disagreed with the notion that a nation comes into existence by the will of the people. The discussant challenged his fellow participants to name “any nation on earth that was the product of the express wishes of the people who inhabit it” (TalkNigeria, message #3062, April 30, 2005). In line with
the perspective of Ade-Ajayi, the historian cited in Chapter 1 of this book, there is agreement that the so-called forced amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates that resulted in Nigeria is a myth. The discussant also supported the notion that “robust relational intercourse [existed] between the disparate ethnic groups that populate Nigeria” (TalkNigeria, message #3062, April 30, 2005). The copious historical evidence provided to support this premise was convincing. As part of his conclusion, he argues that the notion of similarity (between the various ethnic groups) as a nation is buried in narratives out of the reach of the majority. To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi, it can also argue that a nation is a product of its individual and collective thoughts. What they think is what the nation becomes.

The debate took place in different places online and in the media. As an observer participant I had my personal views I shared with a select few after reading a paper on the subject of nationhood. I noticed in the last few weeks of my data collection that more and more public intellectuals are taking the concept of nationhood head-on.

What is the Nigerian nation and how does it rate among other nations, especially among its neighbors? Reading this paper does not give me much comfort in a couple of aspects. Have we as a people just taken a Western model and accepted it for what it is, or are there ways in which the concept bears a typical African stamp? What will that African stamp be?

Modernity and its many meanings still come across as Westernization to me and I think nationhood is part of the modernizing agenda. I read somewhere that you cannot have a modern nation without a modern economy. Does Nigeria have a modern economic system? If not, does that make us a non-nation? If you ask me, I say modern economy is the preserve of the state and not the business of the nation.

Something in me warns that I have misread Awolowo’s position and that the great man’s agenda is totally outside of the Western paradigm. But what is wrong if our concept of nationhood is a parody of the Western model? In the words of one of the columnists, “if the nation is an expression of the imperial will of the few, it takes the collective heroic will of the many to turn it into a national community of organic principles” (Alamu, 2009). I have searched everywhere for Afrocentric definitions of nationhood but my searches have produced no results. I have read a lot of what a nation should not be but nothing yet about what nationhood means to a Nigerian and how the project of imagining a nation for us can start. I am convinced that issues such as these country Nigeria would have still been founded despite the British or any colonial interventions.
are beyond the political class (a.k.a. the present crop of political jobbers). I love Nigeria but I do not know why. I hate those who want Nigeria dismembered, just for the simple reason that I grew up knowing a place called Nigeria and I fear the change that may be imposed upon my consciousness if I have to think otherwise. I have allowed Nigeria to become a geographical impression on my heart and an expression in my (growing) art. I say this to share with you my passion for the subject and also my ignorance. As you will notice I have given my personal views on the research subject but there are still a couple of issues to be addressed.

To what extent do news media reports from the homeland reinforce (or displace) previously held notions of nationhood and nationalism when immigrants relocate to Western countries? Are the shifts influenced by dominant Western ideas and media?

Figure 6.6. The Linear Relationship between Press Reports and Knowledge Production

It has been shown that previously held notions have a way of coloring the interpretation of actual media representation (Ogundimu, 1994). Based on this premise, it is possible to assume that ideas that Nigerians brought with them to their host country will also influence how they reinterpret local and global news reports. If this assumption holds in any qualitative way, it will be possible to monitor within the text produced whether such ideas have changed since relocating to nations where constitutionalism, rule of law, and democracy are values promoted in various official and popular narratives. Aside from direct personal experiences gained from host countries, most contributors to online dialogues have also trained within Western oriented institutions where rudiments of nationalism (or patriotism) are inculcated. To most Nigerians, the place of origin bestows the first stream of identity before any other form of identity. According to Dmitri van den Bersselaar, “Igbo people are regarded, and regard themselves, as a people with their own common culture and a
shared history going back centuries” (2000, pg. 124). The same can be said of
the other 250 ethnic groups that were brought together to form Nigeria. There
are scores of examples within the postings to illustrate this point. For exam-
ple, in a posting dated December 6, 2006, one of the contributors to NVS had
occasion to intervene in what appeared like a virtual war of words. He wrote
“I have noticed with total unhappiness the tribal war going on here” (De-
ember 6, 2006, WAZOBIA: Brotherly love on NVS, para. 1). He continued the ar-
ticle by listing names and their ethnic affiliations as a way of showing the ethnic
diversity. He stated that the online ethnic and tribal wars were affecting the
quality of discourse and social interaction the site had as one of its objectives.

The issue of an ethnicized public sphere is one of scholarly interest. Orji
Nkwachukwu (2008) reflected on ethnicization, policization, and power sharing
strategies as means of managing the public sphere. He identifies different dis-
cursive moments in Nigeria within a certain time frame. He categorizes the dis-
course, starting from the discourse of “unity in diversity,” to the 1950s and 1960s
as the period of “discourse of ethnic competition,” to the 1970s as the time of
“discourse of ethnic collaboration.” The nature of online discourse has returned
to the period of ethnic competition with the intermediation of local and global
news reports that have played up the crises. Steven Pierce states that “[i]n the in-
ternational press Nigeria is represented almost exclusively as a state in crisis. Re-
current military coups, ethnic and religious sectionalism, a civil war” (2006, pg.
887) adorn screens and the pages of papers. A content analysis of headlines of new-
s reports posted to the discussion groups supports this notion, as earlier stated.

The extent to which news media reports from the homeland reinforce (or
displace) previously held notions of nationhood and nationalism when im-
migrants relocate to Western countries can be addressed by looking at how the
press in Nigeria frames ethnic diversity and national integration, as typified
by the notion of federalism. On the other hand, I will examine the data to un-
cover if there are indications of shifts in discourse influenced by dominant
Western ideas and the media.

The robustness or otherwise of online conversations can be partially traced
to the nature of the content of the news media reports on which some of the
issues of discussions are based. The narrative in most Nigerian newspapers,
especially those with online presence, speaks about a weak state and a non-
existent nation or a nation waiting to be constructed. When the news reports
are read in tandem with academic postcolonial perspectives, a Nigerian in the
diaspora, who relies on secondary accounts, can easily conclude that nothing
has changed in the country and that in fact there is deterioration in the home-
land. Since deterioration is a relative marker, there is a need to compare the
present with a past mediated by personal memories and perception or by
other places the readers think are stable and can be emulated. This can be illustrated better with a debate which took place on the Nigeria Village Square website on September 2, 2003. The contributor wanted participants on the site to reflect on the future of Nigeria. It was a sort of device to get participants to reflect on why they left Nigeria when they did. To assist the discussion, contributor #1 supplied two articles. One news report focused on the pledge of the former president of Nigeria to fight corruption, while the other was a report on a visiting British trade mission to Nigeria. Both reports represent major concerns for Nigerians. Contributor #2 gave reasons why he thinks Nigerians leave the country. He wrote, “[m]ost Nigerians leave because they have a more satisfying life in foreign countries, and can make long term plans that suit their personalities. They just do not have the patience to wait for Nigeria with their ‘one life to live and give’” (Nigeria Village Square website, September 2, 2003). A careful reading of this statement will show that this writer accepts that Nigerian émigrés are properly informed about the countries to which they move. What is not explicit is how that knowledge of other places was developed.

Contributor #3, commenting on the same subject, relies on a combination of memory and new information coming from Nigeria when he submits that “I would have been very happy to stay in Nigeria if the opportunities that were available to professionals in the early eighties were still available now. But anyone in the diaspora reading this can give their own opinion—were you ‘pulled out’ or ‘pushed out’ of Nigeria?” Implicit in these confessions are indicators that this contributor left Nigeria with a set of views and still keeps to those views. That the situation in Nigeria is getting worse can be a conjecture or a statement of fact based on secondary or direct information or knowledge. In a third contribution to the same thread, contributor #3 restates his position by comparing the reward systems of Nigeria and the United States. The United States’ system is better than what obtains in Nigeria. Contributor #4 differs from the previous contributor; he narrates his personal story to reinforce his position. He writes, “I left Nigeria because my circumstances were getting worse and worse—still, the future looked much bleaker unless I chose to engage in practices that would have nullified everything I was raised and educated to believe in” (Nigeria Village Square website, September 2, 2003). Here again the past and the knowledge that supported the decision to leave the country can be gleaned from the excerpt. Family values and education are two things this immigrant brought to his host country. Though the contributions do not explicitly bring nationhood to the fore, how the state of the country disappointed them is evident. They look back and reflect about the situation and wish things could be better.
There are hints of influences on their various contributions. Information from different sources can be seen contributing to their perceptions of the country and, to an extent, to what they experienced while in the country and now how they perceive the same country during their relocation to their host countries must have been influenced. In the final question the implicit is made explicit.

Conclusion

As I conclude this journey, the words of Ivan Izosimovich Pothehin, the Soviet Africanist, ring anew in my mind. He once observed that “[a] generally recognized definition of that word [nation] does not yet exist in world science. It is often used in an extreme arbitrary way and its content can be very different” (1958, pg. 27). Over fifty years after his submission, I am tempted to appropriate his words and the sentiments contained therein. Who would not notice books and articles that have been written about the formation of nations, the origin of nations and the disintegration of nations; what I am yet to see is a location-specific definition of the term. I will like my mind to host a term which encapsulates and reflects the peculiarities of a place, its history, level of political development, and socio-economic conditions. For now the nation as a concept exists in the mental universe of those who have the luxury to constantly engage others in dialogue. This mental universe is what Work et al. refer to in their set of assumptions. They stated that “nations are mental constructs, ‘imagined communities’, which nationalized political subjects perceive as discrete political entities” (2009, pg. 3). These sets of people or political entities are known to rely on the media of their immediate environment to furnish them with materials from the past and current reports on which to fashion out a collective feature. The nation as a concept is a dream of the future that can be lived in the present. The present only needs certain conditions to make the present reality and the future become an organic whole. Nations do not result from personal wishes but concerted efforts of a people in constant dialogue and engagement with each other. Looking at the data collected and the literature about nationhood, it appears those within a country do not need to intellectualize nationhood as a postcolonial legacy, unlike immigrants of the country. It is the immigrants (those in diaspora) who in contact with ‘others’ need to revise their understanding of nationhood and come to terms with their national identity.

This book brings into focus how geographically dispersed citizens make use of different media forms for conversation, debates, and exchange of informa-
tion derived from different sources and goes a step further to harvest one of the many fruits of the various online interactions and conversations. As a foundation to the study it was imperative to investigate the multiplicity of sources from which the participants draw their materials. I sought to know what these sources are and what roles they play in the construction of knowledge about a distant homeland. One of the expected outcomes was that the research would make visible how the group makes “sense of events and transmitted information about them” (Schudson, 2002, pg. 483). At another level, paraphrasing Ali Mazrui, it would be possible to conclude whether anything like knowledge nationalism exists in the mode of Mazrui’s linguistic nationalism (1998, pg. 1). By knowledge nationalism, I mean Nigerians in the diaspora taking pride in knowledge that can be traced to people of their own country. This research takes a stab at the politics of knowledge construction and dissemination in a way to establish what exists before evaluating the main substance of what becomes knowledge in different knowledge communities. I then ask if those at the margins of world power can also create their own ideas about concepts that already have wide acceptability in Western academia. Once this question was raised, it brought up questions like who are those at the margins of world power and why they are there. A part of these questions have been answered by scholars who deal with the geography of knowledge or what Edward J. Malecki refers to as the “spatial manifestation of knowledge” (2010, pg. 493).

Unlike the case of scientific knowledge which is constantly monitored and quantified, because of the establishment of patents, knowledge in the social sciences and humanities do not have such established systems except through academic publications. A look at the countries of origin where the publications come from validate the point made by Bjorn Asheim & M. T. Gertler when they submitted that “tendency toward spatial concentration has become more marked over time, not less” (2005, pg. 291). The evidence of this lopsidedness can be seen in texts produced by Nigerians and other Africans. At another lever this book raises the question of how geographical dislocation facilitates systematic displacement of a people’s knowledge stock and a reliance on ideas and knowledge from other parts of the world.

As part of the analysis, the perspective about how governments in developing countries view the Internet as “another hegemonic tool for the export of Western cultural and political ideology” (Ebo, 1998) would not be totally discountenanced. Once the issue of hegemony is raised, it becomes logical to seek sites and actors capable of counter-hegemony in the service of developing countries against Western imperialism. It is pertinent to introduce the question of whether Nigerians posting comments and contributing articles online are aware of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic possibilities. Though the answer to
such a question can only be derived by well structured interviews or surveys, this book notes the issue for the future.

In seeking answers to these questions, I did not take the position that the Internet is a neutral tool without consequences. It is a discursive site and, according to Barbara Johnstone, discourse “is both shaped by the world as well as shaping the world. Discourse is shaped by language as well as shaping language” (2002, pg. 3). The notion of shaping can be further brought home by focusing on those who use the Internet for communication; they too are shaped by the Internet and they in turn shape the future of the Internet. Eriksen (1996) is of the opinion that the use of the Internet has both direct and indirect impacts on identity politics. It directly inspires “through the intensification of alienation and the weakening of the national sphere, which encourages sub-national and trans-national ‘tribes’ or other self-defined groupings to get their acts together in a serious way” (1996). The seriousness of their actions is inscribed in dialogue and disagreements noticed online and these throws back collective social intervention to colonial times when discursive spaces were militant in language and in tone. One other probable consequence, according to Ebo (1998), is the possibility of replacing traditional hierarchical global relationships by a combination of horizontal alignments of local and global transnational civil societies.

It appears that Nigerians in the diaspora are unaware that this period of social realignments is yet another phase of adversarial politics that pits the governed against those in authority. This assertion is supported by the view of a former foreign affairs minister of Nigeria, Mr. Ojo Maduekwe, who was quoted as saying, “that time has come for a strategic ‘truce’ between Nigeria’s intellectual class and its political class. The historical rupture in that relationship has created the adversarial traditions, which limits a potentially productive relationship between those two axes of power for the benefit of Nigeria” (Nwakanma, 2009, Vanguard online). In essence there is a call for meaningful dialogue between the state and the citizens, either at home or abroad. In an interview granted to one of Nigeria’s news magazines, Niyi Osundare, a professor based in New Orleans, expressed his view on what dialogue is not, and then stated what it ought to be, before finally ending with a precondition for effective dialogue. “Dialogue is not just a colloquial rhetorical exchange. Dialogue is evaluative. Dialogue is qualitative. Dialogue is essentially a horizontal exchange between people, things, and ideas that have a certain level of contiguity” (2007, para. 10). If these parameters are applied to citizen-state interaction, it would hardly pass a simple dialogic test. The data collected for this book shows that qualitative dialogue between Nigerian citizens and others is on-going and meaningful. The participants share information, ideas and opportunities as they come across them.
It will be safe at this point to conclude that nationhood as a concept comes across as a given (unproblematized) which needs little interrogation or reflection by commentators to the various online conversations. The robustness or otherwise of online conversations can be partially traced to the nature of the content of the news media reports on which some of the issues of discussions are based. The narrative in most Nigerian newspapers, especially those with online presence, speaks about a weak state and a nonexistent nation or a nation waiting to be constructed. When the news reports are read in tandem with academic postcolonial perspectives, a Nigerian in the diaspora who relies on secondary accounts can easily conclude that nothing has changed in the country and that in fact there is deterioration in the homeland. Since deterioration is a relative marker, the need to compare the present with a past mediated by personal memories and perception is evident in the postings. There is also the tendency to constantly compare Nigeria with other places which the readers think are stable and can be emulated. The comparisons most times fall short of reality as it obtains on ground. It conjures a constructed nation-state as opposed to what exists in time and space.

A virtual nation, as opposed to a nation which exists in time and space, is normative in conceptualization. That normative essence is constructed through conversations and reflections and imposes how a nation structurally and functionally ought to be. The online narrative and its narrators depend on external ideas to a great extent and on intuition in very rare cases in adducing arguments needed to change direction or erect new constructions. The purpose of a virtual concept of nationhood is to act as a barometer by which the real nation with all its imperfections and contradictions is judged. One issue the idea of virtual nationhood brings to the fore is that of legitimacy: who is qualified to discuss how a nation ought to be? Should the task be left to those who are within the malfunctioning national space? Or should the task be left to those who are located outside of the national space but depend on mediated communication and information for their knowledge? There is hardly any doubt that introducing a binary opposition of inside/outside overly simplifies the situation, in that those inside may also be outside of the system and thus alienated, while those outside the national space as immigrants in other countries may have inside knowledge of the socioeconomic system that runs the nation.

Immigrants (or those in the diaspora) have been known to take more than passing interests in the political affairs of their homeland. There are many examples of immigrant groups or diasporic populations that have facilitated changes in their homelands using different information and communication technologies to connect, mobilize, and organize geographically dispersed mem-
bers. What is still obscure in certain instances is why diasporic groups expend so much energy to effect or sustain change(s) in their homelands. The situation of those who were forced to leave their homelands is understandable, but what of those who left out of their own free volition to seek better fortunes abroad? Nations can only be renewed by ideas shared and discussed by a multitude of people who are bound by common purpose and vision. It is not unfounded to expect that ideas for such renewal survive more in atmospheres of justice and freedom. Whichever way the pie is sliced both actors need a public channel for the dissemination of their opinions to the public.

The story of how different kinds of information are produced and circulated by those in the diaspora is just a part of the larger story inherent in the struggle for meaning. On one side is the political class with their tools of communication and propaganda, while on the other side is the bifurcated civil society of homeland citizens and its twin in the diaspora who are far from the effects of misgovernance and are free within the constraints of the technology and knowledge garnered from Western institutions.

Discourse on identity, nationality and ethnicity, which is a never-ending debate online, is not an end in itself; it is a means for self-representation and exercise of freedom of expression. This consequence of exposure to a large body of knowledge from different geopolitical spaces is one aspect of the digital culture that must not be overlooked. I argue that the Internet, unlike the print media, has a potential for the instant reconstruction of memory with the assistance of technology instead of reliance on human memory or hard paper copies that can be difficult to organize. This instant creation/recall of memory affected the constant shaping of conversations and interactions online that are yet to be fully explored, especially in cases of Nigeria’s multiethnic and potentially volatile societies. What has been explored is the role of traditional media in constructing and preserving collective memory (Baer, 2001). George Lipsitz (2001) is of the opinion that the mass media have a potential of creating crisis for collective memory in the way they represent happenings of the past in the present.

This study brought into focus how geographically dispersed citizens made use of different forums for conversation, debates, and exchange of information derived from different home and other available sources. Foreign sources and ideas played roles in the construction of knowledge about the homeland and concept of what a nation is. Lipsitz avers that “[n]ew technologies do lend themselves to new forms of exploitation and oppression, but they also have possible uses for fundamentally new forms of resistance and revolution” (2001, pg. vii). The ongoing social revolution is symbolic of potential to bear concrete sociopolitical fruits of transformation.
As a study of media use among Nigerian diasporic communities, this work brings together concepts from interrelated research strands: the study of the role of immigrants to a virtual public sphere, media use by immigrants, and the study of the social consequences of new communication forms. This study exposes the “messy construction” of thoughts and ideas before they are fully formed and the role online newspapers play in facilitating dialogues in a public sphere where reason and emotions clash. The analysis of these conversations brings the public close to the working minds of those Hong Qiu refers to as “knowledge diasporas” (2003). They represent an intellectual class which has the capacity to influence national discourse and at the same time transform negative representations about their homeland in the media of their host countries. It can be concluded that a textual bridge from the homeland to the diaspora now exists for the circular transfer of ideas within both communities. What remains to be seen is how a bridge from the diaspora to the mainstream media of the host countries will develop. This study is not flawless; it encountered its own measure of methodological limitations and constraints. Some of the limitations listed below are done in a way that links personal reflection with intellection or what Bill Nichols will refer to as the “reflexive mode” (2010, pg. 196).

Limitation of Study

1. Anna Everett (2009) notes that the hyper-ephemeralty of cyber-text is a very real problem, and I agree with her observation. Doing online research is reminiscent of what Michel Foucault might consider a history of the present. By this is meant “a history that seeks neither to explain the present in terms of the past nor to interpret the past on the basis of present issues, but to grasp the present as present” (Smart, pg. 170). Even so, there are cases when the object of study keeps changing through the addition of more layers of complexities that redefine the past in the presence of new knowledge. Every history is incomplete as long as other points of view are still possible.

2. Method: One of the challenges of naturalistic research design is that issues unfold at their own pace. The method is unpredictable and it is time-bound. It limits both the quality and quantity of data collected at any period of time.

3. The disciplinary narrowness of media studies imposed a limitation on the richness of data and on the scope of what could be in-
cluded in the study. It was not possible to give free reign to Geertz’s intellectual curiosity of “what overall is happening, why it is happening and what it portends” (2004, pg. 577).

Issues for Further Research

1. Thomas Henriksen traces the influence of African intellectuals on Black Americans and concludes that Edward W. Blyden and other West African intellectuals played significant roles in the historical development of Black Americans. Conversely, tracking how ideas from Nigerians in the diaspora influence Europe and America will be a logical step.

2. Asking Nigerians directly which of their views have changed about the nation since arrival in their host country. What is said will be compared with what is written by contributors to online discussions.

3. The effect of what happens online, within the homeland, is one of the issues for future research.

4. Comprehensive examination of data to uncover indications of shifts in discourse influenced by dominant Western ideas and media.
Appendix A

“Technology widens rich-poor gap” and Response

Philip Emeagwali (October 8, 2007)

Oil has made us billions and fuelled our economic stability, but oil has also become the bane of our existence. For some, it is a curse that has caused poverty and corruption, but for others it is an essential source of untold wealth and power. But as the gap between rich and poor countries continues to expand, it is clear that intellectual capital and technology rule the world, and that natural resources such as oil, gold, and diamonds are no longer the primary determinants of wealth.

Surprisingly, nations with few natural resources demonstrate greater economic growth rates than OPEC countries. Japan’s economic growth, driven by technological superiority, outpaces that of Saudi Arabia; South Korea is growing faster than oil-rich Nigeria; and Taiwan’s economy has moved well beyond that of oil-rich Venezuela. The United States and Norway are also rich in oil, yet their staggering economic growth comes from intellectual capital.

In reality, it is not money but intellectual capital that drives prosperity. More important, perhaps, is the reality that poverty is driven and sustained by a lack of intellectual capital. The intimate relationship between intellectual capital and economic growth is as old as humanity itself, and is well illustrated by this parable from ancient Babylon (modern-day Iraq). A man asked his children:

“If you had a choice between the clay of wisdom or a bag of gold, which would you choose?”

“The bag of gold, the bag of gold” the naive children cried, not realising that wisdom had the potential to earn them many more bags of gold in the future.

Seven thousand years later, Iraq—the cradle of civilisation—has its own private bag of gold as it sits perched atop the world’s third largest oil reserves.

Meanwhile, Israel, tucked away in the hostile terrain of a barren desert, has the clay of wisdom—the weightless wealth of intellectual capital embodied in the collective mind of its people. The striking economic gap that persists be-
between rich and poor nations has increased sevenfold over the past century to what is now an all-time high. The accumulation of intellectual capital by rich nations has helped broaden this gap because it has enabled them to control technology and collect hidden taxes from less affluent nations. For instance, Nigeria pays a 40 per cent “royalty” tax on its petroleum revenues to foreign oil companies that are ripping out its family jewels — the huge store of wealth in its oilfields. These oilfields started forming when prehistoric, dog-sized humans — our common ancestor with the apes — walked African grasslands on four legs.

It’s a shocking reality, but the deep oil reserves laid down by Mother Nature millions of years ago and nurtured through the millennia in Africa have been whittled away within decades. And, for the dubious privilege of surrendering its natural resources forever, Nigeria is required to pay half its petroleum revenue in the form of “royalties” to the rich kids on the global block, the United States and the Netherlands. That oilfield has been exchanged for a bowl of porridge, and the black gold that should serve the under-served in Nigeria is helping wealthy Westerners get wealthier.

Today, half the world’s population — three billion people — live on an average of $500 a year. In contrast, Bill Gates earns $500 every second. By controlling technology and taxing computer users, Gates has become wealthier than each of the 70 poorest nations on earth and using his financial might has conquered more territory than Genghis Khan, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great combined.

While Bill Gates is the new millennium’s Prince of Technology, he is by no means the first to have taken on the huge potential offered by the realm of technology. The Romans used roads and military technology to expand their empire. And, for centuries, Britain ruled a quarter of the Earth due to its unparalleled ability to command maritime technology and conquer the Seven Seas. Britain undoubtedly established itself as the world’s first superpower through its rapid and ruthless colonial expansion programme. The British raised the Union Jack over Canada and Australia, India and Hong Kong, Egypt and Kenya, and countless other countries — even the United States. The Union Jack cast its shadow in every global time zone, giving rise to the saying, “The sun never sets on the British Empire,” a fact that was cold comfort to the colonised nations.

In the same way, the United States has embraced its technological supremacy, both offensively and defensively, to build its own global empire without a physical presence in any of its “colonies.” The sole remaining superpower is at the forefront of every major technological advancement, which it has used to become deeply embedded in three-quarters of the globe. The U.S. has accomplished
a virtual economic colonisation manifesting its presence throughout the globe by harnessing the power of technology and capitalising on its clay of wisdom.

Africa’s inability to realise its potential and embrace technology has left it at the mercy of the West. The time has come for Africa to seize the day and resist the efforts of America and others to leave their imprint and plunder its natural resources. Numerous examples throughout history support the idea that technology can be used as a tool of oppression. And there’s little doubt that America’s technological advancement has allowed it to exploit natural resources around the world.

This is particularly evident in Africa, where the U.S. is exploiting oilfields beneath the pristine rainforest—and being rewarded with a 40 per cent tax at the expense of the African people. This lends credence to history’s assertion that those who control technology oppress those who do not, eventually en-slaving them and, finally, wielding power around the globe.

*Emeagwali, winner of the 1989 Gordon Bell Prize, the Nobel Prize of supercomputing, lives in the United States.*

### Technology, Wealth, and Power

*Edwin Madunagu*

I WAS attracted to the article” Technology widens rich-poor gap” (The Guardian, Monday, October 8, 2007) by its author, Philip Emeagwali. So, let me first present him.

Emeagwali is a Nigerian by birth and an American, by citizenship. In America, where he has lived for over 30 years, he would be classified as a Nigerian American. He was born in 1954 and experienced the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) as a teenager. A version of his biography says that he served in the Biafran Army during the war. After the war, he completed his secondary school education and left for the United States of America. Between 1977 and 1986 he obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics, a master’s degree in Environmental Engineering and a Master’s degree in Mathematics.

Emeagwali has since become a world-famous computer scientist, working in America. In 1989, at the age of 35, he received the Gordon Bell Prize which The Guardian newspaper described as the “Nobel Prize of supercomputing”. Several other awards and recognitions have since followed. It was these credentials that made me read Emeagwali’s October 8 article almost immediately. His general propositions are in the opening paragraph which I beg to quote in full:
“Oil has made us billions and fuelled our economic stability, but oil has also become the bane of our existence. For some, it is a curse that has caused poverty and corruption, but for others it is an essential source of untold wealth and power. But as the gap between rich and poor countries continues to expand, it is clear that intellectual capital and technology rule the world, and that natural resources such as oil, gold, and diamonds are no longer the primary determinants of wealth.”

In the rest of the article, Emeagwali tried to provide proofs for the three theses that can be distilled from the above. Although the theses about oil being the “bane of our existence” and source of both poverty and wealth are not new, they appeared fresh in Emeagwali’s article. The third thesis, namely, that natural resources are no longer the “natural determinants of wealth,” is his main thesis. I take the “our” in the “bane of our existence” thesis as a reference to Nigeria in particular and countries of the Organisation of Petroleum Producing Countries (OPEC) in general. Emeagwali did not say that he was presenting theses, much less placing them in an order. He was just writing as a scientist and a Nigerian/African patriot.

The population of the world is now estimated at 6.5 billion, that is, 6,500 million. Emeagwali says that about half of this “lives on an average of $500 a year.” He then contrasted this existential fact with the world of Bill Gates, the American billionaire and “computer wizard” who earns $500 every second. Let us play around with these figures. By simple arithmetic, Bill Gates earns $43,200,000 a day while half of humankind lives on an average of $500 per year per person. If we divide the former by the latter the result is that Bill Gates earns in a day what 86,400 people live on in a year; or earns, in a day, 86,400 times what an average member of half of humanity lives on. How is Bill Gates able to do this? Emeagwali’s answer: “By controlling technology and taxing computer users.” With due respect to Emeagwali, this is pure mystification.

He then drew the connection between Bill Gates’ stupendous wealth and his awesome power: “Bill Gates has become wealthier than each of the 70 poorest nations on earth and, using his financial might has conquered more territory than Genghis Khan, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great combined.” There are 191 member-nations in the United Nations. Their Heads of Government gathered in New York last September to address the General Assembly. What Emeagwali is telling us is that Bill Gates, sitting at the gallery, could wave off 70 of these people as they rose to speak. I would suggest that Bill Gates’ wealth and power rest, primarily, not on any wizardry, but on three pillars: America’s political economy, the global neoliberal capitalist order, and his “connections.”

We may rest that dimension of Emeagwali’s submission for now and move to another: “Japan’s economic growth, driven by technological superiority,
outpaces that of Saudi Arabia; South Korea is growing faster than oil-rich Nigeria; and Taiwan’s economy has moved well beyond that of oil-rich Venezuela.” These are provided as illustrations of his submission that “it is not money but intellectual capital that drives prosperity”; that “poverty is driven and sustained by a lack of intellectual capital”; that “the intimate relationship between intellectual capital and economic growth is as old as humanity itself”; and that “those who control technology oppress those that do not, eventually enslaving them and, finally, wielding power around the globe.”

Emeagwali escaped being accused of “either-or” fallacy by admitting that “the United States and Norway are also rich in oil.” But he quickly added that these countries’ “staggering economic growth comes from intellectual capital.” I, however, searched through the article to see if either China or Russia was used as illustration. None of them was. Definitely Emeagwali could not have mentioned all countries. But I just felt that the omission of both Russia and China from an article that adopts a global perspective and mentions America, Japan, Norway, Britain, the Netherlands and Israel—as illustrations of the link between oil, intellectual capital, technology, wealth and power—is significant.

My present piece would not have gone beyond promoting Emeagwali’s very useful article if there had not been a suggestion in the latter that African peoples had a choice of embracing technology, but did not, thereby placing themselves “at the mercy of the West”; or if some social forces were identified as responsible for this calamitous choice; or if there had been an explicit statement that, ultimately, technological advance and “intellectual capital”—in the given historical context—are sustained, reproduced and expanded by the control of natural resources and human labour (power). In other words, “they” appropriated our natural resources by means of their technological superiority; and thereafter they used this appropriation to sustain their superiority.

Emeagwali recalls that the British “raised the Union Jack over Canada and Australia, India and Hong Kong, Egypt and Kenya, and countless other countries—even the United States,” and used its technological advantage to dominate them. The United States of America has now replaced Britain as the vanguard of the global plunder. But the critical point is that it was not just that technological superiority was used to dominate and exploit but also that, after the initial contact, technological superiority now depended on the perpetuation of domination and exploitation. It was our raw materials, cheap labour, and later, markets, that acted as catalysts for further development of technological superiority. It is a dialectical relationship.

The “sole remaining super-power,” the United States of America, according to Emeagwali, “is at the forefront of every major technological advancement,
which it has used to become deeply embedded in three quarters of the globe.” America has accomplished a “virtual economic colonisation” of the globe. But will the famous scientist be surprised to hear that the ruling blocs in most of the poor countries whose fate he is bemoaning accept and like the global arrangement or global division of labour as it is? Will he be shocked to learn that the ruling blocs of his country, Nigeria, prefer the way things are because their basic interests are met that way?

Will Philip Emeagwali regard it as impertinent or scandalous on my part, if I suggest that his call on Africans, and particularly Nigerians, to confront the West’s use of its technological superiority to exploit, plunder and dominate us—and “embrace” technology—is a call for the social forces who are committed to this type of liberating mission to seek political power? Philip Emeagwali should however be commended for his social commitment. After all, he is not the only Nigerian-born scientist in America, even if he is a famous one. I am sure that some of his compatriots would be embarrassed by his article.

This point reminds me of an encounter I had with a comrade of mine in Calabar in 1982 or 1983 when I was still teaching mathematics at the University of Calabar. The comrade had just come to consult with me on an organisational matter. As we were leaving my office I complained bitterly about the “unseriousness” of a female journalist in performing assignments. The visiting comrade said nothing for a long time. But as he was entering his Volkswagen Beetle car he appealed to me to take it “easy” with the woman who had simply volunteered to work with us. He argued that even if she could do not more than give us useful information gathered in the course of her fieldwork she would still be very useful to the struggle. What of her colleagues that had openly pitched camps with the “other side?” he queried me.

I have never forgotten that encounter. What he said about professional journalists can be said of other socially committed professionals—lawyers, teachers, medical workers, architects, scientists, etc. I think Emeagwali is a member of that critically important and valued tribe. May that tribe grow in population and strength.

Would you like to add some author information here as in the first article?
Appendix B

Full Summary of a Particular Thread

Post 1 Name 21 turn 1
Sent: Tuesday, December 11, 2007 2:55:20 PM
Subject: USA Africa Dialogue Series—Reuben Abati and the Guardian Newspaper

Summary of posting:
The contributor revisits an earlier article he wrote in 2006 about one of Nigeria’s newspapers. In the article he blamed the management of the paper for its insensitivity to its workers who were against its stance on national issues.

Post 2 Name 7 turn 1
Subject: USA Africa Dialogue Series—Re: Reuben Abati and the Guardian Newspaper

Summary of posting:
The contributor of post 2 responds with an opinion differing slightly from that of post 1. He names ThisDay and Daily Independent newspapers as his preferred dailies. He agrees with the previous contributor that the Guardian appears alienated from Nigerian society because of its reliance on corporate and government patronage. The main problem with the paper in his view is that most of its writers have lost touch with public intellectualism and social discourse”

He signs off his contribution with a long chain of titles and responsibilities:
Special Assistant to Nigerian Foreign Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Abuja, Nigeria
234-803-329-XXXX
Director,
Center for Public Policy & Research
10 Awoniyi Elemo Street  
Senior Policy Advisor  
6th Sense Consulting  
Abuja, Nigeria

Post 3 Name 5 turn 1  
Sent: Tue, 11 Dec 2007 21:29:19–0800 (PST)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 7. Name 5 is the first person to veer off from the discussion about one of the newspapers in Nigeria, and instead wants to know “the job prescriptions or duties of (a) Senior Special Assistant [sic], (b) Special Assistant, (c) Senior Assistant and presumably [sic] (d) Assistant to FGN Ministers. Are these ‘ad hoc’ political positions created by the executive or they are approved by any act of parliament (NA)? How do you really function as both a [sic] SA and at the same time as Director (CPP&R)- full time or part-time from two far distant locations (Lagos and Abuja)?”

Post 4 Name 7 turn 2  
Sent: Wed, 12 Dec 2007 09:41:26–0800(PST)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 5. Name 7 responds that he is not an expert in what the duties entail but will take a shot at the question from a personal experience of working with Ken Nnamani [one of the former presidents of the Senate in Nigeria]. He explains that he was one of four consultants who set up the office in 2005, and gives very detailed workings of government. He provides the number of aides each of the officers have in Nigeria. After this detailed explanation he then provides an answer to how he can be a Special Assistant and Director of a Center simultaneously. In his defense he cites colleagues in the United States of America who do similar things and hold multiple positions in different geographical locations.

Post 5 Name 20 turn 1  
Sent: 13 Dec 2007 08:34:27–0000 (GMT)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 4 and Name 11. Using personal experience, this contributor introduces another angle to the discussion, which actually started with commentary on one of Nigeria’s newspapers and then moved into talk of the long titles of Name 7. This present posting is about the 1999 elections and the fraud they soon turned into. The author lists about four officers employed by each
of the 360 House of Representatives and 109. However, according to him, the opportunity to employ personal staff by the legislators became a source of fraud and waste of human resources.

Post 6 Name 5 turn 2
Sent: Thu, 13 Dec 2007 07:19:07–0800 (PST)

Summary of posting:
Addressed to Name 7. The author submits that the detailed explanation given by Name 7 goes to show the unnecessary financial burden borne by the generality of Nigerians. He includes an appreciation for the former President of the Senate, to be delivered in person by Name 7. In concluding his contribution he advises Name 7 to delete the extra titles in his electronic signature and talks about his own personal predicament as an academic in the diaspora. He wishes things were the other way around.

Post 7 Name 10 turn 1

Summary of posting:
Addressed to Name 7. The author identifies the location of Name 7 and goes on to comment on what was written about the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the boss of Name 7. He narrates a long personal story which details how he got involved with the pro-democracy movement that was started because of June 12. Names of actors and organizations are included in this posting in good measure. It gives a background to the inner thoughts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He ends this posting with the word “reminiscing” above his name.

Post 8 Name 7 turn 3

Summary of posting:
Addressed to Name 7. The author confirms his present location, which is a hotel in Washington, D.C., just as Name 10 had speculated. He then mentions a new Nigeria which he says is about service and which most citizens are passionate about. He tacitly responds to the issue of staffing and redundancy which Name 20 introduced in post 5. He frames the staffing situation as one of efficiency in governance. He also explains his move from being a Special Adviser to his present position as Special Assistant to the Minister as one that resulted from his social networking.
Apart from friendship, he says a bond of intellectual exploration and a robust Christian theology link him and his minister. He submits that they both believe in Nigeria. This assertion soon leads to discussion of the aborted third-term campaign which was embarked on by the aides of the last president of Nigeria. He was against the campaign but the minister who then was the secretary to his party appeared to be for the idea.

He ends this particular posting while giving his reasons for the choice to work in government by invoking Edward Said’s comment about intellectuals who are policy oriented and about their possible immersion in the illogicality and “immorality of the hegemony.” His position is to remain firm in his values and beliefs.

Post 9 Name 10 turn 2

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 7. He picks upon the issue of aides of political leaders who do not have a budget to operate from. He thinks they are “gofers.” He also notes how the discussion moved from working as Special Adviser to Senate President to the present discussion on anti-third-term campaign issues. He brings to light the contradictory roles played by the present Minister of Foreign Affairs on term elongation of the last administration and during the time of the last military dictator. He then poses the question how Name 7 chooses his employers or how they choose him. In a light-hearted way he includes an expression used by Name 7 in his posting about “pragmatic politics.”

Post 10 Name 19 turn 1
Sent: Thu, 13 Dec 2007 09:59:55 –0800 (PST)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 7. The author sympathizes with Name 7’s laboring to convince other participants on the forum about his position in government. He thinks most contributors are cynics. He compares the hard-hitting position of some participants in this conversation to the position of some in a similar conversation about an American female activist who worked as a representative of the Bush administration in the African Union. He identifies the contribution of citizens to their nation as the central thesis of Name 7’s discourse, contrasting that position with those who think intellectuals must always be antagonistic to government. As if going back to the initial discussion, he brings back the issue of the Guardian and its sordid labor relations.
He condemns the double standard and the cynicism of some of the contributors to the conversation.

**Post 11 Name 10 turn 3**

*Summary of posting:*
Addressed to Name 19. This posting attacks a previous contribution. It makes references to past contributions and says that most of the time the participant panders to the establishment in his contributions. He then digs into the archive to support his argument with something written by Name 19. In the said posting Name 19 seems to be in support of a flawed election. This is a case of how critics are perceived. Name 10 accepts the fallibility of critics and posits that that does not stop them from criticizing others. To support his argument he quotes copiously from Maya Angelou’s poem “When I say I am a Christian.”

**Post 12 Name 18 turn 1**

*Summary of posting:*
Addressed to Name 7. The author sends her congratulations gleaned from the long string of titles that set off this thread. She makes reference to a piece written by Name 7 on the issue of citizens’ diplomacy. An update on the position paper and other foreign affairs issues is requested. She then ends by giving her opinion on what citizens’ diplomacy should be.

**Post 13 Name 7 turn 4**
Sent: Thu, 13 Dec 2007 11:54:10–0800

*Summary of posting:*
Addressed to Name 19. This is a response to critics and criticism. The author supports the position of Name 19 and posits that some contributors are comfortable with pessimism. He accepts that criticism is important in the running of the state. He thinks critics are heroes but nothing more. He casts himself as one who believes in efforts that can bring about results. He concludes that participants must not lose hope in Nigeria. He also frames this moment in time for the country as one of rebirth which requires quality engagement, without which the rebirth is not possible.
Post 14 Name 11 turn 1
Sent: Thu, 13 Dec 2007 19:44:44 -0800 (PST)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 7. The author sets the tone of his posting by acknowledging the efforts of Name 7 in making time to respond to the postings and positions. He then links this to how political conversations are conducted in Nigeria. He singles out Name 7 as a cultured mind “amidst a throng of ridiculous characters” in the seat of power in Nigeria. He dismisses Name 19’s contribution as an incoherent distraction and starts by recalling the contributions of Name 4 and Name 20 to the issue of political jobbers. He explicitly states that his rhetorical device will be satire because of the seriousness he attaches to the subject at hand. To reinforce this point he states a non-English proverb and translates it for effect.

The issue dealt with first is what he terms “food-for-the-boys,” which to him is another method of political patronage. He cites his experience of governance at the local government level where Personal Aides of the Chairmen, who are university graduates, loiter around with little or nothing to do.

He differs on the comparison of Nigeria’s system with that of the United States of America, especially in the area of knowledge production/consumption of the various think-tanks and other sites of political knowledge construction. Apart from this, he brings in the hierarchical cultural difference issue.

In conclusion, the compassion between Nigerians at home and those in the diaspora comes to the fore. This reference is to the string of titles attached to Name 7’s electronic signature.

Post 15 Name 7 turn 5
Sent: Thu, 13 Dec 2007 21:06:28 -0800 (PST)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 11. The author acknowledges that the last 24 hours of this thread have provided him with a better appreciation of the problems of Nigeria. He does not fall for the line in Name 11’s posting that he is different from other aides at the political seat of power in Nigeria. He reiterates his position that all he wants to do, like participants in the forum, is to make a difference.

He narrates his optimistic stance by describing a discussion with a relation about Nigeria’s possibilities. He avers that his closeness to government in the country makes his views on Nigeria’s predicament strong and at the same time radical. He thus combines his optimism with his ability to criticize. To buttress his position he narrates a lengthy story of his encounter with one of the state governors and uses the opportunity to construct his biography and pro-
democracy credentials. These credentials, according to him, cast him as an outsider to politics. To ward off such an idea he frames Nigeria as a common patrimony that should be inclusive of all shades of opinions and radicalism. Furthermore, this posting goes into the inner working of Nigeria’s ruling political party—the PDP.

On the premise above, he concludes that the difference between him and those in the forum is his insistence that citizens must get engaged in the art of making Nigeria a nation. In analyzing the problem of nationhood he identifies a crisis of citizenship as “the failure of ownership of the nation.” His analysis then turns generational. He posits that the younger generation has not shown the courage to wrestle the nation from those he termed as the charlatans.

It is in this posting that he addresses, in passing, the issue of his string of titles in the electronic signature. He thinks there are times when commentators “grandstand and avoid the difficult job of critical and constructive social critique.” In a rare moment of free expression, he mentions the name of the former Chairman of the ruling party when discussing charlatans within the system, but it is done not as condemnation but as part of the contradiction between those who see themselves as saints and those they demonize.

In the posting, the tone of his language changes and he takes on his interlocutors with phrases such as, “loud-mouthed critics who think they are too clean and everyone else a fraud or a fool.” In making another point he compares the refusal of the former Senate President’s refusal to seek reelection into the senate with that of Governor Brown of California who later became the Mayor of Oakland.

In a swift change, he adopts a sort of reconciliatory stance with the inclusion of “brothers and sisters” before he calls for a collective change of ways in building the nation. He cites a few examples of people who have contributed to nation building and have moved on to other responsibilities. The metaphor he uses for nationhood is that of a project.

Post 16 Name 12 turn 1

Summary of posting:
Addressed to no one in particular but makes reference to Name 7. This posting by its own admission focuses on two issues. One has to do with channeling anger in order to gain entry to make changes and the other is the self-adulation in regards of the defeat of term elongation for the former president and its effect on the Senate as a collective, including the role played by the former president of Senate.
This contributor takes a different position by laying priority on the education of the mind rather than on the problems at hand. He does not think there is a need to locate entry points into the system before change is effected. He does not subscribe to the notion that it is only insiders within the government who can make changes.

As an aside he constructs a user profile of forum members and their self-reliance.

On the second issue of the role of the former Senate President, Name 12 is of the opinion that Nigerians would have devised other means of frustrating the term elongation campaign. He cites antecedents to buttress his point.

Post 17 Name 9 turn 1
Sent: Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:30:24–0000

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 7 with cordiality. The opening line in this posting introduces cordiality and an acknowledgement of brilliance in the responses. The author introduces the AFRICOM issue into the conversation and wants to know the reason for the policy reversal by the president. He explicitly states that his question is based on news coming from the White House. As background information he insinuates that the Secretary to the federal government is a member of the Board of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). This membership, to him, presents a potential conflict of interest. He also wants to know how much of Name 7’s contact and connections “define the quality of policy paper” (sic) handed to his boss, the Minister.

Post 18 Name 4 turn 1

Summary of posting:

Addressed to the collective. The author asks for restraint in what he terms the canonization of Name 7 “as an eloquent rebel within the Nigerian government.” He calls attention to the contrast made between the role of the former Chairman of the ruling party and those Name 4 reframed as “‘reckless’ keyboard critics” who are in the diaspora.

According to this contributor, there is a distinction between engagement by participation and engagement by co-optation. He then frames questions based on the differences he pointed out. He wants to know if “those who have chosen to stand aside to comment critically on the rot in the hope of triggering a public backlash against the predatory politicians and/or instigating a mutually assured destruction among them are less patriotic than those who
have chosen to bring about cosmetic changes from within the putrid system?"

In his opinion, to each his own and no need to defend the choices made. He does not believe in mere exhortation about commitment to Nigeria if the experience of what politicians are saying and doing is used as a yardstick.

Post 19 Name 8 turn 1

Summary of posting:

Addressed to the collective. This posting starts by supporting one of the propositions made by Name 7 for generational and attitudinal shifts by younger Nigerian intellectuals in the diaspora. This contributor alludes reasons to why those in the diaspora may be “ultra-pessimists and vitriolic critics” of the government. Despite that he posits that there is nothing wrong in deciding to effect changes from within the system, he supports the assertion, and justifiably so, that those in the diaspora pride themselves in condemning the Nigerian political class and leadership without doing much as a collective to rescue the situation. This sense of cynicism he observes is pervasive online and offline. He concludes that the situation requires both critics and those willing to constructively engage from the inside. An individual can occupy both spaces, he asserts.

Post 20 Name 16 turn 1

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 4. This contributor starts by identifying herself as a fellow academic and scholar. She then explicitly states her disagreement with Name 4’s position and says that she agrees with Name 7’s position. She gives a summary of the thread so far. In her opinion, Name 7 has eloquently defended himself and in the process revealed some complexities of democratic politics that seem universally applicable. Attention is drawn to Nancy Pelosi of the United States House of Representatives. A reading of the thread is made by this contributor. She observes the dichotomy of academics versus policy practitioners and keyboard critics during the discussion. She introduces the nationalist term but does not elaborate.
Post 21 Name 15 turn 1
Sent: Fri, 14 Dec 2007 11:51:46 EST

Summary of posting:
Addressed to Name 7. The contributor starts by stating his name and goes on to advise Name 7 on the nature of the forum he has been contributing to. He asks whether Name 7 realizes that the records of this forum are in the public domain and can be reproduced at any time. He then goes further to ask for clarifications on some assertions he thought he had made earlier. He wanted him to clarify his reference of the former Chairman of the ruling party as one of the charlatans. The other issue has to do with his expressing that Gani Fawehinmi supported his joining the Obasanjo government.

Post 22 Name 14 turn 1
Sent: Fri, 14 Dec 2007 16:58:54–0000

Summary of posting:
Addressed to Name 8. This contributor commends Name 8 and then poses a few questions. He wants to know what can be done as a collective to rescue the country. He admits that some participants “are very pessimistic about Nigeria.” He makes reference to “Segun Osoba, the Marxist historian,” who is credited with the saying that “Nigeria is presently in the grip [of] deepening crises. Unless very drastic measures are taken — collectively by majority of Nigerians — the future looks very bleak.”

He avers that even the pessimists among them have not given up on Nigeria but they are only expressing “deep pains about the tragedy of [a] nation.”

To buttress his position that the conditions have gotten worse, he resorts to history as a guide and posits that the country was not as terrible as it presently is. He concludes by stating that what is going on at the seat of power is banditry.

Post 23 Name 4 turn 2

Summary of posting:
Addressed to Name 16. A direct quote from Name 16’s contribution starts this posting. The author interprets the statement as a subtle way of wanting to gag him. He asserts that he will not be gagged. He insists that Name 7 cannot have the argument both ways. On the one hand, asking for understanding and on the other hand, denying a measure of understanding to those he labeled as reckless critics. The issue, he avers, is about shades of patriotism. According to Name 4, the term should not be narrowly defined as participation and co-
optation. On the same premise he adds the distinction of “constructive criticism from supposedly destructive criticism.” In his opinion, all forms of criticisms have their value and must not be devalued.

Post 24 Name 13 turn 1
Sent: Fri, 14 Dec 2007 09:47:00–0800 (PST)

Summary of posting:

Addressed to the collective. Using satire, this contributor makes the point half in jest and wholly seriously that Nigeria needs educated aides like Name 7. He tells a story about a big boss, in the cast of a head of state, who requested that an illegal extra-budgetary transaction be made and the subordinate officer complied to the request. He ends his narrative by comparing a person like Name 7 with the officer in the story.

Post 25 Name 12 turn 2
Sent: Fri, 14 Dec 2007 18:50:34–0100

Summary of posting:

Addressed to no one in particular. The posting reinforces what some of the contributors to the thread already expressed. The author makes the point that “critics are also contributors to national development and not thieves and hangers-on.”

Post 26 Name 11 turn 2

Summary of posting:

Addressed in response to Name 16’s posting. The author takes issue with participation in government as an equivalent of patriotism but aligns himself with a previous posting by Name 4. The light-heartedness of some contributions cannot be missed. Using a metaphor of marriage he submits that the wedlock of patriotism and what he terms “insiderism” would not be allowed. Names of a number of Internet pundits are freely used in this posting and he says that the contributions of the individuals cannot be minimized with respect to those of politicians. By his own admission the forum is a marketplace of ideas where all participants, including government officials, must be subjected to the same intellectual rigor and scrutiny.
Post 27 Name 10 turn 4  

Summary of Posting:  
Addressed to Name 15. This posting commences with a defense and clarification of Name 7’s position on the former Chairman of the ruling party. The author explains the functions of the quotation marks that accompany the word charlatan and that Name 7 did not intend the labeling to apply to himself. However, on gaining support from Gani Fawehinmi Name 10 submits that “that is another matter entirely.”

Post 28 Name 9 turn 2  
Sent: Fri, 14 Dec 2007 21:51:15–0000  

Summary of posting:  
Reaction to Name 11’s posting. The posting starts with an excerpt from Name 11’s posting about accountability. The author disagrees and instead avers that Name 7 be held accountable for what he does or does not do in public office. He thinks the question should not be whether he can be a Special Assistant or not. A restatement of what he thinks is the crux of the discourse is then provided: the preponderance of aides in different guises and not the choice to serve or not. Apart from service an officer should also be queried on the basis of his integrity or lack thereof. For instance, he wants to know about certain specific foreign policies and Name 7’s contribution to such policy issues.

Post 29 Name 8 turn 2  

Summary of posting:  
Addressed to Name 14. Agreement with the point of view of another participant is not uncommon in this thread. Here again Name 8 agrees with an early posting by Name 14 that the situation in Nigeria is dire and needs all hands on the plough to correct the anomaly. He argues that most contributors “have perfected cynicism and criticism to the point where any signs of expression of optimism are now as [sic] a misnomer.”
Post 30 Name 7 turn 6

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 9. This posting corrects a few misunderstandings, principal amongst which is distinction between the role of the critics and that of the politician or policy adviser. The author agrees that all roles are important. In answering the question about AFRICOM he instead elaborates on the collegial nature of government. He explains that there are as many positions as there are advisers with each pushing their own perspectives and viewpoints. But the eventual choice among contending positions is made by the Minster. In Name 7’s words, “[d]ecision-making resembles war by other means. Anyone who understands policymaking knows that it is about negotiation and influence peddling. You try to move the principal to accept your episteme rather than that of your rival. I was a member of the inter-ministerial committee on AFRICOM and our position is as progressive as can be.”

Post 31 Name 6 turn 1

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 8. In reaction to the issue of critics and politicians this posting disagrees and proceeds to use the author’s personal experience as a university teacher in Nigeria before emigrating to the United States. The narrative paints a picture of the conditions that force some intellectuals out of the country. The decay and social disintegration in the country have been progressive with each change of administration. In his words, “preaching ‘love thy country’ is actually easier than retaining the guts to be her consistent critic.” He then takes a look at the business of governance and posits that “[p]roductivity was not one of the goals behind the concept of this evolved government political enterprise.” He suggests that the best way to help Nigeria is to speak the truth about Nigeria without bothering about who will be affected.

Post 32 Name 5 turn 1

Summary of posting:

Addressed to no one in particular. The author agrees that the thread has thrown up revelations about the inner workings of government through the lens of one of the intellectual actors. He brings up three questions distilled from the
contributions so far. He wants to know why Name 7 chose to join the ruling party as opposed to his former mentor’s party. He also raised the issue of running for senate and the advice he gave his former boss.

As to where and when to get involved with the Nigerian project he offers his opinion that each individual must freely choose his or her own style.

Post 33 Name 4 turn 3
Sent: Sat, 15 Dec 2007 10:00:30–0600

Summary of posting:

Addressed to the collective but mentions Name 5. Once again the division between those in the diaspora and those at home plays out. There seems to be a division between those who return home and those who do not. Continuous commitment to Nigeria can be demonstrated in various ways and insider participation should not be unduly eulogized as the best form of patriotism. The author concludes by expressing that the “rhetoric of sacrifice, patriotism, and nationalism is just that: a self-serving justificatory rhetoric.”

Post 34 Name 3 turn 1
Sent: Sat, 15 Dec 2007 17:45:02–0100

Summary of posting:

Addressed to the collective but Name 9 is mentioned. The concern of the posting is the nature of briefing the President is given on foreign affairs any time he is out of the country. There have been a number of gaffes by the President. As part of the conversation, this contributor sends a message through a representative of government who is interacting informally.

Post 35 Name 8 turn 3

Summary of posting:

Addressed to Name 4 and Name 6. This posting is a reiteration of past positions in previous postings and an opportunity to clarify issues. The author accepts that “critics have their place in the equation but so are [sic] those who chose to effect change from the ‘inside’ or ‘outside’.” This contributor now introduces other political actors outside of the political class. “Common” people should not be left out of the equation of blame. He concludes that there are individuals within the system who should be applauded no matter how minuscule their contributions. He then ends with this suggestion: “While [being] critical when appropriate, I will ultimately engage on [sic] the more construc-
tive approach by looking for the good in everything. The earlier we begin to do this, the sooner we begin the long and arduous journey to nation-building.

Post 36 Name 1 turn 1

Summary of posting:
   Addressed to Name3. The issue of recolonization of the country is the focus of this posting. It recaps the various diplomatic blunders of Nigeria’s leadership. The call for foreign powers to help Nigeria in times of crisis appears to have historical roots, as traced by this posting.
Appendix C

Full Statement of USA-Africa Dialogue

This series creates a Pan-Africanist intellectual community drawn [from] all over the world to examine serious and current issues about Africa. The third in the series examines the issues of interactions between the United States and Africa. USA-Africa Dialogue No. 1 spells out some of the core issues to be pursued.

Dear all:

I want to initiate another major Internet dialogue, similar to what I did in two instances, one over the book by Keith B. Richburg, Out of Africa, and another about the Wonders of the African World by H. Louis Gates. Both grew energetic and passionate, drawing the best minds, from graduate students to Nobel winners, from young professors to college presidents. They were also Pan-Africanist in nature, as scholars from all over the world became involved. In both cases, the exchanges fed some journals and books.

What I have in mind is to use the Bush presidency and the American elections to provoke a number of issues as they relate to Africa and African American issues. As with the previous dialogue, I simply raise the issues, and let people respond. I serve as the clearing house, which means that all comments come to me, and I circulate them to others. This way, those that are highly insulting and personal are either edited or not circulated. Also, the wish of those who want to be removed from the list can be respected.

If you want me to add your friends to the list, simply give me their email addresses. You are also free to forward to others.

Do please allow me to begin with a preliminary comment, which is not to establish the parameters or indicate the topics of dialogue/debate, but simply to start the discussion.
Democracy

President Bush started his term with a contested election. Similar to what happened in Nigeria in 1979 when the court declared Shagari the winner, Bush came to the office largely because of the decision by the Supreme Court. The Nigerian court in 1979 said that the case cannot be cited as a precedent. The American Supreme Court said the same thing. Que: what does contested elections mean, and why is there stability in one place and instability in another? Should we spend our energies on the rule of law and accountability instead?

Religion

Are we exaggerating the case of religious divide in Africa? In the USA, Sunday is the most segregated day of the week, with whites going to their own churches and Blacks to their own, and migrants have created their own places of worship. Now, under the Bush presidency, the rise of evangelical churches and their link with the Republican party has introduced something far more political. Traditionally, the role of the Church has been to use God and the power of the outer universe to bring people of different political persuasions together in one building. With the American church, especially in the South, now identifying with one party, what does this say about religion? Suppose I were a Democrat, can I go to a Church that asks me to vote for a Republican? How can we relate this to Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal and other places?

Ethnicity

When the Soviet Union collapsed and other crises followed, the academic world that had crucified ethnicity in Africa began a process of revision. Are we exaggerating the divisions in Africa? Are we, as intellectuals, unable to contribute to nation building? The divisions along racial and religious lines in the US are sharp but why is there greater stability there than in Africa?

Development

I have met many people who do not see corruption in the United States. This view can be contested, as they may not be using the same word for what Africans call corruption. Americans don’t use the word
corruption to describe the activities of lobbyists, the behavior of Enron, the use of political influence to get contracts, things that we routinely describe as corruption in Africa and the literature. I have advanced an argument that in the US, corruption is privatized, and in Africa we democratize it.

Comparison

Should we even compare? Can we begin the analysis with models internal to Africa and use those, as some have argued? If comparison is inevitable, how do we go about it?

These are just a few issues to start the debate and people can respond.


REFERENCES


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