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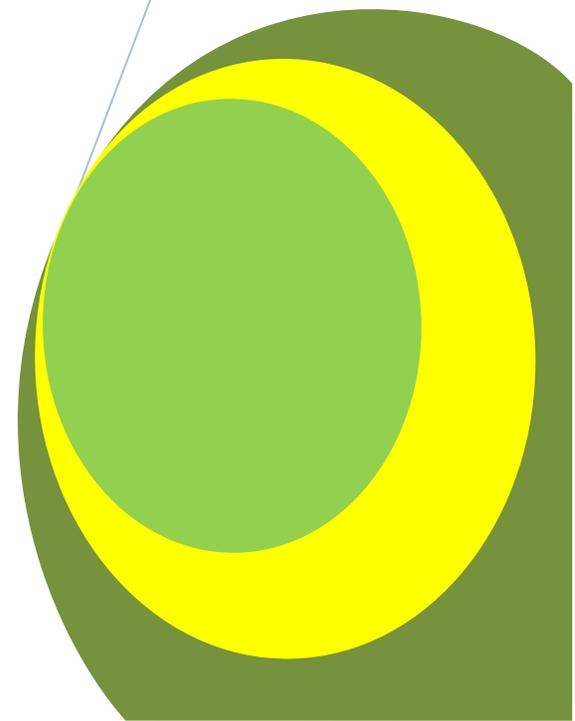
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Digital economy, diasporized 'homes' and ideological *crisis* in global interpretive communities: rethinking the political economy of ICT virtual reality

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Digital economy, diasporized 'homes' and ideological crisis in global interpretive communities: rethinking the political economy of ICT virtual reality

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ABSTRACT

This paper on digital economy, the diaspora and ideological crisis argues that ICTs in the context of the political economy of trans-nationalism and globalization are a very powerful machinery taking on new shapes, concerns and directions and with potential to subvert any narrations of nation states, home, roots or other forms of organization. Exploiting the tools and techniques of the cyberspace, with the uses to which they are put to promote capital (e-business, e-commerce, e-marketing, etc), the paper maintains that the technology intersects with and neutralizes concerns over civilization, identity, political image, ethnicity, religion, law, and so forth. The digital diaspora is therefore a formidable project which is ongoing at a greater pace than before; however, this pace is undecidable, unpredictable and irreducible to any given region, nation or community. Drawing insights from Stanley Fish's critical theory of interpretive communities, it argues that digitization of the economy and the diaspora are narrowly fueled by the determinism of capital and ICT technologies; therefore, it is necessary to consider that there are always new forms of civilizational foundationalism that have the potential to resist the cyberspace of 'origin', from the perspectives of narratives of place, time, identity, etc, and are now re-asserting themselves in different ways and by re-engaging alternatively with the digital technologies of transnationalism and globalization and in a manner that was never predictable.

The new identitarian ideologies emerging from the digital economy and diasporization of 'homes' have to do with the culture of being 'cool', construction of new political awareness leading to dissensions, the talking-back website culture, lesbian and gay pride identities, post nation state identities, creation of transnational and multilingual 'masses', construction of pornography diasporic communities, communities of *popular resentment* and economic disruption, of *self-organization*, of digital youth branding, black critical consumerism, and global humanity. New security questions are also emerging to take centre stage in these identities.

Keywords: E-marketing cyberculture and virtual reality, nation state communities and political dissensions, home, trans-nationalism and diaspora, neo-imperial age of the digital economy, undecidability of ideologies.

INTRODUCTION

In this age of digital networks, when the high demand for ICTs is causing scientists and technologists in developing countries to migrate and settle in the western 'cores' of technology (Castells 1996, Drucker, Lunenfeld, Presner, and Schnapp. 2012), unlike during the age of industrialization, with its high costs of information and communication, transportations, etc, when businesses were integrated with organizations vertically, mobility and global dispersal is creating new forms of diaspora that are valuable networks of finance, business contacts and skills transfer for nation state homes (Boomen, Lammes, Lehmann, Raessens, and Schäfer 2009). Nowadays, horizontal arrangements have emerged following the intersection of such diasporic 'roots' and 'routes' with separate migration players such as business suppliers, sub-contractors, consultants, laboratories, commercial distributors, market research organizations, etc prospecting for more contacts and arrangements. The different and complex interactions that go on between them has created value chains that are now driving global technology and business and are opening up diasporic networks (UN, 2001: 31). But in parallel, today, the diasporic narrative as new 'routes' is also increasing and reproducing viral effects as an immigrant can now use *e-commerce* and *instant messaging*, *internet telephony*, *satellite TV*, *push-to-talk wireless* and *web-based news sources* to construct a micro-virtual reality of their

homeland universe. Children born in the diaspora employ the internet to connect with their peers in their ethnic homes (Saunders 2011: 5). Individuals who leave their home communities and those who decide to stay, employ the internet to construct a continuum of information and ideas. When minority groups leave their home communities for western, information-endowed countries, for reasons of oppression, for example, they use ICT resources very richly as a tool of national political liberation to deconstruct the hegemonic versions of information practices in their own nation states. Similarly, indigenous populations exploit the resources of the technology to create alternative narrations to the dominant culture of nation state media control. In this way, ICTs have been deployed for the deterritorialization of old Westphalian systems and for reconstructing new virtualities of nation states and new identities of globalizing communities (Ndi 2015).

This paper proposes to investigate the implicit *ideological* meanings that underpin the complex intersections of digital economy (e-commerce, e-marketing, e-trade, etc.) of the diaspora and the 'roots'-and-'routes' of global communities with a view to elucidate the 'fluidity' of virtual reality and the construction of new community identities in this new imperial age. By exploiting critical cyberculture insights (Kitchin 1998, Lévy 2001, Haraway 1991, Haraway, 1997, Rogers 2013) to investigate various transnational intersections, the paper is premised on the hypothesis that any *signifier* of capital such as the digital technology is too deterministic a value to explain the new identity drives reconstructing the virtual reality space in different global contexts. The 'double articulation' of the *signifier/signified* can be very illuminating when appreciating the potentialities of the new digital technologies, in the context of diaspora formations and the complexifying identities created in environments where trans-nations emerge freely. The process of digitization of the diaspora is unleashed when e-communities of migrants, who are geographically dispersed, start to form as they travel from their homelands in the Third World to the core countries in Europe and the US and to semi-periphery countries in Asia and interact with their 'homes' and 'routes' as online or virtual societies thanks to the 'new' technologies of information and communication, fostering racial solidarity, unity and responsibility (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Everett, 2009). In history, digitization of the economy in the diaspora emerged at the same time as the access to cell phones, online public content, connectivity and as the Internet was made possible and cheaper (Diminescu 2008 Diminescu, Jacomy and Renault 2010). The trans-nationalization of 'homes' in nation states was made possible thanks to social media tools and techniques such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *LinkedIn* through which online communities were re-constructed to promote integration in host countries in ways that were not possible in their 'offline' life (Diminescu, Jacomy, and Renault, 2010; Riddings and Geffen 2006). *Web sites* and *blogs* are now being deployed to construct virtual communities, by communicating and conveying information about diasporic experiences and social life in 'hosting' and 'origin' nation states (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010). In this globalization dynamic, grassroots communities and societies are emerging in cyber-spaces as networked diasporic communities thanks to digital forums where ideas, debate and opinions are mobilized, friendship and support are expressed and issues like soliciting of funds to promote social and economic projects are addressed (Brainard and Brinkerhoff 2004). These digital tools are being deployed as well to contest the legitimacy of what is seen as oppressive nation state governments, to circulate propaganda in media networks against their ruling elites, facilitate the radiation of political programmes and to call for open confrontations and disobedience. The e-economy is one of the signifiers of capital that potentializes expansion of this knowledge economy and increases the prospects for development of new narratives of 'home', 'roots' and 'routes' through the culture of the diaspora. This transnational virtualization of reality that globalization constructs is one of inter-dependence of electronic communities living apart in different geographies. The e-economy is therefore a powerful engine of community growth, which has been sustaining new massification relationships and cultivating better forms of cooperation between villages, nations states, and trans-nations in ways which politics or diplomacy cannot (Bolaffi, Bracalenti, Braham, and Sandro 2003:131) and yet, these developments cannot be totally controlled as they create new ideologies of their own that flow in undecidable directions and ways. This flow of signifiers/signifieds has been theorized by Stanley Fish in his interpretive communities paradigm.

Stanley Fish's interpretive communities

The concept of interpretive communities, which is deployed to understand the emerging phenomenon of digital diasporas, was developed by Stanley Fish (1985) on the principle that the production of *signs* (de Saussurian *signifiers* and *signified*) can shift away from what is *in* a text towards ways of re-producing the text itself (Whitson and Whittaker 2013: 91). Fish maintained that the production of meaning is not infinite but always constrained (1985). For example, he upheld the structuralist view that people always make determination on certain kinds of readings of texts as 'incorrect' and on other types of readings as 'correct'. But, there is increasing evidence from cybercultural 'texts', especially in the area of digital diasporas, that meanings can never be constrained. Deleuze and Guattari proposed the idea of *double articulation* and by that they were referring to the fact that meanings operate on the basis of different ordering processes take place simultaneously but on various plateaux and processes that may even take meanings (signified) to the verge of chaos. From this light, meaning consists not merely of *either/or* but of *both/and*. The act of interpreting meaning cannot be one of delimiting it to an intended primary sense, territorializing it to an

original, specific experience. Meaning is created by desire (the Freudian *Id*-eology). Desire is not a *representamen* based on a lack, with the promise of a return to the original absent idea; but a desiring-production synergy in which desire creates meaning, which has to be articulated in a paradoxical double bind. The double bind is a dynamic process of meaning, a system of order, which is non-identifiable and borders on the edge of anarchy. As an abstract machine, ICT does not gesture to a hierarchical system of meaning that can be transmitted from author to reader. Rather, it operates on a network of relationships. ICTs are one of the knowledge management technologies through which networks of relationships are articulated as a double bind.

New readings of ICT diasporic economies in identitarian communities

Drawing from Fish's interpretive communities, we argue that the digital economy and its virtual reality of cyberspaced communities is being susceptibilized to new *identitarian* questions and to new and explosive narratives of opposition pitting the nation state and the diaspora. When posts are forwarded in the technological space through *chats* and *boards*, the major goal is to preserve ethnic or nation state identity by participation. For example, Tibetans confirm this principle through avenues like their *TibetBoard* and *Tibetchat* (Brinkerhoff 2009: 71). However, there are also influences of western culture on Tibetans in the diaspora reflected in these avenue tools. Consequently, in these tools *TibetBoard* and *Tibetchat*, it has become fashionable to become 'cool' which is a psychological characteristic of western communities (Ibid). Similarly, the creation and sustenance of communities in the real/virtual world is taking place at a time when the digital media is increasingly becoming convergent and interactive. Queer Indians, for example, have developed a network technique of simultaneous legitimization and "talking-back" of media authority through the tool of *blogging*. In this site, they become not only producers, but also readers of and commenters about mainstream media coverage of India's national Gay Pride marches (Mitra 2010). The interpretive community of Gay Indian *bloggers* is both a community of consumers/audience of mainstream media and also producers of alternative media that is resistant to mainstream media opinion on gender-normativity, for example, by problematizing its claims to heteronormativity. Internet practices have leveraged diasporic subjectivity in meaningful ways. As well, social-networking sites in the digital technology offer a 'safe space' for participants to negotiate their sense of self and express their hybrid identities or to demarcate what it means to be a member of a said diaspora (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Some scholars speak of the Internet as the primary producer of diasporic subjects because it is often the only way to maintain a particular identity when living in a host country (Franklin, 2001; Parham, 2004; Bernal, 2007; Liu, 2012), but others have shown that as a result of the various ways diasporas have used the Internet, our very understanding of what it means to be diasporic is shaped by the digital age itself (Everett, 2009; Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010; Brinkerhoff, 2009).

It is increasingly clear that the age of the information economy came with a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it empowered communities like the Chinese diaspora to re-shape China's nation state politics and foreign policy, strengthen China's international broadcasting power, establish a favourable national image, in the context of China's rise to the status of a global power (Liu 2012). As a result, China used soft power to polish its trans-national image by encouraging state media to 'go global' and collaborate with Chinese language media. On the other hand, the digital diaspora offers opportunities for communication and building of connections that can expose the image of the "real China" negatively to the rest of the world, and this is having very harmful effects on China's image (Sheng 2007). Trans-national media outlets such as BBC's 'Have your say' *forum* combine with the Chinese diaspora to re-introduce elements of dissonance into the transnational space thereby thwarting the attempts made at image management (Wanning and Sinclair, 2015:144). The virtual reality in the global digital diaspora has been able to potentialize the displacement of nation state narratives through new technological processes of massification (Bernal 2007, Lama 2010, Franklin 2001, Parham 2004, Ito *et al.* 2010, Japanese American National Museum 2005). When J. Hillis Miller wrote 'The work of cultural criticism in the age of digital reproduction', he drew insights from the concept of 'aura' to argue that 'art', like *virtual reality*, is reproducible (Chow R, 1993). A modern work of art does not only cast a shadow that removes the aura from traditional works, it also reveals aura as being in a position of *ideological* formation (Adamic and Eytan Adar 2001, Ponzanesi 2001,). Citing Benjamin, he argued that, in the same way as film, a means of mechanical reproduction, was a revolutionary criticism of art, so too did developments in the ICT technology sector render oppositions between traditional man/woman and the masses unnecessary and the idea of a people with a culture impertinent. ICTs transformed that binary of people into a new category called the 'masses'. The 'masses' are members of a transnational, multilingual and global technological culture that is rendering nation state pieties outdated, uselessly nostalgic and even reactionary in an old-fashioned way (Ibid: 192). Consequently, when the internet technology was introduced in the nation state of Saudi Arabia in 1999, it was chiefly thanks to the huge trade possibilities that its diasporic community abroad afforded the country (Shanthil and Boas 2003). In Saudi Arabia, the virtuality of the digital technology was filtered through very extensive mechanisms of cultural censorship. Thus, beyond its function as a facilitating tool to connect 'home' and host diasporic nationals as an 'imagined community' (cf. Benedict Anderson), was the emerging state opinion that the e-commerce technology it hosted was dangerous to the re-construction of an externalized neo-liberal national consciousness. In addition to

goods and services like pornography which were appreciated by the diasporic community, the Saudi Arabian state was preoccupied with textualization of political messages such as criticisms of the royal family by Islamic opposition groups abroad and within. As a result of these precautions, there were some 'initial stirrings of e-commerce in Saudi Arabia' (Shanthil and Boas 2003) which alienated the digital technology from its focus on the national economy dominated by the state.

Similarly, the Malaysian state response to the advent of the cyber technology with the support of its diasporic nationals was an old-fashioned reflex of political *detention* of people, who were associated with the technology, the seizure of computers and the blockage of web access to the national diasporic community from abroad. But paradoxically, these extreme measures impacted negatively on the nation state grandnarrative and economy that was supported by the diasporic community. As a result, Raisinghani (2008) explains: 'as e-commerce transactions became critical and *thicker*, network stability and continuity became critical concerns for both local and foreign businesses' (my italics, Raisinghani 2008). The result from this outcome was '*popular resentment* and economic disruption' rather than support for the nation state grandnarratives of confrontation. However, the *vulnerability* of the nation state narrative should not necessarily be construed as meaning a desire for the disappearance of this Westphalian legacy from colonial rule. Rather, it should be seen as possibility that should be addressed through the digital technology. The nation state has its place in the order of the virtual reality. In order to protect this place, the choice of digital tools and techniques is critical to communication possibilities between diasporic, nation state and transnational communities during the age of the knowledge economy. The impact that digital tools have on the relationships between diaspora communities and nation state embassies, for example, can lead to a crisis of communication and an online backlash if certain steps are not taken to address the practice of diaspora diplomacy. Although digital tools such as *Skype* and *WhatsApp* enable migrants to establish intimate ties with their country of origin: family members, friends, home communities, thereby minimizing their reliance on diasporic communities, embassies and other official channels, as was once the case, the digital tools and social media may themselves construct new forms of *self-organization* and vibrant virtual communities that may *alienate* the communities from and render them independent of nation state embassies. Consequently, nation state embassies must adopt new strategies of diaspora diplomacy that facilitate online outreach to virtual diasporic communities by actively writing posts for popular diasporic websites, engaging in online discussion forums, analyzing events taking place at home, engaging embassy staff in virtual Question and Answer sessions, demonstrating the value of their own digital platforms for diasporic communities. It is not clear which tool, *whatsapp* or *telegram*, for instance, should be deployed by embassies to create different groups of interest (embassy spokesperson and Diasporic journalists, trade officer and migrant business owners, etc). With the growth in the population of diaspora communities, the prospect is that power may shift from the nation state ministries to the embassies as the communities impact on their host countries and strain the embassies servicing them to achieve diplomatic goals. This depends on the embassy's digital skills, availability of digital embassy services. The social media channel with the greatest potential must be selected to articulate a crisis, by using certain criteria such as level of engagement and dialogue creation on the channel, variety of aims (e.g. by using numerous channels), the purpose, the power of each channel, checking out information internally prior to online communication, information in real-time (such as consular service numbers, and emergency details), regularity in updating information, constant competition for views, avoiding information overload in periods of crisis, giving the right information needed, avoiding information lose, etc. For example, *Twitter* has only 140 characters whereas *Facebook* has greater potential), *Instagram* is for low levels of dialogue creation as opposed to *Twitter* with high levels of dialogue creation.

Responding to the online backlash

How does one deal with online backlash or negative reactions towards a policy stance held by a nation state concerning a conflict, unpopular domestic issues, or simply as a result of their communication activities online? Is it by *reacting swiftly* to negative reactions, taking time to consider them in a measured manner, correcting false information spread, engaging with the audience where possible, *counteracting bad news* with sporadic additions of more positive news online. Should positive news stories dispersed through online feed be 'very positive', make lightness of the situation, or maintain positivity as much as possible online? This is an area for future research because attempts have been made to protect or reconstruct the *id*-eological images of nation states in Africa, for example, but these attempts have witnessed ambiguous results. The practice of online networking has been shifting the focus of its target over the years. It moved from the 'niche' net (e.g. the Argentine Net, Anderson in Eric Gower (1996) to new forms of digital communication such as social networking sites (e.g. *Facebook*), Weblogs, micro-blogging (e.g. *Twitter*), and video-sharing sites (e.g. *YouTube*), and now to globalization marked by migration flows across, and between, all continents. As Arjun Appadurai (1996) points out in his book *Modernity at large*, migration and the electronic media did not only change the ways the imagination of migrant masses functions; but human motion and digital mediation are themselves in constant "flux" (44). Consequently, the circulation of people and the content of their digital mediation goes beyond nation-state borders into new communities, identity formations,

'hypertextual diasporas' and so forth with rhizomatic formations where associations, locations, and spaces are constantly unsettled, destabilised and renegotiated, away from traditional understandings of the local, transnational, and culturally hybrid artifacts, global networking flows of goods, services, people, ideas, and so forth. Thus there is a move from forging of transnational public spheres, where virtual social relations are nourished by people scattered all over the world to new forms of digital diasporic youth branding; and the cultural production of new hypertexts with rhizomatic digital diaspora formations. When the concept of digital 'diaspora' started to take on new meanings in the virtual reality, it was because it intersected with technological and cultural narratives that drove trans-national cybercultures. The central factors that accounted for these transnational changes was capital and freedom (Falzon 2004, Brinkerhoff 2009). Thanks to digitized capitalism, the perception of the diaspora shifted its focus from old connotations of it as a 'problematic' to be resolved (e.g. exile, separation, alienation, etc) to new understandings of it as *opportunities* for nation state economic growth and trans-national development in the present age of the cyberculture at both local and international levels.

While the Argentinian diaspora added hyperlinks (journals, networking sites, streaming audio/video pages, a forums) to websites in order to increase possibilities of participation and affiliation based on Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) coding with multiple entryways and exits (Landow 58-61, Miller and Don Slater 2000, Androutsopoulos 2007.), varied connections as practice (Haraway 1997:128-30), subaltern communities interlaced their own hypertextual paths of multivocality, multilinearity, open-endedness and traversal thereby changing the network topology of bodies and texts where racialized geographies are unknown or unrecognized, (Balibar 1998, 2003, Brown 2008, Georgiou 2006, Berry, Kim and Spigel, eds., 2010). As youths who were born in the Argentinian diaspora began to manifest themselves online, digital diasporas evolved from transnational public spheres to differential hypertexts (Odin 1997). With mass migration and digital mediation, transnational audiences were re-created portrayed by Appadurai as "diasporic public spheres" (Appadurai 22). An example of such digitized diasporic public spheres is *Naijanet*, a virtual society of 'Nigerians Living Abroad'. Consequently, the movement of people mediatized on the net over geographical distances led to a critical distinction between "roots" and "routes" in ways which were specific to each transnational community such as the black American nationals. When Paul Gilroy (1993) wrote *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness*, he pointed out relevantly the need to understand the 'double consciousness' of migrant diasporians as one in which 'roots' and 'routes' are affiliated as part of a complex cultural identification. 'Roots' are the stable side of a community's identity, and 'routes' signify disruption and change; they are a negotiated process of movement and mediation especially through the digital technologies. When the cyberspace was introduced, African and black American people and their relationship to the technology were racialized and misrepresented historically as information-age 'outsiders' and as poster children for the digital divide especially during the early years of the technoculture; but the reality is that they were early adopters and consumers of the cyber technology, who helped to drive the information superhighway revolution. Many organizations such as the Association of Nigerians Living Abroad (ANLA), their *Naijanet* virtual community counterparts, grassroots projects like the Million Woman March (MWM), the different black media online, were also supportive of the digital movement (Everett 2009). Unfortunately, contemporary online video games have disincarnated the black and African race in ways which are very troubling. As David Desser, *American Jewish Filmmakers* has pointed out, corporate capital, mainstream media and racist forces are still working to marginalize the input of African American intellectuals, grassroots organizers, video game makers, journalists, etc.,. But this is a tendency which can and should be reversed through the deployment of new technological projects in the spirit of the 'double bind'. Attempts by black and African communities in this direction have been rather limited. Especially during the 1990s, the *web-site* emerged as a technology creating great hysteria over the potentialities of e-trade as a high tech speciality in mainstream media and magazines. However, when e-commerce intersected with black American entrepreneurial and diasporic culture, a new cultural site of marketing emerged marked by ambiguity (Everett 2009: 104). The electronic marketplace afforded black American entrepreneurial communities, startup organizations and pop and mom operations a level economic ground from which they could emerge despite the presence of global and media oligopolies. Black websites marketed black artistic products and other Afro-centric commercial products and services. However, this metanarrative was confronted with a new spirit of black critical consumerism. It re-echoed the anti-racist racialism of old in which black communities had to make recourse to identity politics through segregationist boycott campaigns in order to articulate their subaltern *status* in American society, namely, 'don't shop where you can't work!'. Anna Everett (2009) reports the findings of a journalist, Archie Clark who carried out an experiment determining responses to dolls by black children in order to prove that 'beauty is at stake when a child prefers a doll of a different race'. The 1988 experiment showed that: '...a majority of children answered favourably toward white dolls...because of a lack of self esteem and racial identity'. Clark concluded that: 'a doll is something a child plays with as an extension of themselves...When a child owns a doll, they unknowingly idolize it and want to be like it. I don't think white dolls should be given to black kids' (109)

In various magazines, such as *Black Enterprise*, *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Collegian* and *Essence*, the focus was not strictly on business but shifted to race matters; readers were urged not to forget the hard-fought won gains against white racism nor ignore the financial and psychosocial benefits of purchasing black products and services as opposed to white American ones. The *online* contents of these magazines were restricted to photographs and narrative *précis*. Thus as opposed to online content of newspapers, which is dominated by the drive for information, online sites of black magazines were marked by virtual publicity, virtual newsstands and virtual e-subscriptions. The attractive photographs they presented compelled guests of these sites to effect close scrutiny followed by purchase of the magazines in printed copies promoted online. On 31 December 1988, for example, the homepage of *Ebony Online* displayed the picture of a confident-looking and smiling Whitney Houston and *Jet* displayed three photos of R. Kelly, a rhythm and blues superstar. The news in them was simply that Whitney Houston had turned thirty five and Kelly had won three Grammy Awards and had now solidified his status with his duet entitled 'I am your angel' sung with Celine Dion. In this way, the web pages went great on graphics and small on textual material because they served a linking function by redirecting visitors to other web locations such as the site of *Ebony South Africa*. Thus, from a business (economic) project perspective, the context of black American diaspora evolved a political narrative that revealed their commitment to continue the anti-racialist struggles in ways which shifted from capital to political id-eology.

Response from the local context

At the local, nation state level of 'roots', the concept of digital technology was positivized to a point where it is now possible to speak, for example, of the *virtual face of indigeneity*. Online projects are now being undertaken or commissioned by indigenous people through *websites*, *webpages* of businesses, *homepages* by traditional individuals and *chatrooms* or *discussion lists* that link different indigenous groups. As a result, new projects such as the Digital diaspora initiative (DDI) emerged to offer *e-mails*, *e-commerce*, *e-jobs* and *e-quality* tools, to empower women's organizations in Africa economically, build capacities, identify business opportunities, partnerships and finance and to facilitate poverty alleviation across nation state borders. The priority here was meeting objectives like linking African entrepreneurs in the diaspora and women entrepreneurs in Africa, establishing partnerships between private sector and private foundations, technology transfer programmes and addressing policy and infrastructural issues. In this way, whether in Uganda, Cameroon or Rwanda, where these projects were launched in 2006, the aim was to create jobs, convert nationals to what president Paul Biya termed as the 'Android Generation', transform women into active participants of ICTs rather than see them follow the course of passive victims (Ligaya and Wallimann 2009: 149). At the trans-national level, notions of evolving 'routes' intersected with *effects* of liberalization of the world's economy, which led to certain significant outcomes during the 1980s and 1990s, namely, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism in the Eastern *Bloc* and China, the overhaul of nation state allegiances in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the expansion of transnational politics and media technology, a digital revolution in the communication and informatics sector that emerged to reshape the global economic landscape. In the same way as steam power triggered the industrial revolution, which in turn launched mass production, mass transportation, the slave trade in America, colonial rule and so forth, this revolution triggered a new movement that took the form of a technological, textual and symbolic 'route', that of the network society, while also embracing and even empowering the ethno-nationalistic 'roots' of the 'home' situated in Third World villages and nation-states. Consequently, nation states transmuted into trans-nations, and this globalizing process, in turn, fossilized into the new narratives of the diaspora. With the advent of the borderless, digitized economy, came the potential to spread the power of economic modernization; but as well, post-modernizing moments emerged across the continuum of E-business and 'home', nation state, trans-nation and diaspora to challenge the prospect.

Today, the digital diaspora has come to mean huge opportunities for the promotion of African 'roots' such as art and the sale of products of artists and artisans abroad. Because the price of a product may go up to fifteen times its original value in European and US markets, galleries, banks and corporations, the diaspora came to mean an opportunity to deploy ICT tools and techniques to source objects of African art like masks, woven fabrics, statues and figures, ceramics, jewelry and musical instruments through its dynamic trans-national communities (Moirá C, Billotte J, Darbellay F, and Francis, 2011:132, Oiarzabal 2013,). The ICT has become a 'route' through which direct access and online sale of products was to be facilitated through the employment of web 2.0 technologies: e-mail marketing, graphics and design, data management and web-based project management tools. E-commerce on African art deploys new strategies such as provision of extensive background information with video footages on the artists, their ethnic groups, the meaning of their art, the traditional uses of the art and so forth. Through the organization of fashion shows with *mannequins* adorning African jewelry and models, African parties in digital diasporic settings with the ambiance of music, movies and presentations, expositions of the art in galleries, restaurants, fashion shops, schools and universities, product fairs in administrative buildings, markets, direct e-mailing of product catalogues and use of *twitter*, *facebook*, *Google ads*, *linkedin* or *xing*, *blogs*, etc, mapping of artisanal landscape, income was generated and redistributed along the trade model of a cooperative society.

Although the major challenge continues to remain how to overcome the digital divide (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability, etc) by connecting the cultural assets of indigenous knowledge systems and creative producers with network possibilities in the digital economy, there is an increasing penetration of ICTs among indigenous communities. Even with structural factors in desert areas of aboriginal Australia such as the unreliable supply of electricity in households and poor digital connectivity which prevent families from investing in the virtual technology, a sub-standard form of the e-commerce technology was set up to negotiate remoteness, exploit its potentialities and 'connect with overseas art dealers, festival and music promoters and tourists' (UNESCO 2013: 102). As a result, in aboriginal Australia, indigenous communities were able to set up burgeoning musical productions from their ancestral and artistic culture which they placed in the diasporic market. The utilization of school resources enabled these communities to setup digital platforms from which they were able to bypass intermediary dealers who exploited them and converse with the diasporic and touristic audiences directly (Ibid :102). With the aid of audio and video digital technologies, and other capabilities to upload film clips into *YouTube* and other social media sites, they were able to solve the problem of remoteness from the centres of cultural production in western capitals. Aboriginal Australian music was recorded on free software and musical tracks were uploaded onto *YouTube* and *MySpace* for distribution. The point here is that even in very unfavourable environments of connectivity, the resilience of *virtuality* constructed possibilities for *hip hop* musicians to place thousands of 'hits' online (Ibid :102). In these sites, it was not simplistically a question of churning out cultural products to the market; *virtuality* offered new prospects for constructing communities of practice with diasporic audiences all over the world.

ICT and the religious ideological intersection

The *virtual reality* of the internet technology allowed the digitization of Africa's diasporic market to be reconstructed by new integrative narratives of religion such as the *tabaski* or *Eid al-Adha* festival. As Nder (2014) reveals, Dakar is a vibrant centre of eight million inhabitants in Senegal where each year: "Each Senegalese, each Muslim, must do everything he can to have a ram, because it's a command from God," Because it is an order from Allah, the *tabaski* became the biggest festival organized on 4 October each year in Senegal comprised of 90% Muslim. During this period of the year each family was required to share a dinner with other citizens even of a different religion such as Christianity by ritually slaughtering at dawn a big and healthy ram, which is a source of great pride to any such family. Hence, prior to this day, a lot of effort was made to fatten up sheep, organize yearly televised beauty contests referred to in Wolof as the *KharBii* or "this sheep" and so forth. Thus about 800,000 sheep and goats were slaughtered with about 250,000 demanded by Dakarians alone (Ibid). Because of this ritually instituted divine order, muslims in Senegal had to go through difficult transactions and, it is at this point that the Senegalese diaspora was summoned to support the national effort.

In 2010, 1.3 billion was remitted by five hundred thousand Senegalese nationals living abroad to support their loved families living at home. This outcome shows that from a religious requirement perspective, diasporic E-commerce in the Senegalese version was created to facilitate the process of conveying money home. In this process, many challenges had to be met by e-commerce start-ups like Niokobok. For example, it was necessary to minimize costs of transference, identify home addresses of beneficiaries correctly, ensure that money sent was not spent to resolve other problems other than what it was intended for, namely, the *tabaski* festival. E-commerce in Senegal offered other openings for E-business. The Senegalese nationals could now shop online for food, solar systems and other types of electronics sourced directly in Senegal to be conveyed to family and friends living there. Before rams and goats together with other accompaniments like potatoes, onions, sauces, etc, were delivered for the *tabaski*. Senegalese clients in the diaspora had the option to view video pictures of the products offered for sale, before they made their selection and purchase. The Senegalese E-business became a virtual technology, a new 'route' where two 'imagined communities' with the same 'root', but living apart, were brought together. Distance was minimized and a feeling of nearness was created when a son living in Paris offered his due for the spiritual growth of his family back home. As Mme Ndiaye living in Guediawaye confirms in Nder (2014): 'When I receive the delivery it is as if he is here in Senegal, and he is delivering it himself...If you have a son who loves you and helps you like this, he is never far away...I thank God and the prophet Mohammed for the deliveries. I'm so grateful to my son, because he's taking care of me.' In addition to Niokobok, other African e-commerce entrepreneurs focusing on the diaspora include Mama Mike's based in Kenya and Jumia which focuses on expatriate Nigerians. Even though E-commerce's placement of diasporic communities dialectizes with a nightmare of logistics, less reliable partners, standardization of consumerist patterns, lack of adequate transport infrastructure, inaccurate mapping challenges and other costs, the 'invisible hand' of virtual reality continues to drive the digital technology to roll out its potentialities and possibilities to the remotest areas of the continent.

Digital *virtuality* also intersected with a moslemic ideology in which the focus was not only on profit but now on the *id-eology* of a global humanity, that is, of Ummah Wide as a brand that crosses nation state, racial, national, religious and ideological borders (Craun 2016). This ideology was itself constructed from ideas of the golden epoch of *hip hop* in the 1990s that embedded Islam, its social consciousness, the autobiography of *MalcolmX* and

information about the Qur'an with its ideas of *Taarif*, and verses where God calls upon mankind to know one another, to address racism and other social ills that divide mankind. Craun (2016) anticipated that the digital media was a powerful tool that could be exploited to connect people together under this ideological banner. As a brand, Ummah Wide covered a vertical space comprised of global Muslim communities, youths living across borders, with different cultural, and lifestyle tastes. Its mission was to achieve the disruption of borders and construct an empowered society of information and connectivity through *websites* and *blogs*. The ideology was to be conveyed through video shootings that told stories from social media, to the web, the television. The idea of shifting from social media to television in order to facilitate storytelling came from digital media business models based on content partnerships (native advertising) and in 2016 this was to expand to include business models of content distribution and licensing around video production, with prospects for a Global Muslim Startup ecology and creative communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and Kuala Lumpur.

The demographics of this digitally ideologized brand expanded across South East Asia, Europe, North America and the Gulf. As Dustin Craun explains, it was to depend on contributions of digital media editors and writers charged with extending the ideological 'faith' across the Western secularism of the sacred and the profane, lifestyles, politics, identities, etc. The idea of regionalizing Islam as if regionalism was "globalism," was rejected in this brand because it ignored the fact that the largest groups of Muslims on the planet live in South East Asia and in Africa. The Ummah Wide brand advocated for a global diaspora (where the *hijab*, the *burqa*, the *chador* could be worn with jeans in New York, for example) that would push peoples' boundaries, and open up to a much broader understanding of the Islamic tradition, diversity of opinion, differences, etc. The biggest challenge from the viewpoint of this ideological brand was to use the digital technology to raise venture capital for a global Muslim market based on data on the "global Islamic economy" from the *World Islamic Economic Summit* and the *Global Islamic Economy Summit*, starting from grassroots communities in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and London, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Amman, and Cairo. The major goal was the emergence of a Global Muslim Economy through the development of a Global Muslim startup ecology with its networks, angel investing infrastructure with the aid of publications translated into Mandarin, Bahasa, Arabic, Russian and French designed to go viral. This project was similar to the construction of digitized faith lines by the Jewish community in the Bay Area organized with the support of incubators that support Jewish entrepreneurs and open doors for the Tel Aviv tech economy, the Jewish community in Silicon Valley. With the aid of journalists, producers, companies, distributors, filmmakers, writers, animators, creatives, designers, etc. connected to each other through the social media, blogs and so on.

The security question

In addition to general security issues (Abbott 2004), the cyberspace is confronted with important legal questions. As Blythe (2011) has confirmed, Argentina experienced rapid growth in internet accessibility and e-commerce, but its e-commerce laws still depended on their old frameworks which needed to be updated. Argentina enacted a digital signature law ("DSL") in 2001 requiring that digital signatures and documents shall be valid in Argentina if they meet stringent security requirements and comply with legal prerequisites for: a handwritten signature; a paper document; an original paper document; and retention of a paper document. In this case, a digital certificate had to be issued by a licensed certification authority (CA) that accurately identified the subscriber. Only then could the CA issue a private 'key' to the subscriber with the certificate, and the CA had to annul the certificate whenever security was compromised. All CAs were to be licensed and regulated by the federal government and could be audited and sanctioned for any legal breaches. CAs could be held accountable for damages incurred by third parties owing to their acts and negligences. The main characteristics of this law include compulsory licensing of CA, the rights and responsibilities of subscribers, compulsory E-governance with free CA services and authorization of registration authorities to work for CAs in the processing of applications for certificates. In this sense, the DSL provides an example of a valid legal foundation for e-commerce; however, as Blythe (2011) recommends, it should be standardized with appendages, a comprehensive electronic transactions law (ETL) should be enacted to include all laws relevant to e-commerce, and e-contract regulations. The validity of the electronic form should be acknowledged in conformity with other requirements of laws on notarization, etc. Removal of all instances of exclusions from coverage, which may potentially allow e-signatures and e-documents to be employed in all situations and appendage of rules for electronic automated contracts and electronic carriage/transportation contracts. There should be consumer protection enforcements for E-buyers, institution of IT courts for resolution of E-commerce disputes and creation of a jurisdiction over foreign E-commerce parties followed by the licensing of post offices as certification authority. A national identity card should contain a digital signature which can be activate by a CA, such as a post office. Laws should be enacted on computer crimes, which should include laws against intentional injection of a virus into a computer system and a law on third-generation E-signature that replaces the first-generation DSL.

Rethinking the ICT leadership

In the next section of this paper, we propose to elucidate technological tools and techniques that can be re-deployed to address the *id*-eological perspectives of e-business, transnation and the diaspora. As Delany (2015) has pointed out, tools that can be deployed include a CiviCRM package for supporter communication and management, a data-manipulation and visualization package, an elections-monitoring package, citizen petition feature, built on the model of the White House's *We the People* platform, a system to view politician's views on issues and a community-improvement module for citizen reporting of problems. We think that this kind of digital organization, which is commonplace in the U.S., can provide potential to support openness in the political realm of the digital diaspora. The use of particular applications like social media, social network, blogs, online video and email advocacy can enable politically marginalized groups to harness the power to build support, spread messages, influence political bodies and policy makers, raise money, get votes and motivate people to act on their behalf. An integrated online strategy would work to integrate online tools with one another and with the organization's overall communications and outreach. This can aim at online advocacy campaigns, email marketing, online fundraising, websites and social media channels after an audit of the political organization has been made. Social media like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Pinterest* and other channels, would aid homegrown organizations to increase the growth of their membership and influence at home and in the diaspora. By increasing email lists, which is a key tool for online communications campaigns, organizations can improve their overall messaging across the transnation and the diaspora and these lists can enable them to boost the response to their advocacy and fundraising requests. By leveraging online advertising channels such as *Facebook* and *Google ads*, together with advertising techniques such as cookie-targeted content advertising. Channels such as Facebook is used to identify needs, write specific documents, and keep the political project on track and on budget. In order to exert online influence and facilitate outreach, prominent bloggers can be identified and other influential people to voice their opinion online in areas of politics relevant to their specialty. This way, they reach out to other people, place their stories and contribute to shape the online discussion around the political issues.

Law is a growing narrative concern of transnationalization that goes beyond the digitized diaspora. It is arguable that regulation (of a governmental, social, institutional, etc, type) of certain electronic commercial activities across nation state boundaries related to the use of commercial *e-mails*, *online advertising* and consumer privacy, may yield optimal results. From this perspective, national standards can be established to regulate direct marketing over e-mail, for example. As is the case in the US (e.g. the Federal Trade Commission Act, the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003) e-mails, advertising, and online advertising, are regulated through prerequisites that demand truthfulness, fairness and non-deception in their practices. The requirements in corporate privacy include security of consumers' personal information. Other Acts regulating nation state-diasporic exchanges (The 2008 Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act, the Controlled Substances Act, the 1991 International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network, the 1996 UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce) addressed biomedical issues of reliability, harmonization of the e-commerce legal framework in transnational contexts in order to uniformize e-commerce across borders, nation state- customer fair trade, co-operation on cross-border transactions, information exchange, etc.

Today, new initiatives (e.g. 1989 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, Econsumer.gov. in 2001, Electronic Commerce Steering Group) have been concerned with stability and security in free trade and open investment, privacy regulations and exposure of complaints about online and other transactions with foreign companies. Guidelines (the Australian Treasury Guidelines for electronic commerce, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission) offer rules and advice on business online and on remedial procedures. Many Authorities (The Financial Services Authority, The Payment Services Directive, the Prudential Regulation Authority, the Financial Conduct Authority, the Payment Services Regulations 2009) raised diasporic questions of customers, provision of payment services, non-bank merchant acquirers, banks, e-money issuers, non-bank credit card issuers, and so forth. etc. The critical point here was prudence. The Information Technology Act of 2000 in India, the Telecommunications Regulations of China and the Electronic Signature Law, raised issues of applicability of e-commerce, regulation of data message, electronic signature authentication and legal liability. The expansion of the digitized diaspora is now taking the form of growth of online shopping, bookshops and travel agencies as the costs, namely, procedural, relational, and financial, experienced by transnational customers drop. E-business expands the horizon of diasporism by enabling commerce to communicate, form transactions at any time and place and open up geophysical barriers, transforming transnationals into potential customers and suppliers. These critical issues triggered other ones like supply chain and logistics with low efficiency of cross-border logistics and the need to set up warehouse centers in nation states to ensure high effectivity, improvement of customer satisfaction and loyalty. E-commerce triggered the three 'flows' (physical flow, financial flow and information flow) of the supply chain in the diasporic context. The physical flows of goods and services improved product and service movement for enterprises. As concerns information flows, e-commerce and the diasporic context optimised information processing, and for the

financial flows, e-commerce enabled more efficient payment and settlement solutions. New capabilities like the ERP systems (e.g. *SAP ERP*, *Xero*, or *Megaventory*) have helped companies to manage operations with customers and suppliers. Yet these new capabilities are still faced with challenges such as political barriers or cross-country changes. The diasporic culture that emerged with globalization brought new ideas and vocabularies such as virtual enterprise, online shopping, virtual bank, network marketing, e-payment and e-advertising, based on the notions of the economy and society as transnation, speed of time, total transparency of information, culture of interactive mechanisms, decrease in information and transaction cost, review mechanisms which help shoppers to decide on the product to purchase and the incorporeal revolution.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to show that it is naïve to reify, overgeneralize or abstract the digital diaspora as a single phenomenon that can be identified with particular histories and cultural 'routes'. The digitalization of the diasporas has multiple sectors of overlap. Digital diasporic 'routes' are very rich with experience which are re-constituted through a complex set of imaginative, affective and emotional practices. These intersections show the multifacetedness of the digital diaspora and points to the fact that the it is not merely an *effect* of colonial and post-colonial history based on technology, for example, but is also a *producer* of history through reading practices and in ways which re-shape new understanding of mankind's technological history of managing knowledge. Nevertheless, how communities interact with technology is never definite but complex. A further understanding of this process would require us to probe into the 'undecidabilities' of imagined communities, for example (Ndi 2015).

Sketch bio

Alfred Ndi holds a *Doctorat d'État* Degree with research interests in digital capitalism and the ideas industry. He investigates how imperial online *signifiers* of capital intersect with knowledge production in the largest sense of political economy and interfaces further with postcolonial critical discourses to spawn power crisis in ICT technologies and cultures.

He is an advocate for a new consultancy model of thought leadership that prioritizes enlightened vision but also nuances online/offline action with the inputs of public intellectualism.

He has published critical papers in several academic journals and books and lectures in University of Bamenda.

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