Habermas in the African e-Village: Deliberative Practices of Diasporan Nigerians on the Internet

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The notion of the public sphere is at the core of the reconstruction of deliberative democracy.¹ In the age of the Internet, deliberative democracy is increasingly instrumentalized through spatially dispersed but nonetheless organic online communities. Mary Chayko calls these “the portability of social connectedness,”² and they have been mushrooming exponentially even in “digital backwaters” of the world such as Africa, that Manuel Castells had gloomily characterized as the “black hole of informational capitalism.”³

Thanks to the ubiquity of Internet-ready mobile devices, several African countries—including Nigeria, the continent’s most populous nation and biggest economy—are active participants in participatory, many-to-many, user-led online communities.

This chapter examines a vibrant Nigerian online community called the “Nigerian Village Square” (www.NigeriaVillageSquare.com). Over the years, this community has functioned as an arena for the vigorous exchange of ideas among Nigerians both at home and in the diaspora, and as a veritable locus for the initiation of petition drives to change or influence state policies in Nigeria. The author argues that several of the deliberative practices of Nigerianvillagesquare.com resonate with—or at least consciously seek to abide by—some features of Habermas’s characterization of the 17th- and 18th-century public spheres in Britain, France, and Germany.

This chapter first gives a brief review of the literature on the public sphere, with a special reference to the conception of the public sphere as popularized by Jürgen Habermas. It next reviews and interrogates the contending theoretical constructions on the deliberative potential and practices—or lack thereof—of the Internet. It also dissects the internal categories of the Habermasian “ideal speech situation” and reviews the trajectory of scholarship that affirms or repudiates the symbolic nexus between the traditional, normative
conception of the public sphere that Habermas theorized, and the dizzyingly\n
dimensional public marketplace of ideas that the Internet enables. The author contends that the Internet, sometimes falling short of the requirements of a normative Habermasian conception of the public sphere, has many respects also created the opportunities for a "robust flowering of a variety of "public spheres," especially transnational, asporic spheres of public discourse.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE CLASSICAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Jürgen Habermas, arguably the most notable of the second-generation mem-

bers of the Frankfurt School, popularized the concept of the public sphere in\nthe English-speaking world when his book The Structural Transformation of the
Public Sphere, first published in 1962, was translated into English in 1989. The\nremarkable popularity of the Internet as a new arena for deliberative practices,\ncoupled with the dramatic corporatization of and disillusionment with both\nthe content and form of the traditional media of mass communication that\nwere hitherto construed as embodying the public sphere, have been incentives\nin the renewed focus on Habermas' theory of the public sphere.

It is noteworthy, however, that although Habermas' theory of the public sphere might be the most influential, it by no means stands alone; there exists a\nmultiplicity of competing conceptions of what constitutes the public sphere.\nAn influential conception of the public sphere that is coeval with but radically\ndifferent from Habermas', for instance, is that of Reinhart Koselleck. Koselleck's\nconcept of the public sphere is found in his historicization of the role that secret\nsocieties such as the Freemasons played in challenging totalitarian authority in\nEurope. By countervailing the totalitarianism prevalent in Europe in the 18th\ncentury, he argued, the secret societies created moral alternatives that expanded\nthe range of discourse in much the same way that the bourgeois public sphere\nHabermas historicized served as counterweights to feudal absolutism.

For John Dewey, an influential American theorist, the public is called into\nbeing by the concatenation of "indirect, extensive, enduring and serious con-
sequences of conjoint and interacting behavior" of individuals and groups in\nthe society. What is noteworthy about Dewey's conception of the public is\nthat, unlike Habermas' and Koselleck's, it is not uncoupled from the state. It\nis beyond the scope of this chapter, however, to explore all the conceptions of\nthe public. Nevertheless, the notion of the public sphere that forms the theo-
retical bedrock of this chapter is that propounded by Habermas. This is be-
cause, as Nancy Fraser argues, "no attempt to understand the limits of actually\nexisting late-capitalist democracy can succeed without in some way or an-
other making use of [Habermas' early conception of the public sphere]."

Habermas (1991: 398) defines the public sphere as follows.

1. The public sphere is an arena of free interaction.
2. The public sphere is a community of discursive engagement.
3. The public sphere is a marketplace of ideas.
4. The public sphere is a site of political action.
5. The public sphere is a forum for public opinion.
By “public sphere” we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of a political public sphere when the public discussions concern objects connected with the practice of the state.

Habermas’s theory derives inspirational strength from a historical juncture during the 17th and 18th centuries in Western Europe—particularly in England, France, and Germany—when coffee houses, salons, societies, the town hall, the village church, the tavern, the public square, convenient barns, union halls, parks, factory lunchrooms, and even street corners became the arenas of debate, political discussion, and action. Habermas extends this to a normative model of popular involvement in the public sphere for contemporary times. He explains that in these venues, everyone had an equal right to speak as if they were equals. In England, for example, the coffee house conferred discursive sanctuary not only on the nobility but also on “the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers.” The dialogue, he posited, transpired in a profoundly democratic forum where the status differentials and positional hierarchies of participants were bracketed, and issues were discussed without external coercion.

The public sphere, Habermas contends, was governed by a moral-practical discourse, and the apparatus for the mediation of this discourse was rational and critical argumentation. His analysis of communication in the archetypal bourgeois public sphere reveals that every participant who engaged in the moral-practical discourse of the time made recourse to a number of normative conditions, which he later called the “ideal speech situation” in his extension of this theory. The requirements to qualify for the Habermasian “ideal speech situation” are:

- The discourse should be independent from state and corporate interferences;
- The exchange of points of views during a discourse should be amenable to criticism and review, and dogmatism should be eschewed;
- Participants in the discourse should demonstrate reflexivity and a willingness to question both their individual assumptions and those of the social milieu in which they live;
• Participants should show a capacity for tolerance, sympathy, and even vicarious identification with points of views that are at variance with theirs and also avoid the use of emotive and insulting language;
• Participants must make an effort to be sincere in their search for the truth; and
• There must be discursive inclusivity and equality.  

It is important to note that Habermas himself has recognized that these are mere ideals that have never been fully realized even in the classical bourgeois public sphere.

Nonetheless, as persuasive as his historicization and idealization of the bourgeois public sphere is, critics from different theoretical and ideological orientations have criticized it. Specifically, it has been criticized as Eurocentric, biased in favor of the bourgeoisie and against the working class, as patriarchal, and as logocentric. Poststructuralists like Lyotard even questioned the functional relevance of Habermas’s model of consensus through rational-critical discourse. He specifically queried the emancipatory and social utility of excessive rationalism in the conduct of discourse for the wider strata of society. The concept is also criticized for instituting a linear, evolutionary, and progressive history of the world that ignores the differential socio-historical experiences of non-Western or, to be sure, non-European societies. It is accused of falsely conferring on the idiosyncrasies of Enlightenment Europe a universality it never possessed, and of consigning the differential temporalities of other societies to the discursive fringes.

Feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser also point out the exclusion of women in Habermas’s public sphere. As Neil McLaughlin observes, a typical participant in the public sphere usually was male, educated, and propertied; with the means and leisure to take part in public discourse. Economically disaffiliated segments of the society that had a need—indeed an obligation—to work hard to survive the vicissitudes and cruelties of the incipient capitalist socioeconomic order did not have the luxury to expend energies and time to participate in the discussions. Certainly, women at that time were either too ensnared by the drudgery of domestic engagements or the suffocating stranglehold of male tyranny and oppression to participate in the discursive indulgence of the public sphere. Several feminist theorists such as Anne Fernald, including a whole host of other critics in an edited volume titled Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse, also point out that the putative discursive openness of Habermas’ public sphere was premised on practices of deliberative omission not only of women but also of other marginal and subordinate groups in the society. Jodi Dean even suggests that Habermas’s account of the bourgeois public sphere was at best apocryphal.

Aside from positing such as Oskar Negt, also instructively call for a public sphere, which the experiences and prejudices of one or multiple publics, publics but the society such as the and the symbolic utility of computer-mediated has been shifted from the Enlightenment a crucial change in the when it is seen in relation the status of public the discourse.

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THE INTERNET

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Aside from poststructuralist, postcolonial, and feminist critics, other critics such as Oskar Negri, Alexander Kluge, Nancy Fraser, and Michael Warner also instructively call attention to Habermas’s privileging of a hegemonic public sphere, which they argue was structured to be congenial only to the preferences and prejudices of people who occupy the upper end of the social scale. In place of one overarching, dominant public sphere, they postulate the concept of multiple public spheres that are not only oppositional to the hegemonic public sphere but that also incorporate the aspirations of marginal groups in the society such as the working class, women, and racial and sexual minorities. The symbolic utility of their argument in terms of contemporary scholarship in computer-mediated communication is that the landscape of the public sphere has been shifted from a historic-transcendental veneration of Europe during the Enlightenment to a multiplicity of trans-historical loci of discourses. This crucial change in the notion of the public sphere assumes its full consequence when it is seen in relation to the Internet, which, in many ways, defies simplistic spatial and temporal categorizations, and encompasses a robust array of spheres of discourses in ways that are probably unparalleled in human history.

Now, how does the Internet relate with classical notions of the public sphere and how does it depart from it? Do Internet chat rooms, e-zines, news groups, electronic bulletin boards, and cyber salons qualify to be labeled modern-day public spheres? What conditions must they fulfill to approximate the status of public spheres? The next section addresses how some scholars have answered these questions.

**The Internet and the Public Sphere**

Although it is obvious that Habermas did not envision the Internet when he formulated his theory of the public sphere, his caution against “Athens envy” in his subsequent work no doubt anticipates the debates about the deliberative capacities of the Internet. Habermas—in an important extension of his theory of the public sphere—argued that if democracy is to be implemented in today’s diverse and complex world, then society has to learn to adjust to the reality of the impossibly a spatially bounded agglomeration of mutually consenting members in the public sphere. Instead, he proposes that citizens who are not necessarily physically co-present can develop forms of communication that dispense with the necessity for corporeal presence. Although Habermas did not specifically refer to the Internet when he said this, many communication scholars have interpreted him as affirming the deliberative potential of the Internet. As Heinz Brandenburg instructively observed,

[I]t is not the case that Habermas himself or deliberative theorists went on the search to discover an effective and inclusive forum of public
deliberation on a mass scale and came across the Internet. It is rather
the other way around: namely that early cyber-enthusiasts quickly em-
braced Habermas' notion of the public sphere and the theory of delib-
erative democracy and began to claim that the Internet provides just
that: a virtual public sphere.23

One of the most notable early cyber-theorists who rhapsodized over
the emancipatory and deliberative potential of the Internet was Howard Rhein-
gold.24 Rheingold popularized a cyber-enthusiastic vision of the electronic
agora, or what Robin and Webster have characterized as the vision of an
"Athens without slaves."25 Rheingold believes that Internet technology,
"if properly understood and defended by enough citizens, does have demo-
cratizing potential in the way that alphabets and printing presses had demo-
cratizing potential. 26 He postulates that the formation of virtual communities
on the Internet provides the chance to revitalize the public sphere, and that
the chance to do this has been put back in the hands of the public in a
manner that is unparalleled in the records of human democratic progress. One
of the main benefits of the Internet, he said, is the wide latitude it gives its
users to find others who share similar interests, concerns, and worries with
them. He made the point that although a person cannot, for instance, simply
pick up a phone and ask to be connected with someone who wants to talk
about Islamic art or Californian wine, but a person can join a newsgroup on
any of those topics and converse with the people there, either privately or
publicly.

Rheingold, in spite of his faith in the strengths and promises of the Inter-
net, was cautious not to draw a mechanical link between the normative pub-
clic sphere and the Internet, preferring to use the word "potential." Hubertus
Buchstein was less restrained. He was certain that the Internet is the Haber-
masian public sphere reincarnated in an electronic form. He contends that it
"looks like the most ideal speech situation."27 Douglas Kellner also states that
the Internet has "produced new public spheres and spaces for information,
debate, and participation that contain the potential to invigorate democracy
and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas."28 Simi-
larly, Hauben and Hauben, from their empirical inquiry into the discursive
practices of Usenet groups and other forms of deliberation on the Web, con-
clude that the Internet expands the range and diversity of communication
and viewpoints "through the freewheeling and rambling discussion" that it
enables.29

Several other scholars, however, do not share in the optimism of these cyber-
enthusiasts. Dahlberg, for instance, on the basis of an empirical research,
concludes that the gains of Internet discussion groups in terms of opening up new
vistas for advancing the concept of the public sphere are vitiated by the
growing commercialization of the corporate concerns.20 He is hallmarked by a
dearth in authenticating identity in Internet discussion groups, online political forums,
individuals and groups from the ascription of the introduction to Resisting
substitutes for face-to-face debate.

There are scholars who argue that a balance between the ethnocentrism of
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Habermasian of the African Village

The Nigeriavillage is one of the most significant social formations in Africa and in the diaspora. It is a place where the deliberative and democratic processes that characterize the social formation when everyone contributes to the communal well-being, and after a hard day's work, everyone comes together to share in the community's common spaces, such as the village square, the public library, and the local bar. In the Nigeriavillage, individuals and groups from the ascription of the introduction to Resisting Habermasian of the African Village.

The reincarnation of the Nigeriavillage and Habermasian of the African Village.

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growing commercialization and commoditization of cyberspace by state and corporate concerns. He also notes that the Internet as presently constituted is hallmarked by a dearth of reflexivity, a deficit of mutual tolerance, difficulty in authenticating identity claims and information put forward by participants in Internet discussion groups, the disaffiliation of large sections of people from online political forums, and the monopolization of cyber-discourse by a few individuals and groups. Dahlberg contends therefore that this reality detracts from the ascription of the status of public sphere to the Internet. In their introduction to Resisting the Virtual Life, Brook and Boal were even harsher in their critique of the Internet. They say it is “pernicious” when it is deployed as “substitutes for face-to-face interactions.”

There are scholars such as Susan O’Donnell, however, who strike a happy balance between the cyber-enthusiasts and the cyber-skeptics. O’Donnell’s research applies the public sphere concept to the Internet and argues that although the Internet does have democratizing potential it often fails as a public sphere in practice. How do these views relate to an actual, extant site of discourse on the Internet?

THE NIGERIAN VILLAGE SQUARE AS A COLLABORATIVE, HABERMASIAN ONLINE COMMUNITY

The NigeriaVillagesquare.com was founded in 2003 by a group of immigrant Nigerians based in the United States. The main figure associated with the site is Philip Adekunle, a Chicago-based computer information systems specialist. The Web site was created to serve as a locus for the untrammeled exchange of ideas and opinions about the homeland by Nigerians both in Africa and in the diaspora. It is the reinvention, in an electronic form, of the deliberative content of the “village square” in the precolonial African social formation where “people from all corners [met] at the Village Square after a hard day’s work to sip unadulterated palm-wine, share news, gossip, jokes, music, dance, events and opinions.” In many respects, the precolonial African village square that the owners of this Web site reference has many resonances with the early European bourgeois public sphere that Habermas historicized; only that the African village square was premodern, pre-bourgeois, and did not function as a counterweight to the ruling class, nor did it have any purposive, codified, normative ideals that guided its deliberative practices. It was a core cultural institution, however, that was crucial to the intergenerational perpetuation of traditions, customs, and mores, which were disrupted with the advent of colonialism.

The reincarnated village square in electronic form, however, both replicates and transcends the structures and discursive practices of its predecessor. Although the NigeriaVillagesquare.com site has guidelines on the form of
articles to be posted on its front pages and in its discussion forums, the site is largely unmoderated. It accepts opinion articles, news commentaries, trivia, and even fictional creative writing from all Nigerians and non-Nigerians interested in Nigerian affairs. Contributors to the site do not have to be subscribers or registered users to submit articles, although they must register to participate in online discussions of materials posted on the site. This speaks to the site's inclusivity.

Although the site is not primarily a news site, it publishes breaking news stories, has a citizen media project called "i-Witness," which collates reports from citizen reporters from all over Nigeria—especially during periods of conflicts—and it often is the interim medium for many of Nigeria's robust diasporan citizen media projects. Many of the strictly news citizen media sites still share their news stories on the Village Square's message boards, and a great number of politically consequential citizen reports that went on to change state policy started on this site.

The site also has links to the Web addresses of major Nigerian newspapers that have an online presence, it periodically posts high-impact and controversial news stories both from the domestic newspapers and from diasporan online newspapers on its front page, and it invites discussion from subscribers. This feature has made it one of the most popular Internet sites for Nigerians both at home and in the diaspora. The debates in the site's forums are not only robust, and sometimes frenzied, even emotional, but also evince a studious concern for civility in public discourse.

Because Internet deliberation is easily susceptible to degeneration into ad hominem attacks, the site has what it calls the "Nigerian Village Square Publishing Guide," which not only gives instructions on how commentaries should be posted on the site but also provides the ground rules for deliberation. It stresses the importance of eschewing emotive language and embracing what Habermas would call rational-critical debate. One of the mechanisms established to ensure that this rule is observed is the formation of what is called the "village dumpster" where articles, comments, and discussions that are deemed irreverent or overly personal and insulting are consigned. The decision about what posts should be pushed to the "village dumpster" often is arrived at through the votes of registered members of the site. This structural check has imposed self-moderation on many discussions in the forum, but it also occasionally raises allegations of majoritarian tyranny.

It is instructive that, over the years, the site has transformed from being a mere cyber salon for quotidian dialogic disputations to a close-knit, many-to-many, collaborative cyber community where deliberations and decisions about national politics take place. In 2006, for instance, when former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo wanted to manipulate the national legislature to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a third term, "villagers," as members of the Internet petition drive that tens of thousands of Nigerians and the speaker of the then president when he was in the Nigerian national assembly's third-term bill.

Similarly, in the case of Osamuyi Aikpitie, the "villagers" not only raised money and sent a group of representatives to the family if need be, a typical issue was elections in Spain. At last, the murder of the leader of the opposition government while the petition drive was ongoing. The "villagers," a community self-organized that was unconnected to the government, directed the petition drive that tens of thousands of Nigerians and the speaker of the then president when he was in the Nigerian national assembly's third-term bill.
as members of the discussion forums on the site call themselves, started an Internet petition drive to stop the move. They generated petitions from thousands of Nigerians in the diaspora and contributed money to send a representative to deliver the petition to the president of the Nigerian Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives. It was also delivered to the president when he visited the United States. This move generated publicity in the Nigerian national media and contributed to the defeat of the president's third-term bid.

Similarly, in the same year, when a Nigerian immigrant by the name of Osamuyia Aikpitanhi was murdered by Spanish immigration officers, the "villagers" not only vigorously deliberated on the issue, they contributed money and sent a delegation to Spain to demand an explanation of the circumstances that led to the death of their compatriot. The delegation also met with the parents of the deceased and gave them a $1,200 check that the "villagers" contributed. It was robustly covered by Nigeria's biggest, state-run television network, the Nigerian Television Authority, more popularly known by its initialism, NTA. The Nigerian Village Square delegation also had a meeting with Nigerian government officials and got the president and the Nigerian legislature to request that Spanish authorities explain the circumstances that surrounded the death of the Nigerian and to pay compensation to the family if need be. Weeks after this visit, what would have been an ignored issue was elevated to a major diplomatic row between Nigeria and Spain. At last, the Spanish government created a commission to investigate the murder of the Nigerian and issued an interim apology to the Nigerian government while the investigation was in progress.

The "villagers," many of whom have never met except through the virtual village square, directly intervene in many other domestic political issues. Another prominent example of their collaborative political activism was the petition drive that they started in the village square in the midpoint of 2007 to force the then Nigerian vice president Goodluck Jonathan (who later became president) to declare his assets. Although the Nigerian constitution does not require public officials to declare their assets publicly, Nigeria's then newly elected president, in a bid to show his seriousness in fighting corruption, publicly declared his assets for the first time in the country's history. This singular act earned him praise, but it also paved the way for citizens to demand the same forthrightness from other elected representatives. The vice president insisted that because he was under no constitutional obligation to declare his assets publicly, he would not be railroaded into doing so. Again, members of the Nigerian Village Square started a petition drive to which hundreds of Nigerians in the diaspora appended their signatures. A representative physically went to Nigeria not only to deliver the petition but to attract wide media attention to this event. This pressure contributed to
forcing the vice president to publicly declare his assets. Efforts were doubled
to shame other well-placed public officers into also publicly declaring their
assets.

The media attention that the interventionist activities of members of the
Nigerian villagesquare.com has generated has given it a lot of visibility and
clout in government circles, and many well-known personalities in govern-
ment are known to be registered members of the forum either anonymously
or under their full names. A case in point is that of a Mr. Olusegun Adeniyi,
who was the spokesman for the late Nigerian president, Umar Musa Yar’adua.
In the wake of withering attacks against him in the village square over a frivo-
rous trip he had taken to the United States, he appeared in the forum under
his own name to defend himself. In no way, however, can this be construed
as an infiltration of the forum by government. On the contrary, it represents
a dialogue with citizens who ordinarily would not have had the privilege to
engage in this deliberative exchange had they sought the traditional means of
communication with the government.

As most scholars argue, at the heart of most conceptions of the public
sphere—especially the Habermasian one—is the idea of conversation, which
this Internet forum seems to enhance in more ways than spatially bounded
notions of deliberation can. Indeed many scholars contend that conversation
in the public sphere is a precondition for democracy. Michael Schudson, for
instance, notes that “[d]emocracy is government by discussion.” Bruce Ack-
erman also states that “[d]ialogue is the first obligation of citizenship.”
This Internet discussion group does certainly make possible the type of categories
necessary for most, if not all, of Habermas’s “ideal speech situation” to occur.

CONCLUSION

The communicative acts that take place in this Nigerian virtual village
square confirm, to a large degree, that the Internet is capable of facilitating
discourse that replicates the central construction of rational-critical debate
and that, in a variety of ways, approximate the prerequisites of the Haber-
masian public sphere. It is discursively inclusive, as evidenced in its policy of not
moderating its discussions and in not requiring that potential contributors of
articles to the site be registered members. Participation also is entirely voluntary
and is not the product of coercion by government or corporate interests,
and the site’s deliberative practices so far have impacted governance in the
homeland. What is more, although members of the forum come from different
social backgrounds—including professors in United States, United King-
dom, and Nigerian universities; engineers; doctors; students; and Nigeria-based
working-class people—there has not been any record of open social discrimi-
nation in the discursive enterprise. Although the main preoccupation of
the forum is politics in the homeland, however, it also features short-story fiction and trivia and sometimes can get bogged down by petty personality disputes.

Bohman notes that a crucial deficiency of Internet public spaces is that they have no linkages with structures of power, a condition, he says, that divests them of the capacity to "secure the conditions of publicity but also in order to promote the interaction among publics that is required for deliberative democracy." Bohman's arguments are difficult to sustain when applied to the Nigerian Village Square because the activities of this Internet site generate a lot of media attention in Nigeria.

Nancy Fraser's recent exposition of what constitutes a transnational public sphere also strengthens the case for the Nigerian Village Square to be ascribed the status of a transnational online public sphere. According to Fraser, "a public sphere is supposed to be a vehicle for mobilizing public opinion as a political force. It should empower the citizenry vis-à-vis private powers and permit it to exercise influence over the state." This site's continually productive engagements with the Nigerian state on domestic policy issues certainly elevate it to a politically consequential public sphere.

Admittedly, however, the relative numerical inferiority of this Internet-based public sphere, and the uncertainty whether it can sustain its activities, potentially detract from its potency. Similarly, although many contributors to the forum are identifiable by their names, others use anonymous handles. Scholars have debated whether the incidence of anonymity on the Internet invalidates the notion of conversation in news groups and chat rooms in the real sense of the word. This concern is perfectly legitimate but, as Dean reminds us, "anxieties around authenticity on the Net function primarily to reassure our trust in the authenticity of other sorts of mediated interactions, indeed, to pathologize our justifiable paranoia." The point, therefore, is that although some of the Internet's shortcomings significantly detract from the Habermasian status of the public sphere that many scholars ascribe to it, there are certainly important respects in which it fulfils this requirement, as the analysis of the Nigerian Village Square suggests.

The foregoing, though, does not seek to institute the relative discursive openness of the Nigerian Village Square as representative of the sort of interaction that takes place on all Nigerian online media forums. Although several such examples abound on the Internet, there is also a multiplicity of Web sites that do not have deliberative democracy—or anything remotely related to such democracy—as their raison d'être. It is incontestable that the Internet meshes with existing and preexisting social functions and extends them in many fresh and new ways, but it does not fit easily in comparison to characteristically modern organizations or stereotypically idyllic early modern social and cultural institutions such as the Habermasian public sphere.
The new peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the Internet can become intelligible only if a conceptual frame of reference is adopted that does not limit the discussion of the Internet from the outset to predetermined and pre-given patterns of interpretation. More importantly, the Nigerian Village Square has shown the possibility for the coexistence between online communities and citizen journalism. The site provides the platform for citizen reports, for discussions about politics in the homeland, and for direct action. This fits the outlines of the traditional conceptions of alternative journalism. The Village Square, however, is a loose collection of disparate people and interests that are not all united by notions of progressive ideology. In more ways than one, it problematizes the boundaries between alternative and citizen journalism in that it provides an arena for both forms of interaction.

NOTES


2. See Mary Chyko (2008), Portable Communities: The Social Dynamics of Online and Mobile Connectedness (Albany: SUNY Press).


4. The Frankfurt School, also known as the Institute of Social Research, was founded in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923 by German Jewish Marxists Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and Erich Fromm. As a result of Nazi persecution, they fled Germany and went into exile first in Geneva and later to California and to Columbia University in New York. For a discussion of the influence they brought to bear on the social sciences and philosophy, see Neil McLaughlin, “Origin Myths in the Social Sciences: Fromm, the Frankfurt School and the Emergence of Critical Theory,” Canadian Journal of Sociology 24 (1) (1999): 109–39.

5. Habermas (1989), The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.


8. For other influential conceptions of the public sphere, see, for instance, Hanna Arendt’s The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), Walter
Lipmann’s *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1922). For an excellent comparison of the different traditions of public sphere theorizing, see Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (MIT Press, 1992). Benhabib delineates three models of the public sphere and associates them with the work of particular theorists. She calls the first model, represented by the work of Hanna Arendt, the agonistic model. She characterizes the second model, represented by the work of Ackerman, as the legalistic model, and labels the third model, represented by the work of Habermas, as the discursive model.


10. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 33.


15. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 80–56.


24. Howard Rheingold's seminal text, The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993): 279, provides, in the view of many scholars, the first systematic, scholarly reflection on online sociability and the democratizing promise of the Internet. The book basically is a recounting of Rheingold's experiential encounters with online environments, particularly with the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link—one of the Internet's earliest bulletin board systems).


26. Rheingold, The Virtual Community, 279.


30. Lincoln Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere."


34. Ibid. For another insightful fictional reconstruction of precolonial deliberative practices in what were called village squares in Nigeria and, by extension, Africa, read Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart.


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When Recounting the Past

Stephanie Solomon

This chapter is an overlooked as a producer, how we understand our interactions with coworkers and neighbors, friends or coworkers, and how our perceptions of the communication process is affected by the time in nonverbal communication.

Before discussing the first examines how time there are two main orientations: "polychronic" (a monochronic view) to focus on the present. Conversely, people on several different on P time can have different guidelines for communication. Also, less of an emphasis on punctuality. This sense of orientational to punctuality. Consequently, interaction in which we participate in our interperson