PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

IN A GLOBAL ERA

EDITED BY
SCOTT NICHOLAS ROMANIUK AND MARGUERITE MARLIN

Democracy and Civil Society in a Global Era

Democracy and Civil Society in a Global Era addresses institutional and societal barriers to building a more active and engaged citizenry. It examines the challenges to fostering a culture of peace and non-violence, to the lessening of fear and insecurity, and to leading more dignified lives in regions as diverse as the Indian subcontinent, Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Iran, China, the Middle East, Nigeria, and the EU, with a focus on the commonality and universality of the obstacles faced by regions around the globe.

Presenting a dynamic combination of theory and field research, this book demonstrates how social movements can introduce and strengthen equality, inclusion, accountability, and the free flow of information—and how these elements, in turn, contribute to the acculturation of freedom and social justice in both the developed and developing worlds. Rather than another vague exploration of ideas and processes, this is a book about action, and will be required reading for policymakers, think tanks, and development practitioners.

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Chapter 5

The Public Sphere and Practice of Democracy in Nigeria: The Context and Contribution of the Nigerian Diaspora

Kudus Oluwatoyin Adebayo and Emeka Thaddues Njoku

In this chapter, the context and contribution of the Nigerian diaspora in the transformation of Nigeria's public sphere is examined. Relying mainly on secondary materials, the chapter contends that Nigeria's public sphere has taken a transnational turn. The "public sphere," as articulated by Jürgen Habermas, has inspired critical debates on democratic theory in the social and political sciences since it was proposed in 1962. Although Habermas' vision of an ideal deliberative social space was criticized on many fronts, its relevance continues to endure. Several factors may account for this, ranging from the theoretical depth of the idea itself to its multidisciplinary applicability. In the context of this chapter, however, the value of the public sphere as a social and political idea lies in its recognition of civil society as a core constituent element of practicing democracies.

In Fraser's (1990: 57) interpretation, the public sphere "designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction." As key participants in the discursive realm, civil society shapes public discourse and produces public opinion through rational communicative exchanges. While the public sphere represents the sociopolitical organization for articulation of autonomous views directed at influencing political institutions, civil society is the organized expression of these views (Castells 2008). Civil society bridges the gap between the state and the society by expanding avenues for rational discussions and improving the quality of public debates.

By partaking in "public talk," civil society helps bring the state and citizens more closely together to engage over diverse ideas and conflicting interests; this relationship, notes Castells (2008), is the cornerstone of democracy.

While confusion persists on what sort of social groupings actually constitute civil society—a confusion that has now been complicated by the ascendance of the idea of global civil society, occasioned by prevailing contexts of deterritorialization, boundary disappearance and realities of unbounded "-scapes" and social spaces (Schiller et al. 1992; Appadurai 1996; Bartelson 2006)—certain groups may reasonably be considered as one, including transnational diaspora communities. In fact, evidence supporting "diaspora as civil society" dots existing literature on transnational diaspora hometown associations and self-helps in host societies (Mercer et al. 2008; Heath 2009), and in studies exploring diaspora–homeland development practices (Sørensen 2007; Judge and Plaen 2011; Plaza and Ratha 2011). Although most of the civil society engagements of transnational diaspora communities are clustered around remittances and social assistance issues, political engagement has also become important among diaspora populations. In developing democracies across Africa, politically oriented civic engagement has assumed greater importance due to the advent of the Internet and growing accessibility to—and adoption of—information technologies. Through the use of social media platforms and by participating actively in online discussions, a growing number of the African diaspora population are joining the ranks of "netizens" or "digital diasporas" in order to shape the public spheres of their home countries (Brinkerhoff 2009; Everett 2009; see Bernal 2005, 2006 for detailed study of the Eritrean diaspora).

By first describing the contribution of the Nigerian diaspora in Nigeria's democratization process and then analyzing their recent online homeland-oriented political discourses and practices, we bring into focus the participation of foreign-based Nigerians in enshrining democracy and in shaping the practice of democratic ideals in Africa's most populous country.

Diaspora and Democratization in Nigeria

During the colonial and postcolonial historical epochs, the African diaspora made significant contributions to the attainment of statehood and state-building in many African countries. From the early eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Africans were either forced out of their homeland through the slave trade or were compelled due to the quest for educational or employment opportunities in the Western world (Adi 2000). Interestingly, this coerced and consensual congregation of Africans in a new setting created a unique form of political consciousness—particularly on issues that related to their homeland (Papastergiadis 2000). Similarly, Van der Veer (1995: 5) states that "the marginal position of the migrant and the special qualities of group formation among exiles seem in general to play a significant role in the formulation of a nationalist discourse." The African diaspora of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was credited for its immense contributions to the establishment of pan-Africanist ideologies, established in response to racism and the quest for the decolonization of African states (Adi 2000; Blake 2005). Moreover, in the twentieth century, the writings of James Africanus Beale Horton and Edward Blyden expedited the idea of West African nationalism—an idea that attracted West African intellectuals (Langley 1973: 37). By the 1920s, the increased cognizance of a West African nationalism aided the formation of three major organizations in Ghana, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom: namely, the National

Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), formed in 1920; the Nigerian Progress Union (NPU), created in 1924; and the West African Student Union, established in 1925. These organizations became the major vehicles for the idea of West African nationalism. Moreover, among its contemporaries, WASU grew to become a formidable force not only in the political socialization of young Africans in the UK, but a major anti-colonial force (Olusanya 1982: 19). According to Adi (2000: 75–76), WASU championed the concept of West African nationalism by nurturing "a healthy nationalist sentiment throughout West Africa." The struggle of these groups paid off in the 1960s, as many African states became independent politically.

Furthermore, the postcolonial era saw another wave of African diaspora, many of whom were forced into self-exile by despotic governments. Akyeampong (2000: 204) stresses that the emergence of military rule in the 1960s, economic crisis, stymied expectations, and civil wars contributed to the destabilization of a newly independent African nation and consequently led to "new waves of political and economic refugees" that migrated to the West. Hence, a new form of African diaspora was established. Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002: 231) best captured this when they stated that:

> A related element of political activity in diaspora is around democratisation and human rights. As some states have entered progressive legitimacy crises they have tended to clamp down on political dissent, which can escalate into violence and murder. In turn this sets up waves of out-migration either as people flee the potential risk of persecution or leave as formal political refugees. While far from perfect, their diasporic location may permit them the political space to lobby against repressive regimes; a space which is flatly denied to them at home . . . Indeed, one could argue further that given the geographical and political closeness of the diaspora to the centres of global decision-making in London, Paris, New York and Washington it should be better placed to lobby for changes in development policy towards the continent.

As with most other African countries, the debacle that characterized the postcolonial states in the 1960s to the 1980s—consisting of such institutional and policy failures as those that accompanied the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the socio-economic underdevelopment or disparity, and augmentation of dictatorial administrations—facilitated the mass departure of consummate Nigerians to the developed world. Remarkably, this period also saw the emergence of a vibrant civil society that advocated for democratic governance, accountability, transparency, and respect for the principle of rule of law in Nigeria. Aiyede (2003) contends that the general dissatisfaction by the people in the processes of governance provided a fecund site for civil society organizations to strive. Hence, such groups as the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), civil liberties organizations (CLO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), etc. surfaced and came up with creative strategies to resist despotic and corrupt administrations.

Similarly, the diaspora groups were equally involved in the struggle for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This was more evident in the aftermath of the annulled June 12, 1993, presidential elections. This period saw the birth of diaspora groups such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON), the United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDF), and Radio Kudirat, a short radio program

pioneered by Wole Soyinka to criticize the government. According to Shettima (1999), within this period there were no fewer than 100 Nigerian pro-democracy groups in the US, UK, and Canada. According to Kperogi (2011: 112), these organizations were "a central and symbolic locus of political mobilization in the long and arduous struggle to dislodge totalitarian military regimes in Nigeria in the 1990s."

Civil Society, Internet, and Diasporic Public Sphere

To the extent that it contributes toward the discursive environment known as the public sphere, civil society continues to be critical to the both the development and survival of democracy. Civil society promotes the practice of democracy as a system of collective discussion, exchange, and action, and facilitates the process through which the public refine expectations and make demands on the state (Diamond 1994, cited in Aiyede 2003; Fraser 2007). It has been observed that much of the literature tends to focus on civil society within a particular society. This, note Hall and Trentmann (2005), has benefits of depth but risks a loss of perspective on the changing overall contours of the civil society debate. In this regard, Fraser (2007) argues that current mobilizations of public opinion rarely terminate at the borders of states, with implications that manifestations of civil society have multiplied and transnationalized. Castells (2008) identified at least four modes of civil society formations: the first is local civil society that defend local or sectoral interests (i.e. grassroots organizations); the second is nongovernmental organizations with global or international frame of reference in both actions and goals (i.e. the so-called "global civil society"); third are social movements aiming to control process of globalization that build networks of action and organization to induce global social movements for global justice (i.e. the Zapatistas); and fourth are movements of public opinion that operate within a diversified media system and employ Internet and wireless communications as organizing tools and means for debate, dialogue, and collective decision-making (i.e. networked mobilizers against the Iraq war).

On the ground that the last three manifestations of civil society are underlain by similar globalizing processes, the question of whether Castells' (2008) typifications constitute meaningfully distinguishable categorization can be raised. Nonetheless, Castells was right to make this distinction between global–local focus/orientated actions of civil society. Both in form and action, diasporic civil society straddles local and global spaces. Through identification with the homeland, diasporas (wherever dispersed) often direct their civic engagements toward home countries and invest in homeland politics by drawing upon globalizing structures that blur the lines between here and there. An extrapolative undertaking that regroups Castells' typifications into two broad (local and global) forms will conceive diaspora civil society as a "third way." Because of their multi-spatial dispersion, diaspora civil society are globally situated (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997), although participation in the public sphere is mostly locally oriented—tending primarily toward the homeland.

While residing abroad, strong attachment to—and interest in—homeland publics, politics, and wider public sphere constitute motivations for engagement (Gillespie 1998). The Internet has been a critical part of diasporic civil service participation in homeland politics. Political participation is a core research theme in recent studies on the Internet and online behaviors. In studying online politics, DiMaggio et al. (2001) observe that the literature has developed from the stages of unjustifiable euphoria and unjustified skepticism to the gradual realiza-

tion that the Internet does possess unique and politically significant properties. As a growing substructure within an established system of political communication, the Internet accentuates the sprawling character of the public sphere as it permits rational political deliberation while also offering alternative space for challenging established power (Dahlgren 2005). The argument has been made that the Internet can promote the practice of deliberative democracy as it "will enhance the quality of political discussion and the viability, meaningfulness, and diversity of the public sphere by lowering the access barrier to meaningful public speech" (DiMaggio et al. 2001: 321). Also, the transnational public sphere established using the Internet transcends and sets itself apart from the Habermasian public sphere, because it accommodates diverse identities and multiple participatory cultures (Dahlgren 2005).

The attraction of diaspora civil society to the Internet cannot be divorced from the possibilities it holds for the development of an alternative public sphere. More than anything else, the Internet has helped in overcoming the boundaries of time and space and provides the infrastructure necessary for deliberation and discussion among special interest groups, ad hoc pressure groups, or cyber protesters (Grbeša 2003). Bernal (2005) especially emphasized that diaspora and cyberspace are linked because of shared images of "displacement" and the feeling of "community" it engenders—be they real or imagined. Elsewhere, the same author showed that diasporas appropriate the Internet to set up "a transnational public sphere where they produce and debate narratives of history, culture, democracy and identity" (Bernal 2006: 162). Describing how Eritrean diaspora appropriate the Internet, Bernal (2006) explains how the Internet-facilitated, transnational pathway is used to mobilize demonstrators, raise funds for war, debate the content and formation of constitution, and also influence the government of Eritrea. Thus, in accordance with the precepts of the Habermasian public sphere, Eritreans online construct a national space within cyberspace for the purpose of circulating views about homeland politics.

It is worth noting that the structure of the Internet accommodates varied forms of public spheres. In light of the fact that Habermas' public sphere failed to recognize non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres (Fraser 1990), Dahlgren (2005) identifies at least five sectors of Net-based public spheres. First, there is the *version of e-government* in which government representatives interact with citizens employing top-down tactics. Second, there is the *advocacy/activist domain* where organizations frame issues using generally shared perceptions, values, and goals for the purposes of political intervention. Third, the Internet-based public sphere can take the form of *civic forums* wherein citizens exchange views and deliberate issues of mutual interest. The civic forum is considered the paradigmatic version of public sphere on the Internet. The *pre-political or parapolitical domain* is the fourth of Dahlgren's Net-based public spheres. Here, the main topics discussed revolve around commonly shared social and cultural issues, although political issues are sometimes interwoven in the discussions. The final sector identified is the *journalism domain*, which is constituted by major news organizations—from online/offline news media to Web news crowding sites and blogs. Dahlgren (2005) was quick to note that the journalistic domain is a core element of the public sphere on the Internet. Suffice it to note that while the different sectors of the Net-based public sphere may be conceptually distinguishable, it is possible for most (or even all) the domains to blend into one another or manifest conterminously through the activities of a single diaspora civil society. Much of this will be substantiated in the next section through the analysis of practices of Nigerian diaspora civil society.

Nigeria's Declining Public Sphere: Diaspora to the Rescue?

The participation of civil society in the public sphere is critical to the practice and survival of democracies. Civil society intersects with the development of a vibrant democracy by providing clarity across positions and facilitating the processes of deliberation that will over time entrench what Guidry and Sawyer (2003) called "contentious pluralism" in the societal political architecture. Yet, civil society may not necessarily succeed at sustaining "contentious pluralism" once established.

As shown in the previous section, civil society contributed immensely to Nigeria's democratization in the years following the economic collapse and political repression of the 1980s. After the handover of power to civilians by the military on May 1999, locally based civil society has since been set on a path of decline. This has negatively impacted the quality of deliberation in the public sphere (Kperogi 2011). The development of a full-fledged diaspora civil society can be traced to this context of decline, with grave implications for the transnationalization of the public sphere. Indeed, as Castells (2008) observed, the crisis of the national public sphere makes the emergence of an international public sphere particularly relevant. In a recent assessment, Kperogi (2011) argues that Nigerian online diaspora media emerged from the ashes of a dying media tradition that hitherto succeeded in pressing for the demilitarization of the government of Nigeria. For pro-democracy NGOs and other civil society organizations, the percolation of militaristic tendencies across all segments of society affected their constitution and modes of operation (Aiyede 2003), thus preventing them from making meaningful contributions to the public sphere.

Although homeland political engagement appropriating the Internet took off in the 1990s, the participation of Nigerian diasporic civil society in the national public sphere began much earlier—spanning colonial and postcolonial periods. With the Internet, however, the cyberspace provided an avenue for Nigerian diasporic civil society to establish a transnational public sphere with which deliberation over matters of national interests was carried out. From the 1990s, Nigerians in the United States assembled in cyberspace using multiple Web platforms (Bastian 1999) and reconstructed imaginations of the homeland and identities. In the period between the annulled elections in 1993 up until 1999, democracy and other matters of political significance were discussed vigorously in chat rooms. Their online activities throughout the 1990s helped lay the foundation for what was to come (Adebayo 2014).

Before narrowing to a single case, it is fruitful to point out that the Internet-based practices of Nigerian diaspora civil society contributing to the emergence of transnational public sphere have different manifestations. It has manifested in terms of mobilizing or organizing transnationally to protest against the state, as occurred during the 2012 fuel subsidy protest. In response to the government's decision to remove subsidies from petroleum products in January 2012, Nigerian diaspora communities organized protests in cities across Europe and America and recorded images and videos that were later circulated on popular social media sites (Adebayo 2014; Akanle et al. 2014). While it lasted, protest spaces were littered with placards that communicated diaspora preferences while diasporic public performances were used to express solidarity with citizens at home. Another recent instance of diaspora-initiated mobilization was the worldwide protest that trailed the kidnapping of over 250 schoolgirls in Chibok Town by Boko Haram in April 2014. Armed with a simple Twitter hashtag #bringbackourgirls inscribed on cardboard sheets, the Nigerian diaspora successfully staged one of the most massive social media mobilization efforts of recent times, attracting solidarity

from political leaders around the world—including the US—as well as high-profile visits to Nigeria from figures such as the Nobel Laureate and Malala Yousafzai. Meanwhile, diaspora civil society could also manifest itself in terms of monitoring the activities of Nigerian public figures or government activities in places of settlement, and ensuring that discoveries are circulated as appropriate. A good example of this was when the US-based diaspora obtained and made public evidence of fraudulent accumulations by members of the Nigerian political class in the United States (Kperogi 2011).

In the paragraphs that follow, we focus on an online media to discuss a transnational public sphere in which Nigerian diasporic civil society are active participants. The case discussed revolves around www.saharareporters.com (hereafter Sahara Reporters/Sahara), an online news media organization that was established by New York-based Nigerian political activist Omoleye Sowore. It is one of the most visited Nigeria-focused news media online (see Table 5.1). The character of this transnational public sphere reflects the motivation and attitude of its founder, who in the early 1990s mobilized students and organized several protests against the military regimes and their "anti-people" policies (Oyedoyin 2003; Kperogi 2011). From a journalistic point of view, the website is a brand of citizen's journalism where "everyday people" supply news contents, report misdoings, and assist in verifying controversial news materials (the so-called "citizen verifiers" and "citizen editors" (Egbunike 2011). One study found that issues that get reported often become topical issues in the local news media scene as well (Kperogi 2011).

As a transnational public sphere for rational deliberation over matters of national significance, Sahara Reporters has been more than a news medium. On the "About Us" section of the website, it is written that:

> Sahara Reporters is an online community of international reporters and social advocates dedicated to bringing you commentaries, features, news reports from a Nigerian-African perspective. A unique organization, founded in the spirit of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, comprising of ordinary people with an overriding commitment to seeking the truth and publishing it without fear or favor. Because its core members are unapologetic practitioners of advocacy journalism, Sahara Reporters also serves as an umbrella outlet for objective reporting of verifiable and accurate news and untainted social commentaries for anyone wishing to exercise their freedom of speech in the public interest and common good.
>
> (Sahara Reporters 2015)

The statement of purpose is clear enough. The owners intend to make a public sphere out of Sahara Reporters, and with choice of phrases such as "practitioners of advocacy," "untainted social commentaries," "exercise of freedom of speech," and "public interest and common good," the website accommodates multiple Net-based public sphere domains at the same time. Although operating from the US, the politics discussed are mainly about Nigeria and of Nigerian political personalities. Also, while most of its opinion writers are based in the US, mostly connected to the academic/intelligentsia class, most of those participating in the sphere are based in Nigeria.

From Table 5.2, it will be noticed that the audience of Sahara is very similar to other Nigerian online news media. This suggests that the primary target of Sahara are co-citizens in the homeland. While geographically dispersed, the Net-based transnational public sphere

Table 5.1 Most Visited Nigeria-Focused Online News Sites, March 20, 2015

Online Media	*Country Ranking of Site*	*Ranking by News Content*	*Base of Operation*	*Nature of News Publishing*
Punch www.punchng.com	#19	#1	Nigeria	Online/offline
Vanguard www.vanguardngr.com	#26	#2	Nigeria	Online/offline
Sahara Reporters www.saharareporters.com	**#48**	**#3**	**United States**	**Online**
Premium Times www.premiumtimesng.com	#61	#4	Nigeria	Online
Thisday www.thisdaylive.com	#82	#5	Nigeria	Online/offline

Note: The news content ranking is based on the main focus of the online media in question. Blogs, foreign news websites, marketing and shopping sites, and information crowding and sports websites—many of which ranked higher on the most visited sites list—are not included here. Sites in the top sites lists are ordered by their one-month Alexa traffic rank. The one-month rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and page views over the past month. The site with the highest combination of visitors and page views is ranked #1.

Source: www.alexa.com

Table 5.2 Locations of Top Visitors to Nigeria-Focused Online News Media

Online Media	*Top Five Locations of Visitors*				
Punch www.punchng.com	Nigeria (85.4%)	US (2.4%)	South Africa (2.1%)	UK (1.9%)	India (1.6%)
Vanguard www.vanguardngr.com	Nigeria (76%)	UK (4.1%)	US (3.5%)	India (2.9%)	South Africa (2.6%)
Sahara Reporters www.saharareporters.com	Nigeria (75%)	UK (4.7%)	South Africa (4.2%)	US (4.1%)	Finland (2.8%)
Premium Times www.premiumtimesng.com	Nigeria (81.4%)	South Africa (4.7%)	UK (3.4%)	US (3.3%)	Finland (2.9%)
Thisday www.thisdaylive.com	Nigeria (76.4%)	US (4.1%)	South Africa (3.5%)	UK (3.3%)	India (2.2%)

Source: www.alexa.com

helps the Nigerian diaspora to remain connected to the homeland while also giving allowance for them to offer viewpoints that differ sharply from those prevailing in national public sphere. By seeking to clarify complex sociopolitical issues, opinion writers transcend government propaganda and lay bare matters that ordinary citizens may consider too confusing. With the hyper-interactive nature of the website, visitors find it easy to comment, reanalyze, and interpret issues as they wish. Discussing what the organization was doing to mentor the next

generation of activist writers, Sowore's position revealed a fact that underlines the character of Sahara as a quintessential public sphere:

> What we experience on the website is a dynamic interaction of different thought processes, a clashing and mixing of ideas, where you publish a report and people come forward to dissect, redirect and make additions and sometimes provide better ideas than the original report. Sometimes you watch a story develop and through this participatory infusion of ideas, it grows a life of its own. I am seeing better writers and reporters on the site every day, making measured comment. The real mentors are the readers and commentators, they are my mentors. It is not the other way round.
>
> (Egbunike 2011)

On Sahara, opinion articles of fewer than 1,000 words often generate over 100 comments from both regular visitors and new users. Articles and associated raw documents are mostly archived and commentary sections are never closed, making it possible for participants to explore and reflect over the contours of issues for long periods of time. This means that issues are/can be revisited and reviewed in a continuous manner. The capacity of record-keeping appears to further distinguish the Net-based transnational public sphere from a Habermasian public sphere in which deliberations are at best "fleeting." In other words, the Net-based public sphere that diaspora civil society create consist of durable spaces, and rather than merely arriving at some aggregated "public opinion," there is room to both achieve aggregation and compartmentalization—compartmentalization meaning that we will be able to say "this is what most of them think," as distinct from "this group said A rather than B, with B being the opinion of that other group."

No doubt, the activities of Sahara and other Nigerian diasporic civil society groups have widened the space for democracy to take root in Nigeria. In the face of a declining national public sphere, the Nigerian diaspora stepped in and continued to question the government and have been deliberating over matters of social and political significance. From the goals of the organization and the viewpoints it supports, the Sahara Reporters' transnational public sphere possesses the features of advocacy/activist, civic forums, and journalistic domains (as conceived by Dahlgren 2005). The website not only informs its mostly Nigeria-based audience, but also provides an avenue through which Nigerians at home and abroad discuss government actions/inactions and mobilize for change.

Conclusion: Diaspora Civil Society, Transnational Public Sphere, and Democracy

The practices of diaspora civil society connect geographically dispersed nodes through a transnational public sphere, and the Internet has been a great enabler of this process. In the era of globalization, the transnational expansion of deliberative space has implications for the practice of democracy. As Fraser (2007) observes, the notion of a transnational public sphere may be indispensable to those interested in reconstructing democratic theory in the current "postnational constellation"—in which boundaries among nations are disappearing. Members of the diaspora form opinion over important matters and subject the views to citizens' critical scrutiny, with the view to either modify, reject, or supply alternative

perspective through reasoned arguments. In social settings where the national public sphere is in crisis—perhaps due to takeover of local media by powerful individuals as in the case of Nigeria (Kperogi 2011)—the transnational public sphere offers an alternative outlet for continued expression of free speech, opinion formation, and citizens' participation.

While acknowledging that the transnational public sphere could promote democracy, Dahlgren (2005) warns us that it can also have destabilizing consequences. Taking a clue from Fraser's (1990: 67) concern about counter-publics, the structure of and practices within transnational public sphere can be antidemocratic in character, having in mind that "even those with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization." For one, a transnational public sphere that is based on Internet infrastructure basically marginalizes those without access (thus excluding people with alternative, and perhaps superior, arguments). Similar criticism was leveled against the Habermasian public sphere. What is more, the discussion of the transnational public sphere presented here ignores the inherently diverse/fragmented nature of diaspora (Akinrinade and Ogen 2011), which can lead to the formation of fragmented "public opinion" instead of a truly balanced position. The interest of diverse participants and the power differentials among those deliberating in a transnational public sphere will also stifle equitable democratic expression and undermine the possibility of arriving at representative outcomes. Nevertheless, diaspora civil society holds great promise for the reconstruction of democratic theory in the postmodern world.

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