

...we are members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening in the dark forests of its African fatherland. We are the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black tomorrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the teutonic today (Du Bois cited in Franklin 1990, 45).

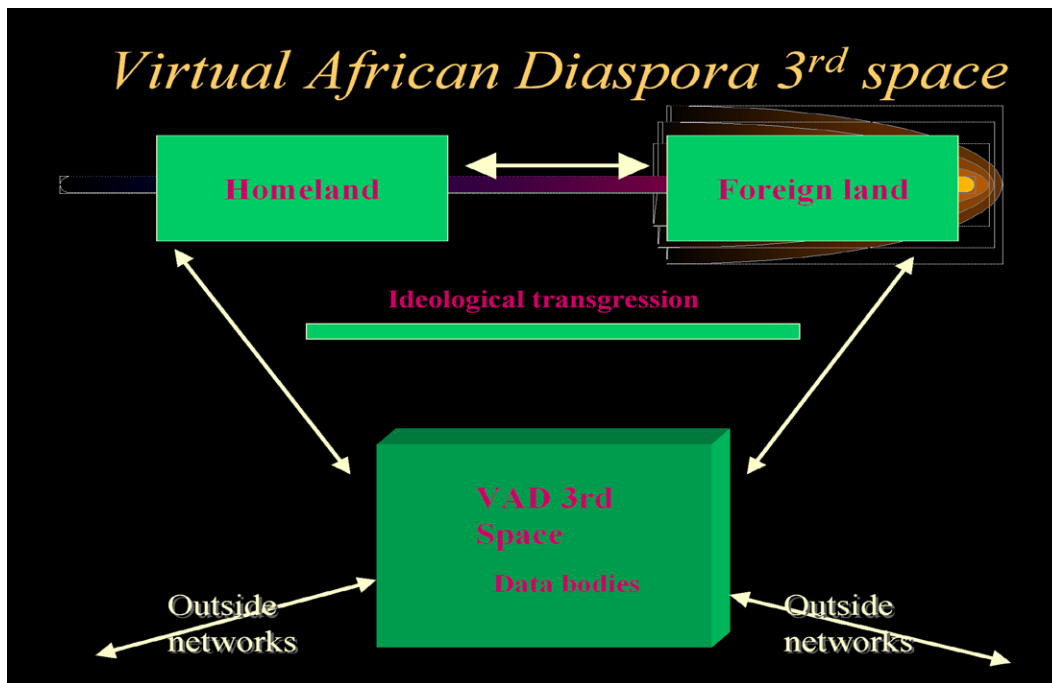
VAD is an interactive communication strategy that communicates with the people. It enables Africans to share their aspirations and ideals with each other and the rest of the world. According to Williamson (1992), our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. The new African slave is a digitized barcode and the new war is fought on the information superhighway. The diasporic African of today who inhabits this new digital age has to make a conscious effort to help pull the continent out of its present subservient position into equal sociopolitical and economic level with the rest of the world. VAD does not claim to have an answer to all the problems of the continent and its citizens but promises to bring its diasporic citizens together in the new virtual village and, like our forebears, to discuss ways and strategies of solving the communities' problems. VAD project like Pan Africanism is a positive false memory built to counter our cultural amnesia caused by imperial parental abuse. Our fear is not that we are black or inadequate but rather that we have the capacity to overtake the world because history has confirmed that it all started in Africa.

### **VAD Philosophy**

We believe that disclaiming the homogeneity of African cultures and traditions is not synonymous with affirming the non-existence of African cultures and traditions. We therefore acknowledge African unity in diversity. African diaspora is built on the premise of African identity as memory of homeland. This memory could be likened to a footprint on a sandy beach. Such footprint hardly leaves any evidence when tide washes it away unless there is an instant photographic recording of its existence. The argument is that our inability to find the print does not mean that the print never existed. The print exists in the memory of the owner. Therefore to disprove its existence is to deny the existence of the beach as well as detract from the essence of the footprint, the foot and the beach. Without them there would have been no print. The memory of Africa, in the heart of its diasporic citizens, is like the sand on the beach. It is always there but the waves keep washing away every print and smoothens the beach for another footprint. But the sandy beach is always there because the thinking body (in this case the stamping feet) cannot be separated from its thought process, therefore as long as Africans and their descendants are alive to remember, African cultural values will continue to exist. We think therefore they exist (*cogito ergo sum*). However, we cannot step into the same river twice because new global trends keep changing our concept of Africa from the diaspora.

VAD is both a theory of empowerment as well as a site of collaborative action. Because of the spatial transgression of the World Wide Web and other communication networks, members of the virtual diaspora can no longer be defined by mere spatial or temporal dislocation. In other words, virtual diaspora is an ideological movement of people from one geopolitical and cultural space to another. It presupposes that membership of a virtual diaspora is inclusive of residents of homeland. It includes those who, though have not physically transgressed physical national borders of Africa but have nevertheless ideologically migrated to other global spaces through their emersion into the World Wide Web. This inclusion of homeland members within diasporic discourse shifts the debate from only physical bodies to include databodies. The complexity of this dual body discourse outside the realm of philosophical dialectics of mind and matter also opens up debate about memory as a fixed or static image, especially as it forms an important part of our diasporic identities. Members of this virtual diasporic community therefore inhabit a third space. This third space is a vantage position of empowerment and resistance made possible through collective action.

### **VAD as a Third space**



(Chika Anyanwu 2005)

### Why the project?

“A gifted individual is not free to pursue personal fulfilment while ignoring the plight of his or her oppressed kin” (Du Bois in Franklin 1990, 62). Accordingly, “black professionals are the unelected representatives charged with responding directly to the needs of the black community” (Franklin 1990, 72). It used to be said that the sun never sets in the British Empire. But today, technology has let the sun set in the British Empire, especially in the political control of its colonies. The new virtual world can be likened to Hong Kong or what Moore Ede (Bauman in Holmes 2001, 4) calls the ‘24 hour city’. This is a world of mobile elite, a world bound by locality. For the mobile elite, space has lost its constraining quality while the locality bound absorbs either passively or actively what the rest of the world brings to its door step. This is the new virtual environment where people do not have to physically leave their living room to be confronted with global problems. On the other hand the mobile elite does not necessarily have to physically move before intruding into other people’s cultural or social space. According to Crang et al (1999, 11) “the geographies of ‘mediation’ produce globalised locals and localized global”. If we place this situation in the context of the information haves and have-nots it becomes apparent that although developing nations are receiving information passed through these communication networks, they can hardly send such information. Only those who have the capacity to checkmate or filter out those who intrude into their space can monitor the level of intrusion. No matter how many textbooks we write as Africans or inventions we patent in the name of intellectual contribution to knowledge, unless there is a participatory medium where Africans can gather together to tell their own stories, make their own decisions and carve their own identities they will always be subsumed by the loudest mouthpiece in global discourse. In the information age those who have the power of communication have the power to dominate or be heard.

VAD aims at addressing the above shortfalls through a collaborative venture between Africans in the continent and diaspora. As the unelected representatives charged with responding directly to the needs of the black community it is our duty as members of the diaspora to respond to this challenge. We have the responsibility to use our inside knowledge of western systems to help alleviate the plights of Africa because as an Igbo proverb says it is not the madman that feels ashamed but his relatives who get taunted. As Africans in the diaspora we are judged by the

standard of our motherland and not by our individual standards as migrants. We are unofficial ambassadors of our cultural origin. And until there is a balance between African and Western development we will continue to be perceived as underdogs irrespective of our contributions to global peace and progress from outside.

Transport technology enabled Africans to be taken away from homeland to foreign lands. Today we have mastered the secret of that technology. We have rerouted the new transport technology to take us back to motherland. For you whose spirit and body belongs to Africa and African people get on board. Come and let us connect with our root and kindred spirits

VAD is about Africans abroad and at home

It is about our journeys abroad and at home

It is about our networks as a result of these journeys

It is about our place in the world of economics, politics, science and technology, arts and culture, education and social justice, equality and progress.

VAD is about our children's future in the new global landscape

## **Limitations**

This project appreciates that at the level of virtual social mobilisation we are transgressing the progressive patterns of Maslow's hierarchy of needs which starts from the physiological to self actualisation. In other words some may ask and rightly so, why start a project about virtual interaction when majority of the people it represents are still struggle with basic physiological needs, and may not afford the tools to participate? While this is a valid observation it is also necessary to say that the world economic emphasis has shifted from material to virtual culture and those who control the virtual control the lives of others. While Africans and other developing world nations are still sitting on material economic needs, the rest of the world has shifted the battle ground to space and its terrestrial virtual networks. Africans need to be made aware of this shifting battle ground and be prepared as Mathea Ekra, then Minister of State, The Ivory Coast, said "those who have recently achieved their independence, must take care this time not to miss the last train of the twentieth century" (cited in Wresch 1996, 113).

In Sun Tzu *The Art of War*, knowing ones enemy is one of the best strategies of survival. But in the case of African issues, identifying a common ground is more problematic than solving some of the continent's major crises. This is because Africa is not a homogenous community. It is a complex and divergent continent with varied cultures and peoples. While this project understands this complexity, it therefore situates its emphasis on the united front of Africa as a marginalised continent rather than assume that its objectives are representative of every African experience. It also acknowledges what Fela Anikulapo Kuti (late Nigerian musician), calls 'kolomentality' (colonial mentality). It is a false perception of superiority, which makes some Africans feel whiter than the white person or to idolise western values at the expense of their African heritage. In line with these observations it will be logical to infer that being African is not a passport to representing African views or even expecting acceptance within all African communities or communities of colour. While this project aims at representing Africans, there may be some who would not like to be represented by its ideological positions. The projects cannot claim to have a magic wand that would solve the complex issues of African socio-political and economic woes. The disenfranchisement of Africa and Africans in global technological discourses is not only externally situated and should therefore not be seen as merely an 'us' and 'them' situation or only a centre-periphery dichotomy. Tackling a project this big which takes a continental and

diasporic Africa overview stands the risk of falling into the same trap of western cultural homogeneity which it criticises. Despite all the aforementioned limitations, the project intends to avoid falling into old traps by devising a decentred information gathering methodology which empowers participating communities to own their information and represent such in ways they see fit.

## References

- Appadurai, Arjun. 2003. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. In Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Eds. *Theorizing Diaspora*. Maryland USA: Blackwell Publication. 25-48.
- Barber, T. John and Jones, Steven. 2001. More Than You Think: African Americans on the World Wide Web. In John T. Barber and Alice A. Tait. Eds. *The Information Society and the Black Community*. Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers. 3-30.
- Bhabha, K. Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Crang, Mike; Crang, Phil and May, Jon. Eds. 1999. *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations*. London and NY: Routledge.
- Dean, Jodi. 2001. Cybersalons and Civil Society: Rethinking the public Sphere in transnational Technoculture. *Public Culture* 13.2, 243-265..
- Franklin, Robert Michael. 1990. *Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African American Thought*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 2003. Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Eds. *Theorizing Diaspora*. Maryland USA: Blackwell Publication. 233-246.
- Hawley, Charles. 2005. German Zoo Scandal 'African Village' Accused of Putting Humans on Display. <http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/0,1518,359799,00.html>. Accessed June 2005.
- Holmes, David. 2001 Ed. *Virtual Globalization: Virtual Spaces/Tourist Spaces*, London and NY: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 1992. *Black looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA : South End Press.
- Lucas, Brad. 1997. **Hybrid Revolutions: Differential Positioning and Homi Bhabha's Third Space**. *Revolution Conference*. University of California, Irvine. <http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwegsa/revolutions/Program.htm>. Accessed April 2005.
- Marriott, S. 1999. Indigenous Identities Online. *The Irish Times*, Monday, August 9, <http://www.atour.com/news/national/20010610a.html>. Accessed April 2005.
- Mazrui, A. Ali. 2000. Cultural Amnesia, Cultural Nostalgia and False Memory: Africa's identity Crises Revisited. *African Philosophy, Vol. 13, No. 2*.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McLuhan, Marshall, Fiore, Quentin and Agel, Jerome. 1967. *The Medium is the Message*. New York: Random House.
- Ngwainmbi, K. Emmanuel. 2001. Black Connections and Disconnections in the Global Information Supermarket. In John T. Barber and Alice A. Tait. Eds. *The Information Society and the Black Community*. Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers. 237-258.
- Nicholls, Sean. 1999. The Digital Divide. *The Weekend Australian*. Feb 27-28.

- Oguibe, Olu. 1999. Connectivity, and the Fate of the Unconnected. *Telepolis*. <http://www.telepolis.de/r4/artikel/6/6551/1.html>. Accessed Jan 2005.
- Pancevski, Bojan. 2005. German Zoo Sparks Outrage by parading Africans next to Baboons. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/06/12/wzoo12.xml&sSheet=/news/2005/06/12/ixworld.html>. Accessed June 2005..
- Poster, Mark. 1995. *The Second Media Age*. Cambridge UK : Polity Press.
- Roberts, Michael. 2003. "The Sinhalese and Others over the Centuries" *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.9, No.2, 75–102. .
- Soja, W. Edward. 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell Publishers.**
- Whittle, David. 1997. *Cyberspace: The Human Dimension*. NY: W. H. Freeman and company.
- Williamson, Marianne. 1992. *A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles*. Harper Collins.
- Wresch, William. 1996. *Disconnected: haves and have-nots in the information age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.