FACEBOOK, YOUTH AND POLITICAL ACTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ZIMBABWE AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Admire Mare

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ABSTRACT

This comparative multi-sited study examines how, why and when politically engaged youths in distinctive national and social movement contexts use Facebook to facilitate political activism. As part of the research objectives, this study is concerned with investigating how and why youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa use the popular corporate social network site for political purposes. The study explores the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation which plays out on selected Facebook groups and pages. It also examines the extent to which the selected Facebook pages and groups can be considered as alternative spaces for political activism. It also documents and analyses the various kinds of political discourses (described here as digital hidden transcripts) which are circulated by Zimbabwean and South African youth activists on Facebook fan pages and groups.

Methodologically, this study adopts a predominantly qualitative research design although it also draws on quantitative data in terms of levels of interaction on Facebook groups and pages. Consequently, this study engages in data triangulation which allows me to make sense of how and why politically engaged youths from a range of six social movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook for political action. In terms of data collection techniques, the study deploys social media ethnography (online participant observation), qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews.

Theoretically, this study jettisons the Habermasian theory of public sphere in favour of Fraser's (1990) concept of the subaltern counter-publics, Scott's (1985) metaphor of hidden transcripts and some insightful views on popular culture gleaned from African studies. Melding these ideas into a synthesised theoretical frame, this study argues that Facebook fan pages and groups can be conceptualised as parallel discursive arenas where marginalised groups (including politically active youths) have a political life outside the dominant mediated public sphere often in ways that are generally viewed as "irrational" and "non-political" in mainstream Western literature. This study also proposes ways of enriching Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics by incorporating elements from Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts in order to analyse the various kinds of political discourses which are circulated on social media.

The findings demonstrate that youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa are using Facebook to engage in traditional and alternative forms of political participation. Findings show that Facebook in both political contexts is deployed for transmitting and accessing civic and political information, as a conduit for online donations and fundraising, for contacting political decision makers, as a venue of political activism, as an advertising platform for social and political events and as a platform for everyday political talk. It demonstrates that the broader political context shapes and constraints the localised appropriations of Facebook for political purposes in ways that deconstructs some of the postulations of the cyber-optimist and pessimist approaches. The study also found that youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa used Facebook in their own unique ways as shaped and dictated by the broader political and mediated opportunity structures. It argues that youth's engagement with social media platforms for political purposes should be understood in their own terms without necessarily imposing inflexible boundaries on what counts as political participation. Although Facebook like other social media platforms foster avenues for cognitive engagement, discursive participation and political mobilisation, these political practices are not immune to the influences of offline processes. Youth activists in all the six case organisations used Facebook as a complementary and supplementary space for political processes rather than as a standalone platform. The study also argues that compared to South Africa, the political uses of Facebook in Zimbabwe are largely influenced by practices of state surveillance. It also found that whilst youth activists in South Africa are deploying Facebook to supplement traditional methods of political activism, their counterparts in Zimbabwe are using the same technology to circumvent the restricted political and media environment. The findings also indicate that youth activists in both countries are using Facebook as a change agent tool within the broader media ecology which is characterised by the increasing interpenetration of older and newer media platforms.

In terms of micro-politics of participation and discursive interactions, this study found that Facebook pages and groups should viewed as a "sites of power" where corporate forces and platform specific code coalesce together fostering "algorithmic" gatekeeping practices and the favouring of paid for content over non-paid for user-generated-content which ultimately affects activists' visibility and reach within the online media ecology. These gatekeeping practices therefore further complicate claims by cyber-optimists that social media platforms

are the *sine qua non* spaces for symmetrical and democratic participation. This study argues that "subtle forms of control" characterise the much glorified participatory cultures on Facebook in ways that defy optimistic accounts of the role of new media in political change.

DEDICATIONS

For my parents Reuben Mare and Daisy Gomba-Mare

&

In loving memory my late grandmother Stella Tuge Charumbira-Gomba (14 August 2014)

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ACRONYMS

ADSL: Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line

ANCYL: African National Congress Youth League

ANC: African National Congress

AIPPA: Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act

ANZ: Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe

AYC: African Youth Charter

BEE: Black Economic Empowerment

B-BBEE: Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment

BSA: Broadcasting Services Act

CIO: Central Intelligence Organisation

CiZC: Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition

CiZC (SA): Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition-Regional Office (SA)

COPE: Congress of the People

COSATU: Congress of South African Trade Unions

DA: Democratic Alliance

DStv MultiChoice Africa: Digital Satellite Television

EFF: Economic Freedom Fighters

ESAP: Economic Structural Adjustments Programmes

ECTA: Electronic Communications and Transactions Act

GEAR: Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan

GNU: Government of National Unity

GPA: Global Political Agreement

FTLRP: Fast Track Land Reform Programme

FsQCA: Fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis

FPTP: First-Past-The-Post Model

KPCB: Kleiner Perkins Caufield Byers

LSM: Living Standard Measure

ICA: Interception of Communication Act

ICT: information and communication technology

IAPs: Internet Access Providers

IIAG: Ibrahim Index of African Governance

ILO: International Labour Organisation

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IMPI: Information and Media Panel of Inquiry

ISPs: Internet Service Providers

MAZ: Media Appeals Tribunal

MDC: Movement of Democratic Change

MDC-T: Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai

MDC-N: Movement for Democratic Change-Ncube

MP: Member of Parliament

MDDA: Media Diversity and Development Agency

MDSD: Most Different Systems Design

MSSD: Most Similar System Design

MIC: Media Information Commission

MICC: Monitoring of Interception of Communications Centre (MICC)

MI: Military Intelligence

NCA: National Constitutional Assembly

NCC: National Communications Centre

NYDA: National Youth Development Agency

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NPC: National Planning Commission

PASSOP Afrika: People Against Suffering Oppression and Poverty Afrika

PF-ZAPU: Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union

POSA: Public Order and Security Act

POTRAZ: Postal Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe

PCSA: Press Council of South Africa

PICES: Poverty and Poverty Datum Line Analysis in Zimbabwe

PR: Proportional Representation system

RBC: Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation

RDP: Reconstruction and Development Programme

RGA: Regulation of Gatherings Act

RICA: Regulation of Interception of Communications and provision of communication-related information Act

RIA: Research ICT Africa

R2K: Right to Know Campaign

RMF: Rhodes Must Fall Movement

SABC: South African Broadcasting Corporation

SANPAD: South Africa Netherlands Partnership and Development

SAARF: South African Advertising Research Foundation

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SAPS: South African Police Service

Stats SA: Statistics South Africa

SASAS: South African Social Attitudes Survey

SA Reconciliation Barometer: South African Reconciliation Barometer

SACP: South African Communist Party

SMOs: Social Movement Organisations

TDNs: Take-Down Notices

UCT: University of Cape Town

UPM: Unemployed People's Movement

VANS: Value-added Network Service

WAAKS: We Are All Khalid Said

WB: World Bank

YIDAZ: Youth Initiative for Democracy in Zimbabwe

YAT: Youth Agenda Trust

YFZ: Youth Forum Zimbabwe

ZANU-PF: Zimbabwe African National Unity-Patriotic Front

ZANU: Zimbabwe African National Unity

ZRP: Zimbabwe Republic Authority

ZIMSTAT: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

ZESA: Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority

ZEC: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

ZBC: Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation

ZESN: Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network

ZYC: Zimbabwe Youth Council

ZIPRA: Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

ZAMPS: Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey

ZMC: Zimbabwe Media Commission

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

This thesis examines how, why and when youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action, using "not free" (Zimbabwe) and "free" (South Africa) political contexts as case nations. Zimbabwe has been classified as "not free" (meaning there is no respect for political rights and civil liberties) while South Africa has been characterised as "free" (meaning there is sufficient respect for political and civil liberties) though its media context is characterised as "partly free" (meaning there is limited respect for media freedom and freedom of expression) (Freedom House[1], 2014). In this chapter, I intend to outline the introduction and contextual background of this thesis. I begin by briefly looking at the state of political and media transformations in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Besides highlighting the similarities and differences in terms of political transitions in both countries, this chapter also discusses, albeit briefly, the position of the youth in relation to the political and media transformations. I then proceed to tease out the research problem. The next section unpacks the architecture and business model of Facebook. I also discuss the academic debate on the relationship between social media and political action thereby contextualising my thesis within the broader literature on new media and social change. This chapter also outlines the research objectives and questions as well as maps out the theoretical and methodological approaches, which provide the framework upon which empirical data will be analysed in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight. I also define key concepts used in this study and offer an outline of the rest of the chapters.

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[1] Whilst I make reference to Freedom House Index on freedom of expression to compare two African countries, I am very much cognisant of the controversial nature of these Westocentric forms of democracy measurements. I concur with scholars (Steiner, 2014) who argue these categorisations are not neutral and innocent, but tied to certain ideological and material interests. Critics suggest that the Freedom House scores favour countries that have particular political ties to and affinities with the United States (Steiner, 2014). They view such a bias as originating from the personal and/or financial links between Freedom House and the US government. In the context of this study, despite its flaws and controversies, the Freedom House indices provide one of the most developed and popularised heuristic device for ranking countries which aids comparison of various political and media systems, in this case Zimbabwe and South Africa.

1.1 Preamble on the social context

The two cases chosen for this particular study are unidentical although they have both experienced transitions[2] from authoritarian colonial rule to democratic government. Zimbabwe and South Africa provides two extreme cases for a richer comparative study on how, why and when politically engaged youths use Facebook to facilitate political activism. These two countries also share considerable similarities and differences in terms of political and media transformations. Whilst Zimbabwe got its independence in 1980, its neighbour South Africa experienced political transition in 1994 after the fall of the Berlin wall, when prospects for revolutionary change had waned, and which significantly proscribed spaces for thoroughgoing change (see Chapter Two). Both countries are part of the "third wave[3]" of democratisation as espoused by Huntington (1991). Contrary to the literature on transitology[4] (Schmitter & Karl, 1994; Huntington, 1991), the two neighbouring countries have experienced "elite continuity and renewal" (Sparks, 2011) rather than genuine political and media transformation (I will return to this shortly). Transitologists believe that regime transitions move in a linear fashion from an authoritarian order to a more democratic order (Huntington, 1991). Critiquing transitology literature, scholars (Voltmer, 2006; Levitsky & Way, 2010; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 3) suggest that transitions are highly uncertain phenomena that have complex outcomes: democracy, renewed authoritarianism or some combination of both. This is evident in the Zimbabwean case, where the transition from an authoritarian colonial state led to a "post-colonial state[5]" which could be classified as a "hybrid regime" (Young, 2004; Levitsky & Way, 2010). As Young (2004) argues, hybrid regimes combine democratic rules with authoritarian governance. In this kind of regime, institutions of the old regimes coexist with those of the new state (Young, 2004). Unlike Zimbabwe, South Africa transformed itself from an apartheid state (also described as

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[2] This refers to the interval between one type of political regime and another . The change is characteried by uncertainty: uncertainty in the conditions they occur under, uncertainty in the actors that participate in them and uncertainty in their outcomes, which can see the restoration of authoritarianism or the development of democracy (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 6).

[3] Huntington (1991) describes global democratisation as coming in three waves, the first beginning in the early 19th century when suffrage was granted to the majority of white males in the United States of America, the second wave began following the Allied victory in World War II which lasted for at least 20 years and finally the third wave which began in 1974 (including historic transitions in Latin American, Eastern European, African and Asian Pacific countries) until now.

[4] Transitology is a paradigm in political science that studies and explains political change from authoritarian societies to democratic societies (Schmitter & Karl, 1994; Huntington, 1991). It's derived from the word 'transition'- the interval between one political regime and another.

[5] The term "post" in post-colonialism appears to signal a chronologically defined periodisation and linear progression from pre-colonialism through colonialism to post-colonialism (Abrahamsen, 2003). However in reality the interval between the end of colonialism and the beginning of post-colonialism is not necessarily marked by complete transformation but rather change and continuity (Shome, 2006).

"colonialism of a special type[6]" by the South African Communist Party) to a democratic state (Sparks, 2011).

Given the history of colonialism and apartheid, Zimbabwe and South Africa share comparable structural conditions and historical legacies in the sense that they have endured colonial-induced land dispossessions and territorial segregations (Bantustans in South Africa and reserves in rural Zimbabwe), minority rule and struggles for liberation (Pape, 1998). This colonial history left significant legacies in both countries like land imbalances, lack of thick media and economic transformation and inherited colonial laws. In both countries, the state's capacity to effect seismic economic transformation policies has been profoundly constrained by the nature of the negotiated transitions. The Lancaster House Constitution in Zimbabwe set limits on the extent to which the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government could temper with land redistribution and private property issues (Chiweshe, 2011; see Chapter Two). In the case of South Africa, informal negotiations prior to the dawn of democracy ensured that the corporate sector achieved continued economic control (Terreblanche, 2002) while the African National Congress (ANC) got away with political control. In both countries, change has been limited to "political life in the narrow sense and the economic system has displayed a marked continuity" (Sparks, 2008). This is because, as Matlosa & Shale (2013) observe, both countries have experimented with different models of power-sharing arrangements (in 1980 and 2009 in Zimbabwe and 1994 in South Africa).

Although the two case nations have taken different paths and developed in diverse ways, it can be argued that their political and media transformations are converging in many ways. For instance, party alternation has not occurred since the regime transitions—with ZANU-PF (in Zimbabwe) and the ANC (in South Africa) dominating the political sphere (Freedom House, 2014). Both countries also share some of the undesirable features of transitional[7] societies in the sense that admission to the economic elite is very closely related to political connections (Southall, 2005; Bratton & Masunungure, 2011). Even though the two countries have implemented social policies like Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBB-EE) (in South Africa), the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and the

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[6] This expression essentially refers to the racial oppression of Black people within the context of a capitalist state. It is considered "special" in the sense that was no spatial separation between the colonising power (the white minority state) and the colonised black people (Du Toit, 2010: 185).

[7] Transitologists identify four stages of political transformation: pre-transition, transition, democratisation and the consolidation phase (Jebril, Stetka, & Loveless, 2013). Hence in this study South Africa and Zimbabwe are referred to as transitional or democratising countries.

Indigenisation Programme (in Zimbabwe), the elitist nature of these interventions has meant that the political elite and their connections have managed to restructure themselves as the owners of private capital (Duncan, 2012; Chiweshe, 2011). Unlike South Africa, Zimbabwe has endured a decade (2000-2008) of multi-layered and multifaceted politico-economic crises (Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010) which has given birth to an "authoritarian-nationalist state" (Raftopoulos, 2006).

While Zimbabwe has been described as a "competitive authoritarian regime[8]" because of the dominance of ZANU-PF over the state apparatus (Levitsky & Way, 2010; McCorley, 2013; 2015), South Africa is considered a "model of electoral democracy" (Diamond, 1999; Bauer & Taylor, 2005)—irrespective of the existence of major social and economic inequities. In terms of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance[9] (2014), South Africa is ranked 5th in Africa with a score index of 71.3 which means that it is judged to protect a full range of political freedoms and civil rights while Zimbabwe is ranked 47th with a score index of 35.4 according to the same index. Compared to Zimbabwe, South Africa has a vibrant civil society (Heller, 2009), stronger political institutions and a freer media which act as counter-balancing force to the over-bearing influence of the executive (see Chapter Two for a detailed discussion on the social context).

Change and continuity are also evident at the level of media transformation in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In both countries, the public broadcasters have been riddled with cases of political interference, mismanagement, and corruption (see Chapter Two). Because of the co-existence of authoritarian state control of the public media as well as the relative media freedom enjoyed by the private media in Zimbabwe, Rønning & Kupe (1998) describe the situation as signified by a "dual legacy of authoritarianism and democracy". As Chapter Two will demonstrate, after attaining independence in 1980, the ZANU-PF government revived the authoritarian control of the public media (both print and electronic) for political expediency. Besides changing the name of the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) to the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the new government continued to govern the

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[8] It refers to a hybrid regime type in which formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which fraud, civil liberties violations and abuse of state and media resources so skew the playing field in favour of the incumbent (Levitsky & Way, 2010: 5).

[9] Governance is defined by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation as the provision of the political, social and economic public goods and services that a citizen has the right to expect from his or her state, and that a state has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens (Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2014: 6). Similar to the Freedom House Index, the Ibrahim Index is not immune to the ideological and material interests that undergird some of these categorisaions. This is despite the fact Mo Ibrahim Foundation is an African think tank, it is not neutral and inherently benevolent.

broadcasting sector using the colonial Broadcasting Act until 2001 (Moyo, 2004). This affirms Sparks's (2006) view that media institutions that emerged from the process of transition have generally been influenced by the political elite. Similar to the colonial regime, the new government also continued to use public media to entrench its hegemonic power and vilify pro-democracy activists and opposition parties. These foregoing statements support Voltmer's (2013) insightful argument that media organisations are not created from scratch after the breakdown of the old regime. Her observation is that existing media organisations are transformed and reshaped, but still carry elements of the logic and constraints of their predecessors.

In South Africa, the country's negotiated transition set limits on the nature and character of media transformation. On the one hand, it experienced "democratisation" whilst on the other hand it witnessed the "marketisation" of the media sector (Duncan, 2010; Sparks, 2011). Some scholars (Berger, 2001; Jacobs, 2004) have hailed the de-racialisation of the media sector while others (Tomaselli & Teer-Tomaselli, 2001; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001; Boloka & Krabill, 2001) have bemoaned the fact that total media transformation has been limited by class continuity in ownership, control, content and audiences. The transformation of the South African media landscape from "an authoritarian-mediated sphere to a highly commercialised, privatised public sphere" (Wasserman, 2010: 10) has led to the concentration on elite audiences that is attractive to advertisers, tabloidisation of media content, a general neglect of public service content and exclusion of threatening voices (like activists) (Wasserman & Botma, 2008; see Chapter Two). This gives credence to claims that market-led transitions have resulted in media systems that systematically under-represented those who lack socio-economic power (Voltmer, 2006). Tettey (2010: 98) also concurs, arguing that "much of the mediated public sphere in Africa is captured by elite discourses, raising concerns about whose interests are served by the spaces opened up by processes of democratisation".

Like other political transitions, both countries have witnessed threats to media freedom, although at varying levels. In South Africa, the independence of the broadcasting sector has been significantly reversed by repeated attempts by the ANC to increase the control of the executive arm of government over broadcasting (Duncan, 2012). In the Zimbabwean case, despite the licensing of two commercial radio stations (*Star FM* and *ZiFM Stereo*) during the Government of National Unity (GNU) era, the executive has continued to interfere with

editorial independence of the public media. The ANC government in South Africa tabled the Protection of State Information Bill[10] (POSIB) as well as proposed to establish a statutory Media Appeals Tribunal as an alternative to the appeals body of the Press Council of South Africa which stirred heated debate from 2010 onwards over the merits of the two proposals (Yin, 2011). The ruling party eventually settled for a modified co-regulatory system for complaints against the media. The ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe set up a statutory regulatory body the Media Information Commission (replaced by the Zimbabwe Media Commission in 2009) in 2001 tasked with the mandate of licensing journalists and media organisations. It also passed a series of repressive media laws like AIPPA[11] (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act), BSA[12] (Broadcasting Services Act), POSA[13] (Public Order and Security Act) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of 2004. The passage of the laws was designed to silence the critical private media, to inhibit media development (especially in the electronic media sector) and to increase the influence of the Minister of Information and Publicity on mediated communication in the country (Chuma, 2010; Moyo, 2004; see Chapters Two and Four for a discussion on the state of media in Zimbabwe and South Africa).

Notwithstanding similarities and differences in terms of political and media transformations, both countries have experienced different levels of "democratisation conflicts[14]" (see Voltmer, Parry & Kraetzschmar, 2014, for a detailed overview). In South Africa, accountability conflicts have taken the form of community protests which are largely fuelled by a range of issues like corruption, e-tolling, service delivery backlogs, youth unemployment and the influx of foreign migrants (Gower, 2009). As Wasserman & Garman (2014) observe, these protests are born out of the frustration with the continued high levels of inequality and a revolt against a government that is increasingly seen as uncaring and not listening. Zimbabwe has experienced constitutional, accountability and electoral conflicts

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[10]The Bill was passed by the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces in November 2011 and 2012 respectively. But in September 2013 President Jacob Zuma refused to sign the Bill into law and sent it back to the parliament where it was eventually passed into law. It aims to regulate the classification, protection and dissemination of state information, weighing state interests against transparency and freedom of expression.

[11] AIPPA was passed in 2002 by the parliament of Zimbabwe. It provides for the licensing of all media organisations and registration of all journalists with the government appointed Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). Anyone who disobeys this Act may have his or her name struck from the roll of journalists, or be suspended or made to pay a heavy fine.

[12] BSA was passed in 2001, which among other things places excessive powers in the hands of the Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, who is the ultimate licensing authority. The Act seriously inhibited investment in the broadcasting sector by creating unrealistic licensing conditions (like the 75 percent local content programming and outlawing foreign investment in the sector), particularly for commercial broadcasting.

[13] POSA which succeeded the colonial-inherited Law and Order Maintenance Act was passed in 2002 in order to restrict freedom of expression, movement and assembly. It criminalises anyone who undermines or makes "any abusive, indecent, obscene or false statement about or concerning the President or an acting President, whether in respect of his person or his office.

[14] This refers to conflicts that accompany and are triggered by, democratic transformations like constitutional, accountability and electoral issues.

which have manifested themselves through disputed elections, poor service delivery, deteriorating economic situation and worsening human rights record (Makumbe, 2009; Sachikonye, 2002).

Besides social protests, the two countries have bottom heavy population structures, a phenomenon known as "youth bulge[15]" and their youth are generally politically and economically disenfranchised which is evidenced by high youth unemployment rates (Guduza & Chingarande, 2011; Gower, 2009; International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2012). Both countries are ranked amongst the top 12 most unequal countries as measured by the Gini coefficient[16]. Although both countries boast of youthful populations which could be translated into "demographic dividends[17]", research (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013; Resnick & Casale, 2011) shows that failure to integrate youth into development processes in Zimbabwe and South Africa has seen them being recruited as "foot soldiers" for political violence and criminal activities. In South Africa, young people are marginalised by political and social structures which are unable to uplift them (Garman & Malila, 2016). Discontent especially amongst out-of-school youth has been singled out as a key factor in community protests in both countries (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013; Bernstein & Johnston, 2007; Munro, 2015). As a result, the toxic mixture of poverty, inequality and large youthful populations poses a real threat to the stability of Zimbabwe and South Africa (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013; Seekings, 2014). Writing in the South African context, Seekings further asserts that "all these factors might be expected to result in distinctive disaffection and a propensity for dissent" (2014: 70).

In terms of connectivity, Zimbabwe and South Africa are characterised by high internet penetration and Facebook usage rates spawned by the uptake of mobile and fixed broadband internet services (ZAMPS, 2013; World Wide Worx, 2014; see Chapter Two). The popularity of Facebook in both countries has been fuelled by the introduction of data bundles and zero-rated[18] services by the major mobiles service providers. Youth in both countries have also

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[15] This is a demographic phenomenon characterised by high fertility rates which result in a large share of the population consisting of children and young adults who are mostly dependent on parents (Lin, 2012). Viewed negatively youth bulge presupposes a "demographic time bomb", whereas when looked at from a positive lens it associated with "demographic dividends".

[16] The Gini coefficient (also known as the Gini index or Gini ratio) (/dʒini/ jee-nee) is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income distribution of a nation's residents, and is the most commonly used measure of inequality.

[17] This refers to the accelerated economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in a country's fertility and the subsequent change in the population age structure.

[18] The practice involves mobile carriers, through a prior agreement with specific content providers, offering free mobile data to allow customers to access particular online content or services at no additional costs.

been identified as the heaviest users of Facebook; hence this study endeavoured to investigate whether those who are politically engaged are deploying this platform for political purposes.

1.2 The research problem: why focus on social media and politically engaged youths?

The youth constitute an important population group within any given society largely due to their energy and experimental outlook to life (Bauman, 2004). Young people are more experimental with new technologies for political action when compared to other groups (boyd, 2014). Some scholars (Honwana, 2012; Chamunogwa, 2011) have argued that youth's demographic weight in any society gives them a numerical number which can tilt the balance of power when mobilised for political change. This demographic superiority presents them with a comparative advantage in relation to other population groups. Because of their numerical advantage (amongst the voting population, unemployed groups of people and so forth), the youth have the power to mobilise and advocate for positive and transformative political changes in different societies (Honwana, 2013; Bayat, 2010). Like the proletariat within the classical Marxist theory who are seen as holding the power to make the capitalist economic system ungovernable and redundant (Giddens, 1985), the youth are also represented as "kingmakers" within developing societies hence the coinage of monikers such as "youth revolutions".

Youths are also overly represented in social protests and non-conventional modes of political participation (Resnick & Casale, 2010; Loader, 2008; Dahlgren, 2013; see also Chapter Two) which makes them an interesting group to study in relation to the use of social media for political action. For example, politically engaged youths frustrated with the status quo have been at the forefront of major political events such as the Soweto Uprising in South Africa (see Olorunnisola & Martin, 2011) and the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe (Zeilig, 2008; see Chapter Two). A study by Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2007) found that youths preferred online-based activism compared to traditional forms. Similarly, Tapscott (2009) observes that young people have received special attention in academic work around new technologies because of the close relationship between youth and the internet. Unlike any other social group, young people globally interact with social media platforms more actively in their everyday lives. In light of these observations, it is important to study the Facebook usage of politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Although social media are a new phenomenon in Africa, these platforms are increasingly being appropriated by the youth for political participation (see Bosch, 2013; SANPAD, 2013; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014; Ndlovu & Mbenga; 2013; Mare, 2014; Mhiripiri & Mutsvairo, 2013). As Olorunnisola (2013: 424) aptly observes, "until very recently, examinations of the communications dimension to socio-political transformations had focused principally on "old" media in single or a few assortments of African countries". In Africa, immense literature (see Mudhai, 2004; Willems, 2011; Moyo, 2011; Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2015; Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015; Kalyango & Adu-Kumi, 2012; Bohler-Muller & van der Merwe, 2011; Mudhai, Banda & Tettey, 2009; Wasserman, 2011; Ekine, 2010; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Moussa, 2013; Martin & Olorunnisola, 2013; Alozie, Akpan-Obong & Foster, 2011; Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013; Ogola, 2015; Mpofu, 2013; 2015; Makinen & Kuira, 2012; Chuma, 2006; Ngomba, 2016; Olorunnisola & Douai, 2013) exists on the intersection between social media and political participation. For instance, an edited book by Olorunnisola & Douai, 2013 entitled: *New Media Influence on Social and Political Change in Africa* addresses the development of new mass media and communication tools and its influence on social and political change. Based on writings from scholars situated in different national and spatial contexts, the book demonstrates the complex engagement of new media technologies for political work. Whilst most of the case studies in Olorunnisola & Douai's (2013) focus on citizen engagement through new media, social movements' creative appropriation of these tools for mobilisation purposes and how politicians are deploying social media platforms for election campaigning, very little research has been conducted on how politically engaged youths use Facebook for political purposes.

Another book titled: *African Media and the Digital Public Sphere edited by* Mudhai, Tettey, Banda, (2009) also examines the claims that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are catalysts of democratic change in Africa. Adopting the optimist, pragmatist-realist and pessimist standpoints on the relationship between new media and political change, Mudhai et al., (2009) underscore the importance of contextual factors and digital divide in terms of how situated actors in Africa interact with new media for political purposes. Investigating the use of new media technologies by mainstream political parties in Kenya during the disputed 2007 election, Nyabuga & Mudhai (2009) argue that while new media has the potential to help monitor elections and mobilise political activity and possibly encourage political engagement, they can also reinforce positions of those in power and are

susceptible to manipulation by human agents. Examining the impact on social media on political mobilisation in East and West Africa, Kalyango & Adu-Kumi (2013) point out that the role of media continues to be useful in mobilising and drawing citizens to focus on issues that are perceived as important and in priming public opinion among many Africans to get engaged in the political process of governance and democratisation. In their critical evaluation of the Arab Spring and the Soweto Uprising, Olorunnisola & Martin (2011) observe that assessments underscore citizen empowerment and multiplier capabilities of new media but also highlight the value of contextual factors that minimise hyperbolic assumptions about the contribution of new media to the formation and progression of social movements.

Notable exceptions exist in Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique and South Africa where studies (see Otieno & Mukhongo, 2013; Iwilade, 2013; Honwana, 2013; SANPAD, 2013) have begun to sprout focusing on how youths use new media for political change. In Kenya, Otieno & Mukhongo (2013) examined whether there is any relationship between the level of youth engagement on social media and their level of interest in politics. Grounded in a post-test quasi experiment to compare political interest between a naturally occurring group of Facebook users and a naturally occurring group of non-Facebook users, their findings reveals that Facebook has provided the youth with a platform where they can access political information in formats that are appealing to them. In another study by Mukhongo & Macharia (2016), they argue that social media has reinvigorated political participation by educated urban youth in Kenya. According to Mukhongo (2014), new media platforms, particularly social networks act as vehicles for the visual representation of a nation's political discourse among the youth Web 2.0 has created online spaces (private and public) that have been appropriated by Kenyan youths, locally, and in the diaspora to weave their own political narratives and present them in forums that accommodate their views without fear of censorship or regulation that characterises "offline" communications. She argues that political images posted by the youth in Kenya on their online private spaces can be used to promote political stereotypes, subjectivities and perpetuate visual hegemonies as well as allows the youth to circumvent government surveillance tactics and affords nations an opportunity to correct the media hegemony by rewriting their own stories on a platform that is not just national, but transnational (Mukhongo, 2014).

Writing about youth and political participation in South Africa, Mozambique, Senegal and Tunisia, Honwana (2013; 2014) argues that young people are protesting their socio-economic

and political marginalisation through social media platforms and street demonstrations. Through social media posts, Hip Hop lyrics and graffiti young Africans are organising in many ways, and are making their voices heard. Iwilade (2013) discusses the use of social media by youth in Nigeria and Mozambique. Both cases illustrated the use of ICTs and social media to mobilise for protests, in ways that not only marginalised the traditional opposition, but also allowed youth to broaden and dominate the protest discourses. According to Iwilade (2013), new media enables the youth to renegotiate their place and space with patterns of authority and control in Africa. For him, the intersection between youth protest, the pressures of a global system in crisis and the opportunities being provided by globalised social media has been critical not only to the deepening of resistance, but also to the ability of youth to appropriate the discourses and channel grievance (Iwilade, 2013). Though important to the debate on social media and political action, these studies do not explicitly focus on Facebook and politically engaged youths.

Although there is bourgeoning literature on the relationship between youth, social media and political participation in non-Western societies in general and in Africa in particular, this is not comparable to trends in Western societies where these issues have occupied the minds of scholars for a long time. Much of the literature on youth, new media and political action hails from Western societies and very little academic analysis has been conducted in relation to southern Africa, despite anecdotal evidence showing that the youth are using new media technologies during democratisation conflicts for mass mobilisation purposes. Extant literature (Kahne & Middaugh, 2012; Juris, 2005; Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman, 2012; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011) on the relationship between youth, social media and political participation from Western contexts has largely been framed within the contours of technological determinism[19]. As Olsson (2008) insightfully writes, this stream of literature views the political significance of social media as a consequence of features. Some of these studies (Pew Research Centre 2012; boyd, 2008; Storsul, 2014) emanating from developed societies paint a mixed picture on how politically engaged youths use Facebook for political purposes. Other studies (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2013; Skoric & Kwan, 2011; Olsson, 2007) reveal that the youth use Facebook to engage in "participatory

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[19] Technological determinism assumes that technology is the prime driver of social relations and how they are organised.

politics[20]" (like starting a political group online, circulating a blog about a political issue, or forwarding political videos to friends and to join with others to mobilise political action).

Unlike technological deterministic accounts of the relationship between new media and political change, Kahne et al (2013) focus on specific sets of political and cultural practices and how young Americans deploy social media tools to help redefine the dynamics of political debate and mobilisation. Contrary for institutional politics, participatory politics often facilitate a renegotiation of political power and control with the traditional political entities that are now searching for ways to engage participants (Kahne et al., 2013). Participatory politics allow individuals to operate with greater independence in the political realm, circumventing traditional gatekeepers of information and influence, such as newspaper editors, political parties, and interest groups. Online spaces provide for greater creativity and voice, as participants produce original content using video, images, and text. Rather than displacing institutional politics, Kahne et al., (2013) view participatory politics as a supplemental domain where young people can take part in a dialogue about the issues that matter, think about strategies of mobilisation, and do some of that mobilising collectively online. While some of these studies from Western contexts have generated important insights, they are "predicated on media-saturated societies with broad access to new media technologies that have extended the range of media choices available to consumers" (Wasserman, 2010: 10), hence it cannot help us to understand how and why politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa deploy Facebook for political purposes.

Research also indicate that Facebook was used by anti-FARC protestors to organise an offline social movement in Columbia (Neumayer & Raffl, 2008), by the Occupy movement in the United States (Sassen, 2011; Gerbaudo, 2013), by protesters in the 2011 London riots (Bright, 2011) and by young activists during the Arab Spring[21] (Gerbaudo, 2013; Honwana, 2012; Herrera, 2012) to facilitate collection action in the physical world. As intimated earlier, most of these studies have tended to reproduce hyperbolic conclusions about the mythical powers of social media. Because of the dominance of Western scholars in the knowledge production processes, this has meant that Facebook activist cultures and communication practices that emerge from Western societies, where new media technologies have long been

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[20] Participatory politics are defined as acts that are interactive, peer-based, not guided by deference to elites or formal institutions, and meant to address issues of public concern (Cohen & Kahne, 2012)

[21] This term used to define the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests, riots and civil wars in the Arab world that began on the 18th of December 2010. It led to the removal of presidents in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen; civil uprisings erupted in Libya, Bahrain and Syria; major protests also broke out in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan (Lynch, 2012).

incorporated into activist practices "are applied out of context, and sometimes awkwardly in Africa" (Ibelema, 2008: 36). This study attempted to correct this misnomer by studying the environment in which Facebook is deployed as well as "what [young] people actually do with [social] media" (Couldry, 2010: 204).

Besides single country studies (Herrera, 2012; Lim, 2012; 2013; Aouragh, 2012) coming from Tunisia and Egypt, there is a dearth of comparative research on how and why politically engaged youths—who are seen as central to community protests in Zimbabwe and South Africa—are appropriating Facebook to support their work. Notwithstanding the abundance of literature on new media technologies, youth and political action (Moyo, 2007; Paterson, 2013; Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015, Moyo, 2011; Moyo, 2007, there is a marked dearth of this kind of research in Sub-Saharan Africa, more so in Southern Africa (Booysen, 2015). This study seeks to bridge that gap. It endeavours to find out whether youths utilise Facebook as an alternative space of political activism given their marginalisation from the mainstream mediated public sphere. It also examined the place of social media in lives of politically engaged youths as well as assessed the potential of Facebook to act as an agent of change.

While pockets of research (Wasserman, 2007; Moyo, 2009; Moyo, 2011; Chuma, 2016; Bosch, 2013; SANPAD, 2013; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014; Duncan, 2014; Ndlovu & Mbenga; 2013; Mhiripiri & Mutsvairo, 2013; Mare, 2014; Chiumbu, 2012) have begun to sprout detailing how Zimbabweans and South Africans use new media technologies for political purposes, this stream of literature does not explicitly focus on politically engaged youths who are main concern of this particular study. For instance, research by Moyo (2011) focuses on the use of citizen journalism platforms to disarticulate dictatorial tendencies of the ZANU-PF regime in Zimbabwe. Mutsvairo & Sirks (2015) focuses explicitly on the contribution of the *Baba Jukwa* Facebook page in reinforcing political participation in Zimbabwe. Their study is mainly concerned with the interactions on the Facebook page rather than on how, why, when do youth as a category of social media users deploy the platform for political participation. Mutsvairo & Sirks (2015) concluded that in spite of the page's ability to encourage Zimbabweans to openly discuss and share thoughts, there simply is no evidence that Baba Jukwa had helped facilitate increased democratic participation. In as much as these age-blind studies are very insightful, they are silent on disaggregated data on

the use of social media platforms by young people, their political posting behaviours and discursive participation practices.

There is a litany of research (see Wasserman, 2007; Chiumbu, 2012; Loudon, 2010; Glenn & Mattes, 2011; Dawson, 2012; Willems, 2010; Wasserman, 2011; Munro, 2015) on new media technologies and political action in South Africa, although most of the literature neglects the issue of how, why, to what effect and when do young people use social media for political participation. As Mutsvairo (2016) reminds us, there has outrageously been lack of empirical accounts detailing who is doing what, why, where, when and with what impact in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of these studies (Chiumbu, 2012; Wasserman, 2007; Loudon, 2010) are preoccupied with how social movement actors deploy new media technologies like websites, emails, mobile phones and the internet to instigate social and political change. As Chiumbu (2015) aptly puts it, new media technologies are indeed incorporated in the movements' communication repertoire, but mainly for administrative and networking purposes and not necessarily for mass mobilisation purposes. Very few of these studies (Bosch, 2013; Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013; SANPAD, 2013) have attempted to examine how and why youth activists increasingly prefer to use social media platforms when compared to the mainstream media for their political actions. This emergent body of research in South Africa suggests that many young people are opting to use new media and alternative forms of media as they feel marginalised by the mainstream media and party political institutions (SANPAD, 2013; Garman & Malila, 2016; Wasserman, 2014; Bosch, 2013).

Due to a lack of systematic and empirical research, it is not clear whether or not politically engaged youths in both countries are using Facebook to facilitate online political activism. This is more acute because extant research which is by and large age-blind fails to examine the civic experiences of different segments of the youth—that is politically engaged or disengaged. As this study will show, age-blindness does not do justice to the issue of youth political disengagement which has been characterised as symbolising a "civic crisis" (Putnam, 2000) in Western societies as well as in developing societies especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Seekings, 2014). Because the youth are often poorly served by traditional civic and political institutions, including mainstream media, they provide an important target group for understanding how and why they use new media technologies for political purposes. In terms of methodological approach, studies (Chuma, 2006; Lewis, Hussen & van Vuuren, 2013; Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014; Munro, 2015)

from South Africa have relied heavily on qualitative content analysis of Facebook pages hence lack an appreciation of the "insider's perspective" and "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) obtainable through qualitative interviews and online participant observation. As Chapter Four will show, in-depth interviews are important because they allow researchers to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individual participants (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 1999).

Although scholars (Walton, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012; 2016; Sakr, 2013; Chiumbu, 2015) have looked at the role of Facebook page and group administrators as agenda setters in African social movements, there is conspicuous scarcity of research focusing on the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook pages. Gerbaudo (2016) examined the levels of user engagement and the dominant themes on two highly influential activist Facebook pages: the WAAKS (We are all Khaled Said) Facebook page, the most important communication channel in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and the DRY (Real Democracy Now) Facebook page, an arm of the foremost protest organisation in the Indignados movement in Spain. He found that these groups were characterised by peaks in feedback loops between administrators and users as well as moments of digital enthuasism (Gerbaudo, 2016). With the exception of this study, there are no studies in Southern Africa which have focused on discursive interactions and the micro-politics of participation on Facebook pages and groups. As such, the present study sought to fill this lacuna.

In her recent study, Chiumbu (2015) explores the power dynamics and pre-figurative politics that punctuate social media use within social movements in South Africa. Through the lens of radical democracy and critical participation theories, Chiumbu (2015: 1-2) argues that while the material on the websites, social media platforms and print media project counter-hegemonic ideologies, the discursive and institutional practices of the social movements do not manifest radical democratic principles and genuine participation. She notes that the discursive struggles and tensions highlight the importance of recognising power dynamics within media practices of social movements (Chiumbu, 2015). Through interviews and online participant observation, it also assessed the extent to which Facebook pages and groups could be viewed as an alternative space for online political activism.

1.3 Facebook: So what is it and how does it work?

Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook, 2015). Facebook was started by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow students at Harvard University. Initially designed to allow university students to stay connected with college friends and to find dates, Facebook is the most visited social network site on the internet (Alexa, 2015). It boasts of 1.44 billion monthly active users, which means that it is used by every seventh person on Earth (Alexa, 2015). As of 31st March 2015, Facebook had 1.25 billion mobile monthly active users. At least 936 million daily active users were logging on to the site (Facebook, 2015). In Africa, there were 51,612,460 Facebook users as of 31st December 2012, representing a 4.8% penetration rate (Internetworldstats, 2014). Although there is a gradual decrease in daily users, specifically among teenagers in Western countries, the youth remain the most active users of the site (Miller, 2013; Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkatraman & Wang, 2016). Given its embeddness in the everyday lives of the youth, Facebook provides an interesting "research laboratory" to examine how and why politically active youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa use the site to facilitate political activism.

Facebook's business model is based on systematically monitoring and harvesting of user data (such as the way people describe themselves in their profiles, who they are connected to, their interests and hobbies and their online activities) which the company eventually sells as a commodity to advertising clients (Van Dijck, 2013; Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014). Facebook acts as an advertising agent linking advertisers with a huge pool of users on its database. Although the company listed on the New York stock exchange in a record breaking transaction in 2012, it essentially relies on digital free labour to generate economic value (Scholz, 2013; Andrejevic, 2010). As Fuchs (2014) notes, Facebook uses privacy policies to legitimate its capital accumulation model of turning user data into a private good. Like other media platforms, Facebook is susceptible to both state and corporate censorship. As MacKinnon, Miltner, Gray & Lim (2014: 132) observe, the site's ability "to respect users' freedom of expression is heavily influenced by national legal and regulatory contexts". The company also subjects its users to intermediary censorship, which may limit activists' freedom of speech and expression (Zuckerman, 2013). This means that the violation of the site's community standards can lead to the deletion of content, blocking it from view for users in

specific jurisdictions, or shutting down of the account of a user who posts certain content (Youmans & York, 2012).

While Twitter and Facebook are sometimes seen as similar in terms of their usage, they are distinctly different in terms of their respective technical infrastructures, appearance, and terminology (boyd & Ellison, 2008). The two sites are comparable in terms of their modes of communication. In terms of redistribution of content (Twitter uses retweet while Facebook has a share button). For interaction purposes, Facebook has features like comment, chat and private messaging (I will return to these features below) while Twitter makes use of mentions, @reply and direct message. Both platforms also have acknowledging features (like on Facebook and favourite on Twitter). They are also different in the sense that Twitter restricts its users to 140 characters, while Facebook imposes no restriction. Both platforms have hashtag features, although Twitter was the first to roll it out. Whereas Twitter is generally treated as generally public in nature, Facebook intersects the private and public spheres in complex ways. In contrast to Twitter, Facebook allows its users to create groups, fan pages and write notes (Below I will define these terms). Unlike Twitter, Instagram and MySpace users who can use pseudonyms, Facebook require its users to use their real names (Youmans & York, 2012). Compared to mobile-centric platforms like Instagram, Facebook can be accessed through an array of technological gadgets. A Facebook account can be opened by anyone aged 13 years and above with a valid email address or mobile phone number.

Facebook is built around an architecture of code that produces a specific digital environment. Architecture denotes a composite of structure, design and organisation (Papacharissi, 2009). Like the architecture of physical spaces, the Facebook architecture simultaneously enables and restricts particular modes of interaction (Valtysson, 2012). This is because the site is specified by programming code (boyd, 2010). Its features allow users to friend[22] other users, share text updates (status updates), photos and private messages, with a large emphasis on interacting online through "liking[23]", "tagging", "sharing", "following" and commenting on the "status" of friends (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2012). "Friending" on Facebook is not restricted to people you know, but people you may or should know according to an

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[22] Friends are contacts added by users. One has to "accept" a friend request before being added to a user's list of contacts.

[23] In February 2016, Facebook introduced a range of "likes" that express a far more nuanced range approval. The social network rolled out "Reactions" - an extension of the "Like" button - to allow users to express sadness, wow, anger, love and laughter. The five new buttons appear as animated emoticons that pop up when the "Like" button is held down on mobile devices. The buttons appear on desktops when users hover over the "Like" button.

algorithm's computation. "Liking" constitutes a provoked automated gesture that yields precious information about people's desires and predilections (van Dijck, 2012). "Following" discloses and connects people's interests and allows for the detection of trends.

Upon joining Facebook, users obtain a "page" on which to create a personal "profile". As Fuchs (2014) posits, Facebook is implicated in the licquafaction of boundaries (blurring the oft-cited divide between the private and public sphere). This is because the site allows for the convergence of personal data, communicative data, social network data/ community data (in relation to private roles like friend, father, mother and so forth), civic roles (like socio-cultural roles as fan community members), public roles (like socio-political roles as youth activists) and so forth (Fuchs, 2014). Thus it integrates tools that support various forms of sociality (like cognition, communication and cooperation) into one platform. In terms of privacy settings, the Facebook architecture is designed in such a way that users are able to control which parts of their profiles are visible to others. Users' profiles can be viewed by friends only, friends of friends, friends and networks and everyone on the internet.

As pointed out earlier, Facebook has features like the "wall" which refers to a space on every user's profile page that allows friends to post messages for others to see; "pokes", which allows users to send an emoticon known as a poke to each other; "chat", which allows users to communicate with their friends in real-time; "photos", where users can upload albums and photos; "voice calls", which enables users to make live voice calls via Facebook chat; "notes", a blogging feature which allows users to post their stories, embeddable images and tags and "fan pages" where users can show support for a public figure (Facebook, 2015). Causes is another feature which enables users to make donations to charities (predefined by Facebook). To keep users updated about their social circles, Facebook has two features: newsfeed (which appears on the homepage of each user) and mini-feed (which appears in each individual's profile). Newsfeed updates a personalised list of news stories throughout the day generated by the activity of friends.

The groups feature is another important component of Facebook. Facebook allows users to create and join groups based around common interests and activities. Once a user joins a Facebook group, he/she receives a message on the notifications button whenever someone posts something in the group. There are three kinds of Facebook groups: secret, public and private (Westling, 2007; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009). A secret group does not appear in group search results or in members' profiles and requires an invitation from an administrator to join.

Group information can only be viewed by members. A public group allows anyone to join and to invite others to join. Information in this group can be viewed by anyone with a Facebook account. A private group requires approval from Facebook administrator(s) for one to join. Anyone can see the group information but all discussions, posted items and list of members remain private. It is important to underscore that Facebook is a dynamic environment which is constantly changing and upgrading its architecture and EdgeRank algorithms. The group feature provided a fruitful "testing ground" to tease out the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook.

The choice to focus on Facebook was also shaped by the fact that Facebook compared to Twitter has a far larger penetration in Africa. Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform in Zimbabwe and South Africa (see Chapter Two). Most studies from Western contexts have focused on Twitter which has left Facebook surprisingly understudied (Gerbaudo, 2016). At the time when i undertook fieldwork for this particular study, Facebook was the place of choice for politically engaged youths judging by the amount of political conversations on profiles, pages and groups. Below, I look at the debate of the role of social media in youth political involvement.

1.4 Social media and political action: The grand debate?

boyd (2008) asks a pertinent question: Can social network sites enable political action? Although the answer to this poignant question remains elusive (Wasserman, 2011; Jebril et al, 2013), an interesting debate has ensued within academic literature pitting cyber-optimists, cyber-pessimists and cyber-realists. Cyber-optimists (Shirky, 2008; Papacharissi, 2010) celebrate social media's revolutionary and democratising potential in ways that resonate with technological deterministic discourses. Cyber-pessimists (Gladwell, 2010; Dean, 2005) question the revolutionary potential of the social media in bringing about political change. In the middle, are cyber-realists (Morozov, 2011; Aouragh, 2013; 2013) who adopt a more cautious approach that transcends both the cyber-optimist and cyber-pessimist approaches. As Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer (2013) observe, the third approach tends to use comparative research to emphasise the impact that political, social, and economic variations have on the role of the social media in collective action.

Cyber-optimists (Shirky, 2008; Diamond, 2010) have branded Facebook as a "liberation technology" and "technology of freedom", which assist activist groupings in their quest to reinvigorate democratic processes. Liberation technology is defined as "any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom" (Diamond, 2010: 51). He describes social media as "liberation technology" that "enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilise protest and monitor elections" (Diamond, 2010: 70). Because of this belief in "liberation technologies", social media platforms like Facebook are viewed as endowed with unlimited powers which eventually empower people to liberate themselves from state repression (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2012). Scholars (Dahlgren, 2013; Root, 2012) argue that social media platforms enhance access to information, enable citizen interactions and facilitate discussions and opinion formation. In light of this, I sought to examine from interview responses whether Zimbabwean and South African youths viewed Facebook as "liberation technology".

Reinventing Sen's (1999) notion of freedom enhancement[24], Shirky, the leading evangelist of cyber-optimism, argues that the political use of Facebook enhances freedom: "Social tools create what economists would call a positive supply-side shock to the amount of freedom in the world. [...] To speak online is to publish, and to publish online is to connect with others. With the arrival of globally accessible publishing, freedom of speech is now freedom of the press and freedom of the press is freedom of assembly" (2008: 172). He further argues that social media "will result in a net improvement for democracy" (Gladwell & Shirky, 2011: 154). With these issues in mind, this study will seek to assess whether such "unmitigated euphoria" and optimism is warranted in Southern Africa. The study also examined whether the benefits of Facebook as espoused by Shirky holds for youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Cyber-optimists laud Facebook pages for "levelling the playing field" (Castells, 2012) by empowering otherwise powerless actors as well as acting as a crucial tool of political activism (Neumayer & Raffl, 2008; Makinen & Kuira, 2008; Harlow, 2012; Lim, 2012). For instance, Castells (2012: 229) argues that the "networked movements of our time are largely

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[24] It is based on the notion that development is a process of expansion of capabilities as well as expansion of the real freedoms that the citizens enjoy to pursue the objectives they have reason to value.

based on the internet". Social media are also touted as spawning new repertoires of collective action (Castells, 2012) like "digital repertoires of action" (Earl & Kimport, 2011) or "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) at the local, national and transnational level. Facebook pages are also seen as enhancing activists' ability to share, cooperate, and act together (Shirky, 2008). Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund & Sandoval (2011) also suggest that the internet has the ability to build communities. As intimated earlier, Facebook pages are also viewed as providing cultural and political spaces for young people to "have a right to express themselves, for their voices to become visible to "be heard" [through]" (Livingstone, Couldry & Markham, 2007: 4). In-depth interviews were used to ascertain the validity of these claims by cyber-optimists in both countries. Online participant observation was used to analyse whether Facebook had lived up to the cyber-utopian promise, or if the idea of social media platforms promoting great political engagement was merely a myth.

Young activists and marginalised groups often excluded from mainstream media are seen as turning to social media (Harlow, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2013), which serves as both the communication channel and the actual "field" of activism itself (Lievrouw, 2011). Jenkins sees social media in context of the development that "the Web has become a site of consumer participation" (Jenkins, 2008: 137). With the aid of qualitative interviews, I will examine whether youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa are using Facebook to compensate for the lack of political voice in the mainstream media. Online observations also assisted me to assess whether youth activists are utilising Facebook as an actual "field" of activism.

Writing about the Arab Spring, Gerbaudo (2012) argues that the We Are All Khalid Said (WAAKS) Facebook page was used as an "emotional choreography of assembly" which facilitated the coming together of an individualised constituency around common identities, common places, common names and formats of action. This page constituted a trending and magnetic place where young activists converged to exchange information about police brutality, human rights violations as well as agitating for the overthrow of the Egyptian government. Online observations assisted me to investigate whether Zimbabwean and South African youth activists used Facebook to facilitate an "emotional choreography of assembly".

Despite the afore-mentioned hyperbolic accounts about the potential of social media to instigate political change during the Arab Spring, more sober theorisations have begun to

emerge (see Curran, 2012; Voltmer, 2013; Lynch, 2012; Robertson, 2013). These scholars argue that the role of social media in the process of regime change cannot be disentangled from other societal factors and variables. For instance, Curran (2012) observes that wider societal contextual factors (such as deteriorating economic conditions, youth unemployment, electoral fraud, and political repression) played an instrumental role while social media were implicated as amplifiers of the protests and demonstrations. In the same vein, some scholars (Fuchs, 2014; Lynch, 2012) argue that social media may have played an important role at key moments in the unfolding of those revolutionary events, but they did so within a context shaped by older media like Al-Jazeera. The argument here is that new media cannot be extricated from legacy media. Robertson (2013: 339-340) notes that while social media promotes a particular type of conversation, but this exchanging of views and opinions cannot form the only part of the democratisation process, and understanding "media connectivity" among the various actors is necessary. These scholars (Curran, 2012; Robertson, 2013; Lynch, 2012; Lim, 2014) advocate for transcending the debate between cyber-optimist and cyber-pessimist perspectives on the role of social media in political change, they propose a shift away from perspectives that isolate the internet from other media, and they call for a better understanding of the dialectical relationship between online and offline political action. This study sought to find out whether there was interconnectivity between the use of Facebook and "old" media for political action by Zimbabwean and South African youth activists.

Cyber-pessimists (Gladwell, 2010; Dean, 2005) argue that social media are not "magic bullets" for solving waning levels of formal political participation. They foreground the disadvantages of relying on social media for political participation. Cyber-pessimists postulate that social media reinforces asymmetries between the information rich and poor and engaged and disengaged youth (Norris & Curtice, 2006). Facebook pages are viewed as a new threat to democracy (lambasted for depoliticising and fragmenting citizens) (Dean, 2005). Given the imbalances with regard to access to the internet, this study sought to find out how the political economy of connectivity shaped participation levels on Facebook.

Facebook activism is lambasted for being based on weak ties and therefore demanding low-risk participation (Gladwell, 2010). Gladwell criticises cyber-optimists for believing "...a Facebook friend is the same as a real friend. In addition, while social network [sites] are

effective at increasing participation, they only do so by 'lessening the level of motivation that participation requires" (2010: 47). Based on the distinction between close friends and more distant friends and acquaintances, Gladwell (2010) posits that Facebook does not contribute to collective identities built on strong ties necessary for high risk activism. He adds that Facebook activism only make it "easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact" (Gladwell, 2010: 47). For Gladwell (2010: 49), social media "are not a natural enemy of the status quo" and "are well suited to making the existing social order more efficient". Extending this argument further, scholars (Kuper, 2012; Bretherton, 2011) who reincarnate the ghost of Karl Marx's critique of religion as the "opium of the oppressed" also dismiss Facebook as an "anti-revolutionary" platform that keeps the world quiet and peaceful. I also investigated respondents' assessment of Facebook's potential as an agent of change.

Cyber-agnosticism[25] as propounded by Morozov (2011: 319) puts emphasis on studying the environment in which social media operate and rejects the view that social media have a single preordained outcome. He criticises cyber-optimism for promoting the gospel of "technological solutionism[26]" where technical fixes are seen as an answer to democratic challenges (Morozov, 2013). Mosco (2004) calls this belief in the liberating power of technology the notion of the "digital sublime". According to Morozov (2013: 43), technological solutionism "impoverish and infantilise our public debate". Building on Gladwell's argument, Morozov (2009) contends that Facebook activism is a very shallow and an ineffective form of activism, which he termed "slacktivism". Slacktivism refers to a feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact (Morozov, 2011; White, 2010; Dean, 2005). As Morozov (2011) observes, this type of activism gives those who participate in "slacktivist[27]" campaigns an illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook group. In concurrence, Lim (2013: 2) adds that Facebook activism has a tendency of being fast, thin and many (which means it amasses a lot of "followers" and "likes" through viral campaigns but lacks the gravitas to effect tangible political change).

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[25] Cyber-agnosticism is based on an unyielding refusal to take an stance on whether the internet is tool for liberation or repression (Morozov, 2011)

[26] Technological solutionism refers to the treatment of "all complex social situations either as neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimised – if only the right algorithms are in place" (Morozov, 2010; xiii).

[27] Slacktivism has come to represent a pejorative term that refers to supposedly inauthentic, low-threshold forms of political engagement online, such as signing an e-petition or "liking" a Facebook page. Compared to offline methods, slacktivism is viewed as low effort forms of online engagement are less effective than offline methods (Dennis, 2015).

For cyber-pessimists, "slacktivism" results in the replacement of effective real-world activism with ineffective online activism (Christensen, 2011). However recent research (Dennis, 2015; Barberá, Wang, Bonneau, Jost, Nagler & Gonzalez-Bailon, 2015) suggest that while cyber-pessimists dismiss social media activism as "clicktivism" or "slacktivism" those who change their profile picture, filters, retweet trending hashtags and post prayers as signs of solidarity also have a role in activism in their own little ways. According to Barberá et al., (2015), there are two kinds of groups within the protest and non-protest communication networks: centre (made of a small minority active at the centre that generated most of the content, photos, and messages) and "critical periphery" (made of a larger group of people who amplify and share the messages from the core group). Dennis (2015) further argues that the slacktivist critique is flawed by an overtly narrow focus. He points out that the critique lacks an appreciation for the complexity of normalised use and instead uses specific examples to support vague, grand theories of internet usage. He accuses critiques of slacktivism for over-focussing on social media in isolation thereby ignoring the multifaceted engagement strategies that political actors employ, and the expansive, hybrid media system that such tools operate within. Slacktivism is often deemed to be lazy activism yet given the time-pressure that citizens experience day-to-day, the granular nature of web 2.0 technologies may lower the threshold for involvement (Dennis, 2015). In-depth interviews were useful in empirically assessing whether this pessimistic outlook is warranted in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

While acknowledging that social media fuels political participation, Morozov (2011) also warns that the same platforms are being used by authoritarian regimes to track, suppress, and silence dissidents. Corporate social media surveillance and policing practices are seen as spawning a "panopticon[28]" (Foucault, 1995) or surveillance[29] society, in which ordinary citizens and activists are criminalised for their online activities. In concurrence, Aouragh (2012; 2013) views Facebook as a double-edged technology[30] with both empowering and disempowering potentialities. Likening social media to Damocles' sword, Aouragh (2013) argues that those who are empowered by taking the seat under the sword do so haunted by the

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[28] The concept of panopticon associated with Jeremy Bentham is concerned with the all pervasiveness of mass surveillance in modern societies, where the few (state authorities) see the many (the entire population).

[29] A society organised around the collection, recording, storage, analysis and application of information on individuals and groups.

[30] Social or other media neither result in positive or negative consequences. They do not act. They do not make society. They do not have one-dimensional impacts. Media are systems that are in a complex manner embedded into antagonistic economic, political and cultural power structures that are antagonistic (Fuchs, 2016).

constant threat of being killed by the same sword, because slaughter could come at the slightest disruption. This observation dovetails with Curran's (2002) view that media [including new and social media] are spaces, where media power and counter-power are played out. Cases abound where authoritarian (like Iran, China, Bahrain, Egypt and Syria) and liberal-democratic systems (United States of America) have used social media to entrap activists and to conduct mass surveillance of citizens through accessing servers directly and imposing intermediary liability on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) (MacKinnon, 2011; Youmans & York, 2012). I also sought to establish if and how the "chilling effect" of state surveillance influenced the way youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa deployed Facebook for political purposes.

Critical perspectives of the political economy of the internet and social media have also highlighted the limitations of social media in terms of bringing about revolutionary political change (Barassi & Trere, 2013; Freedman, 2012; van Dijck, 2011). These scholars (Fuchs, 2013; Freedman, 2012) who recuperate the role of critical theory in understanding new media technologies foreground the importance of reflecting on existing configurations of power. They demonstrate that social media are embedded into structures of control and domination (Fuchs, 2016; Freedman, 2012). Critiquing cyber-optimists' hyperbolic claims, critical political economists of the internet[31] argue that, far from reinventing the public sphere, the social media attention economy is linked to issues of surveillance, corporate control and the exploitation of users' "immaterial labour[32]" (Andrejevic, 2010). Rather than fostering produsage(blurring of production and consumption) (Bruns, 2008), the usage of social media is viewed as the outsourcing of productive labour from wage labour to users who work completely for free and help maximising the rate of exploitation (Fuchs, 2012). Fisher (2012) introduces the notion of "audience alienation", suggesting that users of Facebook are not only exploited, but also do not control content and content production. Activists are therefore vulnerable to the privacy policies and politics of the platform owners (Zuckerman, 2013). As Youmans & York (2012) argue, the commercial mechanisms of social media and the needs of activists do not necessarily match. This study sought to find out how the commercial considerations of Facebook clashed with youth activists' needs. Next, I discuss the theoretical framework.

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[31] Marxist in its orientation, this perspective analyse the private commercial social media companies in capitalist societies from the point of view of their inherent nature to pursue and maximise profits sometimes at the expense of promoting public good (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010).
[32] Immaterial labour denotes activity that produces 'cultural content' of the commodity. It involves a series of activities that are not normally recognised as 'work' like Facebooking and blogging.

1.5 The Theoretical Context

The analysis was influenced by the Fraser's (1990; 1992; 1997) concept of subaltern counter-publics and Scott's (1976; 1985; 1990) metaphor of hidden transcripts (see Chapter Three for a comprehensive theoretical framework). I was interested in testing the applicability of Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics in the Zimbabwean and South African contexts. This study also sought to extend the analytical rigour of Fraser's theoretical frame through the incorporation of Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts, which acknowledges the multi-dimensional nature of resistance as well as the creative circulation of subversive discourses behind the backs of the powerful elite. Fraser's theoretical frame provides a valuable conceptual resource to analyse how and why youth activists use Facebook for political activities, the extent to which Facebook groups can be considered as alternative spaces for political activism and how discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation play out on Facebook groups. Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts was also useful for analysing the various kinds of political discourses which are shared by politically engaged youth on Facebook.

In a critique of Habermas's (1989) notion of the public sphere (more on this will be discussed in Chapter Three), Fraser (1990) argues that marginalised groups may find greater opportunities for exercising voice through creating their own spaces, which she terms "subaltern counter-publics". The term refers to "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1992: 123). These spaces are also characterised by alternative modes of address, alternative forms of social expression, alternative modes of political participation and ways of communicating with a range of publics, who are often politically and culturally marginalised. Through in-depth interviews, I sought to get "thick descriptions" on how and why politically engaged youths used Facebook for political purposes in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Focusing on the fragmentation of the public sphere, Fraser (1990) highlights the legitimate political and social contestation which emanate from marginalised groups over who is allowed to speak in the public, on behalf of whom and what topics are fit for discussion.

Alternative spaces to the dominant bourgeois public sphere are seen as enabling marginalised groups to express their grievances, challenge symbolic domination and advance their political interests. This study was interested in finding out how respondents used Facebook to advance their political objectives.

Fraser's theory is concerned with the existence of the dominant public sphere (populated by the elites) and subaltern counter-publics (made up of historically and culturally marginalised groups) that have been excluded from the dominant public sphere by legal or extra-legal means. This kind of theorisation constitutes an insightful conceptual resource for this study because it is sensitive to the wider socio-political and communication context in which youth activists deploy Facebook for political purposes. It recognises that in stratified societies (like Zimbabwe and South Africa) characterised by structural relations of dominance and subordination, multiple publics exist for different social groups. The theory also acknowledges the political innovations [human agency] of marginalised groups [youth activists] outside the mainstream mediated public sphere.

Building on Fraser's notion of subaltern counter-publics, I coin the term "transnational alternative public spheres" to denote the geographically dispersed communicative arenas spawned by Facebook groups and pages. These communicative arenas allow group members to post, like, comment and chat with others dotted around the globe. Following Melucci (1996), private Facebook groups can also be conceptualised as "submerged networks[33]" of everyday political mobilisation. Thus Facebook groups and pages are viewed as providing spaces where youth activists can contact elected officials directly, share political satire, and express political opinions. This is because subaltern counter-publics allow for the participation of groups (including youth activists) who do not master the critical rational discourse used by politicians, intellectuals, and journalists who dominate mass media discussions (Fraser, 1990).

This study sought to evaluate the extent to which Facebook pages could be conceptualised as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment and bases and training grounds for youth agitational activities directed towards wider publics in Zimbabwe and South Africa. As Fraser notes,

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[33] Submerged networks are made up of the relationships between participants in social movements that are hidden from public view, through which people communicate and exchange information with each other, while also negotiating a collective identity and developing a sense of belonging (Melucci, 1996).

subaltern counter-publics can come to serve a politics of transformation by giving previously excluded groups the time and opportunity to construct their political preferences and express their concerns for themselves (1992). In these alternative spheres, marginalised groups "develop counter-discourses and language, recast their needs and identities and then agitate for their subjects to be debated in the public sphere" (Fraser, 1992: 109). As a result, the public sphere becomes a space of contestation and negotiation among different publics. Online observations enabled me to investigate if the above was reflective of how Facebook is used in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

As Chapter Three will discuss in more detail, Fraser's concept of "intra-public relations" which refers to the quality and character of discursive relations within a subaltern counter-public will be employed to investigate the dialogical nature and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups. It is also a theoretical assumption of this study that Facebook pages as "invented [mediated] spaces of participation[34]" (Cornwall, 2002) are framed by those who create them, and infused with power relations and cultures of interaction carried into them from other spaces (see chapter two). In Gaventa's terms, Facebook groups are spaces of power, in which forms of overt or tacit domination silence certain actors or keep them from entering at all (2006). As Young (1996: 123) observes, "norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people".

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[34] This term refers to spaces created or claimed by citizens meant to challenge the status quo, resist the dominant power relations and advocate for social change (such as direct action, protests and demonstrations) (Cornwall, 2002).

For reasons I will articulate in Chapter Three, I deployed Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts which shares several theoretical affinities with Fraser's notions of alternative styles of political speech and counter-discourses, to document and analyse the kinds of political discourses which are shared by respondents on Facebook groups. Scott's, like Fraser's, theory of everyday forms of resistance proceeds from the basic argument that marginalised groups require spaces of relative autonomy where they could circulate hidden transcripts beyond the supervision of the dominant publics. According to Scott (1985), hidden transcripts denote subtle forms of contesting "public transcripts" or dominant discourses by making use of prescribed roles and language to resist the abuse of power. Some of the hidden transcripts which were identified by Scott (which are also relevant for this study as analytical pointers) include: rumour, gossip, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms and anonymity. I also modified Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts to read "digital hidden transcripts" (I will elaborate on this concept in Chapters Three and Eight).

1.6.1 Research Question and Objectives

The main research question of this study is: how, why and when do youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa?

In conceptualising this broad research question, I disaggregate it into four research objectives:

- How and why do youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook to mediate political action?
- How do dialogic interactions and micro-politics of participation play out on Facebook groups and fan pages used by youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa?
- To what extent, if any, are Facebook groups and fan pages providing alternative spaces for political activism for youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa?
- What kind of political discourses are being circulated by youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa on their Facebook groups and fan pages?

1.6.2 Assumptions of the study

This study is premised on the following assumptions: Firstly, based on a review of studies that explore the nexus between social media, young people and political participation (Honwana, 2012; Herrera, 2012; Bosch, 2013), I assumed that Facebook allows youth activists who lack meaningful voice in the dominant mediated public sphere in Zimbabwe and South Africa to engage in alternative forms of political mobilisation. This is in line with Lim's (2014) argument that social media constitutes an alternative arena for young people to engage and discuss issues of common concern especially in political contexts where public gatherings are highly repressed. The above assumption is also based on the suggestion that digital media broadens youth political activism by lowering the cost of involvement, creating new mechanism for organising groups and opening new channels of information that bypass traditional gatekeepers (di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). Secondly, I assumed that because of the demonstration effect that accompanied the Arab Spring where the youth used social media to organise and mobilise political protests against dictatorial regimes (Gerbaudo, 2013), similar trends could be discerned in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Thirdly, I assumed that youth activists in Zimbabwe where invited spaces of political participation (like traditional media) have been are repressed are more likely to use Facebook to engage in everyday forms of mediated resistance (Scott, 1976; see Chapter Three) than their counterparts in South Africa, where "invited spaces of participation[35]" (Cornwall, 2002) are present and relatively free from government interference. As Lim notes, in political contexts where spaces of opinion formation are repressed and over-commercialised, Facebook can "potentially facilitate activists to form subaltern counter-publics needed in the fostering of hidden transcripts" (2014: 58).

1.6.3 Significance and justification of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the academic literature on Facebook and youth political participation in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The larger significance of this study is to contribute to theory-building around the use of social media for political activism in democratic and non-democratic contexts. This is because due to a Western bias in media studies "some areas of the world and non-western democracies remain either ignored or occupy a marginal position in comparative studies, both theoretically and empirically as well

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[35] These are formal channels of participatory democracy that are mandated by the state or private institutional agencies to promote citizen participation in decision making (see Cornwall, 2002; Miraftab, 2004).

as normative assumptions rooted in Western traditions remain largely unquestioned" (Wasserman & de Beer, 2009: 431). This helped me to push back the narrow presumptions about the universality of technological determinism and, "by constructing a grounded empiricism, contribute to existing critical explorations" (Aouragh, 2012: 519). As Nyamnjoh (2005: 9) reminds us, "it is regrettable that scholarly focus has been rather on what lCTs do to Africans, instead of what Africans do with lCTs". A gap, therefore, remains uncovered in terms of empirically exploring the usage of social media platforms by youth activists in Southern Africa. The events in North Africa provides me with an ample opportunity to bring "the [Southern] African dimension to the raging academic debate; not so as to further muddle the pot but as a way of seeking clarity on contentious assumptions about the role of ICTs" (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013: 2) in political processes.

As discussed above, most of the studies on social media and youth political participation have generally been country specific (see Vromen, 2003; Storsul, 2014; SANPAD, 2013; Booysen, 2015) and quantitative in nature (Karpf, Kreiss, & Nielsen, 2013). Because of the qualitative and comparative thrust of this study, it represents one of the few empirical studies to integrate the most similar systems (MSSD) and the most different systems designs (MDSD) to examine how and why politically engaged youths in repressive and non-repressive contexts use Facebook for political purposes. It is not clear how youth activists from a range of social movements in Southern Africa are adapting to the mushrooming of social media platforms. It specifically contributes to the new ways youth actors organise themselves and imagine social change in the developing world.

As noted earlier, a review of available literature on the deployment of Facebook for political action by Zimbabwean and South African youths indicate that empirical data on this area is scarce. This study therefore addresses this literature gap and provides a basis for understanding the place of social media in the lives of young people.

Theoretically, this study endeavoured to test whether conceptual resources such as Fraser's "subaltern counterpublics" (1992) developed in the West are applicable in African contexts where political and media systems are very different. The study will also test and extend the analytical rigour of Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics through the incorporation of Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts. Whilst I appreciate the collective strengths of the two

conceptual frameworks, I modified some of their ideas by coining concepts like "transnational alternative public sphere" and "digital hidden transcripts" in order to illuminate this study's research objectives (see Chapter Two). Following Fraser (1990) and Scott (1976), I conceptualised Facebook groups as transnational alternative public spheres which allow youth activists to share digital hidden transcripts, engage in both serious and playful political engagement and express individual and collective dissent. It also sought to establish whether content posted on Facebook pages and groups by youth activists constitute counter-hegemonic discourses as revealed in research conducted in Western societies. As Uldam (2010:3) puts it: "it is by analysing how social movement organisations' (SMOs) actors use different online spaces as locations for strategic framing and the formation of political identities that we can begin to study how the internet may contribute to an alternative public sphere where also voices of dissent are heard".

Methodologically, this study deployed in-depth interviews, social media ethnography[36] and qualitative content analysis to gather empirical data. The advantage of deploying a qualitative comparative study is that phenomena can be studied in context and considered with relation to a complex combination of variables (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The integration of the MSSD and MDSD makes this study unique in media studies because the predominant strategy has been the use of the most similar system design (MSSD) (Downey & Stanyer, 2005) as a standalone research design. In Chapter Four, I will demonstrate that studying the use of Facebook for political purposes does not necessarily require new methodological approaches, but rather calls for methodological creativity and flexibility on the part of the researcher who remains the central "research instrument" in multi-sited environments. This study shows that despite the ephemeral and dynamic qualities of the virtual sphere, it remains a textual world researchable by traditional data collection techniques.

At a more general level, this study makes a modest contribution to the body of knowledge about the use of ICTs in political action, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and other protests around the world about which claims are often made that they were facilitated by social media.

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[36] This involves living part of one's life on the internet, keeping up-to-date with and participating and collaborating in social media discussions (Postill & Pink, 2012).

1.7 Research Methods, Procedures and Techniques

This study is a qualitative comparative study which is anchored within the MDSD design (see Chapter Four). It also partly draws on basic quantitative meta-data gathered through online participant observation. Quantitative data enabled me to make insightful findings on the participation levels on Facebook groups. This was done through the collation of statistics of the number of people who have joined a Facebook group, number of comments, number of likes and number of "shares" received by a particular post and gender disaggregated data of participants on Facebook discussions. Qualitative research also enabled me to gather "descriptive data, peoples own written or spoken words and observable behaviour" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984:5). Qualitative researchers are generally interested in respondents' own interpretations of reality which are deeply embedded in a rich contextual web that cannot be separated and generalised out to some mass population (Bryman, 2004). Overall, this study engaged in data triangulation which entails using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of the research. It is rooted within the ambit of comparative small-N case study design. Comparative method seeks to uncover patterns of similarity and difference across a number of observed phenomena as well as revealing unique aspects of a particular entity (Ragin, 2000). Thus by comparing how and why politically engaged youths use Facebook for political participation in different countries can we see what makes each of these contexts unique on the one hand and similar on the other.

Youth activists interviewed in this study are drawn from purposively selected social movements (Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, National Constitutional Assembly, Youth Forum Zimbabwe, Unemployed People's Movement, Right to Know Campaign and PASSOP) in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Although these case studies are not necessarily all youth social movement organisations, youth as a constituency constitutes an important category of members in these organisations. Instead of the general membership of these social movement organisations, I was interested in the social media practices and posting behaviour of the youths in the two case nations. This is very important because as intimated earlier youths are at the forefront of the deployment of social media platforms in their everyday lives compared to other age-based cohorts. The reasons why these case organisations are treated as social movement organisations is outlined in Chapter Four. These cases were selected for instrumental purposes rather than for intrinsic reasons (see Chapter Four, Stake, 1995; for a discussion on instrumental and intrinsic case study).

Although some of the SMOs (like the NCA, CiZC and R2K Campaign) studied here are generally viewed as mainstream and composed mainly of urban middle-class members, they can be conceptualised as "subalterns" in the sense that issues they deal with issues that concern people who are excluded from the dominant power structures. I am also cognisant of the fact that the concept of subalternity is complex and not easy to define or attach to any group (Gramsci, 1971). It is context-specific and As Spivak (1988) observes, subalternity is very much situational and dependent on the context which political and media power are exercised. Whilst organisations such as CiZC and R2K Campaign have access to mainstream media structures of representation, they are also excluded from government "controlled" media in both countries. Most of these organisations exist on the margins of [state] power and "lack autonomous political power" (Smith, 2010: 39), leading to their alienation from invented spaces of [mediated] participation. Unlike in South Africa, where subaltern groups have have access to an array of invented spaces of [mediated participation], in Zimbabwe similar groups for them to "survive the dominant social pressures, legal restrictions, and other challenges from dominant publics and the state" (Squires, 2002: 457) have had to rely on the enclave, counter-public and satellite public spheres.

It is important to note that these organisations are largely made up of working class and grassroots activists although prominent positions are occupied by urban middle class members (in the case of CiZC and R2K Campaign). This tendency of urban middle class members occupying the most prominent positions in SMOs and political formations is not unique to Zimbabwe and South Africa. As Spivak (1988) aptly avers, anti-colonial nationalism assumed a distinctively bourgeois character, and was thus perceived by many to reproduce the social and political inequalities that were prominent under colonial rule. Therefore, the six case organisations are subaltern in as much as they are constituted by grassroots activists in their ranks.

Given the qualitative thrust of this research, I used convenience and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants. In order to answer the four broad objectives of this study, I used in-depth interviews to probe how and why youth activists utilised Facebook for political purposes. I also deployed a combination of semi-structured and unstructured questions during interviews. I also used online participant observation to obtain first-hand experience of the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation within Facebook groups as well as assessing the extent to which these groups can be considered as an alternative space for

political activism. Online participant observation also known as "social media ethnography" (Postill & Pink, 2012), encapsulates observing activists' activities and interactions with friends' on Facebook groups. Through this method, I was able to yield important information about participation levels in Facebook groups. Online observations of Facebook groups also yielded rich qualitative and quantitative data which I used to frame my interview questions. Online participant observations findings were compared to data gathered from in-depth interviews with youth activists. To answer objective number four, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of data gathered from public Facebook groups. This allowed me to systematically document and analyse the kinds of political discourses which are shared by politically active youths on Facebook (see Chapter Four).

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is composed of nine chapters. The current chapter introduces the research, discusses briefly the social context of this research; retraces the academic debate on the relationship between social media and political action; outlines the research problem, question and objectives; explores the conceptual frame suitable for this study and teases out the methodological approach of this study.

In Chapter Two, I outline the social context of the research paying special attention to the state of political and communication transformations in Zimbabwe and South Africa. I also look at the state of youth and political participation in both countries, thereby foregrounding the research gap that I seek to bridge.

In Chapter Three, I further develop a conceptual framework which synthesises Fraser's model of alternative public sphere and Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts.

Chapter Four revisits the methodological route and ethical dilemmas navigated throughout the data collection process. In this chapter, I focus on my role as an online participant observer on Facebook as well as my interviewer status (knower) within a research context that is characterised by mistrust of outsiders.

I then move to Chapter Five where I present and interpret my research findings. This chapter is divided into two sections: a) responses of the youth activists on how they use Facebook for political purposes.

In Chapter Six, I examine the reasons why youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook for political purposes.

Chapter Seven looks at the dialogic nature and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and the extent to which can Facebook groups be considered as alternative spaces for political activism.

In Chapter Eight, I present and interpret research findings meant to answer the fourth objective which focuses on the documentation and analysis of the various kinds of political discourses circulated by youth activists on Facebook groups and profile pages. Data for this particular chapter is drawn from online participant observations and qualitative content analysis.

Finally in Chapter Nine, I wrap up and summarise the key arguments of the thesis by offering a critical assessment of the study's findings in relation to the research questions it set out to answer. I also point to areas for further research.

1.9 Definition of Key Concepts

In this section, my attempt is not to provide exhaustive definitions to some of the recurring concepts in this study, but rather to point out the way in which they are used in this thesis. These include: youth, social movements, progressive social movements, cyber-activism, social media, social network sites and political action.

Youth: Youth is a fluid concept that defies analytical boundaries. For operational convenience, the term is used within the contours of age specific definition to refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years (The African Youth Charter, 2011). I use this expanded definition of youth because it allows me to take into consideration the period of "waithood" (Dhillon & Yousef, 2009) associated with developing countries. Waithood refers

to a kind of prolonged adolescence characterised by the involuntary delay in forming a family and gaining social and economic independence from their parents or nuclear family (Dhillon & Yousef, 2009; Honwana, 2012). This idea ties in neatly with Arnett's (2000) notion of "emerging adulthoods" which refers to a phase of the life span between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood which encompasses late adolescence and early adulthood. It primarily describes young people living in developing countries. As Bauman (2004: 76) adds, today's youth have been "cast in a condition of liminal drift, with no way of knowing whether it is transitory or permanent".

Social Media: This term denotes social network sites and other services, both commercial and non-commercial, that build on the technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media are "social" in the sense that they enable users to realise various forms of sociality like cognition, communication and cooperation (Fuchs, 2014). Although this research primarily focuses on Facebook, it interchangeably uses this term with the generic catchword, social media.

Social Network Sites: It refers to web-based services that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this study the term is used to refer to Facebook.

Social movements: It refers to "those organised efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to non-institutional forms of political participation" (McAdam, 1982: 25). These informal networks based on shared beliefs and solidarity often mobilise about conflictual issues through the frequent use of various forms of protest. I use the term to refer to the six activist groupings under consideration.

Cyber-activism: The concept, a portmanteau of "cyber" and "activism", refers "to the act of using the internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline" (Howard, 2011: 145; Earl & Kimport, 2011). Other terms like web activism, digital activism and net activism have been used to describe this kind of activism. Unlike traditional forms of

activism, cyber-activism leverages the networked properties of the internet and social media. It includes practices like culture jamming, email-bombs, virtual sit-ins, online petitions and hacktivism[37]. It encapsulates organised public effort, making effective claims on the target authority in which civic initiators use digital media technologies to expedite change in the political and social realms. It is viewed as closely associated with dissent, resistance and rebellion (Hands, 2011).

Political Action: It refers to "action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes" (Brady, 1999: 737). Although it is a multi-dimensional concept, it's used in this study to signify both traditional and alternative forms of political participation like lobbying, voting, attending political rallies, starting a new political Facebook group, writing and disseminating a blog about a political issue, forwarding political cartoons or engaging in direct action. Whilst it will be evident throughout this dissertation that I discuss youth political engagement within formal politics and neo-liberal political order, this should not be viewed as an attempt to valorise neo-liberal forms of democratic citizenship. I acknowledge that political engagement also takes place within the radical democracy political order where radical informal politics are equally important. As Mouffe (1992; 2005: 36) aptly points out, what constitutes the public good is conditioned by hegemonic processes. She propounds a notion of citizenship that "is a form of political identity" and understands [young] citizens as "persons who might be engaged in many different communities and who have differing conceptions of the good" (Mouffe, 1992: 30-31). Radical democratic citizenship, therefore, involves a form of political engagement that goes beyond the formal obligations of liberal citizenship and the collective uniformity of communitarian-republican citizenship (Mouffe, 1992). This [radical democratic citizenship] form of identification is conditioned by the (re)articulations of subject positions enabled in a public sphere as well as possibilities for embracing, negotiating and resisting them (Uldam, 2010).

Progressive social movements: these are defined as those informal networks oriented towards improving social conditions for various social groups and infusing new policies, processes and ideas into politics (Castells, 2010). These are essentially inclusive movements that seek to articulate the demands of the poor and politically disenfranchised through

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[37] Hacktivism (a portmanteau of hack and activism) is the use of computers and computer networks to promote political ends, for instance free speech, human rights and freedom of assembly.

interactive campaigns that address structural issues (Cheru & Gill, 1997). Six activist groupings under consideration constitute progressive social movements.

1.10 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has set the scene of the thesis by outlining the statement of the problem as well as research objectives to be answered in this study. Besides looking at the contextual background of the research, I have also revisited the academic debate on the relationship between social media and political action. This was important in the sense that it allowed me to situate my study within the broader academic debate. In terms of outlining the statement of the problem, I have demonstrated that existing literature on youth, social media and political participation does not focus explicitly on politically engaged youths, ignores the reasons why youth use Facebook for political purposes, is silent on the dialogic nature and micro-politics of participation in Facebook groups, and has not looked at the extent to which Facebook groups can be considered as alternative spaces of political activism. Cognisant of this research lacuna, I have discussed the data collection techniques that I use to answer the afore-mentioned research questions. I have also briefly looked at the conceptual tools (Fraserian model of alternative public sphere and Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts) that I use to illuminate my research objectives. The next chapter discusses the social context of this research. It focuses on the state of political and economic transformations in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

2. Introduction

The previous chapter provided an introductory foundation of this thesis. This chapter outlines the contextual background of this study with a special focus on the state of political and media transformations in Zimbabwe and South Africa. As articulated in Chapter One, I deploy Sparks's (2009) notion of elite continuity as an analytical framework in order to make sense of political and media changes in post-colonial societies. The chapter also discusses the position of the youth in relation to the ever-changing political and media systems in the two neighbouring countries. This chapter also invokes Dahlgren's (2009) theorisation of civic disengagement as a conceptual resource to explain the state of youth political participation in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It examines the disengaged and engaged youth paradigms in the two neighbouring countries. Thereafter it focuses on the state of the mainstream media as well as the telecommunications (internet, mobile and social media) landscape in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It also discusses the relationship between social media and political participation in relation to the state of political and media transformations in the two case nations.

2.1 The Zimbabwean Context

Zimbabwe gained its independence from Britain on the 18th of April 1980 after a protracted liberation struggle. As part of the negotiated transition, the Lancaster House Constitution was signed between Britain and the Patriotic Front, which paved way for the holding of general elections. It must be noted that whilst the Lancaster House agreement was a pragmatic solution to restore peace (Sibanda, 1991; Preston, 2004), it failed miserably to resolve the pertinent issues such as the deracialisation of the economy which subsequently sowed seeds for future conflicts on land (the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, FTLRP between 2000 and 2002). This is because, as De Villiers (2003: 9) observes, various safeguards were built into the Constitution to protect the private property rights of the white citizens (this meant that land could not be redistributed unless via the willing buyer willing seller clause). Despite

the adoption of the legally agreed "willing-seller willing-buyer" policy stipulated in the Lancaster House Constitution because of the restricted executive power of the new government, it failed to redistribute sufficient land to quell demands from rural social movements and landless people (Moyo, 1995; Tshuma, 1997). Consequently, the negotiated transition led to partial transformation at the political level and left the colonial capitalist economy intact. As some scholars (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000; Astrow, 1983) observe, the negotiated settlement led to the abandonment of key principles of the liberation struggle as well as the adoption of an economic system that perpetuated the same injustices that the struggle sought to eradicate.

The new government inherited a relatively sophisticated and diversified economy at independence which was however fraught with embedded racial inequalities in terms of income and wealth distribution (Sachikonye, 2003; Mandaza, 1986). As part of its nation building project, the ZANU-PF government adopted the policy of reconciliation (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012) despite its Marxist rhetoric. Although the policy was noble at face value, politically the vision was manipulated by the ruling party to build an atmosphere of political compliance towards the ruling elite and to institutionalise ZANU-PF's political hegemony (Moyo, 2013). The new government also Africanised the personnel of key state institutions as well as implemented the Growth-With-Equity policy which foregrounded welfarist social policies in the allocation and distribution of resources and social benefits (Mandaza, 1986; Zhou & Masunungure, 2006). Because of its welfarist social policies, enrolments at all levels of education increased through the expansion of education and training infrastructure leading Mlambo (1998) to describe the first decade as synonymous with "scheming for the poor".

However the massive spending on social services during the first decade coupled with the government's decision to repay the massive foreign debt incurred before independence, and extremely unfavourable terms of trade for African countries led to budget deficits and debts which put the country in a precarious economic position (Bond & Manyanya, 2003). This culminated in the adoption of the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) prescribed Economic Structural Adjustments Programmes (ESAP) in 1991 (Mlambo, 1998). As will be discussed later, like in many other political transitions, this marketisation of the economy was tantamount to "scheming against the poor" (Mlambo, 1998) because it led to massive unemployment, social unrest and de-industrialisation.

At the political level, despite the political transition that occurred in 1980, authoritarian tendencies inherited from the colonial state and the liberation struggle persisted (McCandless, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003) in a new Zimbabwe. This further cements Milton's (2000) observation that "it is almost impossible to eliminate institutional traces inherited from the past when transforming institutions that have already served the old regime". Writing about the persistence of authoritarianism in post-colonial Zimbabwe, Ranger (1997) has described the situation as a function of "political liberation without democratisation" of traditional political institutions and rules of the political game. The country, thus, only experienced the transfer of state power from the white minority establishment to the majority black government without making any significant changes to the structures and operations of the colonial state apart from recruiting new staff for the public service. This gives credence to Mamdani's argument that in most African post-colonial states: "… although the bifurcated state created with colonialism was deracialised after independence it was not democratised" (1996: 8).

At independence, the incoming government also inherited the power of the colonial state in terms of the monopoly of the use of force and the structures of surveillance and control (Moyo, 2013). As Tendi (2016) observes, the Central Intelligence Organisation's (CIO) surveillance reach and more generally the preponderance of the Zimbabwean state are seen as institutional legacies of the colonial Rhodesian state, which was strong, highly bureaucratised, and centralised. This persistence of continuity rather than complete transformation also manifested itself through the retention of repressive colonial laws (like the Emergency Powers Act and the Law and Order Maintenance Act). As Moyo (2013) argues, these laws were retained in order to restrain and arrest political competitors, silence critics and proscribe democratic space. Some of these laws were used to justify the violent decimation of the opposition the Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (PF-ZAPU) in the 1980s through a double-edged military operation code-named Gukurahundi[38] (wiping off chaff) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). At the end of the massacres, PF-ZAPU and ZANU signed the Unity Accord in 1987, which gave birth to a marriage of convenience known as ZANU-PF. The 'united' ruling party also attempted, but failed, to introduce a legislated one-party political system (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). Even though ZANU-PF failed in its *de-jure* one-party state project, "it went ahead to implement a *de-facto* one-party system

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[38] Gukurahundi refers to the situation where the government responded to acts of banditry committed by disgruntled former Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) combatants by deploying the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade killing at least 20, 000 mostly Ndebele speaking civilians in Matebeleland and Midlands provinces .

in the governance sphere through the colonisation of the state, the bureaucracy and a range of public institutions" (Saunders, 1999: 20). Noteworthy to highlight that the growth of unbridled authoritarian tendencies was also exacerbated by an inherited under-developed black civil society (McCandless, 2011; Moyo, 1993), which failed to speak truth to power.

It was during the second decade of independence (which coincided with the end of apartheid in South Africa and the "second wave" of democracy in Africa) that Zimbabwe experienced some form of cosmetic political liberalisation with the sprouting of civil society organisations working on human rights and governance issues (Win, 2004). Some of these civics filled the gap left behind by the retreating frontiers of the state (during the ESAP era) while others ensured checks and balance on the ruling elite (Bratton & Masunungure, 2011). As the economic dividends of ESAP failed to materialise, popular urban unrest and protests became the order of day as the working class and student activists revolted against deteriorating standards of living (McCandless, 2011). Like during the first decade, the government reacted by promulgating a series of repressive laws aimed at curtailing the operations of civics. However, it was the revolt of the war veterans demanding compensation for their role during the liberation struggle (Kriger, 2005) that forced the government to act. Fearing internal strife, Robert Mugabe used unbudgeted state resources to buy-off the war veterans (Bratton & Masunungure, 2011). Whilst the awarding of war gratuities did the trick in capturing the war veterans, economically it led to Black Friday (the Zimbabwean dollar was devalued by 74% in November 1997). This marked the start of a sustained free-fall of the economy culminating into what is known as the "Zimbabwean crises" (see Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010).

The year 2000 is often marked as a watershed period in Zimbabwe in that it witnessed a number of "critical junctures[39]" such as the land invasions in the year 2000 (which are largely attributable to the failure to deal with the unfinished business of the transition as discussed earlier); the rejection of the government's draft Constitution in 2000 and the formation of the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 which spawned a series of disputed elections—that almost pushed the country to the edge of total collapse (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012; Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010; Bond & Manyanya, 2003). These events contributed immensely to what has been described as the Zimbabwean crises (from 2000 to 2008).

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[39]This consist of a single or series of events that combine with pre-existing factors to produce conditions that may not otherwise have occurred if it were not for that event(s) (Collier & Collier, 1991: 29).

At the core of the Zimbabwean crises was the violent land reform which was undertaken by war veterans, rural social movements and the ZANU-PF government following the rejection of the parliament-led draft constitution during a referendum (Moyo, 2001; Sadomba, 2008). One of the clauses of the rejected constitution allowed the government of the day to compulsorily acquire land for resettlement without compensation. Because of the over-reliance of the economy on commercial agriculture, the violent land seizures led to food insecurity, joblessness, and foreign currency shortages and also invited targeted sanctions from Britain and her allies (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012; Alexander & Tendi, 2008). Besides dealing with landlessness, the redistribution process was undertaken as a way of punishing white commercial farmers who were seen as financiers of the MDC and civics which mobilised people to vote against the elite-driven constitution (see Hammar & Raftopoulos, 2003). The process was also accompanied by the breakdown of rule of law, mass migration and capital flight.

Whilst it is outside the remit of this study to discuss at length the anatomy of the Zimbabwean crises, it must be noted that the debate within the "crisis literature" revolves around the culpability of Robert Mugabe (Mugabe-centric narratives) (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2012), the land issue (Moyo & Yeros, 2007; Mamdani, 2008; Sadomba, 2008) and the crisis of governance (Masunungure & Badza, 2010; Sachikonye 2002; Muzondidya, 2010). The debate pits "patriotic agrarianists[40]"against "civic nationalists[41]". According to "patriotic agrarianists", the genesis of the crisis stems from the Zimbabwe government's bold rectification of historically rooted injustices in land distribution, whose visible consequence was a highly skewed, racialised land ownership and land use pattern (Moyo & Yeros, 2007). Instead of ushering in an economic revolution, the land reform programme led to an economic crisis because the newly resettled farmers had no expertise and capital to continue with commercial agriculture. Thus the agrarian revolution was accompanied by a marked decrease in agricultural production.

Civic nationalists proceed from the premise that Zimbabwe suffers from a governance crisis, and therefore, resolving the governance problem also solves the other attendant problems (Chikuhwa, 2004; Mlambo & Raftopoulos, 2010). This governance crisis manifests itself though quasi-military authoritarian tendencies. Facing arguably, the most serious threat to its

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[40] These are public intellectuals who leapt to the defence of ZANU-PF and its redistributive economic policies (Helliker, 2010).
[41] This refers to public intellectuals who demote the significance of the agrarian question in Zimbabwe by focusing explicitly on human rights violations, and bad governance issues.

political security, Chuma (2013) argues that ZANU-PF restructured the state in a way that made it less tolerant and open to opposition, more militarised, authoritarian and predatory. This school of thought argues that the ruling party instituted a series of legal and extra-legal measures (see Chapter One) designed to deal with mounting protest actions and internal opposition (Onslow, 2011). The passage of the laws was also aimed at monopolising political space and marginalising all recalcitrant political voices.

After almost a decade-long socio-political and economic crisis, the three major political parties in Zimbabwe signed the Global Political Agreement (GPA) brokered by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 15th September 2008 (Raftopoulos, 2010, Bratton & Masunungure, 2012). The truce was in response to the June 2008 run-off election which was riddled by rampant state-sponsored violence against opposition supporters (Alexander & Tendi, 2008). According to the agreement, Robert Mugabe was to remain president, Morgan Tsvangirai became the prime minister, and distributed ministries to ZANU-PF (14, including defence, state security, and justice), Tsvangirai's MDC faction (13, including finance, health, and constitutional and parliamentary affairs), and Arthur Mutambara's faction (three). The signing of GPA also paved way for the formation of an inclusive government in February 2009. As Matlosa & Shale (2013) observe, the political sharing experiment in Zimbabwe served the interests of political elites, especially their appetite for state power.

Economically, the GNU is credited for presiding over the return of consumer goods on supermarket shelves and halting the economic decline. Through the adoption of the multi-currency system (like the US dollar, the South African Rand and so forth), the government was also able to arrest the hyperinflationary trend (Makochekanwa, 2010). Although it brought economic stability, the inclusive government also failed to democratise state institutions (such the police, army, judiciary, parastatals and public media) which are seen as extensions of ZANU-PF's hegemonic power. Most state institutions remained intact, both in "their social position and in terms of their internal structure" (Sparks, 2006). ZANU-PF also continued to hold monopoly of political power under the guise of inclusivity. This was evidenced through the unilateral appointment of key government personnel and refusal to effect media and security reforms (Mare, 2013).

Cosmetic reforms like the setting up of statutory bodies dealing with elections, media, human rights and corruption as well as the passage of the new constitution undertaken by the GNU

did little to open up spaces for citizen participation. ZANU-PF also dragged its feet during the constitutional making process although the referendum was eventually held on the 26th of March 2013 after four years of political bickering. The "Yes" vote won by a landslide and the new charter was signed into law by the president which paved way for the holding of national elections on the 31st of July 2013. The elections were resoundingly won by Robert Mugabe and his party amidst vote rigging allegations from the MDC-T. It is important to highlight that despite the MDC-T's vote-rigging claims; the party ran a poor election campaign (see Zamchiya, 2013) and also has over the years metamorphosed into an elite-driven project. Unlike MDC-T, ZANU-PF has been able to "perfect…a system of mutations under different circumstances without changing its essential character" (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011: 323). The revolutionary party managed to put its crumbling house in order and ran a slick, well-funded, united and generally peaceful election campaign, in contrast to the 2008 violent campaign (Tendi, 2013; see also Zamchiya, 2013; Raftopolous, 2013; Alexander & McGregor, 2013; Hodzi, 2014b; Gallagher, 2015; Tendi, 2016 for a nuanced analysis of the 2013 harmonised elections). Although the elections ended a five year fractious power sharing arrangement, it restored the one party dominant system whilst deferring the tackling of deep-seated issues like youth unemployment.

2.1.2 The socio-economic position of the youth in Zimbabwe

Like many developing countries, Zimbabwe has a young population with 67% of the whole population falling below 35 years of age (ZIMSTAT, 2012). Most of these youth are unemployed. Research (PICES, 2011) suggests that 83.5 percent of the unemployed persons are aged between 15 to 34 years. While youth unemployment is a global problem (ILO, 2012), in Zimbabwe the situation has been accentuated by the Zimbabwean crises. Acknowledging the crisis at hand, President Robert Mugabe in August 2012 warned that: "youth unemployment and under-employment present one of the biggest challenges facing the nation, which if not addressed, is a potential threat to national peace and stability". The situation has also been worsened by the mismatch between educational qualifications and the skills required by industry and the unpredictable macro-economic policies which are not conducive to both local and foreign investment.

The socio-economic position of the youth in Zimbabwe has been shaped significantly by various macro-economic policies adopted by the government. As intimated earlier, massive

investment in social services during the first decade of independence led to positive youth development (Mashingaidze, 2010). These developmental gains were eroded during ESAP decade (1990-1999) following the introduction of cost-recovery fees, liberalisation of trade and devaluation of local currency (Mlambo, 1998). Ever since the implementation of ESAP, the youth have had to contend with receding opportunities for wage employment, inflation of qualifications and growing favouritism which excluded them from available work (Mate, 2012). The Zimbabwean crises also led to the informalisation of the economy, de-industrialisation and massive retrenchments of the working class (Jones, 2010; Kamete, 2010a) with deleterious effects on the youth. As argued by Mate (2012: 2), "the question of youth unemployment and poverty is at the core of the Zimbabwean crises". Some of the youth have been absorbed as agents and dealers in the burgeoning informal sector and parallel (black) market (Kamete, 2010). Other youth (mostly from southern parts of Zimbabwe) have expressed their discontent through "voting with their feet" (migration to neighbouring countries) rather than overt protest (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013).

Although the GNU set up the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment as well as the Zimbabwe Youth Council (ZYC) to deal with socio-economic challenges facing the youth, nothing much has come out of these initiatives. Even the launch of the *Ukondla/Kurera* Youth Fund meant to economically empower the youth failed to ameliorate the situation because the loans were distributed along partisan basis. The ZANU-PF minister responsible ensured that the youth fund was used for political expediency. Youth empowerment has, thus, remained an empty rhetoric used by the government to pacify young people who are seen as restive. Below, I focus on youth and political participation.

2.1.3 Contextualising Youth and Political Participation

As outlined in Chapter One, political participation is defined here as citizens' actions aimed at influencing some political outcomes (Brady, 1999). Unlike some definitions (Verba & Nie, 1972; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Huntington & Nelson, 1976) which focus on state-centric and physical activities, Brady's conceptualisation is broad enough to embrace various repertoires of civic activities which exist outside of the formal political sphere. Political participation can be sub-divided into traditional and alternative modes (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Carpentier, 2011). Traditional forms of political participation are generally more structured and normally "lawful" like voting, party membership, financial support for the political organisations,

attending political meetings, contacting elected officials and so forth. Bourne (2010) observes that alternative forms of political participation consist of signing of petitions, demonstrations, boycotting products, cyber-activism and so forth. It should be noted that the distinction between traditional and alternative forms of political participation is rather blurred as the two modes converge and complement each other in complex ways. In line with Bauman's (1999) notion of liquid modernity, one can postulate the existence of *liquid* forms of political participation. As Dahlgren (2005) aptly avers, political engagement is now more fluid and less dependent on traditional organisations. This is reflected in Beck (1998) and Bauman's (1999) concepts such as life -, sub-and identity-politics, which treat the political as a dimension of the social (Mouffe, 2000), rendering the boundaries between politics, cultural values and identity processes more fluid.

Dahlgren's (2009) insightful work on civic [dis]engagement in mature democracies provides a useful analytical framework for evaluating youth's political involvement in Zimbabwe. There is a general belief that in youth civic engagement as traditionally defined: that is, interacting with established civic and political institutions such as government, political parties, social movement organisations and youth training programmes has been on the decline (Putnam, 2000; Loader, 2007; Vromen, 2003). Youth are viewed as dancing to the beat of a different civic drum than earlier generations, preferring individually-motivated, digitally-enabled, cause-based activism to the more top-down, institution-centred, adult-directed civic styles of yesteryear (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). For instance, Dahlgren (2009) identifies three ways in which youth political involvement can manifest itself: political indifference, ambivalence and resignation. Youth can express "political resignation", when they feel that the political system excludes them from meaningful participation (see Dahlgren, 2009, for a more detailed analysis).

Civic disengagement is viewed as signalling "political ambivalence", which can be seen as a minimum type of involvement that does not result in participation, because of the lack of strong motivation to participate, or because of the amount of resources required in order to participate (Dahlgren, 2009: 82). Young people can also express "political indifference", which is manifested as an alienation from politics, or a treatment of politics and their representations on the media as irrelevant (Dahlgren, 2009: 82). This echoes Hirschman's (1970) notion of "exiting the system", thus the youth can be seen as physically, mentally and

emotionally withdrawing from civic or political participation. For Hirschman (1970), the "exit option" supersedes the "voice option" in political contexts where the latter is ineffective or impossible. As I will discuss later, two paradigms have emerged focusing on the engaged and disengaged youth. Arguing that these two paradigms fail to comprehensively explain youthful political participation, Farthing (2010: 182) reminds us that both engagement and disengagement are simultaneously occurring as young people navigate an entirely new world.

2.1.4 The disengaged youth paradigm in Zimbabwe

Proponents (Putnam, 2000; Delli-Carpini, 2002; Loader, 2007) of this paradigm argue that youth disengagement from traditional forms of political participation signal the dawn of a civic crisis. Research (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013) suggests that although half of the young people in Zimbabwe were registered to vote in the 2013 general elections, only a paltry 18% of the youth (aged between 18-30) turned out for elections during the 2008 general elections (ZESN, 2010). This is despite the fact that young people make up 61 percent of the 7.9 million Zimbabweans who are eligible to vote (ZimStats, 2012). The low number of young people who actually voted in 2008 and the under-registration in 2013 has been flagged as a sign of waning youth interest in traditional forms of political participation (Hodzi, 2014a). This is because electoral politics is often presented as the *raison d'tre* of political participation. However declining levels of electoral participation is not peculiarly a Zimbabwean problem; rather, it is a global challenge (Loader, 2007; Delli-Carpini, 2002). Even Western democracies are experiencing falling youth voter turnout (Sloam, 2013; Vromen, 2011). Putnam (2000) has described the American youth as "lone bowlers", who are politically apathetic and driven more by consumerism than a desire for active citizenship. The disengaged youth paradigm view young people's rejection of traditional political forms (like voting and traditional media) as the "fault" of young people.

Bennett (2008) theorises about the generational shift from "dutiful citizenship" towards "self-actualising citizenship". According to Bennett (2008), the "dutiful citizen" focuses on election and government as the core of democratic participation, trusts leaders and joins formal political organisations, uses traditional media to follow the news and expresses that obligation through traditional forms of political participation. In contrast, the "self-actualising citizen" has weaker allegiance to government, focuses on lifestyle politics, mistrusts media and politicians, joins loose networks for social and political action and uses digital media to

engage in alternative forms of political participation (Bennett, 2008). As discussed earlier, alternative forms of political expression consist of activities like engaging in voluntary organisations, participating in offline and online protests, signing of petitions, contacting political decision makers via online platforms and expressing political views in online forums. This study sought to evaluate whether youth activists in Zimbabwe are using Facebook to engage in some of these alternative forms of political participation.

Zimbabwean youth's disengagement from formal politics was also illustrated by a negligible number of young people who turned out at various constitutional outreach meetings that were meant to capture people's views in 2011 (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013). Research (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013) shows that young people interviewed felt politically marginalised and that their voices are hardly heard in the public domain. This low political efficacy amongst young Zimbabweans reinforces Dahlgren's (2009) claim that when citizens feel that the political system is excluding them they often react through political resignation. In the case of Zimbabwe, although most rural youth were invited to constitutional outreach meetings they were not given an opportunity to speak, as ZANU-PF and traditional leaders decided beforehand who should speak. This brings to the fore the distinction between invited (constitutional outreach meetings) and invented spaces of participation (Cornwall, 2002). Invited spaces of participation are social spaces created by the government to induce participation by communities. In situations where "invited spaces of participation" fail to engender active citizenship; Ballard (2008: 180) claims that they can "serve to demobilise rather than mobilise citizens". This study sought to investigate whether politically active youths are opting out of invited spaces of participation in order to make use of invented spaces of participation like Facebook in Zimbabwe.

Literature shows that a significant proportion of young Zimbabweans have lost confidence in elections because of the political violence and perpetual electoral fraud committed by ZANU-PF (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013; Chamunogwa, 2011). As Mushakavanhu (2014) writes, young people in Zimbabwe are disengaging from electoral politics because they perceive formal political structures as corrupt, ineffective, and unrelated to their everyday lives. Respondents in an Action-Aid Denmark (2013) survey also indicated that voting was worthless because it doesn't make a difference in their everyday lives. These findings have parallels with studies (Wasserman & Garman, 2014; SANPAD, 2013) conducted amongst South African youth. Young South Africans interviewed as part of these studies noted that

they are disillusioned with politics and pessimistic about their chances in the post-apartheid economy. Like their Zimbabwean counterparts, they described voting as a futile exercise with no tangible benefits. This results in a political behaviour that Dahlgren (2009) called political indifference.

Research (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013) also indicates that a large proportion of youth do not "feel free" to join any party (45%) or to say what they think (45%). This is attributable to the political atmosphere of fear engendered by the ruling elite. Given the gerontocratic and patriarchal leadership structures of most political parties and civic organisations, the youth have little space to articulate their social and political views. Matthews, Limb & Taylor's (1999) concept of "culture of non-participation" is fitting here to demonstrate how some political institutions systematically foreclose the opportunities for the youth to express their opinions and preferences. In terms of gender disaggregated data, young women tend to be less interested and active in political issues than their male peers (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013). This is generally reflective of the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean politics. Young Zimbabweans also revealed that they felt powerless towards intimidation and violence while almost half (41%) felt under pressure to vote in a particular way (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013). This could be attributed to state-sponsored intimidation which forces the electorate to vote for the ruling party even against their political will. Most of the youth felt under-engaged in political activities of representation. In cases where youth participation has occurred, it tended to be ad-hoc and tokenistic. It is clear from the foregoing discussion that youth participation in Zimbabwean mainstream politics has been inhibited by the absence of sufficient space for political participation. In view of the above, I endeavoured to establish whether the lack of political space constituted one of the reasons why youth activists use Facebook as a political resource in Zimbabwe.

2.1.5 The engaged youth paradigm

Unlike the previous school of thought, the engaged youth paradigm argues that many citizens are politically active although they do so outside the political system (Dahlgren, 2013; Sloam, 2007). This paradigm puts the fault at the doorstep of political institutions and argues that disengagement is a rational response to unresponsive institutions (Farthing, 2010). Even with mainstream political parties, Kademaunga (2011) observes that Zimbabwean youth are confined to party youth leagues or their equivalents where they are regarded as a "window-

dressing" constituency. Youth are excluded from decision-making and agenda-setting processes of mainstream political parties which promotes 'institutionalised marginalisation' (Kademaunga, 2011: 157). As Kademaunga (2011) observes, young people have fallen victim to the schemes and gamesmanship of their political elders. This view dovetails with Hodzi's (2014a: 48) argument that "the structural dynamics of these political parties deny the youth agency and make them conform". Engaged youth citizenship has manifested itself through student activism in Zimbabwe (Zeilig, 2008; Chikwanha, 2010; Hwami & Kapoor, 2012). Because youth political participation is closely associated with student activism and liberation struggle, it is predominantly elitist in nature (mostly urban and middle class youth).

Notwithstanding its elitist nature, scholars (Chamunogwa, 2011; Magure, 2010; Mashingaidze, 2010) observe that student activists have been at the forefront of most demonstrations against creeping authoritarian tendencies since the late 1980s. As Magure (2010) observes, student activism should be viewed as the "seedbed for an emergent civil society" from the 1990s going forward. This is because student activists played an instrumental role in the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1997 and the MDC in 1999. They also played a key role in the creation of youth social formations (like the Youth Forum Zimbabwe, the Youth Initiative for Democracy in Zimbabwe, Youth Agenda Trust and so forth). However ever since the disputed elections in 2008, Hodzi (2014a) observe that participation by the youth in electoral politics has been driven by individual interests rather than collective grievances or political identity. Participation by the youth in cause-oriented activities has been cited as evidence that they are interested in politics broadly defined. The point is that Zimbabwean youths have not "exited the [political] system" (Hirschman, 1970) but rather diversified into extra-parliamentarian activities. Similar trends have been witnessed in liberal democracies (Micheletti & MacFarland, 2011; Curtice & Seyd, 2007) where a decline in conventional participation has been accompanied by an increase in unconventional participation. Therefore this study sought to examine whether Facebook constituted a venue for unconventional participation for youth activists.

Despite Zimbabwean youths' low levels of trust in politics and political institutions, most interviewees expressed willingness to vote in upcoming elections (Action-Aid Denmark, 2013). On the issue of participating in protests, 41% of the Action-Aid Denmark (2013)

survey respondents reported that they would "raise an issue" if given the chance (47% have already done so), while 29% indicated that they would participate in a demonstration (only 6% have done so). Writing in the British context, Gerodimos (2010) argues that young people still care about formal politics and are interested in public affairs, although they have their own agendas and reject established political practices (Gerodimos, 2010). Research from Britain and Australia (Vromen, 2011; Sloam, 2013) also indicates that young citizens have not contracted out of politics, but rather are engaged in alternative forms of participation that seem to have more relevance to their everyday lives. For the present study, it was only through online observations and interviews with politically active youths that I was able to find out how they are deploying Facebook to express their political opinions and engage in cyber-activism.

Young people's political involvement in Zimbabwe has also manifested itself through popular culture (Muwonwa, 2012; Willems, 2010). Urban grooves[42] drawing on humour, satire and stereotypical voices of the marginalised, has also been identified by some scholars (Mate, 2012; Ndlela, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009) as constitutive of an emerging strand of youth popular politics characterised by ad-hoc activism. This constitutes exercising "voice against the system" (Hirschman, 1970). Ndlela (2008) suggests that most youth have curved out spaces form themselves on the internet and social media platforms. According to Action-Aid Denmark (2013), more than a quarter of the youth interviewed seek information on political issues every day, with one out of twenty doing so on the internet. Similar trends have been observed in Western democracies where young people are sourcing for political information on the internet (Pew Research Centre, 2012; Sloam, 2009). Building on existing literature, I explored youth activists' use of Facebook as a source of political information.

In the next section, I assess the state of the mainstream public sphere in Zimbabwe. Such an assessment is very important because it allows me to demonstrate that the Habermasian theory of public sphere fails to account for the various communicative arenas which the marginalised groups often turn to voice out their opinions especially in multi-cultural and stratified societies (like Zimbabwe and South Africa). I specifically focus on the state of the

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[42] This refers to a glocalised version of R 'n' B and hip hop music which enabled the urban youth to traverse the public sphere hitherto occupied by politicians, scholars, and other opinion shapers (Mate, 2012).

various tiers of the mainstream media (public, private and community) before teasing out the digital media context in Zimbabwe.

2.1.6 The state of the mainstream media in Zimbabwe

As far as the Zimbabwean mediated public sphere is concerned, it is noteworthy to underscore that at independence in 1980 the country inherited a fairly diversified media landscape characterised by a vibrant state-owned media and a blossoming private press reflective of the existing economy which was dominated by private white capital (Chuma, 2008; Rønning & Kupe, 1998). Unlike in South Africa where the mainstream media shifted towards a normative ideal of a watchdog media, which worked in the interest of "the public" by exposing the shortcomings of the new government (Garman & Malila, 2016), in Zimbabwe the mainstream media adopted a "developmental journalism" approach which emphasised supporting the ruling elite rather than blowing the whistle for offside situations. Besides introducing significant ownership and editorial changes in the public print and broadcasting sector, the ZANU-PF government maintained the state monopoly in broadcasting as well as the repressive legal infrastructure used by the colonial regime (Saunders, 1999; Chuma, 2010; Ndlela, 2008). As Rønning & Kupe (2000) argue, this resulted in a dynamic tension between a "democratic" (as reflected in the Lancaster Constitution) and an "authoritarian" impetus (in-built inherited restrictive laws), which undermined the diversity and pluralism of political opinion in the Zimbabwean mainstream public sphere. Because of these "legacies of the past" (Voltmer, 2013: 115) as well as "forces of inertia merge[d] with new values and practices adopted in the course of transition often leading to hybrid forms of journalism and political communication" (Voltmer & Rawnsley, 2009: 236). As will be discussed below, the result has been a failure to democratise participation in the mediated public sphere by groups or interests other than those sanctioned by the powerful elite (see Chapter Three). Public interest was also conflated with national interest by the new government.

Elite continuity and renewal manifested itself in the public broadcasting sector where despite the government's policy of liberalisation in the 1990s, it remained characterised by two salient features: firstly, its *legal status* as a state monopoly, and secondly, its location under the Ministry of Information and Publicity which rendered it a *political tool* in the hands of the government of the day (Moyo, 2004). Because of lack of public media transformation, the

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dominant public sphere has largely remained a prime institutional site for the "manufacturing of public consent" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) by the ruling elite (Tendi, 2011). As intimated in chapter one, "the demise of the old regime and, with it, old models of journalism does not necessarily bring about a higher degree of professionalism" (Voltmer, 2013: 201).Like during the colonial era, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) remains the only television station 34 years after independence. Although two commercial radio stations such as *ZiFM* (owned by a ZANU-PF member of parliament for Nyanga South and deputy minister of media information and broadcasting services, Supa Mandiwanzira) and *Star FM* (owned by Zimpapers which falls under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services) were licensed during the tenure of the GNU in 2009, because of their political economy they provide uncritical coverage of government activities (Mare, 2013). In March 2015, the government also awarded eight commercial community radio stations to individuals and entities affiliated with ZANU-PF. These include Munyaradzi Hwengwere, Supa Mandiwanzira, Obert Mpofu and Jonathan Moyo, Zimpapers and Kingstons. In short, the cosmetic reforms in the radio sector has witnessed both elite continuity in control over the media and a renewal of a media elite with the emergence of a new cohort of media owners and operators (mostly aligned to the new political elite) (Sparks, 2011).

It was only during the second decade of independence (1990-1999) which is often touted as the "golden age" of the Zimbabwean press (Chari, 2009) that the country experienced a phenomenal quantitative growth of new private newspapers and magazines. The launch of private newspapers (like the *Financial Gazette*) and magazines (like *Moto* magazine) provided a formidable counter-hegemonic challenge to the ruling government's hegemony-construction project (Saunders, 1991; Willems, 2013), although most of them found it difficult to survive in a contracting economy. However, it was the launch of the *Daily News* by the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) at a time when the country was experiencing an economic maelstrom, which completely changed the face of the Zimbabwean media landscape (Moyo, 2009; Chari, 2009). Practising a normative approach to news reporting known as "oppositional journalism" (Chuma, 2010), the paper became a strategic conduit for venting popular discontent.

In a bid to counter "oppositional journalism", the ZANU-PF government attempted to monopolise the public sphere (by shutting down private newspapers) through forcing the

state-owned media to practise "patriotic journalism" (Chuma, 2010; IMPI Report, 2014). This normative approach to news reporting manifested itself through the narrativisation and dissemination of a highly selective discourse Zimbabwean nation which was deliberately calculated to interpellate the people of Zimbabwe (Ranger, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2010). It was also intended to whip up pan-African sentiment across the continent in the fight against Western enemies seeking to overthrow the country's hard-won independence. The state-owned media became a political player in its own right privileging the hegemonic discourse of the ruling party over others. This affirms Fraser's (1990) observation that a single public sphere contributes to the filtering of diverse rhetorical and stylistic norms.

Between 2001 and 2005, the ZANU-PF government fearing that oppositional journalism would mobilise people into the streets passed a series of legal and extra-legal restrictions (see Chapter One) meant to curtail freedom of speech, assembly, political association and expression and access to information (Moyo, 2009; Willems, 2013; Atwood, 2009). This was accompanied by a serious clamp down on journalists (foreign and local) and activists who were blacklisted as anti-ZANU-PF. Newspapers which refused to comply with the provisions of AIPPA (including the *Daily News*) were forced to close down (see Moyo, 2009). The state broadcaster, ZBC, was forced to introduce seismic changes in radio and television programming. These included the removal of critical foreign news bulletins as well as the virtual banning of radio airplay of locally produced songs that were critical of government (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2010). In the end, the state-owned media offered a magnified image of the ruling elite through churning out "patriotic" media content.

With the systematic colonisation of the dominant public sphere by the political elite, citizens were left with fewer spaces of civic engagement and public debate (Moyo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2010; IMPI Report, 2014). Empirical research (Moyo, 2010; Mabweazara, 2012; Mare, 2013) suggests that citizens had to turn to clandestine radio stations (*SW Radio Africa* based in the UK, *Studio 7* based in the United States of America and *Radio Voice of the People* based in South Africa) and news websites that served as alternative voices on Zimbabwe. These constituted the "diasporic journalism" (Kupe, 2007) or "parallel markets of information" (Moyo, 2009), platforms through which most of these subaltern or anti-state discourses articulated and exerted themselves. Communicative channels (like popular cultural forms such as music and tabloid newspapers) allowed citizens

and activists to produce, disseminate news and to counter state propaganda churned out via the mainstream public media in Zimbabwe (see Manganga, 2012; Moyo, 2010; Mano, 2011; Willems, 2011; Mabweazara & Strelitz, 2009).

In the next section, I look at the Zimbabwean telecommunications context. This is because in order to understand online political activism, it was essential for this study to find out if and how Facebook has been integrated into youth activists' political work.

2.1.7 The Zimbabwean Telecommunications Context

Zimbabwe is a late comer to the world of internet development, having wasted a number years during the crisis decade. Significant progress in the telecommunications sector took place during the tenure of the GNU following the setting up of a standalone ministry dealing with ICT issues, the dollarisation of the economy, the roll-out of the fibre-optic networks and the scrapping of import duty on ICT hardware and software products (Banda, 2010; Chari, 2014). The dollarisation of the economy led to the elimination of hyper-inflation and reduction in exchange rate volatility (Chitambara, 2009), which allowed telecommunication companies to recapitalise. Internet diffusion was also facilitated by the mass migration (to South Africa, United Kingdom, Australia and other countries) which occurred during the crisis period as the new expatriates sought to stay in touch with friends and family (Atwood, 2009). A combination of these factors paved way for the mushrooming of Internet Access Providers (IAPs), Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and internet cafes in urban areas (POTRAZ, 2014).

Internet penetration rates have phenomenally grown from a 9.8 percent in March 2008 to 47 percent in 2014 (POTRAZ, 2014). Mobile internet access has contributed significantly to this upsurge, with the most recent survey (POTRAZ, 2014) indicating that 98.9 percent of internet users are logging online via mobile phone. This is attributable to the influx of low-cost smartphones (like Huawei and ZTE) from China and other Asian markets as well as locally-produced smartphones like GTel. In spite of the mass adoption of the mobile phone in Zimbabwe, the costs of accessing mobile and broadband internet remain extremely high. As of July 31st 2014, the cheapest ISP was TelOne charging US$25 for 10 gigabyte (GB) for its ADSL broadband basic package, US$45 for 25 GB, US$85 for 50 GB and US$ 160 for unlimited internet access for their platinum package. All the major mobile service providers

have introduced data bundles and zero-rated[43] services for popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp which has contributed significantly to the upsurge of internet connectivity although the practice has also been critiqued for violating norms of net neutrality[44]. Competition in both mobile and fixed internet sector have contributed to price reductions, although asymmetries in internet access continue to manifest itself along class, geographical (mostly an urban phenomenon), gender and racial lines. The current study, therefore, examines the ways in which internet cost shapes how respondents in Zimbabwe use Facebook to advance their causes. It also investigated the social position of youth who are using Facebook for political purposes.

Although recent statistics (POTRAZ, 2014) show that the country's SIM card penetration rate has reached 106 percent, it is arguable that given the high rate of multiple phone ownership and dual SIM phones the actual mobile phone penetration may be lower than this figure. Econet Wireless is the largest mobile service provider with 8.5 million subscribers followed by Telecel Zimbabwe with an estimated subscriber base of 2.54 million and finally NetOne with a total of 2.45 million subscribers (POTRAZ, 2014). In terms of the most popular social network site, Facebook tops the rankings with the site being visited by 15% of Zimbabweans and 31% of people living in urban areas (ZAMPS, 2013). Disaggregated data on Facebook usage in Zimbabwe remains elusive, but it is estimated that the user base is over 1, 500,000 with more than 70 % accessing the platform through mobile phones (ZAMPS, 2013). Similar to other countries, Facebook is mostly used by young people in Zimbabwe although there no age-disaggregated statistics (ZAMPS, 2013). Although statistics on Facebook usage are insightful, they do not necessarily tell us much about how this platform is used as a space of resistance in Zimbabwe. For instance, Ekine (2010: x) reminds us of how misleading statistics may be, especially in developing contexts such as Africa where media usage may occur in patterns that differ quite radically from those in Western societies. In bridging this gap, I investigated how Facebook has been integrated into Zimbabwean youth activists' political work.

Although the country is doggedly known for its restrictive media environment (see Chapter Two), internet and mobile phone usage is nominally "free" from government interference

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[43]Although this practice constitutes a competitive tool for introducing both Internet access and relevant online content to low-income communities, by granting free access to some websites but charging for others, it entails preferential treatment of certain sources of content.
[44]The principle that internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications regardless of the source, and without favouring or blocking particular products or websites.

(Freedom House, 2014). This does not mean communication surveillance[45] is not taking place in Zimbabwe. Media reports suggest that it is occurring secretly based on the leaked emails and WhatsApp chats of Elizabeth Macheka, Tendai Biti and Morgan Tsvangirai during the tenure of government of national unity. More recent research (Tendi, 2016) suggests that communication surveillance has been used in the succession and factional battles which rocked ZANU-PF in the run up to the party's 2014 National Congress. The battles claimed the scalp of Vice-President Joice Mujuru and a number of former liberation war stalwarts. As Tendi (2016: 20) argues, "'invisible' or seemingly' non-existent' high-tech surveillance, taking the form of electronic bugs, hidden cameras, phone monitoring technology, voice cloning software, and drone cameras were apparently central to Military Intelligence's (MI) surveillance strategies". The use of these new surveillance technologies highlights the enduring potential capacity and ambition of the Zimbabwean intelligence sector to deploy these technologies despite wider institutional problems in the context of economic decline and poor remuneration for state employees, politicisation, militarisation, and internal divisions (Tendi, 2016: 21). With these considerations in mind, this thesis sought to examine how the threat of communication surveillance shaped posting behaviour and the use of Facebook for political purposes.

The country, however, has set up a Monitoring of Interception of Communications Centre (MICC) and passed the Interception of Communications Act (ICA) of 2007, which give powers to the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), the Commissioner of Police and the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority to spy on citizens' mobile phones and e-mails. Section 9 of the Act also imposes intermediary liability on mobile operators and ISPs compelling them to install the hardware and software required for the state to carry out surveillance. Using this law POTRAZ banned the use of Blackberry Messenger in Zimbabwe because the service uses encrypted messages. This is because the service contravenes one of the ICA requirements which reads: "all telecommunication services should have the capability of being intercepted." In September 2013, the government enacted Statutory Instrument (SI 142/2013) which imposed some content restrictions and SIM card registration requirements on mobile phone users. This draconian legislation was however repealed following the adverse report by the parliamentary legal portfolio committee in July 2014 and was replaced

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[45] Communications surveillance encompasses a broad range of activity that implicates the privacy and expressive value inherent in communications networks. It includes not only the actual reading of private communications by a another human being, but also the full range of monitoring, interception, collection, analysis, use, preservation and retention of, interference with, or access to information that includes, reflects, or arises from a person's communications in the past, present, or future (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

by the Statutory Instrument (SI 95/2014). Unlike SI 142/2013 which allowed POTRAZ to provide information from its central database to a law enforcement agent if it had received a prior written request from an official of the law enforcement agency with the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police, or equivalent rank in any other law enforcement agency, the SI 95/2014 requires a prior written request from an official of the law enforcement agency.

Although there are no reported cases of internet filtering in Zimbabwe, there is suspicion that the government has acquired sophisticated surveillance equipment from China (Freedom House, 2013). In 2011, the country made history for making the first "Facebook arrest[46]" following the detention of Vikazi Mavhudzi for a comment he made on the site. Another Facebook user informed the police about the comment leading to his subsequent arrest and detention (Mokwetsi, 2011). Given this context, I attempted to find out from the respondents whether the "chilling-effect" of state communication surveillance limited open public discourse on Facebook in Zimbabwe.

2.1.8 Social media and political participation in Zimbabwe

Social media has become an indispensable part of Zimbabwe's political communication landscape (Mare, 2014; Mushakavanhu, 2014; Zhangazha, 2013). Political parties, civic organisations, pro-democracy activists and ordinary citizens have utilised social media to promote their political causes, to encourage the youth to register, check their names on the voters' roll and eventually go out and vote (Hodzi, 2014a). Others have used these platforms to publicise extra-legal activities and human rights abuses, to articulate their political views without fear from reprisals from the state and to challenge sterile hegemonic political discourse associated with the repressive political order in Zimbabwe (Manganga, 2012; Muwonwa, 2012). Politicians from the main political parties have also opened social media accounts as avenues for political communication and engagement. Most of these politicians have used Facebook specifically to interact with their constituencies, to broadcast information to their supporters, to solicit policy suggestions and to engage in political commentary (Mushakavanhu, 2014). It is important for this study to find out how and why youth activists use Facebook to advance their political objectives.

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[46] The comment he posted ex-Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Facebook page read: "I am overwhelmed; I don't know what to say Mr. PM. What happened in Egypt is sending shockwaves to dictators around the world. No weapon but unity of purpose worth emulating, hey."

Social media has also been used by major political parties and activist groupings to mobilise young voters during the 16th of March 2013 referendum and 31st of July 2013 harmonised elections (Mutsvairo, 2015; Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015; Mujere & Mwatwara, 2015). Like in developed countries (see Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Stromer-Galley, 2014), politicians and political parties in Zimbabwe demonstrated that "old habits die hard" because their online campaigning tended to replicate traditional one-way, top-down communication flows, offering few real opportunities for citizen engagement. Vibrant political debates and discussions were hosted on Twitter and Facebook accounts like Baba Jukwa, Amai Jukwa, #263chat[47], Hon.Tendai Biti and Psychology Maziwisa[48] (see Mutsvairo & Sirks, 2015). Although the impact of this usage on swaying voting behaviour is hard to quantify, social media campaigns were aimed at young voters. An anonymous Facebook user with the pseudonym Baba Jukwa became a social media sensation for his frequent posts that exposed alleged secrets from within ZANU-PF. As a digital whistle-blower, Baba Jukwa embarked on a naming and shaming campaign against corrupt ZANU-PF officials. Online observations and interview responses enabled me to explore how politically engaged youth interact with Facebook to advance their causes. Next, I discuss the South African context.

2.2 The South African Context

As discussed in Chapter One, South Africa's democracy has been significantly shaped by the negotiated transition. The country's transition was characterised by two distinct processes: political democratisation and economic liberalisation. In terms of political democratisation, ever since the dismantling of apartheid in 1994, the country has witnessed strides in terms of "democratic consolidation"—a progressive constitution, media freedom, freedom of expression, judicial independence and multi-partyism (Heller, 2009). The 1996 Constitution guarantees citizens an array of rights including freedom of expression and media freedom, the right to free association and to vote for whom they please amongst others. Five successful national elections have taken place since 1994, which is ample evidence of a well-functioning "consolidated representative democracy" (Heller, 2009). Four presidents (Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe and Jacob Zuma) have ruled the country. With the

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[47] @263chat refers to a Zimbabwean media business offering which was created by Nigel Mugamu in 2012. It focuses on encouraging and participating in progressive national conversations. It uses #263chat on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp platforms.
[48] He is the deputy director of information and publicity for ZANU-PF and a Member of Parliament for Highfields West in the National Assembly.

exception of the National Key Points Act, most apartheid repressive laws were repealed and a political climate permitting public scrutiny and protest activity was established (Habib, 2003).

A burgeoning body of "transition literature" has emerged focusing on the successes and failures of South Africa's negotiated transition to democracy as well as the continued domination of privileged groups via the repositioning of partnerships between elites in the post-apartheid era and the continued marginalisation of groups historically disempowered through apartheid (see Southall, 2003; Sparks, 2011; Heller, 2009). Writing about the remnants of formal apartheid in South Africa, scholars (see Bond, 2000; 2009; Marais, 2008) argue that the country experienced "elite transition" characterised by the transformation of the political system as well as the retention of the capitalist economic policies. Because of the uneasy co-existence between "the incoming political elites and the established economic elites" (Southall, 2003), Von Lieres has characterised South Africa as resembling "the simultaneous intertwining of democracy and marginalisation" (2005: 23). In 1998 during a parliamentary debate on reconciliation and nation-building, the then deputy president Thabo Mbeki described South Africa as mirroring the "two nations" in one scenario. These "two nations" are divided by extreme wealth inequalities, income differentials and life chances. In concurrence, Gwede Mantashe, the African National Congress (ANC) secretary general is on record as having described South Africa as "an Irish coffee-society with black at the bottom and white on top[49]". The point here is that most black South Africans are living under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational and communication infrastructure.

In terms of economic liberalisation, the ANC government adopted the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which was superseded by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan (GEAR). Like ESAP implemented in Zimbabwe, GEAR entailed the cutting down of government spending and attracting foreign investment through business tax cuts and privatisation (Padayachee & Desai, 2013). In an effort to cushion the majority of South Africans from the austere effects of GEAR and to address the inequities of the past, the ANC government adopted a significant amount of economic and social policies. Some of these policies have led to a de-racialisation of the apex of the class structure but left a significant chunk of the population (mostly blacks) wallowing in poverty and unemployment

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[49]www.iol.co.za. Independent Online (Independent Newspapers Pty Limited), 10 October 2012.

(Padayachee & Desai, 2013). Noteworthy to point out that the role of the social security system (social grants) which has assisted over 12 million people with monthly income has played an invaluable role in reducing absolute poverty in the country since 2000 (Stats SA, 2013), although the country continues to top the table of Gini coefficients and intra-household inequality (Malada, 2013). The ANC government also implemented the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (revised and renamed the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment, B-BBEE) and Affirmative Action programmes during Thabo Mbeki's tenure, although these policies were largely ineffective and elitist in nature (Bond, 2009). Despite these strides, Robins (2005) maintains that the socio-economic rights that citizens in a democracy are entitled to have failed to materialise for the majority of South Africans.

Transition literature also demonstrates that the country still faces "critical challenges in deepening democracy" (Heller, 2009: 6). In spite of attempts by the ANC government to champion a public sphere "bristling with institutions and policies designed to facilitate public deliberation" (Hamilton, 2009: 357), South African citizens from subordinate groups still find it difficult to engage the state effectively (Heller, 2009). In addition, the contradictory processes of citizens' safeguarded legal statuses and a range of rights including the freedom of speech and expression are incongruous with the continued exclusion from economic equality and empowerment as well as participation in the public sphere (Von Lieres, 2005), alluding to Heller's (2009) suggestion that these rights and freedoms remain *statuses* only without *practice*. The subordination of the civil society to political society has made it difficult for the former to participate in opinion formation, and indeed, decision making (Beall et al., 2005). In this "low intensity democracy" (Southall, 2004), when the political society transacts with civil society, it does so in a highly selective and controlled manner (Heller, 2009). Selective engagement, on the part of the state, has created a bifurcated civil society—an organised one that effectively engages the state and a subaltern one—"almost completely neutralised or side-lined" (Heller, 2009: 136; Bond & Desai, 2010). Instead of confronting the "fetters of the convened public sphere", the government has opted for techniques of silencing and evasion (Hamilton, 2009: 355). This study sought to find out from interviews whether respondents are using Facebook to compensate for their marginalisation from traditional spaces of opinion formation.

Instead of a variety of civic organisations carrying their issues into the public sphere for debate and contention, subaltern South Africans are dependent on the party in power which

sets the agenda, determines the issues and even decides which "identities enter the political domain" (Heller, 2009: 132). This situation was worse during Mbeki's administration when power was centralised in the executive arm of government. Similar to Mugabe's authoritarian tendencies, Thabo Mbeki subjected civics to a wide range of covert and overt forms of repression (Duncan, 2012). The government also dismantled "invited spaces of participation" in local government thereby resulting in the mushrooming of "invented spaces of participation" (Miraftab & Willis, 2005). Invited spaces of participation such as youth councils are formal channels through which young people's issues can be discussed. The benefit of these invented spaces of participation is that invaluable knowledge public officials "gain about situations and opinions they usually have little contact with" (Garman & Malila, 2016). In the South African context, these avenues help public officials to develop an understanding of what lies behind community protests over the provision of public services before dismissing them as "third force" sponsored disturbances. Through in-depth interviews, I investigated whether politically engaged youths used Facebook because they lack meaningful political voice in invited spaces of participation.

Since the end of formal apartheid, attempts by the ANC government to improve service delivery have not been sufficient to assuage the frustration and anger of poor people (Alexander, 2012; Mottiar & Bond, 2012). Alexander (2012) has described South Africa as the "protest capital of the world", although there is no empirical basis for this characterisation because no standard measure exists across countries. The country, however, has experienced an upsurge in protest action on issues relating to service delivery, corruption, lack of accountability and labour issues (including salary demands in the mining sector); with the number of what the Ministry of Police refer to as "crowd management" incidents reaching record levels in 2010-2011. Crowd management incidences refer to non-protest related gatherings like sports events, donkey carnivals and cake sales as well as unrest and peaceful demonstrations where the police monitor the gatherings or intervene to make arrests or need to use force. These incidences are frequent in South Africa, contributing to an average of more than 8000 gatherings per year (South African Police Service, SAPS, 2011).

Generally referred to as "social delivery protests" by the mainstream media, Wasserman & Garman (2014) describe them as "community protests" which are viewed as articulations of a more deep-seated disillusionment with the dividends of democracy. As Wasserman & Garman (2014) argue, most of these protests are not about service delivery but about crime

and not being listened to by elected officials. Although Alexander (2010) characterise these protests as constituting part of the broader "rebellion of the poor", Sinwell (2011: 63) disagrees noting that "given the fragmented nature of current protests, there is a danger that they are "romantically" understood, and that radical tactics are not necessarily underpinned by revolutionary politics". Other scholars (Bond et al., 2012; Mottiar & Bond, 2012) argue that these protests are often geographically and politically isolated from each other, lack an ideological orientation and have no common programmes or bridging organisational strategies. In response to rising discontent, there are signs of the Zuma government becoming increasingly defensive and intolerant of dissent (Duncan, 2012). The murder of Andries Tatane (during a community protest in 2011 in Ficksburg) and the Marikana massacre[50] are some of the examples of state-sponsored violence during Zuma's reign. There are also cases where some South African municipalities are denying citizens the right to protest through the abuse of the Regulation of Gatherings Act (Duncan, 2014). Through in-depth interviews, I sought to investigate whether the closure of political space through militarised policing of protests constitute one of the reasons why youth activists deployed Facebook as a venue of activism in South Africa.

2.2.1 The socio-economic situation of youth in South Africa

As intimated earlier, despite the burial of formal apartheid in 1994, its legacy lives on in structural inequalities, systemic discrimination and palpable injustice (Padayachee & Desai, 2013). Because of the segregationist policies of the colonial and apartheid regimes, poverty in South Africa has racial, age, gender and spatial dimensions (Padayachee & Desai, 2013). Like many other developing countries, the country boasts of a youthful population—of which 70% of the national population—are below 35 years of age. Research (Stats SA, 2013; National Youth Development Agency, 2011) has shown that racialised inequalities are more pronounced in the lives of young people. According to Statistics South Africa (2012), the country has an official[51] unemployment rate of 24%, but if discouraged job-seekers are factored in, the rate of unofficial unemployment skyrockets to 35.8% (Lings, 2011). Recent statistics (Stats SA, 2014) show that the unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 34 increased from 32.7% to 36.1% between 2008 and 2014. The problem has been exacerbated

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[50]It refers to the single most lethal use of force by South Africa Police Services (SAPS) against miners at Lonmin Mine (in Rustenburg) following a series of wildcat strikes, in which 44 people were killed while 78 others were injured on the 16th of August 2012.
[51] StatsSA's measurement of unemployment is based on the assumption that "an unemployed person must have taken active steps to look for work or to start some form of self-employment" (1998: 1).

by the global recession, which saw "almost all of the job losses in 2009/10 being experienced by those under the age of 30, and with less than a grade 12 education" (National Planning Commission, 2010). While youth unemployment is a global problem (ILO, 2012), in South Africa, the challenge is a function of the level of education and work experience of young people (National Youth Development Agency, 2011).

Compared to white South African youth, black youth live in a world of unemployment (with 50% of black youth unemployed in 2008, compared to 4% of white youth), poverty, high population growth rate, HIV and Aids, inadequate schooling and largely unavailable basic social amenities (see Malada, 2013; Phaswana, 2009). This complements research by Stats SA (2011) which indicates that black African children were much more likely to experience hunger than white children (16% compared to 0.3%). In terms of gender disaggregated data, female youth in the 15-24 and 25-35 age categories are also more likely to live in lower-income households than their male counterparts, regardless of their population group or province of residence (Stats SA, 2011: 41). On the educational level, a large number of black youth in particular drop out of formal schooling and remain unemployed for a number of years (Lam et al, 2008).

Cognisant of the racialised and gendered nature of youth poverty, inequality and unemployment, a dark discourse associated with fears of a "demographic time bomb" has arisen within policy making corridors (South African Reconciliation Barometer, 2012). This overly pessimistic dark discourse frames high levels of youth unemployment as "our single greatest risk to social stability in South Africa, likely to rebel if left with no alternative but unemployment and poverty" (NPC, 2011: 4; NYDA, 2011: 2). Former general secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Zwelinzima Vavi has also described the country's volatile mix of "unemployment, grinding poverty and deepening inequalities" as a "ticking time bomb" (South African Reconciliation Barometer, 2012). Extending this view further, the former Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan in 2012 warned that the country could face political unrest reminiscent of the Arab Spring unless jobs were created and inequalities reduced. However, this pessimistic discourse has been strongly refuted by Lefko-Everrett (2012), who argues that South African youth are much more than ticking bombs and demographic dividends that they have been reduced to in mainstream public discourse.

Post-Apartheid South Africa has developed an integrated and comprehensive legislation and policies aimed at protecting and promoting the rights and development prospects of the youth

(Stats SA, 2011; Phaswana, 2009). Besides the existence of the national youth policy, the country has also put in place formal structures of youth participation such as the National Youth Development Agency[52] (NYDA) tasked with the mandate of initiating, designing, coordinating, monitoring, advocating and evaluating all programmes aimed at integrating the youth into the economy and society in general. The agency has however been riddled with mismanagement problems as well as abuse of public funds whilst the majority of the youth are wallowing in poverty (Malada, 2013). It is important to note that because of poverty and other structural factors, youth remain on the margins of political and socio-economic participation, unable to make meaningful contributions to decisions that affect their lives (Garman & Malila, 2016). Even government efforts to implement the Youth Wage Subsidy in 2012 failed to sail through after fierce opposition to the policy from trade unions, which claimed that the subsidy would open the door to cheap labour and jeopardise existing jobs. In view of the foregoing arguments, it is arguable that youth marginalisation is a function of the fact that young people do not have an organised and an independent voice to articulate their concerns to elected officials. Next, I look at youth political participation in South Africa.

2.2.2 The state of youth and political participation in South Africa

Similar to the Zimbabwean case, I also deploy Dahlgren's (2009) insights on civic [dis]engagement which I synthesise with South African literature (Glenn & Mattes, 2012; Mattes & Richmond, 2014; SANPAD, 2013; Wasserman & Garman, 2014) in order to explain young people's political involvement. Like in Zimbabwe, two schools of thought have surfaced: the engaged and disengaged youth paradigms. In South Africa, the debate on youth civic crisis (associated with post-apartheid South African youth) is often juxtaposed with the "golden" era of youth activism (associated with the "young lions" of 1976). Young lions refer to South African youths (mostly Africans) of the 1970s and 1980s, who defended their rights and helped to bring about the end of apartheid (Boyce, 2012; Seekings, 1996).

Unlike young lions, the post-apartheid South African youth have been represented as the "lost generation" (Seekings, 1996; 2014). The term "lost generation" refers to marginalised and unemployed black youth living outside of the social structures and devoid of the values deemed essential for "civilised" society (Seekings, 1996). Mattes has coined the term "born free generation" to denote South African youth who entered adulthood and "came of age

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[52] The NYDA was established under the NYDA Act, 2008 (Act 54 of 2008) as a formal structure aimed at enhancing youth participation in the economy through targeted and integrated programmes with focus on career, skills, job and entrepreneurship development.

politically after 27 April 1994" (2012: 134). Largely viewed as disengaged from societal institutions, these youth have been stereotypically presented as either a "problem" or "victims" (Phaswana, 2009; Dlamini, 2005). It should be underlined that these stereotypical descriptions obscure the contributions that young people make in their communities (SANPAD, 2013; Phaswana, 2009; SA Reconciliation Barometer, 2012). I concur with Fakir, Bhengu & Larsen (2010) that in South Africa socio-economic differentiation shapes political participation while racial cleavages also have an impact on political participation among the youth.

2.2.3 The disengaged youth paradigm in South Africa

As discussed in the Zimbabwean case, debate has also ensued about the state of youth participation in civic and political life in South Africa. Three questions have preoccupied scholars over the years: What has happened to the youth? How did this happen? Who is responsible? In their response to these complex questions, the disengaged youth paradigm scholars (Everatt, 2000; Jacobs, 2004; Ngcobo, 2004) trace the decrease in youth political participation to the transitional period immediately after 1994. As Everatt (2000) notes, between 1996 and 1998, the youth sector was marked by fragmentation and disillusionment. This is because, as he puts it, "youth mobilisation was treated as a tap that could be switched off and on as the vagaries of the negotiating process demanded" (Everatt, 2000:12). In the same breath, Jacobs (2004) suggests that the transformation of parties into professional political organisations geared towards elections led to highly constricted deliberation processes which replaced inclusive processes. Because of this professionalisation of politics (which privileged the educated and economically empowered) in South Africa, the youth were side-lined. This resulted in the demobilisation of the youth as their political contribution as the foot-soldiers of the struggle, was no longer needed (Everatt, 2000; Marks & McKenzie, 1998). Reflecting on the patronising attitude of political parties towards young South Africans, Pityana (2012) suggests that "born frees" have been silenced and marginalised. Part of the main objective of this study is to find out whether politically engaged youths who are marginalised from traditional spaces of participation are using Facebook as an alternative sphere for political activism.

The disengaged youth paradigm foregrounds the idea that there are clear signs of declining levels of political knowledge and participation in South Africa (Mattes, 2012). In Glenn &

Mattes' (2011) words, this means that the young South Africans display low levels of "cognitive engagement" (a combination of political discussion and political interest). Research (Mattes & Richmond, 2014; Glenn & Mattes, 2011) conducted thus far indicates that the current status of youth political participation is very different from the apartheid period. Compared to the "young lions", the "born frees" are seen as a bunch of entertainment mongers who have no interest in politics (Mkhize, 2015). Although Born Frees (31%) constitute the second biggest segment of eligible voters in 2008, just behind the Struggle Generation[53] (43%), the level of political and electoral participation among South African youth has declined compared to the previous decade (especially among youth between the ages of 18 and 25 who account for only 44, 5% of registered voters) (Mattes, 2012). This reflects the fact that youths' "physical engagement" with the South African political system is on a downward plunge (Glenn & Mattes, 2011; Mattes & Richmond, 2015). Besides lack of interest, most of the South African youth do not see the point of voting (Matshiqi, 2011). Low youth turnout at polling stations has been framed as signifying a brewing "crisis of democracy" (Malada, 2013). As highlighted earlier, this situation is not restricted to South Africa but also affects mature democracies (see Buckingham, 2002; Gustafsson, 2013).

Extant literature (Booysen, 2015; Fakir et al, 2010; Ndlovu, 2013; Munro, 2015) shows that young people are among those least likely to see formal political process as relevant to them and they display a low level of political participation. As Fakir et al (2010: 101), observe, "those who are relatively privileged because of their access to education and upward social mobility might be opting out of political and electoral processes because those processes are perceived to be inefficient, passé and ineffective in catering to the needs of such a constituency". This negative view of the political system may engender political resignation (Dahlgren, 2009). According to the 2008 study conducted by the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), out of the respondents (16-29 year-olds) who were asked directly how interested they are in politics, only 37% of South Africans aged 16 and older indicated that they were "very" or "quite" interested in politics (Roberts & Letsoalo, 2009). Survey findings by the SA Reconciliation Barometer (2012) also point to declining levels of confidence in key societal institutions amongst this age cohort (14-35 years) with only 35.2% of white youth reporting confidence in national government, compared with 46.6% of adults. Similarly, only 39.2% of coloured youth reported confidence in local government, compared

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[53] This refers to people who turned 16 between 1976 and 1996 during a time of continued political violence and resistance (Mattes, 2012: 140)

to 50.2% of adults. Black youth and adults are more likely to indicate higher levels of confidence across all of the institutions than other groups (SA Reconciliation Barometer, 2012; Fakir et al, 2010). This echoes Glenn & Mattes' (2011) observation that young white and Indian South Africans display politics of withdrawal. It is clear that socio-economic differentiation and racial cleavages in South Africa have an impact on political participation among the youth (Roberts & Letsoalo, 2009)

Recent studies (SANPAD, 2013; Booysen, 2015; Wasserman & Garman, 2014) reveal that South African youth are generally uninterested and mistrustful of political institutions (like the government, parliament, the police, traditional media and political parties) which are constitutive of the dominant public sphere. This profound loss of faith in institutions of the state has also been documented in America (Putnam, 2000; Delli-Carpini, 2000). The SANPAD (2013) survey also indicated that while levels of political activity and engagement are low across all categories of respondents, young Black South Africans show significantly higher levels of involvement in political activities than other races. This is because "those who are relatively less privileged (or those who are privileged but rely on political connections for business and access to goods and services) are still keenly interested in the political process as it brings access to goods and services which they would not get were they not an intrinsic part of the political process" (Fakir et al,., 2010: 101). In a nutshell, those who lean towards the disengaged youth perspective glorify formal politics as the centre of democratic participation thereby castigating the personalisation of the political sphere as symptomatic of a civic crisis.

Youth civic apathy has also been associated with declining levels of student activism at universities and technikons (Deegan, 2002; Fakir et al., 2010). However this trend changed dramatically in 2015 with the sudden resurrection of student movement unionism in South Africa as evidenced by the #Rhodesmustfall, #Feesmustfall, #NationalShutDown, #Outsourcingmustfall, #Zumamustfall and other related hashtag campaigns. These protests took faculty and university leadership by surprise as students demanded a change in the curriculum and increased access to affordable education As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) observes, the university in South Africa became a key site of struggle. Kick-started by students under the umbrella name, Rhodes Must Fall Movement (RMF), at the University of Cape Town, the student protests were later taken forward by a range of movements at other local and international universities. The movement was about more than the statue's removal

as protesters called for curriculum reform and transformation of university faculty (a small minority of professors at South Africa's top universities are black) and an end to outsourcing (Jacobs & Wasserman, 2015). Services like cleaning, catering and campus security had been handed over to private companies, which meant the loss of benefits like tuition discount for the children of campus workers. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) argues that the student struggles expanded into broader demands for decolonisation, transformation and Africanisation.

Social movements like the Black Student Movement at Rhodes University, Occupy Stellenbosch[54] at Stellenbosch University and Rhodes Must Fall Movement at the University of Cape Town have been at the forefront for advocating for the purging of all oppressive remnants of apartheid, including language policy (which gives preference to Afrikaans at the expense of other African languages), removal of all symbols of colonialism and apartheid like statues and recognition of black academics in terms of career mobility. These campaigns have given rise to militant student activism which shares traits with the Zimbabwean student movement unionism of the 1990s and early 2000s which took the ruling elite to task over privatisation, commercialisation of tertiary education and authoritarian tendencies within the political system of the country (Magure, 2010).

2.2.4 The engaged youth paradigm in South Africa

This paradigm foregrounds the idea that the decline in formal participation does not indicate a rejection of politics *per se*, but reflects changing forms of participation. It highlights the fact that declining levels of actual voting and voter registration among the South African youth should not be read as signalling a decrease in political participation (Dlamini, 2005; Fakir et al, 2010; Booysen, 2015). As pointed out earlier, this perspective is of the view that young South Africans are engaging in alternative forms of political participation like engaging in cause-oriented and protest activities (SA Reconciliation Barometer, 2012; Fakir et al, 2010; Booysen, 2015). As Malada (2013) aptly avers, active citizenship in a democracy is not just about voting every five years but also involves taking responsibility, exercising one's democratic right to hold public representatives accountable and building systems of direct democracy, where the need for representative democracy is minimised. While acknowledging the depoliticisation effects associated with consumerism among young people, scholars

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[54] Open Stellenbosch is a collective of university students and staff seeking radical change in a space of deeply entrenched structural racism and patriarchy. They are working to purge the oppressive remnants of apartheid that exist at the campus in pursuit of a truly African university.

(Dlamini, 2005; Mkhize, 2015) are quick to dismiss as naïve the belief that there was ever a golden age when every youth was an activist. Scholars (Dlamini, 2005; Resnick & Casale, 2011) are of the view that the youth are actively involved in "new social movements[55]" that sprouted during the democratisation phase of the transition. As Loader (2007: 10) observes, "the rejection of arrogant and self-absorbed professional politics may not be a cynical withdrawal, but rather interpreted as the beginnings of a legitimate opposition".

Proponents (Sader & Weidman, 2004) of this perspective challenge the validity of stereotypical representations of the South African youth as dissatisfied and disaffected. Scholars (Booysen, 2015; Roberts & Letsoalo, 2009) posit that it is more of political institutions failing to involve the young people and prioritising their interests, which leads to their unwillingness to participate. For instance, the youth have argued that the current electoral system of proportional representation limited their ability to select representatives because the responsibility was left to the parties, of which they were not necessarily members (IEC, 2008). Similar studies (Boyce, 2010; Kamper & Badenhorst, 2010) on youth political participation suggest that the majority of South African youth do have faith in democracy and its social institutions but that they, along with other age groups, are dissatisfied with public service. Youth disengagement from formal politics in South Africa has been accompanied by high levels of protest actions (Bernstein & Johnston 2007; Resnick & Casale, 2011; Booysen, 2015). These community protest actions are seen as a way to get the attention of politicians (Wasserman & Garman, 2014) as well as making their own politics visible in the public domain. According to the SA Reconciliation Barometer (2012), one in five South Africans under 35 reported being involved in a violent[56] protest in 2011. In 2008, one out of five respondents indicated that they had taken part in a protest or demonstration, and 6 percent said they had used force or violence. The survey also revealed that just under one quarter of South Africans indicated that they had been part of a peaceful demonstration (23.7%) or strike (24.4%) in the past year, and 17.6% that they had participated in a more violent or destructive event: up from 11.6% in 2011 (SA Reconciliation Barometer, 2012). Young black unemployed men have also been identified as the main instigators of community protests

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[55] Unlike the wave of "post-class" movements that sprouted in most Western societies in the mid-1960s focusing on identity politics (Castells, 2004), this term in the South African context refers a wide range of post-apartheid social formations dealing with service delivery issues. In the Western world, "old" social movements and an overarching objective of claims to the redistribution of material resources, new social movements are more concerned with identity and lifestyle issues as something to be built, articulated and invented rather than explained in reference to a social structure (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

[56] Alexander (2014) distinguishes between peaceful, disruptive and violent protests. Violent protests involve destroying property, erecting barricades and closure of main roads.

(Langa & von Holdt, 2012; Langa & Kiguwa, 2013). I investigated whether youth activists in South Africa used Facebook to engage in cyber-protests.

Research in Western democracies (Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014; Fyfe, 2009) indicates that youth participation is occurring in different places and at different levels of society. In the same vein, Juris & Pleyers (2009) show that political participation has changed in form to incorporate new forms of civic engagement and citizenship. This change in form has been described as an attempt to "refine politics itself" (della Porta, 2005). Young people are viewed as preferring to engage in individualised and flexible non-traditional forms of political participation (Vromen, 2011; Bennett, 2008; Juris, 2005). These individualised forms of participation include traditional modes such as voting, writing letters to MPs, donating money and non-traditional modes that are facilitated by new technology, including petition signing, boycotts, chat rooms, email chain letters and SMS (Vromen, 2007: 51). In this study, I attempted to establish the validity of Vromen's claim with regards to the South African case.

As in Zimbabwe, South Africa youth are viewed as having opted for alternative forms of political participation that can be seen as more effective especially when there are sizeable institutional barriers that can discourage them from voting (SA Reconciliation Barometer, 2012; SANPAD, 2013). Dahlgren (2013) contends that disengagement from formal politics should be seen as a political act in the sense that it constitutes a rational response under certain circumstances. South African youth, argues Bosch (2013), are not overtly politically active in the mainstream sense of participation in political organisations but they are engaging in alternative forms of political sub-activism. This corresponds with Bakardjieva's notion of "sub-activism" which is "not about political power in the strict sense, but about personal empowerment seen as the power of the subject to be the person that they want to be in accordance with [their] reflexively chosen moral and political standards" (2010: 134). Noteworthy to highlight that this kind of analysis promotes the fragmentation of political agency associated with post-modern theorisation because it obscures the role of coordination and organisation in bringing about revolutionary political change. This study explored how South African youth activists deployed Facebook to engage in "sub-activism". Next, I look at the South African communications context.

2.2.5 The state of the mainstream media in South Africa

Post-apartheid South African media has enjoyed much more freedom compared to the apartheid era, where an intricate set of laws severely curtailed the media's ability to challenge the apartheid state (Wasserman & Garman, 2012; Kaarsholm, 2009). The dawn of democracy brought an end to decades of repressive state regulation of the media. The media in South Africa underwent a shift in the operations and understanding of what their role in society was to become (Garman & Malila, 2016; Wasserman, 2012; Wasserman & De Beer, 2010). It also brought into existence a vibrant media sector which has fought hard to protect the country's constitution. South Africa also witnessed the arrival of new radio, television stations and tabloid newspapers (Wasserman & Jacobs, 2013; Wasserman, 2010). It was also accompanied by the marketisation and liberalisation of the South African public and private media sectors (Sparks, 2009; Wasserman, 2010) which saw media conglomerates like Naspers (which owns MultiChoice) spreading their tentacles into Africa, Asia and Latin America media markets. To date, the mainstream private media in South Africa is dominated by four print media oligopolies (Media24 owned largely by Naspers, Independent Newspapers, Times Media Ltd and Caxton), one dominant public broadcaster, one commercial free-to-air television station, two satellite television firms (DStv MultiChoice Africa and TopTV), hundreds of community radio stations and newspapers and dozens of magazines (Chiumbu, 2012; Media Diversity and Development Agency (MDDA), 2009).

As discussed in Chapter One, a debate has ensued about the state of media transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. Whilst some scholars (Tomaselli & Teer-Tomaselli, 2001; Krabill, 2000) have hailed strides made since the dawn of democracy, Berger (2001) has weighed in to the debate arguing that the glass has "more liquid it [media] contains now than it [media] did before 1994" (Berger, 2001: 161). Other scholars (Boloka & Krabill, 2000; Duncan, 2008; Steenveld, 2004) have questioned the depth and significance of media diversification and deregulation, arguing that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid on mass media development continued to impact on the nature of the mainstream public sphere. As Nyamnjoh (2010: 68) observes, despite the media transformation that reached its peak in 1998, this has not necessarily "made the newspapers more representative of South African society". This means that existing newspapers do not speak to all audiences in a stratified society like South Africa.

Because of the lack of racial transformation of ownership and the lack of diversity (Kupe, 2011) within the South African print media sector, Friedman (2011) argues that the mainstream media provide a "view from the suburbs" which constitutes a very narrow sliver of South African reality. From recent baseline surveys of youth, media and citizenship (SANPAD, 2013; Malila, Oelofsen, Garman, & Wasserman, 2013), it appears that the mainstream media's representation of South African reality does not resonate with youth's everyday lives. Most of the youth surveyed did not feel that the mainstream news was relevant to them in any way and they felt largely excluded from media coverage. Respondents also criticised the mainstream public and private media for affording them little opportunity to speak back and participate in debates. In their research in the Eastern Cape in South Africa, Garman & Malila (2016) found that many young, black and poor South Africans do not recognise themselves or their communities in the stories they see, hear or read in the mainstream media. Consequently, the failure of the media to listen to people places a barrier between the media they consume and their lived experiences (Garman & Malila, 2016). Respondents observed that the news lacked relevance to their lives. This is because the media in South Africa are failing to listen to their daily challenges. Research on the coverage of education stories in South African newspapers shows that they lack the voices of young people (Garman & Malila, 2016). Because of the absence of active listening by the media in South Africa, young people have limited spaces where they can speak out and receive attention. This further echoes Fraser's (1990) argument that an elitist public sphere tends to exclude certain kinds of identities and subjectivities from being heard.

Highlighting the persistence of inequalities in terms of wealth and power in South Africa, Sparks (2011) speaks of "elite continuity[57]". The point is that commercial media are still governed by the market logic that results in the stratification of audiences according to income and social position. For instance, South Africa's mainstream media (private newspapers and television) targets the audience which falls in the LSM[58] 5.5 cutting out the majority of the ordinary people with low incomes who fall under lower LSMs (Duncan & Glenn, 2010). The increased marketisation and conglomeration of the South African media landscape has resulted in the preference of elite audiences among the commercial media

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[57] This can be observed not only in the power structures inscribed in the existing institutions, but also in the personnel in positions of power, thus perpetuating the logic of the old regime (Sparks, 2008).
[58] It is a demographic and market segmentation tool developed by the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) to measure the standard of living of audiences, using criteria such as salary levels, degrees of urbanisation, and ownership of cars and major appliances. LSM 10 is the highest, and LSM I the lowest. Most audiences are skewed towards the lower LSMs (Duncan & Glenn, 2010: 297).

(Wasserman & Botma, 2008) as well as the fragmentation of publics (into clusters of elite and poor audiences). Through its privileging of elite audiences (although the elite are no longer defined strictly in racial terms), the mainstream private media has contributed to the systematic exclusion of subaltern, economically-marginalised publics (mostly blacks, women, youth and marginalised ethnic groups with low purchasing power) from the dominant public sphere (Garman, 2011; Wasserman & Garman, 2012; Hamilton, 2009; Duncan, 2011).

Like in other political transitions, the South African government retained its grip in broadcast media through the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), leading Rao & Wasserman (2015) to argue that it has evolved into an uncritical pro-government agency. Similar to ZBC in Zimbabwe, the SABC is frequently criticised for showing pro-government bias. The public broadcaster has not escaped the protruding tentacles of commercialisation (see, Duncan & Glenn, 2010; Fourie, 2007; Hamilton, 2009). SABC has had to rely on advertising revenue to complement state funding and licence fees for its sustainability. Consequently, SABC's leapfrogging into the market approach has resulted in the prioritisation of commercial interests at the expense of public service content and nation building (Fourie, 2007; Teer-Tomaselli, 1996). This is because, as Fourie (2007) observes, commercialisation fosters the programming of light entertainment and thereby advances the tabloidisation of the media as well as the undermining of public service media/content.

It is clear from the foregoing that in a country as diverse as South Africa, a single public sphere cannot be able to represent the full spectrum of lived experiences and to provide a platform for a range of citizens to express their voices (Wasserman & Garman, 2012; Kupe, 2011). In view of the inaccessible dominant public sphere, Kaarsholm (2009) suggests, that majority of the people rely on different systems of networking that make up counter-publics. Tabloid newspapers (like the *Daily Sun*) focusing on the daily lived experiences of the poor and working class, which are largely absent from the mainstream commercial press has been described as providing alternative public sphere (Wasserman, 2010; Bosch, 2011). By giving voice to marginalised groups, tabloids can be understood as being "part of a political discourse in African countries where access to the mainstream media or participation in political debate remains the preserve of the elite" (Wasserman, 2011: 2-3). Similar claims have been made with regards to the community media sector which is supported by

government agencies in order to serve marginalised communities despite its under-funding which has complicated its efforts to broaden the public sphere (Duncan, 2010; Chiumbu, 2010).

Some of the marginalised groups who have been shunned by the mainstream public and private media are political activists. The private media have generally been disparaged for ignoring the activities of social movements or for skewing coverage to focus on ideological clashes between political groupings (Jacobs & Johnson, 2007). Because of the advertising-driven mainstream private media in South Africa, the views of activists are often represented in ways more palatable to mainstream discourse and thinking—often cast in a negative light (McKinley & Naidoo, 2004; Duncan, 2010; Kariithi & Kareithi, 2007; Chiumbu, 2012; Willems, 2010; Dawson, 2012; Wasserman, Chuma & Bosch, 2016). Some activist organisations have "consciously begun developing their own independent spaces for the production of forms of representation" (McKinley & Naidoo, 2004:2; Dawson, 2012). These independent spaces include magazines, websites, film and video distribution networks, festivals, conventions and local meeting spaces. As Finlay (2011) observes, some of these independent publishing projects fulfil the criteria of active counter-public spheres in that they make space for the discussion of marginalised social content. Others find alternative avenues for speaking and being heard (including voting, protest, petitions and social media platforms). I sought to examine the extent to which Facebook can be considered an alternative avenue for speaking and being heard in South Africa.

2.2.6 The South African Telecommunications Context

The slow growth of the fixed telecommunications sector in South Africa has been attributed to the government's failed policy of managed liberalisation which sought to preserve a central role for state-owned operators and state shareholding in private companies (Horwitz, 2007). Significant growth in the fixed telecommunications sector was witnessed in 2006 following the licensing of a private fixed-line operator Neotel and in August 2008 when a court ruled that value-added network service (VANS) providers could self-provide facilities (Duncan, 2011). This liberalisation of the sector was also accompanied by the explosion of the mobile market. The roll-out of several undersea cables and the establishment of a state-owned internet company Broadband InfraCo in 2009 significantly improved the country's

bandwidth capacity (Duncan, 2011). However these initiatives have not resulted in reduced prices as initially envisaged.

According to the Internetworldstats (2014), South Africa's internet penetration is estimated at 48.9% as of December 2013. Similar to Zimbabwe, the number of mobile internet subscriptions in South Africa contributes significantly to the total penetration rate. It is important to note that access is consistent with geographical and economic inequalities in the country. Discrepancies in internet access also follow gender lines with 69% males connected compared to 31% females (Goldstuck, 2010). Age-disaggregated data shows that most internet users fall within the 35-54 age group. In South Africa, one of the major barriers to internet use is low English language literacy. Bearing in the mind the afore-mentioned connectivity constraints, I sought to find out how discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation played out in Facebook groups and fan pages.

Besides Telkom (which provides internet connectivity largely through ADSL) and other private fixed-line operators, the country's major mobile service providers (Vodacom, MTN, and Cell-C, Virgin Mobile and 8ta) have entered into the mobile internet market (Duncan, 2012). These networks also provide wireless 3G broadband access to the internet, although their pre-paid data plans are relatively expensive for ordinary users. Research (Research ICT Africa, RIA, 2013) indicates that mobile broadband has overtaken fixed broadband in South Africa in terms of subscribers, affordability and speed of service. Compared to fixed operators, mobile internet data plans are relatively cheaper and faster. This explains why the mobile phone constitutes a major entry point for internet usage in South Africa (Research ICT Africa, 2012; de Lanerolle, 2012). Pre-paid mobile data packages cost between R15 for 25 MB and R349 for 5 GB (which translates to 7 cents per MB). Blackberry which offers data at a relatively affordable flat rate provides an alternative for South Africans who cannot afford post-paid mobile internet packages. Like in Zimbabwe, mobile service providers in South Africa have also rolled out zero-rated data bundles for services like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter which has contributed significantly to the popularisation of these platforms. The prices for broadband ADSL internet range between R165 per month for the speed of up to 2 Mbps and R795 per month for the internet speed of up to 40Mbps. These prices exclude ADSL access and line rental. These high internet prices restrict and limit

significant engagement with the tools and resources available through the internet for a majority of South Africans.

South Africa is one of the most "mobile-centric" (Gitau, Marsden & Donner, 2010) environments in the world with 64 million mobile phone subscriptions, which amounts to a sim card penetration rate of nearly 127 percent. As noted in relation to Zimbabwe, this sim card penetration rate includes multiple phone and dual SIM phone owners. A new report estimates that South Africa has 20 million smartphone users (KPCB, 2014). Given that most South African internet users access it via mobile phones, it is difficult for them to use the medium for the purposes of accessing political information because of slow speed and high user costs (Walton & Leukes, 2013). In the light of the foregoing, this study examined how politically active youth in South Africa utilised Facebook to promote their political objectives. More importantly it is only through an ethnographic study of how youth activists interact with Facebook in their everyday civic activities that we can understand the role of the platform in facilitating online activism.

Facebook is the most popular social network site in South Africa with an estimated 9,4-million active users, a significant leap from 6,8-million users in 2013 (World Wide Worx, 2014). It is often listed by young people as being the most (68.7%) commonly used site (SANPAD, 2013) ahead of other platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, BlackBerry Messenger and Mxit. Survey data (SA Reconciliation Barometer, 2012) also show that South African urban and white youth exhibit the highest levels of involvement in online political activities. This "virtual engagement" (Glenn & Mattes, 2011) with the political system demonstrates a shift from more passive forms of viewership and listenership towards more active forms of interaction in virtual spaces. I examined the dialogic nature and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups.

Internet users in South Africa enjoy relative digital media freedom, although there are fears of the existence of subtle state and corporate censorship by ISPs (Duncan, 2012). This is because under the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act of 2002 (ECTA), ISPs are compelled to register with the Film and Publications Board, which falls under the Department of Home Affairs. The same law compel ISPs to respond to and implement take-down notices (TDNs) regarding illegal content, like child pornography, material that could be defamatory without justification, or copyright violations. The Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act (RICA) compel

mobile operators to register all their current users or de-activate their service if they fail to provide proof of address and proper identification documents. This mandatory SIM card registration as well as the requirement for telecommunication service providers to erect surveillance equipment suggests that South Africans like their counterparts in Zimbabwe are susceptible to communication surveillance (see Mare, 2015; Swart, 2015a; 2015b). Furthermore, the operation of the National Communications Centre (NCC) outside the RICA framework means that the surveillance power of the state can be abused for political gain (Swart, 2015b). Like Zimbabwe, South Africa is not immune to state surveillance since the "spy cables" scandal has shown that there are various regulatory loopholes currently being exploited by intelligence and security personnel to conduct physical and electronic surveillance of citizens (Jordan, 2015; Mare, 2015). In view of both state and corporate censorship, this study investigated whether these threats had a "chilling effect" on how youth activists used Facebook for political activities in South Africa.

2.2.7 Social media and political participation in South Africa

Studies (Bosch, 2013; Hyde-Clarke & Steenkamp, 2013; Ndlovu, 2013; Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013; Walton & Leukes, 2013; Chuma, 2006; Duncan, 2014) demonstrate that new media technologies have been embraced as an avenue for political participation in South Africa. Social media platforms are deployed by political parties, civil society organisations, activists and ordinary people to engage in individualised forms of activism, to source political news, to join interest groups, to participate in discussions of a political nature and to disseminate information (Bosch, 2013; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2012; Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013; Munro, 2015). Through qualitative interviews and online observations, I explored how politically active youth used Facebook to facilitate political activism.

South African political representatives are increasingly using the internet and social media to post political messages and to communicate with their (connected) constituencies (Ndlovu, 2013: 109). For instance, the presidency runs an official and verified Twitter page "PresidencyZA"; a Facebook page, "The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa"; a YouTube channel "PresidencyZA Channel"; and a Flickr photo-account, titled "The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa's Photostream" (Chatora, 2012). Zuma has been the subject of countless memes, gifs, remixes, photoshopped pictures and YouTube videos of Zuma's apparent innumeracy (Jacobs & Wasserman, 2015). As Wasserman & Jacobs (2015)

observe, former opposition party leader Helen Zille (of the opposition party Democratic Alliance (DA)) has become known for tweeting from the hip, and landed her in trouble for unguarded remarks. They further note that Zille's Twitter dominance reflected racial disparities (still largely skewed to the small white minority) in internet access and use in South Africa. Following the launch of the Economic Freedom Front (EFF), the DA was deposed from their Twitter dominance by young MPs like Mbuyiseni Ndlozi and Julius Malema and the emergence of #BlackTwitter in South Africa (Jacobs & Wasserman, 2015). These platforms provide citizens with information on government initiatives and facilitate interaction with the presidency and ministries (Chatora, 2012). The country's ex-Finance minister (Trevor Manuel) and the current minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan, have also utilised social media platforms to encourage public participation in the budget process. Part of the aim of this study was to investigate how South African youth activists deployed Facebook to contact elected officials.

Social media platforms were also extensively utilised by the major political parties during the 2014 national election (Phakathi, 2014). The sites were used to broadcast their election manifestos, to mobilise voters, to report election transgressions, to solicit views from potential voters and to post election results in real time (Mutheiwana, 2014). Voters also used this platform to circulate election-related photos and *selfies*[59]. It is important to note that South African politicians and political parties continue to use social media as broadcast media, not as dialogic media, even those who claim to be appealing to a youth audience (Duncan, 2014). This study endeavoured to observe and analyse the dialogic nature of participation and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups.

Besides the creative appropriation of social media platforms for political communication, student activists during the protests that rocked South African universities in 2015 also made use of these technologies. The students exploited social media and the internet's full potential as an online public sphere. Hashtags like #RhodesMustFall #RhodesSoWhite and #TransformWits symbolised the transformation of contemporary political activism in South Africa. The hashtags articulated actual events: the hashtag #RhodesMustFall amplified on an already existing movement, mostly by black students, at UCT against a colonial era statue of Cecil John Rhodes. The hashtags took over relegating the mainstream media to the dustbin of

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[59]It is a self-portrait photograph, typically taken with a hand-held digital camera or camera phone.

history (Jacobs & Wasserman, 2015). The mainstream media become increasingly irrelevant to what was going on in the streets. Ordinary people also followed the protests online (initially mainstream global news channels avoided the protests) as they were unfolding (Jacobs & Wasserman, 2015). This indicates that the internet and social media became the source of breaking and developing news. At the University of the Western Cape — a historically black university in Cape Town, which struggles to command the same mainstream media attention as historically white, middle class University of Cape Town (UCT) or Stellenbosch University (where students fought over language policy) — students called for donations of vital supplies via Facebook (Jacobs & Wasserman, 2015). This study therefore sought to find out whether youth activists in South Africa are using Facebook to solicit for donations and fundraising.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have unpacked the state of political, media and telecommunication transformations in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This chapter has established that political transitions from apartheid to democracy in South Africa and from the colonial state to a post-colonial state in Zimbabwe have been "far from uniform" (Sparks, 2009). Zimbabwe and South Africa have unfinished business of transitions to deal with regards to war-time and apartheid legacies, as illustrated by the "democratisation conflicts" (Voltmer & Kraetzschmar, 2015) which have engulfed the two countries since the dawn of independence and democracy respectively. In both countries, the youth are generally disengaged from conventional forms of political participation such as voting or contacting elected officials, although they are also over-represented in the populations of those who engage in protest and political violence. Invoking Dahlgren's (2009) analytical framework, I have argued that the two countries are witnessing the simultaneous processes of youth engagement and disengagement. In this Chapter, I have also demonstrated that the mainstream private media in South Africa and Zimbabwe are the preserve of political and economic elites. Unlike in South Africa, I have shown that marginalised groups in Zimbabwe are turning to alternative media to deliberate on issues of common concern.Both countries are characterised by constricted public spheres (due to political restrictions in Zimbabwe and the political economy of access to media in South Africa) which makes it difficult for young people to influence public opinion. I have also shown that despite evident signs of youth disengagement from formal politics, alternative forms of political participation are sprouting

at the margins of the mainstream public sphere. In the next chapter, I develop the conceptual framework which guides the analysis of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3. Introduction

The previous chapter has developed a conceptual frame which I use to analyse the research questions of this study. In this chapter, I outline and develop the conceptual framework that I use to analyse the research questions of this study. In keeping with Michel Serres' advice that "a single theoretical "pass key" will never suffice to open all doors rather, as he insists, each time you want to "unlock" a specific problem, you must forge the specific theoretical key[s] which will be adequate to the problem in hand" (Serres, 1995: 50), I draw on the combined strengths of Nancy Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-public and James C. Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts[60]. I begin this chapter by revisiting the basic assumptions of the Habermasian public sphere before discussing the criticisms as well as the responses levelled against the theory. I proceed to briefly assess the state of the mainstream public and private media (the dominant public sphere according to Fraser, 1990) in Zimbabwe and South Africa and show the relevance of Fraser's ideas as a conceptual frame. I then move on to discuss the analytic features of Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics as well as the major criticisms waged against it. I also look at the responses advanced by various scholars in an attempt to illustrate the relevance of Fraser's ideas for this study. I also outline the link between the idea of subaltern counter-publics and the metaphor of hidden transcripts.

Scholars (Bentivegna, 2006; Papacharissi, 2010) have observed that any study of the relationship between the internet and politics cannot be undertaken without revisiting the concept of the public sphere. In the same vein, I concur with scholars (Zhang, 2012; Dahlberg, 2011) who argue that in order to understand what is happening in online spaces, there is need to take criticisms levelled against the Habermasian public sphere more seriously. Consequently, I draw on the Fraser's ideas which acknowledge the existence of the dominant public sphere and a plurality of multiple subaltern counter-publics which are sometimes competing, rather than engaging in rational-critical discussion oriented towards a consensus. The distinction between the dominant public sphere and subaltern counter-publics

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[60] It refers to subtle forms of contesting "public transcripts/ dominant discourses" by making use of prescribed roles and language to resist the abuse of power—including things like 'rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, and anonymity' (Scott, 1985).

allows me to consider structural factors associated with the dominant media which militates against marginalised groups' political participation thereby forcing them to create multiple publics (like Facebook groups).

This theoretical frame also postulates that stratified societies[61] are traversed with pervasive structural inequalities (along age, class, ethnicity, geography, religion and so forth) which provide certain parts of the citizenry with disproportionate power to make themselves heard in the mainstream public sphere. The argument here is that publics in multi-cultural and stratified societies such as Zimbabwe and South Africa are fragmented, unequal and consequently do not have the same access to the unitary public sphere. As discussed in Chapter One, given the stratified nature of Zimbabwe and South Africa it makes sense to speak of a plurality of communicative arenas and conduits along which political action is enacted and ideas are debated. This is because, as Fraser (1990; 1992) observes, marginalised groups (including youths) have a political life outside the formal structures of political participation. As such, I find Fraser's ideas of subaltern counter-publics and intra-public relations to be relevant conceptual resources for analysing how and why youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action, assessing the extent to which Facebook can be considered as an alternative public sphere[62] as well as analysing how discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation play out in various Facebook groups. Following Fraser's (1990) postulation, I conceptualise Facebook groups and pages as parallel discursive arenas allowing youth activists to invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.

For specific reasons (which will be outlined in section 2.6), I graft the metaphor of hidden transcripts (Scott, 1976) onto the Fraser's ideas. I modify the term to "digital hidden transcripts[63]" in order to examine the various kinds of political discourses which are circulated by youth activists on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Hidden transcripts refer to secretive discourses which are created by subordinate groups that represent a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant groups (including the state) (Scott, 1976). The notion of hidden transcripts allows me to pay closer attention to the acts, language and

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[61]It denotes societies whose basic framework generates unequal social groups in structural relations of domination and subordination (Fraser, 1997: 80).

[62] For the purposes of this study, the term alternative public sphere is used interchangeably with other concepts such as subaltern counter publics (Fraser, 1990) and counter public sphere (Squires, 2002).

[63] It refers to digitally-mediated subversive political discourses and popular cultural expressions meant to contest dominant discourses which are circulated in virtual spaces.

symbols of the hidden narratives acted out "backstage" (like on closed Facebook groups). "Backstage" and "frontstage" are concepts associated with the dramaturgical theory advanced by Erving Goffman (1959). According to him, when people perceive themselves to be on the "frontstage", that is, on public Facebook pages, they communicate politics in a restrained manner, avoiding conflict and comments that implicate larger social structures. In other words, people avoid making political expressions that put them at risk of being arrested in authoritarian contexts. In contrast, when people perceive themselves to be in private or semi-public (backstage), they engage in unconstrained political discussions of social issues and public affairs (Goffman, 1959). Next I discuss the Habermasian public sphere.

3.1. The Habermasian Public Sphere

The term "public sphere", largely credited to Jürgen Habermas, though associated with the works of several political theorists (like Hannah Arendt, Plato and Aristotle), remains one of the most enduring theories dealing with the idea of political communication and how unified public opinion becomes political action (Calhoun, 1992). In his seminal book published in 1962 [1989], German philosopher and Frankfurt School[64] sociologist, Habermas provides an extensive historical and sociological sketch of the rise and decline of the "liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere" (1989). This sphere was "bourgeois" because it was populated by the wealthy stratum of the middle class. It was "liberal" in the sense that it was made up of free citizens who conversed as equals. Grounded in Marxian political theory, Habermas theorised about the emergence of a public sphere of informal discussion and debate as part of the expanded cultural and political realm afforded by the growth in print culture and literacy through books, pamphlets and, especially, the press in 18th century Europe (mostly in Britain, France and Germany).

Habermas theorised about the existence of the public sphere as an intermediary system between the private sphere (or the realm where people work, exchange goods, and maintain their families), and the sphere of public authority (or the realm of the state, the law, and the ruling class) (1989: 30). The public sphere is defined "as a body of private persons assembled to discuss matters of public concern or common interest" (Habermas, 1989: 7). For

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[64] The Frankfurt school associated with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno inaugurated critical communications studies in the 1930s and combined political economy of the media, cultural analysis of texts and audience reception studies. Frankfurt School theorists argued that the media were controlled by groups who employed them to further their own interests and power (Kellner, 2009).

Habermas, the public is related to the notion of the commons that is associated with ideas like *Gemeinschaft* (German), community, the common use of resources like a marketplace or a fountain, and communal organisation (1989: 6). Thus the idea of public presupposes that the people taking part in discussions are acting as public citizens whose deliberations are of relevance to the wider public. The idea of sphere comprised of any and all spaces, physical or virtual as well as a mix of formal and informal institutions which existed in a bounded Westphalian nation state (Fraser, 2007). The public sphere is not just a sphere of public political communication, but also a sphere free from state censorship and from private ownership (Habermas, 1991: 36). This sphere should be free from state censorship and corporate ownership so that there is open debate and public opinion which is arrived at without coercion and manipulation (Fuchs, 2014). In modern societies, this sphere represents a theatre in in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk (Fraser, 1990).

According to Habermas, the political public sphere comprised of the institutional communicative spaces, universally accessible, that facilitated the formation of discussion and public opinion, via the unfettered flow of relevant information and ideas (1989: 136). In other words, this sphere was characterised by universal accessibility in the sense that all citizens could voluntarily participate in discussions based on rational-critical debate. It also guaranteed free access and freedoms of assembly, association and expression (Fuchs, 2014). This meant that interlocutors would set aside such characteristics as differences in birth and fortune and speak to one another as if they were social and economic peers. Habermas later revised this postulation by acknowledging that the status (command of resources such as property and intellectual skills) of the participant was important. Reason was to be the sole arbiter of issues in the public sphere which means that discussions were to be based on reliable sources of information. The resultant conversation, which Habermas calls "*praxis*" or public opinion which is conversation which leads to the formation of shared opinion was supposed to hold officials accountable and to ensure that the actions of the state express the will of the citizenry (1991). It was also assumed that politicians would then take democratic decisions on the basis of debates in the public sphere.

For the consummation of a public sphere, a set of ingredients were supposed to be present and lie in a certain relationship to each other (Habermas, 1991). For instance, the family was

expected to engage in literary activities that are centred around reading within the intimate space of the home, and not watch TV, listen to the radio or consume magazines—all of which provoke "individuated acts of reception" (Habermas, 1991: 161) leading to "impersonal indulgence in stimulating relaxation", rather than the public use of reason (1991: 170). Habermas argued that paying for books, the theatre, a concert and a museum (which are products of the capitalist system) was the necessary "precondition for rational-critical debate" (1991: 164). For him, the resultant conversation was free of the taint of the capitalist system (Garman, 2011).

Beginning in earnest in the mid-1800s, Habermas argues that the public sphere was transformed from face-to-face public discussions to the transmission of considered public opinion of society to the state via forms of legally guaranteed free speech, free press and free assembly and eventually through the parliamentary institutions of representative government (sees Downey & Fenton, 2003; Calhoun, 1992; Fuchs, 2014). The press became a crucial vehicle for critical-rational debate as well as the transmission of shared opinion to the state. Habermas attributes a change in public participation to economic, political, and social events that shaped society at that time. This transformation of the 18th century public sphere was caused by the rise of state capitalism, the growth of commodification and commercialisation of culture through the media (especially radio, film, television and magazines). As will be outlined later, the "refeudalisation" of the public sphere by the state and the market meant that space for participatory communication was severely constricted. The situation was made worse by the increasing complexity and rationalisation of societies over the course of the 20th century (Downey & Fenton, 2003), which led to the loss of the delineation of the strictly private domain of family, in which literary activities (tied to books, literary journals, novels and letters) were the foundation for the outgrowth of conversations going on in public spaces.

Habermas saw the distinction between rational communication and the public representation of private interests as increasingly becoming blurred. Given his belief in the strict boundary between the private and public spheres, Habermas bemoaned the blurring of the two spheres as contributing to the pollution of public discussions. Connected to the issue of the blurring of the private and public spheres, according to Habermas, was also the intrusion of the mass media into the intimate space of the family, resulting in individualised media consumption (rather than common viewing spaces for citizens) and the loss of literary inspired subjectivity.

Habermas also criticised the type and quality of media consumed by private individuals, which he felt affected the individual's sense of self and their place and role in society. Although Habermas did not critique mobile and social media which are associated with individualised media consumption, his ideas remain valid. For Habermas, new forms of media characterised by individuated reception were responsible for inculcating a passive culture of consumption, thereby replacing what he termed "serious involvement" and the "shared critical activity of public discourse", a withdrawal from literary and political debate and the maintenance of a false sense of contributing to public opinion (1991). As Lunt & Livingstone (2013) aptly observe, Habermas pointed to problems of political apathy (linked to the rise of consumer society), representative democracy (which distanced the public from politics) and the welfare state (which created a softening of class divisions and increasing intrusion of public administration into private lives).

Fuchs (2014) urges scholars to read the Habermasian public sphere as a method of *immanent critique*[65] that critically scrutinises the limits of the media and culture grounded in power relations and political economy. This is because Habermas criticises the commercialisation of the press by arguing that such kind of "press itself became more manipulable to the extent that it became commercialised" (1989: 185). He added that such a "world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (Habermas, 1991: 171). His reasoning was that such as a public sphere of the media would become undemocratic and a privatised realm controlled by powerful actors instead of citizens (Fuchs, 2014). Habermas observed that in capitalist media, publicity is not generated from below, but from above (Habermas, 1991: 177). Because of over-commercialisation of the mass media, the public sphere was thus transformed from a forum for rational-critical debate into a "platform for advertising" (Habermas, 1989: 181). Commercialisation and commodification also transformed the public sphere into "a sphere of culture consumption" that is only a "pseudo-public sphere" (Habermas, 1991: 162) and a "manipulated public sphere" (in which states and corporations use "publicity" in the modern sense to secure for themselves a kind of plebiscitary acclamation) (1991: 217). Instead of hosting robust rational-critical discussions on public issues, Habermas dismissed modern-day mass media content as "administered conversation" (administered by public relations agents, advertisers, ruling elite and news media owners).

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[65] It compares proclaimed ideals to reality and if it finds out that reality permanently contradicts its own ideals, and then it becomes clear that there is a fundamental mismatch and that reality needs to be changed in order to overcome this incongruity (Fuchs, 2014: 63).

The point is that rational-critical debate was replaced by the systematic selection and representation of information undertaken according to commercial or political interests.

Habermas also accuses the modern public sphere of depoliticising citizens by turning them in consumers who are disinterested in issues of the common good and democratic participation. For him, "Reporting facts as human-interest stories, mixing information with entertainment [tabloidisation of media content], arranging material episodically, and breaking down complex relationships into smaller fragments – all of this comes together to form a syndrome that works to depoliticise public communication" (Habermas, 1996: 377). Cumulatively, this was seen as exacerbating the process of individualisation, leading to a loss of political consciousness, especially class consciousness (Villa, 2008). I will respond to this Habermasian claim in section 2.4 when I argue that Facebook groups and pages can be conceptualised as subaltern counter-publics. Habermas also criticised the modern-day mass media for not allowing citizens to talk back: they "deprive people of the opportunity to say something and to disagree" (1991: 171). This kind of vertical communication can easily result in an "uneven distribution of effective voice" (Couldry, 2010: 145). Depriving people of the opportunity to say something and to disagree, the modern-day mass media have become vehicles for political propaganda, capitalist hegemony and ideological reproduction (Papacharissi, 2009).

Although Habermas initially criticised the mass media, in his later writings, he acknowledges the modern-day problem of providing public meeting spaces so that millions of citizens can converse, and evokes the normative idea of the value of the news media as the vehicle to deal with this problem. He writes: "In a large public body, this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today newspapers and magazines, radio and TV are the media of the public sphere" (quoted by Eley, 1992: 289). His argument is that the mass media—commercial or not—can play a valid public sphere role if they allow access to information to everyone, keep matters of serious and general concern and allow for feedback (through SMSs or letters to the editor, comments section and so forth). Scholars (Garnham, 1995; Castells, 2008; Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004) have adopted this Habermasian public sphere as a normative standard to evaluate the state of health of the media landscape. The heuristic standard has also been used to delineate the media that fail to do this as non-public sphere vehicles (Garman, 2011). The media meeting

the test of public service content (like public broadcasting service television), public interest issues and "serious journalism" have been hailed as vehicles of the public sphere (Curran, 2002) while those which focus on private and personal issues and genres which rely on entertainment and personal gratification (like tabloid press, television and radio) have been berated for lowering standards of public discussion (Papacharissi, 2004). I will respond to this assumption of the existence of a strict demarcation between public and private issues when I discuss Fraser's ideas.

The mass media are widely viewed as the central institution of the contemporary public sphere (Garnham, 1995; Castells, 1997; Thompson, 2000). It is important to note that although the media is not the place where the public sphere resides, it is not the public sphere *per se*, but it is a vehicle through which such a space can be created. The liberal-pluralist perspective of media–state relations views the mass media system as playing an intermediary or the fifth estate role between the state and citizens (Willems, 2011; Bignell, 2000; Klein, 2000). This is because the media act as a discursive space and a conduit through which both the "input" and the "output" of the political system are delivered (Dahlgren, 1995: 2). As a constitutive element of the civil society, the media is seen as important in carrying information that enables citizens to make informed political choices as well as influencing the decisions of the state (Castells, 2008; Dahlgren, 1995). In recent years, new media technologies (like the internet and social media) have also been classified as the public sphere (Castells, 2008; Curran, 2012; Papacharissi, 2010; Goldberg, 2011; Isofidis, 2012). New media technologies are believed to have widened the public sphere to global audiences, spawning what Papacharissi (2004) refers to as the "virtual public sphere". Next I look at the critique of the Habermasian public sphere.

3.2 Critiques and replies on the Habermasian public sphere

Despite the apparent strengths of the Habermasian public sphere in allowing for the richest, best developed conceptualisation available of the social nature and foundations of public life (see Calhoun, 1992; Fraser, 1992) as well as an analytic category to measure the extent to which the media act as platforms for public participation (Garnham 1992), the theory has attracted criticism from various scholars (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013; Rasmussen, 2013; Goode & McKee, 2013; Susen, 2011). In this section, I will focus mainly on the feminist,

working class, postmodernist[66] and poststructuralist[67] critiques of the theory. Building on some of these criticisms, I will advance Fraser's ideas which acknowledge the existence of multiple public "sphericules" (Gitlin, 1998).

Scholars (Fraser, 1990; Felski, 1989; Eley, 1992) have advanced a feminist critique against the Habermasian notion of public sphere. Within this feminist critique are two broad criticisms levelled against Habermas relating to legitimacy and efficacy. The legitimacy critique questions the legitimacy of what passes for public opinion in democratic theory and in social reality. Far from being a universal and all-inclusive public sphere, Eley (1992) and Fraser (1990) argue that such as a space was the preserve of white males, upper classes and educated rich men, juxtaposed to the private sphere that was seen as the domain of women. Their argument is that the systematic exclusion of women from the public sphere led to the creation of a "masculine" and "rational" austere style of public speech and behaviour (Eley, 1992; Fraser, 1990). As will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, age is another fault line of exclusion which tends to marginalise the youth from traditional forms of political participation.

In response to Habermas's assertion that participants must leave behind their particular identities when they enter into public debate, Fraser argues that by forcing interlocutors to leave behind their own cultural or status backgrounds when debating about public issues merely obscures the power operating in the public sphere and makes it harder for subordinates to overcome inequalities (1990). Fraser (1992) also points out that it is impossible to reach the real deliberation because such bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups when deliberation is used to obliterate the voice of the subordinated. The problem with bracketing of inequalities in service to the Habermasian lofty ideal of common good is that it forces social unequals to deliberate as equals, when in actual fact subordinated groups (like the youth) are not given a voice in public discussions. In the same vein, Bakhtin does not see participation in public discussion as requiring interlocutors to leave behind their social positions, and thus the "anaesthetising" of one's views and language (Gardiner, 2004).

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[66]It provides a critique of representation and the modern (Enlightenment) assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy. This theory also rejects the totalising macro-perspectives on society in favour of micro-theory and micro-politics (Kellner & Best, 2001).

[67] It advances a critique of the validity of structuralism's method of binary opposition and maintains that meanings and intellectual categories are shifting and unstable. It believes that language is an unstable system of referents, thus it is impossible ever to capture completely the meaning of action, text or intention (Harrison, 2006).

The efficacy critiques point to the public's inability to communicate its will to institutions, and to institutions' inability to realise the public's will (Fraser, 2007). As Fraser (1992) argues, the Habermasian public sphere fails to register the full range of systemic obstacles that deprive discursively generated public opinion of political muscle. Highlighting the respective roles of private economic power and entrenched bureaucratic interests, the feminist critique served to deepen doubt about the efficacy of public opinion as a political force in capitalist societies. The feminist critique also underscores the fact that an egalitarian society should be based on a plurality of public arenas in order to be democratic and multicultural (Fraser, 1990). More on Fraser's ideas will be discussed in section 3.3.1.

Advancing a working class critique Negt & Kluge (1993) accuse Habermas's theory of being ahistorical because of its neglect of popular movements that existed in the 17th , 18th and 19th centuries, like the working-class movement (proletarian public sphere). Scholars (Negt & Kluge, 1993; Gitlin, 1998) arguing for a pluralist conception of the public sphere demonstrate that there multiple public spheres for different segments of people in stratified and multicultural societies. This chimes with the claims by the postmodern critique that the Habermasian public sphere was a sphere of the middle classes and dominant elites. This means that marginalised others were side-lined from such an exclusive public sphere. The Habermasian public sphere fails to explain and account for acts of resistance and voices of protest by marginalised groups (Squires, 2002; Verstraeten, 1995). According to the postmodern critique, for an egalitarian society to be democratic and multi-cultural, it should be based on a plurality of public arenas (Benhabib, 1992; Mouffe, 1999). Struggles against marginalisation and oppression are viewed as taking place in multiple public "sphericules" (Gitlin, 1998) rather than in a single sphere. I sought to test the applicability of the Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics in examining how politically engaged youths use Facebook to support their work in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Critiques of the Habermasian public sphere also reveal how such conceptualisation privileges a particular style of rational communication that largely favours the elite at the expense of the subordinated social groups (Pateman, 1989; Bickford, 2011). As Bickford observes, when rational deliberation is the only legitimate mode of participation in political processes and public debate, the voices that are heard – and amplified by the [traditional] media – are of

those that already have access to "political, communicative, or economic resources" (2011: 1025).Because of the over-reliance on expert discourses, Fraser (1989: 174) argues that rational communication "disregards the views of subordinate groups who are rendered passive, positioned as potential recipients of pre-defined services rather than as agents involved in interpreting their needs and shaping life conditions". By viewing interlocutors as rational beings, Habermas is also criticised for failing to acknowledge the existence of other valid modes of political expression like carnivalesque, emotional, agnosticism and passion which are very important for democracy (Dahlgren, 2005; Mouffe, 2005; Papacharissi, 2014). As Bakhtin (1984) points out, the public sphere is also characterised by carnival which means that laughter, frivolity and the carnivalesque open up an "unofficial" discourses space from which the official world may be ridiculed and resistance sustained. Schudson (1997) also argues that public discourse is not the main ingredient, or the soul of democracy, for it is seldom egalitarian, may be too large and amorphous, is rarely civil, and ultimately offers no magical solution to problems of democracy. In addition to the dominant narrative of rational-critical communication, Bickford (2011) urges researchers to "think differently about what democratic political communication in a conflictual and inegalitarian context might require," and that "emotion and partisan thinking" should be considered "morally appropriate elements of democratic communication." This includes emotional expressions such as angry street protests and personal outbursts directed to politicians on social media platforms. Recent studies (Harlow, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012).of protest discourses have shown that much of their content is personal, informal, emotional or humorous.

Advancing a post-structuralist critique, scholars (Lyotard, 1984; Goode & McKee, 2012; Downing, 2000) argue that conflict, dissensus and critical argumentation can be productive and, indeed, necessary means for advancing democratic culture and debate. As Mouffe (2000: 149) further argues, "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards democratic designs." She adds that the Habermasian public sphere based on "consensus" is bound to fail, because "consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power, and … always entails some form of exclusion" (1999: 756). Instead of a consensual space, other scholars (Foucault, 1995; Mouffe, 2005) view the public sphere as a site of political struggle and conflict.

Critiques of the Habermasian public sphere also point to the pervasiveness of power asymmetries in public discussions (Susen, 2011). As Foucault (1995) argues, power permeates all human relations and thus rejects the possibility of a power-free zone of communication. Habermas's theory is criticised for failing to acknowledge the existence of inequalities in terms of access to communication channels. There are asymmetries in terms of ownership of media technologies (like mobile phones, computers, television and so forth). Besides, there is an uneven distribution of communicative competence (in terms of digital literacy, skills and knowledge) in modern societies. As Couldry (2010) notes, there are also inequalities in terms of "effective voice[68]" which works against marginalised groups. This is more pronounced in stratified societies (capitalist, patriarchal and gerontocratic) where power (economic, political, symbolic, cultural and social) is unequally distributed. As Susen (2011) suggests, the symbolic resources of critique are always dependent on the social resources of power.

In his most recent works (1996; 1999; 2001), Habermas has revised his analysis of public sphere to fit the ever-changing conditions of modern societies. He now embraces the contested nature of public life, the importance of recognition of diverse identities and, therefore, the legitimacy of multiple forms and sites of deliberation (alternative public spheres) as well as their capacity for challenging domination. As he writes, these multiple sites of deliberation are "a network for communicating information and points of view which branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local and sub-cultural arenas" (Habermas, 2001: 373). Despite this climb-down, Habermas still maintains that the public sphere is anchored in rational critical debate (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013).

The Habermasian notion of the public sphere has also met criticism from African studies scholars (Santos, 2012; Ndlela, 2007; Willems, 2012). Highlighting the epistemological and theoretical roots of the idea of public sphere in Western liberal thinking, these scholars Santos, 2012; Willems, 2012) have discussed and debated the extent to which Habermas's concepts are useful in explaining and interrogating developments in Africa (Willems, 2012). Their argument is that its theoretical and cultural presuppositions are entirely European and they are not necessarily universally valid, even when they purport to be general theoriesSantos, 2012). For Ndlela (2007), whilst there are possibilities for researchers to use

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[68] This refers to the conditions under which people's practices of voice are sustained and the outcomes of those practices validated (Couldry, 2010: 113).

the public sphere theory to understand communication practices in Africa, there are also serious impediments which should be taken on board. They propose that researchers should look at "actually existing" (Fraser, 1992) public spheres instead of transposing a prescriptive concept of public sphere onto Africa to assess its match with this concept.

Advancing what he calls a meta-theoretical critique of the concept of the public sphere, Santos (2012: 43) argues that there is need for epistemological diversity. He also asks pertinent questions like: Does non-Western societies need the concept of public sphere? How much political reality is left out or made invisible by the concept of public sphere? Can the limitations of Eurocentric origin be superseded by theoretical and political reconstruction? At what cost? Assuming that the public sphere has become a hegemonic concept, is it possible to use it in a counter-hegemonic way? Santos (2012: 47) suggests that to account for epistemological diversity involves the recognition that the theories produced in Western contexts are best equipped to account for the social, political and cultural realities of Western societies and that in order adequately to account for the realities of non-Western contexts other theories must be developed and anchored in other epistemologies – the epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2012: 47). This entails de-Westernising mainstream theory through the strategic deployment of theoretical constructs from non-Western societies to disrupt the dominant epistemic canon.

Writing prior to the popularisation of the public sphere theory in Africa, Ekeh (1975), in his seminal article titled: *Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: a theoretical statement*, acknowledged the bifurcated nature of publics in Africa. He points out that the Western experience of a unified public sphere, which the state and civil society both occupy, is not reflective of African social spaces (Ekeh, 1975: 111). For Ekeh:

> [I]f we are to capture the spirit of African politics we must seek what is unique in them. I am persuaded that the colonial experience provides that uniqueness. Our post-colonial present has been fashioned by our colonial past. It is that colonial past that has defined for us the spheres of morality that have come to dominate our politics.

Like other alternative public sphere theorists from Western contexts, Ekeh identifies the existence two publics in Africa: the primordial and the civic public. He notes that:

> At one level is the private realm in which primordial groupings, ties, and sentiments influence and determine the individual's public behaviour… On the other hand, there

is a public realm which is historically associated with the colonial administration and which has become identified with popular politics in post-colonial Africa" (Ekeh, 1975: 111).

The primordial public "occupies vast tracts of the political spaces that are relevant for the welfare of the individual, sometimes limiting and breaching the state's efforts to extend its claims beyond the civic public sphere" (Ekeh, 1975: 107). In Africa, ethnicity constitutes an important shared identity for the construction of primordial publics. Ekeh (1975) further argues that most people find political sense in the primordial public with its own architecture of meaning and political etiquette. The civic public was dominated by the colonial administration (later inherited by post-colonial governments) and signifies traditional forms of political participation.

Extending Ekeh's (1975) line of thought, Mbembe (2001) also theorises on the existence of two publics: alternative popular publics and official publics. The ruled often resort to carving out a space for themselves, therefore constituting their own alternative popular publics next to official publics. For Mbembe, the alternative popular public 'occupies vast tracts of the political spaces that are relevant for the welfare of the individual, sometimes limiting and breaching the state's efforts to extend its claims beyond the official public' (1975:107). The point is that the political and social ingenuity of the postcolonial subject lies in his/her ability to manoeuvre through the conceptual spaces to achieve a counter-meaning opposed to the "official" construction of sense and order. Having outlined the critique of Habermas's theory as well as spelling out my preference for Fraserian ideas, below I look at alternative public sphere as a theoretical construct.

3.3. An outline of the theory of alternative public sphere

This section begins by outlining the basic assumptions of the theory of the alternative public sphere before zeroing in on Fraser's ideas. As intimated earlier in section 2.2, alternative public sphere theoreticians start from the basic premise that there is a multiplicity of parallel, complementary, diverse, contending, sometimes acrimonious public spheres (Asen, 2000; Fraser, 1990; Keane, 2000; Gitlin, 1998). This shift towards multiplicity and fragmentation of the public sphere has been spurred by the recognition of social complexity and socio-cultural diversity as well as the realisation that the notion of a monolithic sphere has limited applicability in explaining political communication practices which occur in stratified and

diverse societies (Fraser, 1990; Asen, 2000). The reasoning here is that stratified societies produce huge inequalities which affect the autonomy of publics as well as the accessibility of public spheres. It is believed that the Habermasian public sphere has been shaken substantially by societal changes (occasioned by globalisation and technological developments) opening up increasing possibilities in the process for counter-public spheres to flourish (Keane, 2000; Rasmussen, 2013; Fenton & Downey, 2003).

It is within this context that the term "counter-public" arose as a critical term "to signify that some publics develop not simply as one among a constellation of discursive entities, but as explicitly articulated alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of potential participants" (Asen, 2000: 425). Theoreticians within this school of thought are also concerned with how different public spheres, composed of members of marginalised groups (such as the youth), respond to various political, social, cultural and economic conditions and how marginalised groups react to their systematic side-lining from the dominant public sphere (Squires, 2002; Mansbridge, 1996). (More on the socio-political and economic context of Zimbabwe and South Africa will be discussed in Chapter Three).

It is important to explain why I use the term alternative[69] public sphere interchangeably with other concepts such as subaltern counter-publics (Fraser, 1990) and counter public sphere (Felski, 1989; Squires, 2002) in this study. The three concepts are concerned with how subordinated groups try to challenge power relations to make marginalised and critical voices heard. Discourse here is defined as socially contingent systems of meaning, which form the identities of subjects and objects (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The term counter in counter-discourses indicates that these discourses are defined against or in opposition to a (more) dominant discourse. This means that counter-discourses emerge in response to exclusions within dominant discourses (Dahlberg, 2007). As far alternative public sphere is concerned, Örnebring & Jönsson (2004: 286) point out that the term "alternative" suggests that the discourse itself takes place somewhere else other than in the mainstream mediated public sphere; with other participants, other issues are addressed and debates take a different form than in the dominant public sphere. Although there are many scholars (see Felski, 1989; Gitlin, 1998; Squires, 2002; Asen, 2000; Negt & Kluge, 1972; Warner, 2002; Mouffe, 1999;

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[69] It refers to the counter-discourse which challenges the existing social order and aids the pursuit of social change (Yim Jeong-su, 2003: 37).

Ekeh, 1975; Mbembe, 2001) on the issue of alternative public sphere, Fraser's ideas constitute some of the most developed, and relevant for this study.

3.3.1 Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics

In section 2.2, I discussed briefly Fraser's ideas. Now I wish to take this further by focusing on the suitability of Fraser's ideas to my study. In her ground-breaking article published in 1990, Fraser outlines the basic analytical features of her revisionist historiography of the public sphere. She points out that instead of a bourgeois conception of the public sphere, what is needed is a post-bourgeois conception that recognises the existence of multiple publics. Building on and reacting to Habermas's theorisation, Fraser argues that instead of a monolithic public sphere, there is the dominant public sphere (official publics according to Mbembe, 2001) and multiple subaltern counter-publics (alternative popular publics in Mbembe's diction) in both democratic and undemocratic societies. According to Fraser, the former is a constituency of the powerful elite although it strives for universalism by appealing to the general public (this analytical feature allowed me to assess the state of the mainstream media in South Africa and Zimbabwe in section 2.2.7 and 2.3.7). The mainstream media which ideally provide information, debate and opinion for all members of society constitute this sphere. The latter is made up of multiple publics populated by historically and culturally marginalised groups that have been excluded from the dominant public sphere by legal or extra-legal means (Fraser, 1992) (this conceptual resource is important because it allows me to examine how, why and when youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action). In this study, the distinction provided by Fraser (1992) allows me to consider not only the dominant public sphere of the political and economic elites, but also the subaltern counter-publics of the marginalised others. Rather than being parallel, Fraser sees subaltern counter-publics as standing apart from, feeding off and into the bourgeoisie public sphere. I assessed the extent to which Facebook pages be considered as an alternative space for political activism.

Similar to Fraser's subaltern counter-publics, Rasmussen (2013; 2014) identifies two dimensions of the contemporary public sphere: the representational public sphere and the presentational public sphere. The presentational public sphere (also the dominant public sphere is Fraser's terminology) refers to more traditional media platforms and their attendant

characteristics as well as a plethora of heterogeneous themes, styles, participants and voices that it promotes. Unlike in the presentation public sphere where deliberations are dominated by a few (mostly male and middle class), the representational public sphere denotes the use of social media platforms, internet and other alternative platforms of communication. This is generally viewed as promoting "inclusive" and "democratic" forms of deliberation by cyber-optimists as articulated in Chapter One. As Rasmussen (2013: 98) observes, the representation public sphere is characterised by a lower threshold for participation in public communication platforms, which enables more people to take part.

Subaltern counter-publics is defined as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1992: 123). Her argument is that subaltern counter-publics circulate counter-discourses in order to transgress norms of deliberation, generate debate and remake shared meaning. Besides simply allowing marginalised groups to exercise voice, parallel discursive arenas also enable them to critique the dominant discourses peddled by the dominant publics. I examined how youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

In contrast to Habermas, Fraser posits that marginalised groups need: "venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups [or else they would be] less able than otherwise to articulate and defend their interests in the comprehensive public sphere. They would be less able than otherwise to expose modes of deliberation that mask domination by absorbing the less powerful into a false "we" that reflects the more powerful" (1997: 81). The point is that, in a unified public sphere, members of subordinated groups are less likely to find the right voice or words to express their thoughts and hence are unable to articulate and defend their interests. I investigated from online participant observation and interview responses how youth activists used Facebook to exercise voice and to critique the dominant discourses. I assessed the reasons why youth activists used Facebook to mediate political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Building on Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics, I coin the term "transnational subaltern counter-publics" in order to stress how Facebook groups and pages as discursive and conversational spaces overflow the bounds of the nation-state. Transnational subaltern counter-publics refers to a mediated interactive and conversational space where nationally and globally geographically dispersed participants can gather and share information, debate opinions and tease out their political interests and social needs without the direct supervision of the ruling elite. As semi-public spaces, Facebook groups and fan pages allow networks of friends and connections to communicate and deliberate on issues of common concern from their home environments and over great distances. I examined how youth activists used Facebook to facilitate political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

As Fraser (1990) argues, the need for subaltern counter-publics arises from the ways in which social inequalities in stratified societies can "infect" deliberation even in the absence of formal exclusions. Her view is that marginalised groups (including youth activists) are forced to create their own (human agency) spaces of deliberation in reaction to the exclusionary politics of the dominant public sphere and the state. Through in-depth interviews with youth activists, I investigated the reasons why they used Facebook to facilitate political activism. I also examined how youth activists (who are often denied public voice or entrance into public spaces by dominant groups and the state) deployed Facebook to advance their political objectives in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Fraser conceives subaltern counter-publics as having a dual character. On the one hand: "they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides" (Fraser, 1990: 82). These discursive spaces are seen as respecting interlocutors' identities (politics of recognition) as well as offering avenues from which agitation and resistance against institutional and political hegemony is promoted and maintained (politics of redistribution). I will seek to examine how youth activists use Facebook to mobilise support for their work in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Through a combination of online participant observation and in-depth interviews, I explored whether youth activists used Facebook groups as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment as well as bases and training grounds for political activism.

According to Fraser (1990), subaltern counter-publics help expand the discursive space as well as elaborating alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech. This kind of sphere allows groups with diverse values and rhetorics to participate. Fraser's notion of subaltern counter-publics is akin to Cornwall's idea of invented spaces of participation which refers to "those arenas in which people join together, often with others like them, in collective actions, self-help initiatives, or everyday sociality" (Cornwall, 2004:76). Thus it can be argued that activists have occupied Facebook and turned the site into a platform for critical discussion and political mobilisation against the power-bloc. Building on Holston's (2008) notion of "insurgent citizenship", Facebook groups and pages can also be conceptualised as an alternative spaces of participation through which youth activists engage their needs in terms of citizen rights.

Unlike Habermas who banishes private interests from the public sphere, Fraser believes that there are no natural boundaries between private and public concerns. According to Fraser, what counts as a matter of common concern is arrived at through deliberation. Thus no topics should be ruled off limits in advance of discursive contestation. Fraser's argument chimes with Buckingham's criticism of the "rigid distinction between the public and private" in which there is no place "for the "irrational" side of language, for rhetoric or narrative, nor indeed for aesthetics, for ceremony, or ritual, indeed, for precisely those elements which characterise popular cultural forms" (1997: 354-355). Through online participant observation and qualitative content analysis, I documented and analysed the political discourses which are circulated by youth activists on Facebook groups and pages.

According to Fraser (1992), subaltern counter-publics are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion but also arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities. She sub-divides subaltern counter-publics into two categories: the strong publics and the weak publics. Strong publics (like parliaments) are spaces of institutionalised deliberation whose discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision-making while weak publics (like associational groups) are spaces whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision-making (Fraser, 1992: 125). I will also assess whether discursive interactions on Facebook are characterised by strong or weak publics in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Fraser also argues that the public sphere has always been constructed through exclusion and conflicts. Her point is that subaltern counter-publics are characterised by intra-sphere conflict and contestation. The argument is that these spheres are not spaces of zero degree culture, which are hospitable to any possible form of cultural expression. Instead these spheres are culturally conditioned discursive entities with embedded internal dynamics which filter and alter the utterances they frame as well as accommodating some expressive modes and not others. Fraser distinguishes "intra" from "inter-public relations" within subaltern counter-publics. Intra-public relations denote the character and quality of discursive interactions within a given public sphere while inter-public relations refers to the character of interactions among different publics (Fraser, 1990: 65-66). Drawing on Fraser's ideas, this study examined how discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation played out on Facebook groups and fan pages. In the next section, I discuss the critique and reactions to the Fraser's ideas.

3.3.2 Critiques and reactions to the Fraser's ideas

In this section, I discuss four main criticisms and reactions (from scholars sympathetic to the Fraser's ideas) levelled against and in support of Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics. I also demonstrate the suitability of the Fraser's ideas for this particular study.

1) That fragmented public spheres are incompatible with democracy

Critics (Garnham, 1992; Habermas, 2006; Fuchs, 2014) of the Fraser's ideas have argued that the proliferation of multiple publics contribute to the fragmentation and decline of deliberative democracy. Multiple publics without unity are criticised for engaging in reformist identity politics without challenging the whole, which negatively affects the lives of all subordinated groups (Fuchs, 2014). The argument here is that one needs unity in diversity in order to struggle for participatory democracy and for maintaining this condition once it is reached. This means that in an egalitarian society common communication media are needed for guaranteeing cohesion and solidarity and a strong democracy (Garnham, 1992; Fuchs, 2014).Writing about the fragmentation of public spheres occasioned by the internet, Sunstein argues that subaltern counter-publics (like discussion boards) spawn group polarisation

through "homophilous sorting[70]" which is inimical to deliberative democracy (2001: 65). Sunstein's argument is that for deliberative democracy to take place people should be exposed to materials that they have not chosen in advance and people should have a range of common experiences, in order that they may come to an understanding with respect to particular issues.

In response, scholars (Keane, 2000; Dahlberg, 2007; Fenton & Downey, 2003) sympathetic to Fraser's ideas have argued that differentiation and fragmentation is not to the detriment of deliberative democracy. Writing about agnostic public spaces, Mouffe (2005) argues that a plurality of oppositional discourses and social organisation is central to current notions of political mobilisation and participation. In other words, multiple public spheres are not only viewed as offering vital input to democracy but acting as a barometer for a healthy democratic system where no single public sphere enjoys a monopoly in public disputes about the distribution of power (Fenton & Downey, 2003; Keane, 1996). Dahlberg also adds that deliberation within 'like-minded' groups provide an important step in building alternative visions of life before contributing to opening the boundary of dominant discourse through more explicit forms of contestation (2007). Despite initially chastising deliberative enclaves as antithetical to democracy, Sunstein acknowledges that "like-minded" deliberation spaces might be useful in developing groups, "that would otherwise be invisible, silenced, or squelched in the general debate" (2001: 75-76). Multiple counter-publics are therefore seen as increasing political participation and acting as the seedbed of social movement building (like the civil rights movement).

2) That alternative public spheres risk becoming undemocratic

Another criticism levelled against the Fraser's ideas is that alternative public spheres conceived as separate from the mainstream public sphere fail to challenge the hegemonic structures (McLaughlin, 1993). The point is that alternative public spheres risk developing alternative dominant social relations and structures (McLaughlin, 1993).

In response to McLaughlin, Fraser (2007) acknowledges that some subaltern counter-publics are explicitly anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian. She notes that even those with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal

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[70]This refers to the proliferation of separate communities or conversations that are not in mutual contact.

exclusion and marginalisation. Fraser posits that the major function of counter-publics is to expand the space for the effective participation in politics of different and marginal voices. I will seek to examine how discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation play out on Facebook pages.

3) That Fraser's ideas indirectly reifies the bourgeois public sphere

Fraser has been criticised for reifying the Habermas's theory of public sphere. Dean argues that she is: "not convinced that adding an *s* solves the problem of the public sphere...despite its best intentions, the multi-spheres approach reinforces the priority of a bourgeois public sphere as a goal site, as an ideal, as the fundamental arbiter of inclusion" (Dean, 2001: 248-249). In response to the foregoing criticism, Crack (2008) argues that rather than reifying the bourgeois public sphere, Fraser offers a successful rhetorical challenge of the primacy of the dominant public by theorising about the existence of contesting as well as overlapping multiple publics.

4) That subaltern counter-publics fails to acknowledge antagonism and passion inherent in social relations

One of the shortcomings of Fraser's theory like the Habermasian notion of the public sphere is that it is unable to acknowledge the dimension of antagonism that the pluralism of values entails and its ineradicable character (Mouffe, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Fraser is also critiqued for following Habermas's footsteps in terms of ignoring the dimension of the "political[71]" and reducing politics to a set of technical moves and neutral procedures. This leads her to ignore the possibility of a non-adversarial democratic politics. As scholars (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2000, 2005) of radical democracy have noted, political spaces are characterised by disagreement and antagonism. For Mouffe (2005), contestation of the dominating discourse needs to be incorporated into any healthy, democratic environment. This ensures the representation of marginalised groups and opinions. Contrary to the various liberal models including Fraser's subaltern counter-publics, Mouffe (2005) argues that the agonistic approach recognises that society is always politically instituted and never forgets that the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices and that it is never an neutral one. According to Mouffe (2005:

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[71] The "political" refers to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human societies and ―"politics" refers to the ―ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions‖ that seek to establish order and organise human co-existence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ―the "political" (Mouffe, 1999:754).

3), the agonistic public space is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation. This kind of public space provides arenas where citizens can express their disagreements and where difference can be confronted.

Mouffe (2005) argues that far being a harbinger of rational-consensus debate only, emotions also permeate political action. Like Bickford (2011), Mouffe suggests that emotions should be treated as an alternative type of democratic practice. The public sphere should accommodate passions and should enable the expression of collective passions. She adds that it is important to "mobilise passions towards collective design" rather than strive for rational discussion-based consensus (Mouffe, 2005: 5). This shows that radical democracy scholars (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2005) are sceptical about the capacity of conventional democracies to engage the energies of ordinary citizens. Radical democracy views participation as central to the realisation of active citizenship. Although Fraser and scholars sympathetic to her ideas have not directly engaged with Laclau & Mouffe's discourse theory, this study deployed these radical democratic views to destabilise some of the tenets of the subaltern counter-publics.

There is a plethora of studies (Palczewski, 2001; Harlow & Harp, 2012; Eckert & Chadha, 2012) that have used Nancy Fraser's theory of subaltern counter-publics to examine how activists use the internet to engage in political action. This study indirectly answers Palczweski's (2001: 161) clarion call that given the increasing role that emerging communication technologies are playing in activism, particular attention needs to be directed at how social media impacts counter-public formation and public sphere activism. I will examine how and why youth activists use Facebook for social and political mobilisation in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

5) That Fraser's ideas reifies identity as the only marker of counter-public membership

Scholars (Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Squires, 2002; Warner, 2002) who have engaged with Fraser's ideas have criticised her conceptualisation for reifying identity (such as gender, age, class and so forth) as the only marker of counter-public membership thereby obscuring other important issues. Warner, for instance, also argues that there is no reason to assume that

everybody who partakes in a particular counter-public inhabits a subaltern social position (2002).

In response to the above criticism, the same scholars (Asen, 2000; Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Warner, 2002) have advanced a relational perspective meant to get rid of reductionism (associated with Fraser's ideas) by focusing on a dynamic relation between the dominant and counter-publics. They suggest that counter-public membership is not a fixed identity but a transient situation, a malleable product of changes in political relationships (Hansen in Negt & Kluge, 1993). Warner adds that the reasons why members of a certain public might be regarded as subaltern can differ greatly and that sometimes mere participation in a certain public can make people subaltern (2002: 87). In this study, I desist from the tendency to ascribe a coherent identity to marginalised groups by acknowledging that the youth activists are differentiated through complex, overlapping and multiple markers of identity such as sex, class, race, age, geographical location and so forth. Next I discuss the theoretical linkages between Fraser and Scott's ideas.

3.4 Theoretical overlaps between subaltern counter-publics and hidden transcripts

Whilst I recognise the utility of the social movement framing theory (Benford & Snow, 2000) as a complementary lens that could be integrated with the notion of the subaltern counter-publics, I prefer to use the metaphor of the hidden transcripts to account for the subtle forms of political engagement which often escape the radar of conventional forms of political participation in African contexts. In this particular section, I discuss the strong affinities that exist between Fraser and Scott's ideas, which are important for this particular study. Anthropologist James C. Scott's (1976; 1985; 1990) concept of hidden transcripts is, I argue, particularly illuminative and salient to the analysis of the political discourses which are circulated by youth activists on Facebook.

Influenced by Foucault's decentred notion of power ("wherever there is power there is resistance") as well as an attempt to respond to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Scott propounded a theory of micro-politics known as the "everyday forms of resistance". Scott's ideas like Fraser's (1990) are concerned with the workings of the "political" outside formal political system as well as the various ways through which subordinate groups are able to

penetrate the dominant discourse. He argues that organised collective action may not be possible everywhere (due to geographical dispersion, ethnic and linguistic differences, a lack of organisational skills and experience, and so forth), and thus alternative forms of struggles (like flexible, small-scale and unbureaucratic activism) must be discovered and acknowledged (Scott, 1985). For him, resistance particularly by disenfranchised groups (like youth) takes place in the realm of the everyday in ways which often go unnoticed by researchers (Scott, 1990). Scott (1985) defined resistance as any act(s) by members of the subordinate group that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that group by dominant groups (for instance, landlords, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à- vis these dominant groups.

According to Scott, everyday forms of resistance refers to "the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. Most forms of this struggle stop well short of outright collective defiance" (1985: xvi). It is clear from the foregoing quote that everyday forms of resistance are stratagems deployed by subordinate groups in thwarting the claims of the dominant group or the state which dominates the public exercise of power. Thus, quiescence should not be equated with the acquiescence of subaltern groups to relations of domination (Scott, 1985). Instead of focusing our attention on physical and material protests in the streets, Scott (1990) suggests that resistance encapsulates a range of practices, often hidden and invisible, used by subordinate groups to contest those who make attempts to dominate them.

In his ethnographic research amongst the Sedaka peasants in Malaysia, Scott found that rice farmers when faced with new agricultural technologies and the 'new green revolution' of double cropping that threatened their livelihoods engaged in various forms of everyday resistance (1985). The peasants resorted to low profile techniques such as foot dragging, poaching, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander and arson sabotage to contest social hierarchies and reclaim the symbolic balance of power (Scott, 1985). This means that, instead of outright collective action, Sedaka peasants reluctantly engaged in their day-to-day tasks, concealed their true feelings in the presence of their landlords, abandoned their duties without permission, refused to pay tax to landlords and stole grain stocks from their landlords.

Scott demonstrates the fact that resistance is multi-dimensional and fluid in nature. As Scott observes, the dichotomy between "real" and "token" resistance fundamentally misconstrues the very basis of the economic and political struggle conducted daily by subordinate groups (1990). Real resistance refers to organised, systematic, pre-planned or selfless practices with revolutionary consequences, while token resistance points to unorganised incidental acts without any revolutionary consequences, and which are accommodated in the power structure (Scott, 1990). Thus rather than over-hyping the occurrence of macro-forms of resistance (like the Arab Spring), Scott's theory alerts us to remain attuned for the "political" in the ostensibly "non-political" of everyday life. Scott's theory is akin to what Gluckman calls "rituals of rebellion[72]" as well as Bakhtin's (1984) metaphor of the "carnival", which depicts parody and laughter as strategic weapons of the marginalised to provide momentary interruptions to, or if not coping mechanism in the face of, the dominant narratives that are deployed by the powerful elite.

Scott partly addresses the question about how do everyday forms of resistance become change enabling activism (macro-forms of resistance like changing governments, changing undesirable policies and so forth) rather than mere grumbling in the corner. Answering the above question, Scott suggests that everyday forms of resistance do not automatically lead to macro-forms of resistance. He argues that the "persistent practice of everyday forms of resistance underwritten by a subculture of complicity can achieve many, if not all, of the results aimed at by social movements" (Scott, 1985: 422). The argument is that bit by bit the cumulative impact of everyday forms of resistance may "lay the groundwork" for substantial social change by eroding away an unpopular regime. It must be noted that Scott acknowledged that social change does not occur mechanistically but rather speaks of the microscopic growth of barrier reefs against which "the ship of state [eventually] runs aground" (1989: 20). Similarly, writing about the effects of cartoons on political change in Cameroon Nyamnjoh (2009: 97) argues that, it "may be gradual, cumulative, and in the long term, than on effectiveness that stresses immediate outcomes to the detriment of that which takes time to unfold." The notion of everyday forms of resistance is also important for

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[72] It denotes ritualised forms of hostility or institutional protest used by the ruled to express their grievances against rulers without necessarily overturning the system (Gluckman, 1960: 127).

understanding how youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa are resisting the threats and existence of communication surveillance on Facebook.

It is important to highlight the theoretical affinities that exist between the works of Fraser and Scott. Central to Scott's theory is the metaphor of "transcripts" which refers to the ways of speaking and behaving in different social settings (1990). Scott distinguished public from hidden transcripts. Public transcripts refer to the verbal and non-verbal acts carried out by powerful elite in the dominant public sphere while the hidden transcripts denote the discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond the direct observation of the powerful elite (Scott, 1990: 4), mostly in subaltern counter-publics. The distinction between the public and hidden transcripts resonates with the chasm that exists between the dominant public sphere and subaltern counter-publics (Fraser, 1992). Both scholars (Fraser, 1990; Scott, 1985) agree that the dominant discourse is a highly partisan and partial narrative designed to affirm and naturalise the power of dominant elites as well as to conceal or euphemise the duty of their rule.

Fraser and Scott also concur that marginalised groups use alternative spaces of resistance to circulate oppositional discourses. For Scott, hidden transcripts are circulated through "social spaces of relative autonomy" or offstage social spaces (subaltern counter-publics in Fraser's terminology) which are essentially sites where power does not saturate or colonise the consciousness of subordinate groups (1990:118). Fraser (1990: 61) observes that counter-publics are characterised by the performance of "alternative styles of political behaviour [and discourses]". According to Scott (1985), social spaces of relative autonomy refer to forums where marginalised groups are able to raise their own voices. This typifies what Bayat (2010) refers to as "zones of relative freedom" which can be occupied and appropriated ordinary actors. In line with Scott's idea, I conceptualise Facebook groups and pages as "social spaces of relative autonomy" where youth activists circulate their hidden transcripts. The argument is that unlike legacy media, Facebook can viewed as relatively autonomous although it is still subjected to control and gatekeeping by owners and the state surveillance (see Chapters One and Seven).

Social media has increasingly been conceptualised as constitutive of spaces of resistance which allow marginalised groups to disarticulate hegemonic discourses and circulate

alternative viewpoints (Cheong & Leung, 2008; Aouragh, 2012; Pal & Dutta, 2008; Soriano, & Sreekumar, 2012). New media technologies are seen as creating new spaces for discourse and collective resistance transcending national borders (Voltmer, 2013; Lim, 2014). Social media (including Facebook) provided a channel to translate the hidden transcript into the public transcript during the Arab Spring (Lim, 2014). Some scholars (Dahlgren, 2013; Lim, 2014) argue that social media are synonymous with popular cultural spaces. The argument is that popular culture or issues of a seemingly private character can become a springboard for political concerns and impinge on people's sensibilities for civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2013). Caution must be taken on board when conceptualising social media as popular culture in the Anglo-Saxon[73] canon of media and cultural studies at least in Africa. This is because internet access (either through broadband or mobile) is predominantly a middle-class and urban-biased phenomenon although the situation is changing with the mass adoption of cheaper smartphones. Because of these glaring asymmetries in internet access, the majority of the people are disconnected from online conversations. Friedman (2013) posits that social media in Africa has not yet attained the status of being the "voice of the people".

Drawing on the metaphor of hidden transcripts (Scott, 1976) which has many affinities with Fraser's (1990) notion of "alternative styles of political behaviour", I modify this term to digital hidden transcripts in order to document and analyse the different kinds of political discourses which are circulated by youth activists on Facebook. The advantage of employing digital hidden transcripts as a heuristic resource as opposed to "oppositional discourses" (Fraser, 1992) is that Scott's theory identifies various forms of contesting and engaging dominant discourses like rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures and anonymity (1985), which can be used as analytical tools. In this study, I will test the applicability of analytical constructs like rumours, gossip and linguistic tricks as propounded by Scott (I define these terms below) as well as others gleaned from literature dealing with popular resistance in Africa (Willems & Obadare, 2014; Willems, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Eko, 2007; Barber, 1997; Mbembe, 2001). These heuristic indicators are crucial for the analysis of alternative modes of political expression which are shared on Facebook pages and groups.

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[73] It is generally defined as "the space in which mass-produced products such as soap operas, magazines and clothes are consumed" (Willems, 2011: 49).

In Africa, the circulation of political cartoons, rumour, jokes, radio *"trottoir"* (pavement radio in English) and gossip have been identified as providing alternative ways of engaging with the state and with politics that do not carry the formal hallmarks of deliberative democracy (Fabian, 1998; Wasserman, 2011; Willems, 2011; 2012). Nyamnjoh (2005) defines political rumour as the emergence and circulation of information that is either not yet confirmed publicly or refuted by official sources rather than falsehoods. Gossip refers to idle talk, especially about the private or personal affairs of the powerful elite (Rosnow & Fine, 1976). Jokes refer to something spoken, written or done with a humorous intention. They often employ devices like irony, sarcasm and word play. Political cartoons denote texts (written, audio and video) which are meant to act as satirical subversions that mock the excesses of the state and its political officials (Eko, 2007). Radio *"trottoir"* refers to the popular and unofficial discussion of current affairs in Africa (Ellis, 1989: 321). Through qualitative content analysis, I will also seek to establish if there are any other hidden transcripts being circulated by youth activists on Facebook besides the aforementioned analytical categories.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has proposed to apply and test the analytical rigour of Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics in examining how, why and when youth activists use Facebook to facilitate political activism in Zimbabwe and South Africa. I have also enlisted the theoretical support of the metaphor of hidden transcripts (Scott, 1976) to complement the Fraser's ideas. I began this chapter with a review of the analytical features of the Habermasian public sphere as well as demonstrating its limited applicability in understanding political communication in stratified and multi-cultural societies. This chapter has demonstrated that the mainstream mediated public sphere in Zimbabwe and South Africa is constituted differently with the former being more market-oriented while the latter is largely state-controlled. In short, the Zimbabwean media sphere is shaped by political restrictions while in South Africa the mainstream private media serves the economically elite who are considered profitable thereby excluding the majority of citizens from participation and representation in the public sphere at national level. The fragmentation of the public sphere along social inequalities in South Africa has seen most citizens resorting to community and tabloid media while those in Zimbabwe are using online and diasporic media platforms. In view of this state of affairs, I

have argued that it makes sense to speak of multiple public "sphericules" (Gitlin, 1998) in which various segments of the population create their own spaces to express their views about the state.

I have also outlined Fraser's concept of subaltern counter-publics thereby underscoring its suitability for this particular study. I have also discussed the major criticisms levelled against the theory of alternative public spheres in general and Fraser's ideas in particular. I also highlighted the responses propounded by scholars who support Fraser's ideas in a bid to demonstrate the applicability of this conceptual resource in this study. I have also sought to enrich the Fraser's ideas by grafting some fruitful elements from Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts. Unlike Fraser's notion of counter-discourses, I have argued that Scott's idea of hidden transcripts (which I modify to digital hidden transcripts) allows me to document and analyse the various kinds of political discourses which are circulated by youth activists on Facebook pages and groups. In the next chapter, I look at the methodological approach employed in gathering empirical data for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

4. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical framework which informs this study. In this chapter, I outline and justify the choice and relevance of qualitative research methodology, data collection tools and sampling techniques deployed to examine how and why Zimbabwean and South African youths use Facebook to facilitate political action. I begin by briefly outlining the methodological considerations associated with researching the internet and social media. I proceed to discuss the mechanics of conducting comparative small-N studies as well as multi-sited ethnographic studies in the digital age. I then situate this study within the broader context of a comparative case study approach. Thereafter I discuss the philosophical and epistemological foundations of qualitative research methodology, thereby justifying my research design. I also present the methods of data collection, analysis and presentation as well as the sampling techniques employed in this study. As part of my data collection, I also draw on basic quantitative data gathered from Facebook groups and pages in order to assess their dialogic nature and micro-politics of participation. This chapter will also make a case for data triangulation. It also outlines the strategies used to gain entry into the 'field', ethical dilemmas negotiated and data analysis tools deployed.

4.1 Internet research: revisiting the methodological debate

This section focuses on the methodological debate associated with conducting research on the internet and social media. Given the increasing role played by new media in people's everyday lives, researchers have begun to focus on Facebook as an ethnographic object and area of inquiry (see boyd, 2007; Miller, 2011; Baker, 2013; Pink & Postill, 2012). A highly polarised debate (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006) on how best to study new media technologies has emerged, pitting at least two extreme sides—those who believe there is no need for new inventions in methods (Livingstone, 2002) and those who believe that a whole set of new methods are required (Hine, 2005).

The first camp in this methodological debate maintains that traditional methods are adaptable and flexible enough to meet the demands of studying internet sociality, given the recent theoretical debates in anthropology about multiple identities and dynamism of communities (Hakken, 1999; Marcus, 1995). As Livingstone (2002: 19) suggests, by using traditional methodological approaches to research new media technologies, the "very newness of the new [media technologies] … tends to get left out, while the features in common with the older [technologies] get researched". The point is that online and offline spaces are not necessarily different because the online environment remains "of this world" (Horst& Miller, 2012) and not, therefore, beyond existing knowledge or method.

Some scholars (Sudweeks & Simoff, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2000), however, recommend the re-sharpening of existing research methods to fit new research environments in which new technologies challenge existing research assumptions and premises. These scholars (Denzin 2004; Wittel, 2000; Howard, 2002) advance a "modernising" perspective, and call for a different methodological orientation on the part of the researcher, in order to speak to the ever-changing digital fields. The argument is also that conventional techniques must innovate and transform to accommodate the blurring nature of offline and online field sites (Paech, 2009; Murthy, 2008). Besides transforming the offline field site, new media are viewed as having fundamentally dislocated the notion of "fieldwork" as we know it (Howard, 2002; Wittel, 2000). Attempts to "modernise" ethnography has seen the fieldwork in "the field" being substituted by "fieldwork in and of networks" (Wittel, 2002; Howard, 2002). Approaching a field site as a network involves finding different entry points into a phenomenon, following different relationships between people and practices, and making sense of different types of networks and their relation to one another. This school of thought advocates for the use of hybrid research techniques, like face-to-face and online interviews.

Some scholars (Bruns & Burgess, 2012) have advocated for the shift towards Big Data in social media research. Big data entails the use of network analysis and data visualisation techniques to map out large-scale communication patterns and network structures (Stephansen & Couldry, 2014). However critics (boyd & Crawford, 2012; Crawford, Miltner & Gray, 2014) of big data argue that by privileging large-scale quantitative approaches, it side-lines other forms of analysis and limits the kinds of questions that can be asked. Thus, although big data can reveal connections and patterns, "it has little to say about their meaning and context" (Stephansen & Couldry, 2014: 4). Instead critics (boyd & Crawford, 2012) of

Big data propose the use qualitative and mixed research methods which foreground textual analysis and qualitative interviews with social media users.

According to the second camp, traditional research methods are now moribund, hence new methods are urgently required (Hine, 2005). New technologies are castigated for spawning a "crisis for the ethnographic project" (Horst, Hjorth & Tacchi, 2012; Postill& Pink, 2012), thereby destabilising the epistemological, ontological and methodological roots of social research. The net effect of this transformation is that there is a lack of a common and mutual perception of the physical context between the researcher and the researched (Beaulieu & Estalella, 2009). These technologies are also seen as unleashing ethnography from the traditional single and bounded field site towards the notion of "multi-sited fieldwork" (Marcus, 1995). Multi-sited fieldwork encapsulates the moving out from the single sites and local situations to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space (Marcus, 1998). Scholars (Hine, 2005; Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff & Cui, 2009) in this school of thought argue that the state of flux which characterises new technologies defies conventional research methodologies and therefore requires new methodological approaches. Highlighting the differences between the physical and virtual spaces, scholars (Donath, 1999; Horst &Miller, 2012) also posit that online spheres reconfigure researchers' understanding of the field, researchers' location within the field, participation and ethical guidelines. Their argument is that traditional methods were designed for the study of physically bounded social interactions; hence there is need for newer methods to understand deterritorialised social interactions. This school of thought advocates for the adoption of digital methods such as online questionnaires, online interviews and "virtual ethnography" (Hine, 2005).

Despite the above hair-splitting debate, Jankowski & van Selm (2005) posit that modifying existing methods is a more common practice than radical reconstruction. Cognisant of the fact that ethnography is on the move from the offline to the online field site, scholars (Murthy, 2008; Miller & Slater, 2000; Hine, 2005; Kozinets, 2002; Howard, 2002) have suggested that online fieldwork constitute virtual ethnography (and many other methodological neologisms). Virtual ethnography is about the extension of traditional ethnographic methods in the study of technologically mediated-interactions in online networks and communities (Hine, 2005). Unlike traditional ethnography, online ethnographic studies foreground the use of digital practices like email communication as well as covert and

overt participation in chatrooms [such as Facebook groups and profile pages] to conduct forms of participant content analysis. As will be discussed below, I used online participant observation, interviews and qualitative content analysis to examine how youth activists use Facebook to facilitate political action. In the next section, I give a brief overview of ethnography.

4.2 Ethnography: a reflexive approach in multi-sited fieldwork

The terms "ethnography" and "participant observation" have been used synonymously although the latter has always been a data collection tool associated with ethnographic studies (Beddows, 2008) while the former is both a "method and methodology" (Brewer, 2000). Thus employing an ethnographic approach entails the fusion of a number of research techniques which goes beyond just participant observation. Participant observation is a data collection instrument that relies heavily on the cultivation of personal relationships with local informants as a way of learning about a culture, involving both observing and participating in the social life of a group (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Although often characterised as a method, ethnography encompasses a range of approaches, all of which inscribe a certain relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Ethnography is predominantly qualitative in terms of its ontological and epistemological foundation (Marcus, 1998). This approach is about the epistemic position of the researcher that finds explanation in its epistemological foundation: "ethno" (people) and "graphy" (describing) (Lindlof, 1995: 20). In the words of the pioneer of ethnography, Bronislaw Malinowski (1922: 25), the approach intends "to grasp the native's point of view…to realise his/her vision of the world". One of the central motifs of traditional ethnography is that the researcher should live with the local community and compile detailed accounts of life, traditions and cultural practices of the local people (Palmer, 2001). Because direct and sustained social contacts with the researched (Willis & Trondman, 2000) is one of the core pillars of ethnography, this kind of approach makes it possible for the researcher to understand events in the context in which they happen. For Miller et al (2016), within the discipline of anthropology a central tenet of ethnography is time. A person must be present in the field site for an extended period, typically more than one year. Ethnographic studies encapsulate several data collection tools (participant observation, interviews, informal conversations) which are concerned mainly with observing things that happen in their natural

settings, listening to people's experiences and questioning people in their social settings (Walsh, 1998).

Ethnography seeks to "investigate in particular the perspectives of participants, the nature and forms of their knowledge, their interactions, practices and discourses aiming to draw connections between practices, experiences and the context" (Lüders, 2004: 225). In this study, such an approach enabled me to participate overtly or covertly (I will revisit the ethics of lurking in section 4. 3) in youth activists' daily lives on Facebook for an extended period of time, observing what is posted, making sense of online interactions, asking questions and collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues under investigation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Clifford, 1997). Given that the researcher has been a Facebook user since the year 2008 and lived in both case nations at the time of research, he had "sufficient proficiency in the local language[s] so that they can understand conversations between other people, not just conversation directed at them" (Miller et al, 2016: 14). Ethnography is also characterised by the keeping of extensive field notes which assist the researcher in creating a picture of situations that help to understand the subject matter at hand. Another merit of ethnography is that "[it] deliberately leaves openings for unanticipated discoveries and directions" (Amit, 2000:17).

A large body of ethnographic studies (Gerbaudo, 2012; Postill & Pink, 2012; Storsul, 2014; Gustafsson, 2013) focusing on the use of ICTs by political activists within the context of social movements in Western democracies have emerged. Based on multi-sited fieldwork, these ethnographic studies (Miller, 2011; Barassi & Trere, 2013; Marichal, 2012; Postill & Pink, 2012; Mudhai, 2004) employed extensive and intensive periods of offline and online participant observations in protests, qualitative content analysis of websites and discussion boards as well as interviews with activists. These studies underscore the fact that ethnography constitutes a flexible, adaptable and an enduring methodological approach suitable for studying new technologies and activist practices.

This particular study, as pointed out earlier, deploys social media ethnography (Postill& Pink, 2012) which is characterised by intermittent periods of online participant observations as well as structured and unstructured interviews with youth activists. Instead of simply dipping into and out of Facebook groups and profile pages, I resorted to periodic interactions with the researched via Facebook chat and private messages. In order to avoid influencing the course of debate and the behaviour of observed participants on Facebook groups and profile pages, I

desisted from asking questions in a discussion thread and on the "wall". My role as participant-as-observer was limited to "liking" and "sharing" of interesting Facebook posts. These practices should considered as benign because I was just redistributing and acknowledging postings rather than interacting (through commenting and reply features) with the content. As Pink & Postill (2012) rightfully point out, social media ethnography does not replace long-term immersion in a society or culture or aims to produce "classic" ethnographic knowledge but, rather, creates deep, contextual and contingent understandings produced through intensive and collaborative sensory, embodied engagements often involving digital technologies in co-producing knowledge. Unlike traditional ethnography, which tended to reify speech as more authentic than writing as part of its romantic legacy, social media ethnography treats written texts associated with online cultures as valid accounts of the realities of those being studied. Facebook allowed me to engage in ethnography as a "textual practice" (Hine, 2000). This means that texts (Facebook postings) were taken as "ethnographic material which tells us about the understanding which authors have of the reality which they inhabit" (Hine, 2000: 43).

In this study, Facebook constitutes a rich communicative medium (for conducting interviews with respondents and maintaining social relations), data (such as status updates, group discussion threads, external links) and context (a shared, observable space that feeds into and frames data collection) (Baker, 2013: 142), in which to examine how youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action. As a research site, Facebook constitutes a valuable source of data that offers me unique pathways into youth's "trace data[74]" and thoughts on political activism. It permits me to get an insight into the participants' lives that could have previously been hidden from the researcher's gaze. This is because Facebook allows researchers to "burrow further into [participants'] lives" (Murthy, 2008: 845). Next I look at the qualitative research methodology.

4.3 Research design and procedure

4.3.1 The qualitative research tradition

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[74]Trace data are digital records that humans consciously or unconsciously leave behind as they navigate the digital world (Dubois & Ford, 2015)

This study is theoretically positioned within the Fraser's[75] ideas of subaltern counter-publics and the metaphor of hidden transcripts (Scott, 1976) (see Chapter Three) which puts the narratives of subordinate groups at the centre of social research. As post-structuralist feminist (see Fraser, 1990) and resistance (see Scott, 1976; 1990) scholars, Fraser and Scott believe in the existence of multiple and situated realities. This belief in multiple realities constitutes one of the philosophical orientations of qualitative research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Qualitative methods are oriented towards discovery and process; have high validity; are less concerned with generalisation, and are more concerned with deeper understanding of the research problem in its unique context. As Baxter & Babbie (2003: 61) write, qualitative research moves beyond description of a particular phenomenon to strive for a comprehensive understanding of mean making in a particular setting. The ontological and epistemological foundations of qualitative research makes it the most appropriate methodology for the present study, which is concerned with understanding how and why youth activists use Facebook to mediate political action. Given the predominance of quantitative studies in the field of political communication, Vromen (2007: 52) calls upon scholars to embrace qualitative methods in order to explore both individual attitudes and forms of participation.

Rooted in several disciplines (Lindlof, 1995) as well as the Weberian notion of *verstehen*[76], qualitative research methodology is an assortment of philosophical positions, methodological tactics, and analytical procedures (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The term "qualitative" implies an emphasis on examination of the processes and meanings, but not measured in terms of quantity, amount, or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemologically, qualitative research is anchored in the phenomenology or the interpretivist paradigm. As Baxter & Babbie (2003) observes, the interpretive paradigm suggests that human /social sciences are concerned with understanding human behaviour, and the primary goal of the interpretive researcher is to embrace the subjective world of the people they are studying and try to see the world through their eyes. This contrasts significantly with the positivist epistemology, which focuses on objective reality knowable through empirical observation associated with quantitative research (Bryman, 2004; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The reason for this "marriage" between phenomenology and qualitative methodology is based on the insistence on an interpretative understanding of the meanings and self-descriptions of individual, which privileges participant observation, qualitative content analysis and individual in-depth

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[75] Fraser (1990) posits that multiple, subaltern counter-publics spheres unlike a unitary public sphere allow like-minded people to come together and articulate their issues, concerns, or identity.
[76] The term refers to an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their social situation and activities (Bryman, 1988).

interviews. In-depth interviews allow me to understand what happens to the technology (Facebook) when it is appropriated and adapted by young people for political purposes.

Proponents of qualitative research place particular emphasis on the contextual understanding of perspectives of social actors, to retrieve experiences from the past, to gain expert insight or information, to obtain descriptions of events or scenes that are unavailable for observation, to foster trust or to analyse certain kinds of discourse (Lindlof, 1995; Bryman, 2004; Silverman, 2005; Baxter & Babbie, 2003). The advantage of qualitative research is that it allows one to make sense of, or interpret reality in terms of the meanings that people bring to them and not the meaning imposed by the researcher through the relationship between variables (Silverman, 2005; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This study is predominantly qualitative, although I make use of quantitative data, in the sense that it is concerned with digging below the surface to explore how, why or what and to explore relationships and connections (deep data) (Bryman, 1988). In other words, it allows me to access "thick descriptions" of how and why politically engaged youths use Facebook for political purposes in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Qualitative research methodology helps us answer the how and what questions that must be addressed in order to answer the why and so what questions. Qualitative researchers believe that people construct their realities or "subjective meanings" through actions determined by their lived circumstances which structure or constrain the way they construct meanings in the course of everyday life (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Such an approach enables me to investigate and understand the underlying contextual factors on why youth activists use Facebook to promote their causes "through the eyes of those being studied" (Bryman, 2004: 280).

The flexible nature of qualitative research enables me "to embark on a mission of discovery rather than one of verification" (Bryman, 2004: 281), in this case how and why Facebook has been integrated into youth activists' broader activities. Although rooted in qualitative research, this study is situated within the emerging field of small data analysis (Stephansen & Couldry, 2014) which combines basic quantitative metrics (how many people have joined, liked or participated actively on Facebook groups and the gender-disaggregated data of participants), qualitative content analysis of selected Facebook and qualitative interviews. This quantitative meta-data will also yield important information for me about participation levels in Facebook groups and profile pages. Qualitative research is also useful because it is only through an inquiry into the experience of the researched, the meaning they attach to their

routines that can offer us the possibility of an answer (Scott, 1985: 46). Through the aid of in-depth interviews, it allows me "to probe beneath the surface appearances" (Bryman, 2004:280) of reality to provide the reasons on why youth activists use Facebook to advance their political objectives.

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, qualitative research is best positioned to access "an insider's view" (emic perspective) of the social phenomenon under consideration when compared to quantitative research which exhibits a tendency for the researcher to view events from the outside and to impose empirical concerns upon social reality (Bryman, 1988). Gaining an "insider's view" is very important in this research context because it allows me to understand how youth activists integrate Facebook into their broader activities. Qualitative research is concerned with the contextual understanding of social behaviour and seeks to provide a detailed account of the context within which people's behaviour takes place (Silverman, 2005). It is important to gain an understanding of the actual habitat or "lifeworld" within which activists' behaviour takes place because experiences of people are essentially context bound. This is important for this research which uses online participant observation to understand how youth activists use Facebook to facilitate political activism in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Qualitative research is also concerned with understanding particulars rather than generalising to universals. Guba & Lincoln (1982: 238) suggest that in qualitative research, one can never generalise because phenomena are always studied within a certain context and time frame. The qualitative approach enables the study of many interesting phenomena relating to what people actually do in their day-to-day lives, whether in homes, offices or other public and private places (Silverman, 2005). Through online participant observation, I will seek to examine what youth activists do [Facebook postings] in their day-to-day lives [on Facebook groups and profile pages]. Below I look at the comparative case study research design.

4.3.4 Comparative case study approach

This study is framed within broader ambit of a comparative case study approach. A case is defined as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The term case study as used here refers to an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). As Yin (2003: 13) explains, a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer *how* and *why* questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) the researcher want to cover contextual conditions because he/she believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under investigation; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (which is the case in the present study). Rooted in the qualitative research tradition, a case study approach was also chosen because of its openness to multiple sources of evidence which enables the researcher to deal with a full variety of evidence emerging from direct observation [online participant observation] of the events being studied and interviews [in-depth interviews] of the persons involved in the events (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987; Stake, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Comparative cross-national research is a way of identifying the similarities and differences among "macro-social units" (such as countries, regions and other larger political entities) (Ragin, 2000; Collier, 1993) with the aim of revealing uniqueness. It entails learning about how and why different systems are different or similar as well as generating in-depth, contextual understanding (Ragin, 2000). As Downey & Stanyer (2005) notes, comparative analysis helps us to notice differences and through this making us aware of the geographical limitations of concepts and the importance of generalising prudently. Although single case studies can certainly provide rich insights into the practices associated uniquely with one specific platform (Yin, 2003), comparative method has the advantage of allowing for the systematic examination of two or more cases in order to highlight how different they are, thus establishing a framework for interpreting how parallel processes of change are played out in different ways in each context (Collier, 1993: 108). There are two approaches in comparative research: the most similar system design and the most different system design (Lijphart, 1971). Because in small-N case studies the selection of cases is a deliberate choice based on the theory-driven comparative method, this study integrates both the most different system design (MDSD) and the most similar system design (MSSD) to examine how and why youth activists from a democratic (South Africa) and non-democratic (Zimbabwe) political system use Facebook for political action (see Chapters One and Two for a comparison of the two countries).

Hallin & Mancini (2004: 2) ask a relevant question: Why comparative analysis? They point out that the role comparative analysis in social research can be understood in terms of two

basic functions: its role in concept formation and clarification and its role in causal inference (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Comparative research is important because it sensitises us to variation and to similarity, and this can contribute powerfully to concept formation and to the refinement of our conceptual apparatus. It enables us to conceptualise more clearly what aspects of the system actually require explanation. As Bendix (1963: 535) observes, comparative studies "provide an important check on the generalisations implicit" in our concepts and forces us to clarify the limits of their application. The second reason comparison is important in social investifation is that it allows in many cases to test hypothesis about the interrelationships among social phenomena (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 4).

Noteworthy to highlight that while it is typical for comparativists to use either MSSD or MDSD, some researchers use both system designs (see LeBas, 2011). On the one hand, the MSSD compares very similar cases (apples with apples) which only differ in the *dependent variable*, on the assumption that this would make it easier to find those *independent variables* which can explain the presence/absence of the dependent variable (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 33; Norris, 2010). It focuses on variation across cases as the basis of explanation thereby "controlling" for certain shared cultural, social or regime characteristics, such as studies comparing elections campaigns among member states within the SADC region. Thus, the MSSD seeks to compare political systems that share a host of common features in an effort to neutralise some differences while highlighting others. On the other hand, the MDSD compares very different cases (apples with oranges), all of which however have in common the same *dependent variable*, so that any other circumstance which is present in all the cases can be regarded as the *independent variable*. It concentrates on the commonalities across cases so as to eliminate other explanations (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). It seeks to identify those features that are the same among different countries in an effort to account for a particular outcome and use contrasting cases in order to find the cause of the differences. The "most different" strategy also seeks to maximise contextual variations when identifying regularities in the phenomenon under examination, such as comparing the use of Facebook by youth activists in democratic and non-democratic contexts. It also seeks to identify the key features that are different among similar countries and which account for the observed political outcome. It achieves this through deploying the basic logic of falsification[77], which

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[77] The basic argument is that science progresses by eliminating possible causes for observed phenomena rather than by finding positive relationships.

is anchored in the tradition of Popperian philosophy of science (Popper, 1959). In this way, MDSD allows the researcher to distil out the common elements from a diverse set of countries that have greater explanatory power (Collier, 1993:112).

In terms of their differences, the MDSD differs from the MSSD in the sense that it does not take a strict variable. As Peters (1998) argues, the most similar and most different systems designs therefore do very different things. On the one hand, the MSSD deals more directly with countries as a unit of analysis. It attempts to control for extraneous sources of variance by selecting cases in which this is not likely to be a major problem. On the other hand, the MDSD is not particularly interested in countries; this is more variable-based research. However, as Peters (1998: 41) observes, practically it is difficult to deploy one research design while leaving the other. It is only through combining both research designs that one can counter any deficiencies that may be countered in either of the two. The reason for adopting a combined research design is that because of the area focus of the thesis it was important to include shared historical features of the countries under analysis since these features would have structured the countries' social, economic and political perspectives in a way that, although not uniform, should account for some level of similarity. On the one hand, the MDSD was deployed in order to "distil out the common elements from a diverse set of countries that have a greater explanatory power" (Landman, 2008: 70). On the other hand, the MSSD allowed for the historical comparison of cases under investigation. Therefore the integration of both approaches allowed for the identification of similarities and differences which are essential for comparative method. Drawing inspiration from scholars (Linz & Stepan, 1996; McCorley, 2015) who have integrated the MDSD and MSSD in their comparative studies, I also used a similar approach to compare how and why youth activists use Facebook for political purposes South Africa and Zimbabwe. Below, I briefly motivate the rationale for choosing the two case nations.

Rationale for choosing the case nations

There are certain criteria which should be met in order for the "most similar" and "most different" system designs to be combined in a single study. As Landman (2008: 75) argues, the combination of the two approaches needs to ensure that three criteria are adhered to in order to make sound inferences: "…the proper specification of the outcome to be explained, the reasons for adopting…[a] system design, as well as the choice of the particular countries

under scrutiny". As discussed extensively in Chapters One and Two, the two countries have different regime types although they share numerous "historical legacies and characteristics that lend them to family resemblance selection" (McCorley, 2015: 17). Their historical trajectories make them similar in some ways (see Chapter One). The reason for choosing Zimbabwe and South Africa was based on the variations on the *dependent variable*, current level of democratic governance. Both countries have not yet experienced the "two-turnover test[78]" (Huntington, 1991) and do not seem to do so any time soon (McCorley, 2013; 2015). Zimbabwe has retreated into authoritarian governance which embodies the instrumentalism of violent prebendalism and patronage (Gallagher, 2015). Although South Africa in some respects has been successful in implementing political reforms to develop the complexity of the economy, increased complexity over the past two decades has not meant that democracy has been ingrained (McCorley, 2015: 123; see Chapters One and Two). As demonstrated in Chapter One, data sets from the Freedom House and Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) have classified the two case nations differently on the democratic and authoritarian scale. South Africa is placed on the democratic side of the regime divide while Zimbabwe is characterised as an authoritarian regime (Freedom House, 2014; Ibrahim Index on African Governance, 2014).

Building on Siebert, Peterson & Schramm's (1956) classifications of media systems, Hallin & Mancini's (2004) seminal work offers a standardised measurement for comparing media systems within Western democracies. The primary focus of Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* is the relationship between media systems and political systems (2004: 1). This typology has been used classify the South African and Zimbabwean media systems (see Hadland, 2007; 2012; D'Angelo & Pollock, 2010). Inspired by Hallin & Mancini (2004) typology[79] of press-state relations in mature democracies, D'Angelo & Pollock (2010) have revised and updated this model arguing that although Zimbabwe and South Africa fit within the "Mediterranean"/ "polarised pluralist[80]" model, they can further be classified into "hegemonic" and "participatory pluralist" models respectively. This is partly because in

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[78] According to Huntington (1991) a nascent democracy is considered consolidated only after it has achieved two peaceful electoral alternations after the foundation of the democratic elections. Although passing the two-turnover test does not guarantee that the country will not regress back into authoritarianism, it is generally used in indicating whether a new democracy has matured.

[79] Hallin & Mancini (2004) compared the media and political systems of 18 countries in Europe and North America. They found these countries could be clustered into three broad groups, or "ideal types": the Liberal model, the Democratic Corporatist model and the Polarised Pluralist model. They propose four major dimensions according to which media systems in Western Europe and North America can usefully be compared: (1) the development of media markets, with particular emphasis on the strong or weak development of mass circulation press (high or low levels of press circulation); (2) political parallelism, that is, the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or, more broadly, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in the country; (3) the development of journalistic professionalism and (4) the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 68-72).

[80] A polarised pluralist model, with media integrated into party politics, weaker commercial media and a strong role for the state

Zimbabwe the independent media opeates in an environment which is severely constricted whilst the public media is heavily controlled by the government. Although the Zimbabwean and South African media systems share some similarities, there are important differences which have been enunciated in Chapter Two.

Hadland (2007; 2012) has also attempted to Africanise Hallin & Mancini's (2004) three models of media and political systems and concluded that South Africa's media system falls largely into the "polarised pluralist" model though it retains strong liberal[81] model traits. Some of the liberal model features exhibited by South Africa include the massive development of commercial newspapers with little state involvement and the relative dominance of market mechanisms and of commercial media in general. South Africa also fits into the "polarised pluralist" model because of the dominance of political coverage and the media's predisposition towards elite audiences. Although the South African media system does have leanings towards the "democratic corporatist[82]" model, with some political parallelism[83], a vibrant civic life, and limits on state power, Hadland (2012: 101) also pointed to the limited range of political perspectives found in the media (Hadland, 2012: 101). The state-owned public broadcaster, although displaying elements of bias towards the ruling party at certain times, such as elections, and promoting "developmental journalism" (Hadland, 2012: 106), also incorporates commercial approaches into its journalistic orientation and programming (Duncan & Glenn, 2010).

Zimbabwe, one the other, hand fits into the "polarised pluralist" model largely because the media system has a high degree of political parallelism, relatively low levels of journalistic professionalism and the state has historically played a central, interventionist role in the media (IMPI, 2015; see Chapter Two). The Zimbabwean media system has institutionalised an environment in which party politics and the media are closely integrated, with a relatively weaker commercial radio broadcasting sector (see Chapter Two). As intimated in Chapter Two, media polarisation which manifests itself through explicit partisan editorial orientation means that the Zimbabwean media system is characterised by "considerable" pluralism

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[81] A liberal model, in which the media operate according to the principles of the free market, without formal connections between media and politics and with minimal state intervention.
[82] In this model, commercial media coexist with the media tied to orgsnised social and political groups and the state has a small but active role.
[83] Political parallelism is one of four "major dimensions" used to categorise countries and their media systems into one or other of Hallin and Mancini's three models of media and politics. The concept of political parallelism refers in essence to the closeness of the links between a political system and the media and examines the extent to which media systems reflect the major political trends and cleavages of the host country.

(Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 61). On the one hand, the state media is unapologetic for its support for the ruling ZANU-PF government, on the other hand, the private media appear to have signed a pact with the opposition to "hear no evil," "speak no evil" and "see no evil" regarding its affairs (Chari, 2009:10; Chuma, 2005). Hallin & Mancini (2004) observe that a high degree of political parallelism, in which the media very directly reflect the spectrum and culture of a country's political life, is most often the hallmark of either the "polarised pluralist" model. In Zimbabwe, the media are used as instruments of struggle in conflicts, by the ruling party (ZANU-PF) and by opposition parties (MDC-T) struggling against each other, but also by other contending parties in periods of democratic politics. For Hallin & Mancini (2004), the state in the "polarised pluralist" model plays a large role as an owner, regulator, and funder of media. Unlike the commercialised SABC in South Africa, the ZBC receives a substantial funding from the government and licence fees which explains the extensive political interference in editorial decision making (Moyo, 2009; Mare, 2014). Whereas in Zimbabwe, the government owns newspapers through its majority shares in Zimpapers, in South Africa there are no state-owned newspapers. The Freedom House (2015) rates the Zimbabwean media system as "unfree" while South Africa is considered "partly free". Thus arguably media systems in Zimbabwe and South Africa have very characteristics in common.

Both case nations are also important because of the instrumental role of youths in struggles for political change and the marked usage of new media technologies to amplify grievances and for political mobilisation (Seekings, 2014; Munro, 2015; ActionAid Denmark, 2013). As intimated in earlier chapters, these are some of the reasons why this particular study chose to focus on Zimbabwe and South Africa, notwithstanding, important factors such as convenience and geographical proximity. For practical reasons, the chosen case nations allowed the researcher to visit them easily and conduct fieldwork. Next, I discuss the rationale for choosing the six case organisations.

4.3.3 Selection of case organisations

Since this study constitutes an embedded multi-case study containing more than one sub-unit of analysis (2 countries and 6 organisations), it is important to note that I use these case studies instrumentally rather than intrinsically. According to Stake (1995), there are two types

of single case study: the intrinsic and the instrumental. The intrinsic case study is generally used to learn about a unique phenomenon which the study focuses on whereas the instrumental case study describes a specific case of a general phenomenon (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case study approach is concerned with theory building. For the purposes of this study, the six case organisations were selected to play an instrumental and supportive role thereby helping the reader in understanding broader social and political phenomena like the relationship between Facebook, youth and political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This means that the case organisations chosen here are of secondary interest.

The choice of the six social movements under investigation here was shaped by my prior research (Mare, 2014) experience in a cross-national comparative study on how political activists used social media to organise protests in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, South Africa and Malawi. During this research I realised that most of the political activists who were using social media to organise demonstrations in Zimbabwe and South Africa tended to be young people. Most of these youths were affiliated with social movements like the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), National Constitutional Assembly[84] (NCA), Youth Forum Zimbabwe (YFZ), Unemployed People's Movement (UPM), Right to Know Campaign (R2K) and People Against Suffering Oppression and Poverty Afrika (PASSOP Afrika). Consequently, these social movements were chosen, using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is done when the sample is selected by keeping a certain purpose in mind (Marshall, 1996), in this case, social movements made up of young people who use social media to engage in political activism. Another criterion for choosing these case organisations was on the basis of an "information oriented selection strategy" (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This means these case organisations were selected on the basis of expectations about their information content rather than representativeness and random sampling. The six case organisations were chosen because of their involvement in offline political/social activism, their politically engaged youthful constituencies and their "strong outward presence on the Net" (in this case, active use of Facebook) (Dahlgren, 2000: 340) in their respective countries. In the end, the chosen six organisations constitute "proto-typical" cases which helped me to examine how and why young activists use Facebook for political activism in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Next, I look at the case organisations.

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[84] At the time of this research, the NCA had not yet transformed itself from a mass broad based movement into a political party. It did so in September 2013 during its national congress.

The NCA was formed in 1997 with the primary goal of advocating for the writing of a people-centred constitution. As a pressure group, the NCA was instrumental in the formation of the MDC in 1999 and has over the years been at the forefront of protests against Mugabe's domestic tyranny. As of the 30th of August 3013, NCA had 33 000 members on its Facebook group. The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition is the largest conglomeration of more than 350 civil society organisations. Its youth cluster is made of youth social formations like the Zimbabwe Youth Movement, Youth Agenda Trust and Youth Empowerment Trust. The organisation had 67 981 members on its Facebook page. The YFZ was formed in 2004 as the first youth social formation outside student activism in Zimbabwe. Boasting a network of grassroots activists and volunteers in rural and urban areas, the organisation aims to promote youth empowerment and increase the participation of young men and women in policy dialogue and political discourse. YFZ had 40 000 members on its Facebook page.

The UPM was formed in August 2009 following concerns about high unemployment in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and dissatisfaction with the local government's response to this situation. Formed by a small group of unemployed (old and young) people with limited financial resources, the organisation has been at the forefront of convening public meetings, issuing media statements, participating in public debates, and organising protests and demonstrations in Grahamstown and other parts of South Africa. UPM had 917 members on its Facebook page. PASSOP Afrika was established in 2007 with the sole purpose of fighting for the rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants in South Africa. It draws the majority of its members and volunteers from the refugee community in the Western Cape. It had 4 964 members on its Facebook page. The R2K Campaign was launched in August 2010, is an umbrella group of organisations and activists campaigning to advance the free flow of information in South Africa. Popular for its access to information campaign against the Protection of State Information Bill (the Secrecy Bill), R2K Campaign has expanded its scope to include broader issues like access to information, freedom of expression and the free flow of information. It had 7,753 members on its Facebook page.

It is important to highlight that the six case organisations qualify as social movements in the sense that they "are informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest" (della Porta & Diani, 1999: 16). Another important characteristic of these case organisations is that they are

actively involved in contentious politics and collective claim-making in their respective countries. Contentious politics refers to a situation "when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities and opponents" (Tarrow, 1998: 2). The three selected social movements in Zimbabwe have been at the forefront of organising public meetings, demonstrations, petition drives, issuing statements to and in the media, and pamphleteering (McCandless, 2011). Similarly in South Africa, the PASSOP Afrika, R2K Campaign and UPM make use of repertoires of contention such as engaging in public demonstrations, public meetings, petitions and agitating for the passage of progressive laws. These organisations also have a full-time secretariat, an office, paid staff and or volunteers (Kamete, 2010b). Below, I discuss about negotiating entry into the field.

4.3.4 Negotiating entry into a multi-sited research context

Negotiating entry is a tedious process which involves managing one's identity, self-presentation in everyday life and building cordial relationships with the researched. As part of my pre-fieldwork preparation, I spent a significant amount of time on Facebook trawling through groups, fan and profile pages as a "passive observer" in an attempt to get an "intimate familiarity" (Brewer, 2000) of the research site. I will revisit the ethics of passive observation in section 4.7. This approach to gaining entry known as "mental access" (Gummesson, 2000) enabled me to understand what is happening, delineate what to observe and from whom to gather information. Informally, the fieldwork process began in August 2009 when I became interested in monitoring how prominent activists in Zimbabwe were using Facebook to discuss the Zimbabwean crisis. Although lurking as an ethnographic strategy is replete with ethical challenges (which will be discussed later), it allows for a period of cultural familiarisation in order to facilitate a relatively smooth entry into the field. But officially, the fieldwork for this particular study commenced on the 1st of August 2011 after receiving informed consent (I will look at ethical issues in section 4.7) from individual participants and gatekeepers from the case organisations under consideration. I disclosed my status as a PhD student at Rhodes University undertaking a research project on the use of Facebook for political activities by the youth in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Before embarking on my fieldwork, I had been granted an ethical clearance from Rhodes

University's ethics committee as well as a release letter (see appendix 1) addressed to gatekeepers at the six case organisations.

Because multi-sited fieldwork involves multiple gates of entry (Wittel, 2000), I found myself having to deal with gatekeeping at individual (youth activists), group (Facebook administrators) and organisational (leaders of the six social movements) levels. Being accepted as a member-cum-researcher in a Facebook group required negotiating access with the administrator(s) (often someone who is not the leader of the organisation). Given the multi-sited nature of my fieldwork, I also found myself knocking on *physical* and *virtual* gates manned by different gatekeepers. These gates are sometimes closed, partially closed or opened. This is because Facebook privacy settings allow users to restrict who could access their profiles. Participants were selected based on active participation on Facebook and offline protest actions. Active participants refer to users who create, transform, distribute, and consume content on the web (van Dijck, 2009). I had minimal success recruiting respondents through emails (sent to their professional addresses) and private messages on Facebook. Most of my emails were either ignored or sent back with a message of refusal. I kept on knocking persistently until some "gates" were opened. Referral through friends and Facebook group administrators also proved worthwhile, as some respondents who initially turned down my requests ended up agreeing to take part in the study. This means that the process of gaining entry is never linear but involves negotiation, persistence and continuous re-negotiation. I found some social movements (like the CiZC, PASSOP Afrika and YFZ) more difficult to access than others because of the inherent fear harboured by gatekeepers that researchers can infiltrate their organisations using research as a cover up. Some of these organisations have been under state security surveillance which explains their schizophrenic attitude towards researchers.

In order to negotiate *physical* access, I used Patton's (2002) "known sponsor approach" which entailed relying on the leaders of the purposively sampled case organisations to introduce me to the rest of the members. This kind of snowball sampling technique allowed me to gather research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who was used to provide names of other participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I briefed these "known sponsors" about the nature of my research, data collection tools, fieldwork timescale and ethical obligations. This was in line with Lofland & Lofland's (1984: 25) observation that since qualitative researchers are asking participants to "grant access to their lives, their

minds, and their emotions," it is also important to provide respondents with a straightforward description of the goals of the research. Support at the leadership levels of the social movements was crucial to my success in gaining access to the rest of the members. This is because, as Stake (1995) asserts, "individuals often immediately acquiesce if a superior has granted permission". I asked "known sponsors" to introduce me to youth activists within their organisations who were heavy users of Facebook. I also used the Rhodes University student card to introduce myself to some respondents. The process of negotiating entry was, however, not smooth sailing as some youth activists in Zimbabwe were suspicious of identity and research objectives beyond academic interests. This deep mistrust of my identity is captured in the following conversation:

> Chief, I hear you on your desire to conduct research on Facebook and youth activism but I have to be frank with you. My fear is that we may be opening up our organisation to someone working for the CIO[85]. Do you have a release letter or student ID from your institution before we can grant you access?

Despite this apparent mistrust, the fact that I "shared" Facebook friends and group affiliations with some of the respondents opened *physical* and *virtual* gates for me to conduct fieldwork. This is because, as Ekdale (2013) observes, social media provide a digital archive for participants to "study up" on the researcher. Because of the "shared" friendship, some respondents treated me as a fellow activist, therefore a "comrade" in the struggle. I was constantly greeted using the title "comrade" on Facebook and during face-to-face interviews. Be-friending my respondents on Facebook allowed me to track their online practices as well as maintaining social relationships with them. I also managed to tap into my extended networks of friends, activists, journalists and academics who helped me to reach some of the youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Access to respondents in South Africa was also enhanced by the fact that some of the social movements had working relationship with the Highway Africa Centre and conference, a part of Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies.

Next, I discuss the data collection techniques and sampling procedures.

4.4 Data collection techniques and sampling procedures

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[85] The Central Intelligence Officers (CIO) is the national intelligence agency or 'secret police' of Zimbabwe.

In keeping with the epistemological imperatives of the qualitative research tradition, this study blends traditional and digital data collection techniques (Murthy, 2008), also known as "hybridisation" (Denzin, 2004) which includes: online participant observation, qualitative content analysis and individual in-depth interviews (I discuss these data gathering instruments below). This hybrid approach "not only gives researchers a larger and more exciting array of methods, but also enables them to demarginalise the voice of respondents" (Murthy, 2008: 837). Quantitative data on the levels of participation on Facebook was also collected through online participant observation.

4.4.1 Social media ethnography (online participant observation)

As outlined earlier, online participant observation is one of the key data collection techniques for ethnography. This technique is defined as the process which enables researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in their natural settings through observing and participating in those activities (Kawulich, 2005). It entails being involved for an extended period of time in the daily lives of people (for instance, Facebook groups and profile pages) under investigation. This method views virtual worlds as legitimate contexts of culture and meaning making as the actual world. Thus Facebook groups and fan pages as sites of meaningful social action and cultural reconstruction can be studied through ethnographic methods like physical communities. Participant observation allowed me to go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions and dig deep into youth activists' everyday life contexts [on Facebook] or what Malinowski (1922) calls the "the imponderabilia of everyday life". This technique also allowed me to view youths' "backstage culture" (DeMunck & Sobo, 1998) on Facebook. Combining the advantage of unobtrusive observation with the benefits of engagement with research participants, online participant observation allowed me to participate in and observe youth activists' online activities. Moving between mediated and unmediated spaces, I was able to observe and interview youth activists on how they use Facebook to promote their political objectives. I also used this technique to understand the levels of participation and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and profile pages.

The advantage of online participant observation is that it allowed me to engage in "deep hanging out" (Geertz, 1998; boyd, 2007) as well as to conduct online qualitative interviews with youth activists. Deep hanging out is a form of participatory observation in which the

researcher is physically or virtually present in a group for extended periods of time or for long informal sessions (interactions via private message and chat on Facebook). This is because the immersion into a specific locality [such as Facebook groups and fan pages] and online participant observation remains the cornerstone of both traditional and virtual ethnographic research (Miller & Slater, 2000; Hine, 2005; Postill & Pink, 2012). Through this immersion in Facebook groups and profile pages, I was able to experience events as an insider in the same way that the youth activists I was studying experienced these events. Described as social media ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012), online participant observation enabled me to observe youth activists' political discussions and levels of interaction on Facebook groups and profile pages. This practice finds support in Lichterman's (1998: 401) suggestion that [online] participant observation "can teach us much about the everyday meanings of doing social activism". Given the "general tendency for people to disclose more about themselves online" (Hine, 2005: 18), social media ethnography allowed me to observe youth activists' use of Facebook for political purposes which could not be gathered through qualitative interviews. It also allowed me to assess the extent to which Facebook can be considered as an alternative space for political activism.

Formally online participant observation took place during a period of two years (from the 1st of August 2011 to the 30th of August 2013). Although I did not keep records of how much time I spent combing through Facebook, on average I scanned at least 10 profile pages a day in an effort to keep track of youth activists' everyday political conversations. I also regularly monitored discursive interactions in the six Facebook groups under investigation. In total, I befriended and observed at least 102 Facebook profile pages. These Facebook users were selected on the basis of purposive and snowball sampling techniques which allowed me to focus on active participants on the site and youth activists who were already using the platform for political purposes. Online participant observation gave me first-hand information on Facebook activist practices and the participative nature of on different groups and profile pages. Building on Postill & Pink's (2012) typology, my ethnographic fieldwork revolved around five overlapping routines: observing, catching up, exploring, interacting, and archiving (I will look at these routines in detail below).

The first routine entailed *observing* conversations, interactions, practices and activities of individuals and group members on Facebook. A decision (based on ethical considerations)

was made to observe and identify relevant "political[86]" rather than "personal[87]" postings on Facebook groups and profile pages, although I acknowledge that there are very blurry lines between them. This allowed me to draw a flexible checklist (see appendix 4) of how young people use Facebook for political purposes. Directly observing what youth activists "shared", "updated" and "commented" on in their Facebook groups and profile pages enabled me to get insight into how they used the site to facilitate political activism and protests. As Haythornthwaite (2005: 127) suggests, "looking at what people talk about with others is an ideal unit for examining social behaviours (…) and reveals aspects of groups that are not evident from aggregations of individual behaviours". As part of the observation phase, I took field notes (through saving relevant status updates, conversations, images and so forth) based on my personal impressions (see appendix 4).

Besides merely observing and identifying relevant political postings and discursive interactions on Facebook groups and profile pages, the second routine I engaged in was *catching-up* with my respondents. I kept track of the happenings on my research participants' Facebook groups and profile pages through periodically checking my "notifications[88]" function. I also used the Facebook news feed[89] function as a "semi-public notice board". This means I read and got timeous updates on individual and group discussions through regularly checking my Facebook news feed. My third routine involved *exploration.* Through this routine, I regularly followed and monitored external website links, listened to audio and watched video messages posted by youth activists on their Facebook groups and profile pages. Following and monitoring youth activists' trace data on Facebook allowed me to track patterns of communication and to quantify the levels of participation on the platform. Most of the external website links posted by youth activists often took me to online newspapers, blogs, social movements' websites, motivational quotations and book reviews.

As a fore-runner to in-depth interviews, my fourth routine involved *interacting* with my respondents through Facebook chat, private messages and e-mail. Besides enabling me to develop an extended set of "weak-ties" with the respondents, informal conversations on

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[86]By political posts, I refer these objectives are directed towards engaging with how power and resources are organised in society, and what needs to be done to change power relations and the distribution of resources. I also refer to posts that raise political questions and can be used to encourage political debate or even action. These posts focus on different targets ranging from government, political parties, corporate organisations, and multinational corporations, regional and supra-national entities and so forth.

[87] These are posts with purely associational and communicative objectives that happen in and are influenced by one's socio-political and cultural environment. For instance: "I have just checked in at city hotel".

[88] This feature acted as an alarm system keeping me abreast of events occurring in different groups and activities of Facebook users who are my friends on the site.

[89] This is a function which automatically deliver news about your friends' latest actions on Facebook to your homepage) regularly

Facebook allowed me to ask follow up questions intended to allow respondents to expand their answers on individual subjects. Dubois & Ford (2015) call these informal conversations "trace interviews[90]". Trace interviews allowed me to use data gathered from online participant observation as probes thereby serving as "instructive way[s] of stimulating the interviewees' memory and encouraging [them] to elaborate" (Orgad, 2005: 61). Because "researchers can easily reinterpret or misinterpret these messages if they lack deep knowledge of the individuals and relationships involved" (Howard, 2002: 555), informal conversations gave me a platform to seek clarification on the contextual meanings of different messages posted, shared and recommended on the site. Interaction also involved "liking" posts shared on Facebook by youth activists. Liking was chosen as a mode of interaction because it ensured that I did not influence the course of events and Facebook discussions. As noted earlier, I desisted from "commenting" and "replying" directly to political post (Facebook discussion thread) as way of minimising my participation. Informal conversations (though chats and private messages) on Facebook facilitated "phatic communion" (Miller, 2008) with a large pool of respondents with very low investments in time per contact. During these informal interviews with youth activists, I often talked about their profiles and group discussions to get a sense of what they thought about the political discourses and conversations they engaged in with their friends on Facebook.

The fifth routine consisted of *archiving* the qualitative and quantitative data mined from Facebook groups and profile pages. Archiving of online data is required "in order to have stable object to study and refer to when the analysis is to be documented" (Bruggler, 2011: 24). Instead of "written diaries" or "field notes" (Malinowski, 1922) associated with traditional ethnography, I used a combination of manual (copying and pasting onto an MS word document) and electronic (relying on archived material by Facebook Inc.) archiving systems. I archived quantitative meta-data on the number of people who had joined a group, number of participants who commented on various political posts, number of participants who liked a post and number of participants who replied to a post. Facebook group and profile pages interactions were downloaded as html files. These were exported into Excel sheets separating the units of text by variables such as date, author, comment, and addressee (if applicable). I regularly copied and pasted onto MS word documents any status updates which suited my research questions (see section 4.4.2). For the purposes of data storage and

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[90] Trace interviews involve the collection, visualisation, and discussion of a participant's traces with that participant. This process enables participants to interpret data by providing contextual details and clues about their motivations for undertaking particular actions represented in the data as well as to point to missing or inaccurate data ((Dubois & Ford, 2015: 2072).

capture, archived data was classified according to the theme of the status update, comments, pseudonym of the author, publication date, group information and name of the event. Facebook is also handy for researchers because it archives data that are constitutively evanescent, rapidly changing and at risk of disappearing (Mosco, 2014). In this case, electronic archiving was complemented by manual archiving since research (Hanna, 2009) has shown that activists have the tendency to delete information they consider incriminating after a mobilisation event. Archived material was also used during in-depth interviews to probe further youth activists' perspectives on how they use Facebook to mediate political action. In the next section, I look at qualitative content analysis.

4.4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

In line with this study's fourth research question, which seeks to document and analyse the kinds of political discourses circulated by youth activists on Facebook groups and profile pages, I also used qualitative thematic/content analysis. Content analysis refers to a quantitative method for the "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952: 18; see also Krippendorf, 1969). Quantitative content analysis is concerned with identifying and counting the frequency of particular traits of a media text so as to deduce and establish certain causal relationships between variables and their wider social significance (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 2007: 119). Because of the interpretive thrust of this study, I used qualitative thematic/ content analysis. Qualitative thematic/content analysis refers to a technique that goes beyond examining the manifest contents or surface structures of a media text, by attempting to unearth its latent/implicit messages or the "deep structural readings" (Wigston, 2009: 5; Berg, 1998; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). It is a research method for the "subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying theme or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). Unlike quantitative content analysis, which is based on predefined categories, the qualitative content analysis is concerned with uncovering themes found in content to address latent meanings contained within texts (Mayring, 1999). Media texts are considered to be constitutive of various social meanings which are situated in particular social contexts (Deacon et al., 1999; Altheide, 1987). As such, qualitative content analysis allowed me to identify important themes or categories within a body of Facebook content (text, images, audio), and to provide

a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

As Huang (2009: 151) argues, qualitative content analysis allows researchers to capture "the key trends and characteristics of the activists' internet use". In social movement studies, qualitative content analysis has been used to analyse 250 politically oriented Facebook groups (Marichal, 2012), and to explore whether the internet can serve a public sphere (Salter, 2003). In this study, through a qualitative content analysis of the Facebook postings, I was able to document and analyse the kinds of political discourses circulated by youth activists on the platform. Qualitative content analysis of content posted on Facebook groups and profile pages also helped me to understand the extent to which the platform can be considered an alternative space for political activism.

The sampling frame for qualitative content analysis constituted 1230 Facebook postings (text, images, links and video) archived from the 1st of August 2011 to the 30th of August 2013. A period of two years was also considered a long enough time to get "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) by observing and documenting youth's everyday political practices on Facebook. As intimated earlier, I focused on political as opposed to personal Facebook postings. Besides personal postings (include post meant for private consumption), advertisements for products, discussions about topics that had no relevance whatsoever to political issues or events were also excluded from the purposively sampled 3182 posts (see section 5.3.1). I also excluded postings containing redundant remarks and that did not answer the research questions of this study. After I identified political posts (as defined earlier), I proceeded to thematically analyse them in order to identify themes. The chosen postings had very different sizes, some quite short and others very long. As the unit of analysis, I used the format of one post (i.e., wall post, shared post, comment), whether it was posted by the group administrator or by an individual on his/her Facebook group or profile page. Out of a corpus of 3182 posts, 230 posts were purposively chosen because of their information richness and relevance for this study. This is because qualitative content analysts "purposively select text which can inform the research questions being investigated" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009: 2).

Data was organised into categories or themes in accordance with the research questions, theoretical frame (see Chapter Two) and Hsieh & Shannon's (2005) conventional and

directed coding system. According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005), conventional content analysis (or inductive category development application) refers to a system in which coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the raw data. Directed content analysis (or deductive category application) refers to a system in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research objectives bringing them in connection with the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this case, conventional qualitative content analysis enabled me to immerse myself in the data and allow themes to emerge from the data during data analysis process. I took notes during the coding process, writing short descriptions of what each code meant and how it could be used to understand the phenomenon. In deploying conventional qualitative content analysis, I took into cognisance the socio-political and media contexts within which the observations were made.

As indicated in Chapter Two, the notion of "digital hidden transcripts" will be used later in Chapter Seven to document and analyse the kinds of political discourses circulated by youth activists on Facebook groups and profile pages. Building on Hsieh & Shannon's (2005) directed qualitative content analysis, various genres of digital hidden transcripts as discussed in Chapter Two were deductively categorised and analysed in relation to raw data. Through a constant process of moving back and forth between theory, literature review, and my data, I coded[91] raw data on the basis of digital hidden transcripts. Thus Facebook postings were analysed and categorised on the basis of analytical categories identified by Scott (1990) and other scholars (Willems, 2010; 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2005) on popular culture in Africa. These include: political rumour, jokes, cartoons, gossip and online petitions (see Chapter Two). Data was compared with the above codes[92] to see if they correspond or if there are any emerging themes. A qualitative content analysis of Facebook postings also served the purpose of preparing me sufficiently for the role of interviewer in individual in-depth interviews. Below I discuss about individual in-depth interviews.

4.4.3 Individual in-depth interviews

At the start of this fieldwork, I intended to use focus group discussions (FGDs), but given the political sensitivities around conducting research (I will focus on ethical issues in section 4.7)

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[91] Coding is a way of defining relevant data and to label them with a word or short phrase. It means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorises, summarises and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2007).
[92] Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive data. Codes usually are attached to "chunks" of varying size-words, phrases, sentence or paragraphs connected or unconnected to a specific setting (Neuman, 2006:460).

especially in Zimbabwe, most respondents expressed reservations about taking part in interviews occurring in a group context. Realising that I risked running out of potential respondents if I proceeded with FGDs, I decided to use individual in-depth interviews. The advantage of an in-depth interview is that it proceeds as a confidential and secure conversation between the interviewer and the respondent. In-depth interviews are concerned with eliciting individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Warren, 2001). I was also interested in cultivating a sense of trust between myself and the respondents. Instead of relying on online data, in-depth interviews allowed me "[to] obtain users' constructions of their experience of Internet [Facebook] use' (Orgad, 2005: 54). In-depth interviews were also chosen because they give the respondents an opportunity to freely express their experiences and explanations about the issue under investigation (Bryman, 2004). These interviews were partly informed by online participant observations and qualitative content analysis of status updates posted on Facebook groups and profile pages. In-depth interviews allowed me to fill gaps and to verify data gathered through online participant observations. This provided me with additional information – especially regarding purposed use (verbalised) and actual use of Facebook.

Generally regarded as a "conversation" (Kvale, 1996) or as a "conversation with a purpose" (Baxter & Babbie, 2003), in-depth interviews put emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering. Because of the ability of in-depth interviews to provide "extensive data concerning participants' opinions, recollections, values, motivations and feelings" (Du Plooy, 1995:112), this method was used to examine how and why politically engaged youth use Facebook to advance political objectives. It also allowed me to account for the kind of activist work that young people do "behind the screen" (Orgad, 2005: 58). The interviews with youth activists took various forms ranging from face-to-face discussions, Facebook chats, e-mail and telephonic interviews. Given the challenge of accessing dispersed populations and dealing with young people's physical immobility (Pascoe, 2012), I also used my mobile phone to schedule interviews, to conduct interviews and to pose follow-up questions. As Pelckmans (2010: 31) suggests, "telephone calls to and from the field ("phoning the field") serve as a reminder of the open-ended and seemingly placeless nature of contemporary fieldwork". Cognisant of the risks associated with mobile communication surveillance, I sought informed consent from my respondents before proceeding with telephonic interviews. I also ensured that sensitive questions were posed

through relatively secure platforms like Gmail, Facebook private messages and WhatsApp chat in order to safeguard the security of my respondents. Overall, the mobile phone served as a recording, receiving and broadcasting tool which allowed me to be in perpetual contact with the field.

Due to time, financial constraints and the cross-national nature of the study, it was difficult to travel throughout Zimbabwe and South Africa conducting face-to-face interviews with youths; hence I used digital tools to reach my respondents. Platforms like the short message application WhatsApp proved to be equally important data collection tools for reaching geographically dispersed respondents. This mobile instant messaging platform enabled me to conduct interviews during times when my respondents were free to chat. Besides probing for more information, I also used WhatsApp to maintain social relationships during and after the fieldwork process. I also used emails to send semi-structured open-ended questions to my respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Extended question and answer session permitted by email interview sessions also helped me to establish rapport, comfort and generate more detailed answers.

Although most of the respondents who preferred email interviews took long to respond, I had the advantage of following up on them via Facebook chat. Facebook chat proved the most popular form of interviewing as most respondents found it hard to attend physical meetings. As one respondent remarked, "I prefer that we conduct the interview on Facebook because it allows me to do other things while I am chatting with you". Consequently, I resorted to Facebook's real-time chat system which gave me an opportunity to communicate with several respondents whilst simultaneously observing their online activities. The advantage of this mode of interviewing is that respondents "write in their own words" which reduces data transfer errors and the time required to transcribe recorded interviews (Bryman, 1988). Another advantage of this form of interviewing is that chats on Facebook are "saved" as messages which allows for some kind of automated archiving. Both online and offline interviews enabled me to verify information observed online and also to expand on themes that emerged from online participant observation.

I interviewed six Facebook group administrators about their motivation(s) for the creation of a group. A total of 49 respondents (38 males and 11 females) were interviewed in Zimbabwe and South Africa (see Figure 1). This gender discrepancy in terms of my respondents can be explained by the fact activist work is generally skewed towards men. This is a good round

number, particularly if interviews are supplemented with online participant-observation and qualitative content analysis. As Adler & Adler (2002) suggest, a broad range of between a dozen and 60, with 30 being the mean offers the advantage of penetrating beyond a very small number of people without imposing the hardship of endless data gathering, especially when researchers are faced with time constraints. They argue that when considering the length of time this type of research often takes, the difficulty of gaining entry to even the most mundane group or setting, and the difficulty in transcribing thousands of hours of interviews (Adler & Adler, 2002). The other reason was the fact that after interviewing 49 respondents, I decided to call off in-depth interviews after noticing that interviewees were repeating what others had said.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa

Name of social movements	Number of respondents
National Constitutional Assembly	8
Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition	14
Youth Forum in Zimbabwe	8
PASSOP Afrika	5
UPM	8
Right to Know Campaign	6
Total	49

I conducted most of the face-to-face interviews between August 2011 and August 2013. The timing of the fieldwork exercise coincided with the referendum and the 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe and upsurge in social protests in South Africa which took place in 2012. I scheduled the interviews at a time and place convenient to the respondents. Most of the interviews with youth activists took place in offices, cafes, cars, boardrooms and university seminar rooms. All the face-to-face interviews were recorded using a Blackberry phone (after seeking permission from participants) and transcribed with the exception of telephonic interviews where extensive notes were taken and written up as verbatim as possible. Interviews took an average of one hour depending on the responses from respondents. Although all interviews were conducted in English, but in South Africa I ended

up recruiting a translator because some of my respondents were not fluent English speakers. As a "cultural broker" (Temple & Young, 2004), the translator was employed to interpret the actual interviews. In cases where respondents refused to be phone-recorded, I resorted to meticulous manual note-taking throughout the interviews. Recorded interviews were uploaded to a laptop with a personal password for safe keeping. Useful informal conversations on Facebook were archived using a combination of MS word and pdf formats.

A wide range of questions related to the four broad research questions were asked via semi-structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher may begin with a set of questions or concerns but is free to engage with the respondent using follow-up questions, to re-phrase a question, and to ask for clarifications (Priest, 1996; Blee & Taylor, 2002). Besides ensuring consistency with all interviewees, an interview guide permitted me to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study. As such, the questions were aimed at eliciting respondents' points of view, motivations and perceptions on how, why and when they use Facebook for political purposes. Some of the questions include: Can you explain how you use Facebook to engage in political activism? What kind of political activities do you engage in on Facebook? As a group administrator, can you explain how you use Facebook to facilitate political and social mobilisation? What kind of political information do you often post on your Facebook group or profile page? Why do you use Facebook (and not any other traditional and social media) to promote your political causes? Under what conditions do you employ Facebook for political activism? How has the use of Facebook during the Arab Spring influenced the way you use the site for political activism? In your opinion, how has Facebook changed the way you conduct political activism? Are there any cases where your online activism spilled into offline activism? If yes or no, can you explain how and why? When using Facebook, have you ever blocked, unfriended or hidden someone because they posted political issues that you disagreed with or found offensive? If yes, explain how did you deal with it? (see the interview guide in the appendix 2 and 3). Next I discuss the sampling techniques for qualitative interviews.

4.4.4 Sampling procedure for interviews

This study used a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit 49 youth activists for in-depth interviews. As intimated earlier, purposive sampling involves the selection of a sample on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the

population and its elements and the nature of the research aims (Baxter & Babbie, 2003: 135). Some interviewees were purposively selected during my online participant observation on Facebook. These respondents were selected because of their "active participation" (van Dijck, 2009) on Facebook, age (falling between 16 and 35 years) and knowledge of digital activism. Convenience sampling technique is when subjects are selected on the basis of their accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Marshall, 1996). In this case, youth activists who were present at the social movements' offices were identified as potential interviewees. Through snowball sampling, I was able to rely on my initial respondents to recruit more youth activists within their social movements. These sampling techniques were used because guidelines for sampling for qualitative researchers are highly flexible and situational (Deacon et al., 1999).

Whilst doing my PhD fieldwork, I was commissioned by the Media Centre[93] to train citizen journalists and community activists on how to use social media to advance social and political objectives in Zimbabwe, which allowed me to identify more interviewees for this particular study. I was also commissioned by the same organisation to conduct a baseline study on how the youth use new media to engage in political activities in five major cities (Mutare, Gweru, Harare, Bulawayo and Masvingo). These part-time engagements ended up opening possibilities for an expanding web of contact and enquiry. I was able to interview over 250 young people in Zimbabwe. Next I look at data triangulation.

4.5 Triangulation

Originally derived from surveying, where it refers to the use of a series of triangles to map out an area (Bryman, 2004), triangulation has been used in social sciences as part of the rationale for multi-method research. In social sciences, triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings (Bryman, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It involves the use of multiple measures, data sources, methods, tools, people, investigators and even theories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). At the core of triangulation is the argument that despite the epistemological and ontological differences between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, synergies between the two can be found (Bryman, 2004). Scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Bryman, 2004) advocating for triangulation point

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[93] The Media Centre is a non-governmental organisation working on access to information issues based in Harare, Zimbabwe.

out that those who argue that qualitative and quantitative research belong to different sides of the epistemological divide have exaggerated the differences between these methods and ignored their common features.

Triangulation is hailed for allowing researchers to cross check data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data (Donoghue & Punch, 2003). Because it offers the prospect of enhanced confidence and the wider and deep understanding of the study phenomena, this study triangulated quantitative and qualitative data. Because this study is anchored within the frame of small data, it deploys data triangulation which entails gathering qualitative and quantitative data through several data techniques (in-depth interviews, qualitative content analysis and online participant observation), so that slices of data at different times and social situations, as well as on a variety of people, are gathered (Bryman, 2004). As outlined earlier, quantitative data was gathered through online participant observation. Quantitative data gathered was aimed at assessing the dialogic nature of Facebook groups and fan pages (see section 4.4.1).Below I focus on data analysis procedures.

4.6 Data Analysis

As intimated earlier (see section 4.4.2), conventional and directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000) was used to make sense of Facebook postings as part of qualitative content analysis. Because the processing and analysis of qualitative data is not so much "a distinct stage of the research" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 204), I began my informal data analysis during the process of verbatim transcription of interviews and recording of field notes (both offline and online data). Data from in-depth interviews and online participant observation was analysed using a qualitative coding approach (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). As part of this qualitative coding approach, all interviews were transcribed. After the verbatim transcription of the interview data, I listened to all recorded materials repeatedly whilst scribbling notes and listing thematic categories. Initial coding was generated through reading responses whilst labelling data that are related without worrying about the variety of categories. This initial coding process allowed me to make sense of raw data without bringing theory and literature to bear on it.

Throughout this cyclical process, I constantly wrote short notes, listed ideas and diagrammed relationships I noticed and searched for special vocabulary that respondents used. Special

vocabulary used here includes: "alternative site of struggle", "virtual public square", "an instrument of political freedom", and "our own mini-website". After the initial coding process, I engaged in focused coding which allowed me to eliminate, combine or sub-divide analytic themes and look for repeating ideas and larger themes that connect codes. This allowed me to zoom in on all the responses that referred directly to my study objectives and research questions. During the formal data analysis phase, I was cognisant of the need to identify common themes and interesting narratives related to my main research questions. Online data from online participant observation was also categorised in accordance with the research questions of this study. Because qualitative data analysis is generally unapologetically "creative and interpretive" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 29), I used interesting narratives and verbatim quotes as representative illustrations.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven therefore report findings from online participant observation and interview data in light of the study's research questions. Analytic themes related to how youth activists use Facebook for political purposes are presented in Chapter Five followed by the reasons why young activists use Facebook for political purposes in Zimbabwe and South Africa in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven presents findings on the dialogic interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and profile pages while section 7.3 assesses the extent to which Facebook can be considered as an alternative sphere for political activism. Next I discuss the ethical considerations which guide this study.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Any scientific endeavour is riddled with the challenge of ensuring a delicate balance between knowledge production and adhering to ethical guidelines. This study was no different, as my desire to produce knowledge had to be counterbalanced by upholding scientific principles. Although I received ethical clearance from Rhodes University's Ethical Standards Committee, I must point out that university ethical codes are insufficient to illuminate hidden aspects and offer practical solutions to researchers in online inquiry settings. Whilst I do not advocate for the total abandonment of academic scientific ethics, I believe that these guidelines are not cast in stone. These ethical guidelines should be "contextualised" (Whiteman, 2010) in line with multi-sited environments. Contextualised ethics, as Whiteman (2012) notes, do not exclude the relevance of general principles to the practice of research but

rather explore the interpretation and relevance of these principals in the specific research context.

Because scientific research ethics exhort researchers to avoid harming their respondents as well as to avoid infringing on the rights of respondents, I had to navigate a minefield of ethical issues. Some of the ethical questions that arose during the fieldwork and reporting phase include: Who are my respondents? Whose data is it? What is private information? What is public information? How do I handle online data in my thesis? Should I include verbatim quotations from Facebook group and profile pages and risk that the participant is traceable through current or future search facilities? All these foregoing ethical questions are intimately connected to the well-established and broader ethical debates around private versus public realms, consent, and rights to privacy (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012).

In order to meet the ethical obligations of this study, I requested permission to be a researcher on the six Facebook groups from their administrators. Although some of these groups were public groups, meaning their information could be accessed by everyone on Facebook, I requested for permission from Facebook group administrators to use messages contained therein. I also asked youth activists for their permission to use Facebook postings and to record them during the interviews. Given the intricate relationship between informed consent and privacy concerns in an online environment, I adopted "de-lurking" as an ethical strategy. De-lurking entails making my presence known to the youth activists before befriending and covertly observing them on Facebook (boyd, 2007). This strategy enabled me to develop social rapport with participants I observed and contacted for further conversation.

Another ethical problem associated with social media research is traceability. This refers to the fact that all communication which is typed rather than spoken leaves a physical trace known as a "data trace" that can be archived or preserved (Duffy, 2002). In order to deal with this ethical problem, data mined from Facebook groups and profile pages will be used sparingly to ensure confidentiality and privacy (Sveningsson, 2004). Due to the political volatility of the Zimbabwean context and the sensitivity of some of the responses provided by respondents, I decided to use the term "male" or "female youth" in place of real names (associated with Facebook policy) to preserve confidentiality throughout findings chapter. The terms male or female youth were qualified with the use of the name of the social movement (for instance, female youth, NCA) with regards to the citation of interviews and

online participant observations. All "Googlable" postings were de-identified through a combination of paraphrasing and use of the term male or female youth.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a detailed account of the choice and justification of the research methodology, methods and procedures. I have situated this study within the ambit of the comparative case study approach. Despite locating this particular study within the context of qualitative research design, I have argued that quantitative data is also useful in terms of assessing the participation levels on Facebook groups and profile pages. Consequently, I have noted that this study make use of data triangulation. Qualitative research has allowed me to investigate how and why Facebook is deployed for political activities "from the ground-level view of those using these tools" (Gerbaudo, 2012: 5-6). In order to gather qualitative and quantitative data, I have deployed three-pronged data collection techniques: online participant observation, qualitative content analysis and individual in-depth interviews. I have also discussed ethical considerations navigated in this study highlighting how these challenges were addressed.

Thus, the research findings presented and discussed in the next two chapters (Chapter Five, Six and Seven) are derived from the methodological approach outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW YOUTH ACTIVISTS USE FACEBOOK FOR POLITICAL ACTION IN ZIMBABWE AND SOUTH AFRICA

5. Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed at length the methodology and methods employed in this study. This chapter presents the research findings mostly informed by the literature and theoretical discussions outlined in Chapters One, Two and Three. As intimated in Chapter Four, data for this particular chapter was gathered through a combination of online participant observation, qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews. The chapter foregrounds a comparative analysis of how Zimbabwean and South African youths drawn from a range of social movements use Facebook for political purposes. The data is interpreted and presented in collaboration with verbatim quotations derived from the in-depth interviews and online participant observations culled from Facebook groups and fan pages. It is important to note that all the discussion and analysis of findings in the next four chapters are discussed in an integrated manner in order to avoid repetition. An integrated approach is concerned with synthesising both the discussion and analysis so as ensure a flawless articulation of issues.

As discussed in Chapter Four, this study is situated within the context of comparative ethnographic and multi-sited fieldwork which allowed me to triangulate online and offline data collection techniques: social media ethnography, qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews. Social media ethnography enabled me "to immerse myself in the context and spaces in which they [Facebook users] use the technology" (Mabweazara, 2013: 106), thereby directly observing how youths behaved on Facebook pages and groups. Qualitative content analysis was also useful because it enabled me to analyse online data gathered from Facebook groups and fan pages. To corroborate online observations and qualitative content analysis, in-depth interviews were also deployed. The purpose of in-depth interviews was to investigate how and why youths in both countries used Facebook for political purposes. In this chapter, online data gathered from Facebook groups, fan pages and profile pages will be used without direct attribution to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. With the exception of a few Facebook posts which are presented in an abridged format, it is important to note that no changes have been made to the original spelling or grammar of all postings. For Facebook

postings written in vernacular languages (like ChiShona, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and so forth) translation is provided. Although not everyone on the six Facebook groups and fan pages studied in Zimbabwe and South Africa fit into the category of the youth (as defined in Chapter One), it is important to note that these digital spaces are frequented by young people (see Chapter Seven). As intimated in Chapter Four, all the 49 respondents (34 males and 15 females) in Zimbabwe and South Africa were promised anonymity hence the use of terms like "male youth" and "female youth" for attribution purposes.

5.1 Responses on how youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook for political purposes

To answer this research question, all the 49 respondents were asked the following question: How are you using Facebook for political purposes? Administrators of the six Facebook groups and pages were also asked to give their opinion on how they utilise the platform to promote their political causes.

5.1.1 Facebook as a platform for disseminating and receiving information

One of the main findings of this study was that Facebook has become an indispensable "repertoire of communication[94]" (Mattoni, 2013) for politically active youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Most respondents acknowledged that Facebook has allowed them to receive and transmit user and professionally-generated political information. Online observations and in-depth interviews revealed that respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa utilised Facebook to respond to the "falsehoods" that they claimed were circulated through traditional media platforms. A classic example of the use of Facebook to respond to "falsehoods" was witnessed on the PASSOP Afrika page:

Box 1: Response by the PASSOP Afrika

> Braam Hanekom responds to Premier and Leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), Helen Zille's newsletter, which referred to him as "(nephew of an ANC Cabinet member)" and to PASSOP as "his organisation "Passop" sought to unionise the workers for the COSATU affiliate, the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU)".

Source: PASSOP Afrika Facebook page

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[94] It refers to the entire set of activist media practices that social movement actors might conceive as possible and then develop in both the latent and visible stages of mobilisation, to reach social actors positioned both within and beyond the social movement milieu.

The above post was circulated following the publication of a story entitled: "*The Real Story Behind The Western Cape, 17th March 2013*" in a newsletter by the former Democratic Alliance (DA) leader and current Premier of the Western Cape referring Braam Hanekom as a nephew of ANC cabinet member. Braam Hanekom is the nephew of Tourism Minister and ANC national executive committee member Derek Hanekom. In response, Braam Hanekom, the director of PASSOP, pointed out that "my (family) relationship to a political leader does not define me politically or in any other way… My political views are defined by my experience and not my surname". He added that the organisation was not a personal entity but collectively owned by the members. It is evident from the above post that Facebook offers young activists in South Africa an opportunity to "talk back" and challenge misrepresentation by other media platforms. As Khamis, Gold & Vaughn (2012: 8) observe, social media "can function as a proxy free press, a medium that can uncover and challenge falsehoods and misinformation". It can be argued that Facebook enables youth activists to engage in frame articulation[95] and disarticulation.

Most of the interviewees in Zimbabwe and South Africa observed that Facebook enabled them to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and retain "control" over content production. As one of the male interviewees from the NCA put it: "it gives us an opportunity to put the record straight without relying on journalists to tell our own narrative". This means that the site allowed youth activists to make their voices heard in an "unmediated" fashion. For instance, the post below illustrates the situation where the NCA by-passed the mainstream public and private media:

Box 2: Media alert shared by one male youth from the NCA on the 19th February 2013

> The National Constitutional Assembly has filed an urgent High Court application today seeking an extension on the referendum date. For more on that contact our lawyers Andrew Makoni on 0772218758, 0772234891, Alec Muchadehama on 0772218754.
> Take charge and complete the Change Vote No
> Asijiki No retreat No surrender

Source: NCA Facebook page

Box 2 clearly illustrates the importance of Facebook as a platform for timeous dissemination of information. In this case, the constitutional lobby group had filed an urgent High Court

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[95] Frame articulation involves "the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they can hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 622). This is achieved by assembling, collating and packaging different perspectives on various events and experiences, which result in the creation of new frames and interpretations.

application seeking to extend the referendum date (16 March) in 2013 proclaimed by President Mugabe. They launched the court application to stop the vote arguing the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was improperly constituted and that acting commission chair, Joyce Kazembe could not run elections. Thus, the use Facebook to update the constituency and members allowed the organisation to by-pass the mainstream media. In terms of the social movement framing theory, Facebook can therefore be viewed as enabling youth activists to undertake "frame amplification[96]". The use of "asijiki" (an isiNdebele which means we will never surrender in English) by the Facebook admin from NCA (see Box 2) can be conceptualised as an attempt to construct collective identity in the online space. Melucci (1989:34) defines collective identity as a "shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their actions as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their actions take place". Thus the use of slogans and militant language is necessary for identity formation (Melucci, 1989).

The mainstream media has also been chastised by activists and scholars for reporting protests and demonstrations through the "law and (dis)order frame" (Cottle, 2008: 855) thereby promoting what Gitlin (1980) has described as the "protest paradigm". This refers to "a routinised template for creating protest stories that has been naturalised through the process of journalistic socialisation" (McLeod, 2007: 186; Chan & Lee, 1984). Based on this template the mainstream media focuses on the spectacle of the protest, highlighting sensational details such as violence, visible drama, and deviant or strange behaviour, thereby obfuscating the core concerns raised by social movements and activists (Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986; Atton, 2002). Most of the respondents in both countries concurred that the mainstream public and private media could not be trusted to articulate their grievances impartially despite its self-representation as the "voice of the voiceless" (Friedman, 2011). As one of the male respondents from the UPM in South Africa observed: "commercial media are part of capitalism and we can't expect them to carry our grievances impartially". It is problem for the UPM if the commercial media are part of capitalism because it means the media protect the interests of the capital rather than the jobless youths when it comes to reporting about the protest action targeted at corporate entities.

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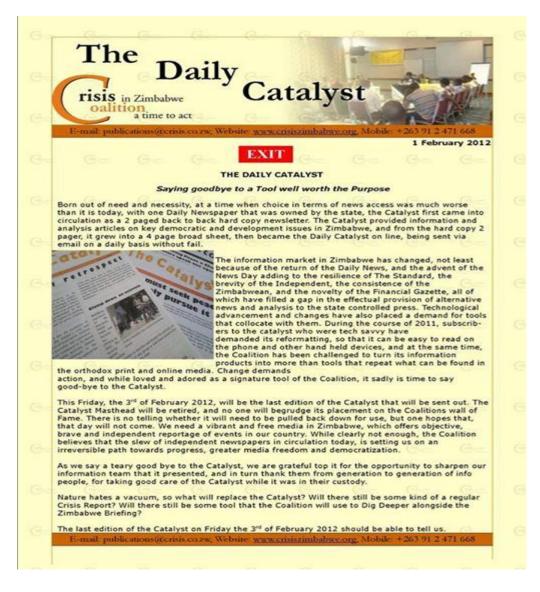
[96] Frame amplification involves "accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 623).

Given the repressive media environment in Zimbabwe, most of the interviewees indicated that Facebook constituted one of the few communication channels through which they could "go around" the "captured" traditional public media platforms. As one male respondent from the CiZC noted, "Facebook has compensated somewhat for the lack of independent spaces for political communication". Extending this view further, Kelly & Eitling (2008) argue that in authoritarian regimes, networked communications can allow participants to get around state control. Unlike in South Africa where respondents mentioned that Facebook was one of the many communication platforms they used to disseminate valuable information to their supporters, their Zimbabwean counterparts highlighted that the site provided an "alternative outlet for information dissemination". This is consistent with research (Moyo, 2009; Manganga, 2012; Mare, 2014; see Chapter Two) that suggests that new media technologies allow marginalised publics to create a "parallel market of communication". It is clear from the foregoing that the concern from youth activists in South Africa is economic censorship whereas in Zimbabwe it's about political censorship of the media.

Figure 1 below shows the front page of the *Daily Catalyst*[97] circulated by the CiZC through Facebook messaging and email system to relay information that is not always accessible through traditional public media. Because the traditional media in Zimbabwe and South Africa are constituted differently—state-controlled and market-oriented respectively—Facebook pages and groups allowed youth activists to circumvent different gatekeeping practices. As Postmes & Brunsting (2002) observe, the internet allows activists to take control of the message they want presented publicly.

Figure 1: The CiZC's *Daily Catalyst*:

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[97] It's an email-based newsletter which updates members of the CiZC on internal activities, news and human rights alerts.

Source: CiZC Facebook Page

Most interviewees in South Africa noted that Facebook was one of the many communication platforms they used to disseminate valuable information to their supporters. For instance, one male respondent from PASSOP Afrika stated that: "Facebook has given us another method of communicating with our members, for our members to communicate with us, for media to follow us, for us to share relevant news". Respondents from the PASSOP Afrika also noted that the site was vital for timeous dissemination of information about deportations, asylum application processes and the plight of asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa. This also suggests that youth activists are using Facebook as a "public space of representation" (Melucci, 1996). For example, Box 3 urges asylum seekers who have been duped by South African officials at the department of home office in Cape Town to come forward and report

the issue. This was following the call by the new Minister of Home Affairs to report all cases of corruption and bribery related to the issuance of asylum papers in Cape Town.

Box 3: Notice to asylum seekers

> IMPORTANT NOTICE!!
> WE ARE HEREBY ADVISING EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN TO HOME AFFAIRS OFFICES AT FORESHORE, (CAPE TOWN), WITH AN EXPIRED ASYLUM PERMIT, AND WAS CHARGED A FINE OF R2500.00 TO CONTACT PASSOP OFFICES ON 021 762 0322 OR E MAIL: office@passop.co.za. AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THANK YOU!

Source: PASSOP Afrika Facebook page

Unlike in Zimbabwe, where Facebook was hailed as an alternative medium for circulating marginalised civic content, most respondents in South Africa saw the same platform as complementing rather than substituting traditional media platforms. Online observations reflected that youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa used Facebook to publish press statements, to make public announcements and to upload photographs of demonstrations and marches. It was also observed that respondents in both countries employed Facebook for providing information in a unidirectional fashion rather than multi-directional conversations. Online observations indicated that most Facebook postings were aimed at broadcasting content rather than interacting with existing fans and potential members. This corroborates McCorkindale's (2010) observation that social media users often under-exploit the opportunity for dialogical communication. Building on Duncan's (2014) argument, one can posit that this demonstrates that most activists and social movements have not internalised the interactive nature of social media.

Online observations also found that some respondents from the CiZC and R2K Campaign used the site live blogging of proceedings from public meetings (see Box 4). When asked why they used Facebook for live blogging of public meetings, one of the interviewees from the CiZC observed that it allowed them to route around limitations imposed by geographical dispersion of their supporters. He put it as follows: "you know mass migration has dislocated our population so through Facebook we are able to inform everyone about what's going on at the meeting even if they can't attend physically". Live commentary enabled geographically dispersed Facebook fans to "virtually" attend public meetings and also to participate through asking questions to the panellists. This entails that the Facebook administrator plays an

intermediary role between the fans or members and the panellists during a public meeting. He/she ensures that textual content and images from the public meetings are posted on the Facebook page while also relaying questions posted by fans or members on the page to the panellists. The administrator/moderator also informs the fans about feedback from the panellists. For instance, Box 4 below shows a micro-blog post by one of the youth activist during a public meeting addressed by three signatories of the GNU. The post is relevant because it shows how youth activists use Facebook to report on public meetings:

Box 4: Live commentary of a public meeting attended by panellists from the three major political parties in Zimbabwe

> **(Priscilla Misihairambwi) Mushonga-Misihairambwi** (MDC-N): tells Mutsvangwa that the liberation generation is not just from ZANU PF, it is about Zimbabwe. She states that she lost a brother in the war
> **(Douglas) Mwonzora** (MDC-T): states that the older people find it hard to believe that blacks can be clever and when something good and smart is done by the prodemocracy forces they assume that it must be the West.
> **(Christopher) Mutsvangwa** (ZANU-PF): says he knows ZIDERA and says that it wants Zimbabwe to reverse the land patterns in order for sanctions to be removed. Says Mwonzora shld nt guess what was fought for becoz the liberators knw. Says zim's economy is doin well and will be the fastest growing economy in the world. Says MDCs hav been coopted into ZANU-PF.

Source: Facebook wall of a youth from the CiZC: 3 March 2013

From the above post, it can be argued that "the storytelling infrastructure of platforms like Facebook…invites observers to tune into events they are physically removed from by imagining what these might feel like for people directly experiencing them" (Papacharissi, 2014: 4). Qualitative interviews with the CiZC Facebook page administrator indicated that they used the site to "crowd-source" questions and feedback from their geographically dispersed members during public meetings with invited guests. She explained:

> Facebook is aiding our work. As panellists are talking we are posting. Even yesterday when the [former] Prime Minister [Morgan Tsvangirai] was discussing we were posting and crowdsourcing questions from the general public. It allows us to reach inaccessible people within a very short space of time. It's more effective than traditional media because we don't have to wait for the news cycle to publish. We also source information from other people which we then post on our page.

It can be argued from the foregoing that the emphasis is on information dissemination rather than dialogical conversations, which means that the interactive potential of Facebook is under-utilised by respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This weakness can be attributed to limited knowledge in terms of social media activism as well as use of repertoires

of communication from other political contexts without localising them to suit their own contexts.

5.1.2 Facebook as a venue to contact and engage with political figures

Compared to their South African counterparts, most of the respondents in Zimbabwe reported using Facebook for contacting and accessing political figures. Unlike traditional political communication where citizens contacted politicians through face-to-face meetings, letters, public meetings and so forth (see Verba & Nie, 1972), in modern political communication young people use repertoires like mobile phone calls, emails and social media platforms for contacting political decision-makers (Stromer-Galley, 2014; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). As part of traditional political communication, citizens relied on sending letters to express deeply felt policy positions or to request assistance on personal matters related to public officials. Contacting, unlike voting, constitutes a direct attempt to influence political representatives and policy outcomes. From the responses, it was evident that respondents from both countries used Facebook to join fan pages administered by political parties and to comment on politicians' status updates. As Schwartz (2015) notes, this platform is a way to circumvent the traditional media gatekeepers, and for the mass media, it is an easy source to gather political statements and *vox populi*. The interactive nature of the Facebook page allows young people to engage with politicians through public comments.

It was established that compared to the Zimbabwean case, the South African respondents are less involved in interacting with politicians on Facebook largely due to the different characters of their electoral systems. Whereas South Africa uses the party list variant of the proportional representation (PR) system, Zimbabwe deploys a hybrid system of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) of the single-member plurity system (for the National Assembly) and the party list system (for The Senate) of the single-member plurity system (Matlosa, 2002; Hodzi, 2014a). Unlike the FPTP system used for the National Assembly in Zimbabwe where a country is divided into relatively equal constituencies from which only one representative is chosen to occupy a parliamentary seat on behalf of that constituency, in South Africa the whole country is considered as one single constituency for the election hence there is no need for the delimitation of election boundaries (Matlosa, 2002). Compared to the PR system, the FPTP is hailed for ensuring accountability of the MP to his/her constituency. In the former, there are no direct lines of political accountability between the MP and his/her constituency.

Unlike the constituency-based system for the National Assembly in Zimbabwe, South Africa uses an opinion-based electoral system. This means that in Zimbabwe candidates contesting election for a seat in the National Assembly stand in their own right as individuals and not as political parties even if their candidature is endorsed by parties. In contrast, in South Africa candidates do not contest elections as individuals, but as party candidates appearing on a prepared list (Matlosa, 2002). Compared to the South African system, the FPTP used for the National Assembly in Zimbabwe ensures that voters have a say in whether the MP retains (notwithstanding electoral fraud) his/her parliamentary seat rather than the party. This partly explains why some Zimbabwean politicians especially in urban constituencies are active on Facebook (and other social media platforms) in order to bypass the mainstream media, create a personal publicity channel and to increase their accessibility and public visibility amongst their constituents.

Although most respondents in Zimbabwe bemoaned the fact that very few politicians were active on Facebook, some of those who were very active on the site were from opposition parties. This is attributed to the fact that most of the MPs from the MDC-T and MDC-N are from urban areas. Another reason is that rural areas are considered no-go areas for the opposition parties. Compared to ZANU-PF, the opposition in Zimbabwe have relatively youthful politicians who are tech-savvy and active on social media platforms. Unlike the opposition, most ZANU-PF politicians are very old and digitally illiterate. Names of politicians from the opposition who are contactable through Facebook include: Job Sikhala (former MP for St Marys), Nelson Chamisa (MP for Kuwadzana), Jessie Majome (MP for Harare West), Douglas Mwonzora (MDC-T Secretary General), Jameson Timba (former MP for Mt Pleasant), David Coltart (MDC-N), Obert Gutu (MDC-T Spokesperson), Hon Tendai Biti (Leader of MDC Renewal), Cecil Zwizwai (MP for Gweru Central), Welshman Ncube (President of MDC-N), Arthur Mutambara (former President of MDC-N) and Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T President). Some of the respondents mentioned the names of ZANU-PF politicians whom they engaged on Facebook like Saviour Kasukuwere (Minister of Water, Environment and Climate Change), Prof Jonathan Moyo (Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services), Fortune Chasi (former deputy Minister of Justice) and Psychology Maziwisa (ZANU-PF deputy-director of information). It is important to bear in mind that although most of these politicians are active on Facebook in so far as they post and respond to their fans' questions regularly, some of them engage in vibrant online discussions with

citizens through chats, wall discussions and private messaging. For instance, Jessie Majome uses her Facebook page to inform, educate and interact with citizens in her constituency. This further affirms the view that social media has given the opportunity to candidates in party-centred systems to engage in personal promotion outside the auspices of their parties (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). More recent research (Miller et al., 2016) indicates that local politicians in South Italy construct long status updates to describe their achievements in the local council.

From the interviews, it was evident that respondents in Zimbabwe have taken advantage of the accessibility of politicians on Facebook. As one male respondent from the YFZ stated, "in a political system where politicians are generally inaccessible because of the bureaucracy involved, new media affords me the opportunity to speak directly with them". This echoes Booysen's (2015: 64) view that social media "help establish an interface with their [citizens] otherwise frequently absentee (elected) representatives". It also shows that youths in both countries are using Facebook to engage in "dutiful citizenship" (Bennett, 2008) practices. As invited spaces of participation, Facebook chat and messaging can be viewed as complementing the traditional methods of dropping of a complaint in the suggestion box. In South Africa, youth activists used Facebook to engage with mostly political parties rather than local representatives. Some of these respondents stressed that they used Facebook to comment and post their opinions on pages like the ANC, EFF, DA and Agang. This supports previous studies (Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013; Hyde-Clarke & Steenkamp, 2014) which indicated that young South Africans are utilising Facebook to engage with youth leagues of the largest political parties. Although some of the respondents noted that they reached out to politicians like Mmusi Maimane, Julius Malema and Andile Mngxitama, most of the interactions occurred on Facebook pages which are administered by political parties. Similar to Bosch's (2013) observation, this study established that despite liking Facebook pages of political parties and politicians, most respondents in South Africa did not interact with the content posted on these pages.

Respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa observed that they also employed Facebook to participate in political radio and television talk shows. These practices constitute what Vaccari, Chadwick & O'Laughlin (2015) call "second or dual screening". Second screening practices involved the use of new media technologies like mobile phones, laptops and ipads to comment on radio programmes, live television events and other mediated events. In both countries, respondents also reported that Facebook also enabled them to share and comment

on political news circulated by mainstream public and private newspapers. This is what one of the respondents from the CiZC had to say:

> … Facebook is now one of the few spaces where we as young people can interact directly with politicians. Take the example of Minister Kasukuwere, Nelson Chamisa and Minister Muzembi who are reachable on their Facebook pages, this allows us to engage directly with them. I like Minister Kasukuwere's approach where every Sunday between 6pm and 8pm, he makes it a point to engage with young people on issues that affect them. He invites us to post questions which he answers and then give us his private contact details if we have further questions.

The above response seems to confirm the view that Facebook allows citizens "to overcome the distance and alienation from the formal institutions of government" (Vromen, 2014: 23). As Coleman & Blumler (2009) argue, new media enable political decision-makers to create a sense of accessibility, which also allows them to foster some kind of "mutuality" through informal conversations online. At the time of this research, Jessie Majome, Job Sikhala, Obert Gutu and Saviour Kasukuwere were some of the few politicians on Facebook with highly interactive pages. For instance, Kasukuwere hosted a Facebook chat session every Sunday evening between 6pm and 8pm. As Box 4 illustrates, Minister Kasukuwere invited his Facebook fans to share their experiences and suggestions on ways of addressing the water crisis in the country. Some of these issue-driven chats focused on youth empowerment, climate change, waste management, and wildlife protection. As Lüders (2013) observes, this participatory turn gives citizens the opportunity to do politics in collaboration with their elected representatives. The problem with these invited spaces of participation, as Vromen (2007: 61) observes, is that they tend to "focus on…consultation with individuals rather than active processes of citizen ownership and collective forms of participation". This means that politicians retain the power to frame the political agenda thereby relegating their Facebook fans to an amorphous public with little control over the consultative rituals. Although the presence of political candidates on Facebook has a democratic potential, the interactive features are often rather *interaction-as-product* than *interaction-as-process* (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Arguably, the deployment of Facebook by political parties and politicians in Zimbabwe and South Africa exhibits a *facade of interaction* (Stromer-Galley, 2000), rather than a genuine attempt to use citizen interaction to further democratic process. As moderators or administrators of these invited spaces of mediated participation, politicians can choose to ignore unpalatable comments and block those who criticise their policies and viewpoints. As Dryzek (2000: 149) points out, "the most effective and insidious way to silence others in

politics is a refusal to listen". In the end, this "rhetoric of participation" and the presence of interactive Facebook pages "create merely a spectacle of interactivity" (Stromer-Galley, 2014: 5). Another problem with these invited spaces of participation is that they may also unintentionally lead to the systematic exclusion of a wide spectrum of people who are not connected to the internet or those fearful of expressing their deeply felt views online.

Box 5: Sunday chat on Facebook hosted by Minister Kasukuwere

> Water situation discussion
> Minister Kasukuwere: Good evening friends. The ministry is exploring a number of interventions to alleviate the water problems across the country. These can be divided into long term and short term interventions. I am hoping to get some feedback from you regarding these interventions with a view of strengthening the processes we have put in motion. An example is Bulawayo, which we have made a priority. What has been your experience? I am equally open to your suggestions and comments on how we can improve the water situation in this country. Let's chat. –SK-

Source: Saviour Kasukuwere Facebook page

5.1.3 Facebook as a vehicle for online fundraising and donations

Another important finding of this study is that Facebook is also used to mount fund-raising campaigns. Online observations established that some youths from PASSOP Afrika are using the social network site as a channel for soliciting donations and crowd-funding. Crowd-funding denotes the practice of funding a project or campaign by raising monetary contributions from a large number of people via the internet and other digital technologies (Prive, 2012). Writing about the American electoral campaigns, Chadwick & Howard (2010) suggest that online fundraising has become increasingly important because it encourages small donations from a multitude of sources. Online fundraising is also viewed as enabling for the mobilisation and recruitment of donors, who may be unreachable through offline methods (Reddick & Panomonov, 2013). Scholars (Wasserman, 2007; Chiumbu, 2015) observe that in South Africa websites are used to mobilise financial resources and develop a network of elite support. Bank details are placed on the website and users are able to donate money to the social movements. Although most respondents did not volunteer information on this aspect during interviews, it was observed that traditional vehicles (such as writing proposals to traditional donors, income-generating projects and voluntary donations) of fundraising remained instrumental. It must be noted that the internet is not a replacement tool for traditional fundraising. In developed countries like the UK, the #nomakeupselfie campaign raised more than £1 million ($1.6 million) for cancer charities through social media

platforms (Lewis, 2014). Research (Wasserman, 2007) in South Africa has also shown that the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) used the e-mail and the internet to solicit funds from supporters abroad. From online observations, it emerged that the administrator of the PASSOP Facebook page used the site to distribute the messages that encouraged people to contribute towards the holding of an LGBTI refugees' conference.

Box 6: Call for donations

> Passop Afrika will be holding an LGBTI Refugees' Conference next month in Observatory, Cape Town. The objective of the conference is to provide expert human rights training for LGBTI refugees who still live in vulnerable and volatile conditions in South Africa. Homophobia is a growing concern in South African society and we must take the first step in eradicating it. In order to hold a successful conference, we are asking people to contribute as much as they can for this good cause. Please click on the link below for more information and we would welcome any contribution, no matter how minimal. Our goal is to raise 9000 rands. So far we have raised 2,830 rands. Please make it happen. Thank you very much.

Source: PASSOP Afrika Facebook Page

Similar to the above example, some of the observed youths from the CiZC employed Facebook to solicit for donations in cash and kind during the Tokwe-Mukosi floods disaster in Masvingo South. The post below is illustrative of how the site was harnessed for fundraising purposes:

Box 7: call for donations

> To those who did not manage to attend the show, you can still bring your donations to our offices. ZimRights in Collaboration with The Women's Trust, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Bhaso and The Design House; held a successful Soap and Shirt Donation Winter Festival at Belgravia Sports Club. We would like to thank everyone who donated and took time out in this cold weather to come for out and do something for charity! ZimRights is still compiling how much was collected and sorting according to the age groups; we will keep you posted on the dates when the donations will be taken to Tokwe Mukosi! Thank you once again for being so kind and blessing the needy! We indeed are making a positive difference.

Source: Facebook wall post by a CiZC activist

It can be deduced from the foregoing that youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa have started to experiment with the utilisation of Facebook as a conduit for fundraising and online donations. Unlike other interviewees, it was established that youths from PASSOP Afrika in South Africa had embraced Facebook as a vehicle for small-scale donations. Miller et al (2016) highlight that when Islamic State (IS) occupied Sinjar in Kurdish Iraq, the Kurdish population in Mardin, Turkey used Facebook to show support and organise a collection of funds, clothes and goods to distribute to the Yezidi refugees who had arrived in the town. At the time of my research, it was not clear whether these online fundraising initiatives were

successful or not but it can be deduced that respondents are using Facebook to engage in alternative forms of political participation.

5.1.4 Facebook as a conduit for political mobilisation

Through online participant observation and in-depth interviews, it emerged that respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook as a crucial tool for mobilising their supporters. Mobilisation refers "to the process by which a passive collection of individuals in a society is transformed into an active group in the pursuit of political, social and ideological change" (Nedelman, 2007: 181). As Gallagher (2009) points out, online mobilisation is not only limited to raising awareness, but also provoking people to take action. It also emerged from interviews that respondents in Zimbabwe viewed Facebook as providing them with an alternative to traditional channels of political mobilisation. This, is because in Zimbabwe, it is almost impossible for activists to organise public rallies, door-to-door visits and street demonstrations. Facebook thus enabled them to evade legal restrictions associated with offline political mobilisation. As Gerbaudo (2012) points out, this explains the reason why corporate social media have been appropriated and turned into an expansive medium of mass mobilisation in authoritarian regimes. Unlike in Zimbabwe, most respondents in South Africa observed that Facebook constituted one among many channels through which they mobilised the public for collective action. As highlighted in Chapter Three, compared to the Zimbabwean context, South Africa has several channels for activists to mobilise supporters for direct political action.

Respondents in both countries indicated that given the diverse demographic backgrounds of their supporters they also used traditional channels like pamphlets, word of mouth, newsletters, telephone calls and door-to-door visits. This view chimes with Tilly's (1978) argument that "repertoires of collective action[98]" are fixed in a certain time and space and generally slow to innovate. As such, Facebook is utilised in Zimbabwe and South Africa in collaboration with other traditional campaign methods rather than as a substitute. In this "hybrid media system", Chadwick (2013) argues that older media logics increasingly operate in relations of interdependence with newer media logics. This is connected with the idea of

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[98] It refers to the distinctive constellations of tactics and strategies developed over time and used by protest groups to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups.

communicative ecology which acknowledges the multiple platforms of mediation which are deployed in any given context based on historical and localised needs (Foth & Hearn, 2007).

 From in-depth interviews, respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa articulated a number of reasons why they use Facebook for political mobilisation. Below are some of their views:

> We are alive to the reality that most youths do spend most of their time on social media, but they also shun conventional platforms for citizen participation like community meetings and rallies, equally they loathe reading civic education materials. Most parts of the country remain volatile, polarised and hostile to ordinary civic activities and in that atmosphere it takes the brave to fully participate. We realised that the majority of the youth feel safer to express themselves on social media. That's why we are using Facebook to mobilise youths to register and go out and cast their votes (male youth, CiZC, 2013).

> I am using Facebook to mobilise first time voters to go out and vote. Basically I am educating them about the importance of participating in political processes and decision making. This is because I believe that almost 90 percent of the youth are on Facebook. Facebook is helping us to reach out to people. It is faster and flexible. If you put it on Facebook it can spread faster (female youth, YFZ, 2013).

> As for us in the Vote No campaign, we are not putting our eggs in one basket. We have many youths on social media. The conventional media campaign of road shows, rallies and public meetings has been overtaken by events. Limited funding means that we have had to devise cheaper means of communication. We have Facebook page, a blog, and a Twitter account. We are also using cheaper methods of conscientising people like door to door campaign (male youth, NCA, 2013).

> Much of my use of Facebook is to promote social or political opinions or create awareness of certain causes and beliefs, and also to mobilise people to get involved in political action (male youth, R2K Campaign, 2013).

Online observations also revealed that most youths in Zimbabwe deployed Facebook to mobilise first time voters to register during the 2013 elections (see Box 7), to inspect the voters roll and to vote during the referendum and harmonised election (see Figure 2), and to boycott consumer products on political grounds (see Box 8). In terms of the social movement framing theory, this indicates that youth activists are using Facebook pages and groups for motivational framing. According to Benford & Snow (2000: 617), motivational framing is a "call to arms" of sorts—a "rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive". These findings suggest that Zimbabwean youths are using Facebook to mobilise others to engage in "dutiful" and "self-

actualising" forms of citizenship (Bennett, 2008). Unlike their Zimbabwean counterparts, South African reported that they utilised Facebook for digital advocacy and mobilising citizens to engage in protests and demonstrations. Online observations also indicated that Facebook event pages and calls for action were used to mobilise protestors in South Africa. Unlike in South Africa, respondents in Zimbabwe noted that they were afraid to use Facebook for "getting people on the streets" (Lievrouw, 2011). This shows that the discursive aspects of Facebook assumed greater importance than the action-oriented aspects in Zimbabwe when compared to the South African case.

Box 8: A call to action

> Bikita & Chiredzi, be the change you want to see in Zimbabwe, go and register to vote! Take no heed of any frustrations in the processes, continue going back until you are a registered voter!

Source: CiZC Facebook page, April 12, 2013

The above call to action as a "motivational frame" (Benford & Snow, 2000) urged first time young voters to be "the change you want to see in Zimbabwe" by actively taking part in the voter registration process.

Figure 2: A post urging the youth in Zimbabwe to register and vote:

Source: YFZ Facebook page: 29 December 2011

Box 9: Call to action for Zimbabweans to boycott Gushungo dairy products

> Zimbabwe can get their message across to President Mugabe that they need him to change or adjust the way he governs us by:
> 1. Boycott all Gushing Dairy products in supermarkets. Ensuring these is not bought.
> 2. Boycott all Gideon Gono (former Reserve Bank governor) Lunar chickens and eggs kusvika zvaora (until it's rotten).
> By hurting their capital we will force them to reconsider how they govern us.

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> toy toying in the streets is dangerous. Here I propose a peaceful but effective way of regulating the ruling elite's behaviour. Identify these peoples businesses esp those with the big agro-based one and simply not buy from them. This is the only way we will have to deal not only with government but also with huge corporates such as Econet and Innscor. People should also boycott that Metro bus in support of the Kombi (taxi) industry (still need to change their rogue behaviour though). The masses are poor but their collective small dollars if withheld can cause pandemonium in the deep pockets of the exploitative rich. We must withhold rates, rent, school fees etc until we see reforms in this country. After all this government and these capitalists have been withholding our salaries. Ndiwo maonero angu (this is how I see it). By the way I'm not an anarchist.

Source: Facebook wall post by a youth from the CiZC

In the post above, a youth from the CiZC is mobilising other Facebook users to express their grievances to President Mugabe through boycotting dairy products processed by Gushungo Holdings(Pvt) Ltd. Gushungo Holdings is a business empire owned by the First Lady Grace Mugabe with subsidiaries like Alpha Omega Dairy based in Zimbabwe. Alpha Omega produces a wide range of dairy which are sold in local supermarkets. Gushungo is Mugabe's clan name. Besides targeting products from Gushungo Holdings, the post also encourages citizens to boycott all chickens and eggs produced by Lunar Chickens (a company owned by Gideon Gono, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe). The post also urges citizens to boycott paying rents, council rates and school fees in order to force the government to implement the necessary political reforms. By urging people to take action, the above "motivational frame" also identifies the diagnostic[99] and prognostic[100] frames. In this case, the President Robert Mugabe and his family are identified as the cause of people's suffering in Zimbabwe and therefore the prognostic frame (solution) to boycott his business empire's products.

Unlike in Zimbabwe, respondents in South Africa used Facebook to mobilise people to attend physical demonstrations. This means that whereas most youths in Zimbabwe constructed motivational and diagnostic framing on their Facebook profiles, they were generally hesistant to engage in prognostic framing when compared to their South African counterparts. For instance, Figure 3 illustrates how the Facebook administrator from the R2K Campaign used the site to rally their members to attend the "Camp out for Openness" demonstration at the

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[99] Diagnostic framing deals primarily with "problem identification and attributions," wherein "injustice frames" (i.e., identifying victims and amplifying victimhood) constitute the main part of the framing process (Benford & Snow, 2000: 615). Diagnostic framing also pinpoints the "sources of causality, blame and culpable agents" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 616).
[100] Prognostic framing involves the "articulation of a proposed solution to the problem or at least a plan of attack and the strategies for carrying out the plan" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 617).

South African Parliament in Cape Town. The demonstration was organised to put pressure on the South African parliament to stop passing the Secrecy Bill in November 2012.

Figure 3: A call for action

Source: R2K Campaign Facebook page

Respondents in Zimbabwe indicated that they had internalised a set of rules which influences what they can share publicly, what they can share on fake profiles and what they can read but not share at all. This is very important because there have been criminal repercussions where an ordinary citizen (Vikazi Mavhudzi) was arrested for posting content on a Facebook page administered by MDC-T President Morgan Tsvangirai (see Chapter Two). Instead of relaxing laws governing the use of new media, the ZANU-PF government has continued to pass more statutory instruments governing the use of mobile phones (see Chapter Two) and also arrested a number of people suspected to be running the infamous Baba Jukwa Facebook page. As such, the fear and threats of state communication surveillance has forced youth activists to change their communication and mobilisation practices. As one male respondent from the CiZC said, "it's a big risk to use your own Facebook page to mobilise for demonstrations in this country because in a short time the intelligence officers would have pounced on you or barricaded your offices". Another female youth from the same movement added that "people are afraid to express their genuine feelings online because we have a dictatorial government". These responses resonate with Freedom House's (2013) report

which suggests that "the lack of anonymity…and fear of repercussions [in Zimbabwe] limit politically oriented statements, which can be traced back to those expressing them". Self-censorship in the Zimbabwean context demonstrates that some of the youth activists have internalised the disciplinary behaviour of the "panopticon" society (Foucault, 1995). Contrary to Gladwell's (2010) assertion that online social networks demand low risk participation, it is clear from the foregoing responses that Facebook activism in Zimbabwe also demands high risk participation. Some of the respondents in Zimbabwe mentioned that they use fake accounts and pseudonyms. This shows that the threat of surveillance has changed people's communication practices on Facebook. Respondents in Zimbabwe are engaging in everyday forms of surveillance resistance. Resistance to surveillance refers to "any active behaviour or interest groups that oppose the collection and processing of personal data, either through the micro-practices of everyday resistance to defeat a given application or through political challenges to wider power relations contest the surveillance regime per se" (Coleman & McCahill, 2010: 147). Besides indicating respondents in Zimbabwe's "condition of being subaltern and living in fear" (Mhlanga & Mpofu, 2014), the use of pseudonyms highlights the creative ways in which young people are circumnavigating the risks associated with Facebook's real name policy. As Miller et al., (2016) point out, state surveillance is a powerful force that has influenced how the semi-public spaces of social media are used in China and Turkey.

Concern for social relations has also prevented some youth activists in Zimbabwe from disagreeing over, discussing or expressing political opinions, especially with regard to national politics. Because of the "strong-tie" nature of Facebook profile conversations, some of the respondents were concerned with maintaining or strengthening relations with their social media contacts, and did not want to risk damaging friendships or relationships with extended family or work colleagues. Most of the respondents felt that they are being watched and under constant surveillance. As Miller et al., (2016) aptly put it, social media leads to an interweaving of the social and political fabric, to the extent that state surveillance overlaps with – and is reinforced by – the social surveillance of friends, acquaintances or family members. Therefore Facebook profiles, pages and groups were not viewed as appropriate platforms for discussing politics and criticising the national government. Instead they viewed "private" spaces such as WhatsApp chat, emails, Facebook messaging system and Twitter's direct message system as places of robust and frank political discussions. Like in China and

Turkey (see Miller eat al., 2016), the fear of communication surveillance and state harassment this has led to a suppression of open political discussion online, just like it is repressed offline.

5.1.5 Facebook as a recruiting ground for potential supporters

The findings also reflected that youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa are using Facebook to recruit supporters and sympathisers to take part in offline and online political action such as demonstrations, marches, petitions and letter writing campaigns. Most respondents in both case nations noted that they deployed Facebook as a means of virtual recruitment. Virtual recruitment entails the act of signing up to a campaign through liking or joining a Facebook group or fan page. The purpose of virtual recruitment is to stay in touch with people that supports the campaign and start them on the path to becoming donors and volunteers. Social networks are also effective methods for harnessing the power of these and other new volunteers and recruiting them to existing movements (Gonzalez-Bailon et al, 2011). Respondents in Zimbabwe observed that Facebook allowed them to bypass limitations imposed on offline political recruitment by the state and repressive legislation. Some of the respondents explained that "Facebook allows us to reach out to first time voters especially in this environment where civic education and offline canvassing has been severely curtailed by the ZANU-PF government". For respondents in South Africa, Facebook provided an avenue of access to users who would otherwise not be reached through traditional recruitment strategies. As one of the female respondents from the R2K Campaign noted, "Facebook is another platform where we can recruit more people who identify with our cause". This confirms earlier research (Gerbaudo, 2012; Harvey, 2014) that indicated that social media platforms are used as "recruitment booths" to conquer new members beyond the confines of the immediate offline activist community. As Gerbaudo (2012) observes, activists use Facebook because they know that it is on this media platform that they can find people who are not already within activist circles.

Online observations and interviews with page and group administrators indicated that movements with websites and blogs (like the CiZC, YFZ, PASSOP Afrika and R2K Campaign) in Zimbabwe and South Africa used widgets[101] as a strategy of building an online

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[101] This refers to a stand-alone application that can be embedded into third party sites by any user on a page where they have rights of authorship, e.g. a profile on a social media site.

constituency. This point also supports Gerbaudo's (2013) observation that modern social movements have a majoritarian orientation which is evident on Facebook where activists tend to recommend their friends to like and join particular groups. This desire to build a huge online membership base is also evident in the way the administrator of the PASSOP Afrika page encouraged Facebook users to "like" their page (see box 9).

Box 10: A call to like PASSOP page

To support PASSOP, please like our Page! Click the link then click the like button. Thank you.
Like Page

Source: Passop Afrika Facebook page: October 31, 2011

The call to support above demonstrates that the PASSOP Afrika is focused on growing their audience on Facebook and Twitter so as to maximise their reach and public visibility. Focusing on Facebook profiles, Miller et al., (2016) argue that its strength is that relationships are based on strong ties but also its weakness is that users tend to avoid commenting on posts and posting controversial content which can lead to antagonisms among friends and relatives. Although Facebook membership on groups and fan pages are sometimes characterised by "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1972), it is important to highlight that the relationship between weak and strong ties is one of complementarity and support, not one of opposition. For instance, weak ties can become strong ties when there is shared conviction and experience. As Tufecki (2013) opines, large pools of weaker ties are crucial for the building of robust networks of stronger ties. This argument has resonances with the social penetration theory which proposes that, as relationships develop, interpersonal communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more intimate ones (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Although the number of participants on a Facebook group or page can be used as a measure of mass support for a cause, it should be noted that all of them cannot be expected to participate in off-line activities. This is because people join Facebook pages for a myriad of reasons. As one female fan on the NCA Facebook page noted: "Liking u does not mean am with u, just want to see hw u think n yr arguments nothing more". Administrators of Facebook groups and fan pages studied here urged their members or fans to invite their

friends and local networks to like or join their groups and fan pages. The following status update is instructive:

Box 11: Status update on the YFZ page

> Have you told someone about Youth Forum? Help us reach more than 60% of our young people in Zimbabwe by recruiting new members for the Forum

Source: YFZ Facebook page

The above post is instructive because it demonstrates the majoritarian orientation of the YFZ on Facebook. Its quest is to reach out to more than 60% of young people in Zimbabwe through virtual recruitment. As Naughton (2011) argues, social media empowers activists to easily connect while sympathisers can simply join in. It allows others to watch and participate in the real-life online activities.

5.1.6 Facebook as a source of political and social news and information

Unlike in South Africa, most respondents in Zimbabwe stated that Facebook constituted an important conduit for gathering solicited and unsolicited alternative political and social news and information. This can be explained by the fact that media systems in the two countries exhibit significant differences (see Chapter Two). Compared to Zimbabwe, South Africa has a vibrant public and private media space characterised by freedom of expression and investigative journalism, although it serves mostly an urban elite (Wasserman, 2010). Unlike Zimbabwe, it also boasted a robust media and a culture of free and open debate. The country also has a diverse community media sector, although it is largely under-funded, which compromises its independence from major vested interests (Duncan, 2010). In comparison to South Africa, Zimbabwe has a polarised public and private media environment riddled with both state propaganda and corporate censorship. As articulated in Chapter Two, the only other options for alternative political viewpoints in Zimbabwe are from the private and diasporic media. Because access to political information in Zimbabwe is severely constricted, one of the male youths from the NCA described Facebook as a "default source of alternative political information".

From the findings, Facebook constitutes an important source for alternative news. This in part corroborates studies (Moyo, 2009; Alexander, 2006) which suggest that the use of new media technologies in Zimbabwe is a result of the stifling media regulatory environment which

limits the free circulation of information thus forcing people to depend on alternative sources of information. Contrary to Zimbabwe, a few respondents in South Africa pointed out that they employed Facebook to solicit political information. Those who indicated that they used Facebook to gather political news information did that on fan pages administered by political parties and mainstream news organisations. Most of the respondents in South Africa reported that traditional media (like television, radio and newspapers) remained their first port of call for political information. This is consistent with research (SANPAD, 2013; Booysen, 2015) that indicates that young South Africans still rely on traditional media for hard political news.

Respondents in Zimbabwe observed that they utilised Facebook to watch political videos, read political news displayed on their newsfeeds and fan pages administered by citizen journalists and mainstream news organisations. At the time of writing, some of the "venues of magnetic gatherings or trending places" (Gerbaudo, 2012) on Facebook in Zimbabwe included: Baba Jukwa (reactivated in 2015 after going offline in 2014), Nehanda Radio, Amai Jukwa (page closed), MuGrade Seven (page closed), Hon Tendai Biti (now inactive), Job Sikhala, Prof Jonathan Moyo, Psychology Maziwisa and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai. It is important to highlight that although all of these pages were once popular but some of them have been closed down due to fear of political persecution. For instance, the witch-hunt by the state against the administrators of the Baba Jukwa led to the closure of several Facebook pages whilst the Hon Tendai Biti page became inactive following the split between the MDC-T and MDC-Renewal in 2013. Baba Jukwa Facebook page generated what Gerbaudo (2016: 255) calls "moments of digital enthuasism". This refers to necessarily transient phases of intense, positive emotional mood emerging in political online conversations in proximity to major event (Gerbaudo, 2016) (for instance, the 2013 harmonised election in Zimbabwe).

Some of the afore-mentioned Facebook pages were popular because they provided perspectives often ignored by the mainstream public and private media for fear of victimisation. While some of these Facebook pages reproduced content from the mainstream media, others like the infamous Baba Jukwa were able to publish sensitive political information "shunned by the traditional media because of the restrictive legal environment which imposes stiff penalties for "falsehoods" or libellous stories" (Chari, 2013: 192). As one male youth from the YFZ observed:

The mainstream media is so polarised that you cannot make head or tale about what is really happening in the country. But Facebook is an important conduit through which we receive valuable political news updates via the news feed and recommendations from friends. Pages like Baba Jukwa are also instrumental for information and updates, to retrieve links to check their voter registration status and to write comments that encourage each other to vote.

The foregoing response chimes with Mukhongo's (2015) view that the contribution of social media to Sub-Saharan Africa has been its ability to provide information and tools to groups that otherwise would not have been able to access the political information. A point needs to be made, however, that some of the respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa bemoaned the increasing usage of Facebook to peddle misinformation, propaganda and outright falsehoods. For instance, respondents in both countries cited incidences where Facebook was used to misinform citizens about the deaths of Nelson Mandela (in South Africa) and the late Vice-President John Nkomo (in Zimbabwe).

5.1.7 Facebook as an advertising platform for political and social events

From online participant observation, it was established that respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa deployed Facebook as an advertising platform. They deployed the site for announcing radio and television talk show appearances, public meetings, workshops, marches and demonstrations. Some of the respondents interviewed in both countries indicated that Facebook was an invaluable platform for broadcasting and viral advertising of public events. Porter & Golan (2006: 33) define viral advertising as "unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others". Compared to Zimbabwe, youths from the three social movements in South Africa created Facebook events[102] as a way of cutting down on costs associated with traditional political advertising in the mainstream media. It is important to highlight that "free" advertising on Facebook is mainly targeted at users of the site although some of the posts' reach and visibility are often amplified beyond the virtual sphere (through the word of mouth). As Mattoni (2009: 201) states that, "due to the relatively low costs of ICTs, those social movement networks, lacking material resources, gain a powerful tool to coordinate [and publicise] their offline and online collective actions".

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[102]On Facebook, users may create an event page and invite people they know to participate. People who have confirmed that they will participate in an event will then get reminders about this on their Facebook homepage.

Respondents in both countries also mentioned that apart from Facebook, they also utilised traditional forms of advertising, like door-to-door canvassing, pamphlets distribution, sticking of posters on lamp posts and word of mouth. Because the public media in Zimbabwe "often refuses to publish adverts that it deems too overtly "political" or human rights related" (Atwood, 2010: 92), some of the respondents indicated that they also used internal mailing lists, WhatsApp groups and Kubatana.net mailing list to spread the word about their upcoming events and activities. As one male youth from the NCA explained, "Facebook offers a relatively inexpensive option to advertise our activities because at the moment our traditional donors have deserted us. It allows us to advertise public meetings like we will be in Kariba. Journalists are also enquiring about our public events based on the information we are advertising on Facebook". Another male respondent from the CiZC added, "I use Facebook to announce public meetings which are held in Kwekwe and surrounding areas". In South Africa, one respondent from the UPM equated Facebook to a billboard, noting that "just like a billboard you can publicise about your marches and demonstrations". However most of the respondents were oblivious of the fact that Facebook regulated the visibility and reach of a particular post through tinkering with its EdgeRank algorithm system (see section 5.2.1). Most of them tended to view the platform as affording them access to an infinite audience.
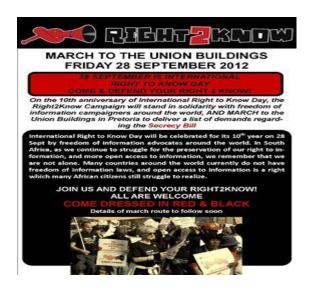
Compared to South African youths who created Facebook event pages, most of those observed in Zimbabwe uploaded and "shared" electronic copies of posters, pamphlets and banners on their walls, profile and cover pictures (see Box 11). Most of the status updates were accompanied by calls for action like "please share with others and attend". Only the R2K Campaign in South Africa used Facebook to share electronic copies of their posters (see Box 12). Box 12 invites R2K Campaigners to attend the right to march at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa. It is important to highlight that the difference in how Zimbabwean and South African activists used the Facebook advertising function can be attributed to disparities in social media skills.

Box 12: An advert for a political event

> You are being invited to a youth public discussion forum on youth perspective on corruption @ GOWERO HSE, ZEWU offices on Friday from 2-4pm. Thus corner Mbuya Nehanda and Nkwame Nkrumah.

Source: YFZ Facebook page: 23 August 2013

Box 13: A call for a march

Source: R2K Campaign Facebook page: 21 September 2012

I also observed that several respondents in Zimbabwe were tagging[103] their friends as a strategy of sharing (RSVPing) and distributing pamphlets and posters. Some of them posted their advertisements on Facebook groups and pages administered by journalists and media advocacy groups like Newsroom Lingo, MISA-Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) to increase the reach and coverage of their public events. Almost all the interviewed page administrators in Zimbabwe and South Africa reported that they did not promote or boost their Facebook posts to increase reach and visibility. This is largely because promotion or boosting of posts requires movements to pay Facebook for increased publicity on the site. One male youth from the CiZC shared the following advert on his wall:

Figure 4: Notice of a public meeting

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[103] Tagging refers to a link (a photo or a status update) which is created when Facebook users tag someone on their profile.

Source: Facebook wall post: 3 June 2013

The significance of the above post lies in the fact that unlike in South Africa where respondents utilised the Facebook advertising function, their Zimbabwean counterparts circulated adverts through sharing and reposting on their individual profiles. For example, Figure 4 illustrates a poster about an upcoming public meeting to discuss the issue of obscene salaries, tenderpreneurship and underhand dealings in the public sector. This was in the wake of revelations that some public officials in government were unduly benefitting from tenders and awarding themselves hefty salaries.

5.1.8 Facebook as a forum for everyday political talk

Online observations and qualitative interviews indicated that youths in both countries utilised Facebook as a forum for everyday political talk. Kim & Kim (2008: 53) define everyday political talk as "non-purposive, informal, casual, and spontaneous political conversation voluntarily carried out by free [young] citizens, without being constrained by formal procedural rules and pre-determined agenda". Unlike in South Africa, Zimbabwean respondents deployed Facebook as a way of circumventing political and legal restrictions imposed on freedom of expression by the ZANU-PF regime. As one male respondent from the YFZ remarked: "things that cannot be discussed in physical spaces for fear of political victimisation can now be deliberated on Facebook groups and private messages[104]". Another male youth from the NCA added that: "in view of the restrictions on access to information and freedom of speech digital platforms like Facebook have opened up spaces for debate and discussion". This view dovetails with Fraser's (1997: 81) postulation that marginalised groups need "venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups [or else they would be] less able than otherwise to articulate and defend their interests in the comprehensive public sphere. They would be less able than otherwise to expose modes of deliberation that mask domination by absorbing the less powerful into a false "we" that reflects the more powerful".

Besides expanding the discursive arena, Facebook has also reinvigorated what De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh & Brinkman (2009) call the "new talking drum of everyday Africa". These discussions on Facebook constitute "virtual extensions of what used to be physically localised

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[104] The messages function is a tool for Facebook users to send direct messages to each other. This is mostly used for individual communication and for smaller groups.

coffeehouses, salons, town-level meetings" (Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013: 177). As such, they represent the digitisation of "pavement radio" (Moyo, 2009; Walton, 2014) in Zimbabwe and South Africa. One male respondent from the NCA in Zimbabwe sums it up thus: "I canvass for my political views and ideas on Facebook through my wall with over 1000 friends. Things we used to discuss over a glass of wine can now be digested via chat or the inbox". As will be explained further below, youth activists pointed out that they resorted to chat and inboxing when discussing organisational and political (like the private life and health status of the president) issues in Zimbabwe. Similar views were expressed by interviewees in South Africa when they indicated that: "Facebook is a space for discussion and sharing of notes with comrades on political developments".

Topics that received most attention on Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe related to the Global Political Agreement (GPA) (see Chapters One and Three for context on these issues) such as:

- the outstanding issues of the GPA (such as the need for security, electoral and media reforms, repealing of repressive laws and institutional reform of the public service sector),
- Voting rights of people in the diaspora,
- Constitutional making process (referendum and passage of the new charter in 2013),
- The distribution of the youth fund by the Zimbabwe Youth Council,
- The performance of major political parties (ZANU-PF, MDC-T and MDC-N) during the GNU era,
- The role of youth in the 2013 election process
- The 2013 harmonised election campaign process and the results.

In South Africa, the most prominent topics (see Chapters One and Three for context on these issues) on the R2K Campaign, PASSOP Afrika and UPM Facebook pages and groups were:

- the tabling of the Secrecy Bill,
- the public consultation process leading to the Secrecy Bill's debate in parliament,
- the Marikana massacre,

- xenophobic attacks against African immigrants,
- The Youth Wage Subsidy discussions in parliament
- The Nkandla Report (see Chapter Eight for more details)

Generally there were a few similarities in the nature of political and social issues that were picked up for discussion by Facebook pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa. During the run-up to the July 2013 election in Zimbabwe, issues like the implementation of GNU reforms, voter registration, state sponsored violence and the funding for the plebiscite also generated "moments of digital enthusiasm" (Gerbaudo, 2016). The interaction between Facebook admins and users took the form of an ascending spiral of collective emotional activation culminating in impressive spikes of user engagement (Gerbaudo, 2016: 255). Similarities were discernible in terms of issues dealing with the state of the economy, corruption by government officials, lobbying against repressive laws (like POSA, AIPPA and ICA in Zimbabwe and the Secrecy Bill and National Key Point Act in South Africa as discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three) and youth unemployment. Significant differences were also observable in the sense that whereas in Zimbabwe discussions on Facebook touched on the need for reforms of the entire political system, seismic changes in the economic policies, dismantling of dictatorial tendencies of ZANU-PF and electoral violence, in South Africa the talk centred on deepening government accountability, safeguarding political and social rights of citizens and immigrants as well as the rights of Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual Transgender (LBGTI) communities.

Significant gaps and silences were also observable in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. For instance, in Zimbabwe the NCA Facebook page only focused on the negative aspects of the new charter thereby downplaying the positive issues. Whilst there was a critique of the government's Look East Policy[105], there was no thorough-going debate about the foreign direct investment. Dictatorial tendencies within the MDC-T received little engagement when compared to the disproportionate focus on ZANU-PF. Another silence was the lack of engagement with the capitalist economic system. It was important for these organisations to engage with these issues because they form part and parcel of the Zimbabwean crisis besides those attributable to the governance and land questions (see Chapter Three). In South Africa,

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[105] This policy aimed to expand bilateral and trade relations and offer priority to investors from not just China but Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, India, and Russia, has focused increasingly on China, to the exclusion of other countries.

there was silence on the darker side of self-regulation on the media. The UPM Facebook page didn't adequately unpack the problems associated with neoliberal economics and the issue of labour broking in South Africa. These are crucial issues especially in South Africa where self-regulation has been accused of lacking the necessary teeth to effect sanctions on journalists who go over the board and the issue of labour broking is the core of the labour crisis which has manifested itself in wildcat strikes.

As Graham & Harju (2011: 22) notes, political talk takes places when "a participant makes a connection from a particular experience, issue or topic in general society, which stimulates reflection and a response". Most of the issues discussed on Facebook ranged from public to private concerns. Some of the everyday issues that were discussed related to sexual and gender identities as well as gender-based violence in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This further reinforces Fraser's (1990: 71) view that what counts as a public issue should be decided through discursive contestation which means "no topics should be ruled off limits in advance of such contestation". Below are some of the everyday political discussions hosted on Facebook walls by a respondent from the CiZC:

Box 14: Everyday political talk

QUESTION OF THE DAY: ZANU PF WILL WIN THE ELECTIONS?
Comment: Mugabe is afraid of Chiwenga (Army General) and Mnangagwa (now Vice-President) for your own information. How can a sane person vote for a person who is afraid of his so called comrades? Wake up Zanu PF. NYIKA YAORA IYI (This country is rotten). CHINESE LOOTING EVERYWHERE AND THE ONLY PEOPLE BENEFITTING ARE THE LIKES OF OBERT Mpofu. Pathetic Zanu PF.
Comment: Muchauraya vanhu mukaneta (You can kill until you are tired) and ngozi dzichakuteverai but you will not change the inevitable. Zanu PF is rotten to the core and it's a party of selfish and brutal criminals.
Comment: I will never vote for a Malawian bustard called Robert Matibili 'Mugabe'. His constituency should be in Malawi not in Zimbabwe. I have put Mugabe in quotation marks because hakuna (there is no) Mugabe weGushungo. The real Mugabes come from Masvingo kwete dhongi raparadza nyika iri. Vanhu vaZanu PF kupusa kunge makapfuhirwa nemboko iyi. Stupid.
Comment: If Zimbabwe is truly independent, why do you fear the opposition so much? MDC is made up of Zimbabweans and to treat it as a puppet of the west is simply stupid especially coming from a party which to all intends and purposes is a Chinese appendage. Zanu PF needs to be reminded that we did not fight a war so that we enrich Chinese people.

Source: Facebook wall post

From the above wall post, it is clear that youths in Zimbabwe are using the platform to deliberate on political issues like elections. One of the posters disputes Mugabe's Zimbabwean ancestry suggesting that he is from Malawi and therefore unfit to rule the country. The xenophobic tinge expressed on the above post suggests that Facebook is not only a medium for progressive political discussion, but also reactionary views. Although Facebook provides citizens with an informal space where they can interact among themselves, it can also be argued that it amplifies ethnic and tribal tensions. In polarised societies like Zimbabwe, Facebook also accentuates the phenomenon known as "balkanisation" where small groups of people who share similar political beliefs and ideas become hostile to groups with antithetical ideas.

Box 15 also shows one respondent from the UPM hosting a vibrant discussion about community programmes in Grahamstown.

Box 15: Suggestions for community programmes in Grahamstown

Youth of Makana we are looking for programmes that u would like to suggest for us this festive season....

Comment: The use of Dakawa Arts and Cultural Centre as a venue for hosting Music Shows, Stand Up Comedy, Drama and Spoken Word, Socio-Political Documentaries during the festive season.

Comment: A serious sports tournament with a serious prize for the Makana youth clubs. A youth concert/competition for the youth gifted in the performance arts which will be judged by a well-known national performing artist, this popular artist will then have to perform in closing...Both events should have free entry for the youth of Makana.

Comment: an urgent programme is the assistance of matriculants in applying to various higher institution of learning... because this tendency of applying late after seeing that you have done well is definitely not assisting the child of the working class.

Source: Facebook wall post

From the above post, it can be concluded that some of the discussions on Facebook elicit rational-critical debate as envisaged by Habermas (1989). For instance, participants on the above post made suggestions about programmes they wanted to see implemented in Grahamstown. Suggestions included holding workshops for the youth on fundraising, sports tournament, assisting matriculants to access tertiary education and hosting performance arts concerts.

In view of Boxes 14 and 15, it is arguable that "irrespective of the questions of access, there is a serious political conversation between young [Zimbabweans and] South Africans going online" (Ndlovu & Mbenga, 2013: 181). In both countries, it was found that there is an inner circle that always posts and comments on Facebook. It was also established that highly active activists in offline spaces are also heavily involved in initiating online political conversations. These constitute what Dennis (2015) describes as "civic instigators" and "contributors" instrumental in kick-starting and sustaining online conversations (see Chapter Seven for a detailed explanation). Mostly the discussions are predominantly made up of males in all the Facebook groups and pages observed which is reflective of the patriarchal nature of politics in both countries. Everyday political discussions amongst mostly middle class and urban citizens in both countries suggest that young people are actively interested in and discuss political issues with friends in online spaces (see Mattes & Richmond, 2014). These online conversations promoted what O'Donnell (1986) calls "horizontal voice" where youths interact with their friends and fellow group members. As O'Donnell (1986) observes, this kind of horizontal voice is seen as a necessary precondition for the formation of collective identity and the formulation of "collective vertical voice". These discussions are more widespread on Zimbabwean Facebook pages compared to the South African case. As Chapter Seven will demonstrate, this study also found that everyday political discussions are dominated by a small group of opinion leaders. This illustrates that an inner circle of Facebook users always post and comment, whilst most of the fans and followers are relegated to roles such as lurkers and "likers". As boyd (2014: 173) writes, these discussions which occur in silos reinforce homophilous social networks rather the effective use of technology to connect across lines of difference.

To circumvent surveillance and monitoring by state security agents, some of the respondents in Zimbabwe acknowledged using Facebook chat, private messaging and video calling to engage in everyday political talk. Unlike in South Africa, the Zimbabwean experience suggests that in repressive contexts Facebook facilitates "authoritarian deliberation[106]" (He, 2006) rather than democratic deliberation. Such online public deliberation is authoritarian because, similar to offline practice, the state actively shapes and prescribes the boundaries of

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[106] The term "authoritarian deliberation" gained currency when it was used to describe the Chinese public sphere, which does provide the illusion of new models of governance without having any significant impact on the regime itself.

political discourse in the Zimbabwean cyberspace (see Chapter Seven). The term also acknowledges the limited public discussion and debate in authoritarian regimes. The fear of overstepping boundaries of public speech shapes the nature and content of everyday political discussions on Facebook in Zimbabwe (see Chapter Seven). On Facebook pages and groups, where weak-tie relationships are based on following, liking and membership, interviewees in Zimbabwe indicated that they could opt out of the conversation or group when they feel that the issues being discussed put them in danger by association, without necessarily causing irreparable damage to their social relationships. The discussions are however deliberative in the sense that argumentation and reasoning are used by citizens to discuss collective problems (see Box 14).

In comparison to South Africa, interviewees in Zimbabwe mentioned that they: "prefer to discuss political issues with people they already know from offline settings rather than with total strangers". As one female youth from the CiZC put it: "people don't trust each other even activists treat each other with suspicion on Facebook". This corresponds with boyd's (2014: 166) observation that "although the technology makes it possible in principle to socialise with anyone online, in practice, youth connect to the people that they know and with whom they have the most in common". Another male respondent from the YFZ noted: "I can move the discussion to the inbox if I feel it's very sensitive to be discussed on my wall". These responses are in line with Tarrow's (1998) postulation that it is difficult to construct a sense of trust online.

In contrast with Zimbabwe where fear of political persecution has had a "chilling effect" on political conversations on Facebook, in South Africa the situation was quite different. The findings in Zimbabwe confirm Miller's et al., (2016) study in Turkey where social media generally reflected the strategies of political debate and silence that were developed in the offline world. As Miller et al (2016) suggest, there are a variety of reasons why offline political debate may not be reproduced online. These include: feelings of indifference, disillusionment or apathy (see Dahlgren, 2009; Chapter Two), or not wanting to be seen by others as "being political". Most of the respondents in South Africa observed that they were free to discuss political issues without resorting to self-censorship. However some of the interviewees from the PASSOP Afrika acknowledged that they were afraid to discuss about corruption and ill-treatment at the hands of public officials at the department of home affairs.

This was because some of them felt that openly discussing such issues on Facebook could hamper their chances of securing asylum and refugee permits.

It is clear from the above that the usage of Facebook as a platform for everyday political talk is influenced by the broader political opportunity structure, communication surveillance and concern with social relations. This explains why political participation generally takes different forms on social media. The fear of communication surveillance and concern with social relations makes social media a conservative and a disempowering space in an authoritarian context. The Zimbabwean field site has shown that compared to South Africa, Facebook discussions are characterised by the "spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), this phenomenon describe people's fear that politics might lead to them becoming isolated or ostracised.

5.1.9 Facebook as a venue of activism and protest

As outlined in Chapter Four (see section 4.4.1), based on a two-year online participant observation this study established that Facebook was also creatively used by respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa as a means of action in itself. This dovetails with Lievrouw's (2011) argument that social media platforms serve as the "field" of activism itself. For Zimbabwean respondents, Facebook allowed them to advance political causes that are difficult to undertake in physical spaces. As intimated earlier, it also enabled them to circumvent limitations imposed on street demonstrations by the state. For them, Facebook constituted an indispensable "digital repertoire of electronic contention" (Costanza-Chock, 2003; Earl & Kimport, 2011). Online observations also revealed that compared to their counterparts in South Africa, respondents in Zimbabwe were more likely to deploy Facebook to engage in what Micheletti (2003) calls "individualised collective action[107]". These online activities include: changing one's profile picture, creating a Facebook page related to a social movement issue, letter writing, blogging about a social movement issue and posting a call to action on one's Facebook wall urging others to boycott certain products on political reasons (Cohen & Kahne, 2012). As Postmes (2002: 291) observes, these individual forms of collective action can be thought of as collective in nature when they are intended as a means

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[107]This refers to the practice of responsibility-taking through the creation of everyday settings on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems which they believe is affecting what they identify as the good life (Michelleti, 2003).

of achieving a collective outcome. Most of these political activities are "more ad-hoc, less dependent on traditional organisations and on elites mobilising their standing cadres of supporters" (Dahlgren, 2009: 33). These individualised collective actions share similarities with Scott's (1990) notion of "everyday forms of resistance" which are enacted in spaces of relative autonomy. Facebook is, therefore, used to engage in what Vegh (2003) describes as "internet-enhanced activism". This entails its utilisation to "enhance the traditional advocacy techniques, as an additional communication channel, by raising awareness beyond the scope possible before the internet" (Vegh, 2003:72).

As mentioned earlier, it was found that South African youths deployed Facebook to augment traditional forms of direct action like rallies, gatherings, marches, demonstrations, and collection of signatures in Grahamstown, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. As one female youth from the R2K Campaign noted: "my political involvement in Facebook activism is an extension of what I do offline". They also used Facebook to rally people to take part in all night vigils and to circulate online petitions. Whilst interviewees in South Africa viewed Facebook as a tool for supplementing traditional forms of activism, those in Zimbabwe saw it as space for new forms of online protest activities. In the same vein, Fenton (2006: 233) argues that virtual computer-mediated ties will not replace traditional forms of protest, such as rallies and demonstrations but may complement them in terms of building collective identity and reinforcing solidarity. In South Africa, some of the respondents used Facebook to create online modes of existing off-line protest actions. Below (Box 16) is a call for a demonstration against xenophobia on the PASSOP Afrika Facebook page aimed at mobilising people to put pressure on the South African parliament to act on the issue.

Box 16: Call for a demonstration

> PASSOP AFRIKA
> EMERGENCY CALL 4 A DEMONSTRATION AGAINST XENOPHOBIA Lets stand together for African Unity!
> June 30, 2012: There's going to be a solidarity march to parliament, organised by the Somali Association of South Africa - Tomorrow Friday June 7. 2012
> Everyone's gathering at Keizergracht (CPUT) at 10AM
> Let's all say No to Xenophobia

Source: PASSOP Afrika Facebook page

During the fieldwork, I observed a number of youths in Zimbabwe changing their profile pictures as a way of protesting against a number of grievances. This creative use of Facebook as a venue of political activism dovetails with Wasserman's (2011: 12) view that new media

technologies can also be seen as "the location where [young] people are transgressing the hitherto fixed boundaries of what counts as political participation". For instance, several youths from the NCA and CiZC changed their status updates to: "We are all Munyaradzi Gwisai". This was in the wake of the arrest of Munyaradzi Gwisai (former MDC MP for Highfield) and 29 activists on allegations of planning to use social media to topple the Zimbabwean government in 2011. The use of the "we" reminiscent of the "We are all Khalid Said"can also be viewed as attempted at constructing a sense of collective identity. Another Facebook activism campaign occurred when Beatrice Mtetwa (a prominent human rights lawyer) was arrested by the police on allegations of obstructing the course of justice. Some of the observed youths from the YFZ and CiZC changed their profile pictures to an avatar inscribed: "Release Beatrice Mtetwa Now!!!!"

As illustrated in Box 16, some youths updated their status to the message: "Release Beatrice Mtetwa Now". These kinds of symbolic protests have become signature occurrences on Facebook whenever a human rights activist is arrested in Zimbabwe. The use of these "protest avatars" (digital images that act as symbols for individualised and collective action) is not unique to Zimbabwe and South Africa. Protest avatars were widely used by supporters of the 2011 protest wave, from Egypt to Spain and the US (Gerbaudo, 2015). From the photos of Egyptian martyr Khaled Said adopted as profile pictures, to protest posters and multiple variations of Anonymous' mask, a great variety of images stemming from Arab Spring have acquired the status of "collective avatars", icons displayed by internet users to express their sense of belonging and support for protest movements to all their internet peers (Gerbaudo, 2015: 1). .

Box 17: A call for action

If you are in favour of her release update your to 'Release Beatrice Mtetwa Now'. If you read this status update, immediately update your status to 'Release Beatrice Mtetwa Now'!!!! She needs your support at this critical moment.

Source: Facebook wall post by a CiZC youth, 18 March 2013

For instance, following the brutal murder of a 12-year-old boy Christpowers Maisiri (son to Shepherd Maisiri, MDC-T deputy organising secretary for Headlands) in February 2013 in an alleged case of politically-motivated violence, some of the respondents from the YFZ and CiZC changed their cover and profile pictures to a black square (see figure 5) as a way of

expressing joint grief and raising awareness about an issue of public concern. By changing their profile picture to a black square, youth activists in Zimbabwe turned what is the quintessential form of individual self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) on Facebook, into an act of identification with collective, crowd-like aggregations gathering on political online networks. As Gerbaudo (2015: 1) argues, the use of profile pictures has also become a means to express collective identification, through the adoption of various protest icons as their personal profile pictures (Gerbaudo, 2015: 1). He adds that these protest avatars constitute "memetic signifiers", that is, symbolic references which because of their inclusive and post-ideological content, their memetic character, their capacity to spread with extreme rapidity, are highly conducive to processes of collective identification. Similar to identity badges in the analogue world, such as political T-shirts, stickers, flags, buttons and the like, sporting digital avatars conveys one's identification with an online group, satisfying the sense of belonging to a political community by new means (Gerbaudo, 2015).

In an informal interview with one of the respondents from the CiZC, she had this to say: "it's a symbolic gesture on our part, we are trying to communicate that the loss of human life to political violence is just unacceptable". This foregoing interview extract validates the view that "young people are expressing themselves in ways that do not always conform or restrict themselves to the formal and procedural processes of decision-making" (Fakir, et al 2010: 118).

Figure 5: A black profile picture

Below are calls for action shared by some of the respondents in Zimbabwe:

Box 18: A call for action

> Its Thursday today, every Thursday we are blackening our profile photos to SEND the message NO TO VIOLENCE. Please share and blacken in solidarity.

Source: Facebook wall post by a CiZC youth

From Box 17 above, it is clear that profile pictures constitute novel spaces for expressing dissent, outrage, fostering solidarity and communicating political statements. Another female

youth in Zimbabwe encouraged her Facebook friends and colleagues to use the avatar below as their profile picture:

Figure 6: Picture: Say NO to Gender-based Violence!!! #16DaysOfActivism

Source: Facebook profile page

The following informal interview between the researcher and a male respondent from the CiZC is very instructive about the use of Facebook as a 'field' of activism:

Interviewer: Is that black profile picture symbolic?

Respondent: Yes, it's symbolic of the current and continuing hopelessness of the Zimbabwe situation, no light at the end of the tunnel yet.

Although some of the youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa used Facebook as a venue of activism, they emphasised that meaningful political action can only be achieved through offline demonstrations, marches and protests. Respondents in Zimbabwe noted that whilst they would prefer to engage in street demonstrations as a way of raising their grievances, militarised policing and repressive pieces of law stood in their way. As one male respondent from the CiZC observed: "so people are not going to trust you when you say let's meet at the Africa Unity Square on Facebook. People will not turn up". Another female interviewee chipped in as follows: "rather than doing nothing about the situation Facebook enables us to engage in symbolic protests". Although they viewed Facebook as a change agent tool, most of the respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa emphasised that it: "should be complemented with street action". One male youth from the R2K Campaign in South Africa observed that: "If you want to get a physical presence in the streets, Facebook is a limited medium for organising. But online involvement is more relevant than many people think". As the interview extracts from Zimbabwean respondents show even in a political context

characterised by a "habitus of fear", situated actors exhibit remarkable "art of presence" (Bayat, 2010). This denotes "the use of courage and creativity against all odds to assert the collective [and individual] will of the people" (Bayat, 2010: 91).

From the foregoing discussion, it can be noted that youths in both countries are creatively appropriating Facebook as both a *means to an end* as well as *an end in itself*. Compared to South African youth activists their Zimbabwean counterparts were more inclined to use Facebook as a venue of activism. This validates the view that "there are other preferred means of participation which are less formal and driven by political ideology" (Fakir et al., 2010: 119). It also demonstrates that youth activists in both countries are deploying Facebook to develop a new "biography of citizenship" (Vinken, 2005: 155) that is characterised by more individualised forms of activism.

It is important to note that, whilst political action on Facebook has often been denigrated as signifying "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2009), the usage of Facebook as a venue of political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa suggests that a more nuanced conceptualisation of political participation is long overdue. As scholars (Dennis, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2015) observe, these apparently trivial acts can be properly understood as manifestations of important processes of collective identification that are relevant for the analysis of contemporary protest movements. Although this study has not found cases where youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa are using Facebook to engage in internet-based acts of civl disobedience (such as hacktivism, virtual sit-ins, distributed denial of service (DDOS) actions and website defacements) aimed at upsetting the status quo by disrupting the normal flow of information (Garret, 2006), it was clear that the venues and cultures of protest action are changing in contemporary activism.

5.2 Conclusion

The chapter has discussed how and why youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook for political purposes. It has looked at similarities in the ways youth activists and movements deploy Facebook for political purposes in both countries. The chapter has also focused on significant differences in the way Facebook has been appropriated by activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Whereas some uses of Facebook like external communication, advertising, mobilisation of supporters, everyday political discussion were more apparent,

others such as sourcing political information, contacting politicians and virtual recruitment were very subtle. Compared to other movements, the PASSOP Afrika and CiZC used Facebook as a tool for fundraising and soliciting donations. In contrast with respondents from South Africa, it has been demonstrated that those in Zimbabwe deployed Facebook for contacting politicians and political parties. Respondents from all the social movements in both case nations indicated that they used the site as a recruitment booth for potential supporters. In contrast with South Africa, interviews showed that respondents in Zimbabwe utilised Facebook as a source of political news and information. Interviews and online observations established that Facebook was used as an advertising platform for public events by all the social movements.

Social movements like the CiZC, R2K Campaign and PASSOP Afrika exhibited some particular uses of Facebook more than the other activist groupings. Although respondents from all the movements used Facebook as a venue for everyday political conversations, in Zimbabwe such online discussions are constrained by fear of state surveillance. Whereas respondents in South Africa deployed Facebook for action-oriented mobilisation of supporters, in Zimbabwe it was for discursive-oriented aspects. Because of the constrained nature of politics in Zimbabwe, most respondents have turned Facebook into a field of activism when compared to their South African counterparts. This means that in Zimbabwe Facebook has become part of the signifying framework within which youths construct political meanings and stake communicative claims in the political domain. The findings show that respondents in both countries utilise Facebook to engage in both traditional and alternative forms of political participation. These findings reinforce previous studies (Delli-Carpini, 2000; Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007; Livingstone, Markham & Couldry, 2007; Storsul, 2014) which conclude that young people, who are already politically engaged in offline spaces use the internet to sustain, expand and strengthen their political participation.

The next chapter discusses the reasons why youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa are using Facebook to engage in political action.

CHAPTER SIX

WHY YOUTH ACTIVISTS USE FACEBOOK FOR POLITICAL ACTION IN ZIMBABWE AND SOUTH AFRICA

6. Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the reasons why politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa deploy Facebook for political purposes. Participants were asked the following questions: What would you say are some of the major reasons why you use Facebook for political purposes in this country? In comparison to other social media platforms, what are some of the reasons why you use Facebook to advance your political objectives? As this section will demonstrate, it emerged from interview responses in both countries that they are resorting to Facebook for strategic and practical reasons. Although there are few similarities in terms of why youths are using Facebook for political activism in Zimbabwe and South Africa, there are also significant differences. Respondents in Zimbabwe observed that they are resorting to Facebook for political purposes because of lack of access to the mainstream media, lack of political space, the social and technical affordances of the site and the demonstration effect[108] of the Arab Spring. Interview responses in South Africa showed that youths are deploying Facebook for political activism because of limited access to the mainstream media, social and technical affordances of the platform and the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring.

As intimated in Chapter Five, respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa also noted that they used Facebook in collaboration with a mix of traditional and digital media platforms. These include face-to-face communication, community meetings, WhatsApp groups, Google+ groups, Twitter, mailing lists, websites, community media, pamphlets, posters, newsletters and mobile phones. Instead of individual technologies, responses from youth activists in both case nations suggests that it makes sense to examine the various layers of the communication ecology[109] which are deployed by youth activists to engage in political action in specific media environments. As Foth & Hearn (2007) put it, there are various layers which constitute

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[108] The term refers "to the diffusion of protest behaviour and tactics caused by observation of the actions of others and their consequences" (Tarrow, 1994: 40).
[109] It denotes "the context in which communication processes occur" (Foth & Hearn, 2007: 9). This approach is concerned with the various types of media or communication spaces and tools which are available to communities and that people use in specific geographical area (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003).

media ecologies: discursive (themes or content of both mediated and unmediated communication), technological (ICTs, TV, radio) and social (community meetings, informal networks, institutions). Far from being disconnected, these layers are intricately interrelated and mutually constitutive. This suggests that in any given context social movent actors (in this case, youth activists) could possibly deploy all the various layers of the media ecologies rather than the single media determinism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011) as propounded by cyber-optimists.

From the interviews, it was clear that respondents do not only utilise individual technologies (like Facebook) but a whole gamut of communication technologies available at their disposal. This means that for youth activists which struggled to command substantial mainstream media attention like those from the UPM in South Africa, they resorted to the "social layer" (Foth & Hearn, 20007) in order to mobilise and conscientise people on collective grievances. Responses from interviewed youths from the NCA and YFZ in Zimbabwe also revealed that in the absence of donor funding for mainstream media advertising and media blackout by both the private and public media, they resorted to door-to-door campaigns, community meetings and informal networks to spread the word against the adoption of the COPAC-authored constitution. It is important to emphasise that the wider political[110] and mediated[111] opportunity structure had a determining impact on which communicative platforms are deployed for mobilisation and claim-making purposes. Context played a significant role in terms of which layers were used to reach out and mobilise their constituencies in both countries.

For instance, when the youths from CiZC indicated that they used different communication platforms to reach to urban and rural youths. Similarly, youth activists from PASSOP indicated that they deployed the technological layer (which include Facebook, Twitter and emails) when they are communicating with their members based in urban areas. For those outside urban areas like migrants who worked on farms, they made use of the social layer

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[110] The concept of political opportunity structure refers to how political and social structures at any moment in time affect social movements (Garret, 2006).

[111] Cammaerts (2012: 122) argues that the mediated opportunity structure is made up of three analytical levels. The first is the media opportunity structure which defines the extent to which movements are able to access and get their messages across in the mainstream media. The second level is that of discursive opportunity structure and this involves self-mediation strategies used by social movements to produce counter-narratives outside the mainstream media. The third level is that of the networked opportunity structure referring to resistance practices by social movements that are mediated through new media technologies (Cammaerts, 2012: 128). These three levels are interrelated and they impact on each other in various ways.

(which invlve the use of community meetings, face-to-face communication and informal networks). Youth activists at CiZC in Zimbabwe, for instance, indicated that discursive layer was mostly deployed to attract the attention of policy makers and the broader population. At the height of the campaign to register first time youth voters, youth activists at CiZC observed that they made use of the popular Urban Grooves and ZimDance Hall music , poetry, radio, dance and and theatre to reach out politically apathetic young people across the country. This reinforces Dawson's (2012: 321) postulation that social movement actors in South Africa creatively appropriated dress, slogans, murals, songs, radio, dance, poetry and political theatre for mobilisation and claim-making. The point is that youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa used each layer of communication ecology creatively to target specific audiences and to publicise their struggles. Facebook although located within the "technological layer" (Forth & Hearn, 2007) was also viewed as "bridge"to access the "discursive layer". This means that through self-mediating strategies on Facebook, some youth activists hoped to attract the attention of mainstream journalists as well as to build their own unique audience. As Chiumbu (2015) adds, in an effort to produce counter-narratives and disseminate them independently from the mainstream media organisations, social movement actors have made use of films (documentaries), books, leaflets and pamphlets, as discursive tools to amplify their struggles.

6.1 Responses on why youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook to facilitate political action

6.1.1 Facebook's social and technical affordances

There was consensus amongst respondents in both countries that the major reason why they use Facebook for political purposes had to do with its affordances. The concept of affordance denotes "the perceived and actual properties of a particular technology, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing [technology] could possibly be used" (Norman, 1988: 9). As scholars (see Earl & Kimport, 2011) observe, the concept of affordances provide strong clues to the operations of a technology as well as the reasons why people might prefer this or that technology for some particular purpose. The reason is that affordances of certain technologies are more inviting than others for enabling users to participate in political activities (Tully & Ekdale, 2014). The properties of Facebook afford

its users to post and share content (including images and video) instantaneously, to comment or offer "likes" to existing content, or to create "events", which people may "join", signaling their intention to participate. Respondents in South Africa noted that some of the properties of Facebook were best suited for the storage of protest photographs, political event organisation, member management, and communication of relatively long messages to a broader audience. Unlike traditional media platforms which are subject to various gatekeeping practices, most respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa mentioned that Facebook was invaluable because it allows for relatively cheap, fast and [un]restricted dissemination of information. The affordances of social media have made them a relatively low-barrier means of communication and organisation (Shirky, 2008). Writing about student activism in Australia, Britain and America, Loader, Vromen, Xenos, Steel & Burgum (2015) argue that the cost effective access to social network sites and functional capacities to instantaneously communicate and share digital content makes them valuable tools for activists to organise themselves.

Respondents in South Africa also reported that the social network site was an ideal platform for activism because it allowed them to create Facebook events and to gauge the response in terms of attendance. Compared to their South African counterparts, respondents in Zimbabwe observed that they utilised Facebook for political activism because it enabled them to stay in touch with fellow activists who are based in the diaspora. As one male youth from the CiZC explained, "most of our cadres are studying abroad and want to remain connected to the struggle so Facebook offers instant messaging, video-calling and private messaging". Interview responses also indicated that Facebook was used largely due to its potential to facilitate interactive communication beyond the boundaries of space and time. This finding reinforces Earl & Kimport's (2011) view that one of the affordance of new media which is relevant for activism is the decreased need for activists to be physically together in order to act together.

In both countries, the respondents reported that unlike Twitter's hashtags, Facebook had the advantage of allowing them to create groups. In contrast with traditional media platforms, Facebook was lauded for allowing youth activists to communicate via private (through private messages and instant messaging) and public (through walls and discussion threads) communication channels. For respondents in Zimbabwe, private and secret Facebook groups were important because they enabled them to control who can see their walls, comments and

private conversations. The advantage of Facebook privacy settings is that it hides users' content from most search engines (except Facebook social plug ins) and web crawlers. In a country dogged by state surveillance, Facebook groups were viewed as defying legal restrictions imposed on public gatherings. As noted in Chapter Three, Facebook privacy settings are also crucial in a political context where ordinary people have been arrested for political statements posted in online spaces. This also concurs with the view that the internet's capacity to "bypass state control and communicate in a secure environment" (Scott & Street, 2001: 46) makes it attractive to youth activists in particular and social movements in general. As Dahlgren (2000) further asserts, the internet's possibilities for cheap, transnational and synchronous communication contributes to advocacy groups only achieving visibility in counter-publics isolated from other counter-publics and the dominant, mainstream public sphere.

Some of the respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa mentioned that the reason why they used Facebook was largely due to its participatory and interactive nature. This contrasts significantly with traditional media platforms which are generally hierarchical and linear (Livingstone, 2009). As Livingstone (2009: 121) observes, the architecture of the internet [and social media platforms] fits well with young people's informal, peer-oriented, anti-authority approach to political activity. Although respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa hailed Facebook for its interactive architecture, online observations indicated that participation levels on the pages and groups were generally low (see Chapter Six). Qualitative interviews with youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa also established that they perceived Facebook as giving them an access to a larger audience compared to any other social media platform. As one male youth from the UPM commented: "Facebook is one of the few available options for us to reach out a significant constituency on a shoe-string budget". This supports Gerbaudo's (2012: 146) point that in using Facebook as a ground for mobilising efforts, activists in Egypt were focusing on the site where they could potentially reach the largest number of users. Similarly, Fuchs (2014) argues that the big advantage of commercial social media like Facebook is that activists can reach out to the public and everyday people. However a caveat is needed here.

As already mentioned, although theoretically Facebook enabled the youths to reach out to everyday people, it must be noted that public visibility and reach on Facebook are dependent on the EdgeRank system. EdgeRank is important because it plays a part of manipulating and

shaping circulations of data and deciding what becomes visible and what does not on the newsfeed (Beer, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015). The system is designed in such a way that certain content types (for instance, photos and video) and interactions (commitment from fans) have a higher EdgeRank than a simple status (text only) and are therefore more likely to be visible on most newsfeeds. The relevance of the EdgeRank algorithms[112] for activists is that mostly data heavy posts (like videos) are privileged, which requires money, bandwidth and a good signal. Thus for activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa who rely on mobile phones to access Facebook posting videos and audios on Edge is extremely difficult and expensive. As Poell (2014) observes, this demonstrates that there is a mismatch between the commercial considerations of Facebook and the needs of activists. Based on analysis of EdgeRank, the algorithm structuring the flow of information and communication on Facebook's "News Feed", Bucher (2012: 1164) argues that the regime of visibility constructed imposes a perceived "threat of invisibility" on the part of the participatory subject. Reversing Foucault's notion of surveillance as a form of permanent visibility, Bucher (2012: 1164) observes that "participatory subjectivity is not constituted through the imposed threat of an all-seeing vision machine, but the constant possibility of disappearing and becoming obsolete".

Respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa also observed that they deployed Facebook because it was accessible through a wide range of technologies. Facebook is accessible through personal computers, smartphones, tablets and ipads. This however raises the question of access and cost of use which somehow favours the privileged few thereby reinforcing "elite continuity" (Sparks, 2011) in online public deliberation. As one male youth from the YFZ in Zimbabwe puts it: "you can log on to your mobile phone at any time and tell your comrades that I have been arrested or I am in trouble". Another point is that Facebook enabled youth activists to tap into their local social networks. A female youth from the R2K Campaign also stated: "Facebook offers great opportunities for campaigners, because your audience is there and it is incredibly cheap and easy to get information to them. However, it is also easy for your audience to perform their interest, by engaging with your message, information or call to action in a way that costs them very little and has limited effect".

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[112] Algorithms, or computational processes that are used to make decisions, are often deployed as gatekeepers; in this function, they are somewhat similar to the role of a newspaper editor, but possess important differences from their offline, non-‑interactive and non-‑‑computational counterparts. Hence, Algorithmic gatekeeping raises significant yet novel issues in many realms (Tufecki, 2015: 206).When I use the word "algorithms" in this study to refer to computational processes that are used to make decisions of such complexity that inputs and outputs are neither transparent nor obvious to the casual human observer (Tufecki, 2015).

Whilst affordances are synonymous with preferred Facebook usage practices from the perspective of designers, it is important to highlight that in practice the interaction between users and the architecture of Facebook is characterised by complex structuration (intersection of structure and agency). Users exhibit their own human agency through creatively using profile pictures as platforms for disseminating counter-hegemonic discourses. As pointed out earlier, Facebook usage cultures differ from context to context. These different Facebook usage cultures support the argument by the social shaping approach that technologies are characterised by interpretive flexibility which enables users to challenge designers'preferences in terms of the use of features.

6.1.2 Lack of political space

Unlike in South Africa, respondents in Zimbabwe cited lack of political space as one of the driving factors behind their deployment of Facebook for political activities. Although respondents in South Africa bemoaned the militarised nature of policing and the abuse of the Regulation of Gatherings Act by some municipalities which has contributed significantly to the shrinkage of the democratic space, they observed that generally the country still had several spaces for political expression. In contrast with South Africa, almost all interviewees in Zimbabwe observed that the existence of repressive laws had contributed immensely to the curtailment of the right to protest in physical spaces. As Gerbaudo (2013) aptly puts it, authoritarian regimes are afraid of street demonstrations "which could create a dangerous interaction between the activist community and the popular classes on the streets". As highlighted in Chapter One, Zimbabwe has a piece of legislation that governs the right to demonstrate and hold public gatherings, christened the Public Order and Safety Act (POSA). The Act criminalises the distribution of political posters, pamphlets or other such material in public places and private homes without the permission from the police. Noteworthy to highlight that contravention of POSA attracts a jail sentence of up to five years. POSA also requires people to notify the police 14 days before holding a public event, thereby giving the police excessive powers in terms of determining "legitimate" and "illegitimate" gatherings. The irony about POSA is that it makes people's right to protest subject to the approval of their adversaries (the police who are subservient to the current government).

In such an environment the holding of "lawful" public demonstrations by civic groupings and ordinary people who are seen as the anti-establishment is extremely difficult when compared

to the South African case. Thus Facebook is used to circumvent the limitations imposed on the right to protest and freedom of assembly in the Zimbabwean context. As one respondent from the NCA remarked, Facebook has become synonymous with an "alternative site of the struggle for political activists inside and outside of Zimbabwe". Given the regulation of public gatherings in Zimbabwe, Facebook groups and pages function as "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" (Fraser, 1992) for politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe. From the foregoing arguments, one can also argue that Facebook provides youth activists with an invented space of participation (Cornwall, 2002).

Although the right to protest is enshrined in the new Constitution of Zimbabwe, in practice, the police continue to manipulate certain sections of POSA and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of 2004 to thwart efforts by social movements and activists to organise street demonstrations. As Moyo (2009) argues, the passage of POSA not only constrained civil society's political activism in "real" space, but also contributed immensely to the closure of democratic space for civic networking, mobilisation and participation in national politics. Extending this argument further, Lewis (2006) suggests that Zimbabwean activists used ICTs in several innovative ways to exercise the right to assembly and freedom of association in the face of on-going government repression. Writing about the Arab Spring in Egypt, Gerbaudo (2012) points out that Mubarak regime's tight control on the public space forced young Egyptians to turn to social media platforms to share their dissent. Respondents in Zimbabwe were unanimous in terms of pointing out that the major reason why Facebook has become a field of activism was that it compensated for their lack of political space in offline settings. They observed that Facebook allowed them to virtually congregate like-minded people outside the restrictive environment. As one interviewee from the YFZ noted, "Facebook is POSA defiant because you don't need a police clearance to express your grievances". As some of the respondents in Zimbabwe explained:

> …as you are aware, the narrowing of the democratic space has played a big role in pushing activists to look for new spaces to continue with their political actions. Ever since the ZANU PF regime became dictatorial through amongst other issues detaining, harassing, torturing and arresting vocal activists we have seen that street activism has become risky and as a result the coming in on board of social media platforms has opened up other avenues for activism. So in essence, the closure of the democratic space is one of the main reasons why we are using Facebook to promote their causes… (male youth, YFZ, 2013).

> …..You see, Chief. There is no space for demonstrations and strikes in the current one party system in Zimbabwe. There are several pieces of legislation which gives the police the authority to outlaw and detain activists without any repercussions. This means that the cyber-space has become a safe space for us to raise political issues which we cannot raise in the physical space (male youth, NCA, 2013).

This finds support in boyd's (2008) assertion that online spaces are increasingly becoming alternatives in contexts where physical public squares have become inaccessible, untenable, heavily regulated or downright oppressive. Although the shrinkage of public spaces in Zimbabwe is largely due to political restrictions, in South Africa social inequalities also contribute to a fragmentation of public space and exclusions. Facebook allows for what Miller & Slater (2000) calls "expansive realisation". Expansive realisation means that people who have access to a new media are at first usually concerned to use this technology to facilitate things they already had been trying to do but were thwarted by the lack of means (Miller & Slater, 2000). Unlike in Zimbabwe, respondents in South Africa noted that they deployed Facebook as an additional political space where they could amplify their grievances beyond the alienating nature of formal political spaces. This supports Miller's (2011:169) view that "Facebook provides an additional space for personal [and political] expression".

6.1.3 The demonstration effect of the Arab Spring

Probably the most often cited explanation why politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa employ Facebook for political purposes had to do with the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring. As defined earlier, the demonstration effect is premised on the notion that the more successful a particular tool or tactic is [perceived], the more likely it is to be adopted, adapted and diffused among activist groupings (Tarrow, 1994). It should be noted that the diffusion and adaptation of a new tactic does not automatically sound a death knell to old tactics. As Harlow (2014) observes, repertoires of collective action are slow to innovate, and most new tactics are abandoned as soon as they are adopted. In fact, the new tactics (like new media) often coexist with old tactics (traditional media). Most of the respondents in both countries indicated that the creative deployment of Facebook by young activists during the Arab Spring had convinced them that the site could be used to mobilise support for their work. Although interviews with some of the Facebook administrators revealed that some of the movements had already created groups and fan pages before the Arab Spring, they stated that prior to the events they were rather casual and unsystematic in their deployment of the

platform. One male respondent from the YFZ put it in this way: "before the Arab Spring, I was using Facebook pretty much for social purposes like communicating with my friends and relatives in the diaspora. But this changed in 2011 when I began to host vibrant political discussions on my Facebook wall".

Respondents in both countries observed that the usage of Facebook during the Arab Spring had made them realise that the platform could be used to enlist external media attention, to mobilise, organise and coordinate public gatherings. In response to the question whether they thought the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring had contributed to their utilisation of Facebook for political purposes, some of the respondents in South Africa stated that, "yes, it was a turning point because all of a sudden Facebook pages began to rally people to stand up for their rights". Another respondent from the NCA in Zimbabwe added that "the events in North Africa taught us that whatever tool one can use should be used strategically to achieve our political goals". Responses from the youth activists from the UPM in South Africa indicated that the use of social media in Egypt and Tunisia had spurred them to launch their own Facebook group in 2011. As one male youth from the UPM remarked: "we opened our page in 2011 following the events in Egypt and Tunisia with the sole aim of mobilising people to demand democratic accountability from their leaders". This is how some of the respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa articulated the role of the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring on their usage of Facebook for political purposes:

> …yea the Arab Spring has a big influence on how we use social media in this country. The mere fact that some people from another country used these social platforms to mobilise and organise demonstrations gives you enough reasons to believe that we can do the same here (male youth, NCA, 2013).

> …You cannot escape the influence of the Arab Spring in the way you use social media for political activism. As activists, we have learnt a lot from Egypt and Tunisia in terms of the dos and don'ts'. For instance, we have learnt that we cannot rely on online communication alone. This is because it is susceptible to state surveillance and its reach is limited to the privileged few (male youth, UPM, 2013).

> …Facebook use for activism was popularised by the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement so naturally you expect us to copy and paste here and there. The influence of these revolutions is therefore inescapable although each context is different (female youth, YFZ, 2013).

6.1.4 Lack of access to the mainstream media

As discussed in Chapter Two, activists depend on the mainstream media for a number of reasons, including for mobilising political support, legitimation and validation of their demands and to enable them to widen the scope of conflict beyond the like-minded (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). This means that gaining attention in the mass media is a key goal of many social movement organisations (Saguin, 2015). From the interviews, it emerged that lack of access to the mainstream media in Zimbabwe was one of the major reasons why youths are resorting to Facebook to communicate their grievances. With the exception of a few respondents in South Africa who noted that they experienced limited access to the mainstream media, most of those interviewed acknowledged that they had access to several channels of communication. This is largely attributed to economic forces (for instance, commercial news values) in the South African media sphere which privileges marketable news content over activist grievances. Respondents from the UPM and PASSOP Afrika in South Africa observed that they had limited access to the mainstream media and in cases where such coverage occurred, it focused on violent and dramatised protests and demonstrations. This invokes the notion of the "protest paradigm", as discussed in section 5.1.1, where the mainstream media tends to marginalise movements and activists by drawing attention away from the core concerns raised by such non-state actors (Gitlin, 1980).

Respondents in Zimbabwe observed that besides the private press and diasporic media which at times provided an outlet for their grievances, they were generally shut out from the public media. Although youths noted that they also relied on the mainstream "private" press which has assumed an anti-government editorial stance, it must be noted that its circulation and distribution figures are surpassed by the public press. Respondents in Zimbabwe also highlighted that the public media had the tendency of refusing to grant them editorial and advertising space. One interviewee from the NCA recalled a situation, where the public media refused to air their radio advertisements because they were seen as decampaigning the government's COPAC-drafted constitution. Another respondent from the same movement also recounted an incident where a pre-recorded programme was heavily edited to remove scenes which were seen as casting the government in bad light by the gatekeepers at the ZBC. This is consistent with previous studies (Kariithi & Kareithi, 2008; Duncan, 2010) which demonstrate that dissenting voices are often side-lined by the mainstream media.

Although the licensing of two commercial radio stations (namely *StarFM* and *ZiFM stereo*) has been touted as signifying the beginning of the liberalisation of the airwaves in Zimbabwe,

interview responses indicated that because of the ownership structures (see Chapter Two) of these radio stations it is difficult to flight content which is considered as anti-establishment. Respondents in Zimbabwe also noted that it was extremely expensive to buy airtime at the two radio stations to flight advertisements and programmes. For a one-hour radio programme, the price ranged between US$1000 and US$4000 depending on the time slot. Besides the programme content was subjected to heavy censorship by the producers and presenters from the radio stations. Because of the limited access to independent channels for political voice, most interviewees in Zimbabwe described Facebook as constitutive of an alternative channel through which they could express their grievances without gatekeeping controls. It is arguable therefore that Facebook functions as a compensatory vehicle for the lack of access to the mainstream media. Some of the respondents remarked in this regard:

> People resort to Facebook because they have limited options. For instance, on the state controlled media, we are not given an opportunity to say out our grievances. During talk shows we are not given an opportunity to express our political opinions. These platforms are muzzled. So we are using our own Facebook pages to express our views which are inexpressible through mainstream media platforms. If people had independent platforms to voice their opinions, they would certainly use them. Facebook gives us options to express our views (male youth, NCA, 2013).

> Without access to the mainstream media, Facebook becomes our alternative avenue to air our views. It is extremely difficult to have access to mainstream public media in this country unless something negative has occurred. We are viewed with disdain and often referred to as regime change agents by the public press (male youth, YFZ, 2013).

Compared to Zimbabwe, interviewees from the R2K Campaign in South Africa noted that their use of Facebook for political purposes was driven by the desire to expand their communicative platforms rather than because of limited access to the mainstream media. This could be attributed to the fact that the R2K Campaign enjoys significant support from the mainstream, commercial media. Furthermore, because freedom of expression is an issue shared by a broad cross-section of media practitioners and ordinary citizens at large, campaigners from the R2K Campaign have access to a wide array of communicative platforms.

From the interviews, it was evident that respondents from the UPM were also critical of the SABC for not covering their public events and marches despite sending invitations to their journalists:

Box 19: Demonstration against the SABC for non-coverage

> We are occupying SABC offices in PE. Our demand is simple, SABC must cover our conference and stop being the mouthpiece of the ruling party and the ruling class. They must stop marginalising the voices of the poor and dispossessed black people. We shall not be moved!

Source: Facebook wall post

It can be deduced from the above post that activists from the UPM have had a hard time trying to access the public broadcaster. This forced some of the activists to picket at the SABC offices in Port Elizabeth demanding the public broadcaster to cover their conference. As noted earlier, the mainstream media in South Africa tends to focus on suburban views and hence marginalises the voices of the poor. Writing about the ambivalent relationship between social movements and the mainstream media in South Africa, Willems (2010: 492) observes that some of the activist groupings have "little access to the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the influential national newspapers such as *The Star*, *The Sunday Times*, *Mail and Guardian* and *Business Day*".

Mainstream media attention garnered by social movement organisations differ significantly depending on the character, social standing and media relations of each organisation in the two countries. The dominant explanation of media attention to SMOs is that the media act like a filter, selecting some types of SMOs and events for attention, and ignoring others based on characteristics of these SMOs, events, and their political environment (Saguin, 2015). Compared to predominantly middle-class oriented movements like the CiZC, NCA and R2K Campaign, others such as YFZ, UPM and PASSOP Afrika complained that it was difficult for them garner significant media attention. This further demonstrates that the "media opportunity structure" (Cammaerts, 2012) tends to favour certain social movements at the expense of others. Because of the unequal access to the "mediated opportunity structure" (Cammaerts, 2012), it follows that visibility and attention are also unequally distributed resources. As Tufecki (2013) argues, the emergent new media ecology has fundamentally affected the means of production and distribution of attention, a key resource for social movements. As interviews with youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa revealed, Facebook was seen as having broadened mediation opportunities and weakened the mainstream media's monopoly on public attention.

Interview responses with respondents from the UPM revealed that coverage in the mainstream private and community press was increasingly difficult to attain. As one male

youth from the UPM observed: "although journalists attend our public meetings and demonstrations, news stories that are published are generally negative". Youth activists from the UPM and PASSOP also observed that: "journalists only come to cover us when we do something out of the ordinary throwing poo at the offices of high ranking authorities". This observation seems to validate research (Duncan, 2010, 2014; Chiumbu, 2015; Wasserrman, Bosch & Chuma, 2016) in South Africa that the coverage of protest actions in South Africa tends to be episodic, focusing on the moment of protest, which does not explain why a community got to the point where they felt that the only way of communicating their message was to barricade roads, stone the mayor's house or torch a library. This explains the normalisation of these protest repertoires in contemporary activism in South Africa as protestors seek to attract the attention of the inaccessible and slow-to-act mainstream media.

Another respondent from the UPM added that: "even the *Grocotts Mail*[113] sometimes does not cover us in good light because of their overreliance on the Makana municipality for advertising revenue". The perceived cosy relationship between *Grocotts Mail* and the Makana municipality was seen as undermining the paper's editorial independence. This is despite the fact that in recent years there has been evidence of a much more fractious relationship between the paper and the municipality with the latter boycotting to advertise in the newspaper. A recent study (Wasserman, Bosch & Chuma, 2016) shows that community protests in South Africa receive unfavourable coverage. The study also found that the reporting also routinely fails to provide depth and context to explain the underlying issues that lead to the protests. Because the underlying structural issues are not unpacked, the net result is superficial and limited reporting (Wasserman, Bosch & Chuma, 2016).

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[113]This is the oldest surviving independent newspaper in South Africa. Founded in 1870 (but incorporating the Grahamstown Journal which was founded in 1831), this weekly newspaper has survived many years and is today the only newspaper that is published in Grahamstown

Respondents from the PASSOP Afrika also castigated newspapers like the *Daily Sun* for concentrating on what they described as "stereotypical xenophobic representations of refugees and asylum seekers' issues in South Africa". Facebook thus provided them with a space to circumnavigate the public invisibility associated with the elite public sphere. As some scholars (Willems, 2010, 2015; Dawson, 2012; Chiumbu, 2012) argue, because of their limited access to formal media at national level, social movements often use range of alternative channels of communication in order to highlight their campaign issues and to draw more activists into their struggles. In the case of the PASSOP Afrika and UPM, respondents hailed Facebook for allowing them to set the agenda for media coverage as well as to react against what they perceived as unfair coverage from mainstream media. This corroborates Papacharissi's (2014) view that although social media platforms do not necessarily give citizens and under-represented groups a stronger voice, but they get the ability to tell their own story, in their own terms. This is because platforms like Facebook enable activists to construct the "injustice frame[114]" (Gamson, 1992) as well as challenge the "protest paradigm" (Gitlin, 1980) thereby changing the terms and manner in which their causes are represented. As Cottle (2008) writes, this contributes significantly to the emergence of "discursive contest" on the ways protests and demonstrations are reported on the mainstream and social media. Rather than simply constructing counter-hegemonic discourses, Rodríguez (2001) argues that alternative communication platforms also offer opportunities for ordinary people to tell their own stories in their own language. Facebook has also provided youth activists "spaces to develop counter-discourses that challenge and resist dominant ideologies" (Chiumbu, 2015: 1).

6.2 Conclusion

Compared to South Africa, respondents in Zimbabwe indicated that the reasons for using Facebook for political purposes related to the lack of political space, lack of access to the mainstream media, the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring and the perceived technical and social affordances of the site. For respondents in South Africa, the reasons include limited access to the mainstream media, technical and social affordances and the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring. It is clear from the foregoing there are more

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[114] An injustice frame is a collection of ideas and symbols that illustrate both how significant the problem is as well as what the movement can do to alleviate it.

similarities compared to the differences cited by respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Thus the political use of Facebook by youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa is predominantly shaped by the socio-political and communication context in which the technology is deployed. This dovetails with several other studies (Mudhai, 2012; Mabweazara, 2010) which show that the wider social context structures the nature and form of the deployment of new media technologies for political purposes. Besides the wider social contextual factors, interview responses reflected that the diverse demographic backgrounds of the supporters of the movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa had a significant bearing on how the technology was appropriated for political purposes.

The next chapter focuses on the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCURSIVE INTERACTIONS AND MICRO-POLITICS OF PARTICIPATION ON FACEBOOK GROUPS AND FAN PAGES

7. Introduction

The previous chapter examined why politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook to facilitate political activism. This chapter looks at the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on selected Facebook groups and pages. Relying on both qualitative and quantitative meta-data gathered from the six Facebook groups and pages under consideration, this chapter uses platform specific tools to measure levels of participation. It also assesses the extent to which Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa can be considered as alternative spaces for political activism. The chapter is divided into three sections: firstly it looks at the discursive interactions (I will define this concept shortly); secondly it discusses the micro-politics of participation (will be defined in section 7.2 below) and thirdly, it focuses on the extent to which Facebook groups and fan pages can be viewed as alternative spaces for political activism.

As discussed in Chapter Four, qualitative content analysis was used to get an idea of the variety of participants, the amount and nature of interaction and the diversity of debated issues on selected Facebook pages and groups. Based on this data, this section provides valuable quantitative data about levels of engagement. In order to evaluate the levels of engagement on the six Facebook pages and groups under investigation, I drew up a set of indicators based on the numbers of likes, comments and shares. Categories of low levels of engagement represent 0 to 30 likes, comments and shares, medium levels of engagement refer to 31 to 60 while high levels of engagement meant 61+ likes, comments and shares. Before teasing out the levels of participation on Facebook, it is important to underscore the fact that the degree of participation in online spaces depends on a myriad of factors such as the design of medium, the will of the participants to engage in conversations, availability of time, economic and cultural capital, access to the internet, and a conducive legal and political environment.

Discursive interactions relates to "the establishment of socio-communicative relationships [embodied in language] within the media sphere" (Carpentier, 2011:29). It denotes the talk and conversations—the speech acts—and written communications of movement members that occur primarily in the context of, or in relation to, movement activities (Chiumbu, 2015). It also encapsulates user-to-user interaction as well as the user-to-(media) technology component. Participation[115] is defined here as "involving leaving some kind of trace on the web: a message, a comment, a like, a share, a vote and so forth" (Olsson & Svensson, 2012: 50). It also involves users taking advantage of different interactive features of a technology. Olsson & Svensson (2012: 51) distinguish between different levels of participation: "active participation" which refers to participation where a user initiates a discussion by posting a message and "reactive participation" where a user reacts to what is published by a producer and chooses to post a comment. They further submit that reactive comments can also be effected by exhortations pronounced by the producer which they called "promoted reactions". Reactive participation can be self-generated or promoted. As noted in Chapter One, Facebook provides their users with both private (chat and private message) and public (discussion board, walls, groups) opportunities for participation.

7.1 The discursive interactions on Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa

It emerged from the online participant observation and qualitative content analysis that in Zimbabwe the CiZC Facebook page had 980 posts, followed by the YFZ with 389 and the NCA had 283 during the selected time range (see Table 2 below). Compared to the Zimbabwean case, the South African Facebook pages like the R2K Campaign had 1052 posts, followed by PASSOP Afrika with a total of 261 and then the UPM with 217 posts. It is evident from the findings that the CiZC and R2K Campaign had the highest number of postings. The findings of this study show that the type of postings shared by Facebook users included: links, videos, audio, questions, status updates and photos. In both countries, it was discovered that links, status updates and photos were the most posted and shared types of postings. The least shared type of postings were videos, audios and questions in both Zimbabwean and South African Facebook pages and groups. This could be attributed to the

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[115]I acknowledge that the concept of participation can signify many different things, and the meaning of the concept can also vary between different empirical contexts (Pateman, 1970; Carpentier, 2011). Fraser defines it as the ability "to speak "in one's own voice, thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style" (1992: 68),

fact that video and audio sharing activities are data intensive and relatively expensive to upload for users relying heavily on mobile internet access.

As can be seen in Table 2 below, in Zimbabwe the CiZC had the most popular Facebook page in terms of the number of people who have liked it followed by the NCA and lastly the YFZ. Given the mass migration which has hit Zimbabwe since the turn of the century (Kamete, 2010a); it is possible that most the fans and group members on Facebook are based outside the country. In South Africa, the R2K Campaign had the most number of fans followed by the PASSOP Afrika and UPM. In comparison to South African Facebook groups and pages, those in Zimbabwe had the most number of fans and group members. Facebook meta-data revealed that with the exception of one page, the other five Facebook pages (YFZ, NCA, R2K Campaign, UPM and PASSOP Afrika) in Zimbabwe and South Africa were dominated by young people between the ages of 25 and 34. The most interactive demographic group on the CiZC Facebook page were between ages of 18 and 24.

Table 2: The table shows the number of postings and group members on the six Facebook pages and pages studied between the 1st of August 2011 and the 31st of August 2013.

Facebook page or group	Country	Number of Facebook fans/ group members	Number of Facebook posts
Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition	Zimbabwe	67 981	980
Youth Forum Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	40 000	389
National Constitutional Assembly	Zimbabwe	33 000	283
PASSOP Afrika	South Africa	4 964	261
UPM	South Africa	917	217
R2K Campaign	South Africa	7753	1052
Total		154 615	3182

The table above illustrates the popularity of Facebook for political work in Zimbabwe relative to South Africa. As pointed out earlier, because the mainstream mediated public sphere in Zimbabwe does not allow for open public discourse, Facebook constitutes an important space for political commentary and debate. This is reflected in the afore-mentioned statistics where all the social movements in Zimbabwe had high numbers of fans and group members when compared to those in South Africa. Table 2 shows that the CiZC in Zimbabwe had fan base of 67 981 compared to 7753 members for the R2K Campaign which was the most popular Facebook page in South Africa. It should be noted that in both countries the

most popular Facebook pages were of those NGO-oriented movements[116] with a strong political voice off-line as well as significant funding from donors. In contrast, grassroots movements like the UPM in South Africa with a predominantly unemployed youth membership had low levels of engagement on Facebook. Given the nature and dynamics of social media penetration rates in South Africa (see Chapter Three), social movements like the UPM and PASSOP Afrika whose membership comprise of unemployed youth and vulnerable immigrants respectively face a lot of hurdles in their usage of Facebook for political purposes. Unlike most movements in South Africa, all the movements in Zimbabwe had parallel Facebook pages for specific campaigns and target audiences. For instance, the CiZC also had the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition-Regional Office (SA) while the YFZ also administered the Youth Decide page and the NCA created the "Take Charge 179489". In contrast the R2K Campaign in South Africa also had the R2K_Youth.

From Table 2, it is also clear that NGO-oriented movements had more postings compared to grassroots movements. This is because NGO-oriented movements (such as the R2K Campaign, CiZC, YFZ and NCA) had both full-and part-time social media staff who constantly updated their pages and websites. The UPM and PASSOP Afrika relied extensively on part-time administrators and leaders of the social movements to post content on their Facebook pages. This explains the reason why they had low levels of engagement compared to other social movements. As Dennis (2015) observes, there are three types of users of social media platforms: civic instigators, contributors and listeners. Civic instigators and contributors engage in digital micro-activism by way of refining their political identity. Listeners use social media to consume political information but refrain from public forms of expression and instead take to private spaces for political discussion (Dennis, 2015). Lurkers or listeners in the Zimbabwean case can be viewed as "spectators" who use Facebook pages to "watch" politics rather than to "do" politics (Miller et al., 2016: 153). Even though the UPM Facebook group allowed members other than the administrator to post content, it was observed that only a few people took advantage of these privacy settings to initiate public discourse. These few people consisted of what Matthews (2012) refers to as the "relatively privileged". This refers to black middle class and white people with a greater degree of income, education and access to media resources than most South Africans.

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[116] These organisations have functionally specialised, paid, professional staff and, sometimes, a limited group of volunteers; receive funding from bilateral and multilateral agencies and (usually foreign) private foundations; and engage in pragmatic strategic planning to develop "reports" or "projects" aimed at influencing public policies (Alvarez, 1997: 307)

Besides the level of access, it can be argued that the different characters of the social movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa impact on their posting habits and levels of participation. As noted earlier, NGO-oriented movements had higher levels of interaction compared to grassroots movements. In terms of posting habits, grassroots movements tended to post more infrequently compared to NGO-oriented movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is attributable to the fact that the former relies on part-time Facebook administrators to update their pages. In contrast NGO-oriented movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa were more likely to post links to external websites compared to grassroots movements like the UPM without a website. Out of the six movements in both countries, only the R2K Campaign and YFZ maintained high levels of interaction on their Facebook pages. The NCA and UPM had low levels of interaction compared to the other pages. As pointed out earlier, this is because these grassroots organisations had funding problems at the time of my fieldwork which could have contributed to the lack of marketing and advertising of their pages and groups beyond their activist community. The NCA also cut funding ties with their traditional donors as well as partners like the MDC-T which affected their public standing.

Compared to Zimbabwe, postings related to calls for action were well-received on R2K Campaign, UPM and PASSOP Afrika Facebook pages and groups observed in South Africa. For instance, 722 people expressed interest to attend a demonstration in Grahamstown following a call for action by one of the participants on the UPM Facebook group. An extract of the post reads as follows:

Box 20: Call for a demonstration in Grahamstown

A Call to Unite & Save Grahamstown from the Vultures in the Municipality
Grahamstown Town Hall in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape
Comment: Sorry George - am out of town this week! Have a good one
Comment: we'll be there
Comment: If people in my hometown do not stand up as one, then nothing will ever change!! Go for it #in solidarity
Comment: we will be there
Comment: Our frustration is very real, but we must be careful not to tar the professional and technical people with the same brush as those responsible for the administrative problems which are at the root of the trouble. There are amazing people working incredibly long and hard to sort Makana out - do not dis-hearten them further with blanket accusations.
Comment: @above, I don't think anyone is doing that. There were many Makana municipal workers at the protest in support of the motion to dissolve the municipality. It's clear that there are people who work hard and care.

Source: UPM Facebook group

In contrast with the above South African case, postings on calls for action on the YFZ, NCA and CiZC Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe garnered low levels of engagement and expression of interest from users. This is despite the fact that unlike South Africa, social movements in Zimbabwe have high numbers of Facebook fans and members which suggests that most of them are "lurkers" or people who are scared to speak out (see Table 2). In Dennis's (2015) typology these lurkers constitute "listeners" who use Facebook to consume political information but refrain from public forms of expression and instead take to private spaces for political discussion. This also echoes Carpentier's (2011) argument that access (which generates the opportunity for people to have their voices heard) to media technologies does not automatically lead to participation. He adds that "access and interaction remain important conditions of possibility of participation, but they cannot be equated with participation" (Carpentier, 2011: 31).

Although it was observed that some of these postings on the CiZC Facebook page received high levels of engagement in terms of "likes", it was noticeable that participants avoided making comments and sharing the postings with their own friends. This is because "liking" postings was considered as less risky when compared to commenting and sharing which leaves traceable digital footprints. As one respondent from the YFZ observed, "liking a post is safer option than commenting and responding to sensitive political issues because it's an ambiguous form of communication". As highlighted in Chapter Five, this could also be attributed to fear of political victimisation and state surveillance harboured by most Facebook users in Zimbabwe. This is also supported by the following explanation from one respondent from the CiZC: "I usually get messages on my inbox from friends and relatives asking me why I like and comment on political posts". The use of private participation channels highlights the agency of users in terms of circumventing Facebook's real name policy as well as state surveillance. As such, some of the Zimbabwean respondents felt that posting sensitive political issues had the unintended consequence of putting friends and relatives on the firing line. This reinforces Zuckerman's (2013: 11) view that Facebook "can be a space for political discourse, though censorship [and fear of surveillance] probably shapes and distorts that discourse".

In both Zimbabwe and South Africa, qualitative content analysis established that status updates and photos attracted high levels of engagement compared to other types of postings (such as links, videos and audios). This could be because status updates and photos are likely

to involve more original content than links and videos. It is also possible that they elicited more interest as they are considered by friends to be less tired and more authentic content. As intimated above, low levels of interaction on video and audio postings could be attributed to the fact that most Facebook users in Zimbabwe and South Africa depend on mobile internet access which makes it difficult for them to view, share and download data intensive files. This supports Walton & Leukes's (2012) view that young people who have easy access to desktop computers, cheaper forms of broadband, sophisticated smartphones and media production software remain at a distinct advantage.

In both countries, it was observed that only the R2K Campaign, YFZ and PASSOP Afrika Facebook pages periodically used questions to solicit feedback from participants. In South Africa, one participant on the PASSOP Afrika page posted the following question on the 15th of July 2013: How will you use your 67 minutes to take action & inspire change on #Mandela Day later this week? This question evoked a torrent of responses from participants. In Zimbabwe, pages like the CiZC mostly posted links aimed at self-promotion and driving traffic to their website rather than fostering dialogic conversation. On the contrary, the YFZ Facebook page used online polls to solicit opinions and to generate reactive participation on topical issues. A typical example follows:

Box 21: Harare Water Poisoning Saga: What's your view?

	Someone wanted to poison all of Harare
	It was a genuine mistake
	If found guilty, those implicated should be hanged
	Add an answer………………………………………..

Source: YFZ Facebook page: 3 August 2012

This study also found that postings dealing with international causes tended to receive low levels of interaction on all the six Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In South Africa, for instance, a link shared on the R2K Campaign Facebook page on the 22nd of August 2013 detailing the sentencing of Bradley Manning (the US soldier who leaked a trove of secret government documents to Wikileaks) to 35 years in prison, only received 10 likes, zero comments and 3 shares from a potential audience of 7753 fans. This trend was also witnessed on the PASSOP Afrika and UPM Facebook pages, where status updates and links aimed at encouraging people to show solidarity with the people of Palestine garnered 8 likes, zero comments and shares. Similar trends were also witnessed in Zimbabwe where, for

instance, a call for action posted on the CiZC Facebook page in relation to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign received only a single 'like' out of a potential audience of 67 981 fans. This was following the kidnapping of over 200 school girls from Chibok by Boko Haram militants in Nigeria. This lack of engagement with international posts can be attributed to the fact that most people are more concerned with issues that affect them directly in their everyday lives rather than those which indirectly affect them. However, informal interviews with respondents in Zimbabwe revealed that lack of engagement on Facebook group and page walls did not mean users were inactive. They observed that they preferred to engage with politically sensitive postings via private messaging and chat system in order to circumvent monitoring by the state. Online observations showed that posts dealing with national or local causes attracted high levels of engagement among Facebook users in Zimbabwe and South Africa. For instance, a status update posted on the UPM Facebook group on the Marikana memorial commemorations received 85 likes and 55 comments. This outpouring of public response on local causes suggests that Facebook users in Zimbabwe and South Africa reflect local affiliations much more strongly than global awareness. As will be illustrated in Chapter Eight, it was found that comedic postings like memes[117] and cartoons received most comments, likes and shares on Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This also corroborates Knobel & Lankshear's (2007: 201) observation that "what scales in networked publics is often the funny, the crude, the embarrassing, the mean, and the bizarre, ranging from the quirky and off-beat, to potty humour, to the bizarrely funny, to parodies, through to the acerbically ironic". As Miller et al (2016) rightly observe, a major effect of social media is that human communication has become more visual at the expense of oral and textual modes. They argue that memes allow people to be able to express their values and disparage those of others in less direct and more acceptable ways than before (Miller et al, 2016).

Carpentier's (2011) insightful work on minimalist and maximalist versions of participation provides a useful heuristic tool for teasing out the levels of participation afforded by Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It acknowledges that the extent of inclusion or exclusion of participants in decision-making-processes can be situated in a continuum between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation (Carpentier, 2011). As scholars (Harlow, 2014; Chiumbu, 2015) note, theories of participation allows one to

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[117]It refers to cultural items in the form of an image, video or phrase that spreads via the internet and is often altered in a creative or humorous way (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007: 199).

examine who is allowed to speak and who is not; who participates in media production and who does not; the tyranny that may exist within these supposedly "structureless" (Freeman, 1972) platforms and elite interests that may manifest behind the rhetoric of participation.

Online observations revealed that the YFZ (in Zimbabwe) and UPM (in South Africa) groups offered more space for users to engage in "active public participation" (Olsson & Svensson, 2012). Apart from liking, commenting, sharing and responding, these Facebook groups provided users with the means to start acts of public communication and potential dialogue, on their own initiative. This means that they fell within what Carpentier (2011) calls the maximalist forms of participation continuum. As Walton (2014) has argued, this is because Facebook groups are designed to foster open conversations among "equal" voices. Because of their architectural design, these Facebook groups reinvigorate what Fraser (1992) refers to as "strong publics" which are spaces of institutionalised deliberation whose discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision-making. Findings of this study shows that the other four Facebook pages (CiZC, NCA, PASSOP Afrika and R2K Campaign) in Zimbabwe and South Africa only provided space for users to engage in "permitted reactive participation" (Olsson & Svensson, 2012) hence fell within the minimalist forms of participation spectrum (Carpentier, 2011). Participants on Facebook pages are relegated to liking, commenting and sharing existing content posted by the administrator. This is because page administrators "set the frames for the content and control infrastructure as well as the production process" (Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011: 140). This indicates that NGO-oriented movements are less democratic in their online practices when compared to grassroots organisations.

In a way, these Facebook pages are therefore synonymous with "weak publics" which Fraser (1992) describes as spaces whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making. It can be argued therefore that these Facebook pages foster what Jönsson & Örnebring (2011) describe as an "interactive illusion". This is because the participatory nature of these spaces is significantly limited, and as such terms like "mediated or symbolic interaction" (Carpentier, 2011) or even "mediated quasi-interaction" (Thompson, 1995) are more appropriate descriptors. The differences between minimalist and maximalist participation relate to the character of the social movement organisations in Zimbabwe and South Africa in the sense that those which fall within the former are mostly NGOs oriented organisations while the latter is made up of grassroots

movements. As Carpentier (2011: 32) observes, "while minimalist participation is characterised by the existence of strong power imbalances between the actors, maximalist participation is characterised by the equalisation of power relations". This also further reinforces the view held by critical participatory theories (see Cooke & Kothari, 2001) that top-down goal-oriented participation models imposes institutional barriers over communities and thereby inhibits other processes that promote empowerment and freedom. In their book, *Participation: The New Tyranny*, Cooke & Kothari (2001) assert that participation in practice is not often participatory, bottom-up and open. Instead, it maintains existing power relationships, though masking this power behind the rhetoric and techniques of participation. Cornwall (2003: 1325) also adds that's:

> claims to "full participation" and "the participation of all stakeholders'"—familiar from innumerable project documents and descriptions of participatory processes—all too often boil down to situations in which only the voices and versions of the vocal few are raised and heard

As highlighted in Chapter Five (see section 5.1.8), most of the interactions within the studied Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa were dominated by a small group of highly influential users. This dovetails with Fenton's (2006: 227) argument that "many sites are generated and maintained by individuals or small groups with little or no accountability or representativeness." Online observations revealed that a small group of influential Facebook users [re]produced content which was consumed by the rest of the participants. Apart from initiating online conversations, this minority group of Facebook users were highly vocal on the discussion wall. This finding confirms previous studies (Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2010) which indicated that communication on the web is characterised by a "power law distribution" whereby a tiny minority of internet users produces the content the great majority consumes. Unlike in Zimbabwe, this study found that online conversations on the R2K Campaign page in South Africa were dominated by white participants compared to the other racial groups. As Wasserman (2014) observes, the continued asymmetry of power in the social domain and the political economy of social media allow middle class, white voices to be heard more often than those of marginalised groups in South Africa. This affirms Fraser's (1992) view that achieving participatory parity is only possible if underlying economic and status inequalities are first addressed. Similar views have been expressed by some scholars (see Marwick & boyd, 2011; Lim, 2003) who

argue that the same people who have social, cultural, or economic capital in offline spaces also exert their influence in online spaces. Gaventa (2002) further submits that without a critical engagement with multiple sources of power inequalities it is likely that spaces of participatory citizenship may entrench some power inequalities. Online observations established that Facebook groups and fan pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa are dominated by male participants in terms of membership and active participation when compared to their female counterparts. This highlights what Freeman (1972) calls the "tyranny of structurelessness" where ―informal elites arise within the affected [online] communities and control the production of ideas. As intimated in Chapter Four, this could be attributed to the fact that political activism is predominantly male-centric in most stratified and patriarchal societies.

Language also acts as a barrier to effective participation in both online and offline deliberations (Chiumbu, 2015). There are two kinds of languages on Facebook: the *language of the platform* (structured by code and algorithms) as well as *language of users* (vernacular and slang languages used by different users). The jettisoning of the *language of the platform* in favour of the *language of users* signifies the creative tempering with the structure (architecture of social media) put in place by designers and the manifestation of human agency through the use of local languages on Facebook. Although English (language by design) was the *lingua franca* of all the Facebook groups and fan pages studied in Zimbabwe and South Africa, it was noted that some vernacular languages (languages of users) were also deployed as vehicles of social interaction. In Zimbabwe, for example, Facebook users deployed English and Shona as well as chat lingo and slang for interaction purposes. It was also observed that Facebook users in Zimbabwe deployed what Chuma (2002) calls "Shonglish" (a mixture of English and Shona) to interact with each other. The use of chat lingo and slang in the Zimbabwean context by Facebook users can also viewed as an attempt to route around censorship of public speech by the state (see Chapter Eight). This reinforces Eaton's (2013) argument that usage of one particular language over another may not be a trivial matter. This is because language plays an instrumental role in terms of facilitating and impoverishing social interaction in stratified and multicultural societies.

In South Africa, it was also observed that some members on the UPM Facebook group occasionally used isiXhosa and a mixture of IsiXhosa and English for social interaction purposes. In multi-cultural and stratified societies like Zimbabwe and South Africa, the use of

vernacular languages as the mode of communication has the unintended consequence of keeping non-speakers out of the conversation. As Katsaura (2013) observes, language as a means of human association is inherently a political tool, one that is deployable to confirm and entrench of socio-political difference. It can be used as a tool for the exclusion of particular groups of people on Facebook who do not share the same language, by those whose language and cultural group is dominant. Scholars (Bosch, 2013; de Lanerolle, 2012) in South Africa indicate that online spaces and forms of participation are dominated by a select group of users who have the cultural and linguistic capital to engage in the English-dominated conversations. Sinwell (2010) also engages with this idea of using websites written in English by social movements in South Africa when most community members generally speak Xhosa and Afrikaans. He argues that they do not assist the cause of the poor and do little to build movements on the ground. Buhlungu (2006: 84) further argues that the vast majority of Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) members are disadvantaged and therefore remain dependent on those with resources and who speak English, the language through which these interactions are conducted.

It is clear from the foregoing that most Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa are characterised by low levels of interactivity. Most of these pages and groups are populated by lurkers rather than active contributors. It has been argued that Facebook fan pages promote minimalist forms of participation whereas Facebook groups nurture maximalist forms of participation. This section has argued that Facebook is permeated by different forms of exclusion. Besides exclusion based on access to new media technologies, language is also another barrier of effective participation on South African Facebook pages and groups. As Chiumbu (2015) notes, the day to day social and discursive practices of social movements marginalise and exclude others voices on grounds of lack of access to mediated communicative structures, digital inequality and language. The voices of the more marginal are barely raised, let alone heard, on Facebook pages and groups. This means that ordinary community members without access to the Internet are not part of content creation and the Internet is not an alternative space for them to contest dominant representations of themselves and produce non-conformist and counter-hegemonic representations of their views (Chiumbu, 2015).

7.2 The micro-politics of participation in Facebook groups and pages

As discussed in Chapter One, this study also looks at the micro-politics of participation which characterise the discursive interactions on Facebook pages and groups. "Micro-politics" refers to the formal and informal power-seeking and power deployment as well as (often hidden) miniature processes of interaction within/between groups or by individuals within and outside physical or virtual communities (Barnes et al., 2004; McAreavey, 2006). It also foregrounds the subtle forms of control that are encoded into the conventions of discourse. As McAreavey (2006) adds, micro-politics consists of the intangible aspects that arise due to such groups of individuals interacting and working together on a shared activity. In the context of this study, micro-politics of participation is concerned with what actually happens on Facebook groups and pages as well as the "structures and processes beyond what are immediately perceivable" (McDowell, 1992: 213). Facebook users, including social movement actors, are at the mercy of the structuring influence of the tyranny of algorithms.

Contrary to claims by cyber-optimists that Facebook ensures the "levelling of the playing field" (Lievrouw, 2011), it was established that because Facebook is still embedded within a capitalist world order (Fuchs, 2014), it retains some degree of mediation and control that explicitly and implicitly shapes what can be freely circulated or rendered visible on the site. Poell & van Dijck (2015) demonstrate that algorithms have a determining effect on the free flow of information and visibility of content on Facebook. As a commercial social media platform, Facebook also reserves the right to delete, suspend and remove accounts of people who violate the company's own self-regulatory norms and standards (MacKinnon et al, 2014). There are cases where Facebook has deleted or deactivated pages and groups of social movements and activists for posting content which was considered violent and obscene (Youmans & York, 2011; Poell, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012). This means that Facebook does not necessarily promote "symmetrical participation" (Shirky, 2008) since it has the power to directly or algorithmically[118] control activists and social movements' internal and public communication capabilities (Fuchs, 2014). On Facebook, "algorithmic manipulations are performed routinely, ranging from purposes as mundane as deciding the colour of a button to decisions as significant as which news article is shown to the public" (Tufecki, 2015: 204). Filtering on Facebook constitutes "technological gatekeeping" (Zittrain, 2006) or

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[118] Facebook's News Feed and other such algorithmic decision makers "decide" whether a news article shared by one of its users is shown to other users or not.

"algorithmic gatekeeping[119]" (Tufecki, 2015). Technological gatekeeping refers to efforts made to "change the technology itself to facilitate direct identification and regulation of individuals" (Zittrain, 2006: 255-56). The foregoing views supports Cornwall's (2002) view that all spaces for participation are not neutral, but are themselves shaped by power relations, which both surround and enter them.

It is, however, not merely the corporate owners or governments that limit the democratic and participative potential of social network sites (Cammaerts, 2008). Thus the specific features of Facebook pages and groups impact on the power relation between administrators and fans or group members. The communicative architecture of Facebook is designed in such a way that pages and groups are run by administrators. These administrators (or moderators) are responsible for managing page roles and settings, editing the page and adding apps, creating and deleting posts, responding to and deleting comments, posting to the page, sending messages, creating advertisements, and viewing insights. As Cammaerts (2008) points out, these structural/organisational and individual levels are also treats to the participatory potential of social media. Although all the six Facebook groups and pages studied here were managed by administrators, it is important to note that they had different moderation strategies. From the interviews with the administrators of the Facebook pages and groups in South Africa, it was evident that although they engaged in post-moderation processes, it was more of monitoring spams, pornographic materials and trolls rather than strict online gatekeeping. Moderation or online gatekeeping is an editing process of selection, rejection and prioritisation of content for publication on a website (Mwilu, 2010). It is used to prevent or retrospectively remove "objectionable" material from sites in line with formal and informal standards of acceptable use. The service provider (Facebook) inevitably becomes active and political curator, instead of providing a neutral and open space for user-generated content (Schwartz, 2015).

On Facebook pages and groups, social movements rely on traditional gatekeeping where human intermediaries (admins) are enlisted to guide "individual behaviour and maintaining collective norms" (Lackaff, 2004:1). As Schwartz (2015) points out, the page owners moderate content and may choose to create individual terms-of-service documents for their particular page, on top of the one provided by Facebook as the service provider. The page

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[119] It denotes "the process by which such non—transparent algorithmic computational---tools dynamically filter, highlight, suppress, or otherwise play an editorial role—fully or partially—determining: information flows through online platforms and similar media; human resources processes (such as hiring and firing); flag potential terrorists; and more" (Tufecki, 2015: 207-208).

owner has a big influence on the public interactions: directly in the ability to post updates, reply to comments, delete comments and so on, but also indirectly by political association and authority (Schwartz, 2015). One of the co-administrators of the UPM Facebook group explained the situation as follows: "we allow people to say what they want on our group without interfering. Facebook is an open platform of communication so our role is to facilitate rather than limit public discourse".

It is important to note that the different character of these social movements shaped the nature of politics of participation on Facebook groups and pages. For instance, NGO oriented social movements (like YFZ, CiZC and NCA) in Zimbabwe were more inclined to practice online gatekeeping compared to grassroots movements (like the UPM) in South Africa. Responses from some Facebook administrators in Zimbabwe acknowledged removing, hiding and blocking content which they considered to be in "bad taste", "inappropriate" and "fanning hate speech". While removing hate speech messages does not necessarily constitute infringement of freedom of expression, some of the moderation practices constituted illegitimate forms of censorship. This view reinforces Foucault's (1975) assertion that even the architecture and the organisation of physical spaces (as well as virtual spaces) can serve as a means of domination and control. For example, Carpentier (2011: 14) stresses that, "participation …involves specific actors interacting within a context of power". As one Facebook administrator at the CiZC puts it:

> Our page is our brand name so I don't tolerate status updates which promote panic and pandemonium. In that case, I often delete posts without any warning because imagine someone calling for "regime change" through our page. It's our organisation which will be targeted by the police for prosecution. Administering a Facebook page involves dealing with inappropriate or negative comments and content, handling disgruntled page contributors, and knowing what is acceptable and what is not.

Another Facebook administrator at the YFZ also observed that:

> It is my duty to post content on our page but in some cases I am forced to delete posts which are politically sensitive. We don't want a situation where the page degenerates into political boxing match. Participants should focus on constructive discussions about how we can improve the lives of the youth.

From these responses, it is evident that the Facebook administrators from the CiZC and YFZ in Zimbabwe are concerned with creating what Marichal (2013) calls the hoped for "digital front stage". As such, what is often presented as interactions on Facebook page can be

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described as the "staged authenticity". The response from the YFZ Facebook administrator also calls into question the extent to which the platform is actually acting as an alternative public sphere and a site for everyday forms of resistance (see section 7.3). Because of the subtle role of administrators, Facebook pages are not characterised by "leaderless horizontality" as espoused by cyber-optimists but accentuates hierarchical power relations. Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a structureless group (Freeman, 1971). Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible; it may vary over time; it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. The very fact that we are individuals, with different talents, predispositions, and backgrounds makes this inevitable. A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others (Freeman, 1972). This hegemony can be so easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones. In view of the asymmetrical power relations between administrators and users, Gerbaudo (2012) describes the former as "movement choreographers" or "soft leaders". Discussing the operations of the Rassd Facebook page in Egypt, Sakr (2013) also found that it was characterised by the same hierarchical power structures, with strong top-down supervision on all the material published. This further cements Fraser's (1992) argument that subaltern counter publics are not inherently democratic and virtuous as they might be used by powerful subaltern elements for selfish ends.

As the findings show, compared to South African Facebook administrators, responses from those interviewed in Zimbabwe reveal that strategies they use to restrict content and participation on their groups and fan pages can be categorised into three: censoring by deletion, censoring by hiding and censoring by blocking. Censoring by deletion refers to the practice through which Facebook administrators remove content which is considered unpalatable from the wall or discussion thread. This means that content which has been deleted can no longer be seen by other participants within the group. Censoring by hiding refers to a practice where a post is hidden from the wall or the discussion thread by the Facebook administrator. Instead of an outright banishment from the Facebook group, a participant whose opinion is seen as sowing discord can be censored through hiding his or her

posts from the wall or discussion thread. This frames the possibilities for engagement, circumscribing what can be said and what cannot by defining the contours of what is up for discussion and shunting other considerations out of the frame (Cornwall, 2009). Censoring by blocking denotes the practice where a Facebook administrator "unfriend" a participant on a page or group. In cases of repeated or extreme violation of the "silent" norms and guidelines, users can be banned from participation. Once someone has been "unfriended" he or she cannot engage in conversations with others or view what is posted on the timeline or group discussion wall. These strategies limit the potential for competing views and the free flow of alternative ideas since some voices are either silenced or totally barred from entering these spaces. Without necessarily denying the participatory potential of Facebook, this study therefore acknowledges "the limitations of and constraints to these participative and democratic potentials" (Cammaerts, 2008, 360). As Gaventa (2006: 60) points out, "the dynamics of participation in particular arenas [like on Facebook] will vary a great deal according to who creates the space for it to occur, and therefore, whose rules of the game are used to determine the space, and how they behave once they do". This is because existing relations of power can be reproduced and further amplified within these newly created arenas (like Facebook) through the way in which spaces are managed (by admins) as well as through associations people may have with particular spaces. In cases where certain sections of society are excluded from Facebook pages and groups, these new spaces of participation can be viewed as amplifying societal inequalities.

7.3 Can Facebook groups and fan pages be considered as alternative spaces for political activism?

The analysis and discussion in this section is informed by Fraser (1992) and Örnebring & Jönsson's (2004) ideas on the concept of alternative public sphere as articulated in Chapter Two. Fraser's (1992) ideas allows me to assess whether Facebook groups and fan pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa are enabling users to express their grievances, challenge symbolic domination and advance their political interests. Örnebring & Jönsson's (2004) conceptualisation of alternative public sphere is also invaluable for evaluating the extent to which discourse on Facebook groups and pages takes place somewhere else other than in the mainstream mediated public sphere; whether other participants than the ones normally dominating mediated discourse have access to and a place in the debates and discussions

taking place on Facebook groups and pages; whether Facebook groups and pages are open to other issues than those commonly debated in the mainstream media and finally, whether the use of other ways or forms of debating and discussing common issues than those commonly used in the mainstream media is tolerated on Facebook groups and pages. This entails looking at who gets to participate (or speak), on what conditions, what kind of limitations do Facebook groups and pages impose on conversations, which issues are discussed and what forms and styles are used to represent issues and actors. As Karayianni (2013) observes, when focusing on the potential use of the internet as an alternative public sphere one needs to pay attention to who is using it and what they are using it for (topics discussed). It also assesses whether Facebook pages and groups studied in Zimbabwe and South Africa ensure a plurality of voices.

It is important to point out that on Facebook 'the discourse [does not] takes place *somewhere else'* (Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004) other than in the mainstream mediated public sphere. As pointed out in Chapter One, Facebook is very much part and parcel of corporate capitalism (Fuchs, 2013). This is because Facebook is a privately-owned company with its own agenda and interests. As Fuchs observes, Facebook is "part of the capitalist economy and therefore produce not only public information, but capital and monetary profit by selling users and/ or content" (2015: 330). Although Facebook at face value seems to be a "free" service, as outlined in Chapter One, it creates surplus value through storing, comparing, assessing, and selling the personal data and usage behaviour of several hundred million users. As Fuchs (2012) points out, social network sites are especially suited for targeted advertising because they store and communication a vast amount of personal likes and dislikes of users that allow surveillance of these data for economic purposes and finding out, which products the users are likely to buy. Consequently, targeted advertising is the main source of income and the business model of Facebook (and other social media platforms). Similar to the mainstream mediated public sphere, Facebook to use the words of Habermas (1989) is "colonised or re-feudalised by capitalist market forces". The point here is that Facebook is not free from state censorship and private ownership. For instance, section 3.1 of the Facebook statement of rights and responsibilities states that, "you will not post content that: is hate speech, threatening, or pornographic; incites violence; or contains nudity or graphic or gratuitous violence". It should be noted that some of these restrictions (for instance, hate speech, pornographic) by Facebook constitute legitimate grounds for censorship while others are

illegitimate like gratuitous violence. Under such conditions of both state and corporate censorship, Facebook users are not able to exercise "democratic participation and open public debate" (Fraser, 1992). The problem is that there is no transparency on how Facebook enforces its own terms of service (McKinnon et al, 2014).

Two Facebook users in Zimbabwe have been arrested because of their posts. As discussed in Chapter Three, Vikazi Mavhudzi was arrested in 2011 for commenting on the then Prime Minister Tsvangirai's Facebook page drawing parallels between the Arab Spring and the political situation in Zimbabwe. Another case occurred in 2014 when Gumisai Manduwa was arrested over a post claiming President Robert Mugabe was dead and kept in a freezer. Several people have also been picked up for questioning over the Baba Jukwa Facebook page by the police. As such, the social network site cannot be considered as an alternative site of political activism in Zimbabwe.

Whilst Facebook groups and fan pages have the potential to enable *other participants* than the ones normally dominating media discourse to have access to and a place in the debates and discussions taking place (Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004), it emerged from online observations that a small group of active contributors dominated online conversations across the six social movements under consideration. As one respondent from the CiZC said, "a few people become domineering meaning that opinion of others becomes diluted. It is like in a football team...if (Lionel) Messi[120] is good the rest of the people might never be recognised. Thus our voices get drowned in the ocean of very strong opinions by the established elite". These comments point to the fact that although Facebook groups and fan pages are designed in a way that other participants can have access to and a place in the debates taking place, but in practice those who have economic and cultural capital from other spaces tend to enjoy a monopoly of attention. As Olsson & Svensson (2012: 48) note, the "already established political and cultural elites appropriate the blogosphere and make it their participatory space and public sphere, rather than everyone's". This view also supports Fuchs's (2013) observation that public visibility and attention are highly stratified on social media with celebrities commanding a lot of attention. In both case nations, it was observed that some of the active contributors on Facebook groups and pages have access (as news sources and citizen journalists) to the mainstream media. For instance, some of the users observed from

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[120] He is believed to be one of the greatest footballers who currently plays for FC Barcelona and Argentina

the NCA Facebook page had their own personal blogs which they used to comment on political and everyday issues.

As pointed out earlier, the political economy of access to social media in South Africa puts middle class whites at an advantage when compared to other racial groups (de Lanerolle, 2012) on Facebook conversations. As Verba & Nie (1972: 17) opine, "citizens of higher social and economic status participate more in [online] politics". In both Zimbabwe and South Africa, online observations revealed that female users are under-represented on the Facebook groups and fan pages. The gendered nature of Facebook activism also reminds us that these social media platforms often amplify voices of males at the expense of their female counterparts. As such, the view that Facebook groups and pages constitute an alternative public sphere becomes very problematic. Besides some of the Facebook groups and pages (like the R2K Campaign and UPM) in South Africa being overtly gendered, it was also established that they are also racialised and classed. On the basis of the social profile of users and active participants on these Facebook pages and groups, it is arguable that these spaces are male-centric. They are also classed in so far as some of the unemployed youths from the UPM bemoaned the fact that they cannot afford smartphones and air time to engage in online conversations. Noteworthy to highlight that although Facebook groups provide an outlet for "voice" to other participants, these technologies are double-edged swords in the sense that they create new social hierarchies between the information have and have-less. Instead of facilitating greater inclusion of previously marginalised groups, these online spaces contribute "to the further exclusion of subaltern, economically-marginalised publics from the mediated public sphere" (Sparks, 2011).

Facebook groups and fan pages can also be seen as contributing towards an alternative space for political activism through opening up to *other issues* than those commonly debated in the mainstream mediated public sphere. Qualitative content analysis revealed that at least one Facebook page in each of the two countries attempted to raise other issues other than those covered in the mainstream. These are the NCA (in Zimbabwe) and PASSOP Afrika (in South Africa) Facebook pages. The rest of the Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa regurgitated content sourced from the mainstream media. For instance, out of the 389 posts circulated on the YFZ page 281 of them were links from the mainstream media while the rest were a combination of original and remixed content. Qualitative content analysis revealed that most of the posts shared by the admins of the NCA and CiZC Facebook pages

in Zimbabwe were sourced from mainstream newspapers like *The Herald*, the *NewsDay*, the *Daily News*, *Southern Eye* and so forth. In South Africa, admins and participants on the R2K Campaign and UPM Facebook pages shared links of news stories from mainstream newspapers such as the *Business Day*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Grocotts Mail*, *The Dispatch*, *Cape Argus*, *Cape Times* and so forth. Contrary to the view that everyone is a "produser" (Bruns, 2008) on social media, it was established that some of the participants on Facebook could be aptly described as "forwarding" and "sharing" agents rather than original content producers. This is because most of the Facebook pages and groups were characterised by cutting and pasting of content from the mainstream media. As Zuckerman (2008) observes, those using networked media to contribute to the dissemination of news selectively amplify stories introduced by traditional media outlets, thereby replicating offline cultural foci. It is arguable therefore that the communicative spaces spawned by some Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa are "alternative in appearance than in substance" (Wasserman, 2010: 91).

In Zimbabwe, Facebook users on the NCA page circulated information and images that undermined hegemonic discourses of the government. They discussed topics such as the loopholes of the COPAC-drafted constitution and lack of consultation which characterised the constitution making exercise. The NCA Facebook page provided an alternative view of the COPAC-drafted constitution found in the mainstream media. Whilst the mainstream media campaigned for the Vote Yes, it systematically ignored the shortcomings of the constitution. Hence the NCA Facebook page provided the opportunity for users to discuss issues which were swept under the carpet by the mainstream media. Facebook users on the NCA page mobilised Zimbabweans to vote against the COPAC-drafted constitution. They highlighted that the constitution was not democratic and people driven as well as left the powers of the president intact. As one Facebook user posted on the NCA page on the 8th of March 2013: "I am convinced that voting NO at the referendum is one of the few remaining ways of building a brighter future for our future generations". Another user added: "We remain ready to die for a genuinely people-driven and democratic constitution and not this fraud by COPAC which every political leader is saying they will change once they assume power". In the South African case, the PASSOP Afrika page raised awareness on the plight of asylum seekers and refugees which are often ignored in the mainstream commercial media. Facebook users on the PASSOP Afrika also discussed about the rights of LGBTI refugees

and violations of the rights of farm workers. Because of the issues they dealt with, the NCA and PASSOP Afrika can be viewed as constituting alternative spaces for political activism.

An important reason why Facebook groups and pages have the ability to constitute an alternative public sphere is that rather than simply fostering rational-critical debate there are *other forms of debating* and discussing common issues which are practised. From the online observations, it was evident that Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa allow for diverse modes of political expression through posts, images, video and comments. These modes of political debate include: rational-critical debate, emotional (see Chapter Two), agnostic[121] and carnivalesque[122]. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2014) observes, the emotional architecture of Facebook is designed in such a way that it promotes the expression of positive emotion through features such as the "like" button. At the time of writing this thesis, Facebook had announced plans to launch the much anticipated "dislike" button. The postings that get the most attention on Facebook are posts that get the most likes, and the posts that get the most likes are, well, more likable (Pariser, 2011: 149). This indicates that the architecture of Facebook shapes communication practices through fostering of affirmative or uncritical interaction. On the six Facebook pages and groups, users who interacted tended to be fuelled by passion and emotions encompassing disgust, fear, compassion and care.

As will be discussed in Chapter Eight, Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa are characterised by sensational and humorous expressions of political issues (see also section 5.1.9). Compared to Facebook groups and pages in South Africa, those in Zimbabwe were more likely to resort to carnivalesque modes of political debate. This playful satirisation of political figures and policies has the potential to "draw historically subordinated publics into the realm of the political in a way that formal political debates are unable to" (Wasserman, 2010: 92). This also dovetails with Bakhtin (1984) notion of carnival which suggests that "laughter, frivolity and the carnivalesque open up an "unofficial" discursive space from which the 'official' world may be ridiculed and resistance sustained". In both case nations, Facebook pages and groups were punctuated by emotional expressions. These emotional conversations allowed Facebook users to express their "deeply felt interests" (Lunt

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[121]Facebook pages constituted a battleground on which different hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideas are contested, debated and confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation (Mouffe, 2000)..

[122]Bahktin's (1981) concept of the carnivalesque refers to an inversion of ordinary public life. Similar to the "popular character of the carnival" (Bakardjieva, 2008), Facebook pages were characterised by the excessive deployment of popular culture to critique and engage with dominant power relations in society, resembled early modern marketplace and public squares in which diverse social types and language styles intermingled, the figures of speech, modes of debate and performances mirrored a carnival atmosphere, punctuated by the suspension of all hierarchical differences. This is because participants on Facebook pages and groups come from different walks of life bringing differential life experience, economic and educational status.

& Stenner, 2005). Although liberal democratic theory tends to cling to visions of rational-critical debate, Livingstone & Lunt (1994) argue that emotional expressions play an invaluable role in authenticating the accounts of participants. This corroborates Bickford's (2011) assertion that emotional expressions, whether as angry street protests or personal responses to everyday life via social media or mobile phones should also be considered as having political implications. For instance, one of the youth activists in Zimbabwe expressed his frustration with the political status quo as follows:

Figure 9: Enough is Enough?

Source: Facebook wall post by a CiZC activist

It is evident from the above image, that the user was expressing his deeply felt views about the status quo in Zimbabwe. This post was made prior to the 2013 harmonised election. The ZANU-PF regime is depicted as a bunch of "bastards" which must leave office. By saying "enough is enough" the Facebook user suggests that time has come for Zimbabweans to vote out ZANU-PF. This further supports Papacharissi's observation that affect which refer to the sum of—often discordant—feelings about affairs, public and private is the energy that drives, neutralises, or entraps networked publics" (2014: 7). Online observations also indicated that compared to Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe, those in South Africa were characterised by conflict and dissensus. Facebook like other private and public-facing social media enable youth activists in both countries to express antagonistic positions via their specific radical discursive practices, articulate emancipatory alternatives and develop counter-hegemonic cultural and economic practices. Far from rational-critical debate, Facebook pages and groups are also punctuated by ideological clashes, name-calling and use of obscenities to silence others. These findings challenges Fraserian ideas on subaltern counter-publics by highlighting the creative appropriation of social media platforms "as

channels of a radical democratic project by allowing community members from divergent social groups to define and constitute themselves, facilitate debate and transmit their viewpoints to a wider public" (Chiumbu, 2015: 10). As Mouffe (2005) propound, agonistic public spaces are places for the expression of dissensus, for bringing to the floor what forces attempt to keep concealed. This does not mean to say that communication complying with the rules and ideals of a rational-critical debate never occurs on Facebook pages and groups but the predominant modes of debating followed carnivalesque, emotional and agnostic lines. Instead of deliberated consensus, some of the Facebook groups and pages in South Africa were characterised by heated clashes and name-calling of minority groups. For instance, on the 7th of December 2011 PASSOP Afrika posted the following topic: "BBC debate on Homosexuality in Africa with Junior, one of our LGBTI project volunteers- Homophobia is a huge problem. As PASSOP we believe that homosexual rights are human rights". This posting elicited a wide range of divergent responses. Some of the responses are illustrated below:

> **Comment**: How is this society linked with gays? I didn't know

> **Comment**: 'Homosexuals are worse than dogs and pigs'

> **Comment**: You ARE being homophobic Mdhara - stop hiding behind religion.

> **Comment**: Hey Theo you are a real twirp what will u do if your child is gay will u disown him or her. Get a life cos religion is just a way of life. Peanut head and no correspondence will b entered into.

> **Comment**: Homosexuality is a sin!

> **Comment**: I think the scientists should work extra hard to come up with antigay drug. All addicts should get free treatment.

It is clear from the foregoing that Facebook pages are also riddled with reactionary[123] politics. A sample of responses cited from the PASSOP Afrika Facebook page shows that rather than only promoting progressive politics, online spaces also amplify homophobic tendencies. As boyd (2014: 158) notes, "tools that enable communication do not sweep away inequality distrust, hatred, and prejudice". Her argument is that far from being the panacea, social media platforms simply sheds new light on the divisive social dynamics that plague contemporary society. Critiquing the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, Örnebring & Jönsson's

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[123] Reactionary politics support the status quo or a return to the previous political state of society. It includes calls for the incarceration of gays and lesbians, killing of foreigners and asylum seekers and descriptions of blacks as kaffirs.

(2004) point out that political participation builds not only on rational processing of information, but also on emotion, sensationalism and sometimes even outrage.

This study also found that compared to groups, Facebook pages (like CiZC, R2K Campaign, NCA, PASSOP Afrika) in Zimbabwe and South Africa cannot be viewed as alternative spaces of political activism because of the limitations they impose on conversations. All of these movements operate as NGOs hence are more concerned with safeguarding the organisational image. As highlighted earlier, Facebook pages do not allow users to create their own discussion topics but rely on content posted by the administrator. As Walton (2014) observes, page owners determine the level to which participants may contribute (whether they may set the agenda by posting or merely follow the owner's agenda in their comments). This makes it difficult for everyday Facebook users "to tell their stories and bring their struggles into the public arena (Örnebring, 2006: 862). This is because Facebook pages allow for a tight control of content and clearer differentiation between administrators and users.

Unlike pages, Facebook groups like the UPM (in South Africa) and YFZ (in Zimbabwe) allow participants to speak as "equals" although administrators retain more power. Thus Facebook groups have the potential to create alternative spaces of political activism because of their architectural features. Because of their "democratic model of collective participation under the governance of "admins'" (Walton, 2014: 453), groups allow people with a similar interest to come together around an issue or activity to organise, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content. This was witnessed on the YFZ and UPM Facebook groups where members posted and shared content they considered to be of common concern. Unlike Facebook pages which are public by default, groups' privacy settings allow administrators to have control over who gets to participate in them. Members of these groups were approved by the administrator. As closed Facebook groups, interactions on the YFZ and UPM can only be seen by those approved by the administrator. In the case of the UPM and YFZ Facebook groups, discourse takes place within the context of what Squires (2002) calls an "enclaved public sphere". This is because deliberations are hidden from the purview of state and the dominant public.

7.4 Conclusion

Despite the hyperbolic accounts which present Facebook as the *sine qua non* for participatory culture, this chapter has demonstrated that most of the pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa are characterised by low levels of interaction. Based on the analysis of the discussion threads, it was found that unlike in Zimbabwe, conversations on some Facebook pages in South Africa are dominated by white participants compared to other racial groups. In the case of the UPM Facebook group, where a small group of white participants tended to dominate public discourse, thereby contributing to the "paradox of the participation of the privileged" (Scholz, 2008). In terms of discursive interactions, a small group of participants dominated conversations on Facebook in both countries. Women participants also seem marginalised from the online political discourse in both countries. The study found that language is a major barrier to effective participation on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Because most of the Facebook pages and groups in both countries fall within the "minimalist form of participation", I concur with Valytsson's (2014: 52) apt observation that "the communicative efforts of the general public remain in the form of weak publics belonging to the cultural public spheres since decision-making still takes place in the "upper" structures of political public spheres".

With regards to the micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and pages, this chapter has highlighted that compared to South Africa, most page administrators in Zimbabwe engage in subtle forms of content gatekeeping through censoring by deletion, hiding and blocking. Although new media technologies make it possible to combine top-down corporate media production structure with more fluid, bottom-up participation, this study has argued that Facebook groups and pages are not inherently democratic. These spaces are riddled with power and hierarchical relations. The admins exert hierarchy and control over the fans of their pages. Most pages prevented fans from publishing directly on the page's wall and all the material had to be filtered through the admin. The admins acknowledged banning and blocking fans who used strong language or whose opinions diverged too far from the group. In her study amongst the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in South Africa, Chiumbu (2015) also found that a few key activists rise up in an unofficial leadership position to steer mobilisation activities. It therefore suggests that the "structurelessness" of Facebook pages and groups serve to mask the power dynamics and discursive struggles immanent in communicative action. As Chiumbu (2015) argues, these contradictions within

social movements highlight the importance of recognising power dynamics and discursive struggles present and their influence in use of media and ICTs for mobilisation.

This study has also established that the extent to which Facebook pages and groups can be viewed as alternative public spheres depends largely on who gets to participate (or speak), on what conditions, what kind of limitations do Facebook groups and pages impose on conversations, which issues are discussed and what forms and styles are used to represent issues and actors. In terms of who gets to participate on Facebook conversations, this study has argued that social media platforms are still very much an elite form of communication in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This significant limits the potential of Facebook to act as an alternative space for counter-hegemonic activism. As Chiumbu (2015) posits, genuine cyber-activism is based on real participation and online deliberations by ordinary people. The chapter has looked at the arguments for and against whether Facebook groups constitute alternative spheres. It has argued that Facebook is part of the mainstream in terms of its political economy although it has been appropriated for activist purposes in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

It has also demonstrated that some Facebook groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa constitute alternative spheres because they validate a more diverse spectrum of topics and styles considered worthy of public discussion (Van Zoonen, 2000). Instead of monoglossic spaces inhabited by rational-critical debate only, this chapter has argued that we need to conceptualise "actually existing" (Fraser, 1990) public spheres on Facebook as punctuated by hybrid modes of debate or heteroglossia as theorised by Bakhtin (1968). Heteroglossia views the world as constituted by a diversity of voices, styles, genres and texts [or modes of debate by extension]. Arguably, a heteroglossia of political expressions is the best description of the actually existing public spheres in Africa. Facebook, therefore, closely approximates a heteroglossic space where multiple modes of debate and political speech conhabit, critique, reinforce and ultimately deconstruct each other. This is contrary to the Habermsian notion of public sphere as discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter has also argued that the assumption that Facebook holds progressive potential needs to be viewed critically. This is especially important in the context of pervasive reactionary politics that pervade Facebook discussions and interactions.

The next chapter looks at digital hidden transcripts which are circulated by youth activists on Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DIGITAL HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS CIRCULATED ON FACEBOOK BY YOUTHS IN ZIMBABWE AND SOUTH AFRICA

8. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This chapter documents and analyses the various kinds of political discourses (referred here as digital hidden transcripts) which are circulated on Facebook by youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa. As outlined in Chapter Two, some of the digital hidden transcripts which are posted and shared on Facebook groups and pages include: gossip, rumour, political jokes, subvertisements, online petitions, cartoons and letters addressed to public and political representatives (I will discuss each of these discourses below). As will be discussed in more detail below, these kinds of online commentary can be viewed as circuits of political discussion because they are directed towards engaging with how power and resources are organised in society as well as raising political questions that are instrumental in kick-starting debate or even direct action. Although most of these modes of political commentary and critique are often seen as channels of "irrational" and "uncivil" social and cultural expressions, they also transmit symbolic and virtual acts of resistance or opposition in the politics of everyday life. This chapter will also show that these informal media genres constitute alternative routes through which young people use to express their political convictions and beliefs.

As argued in Chapter Two, the metaphor of digital hidden transcripts provide a more productive space for analysing active citizenship practices of the youth in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Digital hidden transcripts refer to the ways of communicating political viewpoints as well as resisting or ridiculing power which are circulated through digital forms (see Chapter Two). The over-arching argument of this chapter is that an over-emphasis on rational critical discussion as espoused by Habermas may blind us from focusing on how politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa appropriate popular culture "to engage, debate and contest the state" (Willems, 2010: 48) in seemingly irrational ways. Although engagement on Facebook can be viewed as "irrational" in the sense that most of it does not conform to the conventional definitions of rational debate and formal political

participation (see Chapter Seven), these emotional and carnivalesque forms of political discourse should be seen as valid forms of discursive contestation (see Chapter Two). The problem with assessing the quality of deliberation occurring on Facebook pages against the Habermasian normative standards of rational-critical debate, as Janssen & Kies (2005) observes, is that such an approach misses the importance of other communicative forms. In other words, such an approach "may prevent analysis from assessing online political forums on their own merits" (Bakardjieva, 2008: 292). Hence the deployment of Fraserian ideas which allows one to look for "actually existing" public spheres rather than impose normative ones.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Fraser's ideas are relevant here "because they elaborate on those dimensions of social communication and public life that remain outside the scope of the Habermasian perspective" (Bakardjieva, 2008: 292). As Gardiner (2004: 38) points out:

> The marketplace and public square in early modern times were witness to a tumultuous intermingling of diverse social groups and widely divergent styles and idioms of language, ranging from the serious to the ironic and the playful… In such contested spaces … existing social hierarchies were often questioned and subverted through carnivalesque strategies of remarkable variety and invention, including the use of parodic and satirical language, grotesque humour, and symbolic degradations and inversions. There never was a "golden age of communicative utopia": the real public sphere was always marked by a pluralistic and conflictual heteroglossia.

It is evident from the quote that it borrows heavily from Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnival as a "popular" site of the inversion of hierarchies through ridicule and parody. Besides offering a more nuanced critique of the Habermasian public sphere, Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and the carnival "opens up the scope of available ways of conceptualising online political forums as a mode of public communication in their own right" (Bakardjieva, 2008: 292). In the context of this study, digital hidden transcripts feed into and from Bakhtin's notions of carnivalesque, humour and the inversion of normal rational modes of political communication. Similar to Fraser's (1992) concept of subaltern counter-publics, Bakhtin (1984) acknowledges that there are alternative modes of communication other than those belonging to the rational-critical discourse. This dovetails with Brough & Shresthova's (2012) argument that defining political participation as explicitly linked to traditional political institutions alone obscures the role of [popular]

culture in social and political change. It also fuels the alarmist discourse about youth disengagement from formal politics without taking into consideration other innovative ways through which young people in Africa are engaging with the state through informal media.

As outlined in Chapter Two, Fraser (1992) points out that counter-discourses are circulated within the confines of subaltern counter-publics in order to circumvent censorship from gatekeepers of the dominant public sphere. Her argument shares many similarities with Scott's (1990) observation that hidden transcripts are disseminated through "social spaces of relative autonomy". The concepts of counter-discourses and hidden transcripts refer to similar issues (see Chapter Two). Another term which is synonymous with these two concepts coined by Bourgault (1995) is "parallel discourse". This refers to the means through which mostly Africans attempt to "deform, through deconstruction and reconstruction, the praises they are forced to sing and perform" (Bourgault, 1995: 201). Her argument is that deconstruction and reconstruction occurs through subversion of official party slogans and songs by ordinary people during official visits of government officials (Bourgault, 1995).

Building on Barber (1987), hidden transcripts constitute "unofficial cultures" which can be viewed as popular art forms that are representative of muted, under-represented, or misrepresented media cultures. These kinds of political commentary chimes with what Willems (2015) calls "mediated civic agency". This denotes "a wider spectrum of actions in which [young] citizens engage power through a range of media forms, whether formal or informal" (Willems, 2015: 4). However, in political contexts where invited spaces of participation are repressed, digital hidden transcripts or what O'Donnell (1986: 261) termed "oblique voice", often non-verbal signals of common identity intended to be understood only by like-minded people, but not to be perceived by the agents of the state.

Although digital hidden transcripts were not as frequent when compared to other types of political postings, it was established that they attracted a lot of interaction on Facebook groups and pages as well as elicited different modes of debate (see Chapter Seven). As Zuckerman (2013: 16) writes, "messages that are funny are more likely to be spread, and those that are remixable invite participation and amplification". As intimated in Chapter Four, drawing on a two-year social media ethnography and qualitative content analysis, online discourses which elicited a lot of engagement were purposively chosen based on empirical and theoretical considerations. Qualitative content analysis was deployed in this particular study because it enables researchers to discover, compare and contrast "relevant situations,

settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances" (Altheide, 1987: 8). After spending a considerable amount of time observing and archiving online postings, I then categorised different kinds of political discourses into distinct genres, themes and narratives (see Chapter Four). Thus similar forms of expressions were grouped together for comparison purposes. In keeping with the comparative thrust of the present study, this chapter foregrounds the commonalities and divergences in terms of the political discourses circulated in Zimbabwe and South Africa as well as between the activist groupings under investigation. It also focuses on the social profile of the posters of the political discourses and how they were received through comments, likes and shares. With these issues in mind, the next section looks at political jokes.

8.1.1 Political Jokes

This study found that youths from Zimbabwe and South Africa used Facebook as a socio-cultural space for "poking" fun at the ruling elite. As Flesher Fominaya (2014) observes, jokes are produced and disseminated in both democratic and non-democratic societies with the aim of ridiculing those in power as well as communicating political viewpoints. Although jokes thrive in both political contexts, it is in the authoritarian regime where they are more pervasive largely due to restrictions imposed on public speech and curtailment of freedom of expression. In the Zimbabwean context, political jokes have become a forum for young people to vent, mock and say things that they would not say or do openly for fear of political victimisation (Manganga, 2012; Kuhlmann, 2012). It is important however to highlight that because of the differences in the political, economic and cultural make-up of Zimbabwe and South Africa the subject matter of most of the jokes also differed significantly. Similarities were only noticeable in relation to jokes dealing with the intellectual capabilities of political figures. The subject matter of most political jokes circulated in both case nations tended to focus on the president, his policies and decisions. It was observed that the themes in the jokes were not constant but changed periodically to adapt to shifts in political and economic circumstances. The butt of most political jokes in Zimbabwe were Joseph Chinotimba (MP for Buhera South and war veteran), Robert Mugabe, Grace Mugabe (the first lady and ZANU-PF's secretary for women's affairs), Jonathan Moyo (minister of information, media and broadcasting services), Joice Mujuru (ex-Vice President) and Morgan Tsvangirai. These

political figures were targeted because of their political scandals and shenanigans within Zimbabwean politics.

In both countries, some of the digital hidden transcripts circulated on Facebook groups and pages transgressed the boundaries of permissible public speech. In the Zimbabwean context, the boundaries of permissible and impermissible speech are enshrined within the 2013 Constitution as well as other repressive pieces of legislation as espoused in Chapter One. Whilst Chapter 4 of the new charter which deals with the declaration of rights explicitly guarantees citizens' freedom of expression, freedom of the media, access to information, it is important to note that existing media laws have not yet been aligned to the new constitution. For instance, the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2004) makes it a criminal offence to "insult" the honour or dignity of public officials and other very-important-persons. Section 33 of the law criminalises statements that undermine the authority of or insult the president, while sections 95 and 96 create the crimes of "criminal insult" and "criminal defamation". Despite this law being declared unconstitutional by the constitutional court in October 2013, the law enforcement agents have continued to deploy it to arrest activists and ordinary people for insulting and ridiculing President Mugabe. The police have also used AIPPA, POSA and the Interception of Communications Act to limit the citizens' ability to freely communicate and to self-express without the fear of adverse consequences. As noted in Chapter One, these laws impose serious limitations on open political discourse and the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

In the South African case, the boundaries of reasonable expression are spelt out in the 1996 Constitution and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000, also known as the Equality Act. The right to freedom of expression is set out under section 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. For instance, section 16(2) sets out the limitations with regards to the right of freedom of expression. It states that the right to freedom of expression does not apply to "propaganda for war, incitement of imminent violence or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion and that constitutes incitement to cause harm". It follows that the South African Constitution defines hate speech as "advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion and that constitutes incitement to cause harm". Despite the existence of progressive laws there seems to be confusion over what constitutes acceptable satire, speech and artistic expression. For instance, a section on the right to dignity in the South African Constitution,

which is similar to the Zimbabwean "insult law", has been appealed to by the ANC in their criticism of Brett Murray's The Spear. The situation is made worse by the fact that the Constitution and the Equality Act define hate speech differently. The Equality Act seeks to give effect to the letter and spirit of the Constitution by amongst others, providing measures to facilitate the eradication of unfair discrimination, hate speech and harassment. It states that "no person may publish, propagate, advocate or communicate words based on one or more of the prohibited grounds, against any person, that could reasonably be construed to demonstrate a clear intention to (a) be hurtful; (b) be harmful or to incite harm; or (c) promote or propagate hatred." This means that there are limits to the right to online freedom of expression as espoused in the aforementioned pieces of legislation.

Having outlined the boundaries of permissible and impermissible public speech in the two countries, I now turn my attention to political jokes with similar themes before teasing out those which are different. The first set of political jokes identified from this study related to the intellectual capabilities of political figures in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The jokes below poke fun at the dim-wittedness of Joseph Chinotimba and Jacob Zuma (President of South Africa):

Box 22: Joke about Joseph Chinotimba

> Journalist: "Mr. Chinotimba, first of all, is it true that you are the bread winner in your family." Chinos: "I am not hearing that allegation for the first time, I have been hearing it for some time, I know this allegation is coming from my political enemies who want to tarnish my image. I want to tell you that I have never been in any competition to win bread. Ask them where I won that bread. If anyone saw me entering a competition to win bread, then they must provide the evidence otherwise I will start suing anyone saying I am a bread winner, yes including you reporters and your newspapers."

Source: Facebook profile page

Box 23: A joke about Jacob Zuma and four other people

> A plane with 5 people on board was about to crash, but there were only 4 parachutes. The 1st person, Lionel Messi, said, "I'm the world's best footballer, I can't die now!" So he took one of the parachutes and left.
> Aliko Dangote, said, "I'm the richest man in Africa, I can't die now!" So he took the 2nd parachute and left. The third was a Jacob Zuma and he said, "I'm the president of SA moreover another election is around the corner, so I can't die now!" So he took one

> and left. Then the Pope said to the little girl, "Take the last one, I'll sacrifice my life for you." The little girl replied, "No need for that, your Holiness, there are two parachutes left." The pope asked her, "How come?" The little girl replied, "That SA President took my school bag!

Source: Facebook profile page

The two political jokes cited above were circulated by observed respondents from the YFZ and PASSOP Afrika respectively. The joke about Chinotimba garnered a total of 61 likes, 23 comments and 12 shares while that of Zuma received 32 likes, 15 comments and 3 shares. This indicates that the Zimbabwean joke attracted high levels of engagement in terms of likes but low levels of engagement with regards to comments and shares like the South African one. Some of the comments on the two jokes described Zuma and Chinotimba "intellectual midget", "foolish politician" and "imbecile". It is important to note that the joke about Zuma in South Africa was shared by a male white youth illustrates an element of racism. This also highlights the reactionary nature of Facebook politics where discriminatory practices are easily played out. In fact, the tone of the discourse of the joke focusing on Zuma's education further shows that it was circulated by a poster from an educated, middle-class section of the population. As for the Zimbabwean case, the Chinotimba joke was shared by an educated and urban youth. Writing about the Kenyan context, Musila (2010: 286) argues that satire can be seen as a form of "self-reflexive laughter" which "is the kind of humour that entails laughing at ourselves, at our various weaknesses, vices and flaws".

Boxes 20 and 21 are similar in the sense that they portray Zuma and Chinotimba as dim-witted. Both politicians have been on the receiving end of most satire in their respective countries. Zuma and Chinotimba are generally depicted as politicians with low educational qualifications and a poor grasp of the English language. In Box 20, Chinotimba is caricatured as an epitome of politicians who have been voted into parliament but with little understanding of the meaning of the word "bread winner". By reducing Chinotimba to a laughing stock, the joke invites people to reflect on the quality of politicians who are entrusted to make laws on their behalf. In Box 21, Zuma is portrayed as someone who is so dumb that he cannot make a distinction between a parachute and a school bag. It is clear from the foregoing that these jokes are not really challenging power relations but reinforcing them. For instance, mocking Jacob Zuma for his lack of education is a tricky thing to do in a country where the education system has been so skewed. The same can be said of Chinotimba (a war veteran) who spent most of his childhood life fighting in the liberation struggle. It should be noted there is a

difference between someone's intellectual capabilities and their education levels. This is because a politician can be poorly educated, but still highly intelligent. The satirisation of politicians as dim-witted is not something unique to Zimbabwe and South Africa because dictators like Hosni Mubarak have not been spared (Anagondahalli & Khamis, 2014).

Compared to South Africa, some of the jokes shared on Facebook in Zimbabwe ridiculed the way Robert Mugabe had ruined a country once known "as the breadbasket of Africa into an African basket case" (Tonini, 2005). The joke below is illustrative:

Box 24: Joke about Robert Mugabe's hell country

> Queen Elizabeth, Bill Clinton & Robert Mugabe died & went straight to hell. Queen Elizabeth said "I miss England, I want to call England and see how everybody is doing there. She called and talked for about 5 minutes, then she asked "Well, devil how much do I owe you???? The devil says "Five million dollars" She wrote him a cheque and went to sit back on her chair.
>
> Bill Clinton was so jealous, he starts screaming, "My turn! I wanna call the United States, I want to see how everybody is doing there too" He called and talked for about 2 minutes, then he asked "Well, devil how much do I owe you???? The devil says "Ten million dollars" With a smug look on his face; he made a cheque and went to sit back on his chair. Robert Mugabe was even more jealous & starts screaming, "I want to call Zim too, I want to see how everybody is doing there too. I wanna talk to the ministers, to the deputy, I wanna talk to everybody"..... He called Zim and he talked for about twenty hours, he talked & talked & talked, then he asked "Well, devil how much do I owe you???? The devil says "One dollar". Mugabe is stunned & says "One dollar??? Only one fuc*ing dollar??" The devil says "Well if you make a call from hell to a hell hole, it's a local call".

Source: Facebook profile page

The joke cited above was circulated by a male youth from the CiZC in Zimbabwe. In Box 23, the joke pokes fun at President Mugabe's Zimbabwe describing it as "hell". Unlike Bill Clinton's United States of America and Queen Elizabeth's Great Britain, Mugabe is portrayed as requesting the devil to grant him permission to make a call from "Hell" (assumed to be a place of eternal torment where sinners go when they depart Earth according to the Bible) to his ministers, deputies and everybody to enquire about their well-being in Zimbabwe (a hell hole). Another sub-text of this joke is the fact that Mugabe swears, making him appear unstatesman-like and therefore less unassailable. Given the fact that Christians constitute 70 per cent of the Zimbabwean population (Ruzivo, 2008), Mugabe is depicted as

destined for hell because of his numerous documented sins. As Manganga (2012) observes, jokes in Zimbabwe constitute crucial outlets for political expectoration, to navigate and subvert state power and media censorship. This further cements Dundes's (1971: 51) view that "the more repressive the regime, the more numerous the political jokes". At the time of this research, the joke posted on a Facebook profile page had received 85 likes, 20 comments and 11 shares. As noted in Chapters Five and Seven, because of the chilling effect of internet surveillance most Facebook users are more inclined to "like" rather than to "comment" on sensitive issues related to President Mugabe.As Obadare (2009: 250) notes, jokes "are often targeted at official vulgarity, and are also a means through which the "powerless" hold a mirror to themselves."

Writing about the use of humour in Zimbabwe, Moyo (2009) argues that jokes tend to condense powerful political messages. He also suggests that by choosing to convey political messages through jokes, citizens are to some extent "resisting the formal or institutional ways of packaging information, while at the same time responding to the nature of the technology at hand which demands brevity" (Moyo, 2009: 557). In reference to the Nigerian context, Obadare (2010) argues that jokes are a vehicle through which ordinary citizens subverts, deconstructs, and engages with the state. This is because jokes function as a powerful comic expression of ideas and a strategy for discussing people in authority in social contexts where direct criticism could be risky. As Davies (2007) adds, jokes in authoritarian regimes are tiny realms of freedom that allows the masses to speak their mind and vent their frustration. It is important to note that fear of political victimisation especially in Zimbabwe influences the content and themes of jokes which are circulated. Although this is not more pronounced in democratic settings like South Africa, it should be highlighted that creative artists such as Jonathan Shapiro and Brett Murray have been criticised by the ANC for over-stepping the boundaries of permissible speech. Others like controversial columnist David Bullard was fired from the *Sunday Times* because his writings made fun of Zuma's education as well as peddled racist remarks. Whilst scholars (Anagondahalli & Khamis, 2014; Obadare, 2013) contend that unlike mass media content, jokes cannot be successfully repressed, it is noteworthy to highlight that they are not beyond state censorship. As intimated earlier, ordinary people in Zimbabwe have been arrested for ridiculing the president. In the South African context, the most caricatured politicians were President Jacob Zuma, Thuli Madonsela (Public Protector), Julius Malema (EFF leader) and Helen Zille (DA leader).

Contrary to the Zimbabwean case, some of the jokes circulated in South Africa dealt with the thorny issue of racism. As Musila (2014) suggests, through "comic discourses" people have been able to confront issues considered uncomfortable to deal with by the mainstream channels of communication. She argues that satire constitutes a vehicle of transgressive engagement with a problematic racial status quo in South Africa (Musila, 2014). The following joke circulated by a white youth from the R2K Campaign on her Facebook profile is illustrative:

Box 25: Racism will never end in South Africa?

> 1. Racism will never end as long as white cars are still using black tyres.
>
> 2. Racism will never end as long as white bread still costs more than brown bread.
>
> 3. Racism will never end if people still use BLACK to symbolise bad luck and WHITE for peace!
>
> 4. Racism will never end if people still wear white clothes to weddings and black clothes to the funerals
>
> 5. Racism will never end as long as those who don't pay their bills are Blacklisted not Whitelisted.

Source: Facebook profile page

The foregoing joke about racism in South Africa seems to belittle a very serious issue. For instance, the joke insinuates that, "racism will never end if people still use white clothes to weddings and black clothes to the funerals", this statement fails to acknowledge the root causes of the racism. The above post drew a torrent of humorous and angry responses from Facebook users. Many of the exchanges included racist and obscene language. Although the intention of the post was possibly to get people talking about racism, the joke in Box 24 is many ways racist and serves to normalise and naturalise the scourge when society should find ways of ending it. It is racist in many ways because it portrays the scourge as natural and unchangeable, when it's basically socially-constructed. As highlighted in Chapter Seven, this demonstrates that online popular cultures often reinforce societal hegemonic discourses (Ligaga, 2012; boyd, 2014). These findings contradict cyber-optimists' portrayal of social media as "liberation" technologies (Diamond, 2010). It demonstrates that social media can also give a voice to extremely reactionary perspectives. The results also validate Aouragh's (2013) argument that social media platforms are rife with contradictions which are synonymous with the sword of Damocles (see Chapter One).

Although political satire has traditionally been seen as a "concealed voice" (Hirshmann, 1970) against dominant elites, it can nevertheless take a confrontational stance and challenge a regime. It constitutes an important vehicle for the transmission of political information. As Hammett (2011) observes, jokes as political ephemera can be seen as ad-hoc, unorganised and often uncivil responses to experiences of power and politics which undermine and demythologise hegemonic power and create certain kinds of truth while contesting the politics of belonging which underpins such political engagement. Next I discuss subvertisements.

8.1.2 Subvertisements

Online observations and qualitative content analysis established that Zimbabwean and South African youths also employed Facebook to circulate subvertisements. Subvertising is a portmanteau of "subvert" and "advertising". Subvertisement denotes "a popular online strategy, in the form of language, picture and animation, which comically subverts and deconstructs corporate and political advertisements" (Nomai, 2008: 26). It turns corporate identity on its head, subverting the popular imagery associated with a brand, slogan or an artwork to force the reader to consider broader social and political issues in line with political dynamics of the day (Kuntz, 1998; Cammaerts, 2007). This creative vernacular practice has similarities with Scott's (1985) notion of "linguistic tricks" because it entails the informal use of mainstream icons to deliver social and political commentary. This dovetails with Leibold's (2011) assertion that political parodies playfully subvert a range of authoritative discourses and provides a vehicle for both comic criticism and emotional catharsis.
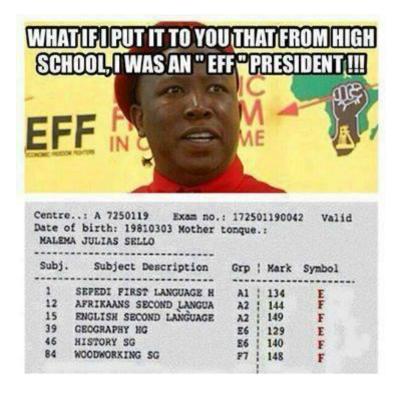
In both Southern African countries, Facebook users creatively subvertised the names of political parties and their mottos. Unlike in Zimbabwe, some of the observed respondents from the UPM in South Africa subvertised the acronym the EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) to stand for the "Economic Foolishness Fighters" on their Facebook personal profiles. Still others from the same movement noted that EFF stands for "Every Fool Follow" on their personal profiles. This is despite EFF's commendable performance during the 2014 election where it won 25 seats in the National Assembly. Some of the observed youths from the R2K Campaign subverted the acronym ANC to stand for the "African National Corruption" on their Facebook personal profiles. This was following the much publicised Nkandla report, where the President Jacob Zuma was found to have unduly benefited from

public funds during the renovation of his Nkandla homestead. Writing about the use of Facebook in South Africa, Walton (2014) argues that that hackronyms (hijacked acronyms) have been deployed as replacements of official party acronyms (ANC became African National Corruption) and EFF became Expelled Frustrated Fools whilst the popular acronym BBM (BlackBerry Messenger) was appropriated to stand for "Bring Back Malema". BBM was popularised following the expulsion of Julius Malema from the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL).

Compared to South Africa where observed youths subverted acronyms of political parties, in Zimbabwe mostly urban based youth tinkered with slogan of the MDC-T. For instance, some of the youths from the NCA subverted MDC-T's slogan "the party of excellence" to "the party of SEXexcellence" in reference to the sexual escapades of the leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The motto of the MDC-T was also renamed as a "party of unprotected SEXcellence". As Toulabor (1981) writes, Togolese citizens have also used linguistic subversion to turn official party names into obscene word play, designed to demystify and ridicule the government.

Given the political economy of access to social media in South Africa, mostly white Facebook users from the R2K Campaign changed the name of the Protection of State Information Bill to the "Secrecy Bill". The reason was that the Bill was viewed as putting a lid on the free flow of information. Qualitative content analysis also showed that one male white Facebook user from the UPM circulated Julius Sello Malema's photoshopped Matric result transcript on his profile page. As the caption of the transcript (see Figure 10) illustrate, "what I put it to you that from high school, I was an "EFF" President, Malema's low academic grades are subverted to suggest he was always a below par student since his school days. Like in the jokes poking fun at Zuma, the above subvertisement of EFF based on Malema's matric transcript was shared by a poster who comes from an educated, middle-class section of the population. Most of the comments came from white participants who lambasted Malema as a "buffoon", "Mugabe's disciple" and an "idiot".

Figure 10: Malema's Matric transcript

Source: Facebook profile page

It is evident from the above that some fans on the R2K and UPM Facebook pages are creatively "poaching" (de Certeau, 1984) acronyms from official discourses thereby using these to their own advantage. As Jiang (2008) points out, such poaching does not necessarily create opposition to the system, but instead exploits the space between the system's production and its use. "Poaching of meanings" (de Certeau, 1984) has also been identified in Togo by Mbembe (2001) where the Togolese party acronym RPT was treated as synonymous with "the sound of faecal matter dropping into a sceptic tank" or "the sound of a fart emitted by quivering buttocks which can only smell disgusting".

In comparison to the South African case, observed respondents from the YFZ, NCA and CiZC in Zimbabwe creatively subverted the names of parastatals thereby undermining positive aspects of the targeted brand name. For instance, the acronym of the country's public broadcaster ZBC (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Authority) was also subverted to Zanu Broadcasting Corporation by Facebook users on the CiZC page. The major reason for the linguistic subversion is that ZBC covers ZANU-PF activities only and acts as the mouthpiece of the ruling party. Similarly, in the South African context, the SABC has been derogatively referred to as the "South African National Corporation" (SANC). In view of the linguistic subversion in Zimbabwe, Willems (2015: 6) observes that ZBC has also been described as

"Dead BC" when discussing television content because of the "screening of documentaries about the liberation war, the emergence of nationalist talk shows and the recycling of liberation war songs". Observed youths from the CiZC also renamed the Zimbabwe Republic Authority (ZRP) to the "Zanu Republic Police". This is because of the partisan operations of the police force which has been involved in the persecution of opposition politicians, journalists and human rights activists. As Willems (2011) points out, naming and re-naming has been a powerful strategy that has long been used in Zimbabwe in order to comment upon political affairs. Similarly, Ellis (1998: 473) notes that "radio trottoir is immensely inventive in parodying these [names of parastatal organisations], and there is hardly an acronym in Togo which has not been co-opted by radio trottoir for subversive purposes". This further complements Scott's (1990) view that behind the scenes we may expect to hear much raucous laughing, merciless lampooning and bitter criticism.

Examples of subvertisements cited above also corroborate the argument that in many African countries, media consumers have re-circulated state media discourse in very inventive ways such as by adopting slogans from radio and television, by creating parodic phrases and by renaming acronyms (Spitulnik, 2002; Barber, 1987). This gives credence to Nyamnjoh's (2005: 84) insightful postulation that "it is necessary to look beyond meta-narratives of euphoria and victimhood to understand how marginalised individuals and communities are responding to state repression [...]".

8.1.3 Online petitions

An online petition is a statement published online that individuals can sign as a show of support to a cause (Earl, 2006). Methods used to deliver petitions vary from physical to electronic delivery. These online petitions constituted digital hidden transcripts in the Zimbabwean context because of the nature of their circulation. Unlike public transcripts which are distributed in the offline world, digital hidden transcripts are distributed by approaching selected individuals beforehand through Facebook messaging and chat systems. There is secrecy attached to the distribution of these online petitions witnessed on Facebookin Zimbabwe. As Scott (1985) argues, everyday social practices and networks are deliberately masked, dissimulated and made opaque, in ways that render them illegible to and ungovernable by the state. In South Africa, online petitions can be conceptualised as digital public transcripts because they are circulated openly on Facebook pages and groups. The

differences in terms of the distribution channels of online petitions in Zimbabwe and South Africa are closely related to the nature and character of their regime types. In non-democratic societies like Zimbabwe, petitions often find their way to pre-selected individuals through enclave and subaltern counter-public outlets. In democratic contexts, the distribution of petitions occurs publicly and the idea is to reach a critical mass of supporters which is important for the credibility and impact of the protest action.

Although it was observed that online petitions are circulated on Facebook in both countries, it was noted that this repertoire of "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) was much more popular amongst youth activists from South African social movements. Mostly addressing pressing societal issues, online petitions were spread via Facebook fan pages and groups compared to the messaging and chat systems. Unlike in South Africa, qualitative content analysis indicated that only one online petition was circulated by an observed respondent from the CiZC in Zimbabwe. Some of the petitions shared by South African youth activists focused on the fighting against policy changes, appointments of board members on public entities, police violence, internet censorship threats and the slashing of mobile call prices. It is clear from the foregoing that targets of the petitions in South Africa included the government, politicians, public institutions and private companies. This corroborates Earl & Schussman's (2008) observation that many citizens are now protesting against private companies themselves in hopes of directly changing corporate policies or products. Instead of relying on traditional repertoires of protest, online petitions can also be viewed as an invaluable unconventional method of claim-making (Vromen, 2007; Earl & Schussman, 2008). For example, one of the observed black youth from the UPM shared the following petition aimed at putting pressure on President Zuma not to appoint Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng as South Africa's Chief Justice:

Box 26: An online petition

> Here is the open letter to President Jacob Zuma. Please consider endorsing it and pass it on to as many organisations and individuals as possible. If you and/or your organisation would like to endorse the letter please send your endorsements by email to mazibuko@amandla.org.za or by fax to 086 661 9470 or post your endorsement on this group page.
>
> 07 September 2011

TO: President Jacob Zuma

Dear Sir

OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA: MAY YOU PLEASE NOT APPOINT JUSTICE MOGOENG AS CHIEF JUSTICE

We write to you as a collection of progressive individuals, activists and organisations committed to equality, non-discrimination, human rights and social justice as enshrined in our country's Constitution. We write to you to submit our appeal that you not appoint Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng to the position of Chief Justice as per your nomination and recommendation of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC). We submit this request mindful of your constitutional role in the appointment of the Chief Justice and the deliberations of the JSC to date. We respectfully submit this request to you motivated by the following considerations:

Source: Facebook profile page

As illustrated by the aforementioned petition, activist groupings (including the UPM) mobilised against the appointment of Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng as the Chief Justice whom they argued was not suitable for such a high post. Their argument was that Justice Mogoeng was not suitable because of his lack of experience and his lack of sensitivity to a court's role in protecting the rights and interests of vulnerable groups. His views as expressed in some of the rulings he has made as a judge were said to be reflective of an insensitive, patriarchal and backward mind-set that is chauvinistically inclined towards the stereotypical role of women. It received 21 likes, 34 comments and 3 shares. This illustrates that the post low levels of engagement with regards to likes and shares but medium levels of engagement in terms of comments. Most of the Facebook comments described Mogoeng as "too conservative", "a threat to progressive gains", "male chauvinist" and "culturally-backward".

Compared to South Africa, the petition shared in Zimbabwe by a diaspora-based youth from the CiZC via the Facebook messaging system focused on the voting rights of people in the diaspora:

Figure 11: Please sign our petition

Source: Facebook profile page

From Figure 11, it is evident that the poster is urging citizens to sign the petition in order to put pressure on the Zimbabwean government to grant its citizens in the diaspora their inalienable right to vote in the 2013 referendum and the subsequent national elections. This represents a counter-hegemonic discourse because the ZANU-PF has consistently denied people living in the diaspora the right to vote citing logistical and practical challenges in terms of voter registration. It is also generally believed that ZANU-PF fears that those in the diaspora would support the opposition. The petition received favourable reception from Facebook users based in the diaspora. It received 130 likes, 85 comments and 12 shares which means high levels of interaction in terms of likes and comments while shares had low levels of engagement.

8.1.4 Political cartoons

It was found that political cartoons were some of the most circulated digital hidden transcripts in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. Cartoons are "a particular media genre of visual discourse relying on the interplay between visual and textual elements" (Müller et al., 2009: 28). As a genre of comic art, their stock in trade is "distortions and exaggerations that characteristically puncture pretension or single out vulnerable features in a target" (Farwell, 1989: 9). The main purpose of "political cartoons are to make social and political commentary that simplifies the subtle and often complex underlying issues" (Fairrington, 2009: 205). Scholars (Eko, 2007; 2010; Hammett, 2010: 202) also highlight that political cartoons "capture complex social and political issues, acknowledge and resist power relations, and are used symbolically to generate identities and propagate ideologies".

Research (Eko, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2005) on popular culture in Africa has shown that the emergence of political cartoons has been influenced by a need to have an alternative platform to voice unpopular political opinion in the face of government crackdown on dissent. In the same vein, James (1997) suggests that black oppression in the face of white authoritarian rule in South Africa under apartheid drove political dissent underground and political cartoons founded a platform for resistance where mainstream press would ordinarily muzzle these opinions. This form of political engagement not only visually documents key socio-political issues but also mobilises new political publics, most of whom are not formally literate but very astute with digital media use (Oduro-Frimpong, 2015). Like all popular cultural genres, political cartoons can also be used to legitimise the status quo and naturalise oppressive power relations.

Most of the political cartoons, memes and photoshopped images circulated on Facebook groups, fan and profile pages in Zimbabwe and South Africa focused on Robert Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai, Julius Malema, Helen Zille and Jacob Zuma. Photoshopped images and cartoons also caricatured and parodied political and public representatives in relation to issues like promiscuity, corruption, LGBTI rights, electoral conflict and political violence. Compared to South Africa, most of the cartoons shared on Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe were photoshopped images of political figures. Most of the photoshopped images had no attribution emphasising the anonymous nature of their production and dissemination. This can be attributed to the fear of political persecution by the state. Unlike in Zimbabwe, it was observed that most of the cartoons circulated on Facebook groups and pages in South Africa were sourced from the mainstream private media. Some of the editorial cartoons circulated in South Africa were drawn by Sifiso Yalo (whose pen name is Yalo) and Jonathan Shapiro (whose pen name is Zapiro). Whereas Yalo's cartoons are published in *The Sowetan*, Zapiro's are published in the *Mail & Guardian*, *The Star*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Cape Times*, *The Mercury* and *Pretoria News*. As intimated earlier, the fact that most of the cartoons posted on Facebook in South Africa were recycled content from the mainstream media validates van Dijck's (2009) argument that the availability of social media does not turn everyone into active participant (produser).

There were also notable similarities in terms of the themes or subject of the cartoons circulated on Facebook in both case nations. These included cartoons and photoshopped images dealing with police brutality, sexual proclivities of political representatives, creeping

forms of authoritarianism, corruption and the systematic pillaging of public funds. Some cartoons were distinct in the sense that they focused on very specific territorial representations of societal ills. As Monga (1996: 110) observes, cartoons are "spaces of expression hidden behind the unsaid".

I will begin by teasing out similar cartoons poking fun at the sexual proclivities of Jacob Zuma and Morgan Tsvangirai, then look at the systematic pillaging of public funds and abuse of power. Thereafter I will discuss cartoons with different thematic focus in both countries.

Below are illustrations of political cartoons poking fun at the sexual peccadilloes of Morgan Tsvangirai and Jacob Zuma:

Figure 12: Zuma's response to the Spear painting

Source: Facebook profile page

Figure 13: Tsvangirai's sexual appetite

Source: Facebook profile page

Figures 12 and 13 above depict President Jacob Zuma and Morgan Tsvangirai as sexual perverts. Both photoshopped images have no bylines, whilst Figure 12 has an English caption, Figure 13 combines both English and ChiShona. The first photoshopped image circulated by a youth from the UPM on his Facebook page alludes to Zuma's imagined response to the Brett Murray's The Spear painting. The painting depicted Zuma in a pose reminiscent of Vladimir Lenin (from Russia), with his genitals exposed. It triggered a defamation lawsuit by the ANC although it was eventually vandalised on the 22nd of May 2012. In his defence, Brett Murray pointed out that the painting was an "attempt at humorous satire of political power and patriarchy within the context of other artworks in the [Goodman gallery] exhibition and within the broader context of the South African discourse". Zuma, in his response to the artwork, is on record as having said; it portrayed him as "a philanderer and a womaniser". This is significantly different from the satirised response captured in Figure 12 where Zuma is quoted as saying: "I have decided 2 take legal action against him (Brett Murray)…I've never been this humiliated in my whole life. I don't have problem with him drawing my penis…but he must draw the right size. The penis on the portrait is not mine…its Malema's. Mine is bigger and stronger…I demand the right size…He must draw the real size. Nxa (swearing in isiZulu) stupid mulungu (white person)…How will I find another wife with that small **Mshini** (penis)?" The sub-text of this satirised Zuma response is that it focuses on the size of the penis rather than the message behind the original painting. It presents Zuma as someone with a big penis which he uses as a bait to lure women. Figure 12 also depicts Zuma as disowning the size of the penis painted by Murray claiming that his is stronger and bigger. He even suggests that the penis on the painting belongs to Julius Malema (his arch-rival). As noted earlier in relation to Mugabe's joke, Zuma is presented as swearing which makes him unstatesman-like. Zuma is also presented as a serial polygamist who is concerned with finding more wives. It is also ironical that the term "*Mshini*" (isiZulu language which means machine gun in English which was popularised by members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing during the struggle against apartheid) is inappropriately used here as a synonym for 'big penis'. Another meaning of "*Mshini*" is that it refers to Zuma's signature song which is called *Umshini Wam.* Figure 12 echoes similar (Eko, 2010) editorial cartoons which have ridiculed Zuma for his polygamous lifestyle with many wives and girlfriends. The satirisation of Zuma in the wake of The Spear painting also reinforces Ligaga's (2012) view that when a political scandal occurs, it creates an opportunity for mockery and insult to be exchanged between online users.

Unlike Figure 12, Figure 13 portrays Morgan Tsvangirai addressing a political rally in Zimbabwe. In the background are mostly MDC-T supporters wearing red T-shirts and berets (symbols of the party). Behind Tsvangirai is a male photographer who is capturing the proceedings. The word "**Meanwhile**…" inscribed in eye-catching bold letters on top of the photoshopped image is meant to attract the attention of the reader to focus on an informal chat between a husband (Baba Domingo) and wife (Mai Domingo) rather than on Tsvangirai addressing the rally. Expressing shock at Tsvangirai's open zip, the wife (Mai Domingo) is quoted in Figure 13 as saying: "Hezvo Baba Domingo tarisai muone zip yake. Yakavhurika!!!" (in ChiShona language). In English, it means: "Hey Father of Domingo, Look his fly is open!!!" The moral of the photoshopped image is that Tsvangirai is a sex-crazed womaniser who is on the prowl for women even at political rallies. Similar to Zuma, Morgan Tsvangirai has been subject to satire largely due to his sex scandals which came to the surface in 2012 following the death of his wife Susan Tsvangirai in 2009. Given that most Zimbabweans and South Africans "are deeply conservative on sexual matters, and shy away from public discussions of sex" (Duncan, 2012: 4); the two cartoons cited above generated mixed reactions from Facebook users. Some of the Facebook users in Zimbabwe exonerated Tsvangirai from wrong doing pointing out that President Mugabe had also cheated on his first wife. Others noted that there was nothing wrong with dating many girlfriends as long as it was not marital infidelity.
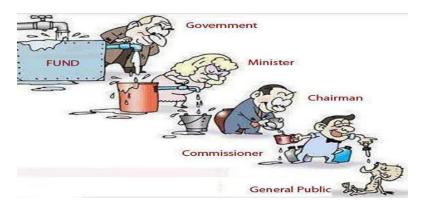
The next set of cartoons in Zimbabwe and South Africa dealt with corruption and the abuse of public funds. Figure 14 was circulated by a white male youth from the R2K Campaign his profile page whilst the Figure 15 was shared on the YFZ Facebook page.

Figure 14: Nkandla Report

Source: Facebook profile page

Figure 15: Unequal distribution of public funds?

Source: YFZ Facebook page
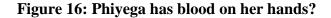
Both cartoons depict the systemic pillaging of public funds by political and public representatives. Whereas Figure 14 is an editorial cartoon drawn by Sifiso Yalo in South Africa, Figure 15 like most cartoons observed in Zimbabwe has no attribution. Figure 14 depicts the President Zuma dipping his hand in the cookie jar whilst Jackson Mthembu (ANC former spokesperson) and Gwede Mantashe (ANC General Secretary) are demanding answers from Thuli Madonsela (the Public Protector). The cookie jar here signifies the national treasury. Mthembu is depicted as asking an ironical question to Thuli Madonsela: "We want to know who put the President's hand in that cookie jar"? This was following the

release of the report by the Public Protector which revealed that President Zuma unduly benefited from the R246-million security upgrades at his Nkandla homestead. The sub-text of the cartoon is that President Zuma is looting the public funds while his lieutenants are shielding him from public and parliamentary accountability. The cartoon also exposes the abuse of power and rampant corruption in high offices. It attracted 50 likes, 32 comments and 5 shares. This suggests that the post elicited medium levels of engagement with regards to likes and comments. Most of the comments from white South Africans called upon Zuma to pay back the money, while others blamed the president and "his acolytes" for running down the economy through their corrupt practices. Some of the participants subverted the ANC's motto "working together we can do more" to "working together we can steal more". One of the few black interlocutors commented that, "show me one perfect government; otherwise you better zip your mouth!" These foregoing remarks validate Fraser's (1990: 67) view that "in stratified societies, the discursive relations among differentially empowered publics are as likely to take the form of contestation as that of deliberation".

Similar to Figure 14, Figure 15 is a metaphor of how Zimbabwean public representatives syphon public funds at the expense of the ordinary people. Figure 15 spotlights the unequal nature of income distribution based on social stratification. It demonstrates that the trickle-down effect disadvantages the general public who are situated at the lower rung of the ladder. Like most of the humorous posts, it garnered 56 likes, 21 comments and 7 shares. Based on indicators presented in Chapter Seven, the post attracted medium levels of engagement in terms of likes while comments and shares enjoyed low levels. It generated substantial political discussion with most participants accusing the ZANU-PF government of being "selfish", "insensitive to the plight of the poor" and "self-enriching parasites". The cartoon satirises the shady disbursement of the US$20 million youth fund which benefited high-ranking ZANU-PF officials at the expense of the youth. This reinforces Muwonwa's (2012) observation that young people in Zimbabwe use new media technologies to critique and poke fun at some of the ruling elite's policies. Similarly Eko (2010: 4) further submits that "cartoonists and comic strip artists use humorous satirical texts to expose African contradictions and hypocrisies and to focus the humiliating searchlight of ridicule and irreverence on greed, corruption, and abuse of power".

Online observations also indicated that respondents in both countries circulated cartoons which foregrounded cases of police brutality and creeping forms of authoritarianism. Unlike
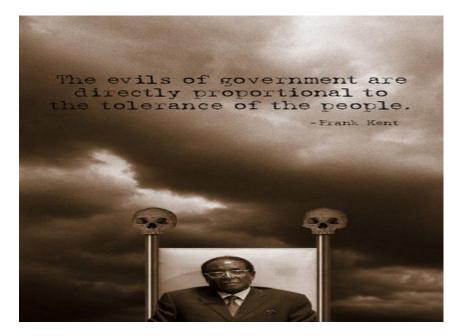
in South Africa where police brutality has become more pronounced during community protests (Duncan, 2010), in Zimbabwe, the ZANU-PF government has consistently deployed state-sponsored political violence against opposition supporters since 2000 (Moyo, 2013). Below are illustrative examples:

Figure 16: Phiyega has blood on her hands?

Source: Facebook profile page

Figure 17: We have degrees in violence?

Source: Facebook profile page

The afore-cited photoshopped images critique the crimes committed by the repressive state apparatuses against ordinary people in both countries. While Figure 16 is a graffiti inscribed

on a building wall, Figure 17 is a photoshopped image of President Mugabe seating on a throne with human skulls hanging over shoulders. Figure 16 was circulated by an interviewed youth from the UPM on his Facebook profile. Unlike Figure 16 which depicts the South African Police Commissioner Riah Phiyega as responsible for the killing of 34 miners during the Marikana massacre (see Chapter Three), Figure 17 blames the post-independence atrocities in Zimbabwe squarely on the shoulders of President Mugabe. Figure 16 can arguably be read as a critique against militarised policing which has seen several activists losing their lives during community protests in South Africa. This is despite the police's claim that they shot at striking miners in self-defence. The post attracted 23 likes, 34 comments and 3 shares with most of the interlocutors blaming the police for massacring unarmed civilians and applying unnecessary excessive force. In the above image, it is clear the issue of the "blood" is used for "accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 623). These figures show that the post generated medium levels of interaction with regards to comments and low levels in terms of likes and shares.
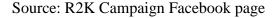
Figure 17 was shared by an observed male youth from the CiZC on his Facebook profile. As noted in Chapter Three, President Mugabe has been fingered in the Gukurahundi massacres, the killing of white commercial farmers during the Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR) and opposition supporters during electoral campaigns in recent years. Unlike in South Africa, where parodying of public representatives can be seen as an attempt to transgress the exclusionary rational political communication associated with the elite public sphere, in Zimbabwe the practice can be viewed an attempt to circumvent state surveillance and censorship. Figure 17 generated 31 likes, 16 comments and 2 shares which indicate low levels of interaction. The open character of memes fosters creative thinking thereby making them valuable entry points in political discussion. Most of the participants accused Mugabe of genocide, sustaining his rule through the spilling of blood and of being a blood-thirsty dictator. Some went as far as drawing parallels between Mugabe and Germany's Hitler. Drawing parallels between President Mugabe and Adolf Hitler is used by cyber-activists in Zimbabwe as a tactic to magnify the crimes against humanity allegedly committed during his tenure as the leader of the country.

In contrast with Zimbabwe, cartoons shared on the R2K Campaign Facebook page dealt with threats to media freedom and freedom of expression in South Africa. This confirms Eko's

(2010: 19) poignant observation that an analysis of "cartoons from countries where there have been major confrontations between governments and the media revealed that African political cartoons are irreverent counter-discourses that use African mythic idioms to portray a sombre picture of media realities on the African continent". An example of this cartoon is below:

Figure 18: Public consultation?

Source: R2K Campaign Facebook page

The above cartoon is concerned with freedom of expression in the wake of the promulgation of the Secrecy Bill. It was drawn by Sifiso Yalo. Like most cartoons observed on Facebook pages in South Africa, it was sourced from the mainstream private media. Figure 18 presents President Zuma attempting to apply "lipstick" on a "pig". The "pig" refers to the Secrecy Bill. This refers to the saying of putting lipstick on a pig, that is, cosmetic changes do not change the substance. The sub-text of the cartoon is that "lipstick" denotes cosmetic public consultation processes which do not allow for citizens to air their views. In short, the cartoon is a direct critique against the Bill which the R2K Campaign argued would threaten whistleblowers and investigative journalists.

In terms of levels of participation, the cartoon received 35 likes, 5 comments and 12 shares which demonstrate low levels of engagement. The comments from mostly white South

Africans read: "ready to become the ANC's bitch...", "Somewhat insulting to the porcine species, perhaps", "I am fond of pigs..., dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals." W.S. Churchill", "Well, if you put lipstick on a pig, it's still a pig! What's to consult? The public have said no!", "Al dra 'n aap 'n goue ring...(Even if a monkey puts on a gold ring, it will remain a monkey, an Afrikaans idiom)". It is clear from these comments that some participants saw public consultation as pointless while others criticised the cartoonist for insulting the porcine species. The participation of white people reinforces Duncan's (2014: 17) observation that "given that Facebook in South Africa is not available in a stripped down version, which means that it still remains bandwidth-heavy and consequently is skewed towards wealthier internet users".

Unlike in South Africa, cartoons circulated on Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe explicitly focused on President Mugabe's authoritarian tendencies. The cartoon below is an example:

Figure 19: Hypocritical Mugabe?

Source: Facebook profile page

The cartoon posted above sourced from the NewZimbabwe.com (a diasporic online newspaper) portrays President Mugabe as an untrustworthy politician. Drawn by Gavin Brown, the cartoon depicts Mugabe as embracing peace and reconciliation through shacking the hand of Tsvangirai during the signing of the Global Political Agreement in 2008 (see Chapter Three). Figure 19 alludes to Mugabe's darker side where he relies on the police and military to silence dissenting voices and opposition parties. It presents the military as using Mugabe as a shield to discipline Tsvangirai. This visual representation of the unpredictable nature of Robert Mugabe echoes widespread belief amongst Zimbabweans that he relies on repressive state apparatus to safeguard his political power. Writing about the Kenyan context under Arap Moi, Musila (2007) points out that the cartoon form became a potent discursive site for engaging with the absurdities of authoritarian rule. Similar findings (Yang, 2009; Zuckerman, 2013) have been noted in China where due to tight controls on political expression, internet users have grown savvy at expressing themselves through political satire and spoofs to evade censorship and avoid repression.

In authoritarian contexts like Zimbabwe, "where the formal, invited spaces for political participation and functioning of the public sphere are severely curtailed, alternative expressions and actions in invented and often hidden spaces of participation are required" (Obadare, 2013: 135). In such contexts, cartoons provide "sites of protest" (Monga, 1996) as well as allowing citizens to engage with the prevailing official discourse. As already noted earlier, cartoons can also serve the purpose of limiting the range of possible modes of debate by reproducing and even accentuating hegemonic discourses contained in the other editorial genres. Despite the appropriation of Facebook pages as "social spaces of relative autonomy" (Scott, 1990), it should be emphasised that several people have been arrested for the possession and circulation of photoshopped images of President Mugabe in Zimbabwe.

8.1.5 Letter-writing campaigns

Facebook provides novel transitory "moments of freedom" (Fabian, 1998: 21) for citizens to write letters addressed to political and public representatives. Although described as "low risk and low effort actions" (Snow, Soule & Kriesi, 2004: 270), letter-writing campaigns constitute new digital repertoire of contention. From this study, it was observed that some of the respondents from both countries drafted and disseminated letters directed at public representatives, which were circulated via the Facebook notes, messaging and chat system.

Online participant observation established that some respondents in Zimbabwe (mostly from the YFZ and CiZC) and South Africa (from the PASSOP Afrika and R2K Campaign) wrote notes which they shared via Facebook messaging and chat. It was found that the YFZ shared 19 notes, the CiZC had only one note while the NCA had none in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, the PASSOP Africa posted a total of 61 notes, the R2K Campaign circulated 3 notes and the UPM shared none. It is evident that notes are most popular amongst South African movements when compared to their Zimbabwean counterparts. This could be explained by the fact that youth activists in South Africa have mastered the use of Facebook features than their Zimbabwean counterparts. Similar to petitions, most of the Facebook notes were directed at government institutions and public representatives. As such, these letters constitute a vital lobbying strategy as well as an informal outlet for "produsers" (Bruns, 2008) to articulate their grievances or to inform political representatives on particular issue of concern. These helped in awareness raising and frame articulation of the important grievances requiring urgent action. In contrast to jokes (see section 7.1) and cartoons (see section 7.4) which are largely about circulating existing content, letters addressed to political representatives allowed Facebook users in Zimbabwe and South Africa to become "produsers". It is important to reiterate van Dijck's (2009) view that there are relatively few active creators of content on new media.

As a repertoire of collective action, letters addressed to public representatives like those written to the editor are aimed at bringing urgent matters to the attention of a targeted audience who can then learn how to act upon the "injustice frame" (Gamson, 1992). In the Zimbabwean case, where participation in marches and demonstrations is considered risky and dangerous, letter writing campaigns can be viewed as platforms for ventilating, complaining, critiquing government policies and suggesting policy alternatives. In comparison to the South African case where Facebook users from the R2K Campaign and PASSOP Afrika posted formal letters which were published in the mainstream media and delivered to their respective addressees, in Zimbabwe all the letters were only published on Facebook. Unlike in South Africa, some of the observed respondents in Zimbabwe used their own Facebook messaging and chat to circulate humorous and satirical letters targeted at public representatives. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on formal letters circulated on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa:

Box 27: Stop Media Personnel Abuses!

> Stop Media Personnel Abuses!!! December 7, 2011
>
> Zimbabwe's police continued with their irrational persecution of media personnel on Tuesday when they raided the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) offices and arrested MMPZ Projects Co-ordinator Andy Moyse and seized more than 100 CDs and DVDs "containing Gukurahundi Information".
>
> The Youth Forum, currently coming up with a plan to make information accessible to youths in marginalised areas in order to improve the free flow of news, ideas and information, would like to strongly condemn the incarceration of private and independent media personnel and this deplorable situation raises obvious questions over charges being concocted out of politically motivated harassment. We urge the regime to cease the arbitrary detention of selected citizens on sham charges, and repeat our call for the revision of laws such as AIPPA and POSA. It is important to restore the right to meet in public places, to organize, to share opinions, ideas and express them no matter how critical or un-popular they may be, as this is an essential aspect of public life. Youth Forum

Source: YFZ Facebook page

Box 27 calls upon the government of Zimbabwe to stop the arbitrary arrest of media personnel on trumped up charges. It also urges the responsible authorities to repeal repressive laws such as AIPPA and POSA. The solidarity note also urges the government to restore the right to meet in public places, to organise, to share opinions, ideas and express them without fear of retribution. This constitutes a digital hidden transcript in the sense that it is circulated outside the public gaze and is aimed at frame articulation and amplification (Benford & Snow, 2000). In South Africa, the following letter addressed to the Minister of Social Development was circulated by a white male youth from the PASSOP Afrika:

Box 28: An Open Letter: Urgent appeal for the vulnerable workers facing off-season

> Dear: Honourable Minister of Social Development; Minister Bathabile Dlamini
>
> We, the undersigned organisations, would like to express our urgent concern that thousands of vulnerable workers are soon to be facing the off-season period. The majority of workers are still paid substantially lower than the new stipulated minimum wage of R105 per day. We are concerned because we anticipate unemployment during this off-season period to exceed over 80% of those currently employed; the majority of whom are women.
>
> These workers are paid extremely low wages; making it impossible for them to save enough to survive the off-season. It is our view that a humanitarian crisis is imminent and workers have advised us that the farm bosses and owners do not provide adequate support for this difficult period. We do not believe that we will be respecting human rights as members of civil society if we fail to raise concerns as the crisis unfolds. It is in this light that we respectfully and earnestly appeal for your assistance for at least three months for the thousands of households that will be affected by this crisis. We would like specific attention to be paid to the De Doorns community, which has a sizeable population of farmworkers. The off-season will take survival away from 7,000 households, in De Doorns alone.
>
> These communities are diverse and include migrant workers who are equally affected, and we therefore appeal that the aid distribution be inclusive of all community members to avoid causing divisions and inter-communal tensions. After working several months, workers should be able to earn enough to save money to survive during the many months of off-season. That said; the new minimum wage is yet to be implemented in practice and workers continue to be exploited and abused.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> PASSOP

Source: PASSOP Afrika Facebook page

Focusing on the precarious labour rights of farm-workers, the afore-mentioned Facebook note constitute an alternative discourse in the sense that it deals with the issue which is often ignored by the South African mainstream commercial media. As Kariithi & Kareithi (2007) point out, the private press in South Africa legitimated neoliberal economic policies while delegitimating organised labour's grievances. This further suggests that some Facebook notes and messaging system "function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (Fraser, 1992: 110).

8.1.6 Political Rumour

This study found that observed youths from social movements in Zimbabwe were more inclined to circulating rumours on their Facebook profile pages compared to those in South Africa. These findings support Kapferer (1990) view that rumours are mostly circulated in an

authoritarian context with restrictions on independent news media when compared to a democratic society. Although the terms rumour and gossip overlap and are often used interchangeably, it is important to note that they are not equivalent. Gossip typically deals with the "personal affairs of individuals while rumour may deal with places and events of great importance and prominence" (Rosnow & Fine, 1976: 11). In other words, gossip is an unverified message about *someone* (see section 7.7) while rumour is an unverified message about *something*, either a trite or of great importance. Rumours are "a recurrent form of communication through which men [and women] caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to reconstruct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources" (Shibutani, 1966: 17).

Three broad categories of rumour can be discerned on the basis of its effect on the listener: "pipe dream rumours," those that express one's hopes and fantasies but are otherwise harmless; "bogies," those rumours that mirror fears and anxieties; and "wedge-driving rumours," those that divide groups (Rosnow & Fine, 1976: 23). According to Scott (1990), rumour constitutes a powerful form of "hidden transcript" which denotes discourse that takes place off-stage beyond direct observation by power-holders. Scholars (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Ogola, 2011) posit that rumour is generally fuelled by the absence of trustworthy information from the official channels of communications and the need of the masses to be informed about key events and personalities.

From interviews and observations, it emerged that rumour in Zimbabwe is circulated via closed groups or affinity communities (like secret Facebook groups, private messaging and chat). Most of the rumours focused on the resolution of the outstanding issues of the GNU through SADC-brokered meetings, the anticipated return of the Zimbabwean dollar, internal struggles within the MDC-T and ZANU-PF as well as election dates. It should be noted that unlike other circuits of political commentary (as discussed earlier) with an explicit oppositional thrust, most of the rumours on Facebook groups and pages in Zimbabwe contested and engaged with official discourses. This is because despite rumour "often [presented] in opposition of the official discourse" (Kapferer, 1987: 22), it is not always oppositional to power.

Rumours circulated by observed youths from the social movements in Zimbabwe include: the issue of the vanishing ink during the 2013 election, the role of NIKUV International Projects (an Israeli-based security company) in the election and internecine power struggles within the

MDC-T. It was suspected that NIKUV was working with the Registrar General to manipulate the voters' roll and that the voter registration process was skewed in favour of ZANU-PF. One of the observed youths from the CiZC shared the post below:

Box 29: NIKUV rigging?

> Guys it has come my attention that ZANU-PF working in cahoots with ZEC and Nikuv are planning to rig the election by providing voters with pens whose ink would vanish several hours after the voting process. I urge you to carry your pens on the actual day of voting. Spread the word. Remember its Feya Feya.

Source: Facebook profile page

It is evident from Box 29 that the rumour focused on warning voters to carry their own pens to the ballot box in order to circumnavigate the rigging machinery put in place by ZANU-PF and NIKUV. This "bogie" rumour reflected Facebook users' anxieties about the likelihood of a stolen election. It prompted fearful voters to carry their own pens on the actual day of voting. As Rosnow & Fine (1976) observe, "ambiguity and anxiety must exist for rumours to flourish. There must be a demand for news on a topic and a lack of reliable information or hard evidence". It is also arguable that this kind of rumour was meant to critique the official discourse which framed the electoral environment leading up to the plebiscite as conducive for a free, fair and credible election. The post elicited 68 likes, 47 comments and 13 shares which suggest that high levels of engagement in terms of likes and low levels with regards to shares. Given the polarised nature of the Zimbabwean society along party political lines (IMPI Report, 2014), some of the interlocutors lambasted the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for favouring ZANU-PF, others criticised the MDC-T for spreading rumours about rigging to exonerate themselves from an impending election defeat. Some of the participants urged the MDC-T to boycott the elections while others pointed out that Baba Jukwa had already exposed plans by Nikuv to temper with the voters roll and constituency boundaries.

Another rumour was circulated on the NCA Facebook page a few months before the eventual split between Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T and Tendai Biti's MDC Renewal:

Box 30: Rumour about political divisions within the MDC-T ahead of the 2013 election

> We have just received intel (shorthand for intelligence) to the effect that Hon Tendai Biti is currently running a 'bhora musango' (sabotage campaign) on Morgan Tsvangirai and that

> MT (Morgan Tsvangirai) has become aware of it. The TB (Tendai Biti) faction seems to have lost faith in the leadership of MT and is pushing for MT to lose the next election so that he goes. Keep watching this space for more on the inside job of the demise of MT.

Source: NCA Facebook page, 18 June 2013

From the above post, it is clear that Tendai Biti (secretary general) was planning to sabotage Morgan Tsvangirai's election campaign with the hopes of eventually succeeding him as the leader of MDC-T. Eventually following the 2013 election defeat the MDC-T imploded into two camps with the other faction being led by Biti. The above post illustrates that in a country where authoritative information is in short supply, rumour provides people with an outlet to break news as well as misinforming the public about political events. This is important especially in the Zimbabwean context where the private media has gone to bed with the main opposition party, the MDC-T. As scholars (Kapferer, 1990; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Ogola, 2011) note, rumours in authoritarian contexts are often exacerbated by the lack of credible public information from the free media.

In view of the foregoing discussion, the pervasive sharing of rumours on Facebook (and other platforms) in Zimbabwe can be viewed as an attempt at sense-making as well as nonsense making. As Nyamnjoh (2005) observes, rumours can also serve the purpose of eliciting official denial or confirmation. Unlike the "official press, which is tedious, censored, uninformative, and often unintelligible" (Bourgault, 1995: 202), the entertainment and pleasure associated with popular culture could serve to draw historically subordinated publics into the realm of the political in a way that formal political debates are unable to (Wasserman, 2010).

8.1.7 Gossip

Gossip constitutes one of the circuits through which alternative discourses contest and engage with public transcripts (Scott, 1985). As defined in the previous section, gossip can be categorised into three types: informative, moralising and entertaining. Informative gossip is used for news trading and for providing participants with a cognitive map of the social environment (Rosnow & Fine, 1976: 130). Moralising gossip is a manipulative device through which one person attempts to gain social control over another. Entertaining gossip is primarily geared towards the mutual entertainment of the participants (Rosnow & Fine, 1976:130).

Qualitative content analysis established that gossip was generally circulated on Facebook profile pages in Zimbabwe when compared to South Africa. Gossip rarely manifested itself through Facebook pages in South Africa largely because of the vibrant nature of the private media which acts as the fourth estate when contrasted with Zimbabwe where this circuit of political communication constitutes an important avenue for information transmission and discussion. Most of the observed respondents in Zimbabwe shared different kinds of gossip with their friends. Given the restrictive nature of media environment, most of the gossip mongering observed on Facebook in Zimbabwe was disseminated through profile walls rather than via public groups and fan pages. This is because gossip tends to have an "inner-circleness" (Rosnow & Snow, 1976) about it, in that it is customarily passed between like-minded people. Unlike rumours, the most discussed gossip issues in Zimbabwe included both private and confidential information like the health of the president, sexual shenanigans of Morgan Tsvangirai, and the death of the late Vice-President John Nkomo. Most of these stories were aimed at filling an information vacuum occasioned by the public media blackout. These rumours also filled the void created by the absence of authoritative information and the "rigid control of information and communication by the power elite" (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 218). Nyamnjoh (2005) further submits that gossip serves repressed groups as "a rebuttal of censorship" against "the totalitarian discourse of the Party State", often through the display of an extraordinary verbal creativity' rich in humour, parody and irony.

Box 31 below illustrates the gossip about the most anticipated death of President Mugabe. Following the live-broadcast of a prophecy by a Nigerian televangelist and prophet TB Joshua predicting the death of an aging head of state from Southern Africa, most observed respondents from the YFZ and CiZC began to hypothesise that it was President Mugabe:

Box 31: First prophecy by TB Joshua

> We should pray for one African head of state, president, against sickness that will likely take his life. It is a long time sickness – being kept in the body for a long time. God showed me the country and the place but I'm not here to say anything like that. I am still praying to God to deliver the president concerned.

Source: Facebook profile page: 5 February 2012

Then on 1st April, TB Joshua reiterated the prophecy saying:

Box 32: Second prophecy by TB Joshua

> Last time I said we should pray for a leader of a country and you people gave different meanings to what I said and I want to say, God will forgive you all. I never mentioned name or time. You can never stop me from saying what God has put in my heart. What I'm saying is very close now. Whether you like it or not, pray for your leaders. The person concerned, God showed me but I'm praying to see whether this can be changed. Pray for your leaders. A head of a nation, I'm seeing a sudden death as a result of sickness. Pray, this is Africa, not even West Africa. I will continue to bring this issue, when it is too close, the name, the country. Pray for your country, your continent, the whole world.

Source: Facebook profile page

Despite clarification from President Mugabe's spokesperson George Charamba that the head of state had gone for his periodic medical reviews in Singapore, the afore-mentioned prophecies elicited significant levels of engagement on Facebook. For instance, the second prophecy garnered 123 likes, 96 comments and 21 shares. It shows that this post attracted high levels of interaction in terms of likes and comments while shares registered low levels. The post attracted a flurry of responses with some of the participants remarking that the prophecy was aimed at President Mugabe because of his failing health. Others went as far as insinuating that the prophecy mentioned the words "aging dictator", "Southern Africa" and "long time sickness". Still other comments were less buoyant: "Guyz stop celebrating this TBJ guy is a cultist who can say anything to please anybody ha ha ha. If you think it's our Mugabe he ain't going nowhere". Some comments were very celebratory: "Let the leader die and we celebrate l'm waiting to hear those good news Satan is waiting for him". Other participants were cautious: "Give us the date time and the name of the president and or country. until tht comes out correct l wl never believe u TBJ". It is evident from these responses that some of the discourses circulated in online platforms are not progressive[124] at all but rather reactionary.

The gossip only subsided after the release of the news that Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika had died of heart attack at the state house. As pointed out by Willems (2013), informal means of expression like gossip are crucial channels through which ordinary people gain information about the formal realm of politics and also through which they express their views about the state. However it is important to note that an overreliance on gossip is a double-edged sword which can fuel misinformation as well as impoverish political deliberation.

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[124] Progressive politics are geared at advocating progress, change, improvement, or reform, as opposed to wishing to maintain the status quo and preventing different forms of disenfranchisement,

8.2 Conclusion

This chapter has established that although there are many striking differences between the way Zimbabwean and South African youths use Facebook to reinvent and circulate digital hidden transcripts, there are also similarities. As this study has argued, these circuits of commentary are moments of political engagement and participation (Obadare, 2013). In other words, Facebook groups and pages provide novel spaces to engage with the political, "even if not in the form associated with the rational public sphere of official media" (Wasserman, 2010: 85). This is because Facebook opens up spaces where young people with access to the internet are able to "to articulate their opinions and desires, perform their identities, present the unsaid, circulate information and negotiate the meaning of political and cultural issues in their lives" (Ligaga, 2012: 2). The chapter has also demonstrated that jokes, rumours and gossip are mostly [re]invented and circulated in Zimbabwe when compared to South Africa due to the repressive nature of the media environment. There are also similarities in terms of the kinds of subvertisements aimed at critiquing public institutions and political parties in both countries. Unlike in Zimbabwe, online observations have revealed that online petitions are generally deployed as a "repertoire of digital contention" in South Africa. This indicates that youths are mobilising outside of the political system. Unlike youth activists from Zimbabwe who distributed online petitions which can be catergorised as digital hidden transcripts, those from South Africa circulated digital public transcripts aimed at mobilising people to take action against pressing societal concerns. Out of the six movements studied, only PASSOP Afrika (in South Africa) and YFZ (in Zimbabwe) posted and shared letters addressed to public representatives as a way of engaging with the political system. In contrast with the South African case, some of the letters circulated by youths in Zimbabwe were framed in sensationalist and humorous language which allowed them to transgress boundaries of public speech. Although cartoons were circulated in in both countries, it was clear that respondents from South Africa regurgitated professionally generated content (cartoons) sourced from the mainstream private media when compared to their Zimbabwean counterparts who circulated photoshopped images with no attribution. This shows that in South Africa use Facebook to circulate mostly public transcripts whereas those in Zimbabwe utilise the site to circumvent state surveillance through sharing anonymous memes. It is clear that cartoons (either professionally or user generated) were used for the purpose of frame amplification.

This chapter also contradicts mainstream literature which presents online forums as inherently democratic and progressive. It has argued that reactionary and hegemonic discourses are also amplified thereby validating the notion that online forums are double-edged swords. As such, this alerts us not to uncritically celebrate popular culture as a space of agency and resistance without engaging with its contents and texts. The chapter has demonstrated that digital hidden transcripts enable the youths to transgress the "exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public [sphere], elaborating alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech" (Fraser, 1992: 116). As such, these circuits of political discussion have many similarities with Bakardjieva's (2010) notion of "subactivism[125]" as well as Bayat's (2010: 56) "quiet encroachment" outside formal political channels. For Bayat (2010), these "the politics of informal people" in non-Western contexts foreground how youth activists, through their individual everyday actions, not only resist but also gradually conquer new space from dominant groups and undermine the capacity of the state to exercise surveillance. Miller et al (2016) describe these "quiet enchroachments" as "passive participation" which denotes the tendency to criticise things in a more resigned way.

The next chapter discusses the conclusion and summary of the empirical and theoretical contributions of this study.

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[125] This is a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

9. Introduction

The main objective of this study was to examine how and why youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook to mediate political action. This chapter wraps up this study by discussing and analysing some of the major findings in relation to the research questions I set out to answer. I specifically focus on the summary of the empirical and theoretical contributions to the discipline as well as identify possible areas for future research. The chapter also offer practical recommendations.

Compared to some previous studies (Gerbaudo, 2012; Lim, 2012) on social media and political activism which have been driven by events (like the Arab Spring, Occupy Movement and Spanish *Indignados*), this qualitative comparative study (*small-N* analysis) represents one of the few studies to empirically investigate how and why youth activists in democratic and authoritarian contexts utilise Facebook for political purposes. This study can also be viewed as partly an answer to Everatt's (2014) insightful observation that one the most glaring weaknesses in youth research in Africa is the lack of comparative research. Although scholars (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2003) hail single-case studies for their ability to generate rich data based on extensive examination of cases, it is important to emphasise that a comparative case study offers a more abstract explanation that can inform scholarly knowledge beyond a particular case. As Hallin & Mancini (2004: 2) observe, "most literature on media is highly ethnocentric, in the sense that it refers only to the experience of a single country, yet it is written in general terms, as the though the model that prevailed in that country were universal". Enlightening as it might be in its own right, a single-case design "would not allow [me] to draw this kind of general conclusion because there is no variation in the context in which the case unfolds" (Voltmer & Kraetzschmar, 2015: 13). In view of these methodological considerations, this study combined the most similar and most different system designs (see Chapter Four). The study was concerned with answering the following four set of questions:

- How and why do politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa deploy Facebook to mediate political action?

- How do discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation play out on Facebook groups and pages used by youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa?

- To what extent, if any, do Facebook groups and pages constitute alternative spaces for political activism for youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa?

- What kind of political discourses are being circulated by Zimbabwean and South African youths on Facebook?

In order to generate empirical answers for the afore-mentioned questions, this study triangulated qualitative and quantitative data, although it is predominantly rooted in qualitative research tradition. Three data collection tools (online participant observation (social media ethnography), qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews) were deployed to capture the perspectives and experiences of Zimbabwean and South African youths on how and why they appropriate Facebook to facilitate political activism (see Chapter Four). As discussed in Chapter Four, social media ethnography involved immersing myself in Facebook groups and pages, learning about posting behaviours, and then producing first-hand accounts based on personal observation (Postill & Pink, 2012). This was important because it enabled me to make sense of the levels of participation as well as to document the various kinds of digital public and hidden transcripts circulated on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

9.1 Empirical contribution

9.1.1 How are youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa using Facebook for political purposes?

Chapter Five focused on how youth activists from a range of social movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa used Facebook to mediate political action. Overall, interviews and online participant observations revealed that there are several similarities between Zimbabwean and South African youth activists in their localised usage of Facebook for political purposes, with the most significant differences emanating from the ways these actors deployed this medium to facilitate traditional forms of political participation. The study has established that

respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa appropriated Facebook to address their political objectives like: the dissemination of information, social and political mobilisation, advertising of upcoming events, recruiting more supporters, everyday political talk, venues of political action, crowd-funding and online donations, contacting and interfacing with political representatives and as a source of alternative political information. To a certain extent, these findings are similar to usage patterns identified in international contexts (Gerbaudo, 2012; Lim, 2014; Storsul, 2014). This further indicates that social media have become an important platform for young people to participate in political activities.

Chapter Five has demonstrated that South African youths are deploying extra-parliamentary platforms like Facebook to engage in alternative forms of political participation whereas their Zimbabwean counterparts used the same site to facilitate traditional forms of political participation. In Bennett's (2008) conceptualisation, this means that South African youth activists are using Facebook to engage in "self-actualising forms of citizenship" whilst Zimbabweans are appropriating it to advance "dutiful forms of citizenship". For instance, most interviewees from the social movements observed that Facebook functioned as a backchannel to engage with mediatised political events like election debates, public meetings and talk shows hosted by the mainstream media. In contrast, South African youths used Facebook to amplify existing off-line forms of collective action. These country-specific discrepancies in usage patterns are attributable to variations in socio-political and media contexts.

In comparison to South African youths who relied on traditional media for news and information, this study has found that respondents from Zimbabwe also deployed Facebook as a source of news and political information alternative to state propaganda. Dissimilarities in terms of how situated youth activists used various forms of media to source political information and news suggest that context matters. As scholars (Dahlgren, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2005) observe, everyday appropriations of available ICTs may differ according to variations in socio-political contexts. In the case of Zimbabwe and South Africa, it is also evident that the political uses of Facebook are shaped by local conditions rather than pre-determined by the medium.

This study has found that some of the Zimbabwean and South African youth activists leveraged the connectivity of the internet to crowd-fund and solicit for online donations so as to complement existing traditional financing models. This supports Agre's (2002) amplification thesis which holds that new media technologies build on and extend existing communication structures in communities rather than putting into place a completely new communication structure. Besides providing access to a large audience, Facebook made it possible for respondents to tag, create event pages, to attach posters, pamphlets and invitation cards as well as to send private invitations to their supporters. As such, Facebook allowed respondents in both transitional societies to subvert the structural limitations (space limitations and distribution problems) associated with the traditional media.

As intimated earlier, marked differences were observable in terms of how respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa used Facebook to engage in traditional forms of political participation. Chapter Five has argued that contrary to South African youths who deployed Facebook to "like" specific causes and to join interest groups, their Zimbabwean counterparts used the site to contact and interact with what Fenton (2012) calls "transparent[126]" politicians and political parties. This might be explained by the fact that the two countries have different electoral systems. Whereas Zimbabwe deploys a hybrid system (both the candidate and party-centred), South Africa uses the proportional representation (party-centred) system (see Shale & Matlosa, 2013; Hodzi, 2014a). Although contacting and interfacing with political leaders via their Facebook pages can be viewed as signifying the rejuvenation of traditional forms of citizenship amongst Zimbabwean youths, it is important to highlight that the creators and administrators of these "invited spaces of [mediated] participation" (Cornwall, 2002) retain the "dictatorial power in selecting participants, allowing certain comments and cutting off or silencing others" (Bakardjieva, 2008: 293). This means that most politicians have not yet incorporated "democratic listening across difference" (Bickford, 1996: 15; Dreher, 2009) into their online deliberation which encapsulates ceding control over political communication in favour of interactive and reciprocal relationship with citizens.

From the findings, Facebook pages and groups functioned as a training ground for agitational activities directed at the wider public. Notwithstanding similarities, striking differences were also witnessed across the two case nations with regards to how youth activists used Facebook

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[126] Those who are easily and readily available to engage in discussion with their constituencies via social media platforms

for mobilisation purposes. For instance, respondents in Zimbabwe appropriated Facebook to mobilise first time voters and their peers to go out and inspect their names on the voters roll as well as to go and cast their votes during the referendum and harmonised election in 2013, whereas South African interviewees acknowledged using the site to mobilise their constituencies to engage in street action. These differences can be explained by the "election year effect" in Zimbabwe especially in 2012 and 2013 which saw many youths using Facebook to engage in conventional politics.

Findings from the South African case suggest that youths are generally mobilising politically, but "outside of the political system" (Sloam, 2012). With regards to the Zimbabwean youth, they used Facebook in order "to circumvent the structural challenges that inhibited them from registering as voters, verifying their voter registration details and obtaining essential information about where they should vote and their nearest polling station" (Hodzi, 2014a: 55). Thus the usage of Facebook for mobilisation purposes varies from country to country as well as organisation to organisation as they are largely influenced by the socio-political context. As Fuchs (2016) aptly puts it, contemporary social media is a field of power struggles, in which dominant actors command a large share of economic, political and ideological media power that can be challenged by alternative actors [including youth activists] that have less resources, visibility and attention, but try to make the best use of the unequal share of media power they are confronted with in order to fight against the dominant powers. These findings alert us to be wary of the technological determinism which overlooks the unpredictable ways in which the wider societal context and technology are mutually implicated.

Both online observations and in-depth interviews highlighted that most of the respondents used Facebook as "a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state" (Fraser, 1997: 70). Most Facebook pages and groups of the six social movements studied served as repositories of press statements, position papers, shadow reports and protest pictures. Chapter Five has also revealed that most youths in both case nations were using Facebook to broadcast information rather than dialogue about it. In light of this observation, it appears reasonable to submit that most youth activists have not internalised the interactive nature of social media, hence their posting behaviour can be best described as "politics as usual" (Margolis & Resnick, 2000).

Some of the respondents utilised the site to micro-blog public meetings and events. This practice of micro-blogging was instrumental in going around the limits of traditional communication channels thereby bridging physical distances. In the Zimbabwean case where mass migration has dislocated the activist community, micro-blogging on Facebook illustrates that "contextual factors have a strong bearing on the uses of the technologies resulting in localised appropriations" (Mabweazara, 2010: 229). This practice demonstrates that respondents in both countries are able to contextualise and appropriate ICTs to meet their own needs and priorities in response to local dynamics and historical conditions (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 1999).

Facebook pages and groups also provided venues for everyday political talk for Zimbabwean and South African youth activists. It allowed them to overcome the limitations of inter-personal communication and spatial distance. Unlike in South Africa where debate was much more open and critical on Facebook, respondents in Zimbabwe indicated that the threat of state surveillance and regulations governing internet and mobile phone usage had a "chilling effect" on online conversations on public Facebook pages (see Chapter Five). This shows that in a political context permeated by a culture of fear and intimidation political conversations on Facebook closely resembles "authoritarian deliberation" (He, 2006). Whereas political conversations on Facebook in Zimbabwe were highly polarised along political affiliation and party political faction lines, in South Africa they tended to be polarised along racial lines. From the findings, it can be argued that off-line societal cracks and crevices are often replicated or even magnified on social media. In the same vein, Mutsvairo (2016) reminds us that, it is too early to celebrate the "normalisation of protest" (Norris, Walgrave & van Aelst, 2005) in undemocratic political contexts where there is a heavy price to pay for disobeying state-sponsored orders. Because of the existent culture of fear and mistrust of conventional political discussions, youth activists in Zimbabwe are hesistant to fully embrace the "potential" and "opportunities" created by new media technologies.

Unlike some experienced South African youth activists who deployed Blackberry mobile phones, encrypted emails, secret Google and WhatsApp groups when discussing sensitive organisational issues, their Zimbabwean counterparts indicated that they used pseudonyms,

private messaging systems, face-to-face communication, shorthand codes and fake accounts to post and share sensitive political issues on Facebook. This means that the fear or threat of state surveillance is forcing youth activists in Zimbabwe to change their communication practices as well as avoiding certain features of Facebook like walls, commenting on public groups and so forth. This support findings from earlier studies (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 207; Poell, 2014), which show that given the flexible nature of the internet, real identities of users can be hidden under ambiguous usernames, making provocative and fearless exchanges more possible. These practices show that youth activists in democratic and non-democratic contexts display remarkable ingenuity in overcoming the obstacles put in their way by state and technology-capitalism complex.

Chapter Five also indicated that respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa deployed Facebook as "bases for agitational activities directed at the wider public" (Fraser, 1992). Compared to South African youths who used Facebook as a vehicle to call for off-line collective actions, some of the Zimbabwean respondents utilised the site to perform what Bennett & Segerberg (2012) call "personalised connective actions". This means that respondents in Zimbabwe used Facebook to engage in profile and cover picture activism. Given the personalised nature of these activities and the failure to activate friends and friends of friends' emotions in the absence of an iconic figure, this kind of everyday forms of resistance in Zimbabwe failed to transform into off-line collective action. It also shows that respondents in Zimbabwe are resorting to "biographical solutions to structural problems" (Couldry, 2010: 113). Unlike in Zimbabwe, cyber-activism in South Africa where there is a vibrant protest culture was deployed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. This finding resonates with the political opportunity structure theory which suggests that opportunities for protests and other types of extra-institutional activities often are greater in more open and liberalised environments (like South Africa) where governments tolerate protests and thereby the costs to collective action are lower (see Tarrow 1998).

Findings from the Zimbabwean case debunk the cyber-optimistic claims that Facebook is the place where the fearful of the world can overcome their fear and unite to fight against the oppressive power structures (see Castells, 2011). Interview responses in Zimbabwe revealed that youth activists are generally afraid to use Facebook to call for off-line collective action. These responses suggest that it is difficult to construct a sense of trust online in authoritarian

contexts (Tarrow, 1998; Gerbaudo, 2012). They also counter Gladwell's (2010) over-simplified argument that Facebook activism demands low-risk participation. The Zimbabwean case therefore reminds us that online activism is equally a high risk undertaking just like its off-line counterpart.

9.1.2 Why are Zimbabwean and South African youths utilising Facebook for political purposes?

Chapter Six outlined the reasons why youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa use Facebook to facilitate political action. The study revealed that what determined technology use in Zimbabwe and South Africa were localised and historical information and communication needs rather than simply the structural features of the medium. Besides striking similarities, the study also found that reasons vary considerably within and across social movements and countries studied. From the interviews, four broad reasons were mentioned: social and technical affordances of the technology, lack of political space, limited access to the mainstream mediated public sphere and the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring.

In terms of similarities, almost all the respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa indicated that they preferred Facebook because of the various potentialities it offered towards answering their local-specific political objectives. They cited architectural features like groups, private messaging, chat system, Facebook events, notes, newsfeed, privacy settings and video call as enabling them to sidestep the limitations of other media platforms. Most of the respondents observed that they preferred Facebook because of its flexible privacy settings which allowed them to control who can have access to their online conversations. These similarities in terms of the reasons behind the deployment of Facebook for political purposes in both transitional societies suggest that conventions have been established as to how to appropriate the existing features of the site.

The study also found that compared to South Africa, respondents in Zimbabwe observed that they utilised Facebook mainly because of lack of political space. Narratives from interviews showed that most youths in Zimbabwe have resorted to creating their own spaces of political discussion as a way of circumventing the exclusionary nature of the mediated public sphere

and the state. In the Zimbabwean case, the fragmentation of the political space is largely due to the criminalisation of street demonstrations and public gatherings as well as political restrictions. In South Africa, deep-seated social inequalities, repressive policing of community protests, the abuse of the Regulation of Gatherings Act by municipalities and over-commercialisation of the private media have cumulatively contributed to the shrinkage of spaces for democratic participation. These findings indicate that Facebook is used to go around the structural limitations associated with the off-line space. As Chapters Six and Seven have illustrated, it is important to highlight that all [virtual and physical] spaces have their own structural limitations. As Voltmer (2013: 16) highlights, although new media technologies open up new opportunities of organising collective action, they are almost always accompanied by new constraints and particular disadvantages. This is because although Facebook enabled youth activists "to create the own spaces" (Fraser, 1992), findings of this study have also shown that these spaces expose them to massive state and corporate surveillance.

Another reason cited for the use of Facebook for political purposes by most respondents in both countries related to the lack of access to the mainstream media. Unlike Zimbabwean respondents who indicated that they lacked access to the mainstream public sphere, whilst some interviewees from South Africa observed that that they had limited access to the mainstream media. This means that youth activists used Facebook to circumvent the political and economic restrictions bedevilling the mainstream media in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Following Fraser's (1992) insightful ideas, it can be argued that Facebook allowed youth activists "to enter the [online] public sphere on their own terms by representing themselves". This finding corroborates one of the assumptions of this study that youths who lack meaningful political voice in the mainstream mediated public sphere often resort to Facebook [and other social media platforms] as an alternative communication channel (Lim, 2014). Therefore understanding the reasons why youth activists are using new media technologies in Africa requires "a firm commitment to contextualising the concept within a broader and diverse framework that underpins the continent's cultural, economic, geo-political and historical backgrounds" (Mutsvairo, 2016: 12).

Chapter Six also found that respondents from both countries deployed a wide array of available communication platforms like WhatsApp groups, Google groups, Twitter, word of

mouth, mobile phones, mailing lists, community meetings, pamphlets, posters, newspapers and radio and so forth. This suggests that rather than assuming that youth activists utilise single technologies to mediate political action, there is need to pay attention to the ways hybrid media infrastructures are appropriated in different historical contexts. Such an acknowledgment helps us to shy away from promoting the "myth of the mediated centre" (Couldry, 2003) as well as fetishising single technologies (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011) through flagging terms like "Facebook revolutions". This is precisely because digital and non-digital as well as new and old forms of media intersect and complement each other in complex and capricious ways. It also re-affirms views by the communication and media ecology scholars (Foth & Hearn, 2007; Tacchi et al, 2003) that situated communicators use available multiple forms of media platforms with varying potentialities to address different needs in historical and local contexts. Youth activists use diverse forms of media to subvert dominant social, economic and cultural codes in order to get their messages across to a broader spectrum of citizens. As Wasserman (2014) adds, the potential of social media to facilitate political action should be evaluated within the wider media ecology and in relation to other social spheres of influence.

Some of the respondents indicated that the "demonstration effect" of Arab Spring had significantly influenced their appropriation of Facebook for political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa. They observed that they had incorporated Facebook into their repertoires of contention after learning about their use during the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. This indicates that repertoires of contention are often borrowed from other political contexts without necessarily being influenced by local needs. The diffusion of these repertoires of communication highlights the fact that when activists realise that a certain tool has been successfully appropriated in another context they are more likely to borrow it. This reliance on imported repertoires of contention also explains the reason why some of the observed Facebook pages had a lot of fans but were characterised by low levels of engagement and limited dialogical communication (see Chapter Seven). This suggests limited appreciation of the interactive features of the medium.

9.1.3 The discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook groups and pages

Chapter Seven shows that the intra-public relations within the six Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It established that societal inequalities infects Facebook pages and groups and taints the discursive interaction within them (see Fraser, 1990). For instance, it was observed that NGO-oriented movements (CiZC, R2K Campaign, PASSOP Afrika, NCA and YFZ) in Zimbabwe and South Africa had the most number of fans when compared to grassroots organisations (like the UPM). This means that that donor-funded social movements which are generally popular in the physical world also "enjoy an oligopoly of the publicistically effective and politically relevant formation of assemblies and associations" (Habermas, 1989: 228) in the online public sphere.

Facebook pages and groups do not promote the ideal of equal participation. As articulated in Chapter Seven, social movements (like R2K Campaign, CiZC and YFZ) with predominantly urban and middle class members who are also literate in English and highly connected on the internet had the most postings when compared to grassroots movements with a working class and rural membership. Findings also show that movements (R2K Campaign and YFZ) with a youth-oriented membership base with access to broadband and mobile internet had the most interactive Facebook pages and groups than those organisations (the UPM, PASSOP Africa and NCA) whose membership are from the working class and unemployed youth segment of the population. This suggests that access to the internet shapes the nature and quality of participation on Facebook pages and groups. It also reinforces the view that "interlocutors do not set aside social inequalities and speak to one another as if they were social and economic peers" (Fraser, 1992) on Facebook. This indicates that those social groups who lack equal access to the material means of equal participation are excluded from the discursive interactions on Facebook or at worst restricted passive forms of usage such as liking without commenting, reading without commenting and sharing without commenting.

As Chapter Seven has shown, professionally generated content (like mainstream news links) was mostly posted on all the Facebook pages and groups when compared to original user generated content. This finding contradicts the notion of "produsage" (Bruns, 2008) which informs most literature on social media and political activism from Western contexts. In contrast to Bruns's concept, this study has proposed the use of sharing and forwarding "agents" to refer to people who engage in the systematic regurgitation of mainstream media content on Facebook pages and groups. Because of the economic and cultural capital

associated with making full use of the potentials offered by Facebook, most of the respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa find it difficult to graduate into "produsers" (Bruns, 2008).

As this study has demonstrated, postings dealing with international causes attracted insignificant levels of engagement when compared with those focusing on national or local causes in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This indicates that youth activists in both countries use Facebook to connect with local causes rather than international struggles. Online observations established that humorous postings (like jokes, cartoons, memes and so forth) generated significant levels of engagement when compared with "serious" postings (political news, press statements and so forth) in both countries. As Zuckerman (2013) observes, messages that are funny are more likely to invite participation and amplification. In-depth interviews with some respondents from Zimbabwe revealed that insignificant levels of engagement on Facebook pages and groups may be deceptive because they often resorted to chat and private messaging to discuss sensitive political issues. This finding suggests that solely focusing our attention on qualitative analysis of discursive interactions on public Facebook pages may actually miss out on private interactions that occur via the inbox and chat in authoritarian contexts.

Chapter Seven has shown that discursive interactions on Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa tended to operate to the advantage of other groups and to the disadvantage of others (see Fraser, 1992). Online participant observations revealed that discussion threads on Zimbabwean and South African Facebook pages and groups were dominated by a minority group of participants. Whereas white participants dominated online conversations on Facebook in South Africa, in Zimbabwe black participants were dominant. In both countries, male participants were generally more participative on Facebook pages and groups when compared to their female counterparts. Most of these Facebook pages can therefore be viewed as gendered, racialised and classed spaces. This confirms Fraser's view that "participatory privileges are enjoyed by members of dominant social groups" (1997: 82). As Chapter Seven has illustrated, participants on Facebook cannot deliberate as if they are social equals "when these discursive arenas [pages and groups] are situated in a larger societal context that is pervaded by structural relations of dominance and subordination" (Fraser, 1992: 65). Findings from both case nations suggest that Facebook "can entrench or

exacerbate unequal gendered or classed power relations (Etzo & Collender, 2010: 660). This corroborates the view that participation on Facebook ushers in an era of leetocracy, where a small tech-savvy elite gain influence at the expense of the majority (Gustafsson, 2013).

Facebook pages and groups are infected by "informal impediments to participatory parity that can persist even after everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate" (Fraser, 1992: 63). Besides the political economy of access to social media, cultural factors like language differences also militated against equal participation on Facebook as non-English language speakers were excluded from the conversations (see Chapter Seven). Thus, language remains a political fault-line in multi-cultural and stratified societies which hampers mutual comprehension. As Fraser (1992) observes, "the language people use as they reason together usually favours one way of seeing things and discourages others". In this regard, I concur with Habermas's (1989: 22) that "participants do not always have the same cultural capital for participating in [online] public sphere".

From the findings, it emerged that Facebook groups (UPM and YFZ) are characterised by "strong publics" while Facebook pages (R2K Campaign, CiZC, PASSOP Afrika and NCA) are populated by "weak publics" (Fraser, 1992) in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is because the former promoted active participation whilst the latter privileged reactive participation. Facebook pages users can only comment on posts initiated by administrators while on groups anyone can initiate a post and comment on other posts (see Chapter Seven).

As the findings indicate, some of the formal impediments to equal participation on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa included: the cost of the internet and technologies, lack of digital literacy and skills, lack of time, the structural features of the medium, fear of state communication surveillance (mostly in Zimbabwe), lack of the required linguistic capital (in South Africa) and the architectural design of the medium. In terms of the design of the medium, scholars (Dahlgren, 2013; Freelon, 2015) have observed that technological features can powerfully influence both the form and content of civic discussion although users retain some degree of agency. Although Facebook is associated with the "reducation of participation costs" (Garret, 2006: 204), it is important to reiterate that structural factors such as the pervasive culture of fear and mistrust can also hinder people from taking advantage of the potential of the platform.

Chapter Seven has argued that Facebook pages and pages are arenas of micro-politics of participation as well as "sites of power" (Lefebvre, 1991; Foucault, 1995). For instance, Facebook as a corporate social media entity retains the power to engage in both legitimate and illegitimate forms of content restrictions. Facebook pages and groups can also be interpreted as "culturally specific rhetorical lenses that [algorithmically] filter and alter the utterances they frame; they can accommodate some expressive modes and not others" (Fraser, 1992: 68). As such, Facebook's opaque and centralised control of its code and architecture is incompatible with the idea of democratic participation and ownership. The interactive and participatory character of Facebook communications does not mean social media platforms are inherently horizontal spaces (Gerbaudo, 2016). This is because Facebook pages are in fact characterised by a strong hierarchy in which leadership, far from being eliminated, acquires new forms (Gerbaudo, 2012).

The study has established that Facebook exercises "subtle forms of control" (Fraser, 1992) via ownership, algorithms and acceptable use policies (see Chapter Seven). Thus contrary to cyber-optimists' (Shirky, 2008; Diamond, 2010) hyperbolic views that social media platforms are characterised by democratic and symmetrical participation, Chapter Seven has illustrated that users of Facebook have no control over platform changes (like privacy settings, surveillance of data and value ranking algorithms). Apart from this "control divide" (Dahlberg, 2015) between platform owners and users, Chapter Seven has also argued that Facebook pages and groups are also permeated by other forms of control which are exercised by creators and administrators. Interviews with Facebook administrators in Zimbabwe indicated that they engaged in gatekeeping practices like censoring by deletion, censoring by hiding and censoring by blocking whilst those in South Africa mentioned that they adopted a hands-off approach (gatewatching) to content filtering and moderation. As Dahlgren (2005) notes, internally social movement organisations strive for some consensus that ends up silencing other minority voices within the groups. With the exception of the UPM and YFZ Facebook groups which filtered who can become their member on the site, the other four public Facebook pages allowed participants to "like" them as part of joining. Similarly, Chiumbu (2015: 15) argues that "media production is not often democratic, communication is not always non-hierarchical and power to facilitate coordinated and collective action not evenly redistributed."

Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa are not "spaces of zero degree culture, equally hospitable to any possible form of cultural expression" (Fraser, 1992: 68). This means that Facebook is not a discursive space that is neutral, with no acceptable use policies or established norms that determine how interaction occurs. Algorithms introduce new obstacles in the quest for accountability and transparency in consequential gatekeeping (Tufecki, 2015: 208-9). As the Zimbabwean case show, Facebook administrators determine the rules of the game as well as the [un]acceptable modes of participation. This affirms the view that "producers, with a capital "P," are not that easily overthrown by scattered produsers' participatory practices" (Olsson & Svensson, 2012: 41) on Facebook groups and pages. Similarly, Moyo (2012) argues that participation is generally regulated and therefore exclusive and undemocratic. Although there are similarities between traditional editorial and algorithmic gatekeeping, editing in the latter is dynamic, invisible and individually tailored (Tufecki, 2015).

It important to note that these platforms also engender an ambivalent situation which Marcuse (1964/2007) calls "democratic unfreedom". According to Marcuse (1964/2007), "democratic unfreedom" denotes the free acceptance of oppression and surplus repression. It underscores the double-edged nature of communication on social media platforms, where despite the aura of democratic participation these platforms are constrained and conditioned by algorithms and socio-political and cultural factors. In the same vein, Curran (2002) foregrounds the contradictory character of contemporary [social] media. He argues that there are "eleven main factors that encourage the media to support dominant power interests" (Curran, 2002: 148), but "the [social] media are also subject to countervailing pressures which can pull potentially in the other direction" (Curran, 2002: 15). The major argument here is that Facebook like other media platforms can best be viewed dialectically: it is subject to elite control, but has the potential for acting as and being influenced by counter-powers that question elite control (Fuchs, 2016).

9.1.4. To what extent, if at all, do Facebook groups and pages constitute alternative spaces for political activism?

This study has established that all the Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa can be understood as alternative public spheres because they allow for the expression of other forms of debate and deliberation of common issues when compared to those privileged by the mainstream media. Besides rational-critical debate which is deified by Habermas's public sphere theory as the *sine qua non* of political deliberation, other forms of debating like agnostic confrontation, emotional engagement and carnivalesque (ironic playfulness, humour and satire) expressions were pronounced on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa. As scholars (Bickford, 2011: 1027; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015) reminds us, emotion and rationality are not necessarily entwined – and they have been separated in the history of Western political thought – but nor are they necessarily antagonistic. Given that Facebook groups and pages constitute arenas in which groups with diverse values and rhetorics participate, online observations revealed that some of these forums constituted battlegrounds on which different ideas were confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation (see Mouffe, 2005). It is the argument of this study that political participation on Facebook is largely driven by alternative styles of political debate that run counter to Habermas's liberal democratic theory.

Based on the analysis of discussion threads and online membership statistics, Facebook pages and groups in both countries cannot be viewed as counter-public spheres in the sense that other participants than are excluded and marginalised from the discussions forums. For example, other races (whites and Indians) were excluded from discussions on Facebook in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, black participants were also marginalised from the online forums. Rural and female participants were generally excluded from the deliberative arenas in both case nations. As such, Facebook is implicated in the reproduction of "structural elitism" (Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004) associated with the mainstream media.

Chapter Seven has highlighted that only two Facebook pages and groups (the PASSOP Afrika in South Africa and the NCA in Zimbabwe) can be conceptualised as alternative spheres of political activism because they were open to the circulation of "counter-discourses" (Fraser, 1992). This entails disseminating information on topics, which the state and capitalist media tended to neglect. The two Facebook pages and groups were also dissimilar from others because they allowed their administrators and fans to critique the unequal power relations, name and shame corrupt officials and expose inconsistencies in

government policies. The other four Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa could not be viewed as alternative spheres because they were characterised by the systemic regurgitation of professionally generated content. The findings therefore counter the cyber-optimists' view that social media are sites for the circulation of marginalised social content.

Facebook groups and pages cannot be viewed as alternative public spheres because the site is heavily embedded in corporate capitalism (Fuchs, 2013; Dahlberg, 2015). Because Facebook cannot be separated from corporate and political powers, it is difficult for activists to create autonomous spaces which are ring-fenced from surveillance and censorship. Like the mainstream media, Facebook's bottom line is to ensure profit maximisation for its shareholders. As Dahlberg (2015) notes, preferential treatment on Facebook is given to those voices (like corporate advertisers and celebrities) that offer more to the company in terms of driving revenues. This promotes the "visibility divide" which results in voices of those with little (like grassroots activists) to offer to platform owners being rendered invisible through the strategic manipulation of value ranking algorithms (Dahlberg, 2015). The net result is that activists who cannot afford to "promote" and "boost" their content experience limited visibility and reach.

9.1.5 What kinds of political discourses are circulated on Facebook by Zimbabwean and South African youths?

The study has established that youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa circulate different kinds of hidden transcripts like political jokes, gossip, rumours, subvertisements, letter addressed to political representatives, online petitions and political cartoons. These findings indicate that the various types of hidden transcripts identified by Scott (1985) which are circulated by subordinate groups (like peasants and slaves) in off-line spaces against the ruling elite needs to be modified in order to make sense of digital hidden transcripts shared on online spaces. As Chapter Eight has shown, digital hidden transcripts like letters addressed to political representatives, online petitions, subvertisements and political cartoons have been grafted into Scott's (1985) insightful typology. These actually occurring practices constitute what Fraser (1992) calls "alternative styles of political behaviour" which are sprouting at the

margins of the formal political system, especially in extra-parliamentary spaces like Facebook.

Chapter Eight has illustrated that digital hidden transcripts are mostly circulated in political and media restrictive contexts like Zimbabwe when contrasted with liberal-democratic settings like South Africa where a culture of open and vibrant debate are still practiced despite the deep-seated social inequalities which makes it difficult for subaltern voices to impact the policy-making sphere. Qualitative content analysis indicated that in South Africa most of the respondents shared public transcripts (mainstream media content) on public Facebook pages. As pointed out earlier, these variations can be explained by the fact that traditional media systems in both countries are different (see Chapter Two). In light of the above, it makes sense to concur with the view that in political contexts (like in Zimbabwe) where spaces of opinion formation are repressed, Facebook can "potentially facilitate activists to form subaltern counter-publics needed in the fostering of hidden transcripts" (Lim, 2014: 58).

Unlike South African youth activists who circulated political discourses such as cartoons, online petitions, subvertisements, jokes and letters addressed political representatives on public Facebook pages, in Zimbabwe most of the observed respondents shared digital hidden transcripts (like cartoons, jokes, gossip, rumour and subvertisements) on their private Facebook profile walls. This suggests that respondents in Zimbabwe are subverting circumventing the structural limitations of Facebook by inventively circulating their alternative ways of political expression through personal profile walls. Compared to their South African counterparts, the study observed that Zimbabwean respondents preferred to tag and share political memes and cartoons with their off-line "friends" rather than distributing them via Facebook public groups and pages. It is arguable therefore that spreading of political discourses in authoritarian settings occurs among friends or trusted others rather than with complete strangers.

Findings of this study also show that some of the digital hidden transcripts (such as political jokes, cartoons and subvertisements) circulated in Zimbabwe and South Africa served to legitimise, naturalise, and mystify dominant discourses. Rather than simply critiquing oppressive power and social relations, some of the political discourses were also transmitters of reactionary politics in the form of xenophobia, tribalism, homophobia and racist attitudes. This dovetails with Aouragh's (2013) view that technologies are janus-faced which means

that Facebook has both empowering and disempowering potentialities. Discussing this issue further, Fuchs (2016) observes that the ambivalent nature of social media platforms does not mean they are not completely unimportant in situations of social struggles. Social media have contradictory characteristics in contradictory societies: they do not necessarily and automatically support/amplify or dampen/limit rebellions, but rather pose contradictory potentials that stand in contradictions with influences by the state, ideology, capitalism and other media (Fuchs, 2016). These platforms can both play a role for exerting control, exploitation and domination as well as for challenging asymmetric power structures of domination and exploitation.

Like Zimbabweans, South African respondents shared political jokes which poked fun at political and parliamentary leaders for their limited formal education. Most of the political jokes and cartoons made references to politicians' personalities, actions, policies, quotes and gaffes. In both case nations, jokes, memes and photoshopped images of political leaders can be viewed as "alternative norms of public speech" (Fraser, 1992). This is because in the Zimbabwean case some of these political discourses allowed Facebook users to transgress boundaries of permissible speech (see Chapter Eight). As Wasserman (2011: 153) asserts, the carnivalesque usage of Facebook "alerts us to the fact that popular media provide alternative ways of engaging with the state and with politics that do not carry the formal hallmarks of liberal democracy". This corresponds with Bickford's (2011: 1031) argument that through emotional responses "[c]ommunity activists […] are not simply trying to get a specific point heard; they are defending, or trying to legitimate, a mode of expressing and perceiving value".

Unlike in Zimbabwe, online petitions and letters to the public representatives were generally a South African phenomenon. This can be attributed to the fact that South Africa has a relatively open political system than Zimbabwe, which allows citizens to freely express their grievances (see Chapter Three). South Africa youth activists circulated digital public transcripts as online petitions when compared to their Zimbabwean counterparts who distributed digital hidden transcripts through Facebook messaging snd chat systems. Compared to South Africa, letters addressed to public representatives circulated by Zimbabwean youths on Facebook were not published in the mainstream media. Given the lack of substantive opportunities for subalterns to exercise a voice in the public sphere, the circulation of digital hidden transcripts on Facebook enables youth activists "to engage with

the political system and intervene in the mainstream mediated public sphere" (Wasserman, 2011: 153). Similarly, the circulation of digital transcripts on Facebook groups and pages allow youth activists in Zimbabwe and South Africa "to transgress [mainstream] norms of [rational] deliberation, generate debate and remake shared [political] meaning" (Fraser, 1992: 81).

Despite the circulation of these political discourses on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa, it is important to note that online petitions and subvertisements were integrated into off-line collective action by the R2K Campaign and PASSOP Afrika. In Zimbabwe, the sharing of digital hidden transcripts constituted "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1985) which did not spill into off-line collective action. This can be attributed to the failure by Zimbabwean activists to use Facebook as an emotional and carnivalesque conduit for the creation of an "emotional choreography of assembly" (Gerbaudo, 2012). Rather than galvanising people to engage in street action, the circulation of these discourses was accompanied by active participation on Facebook.

The circulation of political discourses in both countries should be seen as "a way of circumventing the limitations of the mainstream public sphere by drawing on the resources of popular culture" (Willems, 2010: 56) rather than as a barometer of the "breakdown of the rational deliberation" (Walton & Donner, 2009). It also demonstrates that rational deliberation is not the only route for the youth to engage in political action because there are a "variety of ways of accessing public life" (Fraser, 1990: 61). This chimes with Barber's (1996: 38) observation that in countries "where the majority of the [young] people are silenced and excluded from public debate by the state control of the law-courts, the pulpit, parliament and the press, and they turn to popular genres as the only space in which to represent their views".

9.2 Theoretical contribution

This section discusses the theoretical contributions to the study of how and why youths use Facebook to engage in political action in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In view of the criticisms levelled against the Habermasian concept of public sphere, this study adapted Fraser's (1992) ideas of subaltern counter-publics to an African context. Cognisant of Bakardjieva's (2008: 292) apt advise that "there is no longer a need to foist one particular garment over a living phenomenon only to be disappointed that it does not fit well or at all",

this study has demonstrated the applicability and usefulness of Fraserian ideas in understanding political participation in a changing political and media environment especially in multi-cultural and stratified societies. Contrary to the Habermasian notion of public sphere, Fraserian ideas have directed our attention to actually existing forms of political participation. It has also directed our attention to alternative spaces where marginalised groups curve out for themselves in order to continue with their own kinds of politics (Fraser, 1992).

Notwithstanding criticisms levelled against her feminist critical theory, Fraser's ideas provide invaluable insights into several ways used by the youths to access public life in "actually existing" democracies rather than imposing normative views. This study has argued that Fraserian ideas like "intra-public relations" offer a more fruitful analytical tool which can be used to analyse the character and quality of discursive interactions in online forums in post-colonial societies. It has also highlighted the elasticity and relevance of Fraser's notion of "subtle forms of control" in analysing the micro-politics of participation on Facebook pages and groups.

This thesis has also made an original theoretical contribution that calls for a thorough-going diaological engagement between Western and non-Western theoretical concepts. As Wasserman & de Beer's (2009: 431) argue, there is need for "dialogic" approach to media studies "that would develop non-Western-biased concepts …that extend beyond Western-grown models, incorporating valuable ideas and norms from both Western and non-Western traditions". Based on theoretical insights gleaned from Fraser's subaltern counter-publics and Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts, this study has also incorporated ideas on popular culture gleaned from African studies. As this thesis has argued, actually existing public spheres in Africa are made up of a diverse range of political discourses. Not only are rational critical discourses circulated, but in these heteroglossic spaces other styles of speech like emotion, humour, passion and agnostic discourses. This demonstrates that in actually existing public spheres, interlocutors draw on a wide range of modes of political debate. Various modes of political debate are deployed to enrich and enliven political engagement. I therefore concur with Fraser (1992) that our main task as researchers is to examine and envestigate "actually existing" public spheres on social media platforms rather than impose normative models based on borrowed theoretical lens from Western contexts.

To capture the "alternative styles of political behaviour" (Fraser, 1992) and to delineate specific "counter-discourses" circulated on Facebook pages and groups, Scott's metaphor of hidden transcripts and ideas on popular culture have been grafted to Fraser's ideas. As Willems (2010: 37) points out, Scott's concept is "very suitable in the African context in order to grasp the multidimensional aspects of political communication between the state and citizens". In this study, it has broadened my conceptualisation of political action to include politics of the everyday (everyday forms of resistance) that occur on Facebook. This directs our attention to the "political" which takes place in "non-political" spaces of everyday life. Scott's concept of hidden transcripts provides useful heuristic indicators of counter-discourses which are circulated in online spaces (see Chapter Three). Through qualitative content analysis, this study found other alternative styles of political expression which can further strengthen Scott's original heuristic indicators of hidden transcripts. These include: cartoons, online petitions, subvertisements and letters addressed to political representatives.

9.3 Areas for further research

This comparative study raises a number of focus areas for further research. The predominant focus on one form of technology (Facebook) at the expense of the broader communicative ecologies could be seen as one of the weaknesses of this particular study. Future research can undertake an ethnographic study on how and why activists use available technologies within specific media ecology to advance their political objectives. Given that this study was anchored with a qualitative research methodology (interviewed 49 respondents) which emphasises understanding particulars rather than generalising to universals, there is scope for a quantitative research which will allow for a representative picture of how and why youths use Facebook for political activism.

Whilst this study focused on mostly urban politically engaged youths in Zimbabwe and South Africa, future research can also look at how rural youths (who have limited access to a wide array of mediated public spheres) interact with social media for political purposes. Such a study will contribute towards the challenging of the "urban bias" that punctuates most studies of youth and political participation in Africa.

Another important future study which is long overdue is to investigate how politicians in Zimbabwe and South Africa are using Twitter to engage with citizens and the electorate. This is quite pertinent given the observation that at the time of this fieldwork political conversations were increasingly migrating from Facebook to Twitter. Facebook was being seen as "Baba Jukwa"territory by Zimbabwean politicians and they were in the process of migrating to Twitter which is seen as "professional" and inhabited by the middle class (known as Twimbos). Even in South Africa, politicians were more active on Twitter in their individual capacity when compared to Facebook which was used to host party political pages and groups.

Further research can advance a theoretical building excercise which combines Fraser's subaltern counter-publics and social movement framing theory in order to make sense of how social movement actors in democratic and non-democratic contexts deploy social media platforms for mobilisation purposes. By appreciating the link between social movements' frames and mobilisation, framing analysis provides a basis for bridging the gap between the ideational and symbolic dimensions of collective action and direct forms of mobilisation (Moussa, 2013). Framing theory also provides a suitable framework with which to link online communication with offline action, and allows us to better analyse how Facebook's potential and specific technological characteristics contribute to social movements' mobilisation efforts.

Another limitation of this study could be its deployment of the MSSD and MDSD designs which suffer from the inherent problem of "many variables, few cases" (Collier, 1993: 107), future studies can adopt a fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) (Ragin, 2000) or a longitudinal single case study approach which enables for the intensive examination of social phenomena. There is also scope for research that looks at how youths in either similar or different electoral systems are deploying social media to contact and interface with politicians and political parties during elections in Africa and to what extent new media technologies are changing contacting practices between politicians and citizens. Further research can also examine the issue of activism and communication surveillance. It can investigate how state and corporate surveillance are changing online communication practices of activists in other transitional societies. Research can also focus on how youth activists are resisting or circumventing both state and corporate social media surveillance in different

political contexts. Linked to this aspect is the issue of whether and how activists in different contexts are avoiding commercial social media platforms (which are generally compromised) in favour on non-commercial platforms like Diaspora and Lorea.

9.4 Recommendations

This study raised several structural limitations associated with Facebook and regulatory frameworks in both countries. Some of the limitations were linked to the ways various social movements and youth activists used Facebook to mediate political action. This section discusses some of the reforms that Facebook needs to consider to bring it closer to being an alternative public sphere, rather than being the controlled, commercialised space that it is currently. Based on the empirical findings, I proffer a number of recommendations:

How should Facebook change?

- From the findings, youth activists from Zimbabwe and South Africa complained about Facebook's real name policy which infringes on their right privacy and anonymity. I therefore suggest that Facebook must abandon its real name policy so that it becomes easier for activists to work anonymously or pseudonymously in authoritarian contexts.

- As highlighted in Chapter Six, Facebook reserves the right to modify its architectural design whenever it wishes. This can possibly affect how activists communicate with each other as well as undermine their security. I recommend that instead of closed systems of control and decision making, there is need for Facebook to embrace democratic and decentralised systems so that its rules and platform infrastructures are open to challenge, debate, input, and redesign by users.

- Given that Facebook subjects its users to data surveillance for commercial purposes, there is need for the company to incorporate an in-built opt-in or opt-out option which enables users to choose whether they want to be subjected to commercial surveillance or not.

- In terms of Facebook's EdgeRank value ranking algorithms which privileges data heavy postings over light weight postings which are popular with users who rely on mobile phones for internet access, there is urgent need for the company to use the

unfiltered timeline of postings like Twitter. This will ensure that all postings have the same probability in terms of reach and visibility.

- As Chapter Seven show, one of the major impediments to Facebook use is English language literacy especially in South Africa. I also recommend that Facebook should be available in many African languages (besides KiSwahili and Afrikaans) so that more and more can be part of the online public sphere.

- Facebook should desist from engaging in overbroad content moderation especially blocking and deleting posts and pages which do not necessarily violate their acceptable use policies. Their community mechanism of self-regulation should be transparent, consistent with the Necessary and Proportionate Principles[127] and provide rights to reply to take-down requests.

How does the regulatory environment need to change?

- As interviews with respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa have revealed, there is need for both countries to repeal laws which infringe on the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. In Zimbabwe, the laws which should be repealed include: the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act, Public Order and Security Act (POSA), Interception of Communications Act (ICA) and the Postal and Telecommunications Act. All media laws should also be aligned in line with the new Constitution in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, the Regulation of Gatherings Act, and the right to dignity clause in the 1996 Constitution should be amended so as to enhance freedom of expression and assembly. Unconstitutional elements of RICA should be reformed so that it incorporates user notification, outline legitimate grounds for interception directions, tighter protections for metadata and put limits on the retention of data. These laws should be in line with the Necessary and Proportionate Principles.

- As this study has shown, mobile internet data plans which are used to access the internet are extremely expensive in both countries. In order to address these

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[127] The Principles outline how international human rights law applies in the context of communication surveillance. They are founded on established international human rights law and jurisprudence. Cognisant of the fact that new media technologies have complicated the realisation of human rights norms across the globe, the Necessary and Proportionate Principles call on all national laws to adhere to human rights norms in communication surveillance (https://es.necessaryandproportionate.org). Acknowledging that new media technologies have facilitated increased state surveillance and intervention into individuals' private lives, the Principles call upon the States to update their understandings and regulation of surveillance and modify their practices to ensure that individuals' human rights are respected and protected. The Principles further argue that mass surveillance in all its manifestations is unnecessary, disproportionate and fundamentally lacking in transparency and oversight.

challenges spawned by oligopolistic (in Zimbabwe) and duopolistic (in South Africa) tendencies, there is need for governments to enforce mandatory infrastructure sharing policies which will lead to reduced operational costs as well as trickle-down benefits to subscribers in the form of cheaper data plans.

How can social movements use Facebook more effectively?

- From the findings, it is evident that there was poor interactivity and limited dialogical communication on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa. To address this, there is need for administrators to actively participate in the conversation, taking the time to instigate and respond to comments rather than simply posting content. Administrators can also make use of humorous content, questions, polls, interactive calls to action and language understood by most fans so to encourage active participation on Facebook.

- As the Zimbabwean case has illustrated, there is a mismatch between online and off-line activism. There is need for social movements to ensure that there is a direct link between the two forms of activism.

- Online observations also revealed that only two Facebook groups had adjusted their privacy settings in Zimbabwe and South Africa. I recommend that social movements should adjust their Facebook privacy settings to safeguard their information and protect users from state surveillance. This can include the use of secret and private Facebook groups.

- Given that most users of Facebook in both countries rely on mobile internet, there is need for social movements to devise content dissemination strategies that are compatible with Opera Mini and Edge's light-weight data requirements. Administrators can upload portrait pictures rather than landscape pictures and short video clips without sound which are automatically played on Facebook.

- Social movements in both countries should use Facebook to mobilise support for local causes as they generate more interest and willingness to participate rather than international struggles.

- Administrators of pages and groups should be well-versed in how Facebook algorithms function. Instead of relying on regurgitated professionally generated content and articles sourced from their websites, there is need for administrators to

produce original content, tweak the length, size and content of videos, photos and audios to suit the usage behaviour of their fans and members and platform algorithms.

- Instead of engaging in overbroad censorship of content on Facebook, administrators must confine their moderation role to policing content that violate legitimate acceptable use policies. They should become "gate openers" allowing the public to become active and equal contributors to the production of content.

In view of the Edward Snowden revelations about the connection between state and corporate social media surveillance, I recommend that activists should start using non-profit social media initiatives like Diaspora and Lorea for their communication and mobilisation purposes. Unlike corporate social media platforms like Facebook, Diaspora and Lorea put ownership of platform rules and code, and even of their servers and data, in the hands of their community of users. These platforms have also developed decentralised and free software systems which enable users to bypass surveillance, whether from within or without the platform.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Release Letter for Admire Mare

To whom it may concern,

Request for your participation in the interview process

1 am writing to request your assistance in a research project being undertaken as part of a PhD degree in journalism by Admire Mare (g09m4514), a research student of ours at Rhodes University. His PhD thesis is titled "Youth, Social Media and Political Action: A comparative study of South Africa and Zimbabwe". In particular, we would appreciate your assistance for him to collect a limited amount of information on how youth activists are using Facebook to engage in political activism in the Zimbabwean context. We would be grateful, therefore, if you could permit him access to interview you on a number of issues related to his area of study.

We must stress that the data collected will not identify the individuals personally excerpt where permission is sought. Further, the findings will be used strictly for academic purposes only. If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to email us. Our email addresses are jane.duncan@ru.ac.za and h.wasserman@ru.ac.za.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Prof Jane Duncan and Prof Herman Wasserman

Appendix 2

Interview Questions: Facebook and political activism in Zimbabwe and South Africa

Thank your agreeing to take part in this academic research. The sole purpose of this PhD research is to advance scientific understanding of the use of Facebook by activists to engage in political action.

1. How you do use Facebook to facilitate various modes of political participation?
2. How exactly do you use Facebook in your activist work?
3. Can you explain how you use Facebook to engage in political activism on a daily basis?
4. What kind of political activities do you engage in on Facebook?
5. How do you use Facebook to engage and contact political representatives or political parties in your country?
6. How do you use Facebook to mobilise people to engage in electoral participation in your country?
7. How do you use Facebook to monitor and observe national or local electoral processes?
8. How do you use Facebook to organise demonstrations and protests in your country?
9. How do you use Facebook to seek out political information?
10. What kind of political information do you often post on your Facebook group or profile page?
11. Does your national legislation on communication surveillance have any implications on Facebook activist routines and practices? If so, explain further.

Why do you use Facebook to engage in different modes of political participation?

1. As an activist, what would you say are some of the factors that have shaped or influenced the way you use Facebook for political purposes in your country?
2. What would you say is the connection between free or repressive media environment and the growth of Facebook activism?
3. Has the broader media context influenced how you use Facebook for political purposes in your country? If so how has it contributed to your use of social media?

4. Has the broader political context influenced how you use Facebook for political purposes in your country? If so how has it contributed to your use of social media?

5. Would you say the demonstration effect of the Arab Spring has influenced you to also use Facebook for political purposes or you were using it before the events?

6. Under what circumstances do you think activists resort to using Facebook for political activism?

7. Besides Facebook, what other traditional and social media platforms do you use for political purposes?

8. In what ways has Facebook practices (liking, commenting, sharing, discussion groups, video-calling and private messaging) changed the ways in which you engage in political activism in your country?

9. What do you think can be done by activists to bridge the gap between online and street activism? In other words, what can be done to translate the virtual into offline activism in your country?

10. What would you say is the connection between online and offline activism in your line of work?

11. Are there any cases where your online activism spilled into offline activism? If yes or no, can you explain how and why?

12. Are there any failures or successes you have experienced while using Facebook to engage in political work?

13. Are there any other reasons why you use Facebook for political activism in this country?

Discursive interactions and micro-politics of participation on Facebook pages and groups

1. What are some of the factors would you say influence how people participate on Facebook pages and groups?

2. Would you say internet access have a role to play in how people participate on Facebook pages. If so, explain further.

3. Would you say educational qualifications give others an advantage when it comes to online deliberation on Facebook? If so, explain.

4. Would you say language have a role to play in how people engage in Facebook pages? If so explain.

5. Does English language ability play a significant role in how one participates on Facebook groups and pages?

6. Do you think Facebook ensure equality of participation or it actually exacerbates inequalities?

Thanks a lot once again for taking time to answer the questions

Appendix 3

Interview questions with Facebook administrators

1. As a group administrator, can you explain how you use Facebook to facilitate political action?

2. Would you say Facebook has empowered or disempowered you in the way how you engage in activism?

3. In what ways has Facebook enriched your organisational tactics and strategies when it comes to activism?

4. In your opinion, what challenges do you face as activists when you rely on Facebook to promote your causes?

5. How has Facebook influenced or shaped how you interact with your broader constituency?

6. What role has Facebook played in your interaction with donors and members of your organisation?

7. What challenges (if any) do you generally face in using Facebook for activism?

8. How do you deal with some of these challenges, for instance communication surveillance?

9. Do you have a code of conduct on how you moderate content and interact with fans or group members on your Facebook page or group? (If yes, what does the code address?

10. Do you sometimes deal with content from fans or group members which you consider to violate your own code of conduct? (If Yes, give an example and how you dealt with it)

11. Do you think that you as a Facebook administrator should delete or hide content that goes overbroad? If yes why?

12. When using Facebook, have you ever blocked, unfriended or hidden someone because they posted political issues that you disagreed with or found offensive? If yes, explain how did you deal with it?

13. Do you think content moderation is good for online deliberation? Yes or No? Give reasons why?

    Thanks a lot once again for taking time to answer the questions

Appendix 4

Online Participant Observation checklist

What kinds of political discourses are circulated on different Facebook pages and groups in Zimbabwe and South Africa?

- Photoshopped images depicting political issues
- Political jokes
- Political cartoons
- Online petitions
- Rumour
- Gossip
- Any other political discourses

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