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Social Movements, Social Media and Civil Resistance in Zimbabwe, 2016-2017: Lessons for the Future

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Abstract:
This article explores the use of social media platforms (mainly Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) for the purposes of civil resistance by social movements in Zimbabwe between the year 2016 and 2017. The socialmedia-reliant social movementsunder study include; #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile, #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, #ThisFlower and #ThisGown. This article is motivated by the fact that,except for newspaper articles and commentaries, scholarship focusing on social media-reliant social movements in Zimbabwe remains scant. Existing scholarship tends to gravitate towards the (in)famous "Arab Spring" or South Africa's #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. This study therefore seeks to bridge such a scholarship lacuna by exploring the utilization of social media platforms for the purposes of civil resistance by the above-mentioned social movements. The article concludes by underlining that, although the afore-mentioned movements made notable contributions, they were largely urban-based, elitist and divorced from rural areas where the majorityof the population reside.

Keywords: Social media, civil resistance, social movements, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

The use of social media for purposes of civil resistanceis largely associated with the 2011 "Arab Spring" whichwas witnessed in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Oman, and Djibouti. Chiluwa (2012, p.1) notes that, during the Arab Spring, generally, planning and discussions were carried out on Twitter and Facebook where activists talked to each other, mobilized protesters and advanced new strategies. The UK was also not spared from social media related protests organized by students."The violent protests in the United Kingdom (UK) from July–August 2011 were also driven throughTwitter, Facebook and BlackBerry Messenger" (Institute of Peace and Security, 2012, p.1). In terms of political change and impact, the UK case comparatively falls below the "Arab Spring."

In North Africa, the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan cases were outstanding as they led to dramatic and radical changes.In the Tunisian scenario, which sparked the Arab Spring, social media allowed the formation of networks by the "digitalelite"; reporting on the magnitude of protest events; and the facilitation of the formation of a national collective identity which transcended geographical and socio-economic disparities (Breuer, 2012, p.i). One Egyptian activist during the Egyptian revolution said: "We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world" (Storck, 2011, p.4). In Libya, Harvey (2014, p.5) acknowledges social media use during the Libyan revolution but dispels the notion that it was a "Twitter or Facebook revolution" due to low levels of internet penetration in Libya at that time.

Importantly, Chiluwa (2012, p.217) notes that, "the North African revolutionary experience, with its huge implications for the rise of new paradigms for political change and government, demonstrates the potential for similar uprisings, not only in the Muslim world but also in other parts of Africa." Chiluwa's remarks hold water considering the emergence of social media related platforms in Sub-Saharan Africain recent years.Correspondingly, Willems (2016, p.1) notes that the #GoToVote campaign which seeks to mobilize people to vote in peace has gained ground in Kenya. The Southern African region cannot be excluded from the narrative of social media related political participation. By the same token, Willems (2016, p.2) notes that, social media platforms – primarily Facebook, WhatsApp and to a lesser extent Twitter –also played an important role in circulating information during the recent Zambian elections. In South Africa, March 2015 witnessed the birth of the #RhodesMustFall protest movement. Luescher & Klemenčič (2016, p.1) describe the #RhodesMustFall movement as: "a wave of student protests that started at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, with the purpose to 'decolonize' the University and rid it of offensive colonial symbols such as the statue of Cecil John Rhodes." Importantly, in relation to this paper, Luescher & Klemenčič (2016, p.1) emphasise on the importance of social media; mainly Twitter in the articulation of messages by the #RhodesMustFall movement.Additionally, in October 2015, the #FeesMustFall protest movement, which advocates free tertiary education in South Africa, also emerged.

In Zimbabwe, economic collapse, poor service delivery, former President Mugabe's advance age and ill-health led to the birth of civil resistance and the emergence of social and citizen movements. Moyo (2017) notes that, government's corruption in Zimbabwe has stirred a deadly pot of stark civil resistance and disobedience and the birth of social

movements and campaigns such as #ThisFlag, #ThisGown, #ThisFlower and #Tajamuka/Sesijikile. This article therefore seeks to assess how these social movements used social media in their resistance against the ruling party (ZANU PF) and government in Zimbabwe from 2016 to 2017.Also, the paper embarks on a stock taking exercise to ascertain the effectiveness of the use of such social media platforms by the afore-mentioned groups. There is inadequate literature on this area of study particularly in relation to Zimbabwe. Most studies tend to focus on social media in relation to the "Arab Spring" or South Africa's #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. Zimbabwe as a case study has not been adequately and exhaustively covered. This study therefore seeks to fill that scholarship gap by examining the use of social media (for civil resistance) by social movements in Zimbabwe.The new wave of social media political activism which was ignited by Pastor Evan Mawarire's #ThisFlag movement in 2016, raised curiosity and motivation for the undertaking of this research. Besides, social media related social movements and campaigns in Zimbabwe represent "a third political force" outside government and political parties and therefore a phenomenon worth investigating.

2. Methodology

In terms of sources of information, the article relied on Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTubeaccounts ofthe social movements in question in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the author closely followed social media accounts of the #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile, #ThisGown, #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare and #ThisFlower movements. The researcher analysed the audio-visual and textual content by these social movements from their social media accounts. In addition to that, newspaper articles, journals, reports, and various internet sources played an important role for the purposesof data collection for the article.Theauthor also utilized observation as he was in Zimbabwe for 4 months (from August to December 2016). It is during this period that the researcher witnessed many activities (including street protests) by these social movements. In addition to that, the author had informal discussions with some members of the social movements under study. Although there are several social movements in Zimbabwe, this article's focus is biased towards #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile and #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare movements. Other movements will be highlighted but not in detail. Theperiod of study for this article is January 2016 up to 2017. However, the period before 2016 will only be used for reference purposes. The study period ends in 2017 as it is the time when former Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, was overthrown in a popular military coup in Zimbabwe.

3. TheoreticalTrajectory

This section focuses on theoretical paradigms that are associated with social media. To that end, this section discusses the social penetration and social exchange theories in relation to this study. The social penetration theory is summed up in the following words:

The social penetration theory suggests that relationships become more intimate over a period of time when more personal information is revealed; this is evident in Twitter relationships. Millions of friendships have formed from "tweet-ups" or a friend request. A person may start to follow you, but constant and direct interaction will lead to more intimate friendships that go beyond the computer or cell phone. Maintaining relationships also relies on intimate exchanges by both parties (Fatkin, 2017).

Thus, the social penetration theory is relevant to this paper considering the relationships that has been created (over time) on social media networks by social movements in Zimbabwe. The fact that the relationship between the leadership of social movements and their followers has graduate from existing on online platforms to physical space which rhymes with the dictates of the social penetration theory. Moreover, social and citizen movements in Zimbabwe have managed to penetrate societies through social media platforms.

Another important theory is the social exchange theory. Emmerson (1976) as cited in (Pan & Crotts, 2012, p.7) notes that,the social exchange theory states that human beings form close relationships through self-disclosure. Social exchange theoryoriginated from sociology studies exploring exchange between individuals or small groups (Pan & Crotts, 2012, p.7). Furthermore, Homans (1958) in Pan & Crotts, 2012, p.7) observes that, the social exchange theory mainly uses cost-benefit framework and comparison of alternatives to explain how human beings communicate with each other, how they form relationships and bonds, and how communities are formed through communication exchanges (Pan & Crotts, 2012). The theory states that individuals engage in behaviours they find rewarding and avoid behaviours that have too high a cost (Pan & Crotts, 2012.pp 7). It could therefore be said that citizens in Zimbabwe are making relations on social media because of the beneficiary nature of such a relationship. Moreover, such a relationship could lead to good governance in the future which is beneficiary to social media political participants in Zimbabwe.Thus, it is important to underline that the social penetration theory and social exchange theoryblend well with social media related social and citizen movements not only in Zimbabwe but all over the globe.

4. Social and Citizen Movements in Zimbabwe: Evolution of Civil Resistance

Before delving on the current social media related social movements and resistance, it is important to briefly reflect on the history of civil resistance in Zimbabwe beginning from the late 1990s. Mandaza (2014) cites economic problems of 1990s in Zimbabwe as the budget crisis, unemployment and Economic Structural Adjustment Programme which in turn gave birth to mass unrest: the December 1997 stay-away, the food riots of January 1998. Resistance against poor governance gained momentum in the late 1990s particularly with the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly in 1997. Masunungure and Bratton (2011, p.23) note that, the NCA – a broad alliance of professional, women, religious and labour organizations, includingthe ZCTU – created an educational campaign on constitutional issues

disseminated through a network of meetings in all provinces. The NCA and its allies lobbied for a democratic and people driven constitution, restoration of the rule of law, human rights, jobs and decent wages.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) were some of the top allies of the NCA. The NCA together with the newly formed MDC successfully lobbied for the rejection of a government sponsored constitution in a referendum in 2000. In 1999, the NCA, ZCTU and its affiliatemembers successfully formed the Movement for Democratic Change, the largest opposition in Zimbabwe. What is important for this paper is that the NCA and other pressure groups did not rely on social media because the use of computers, mobile phones and internet was minimal at that time. Instead, a network of meetings across the country was the main method and messages where passed on through the word of mouth, newspapers, flyers and pamphlets. Such a scenario is totally different from that of the current citizen movements that rely heavily on social media platforms.

In 2013, an anonymous activist emerged on Facebook and called him or herself Baba Jukwa. TheNewsday (2013, June 21) reported that Baba Jukwa had 161, 131 followers since joining Facebook on March 22, 2013. On his/her Facebook timeline, he or she described him or herself as a "Concerned father, fighting nepotism and directly linking the community with their leaders, government, Members of Parliament and ministers"Newsday (2013, June 21). In the same year, Baba Jukwa had 400, 000 followers on Facebook. Up to date, no other online social movement's account in Zimbabwe has reached this number. Newsday (2013, June 21) notes that, Baba Jukwa, who claimed to be a disgruntled government and ruling party insider, exposed information on government corruption, assassination plots and incompetence, among other issues. Baba Jukwa deactivated his/her Facebook account after the 2013 elections. His or her identity remains a matter of speculation even up to date. The author of this article was a close follower of Baba Jukwa and he had promised his/her followers that he and his friends were ready to end Mugabe's rule even through force. His/her followers were left disappointed after he/she disappeared after yet another controversial ruling party's electoral victory in 2013.

The year 2016 was a turning point in the birth of social media related movements in Zimbabwe with the emergence of #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile, #ThisGown and #ThisFlower.The #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, which had been initiated in 2015 also became more vocal in 2016. Although this article focuses mainly on #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka and Occupy Africa Unity Square, it is important to highlight the #ThisFlower and #ThisGown campaigns.The #ThisFlower campaign is a social movement led by Stan Zvorwadza who leads the National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe (NAVUZ). The movement is against police brutality in Zimbabwe and uses the flower as a symbol of love and peace (Manayiti, 2016). #ThisFlower's members are drawn mainly from vendors and the movement is not as active as its counterparts on social media. The movement has since become inactive after the military coup of November 2017. Its leader, Stern Zvorwadza seem to have joined the ruling party, ZANU PF. The #ThisGown was a group of graduates who protested against unemployment and started playing football and selling sweets on the streets to demonstrate that they were unemployed andidle. They used to post videos and pictures of their activities mainly on Facebook.The movement has since been minimally active. Below is a discussion on the #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile and OccupyAfricaUnitySquare movements.

4.1.#ThisFlag

The #ThisFlag movement, which describes itself as a "citizens' movement" was started by a Zimbabwean Pastor called Evan Mawarire in May 2016. Aljazeera (2016, September 5) notes that, Pastor Evan Mawarire is heralded as the initiator of the rise of social media activism, with an online monologue discussing the "violation" of the Zimbabwe flag.Moreover, "The video created a domino effect, launching an ongoing campaign using the hash tag #ThisFlag, used as a means of protesting about President Robert Mugabe's government" (Aljazeera, 2016, September 5). The #ThisFlag campaign mainly uses the Zimbabwean flag as a symbol of resistance. Mawarire with a flag wrapped around his neck, started posting videos which bemoaned government corruption, national leadership ineptitude and poor service delivery. His videos went viral and he was joined by scores of Zimbabweans in the country and diaspora. On its Facebook account, the #ThisFlag movement states its vision: "Our vision is a Zimbabwe where citizens are emboldened to speak out, ask questions and act against corruption, injustice and poverty" and its mission as "Speak. Ask. Act" (ThisFlag/IfulegiLeyi/MurezaUyu, 2016).

The #ThisFlag movement is mostly dominant on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The movement also uses YouTube and Instagram. As of 25February 2017, the #ThisFlag Facebook page had 59, 649 followers (ThisFlag/IfulegiLeyi/MurezaUyu, 2016) and 63, 000 followers on its twitter handle (#ThisFlag E. Mawarire, 2017). The #ThisFlag movement has a large support base of Zimbabweans in the diaspora, mostly in the US, UK, Germany, South Africa and Australia, among other countries.An observation shows that, on social media platforms, the movement's activities include; issuing statements, updates, holding interviews with national leaders, hosting policy dialogues, giving presentations at universities, education, mobilisation and recruitment. Apart from online activities, the #ThisFlag movement also participates in protests on the streets and at Zimbabwean embassies in foreign countries like South Africa, UK, Australia, USA and Germany, among others. Supporters of #ThisFlag movement are from diverse backgrounds sections of the society: business, church, student movements, intellectuals, journalists, women's groups, and youth organisations, among others. The movement's activism is currently weak.

4.2.#Tajamuka/Sesijikile

Another social movement in Zimbabwe is the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign. On its account named Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign, the movement had 42 326 and 4 693 followers on Facebook (Tajamuka/Sesijikile Campaign, 2017) and Twitter (#Tajamuka-Sesijikile, 2017) respectively as of 25 February 2017. In an interview with the International Business Times UK (2016, August 1), #Tajamuka/SesijikileSpokesperson, Promise Mkhwananzi described

the word Tajamuka: "As an expression, Tajamuka literally means 'outraged', 'angry' with an implicit component of 'action' - something like: "Let's act". We are very happy about this colloquial term... Generally, it captures very well the national sentiment in the country." The expression Tajamuka is a Shona word which means to strongly disagree. It is common amongst the youth and the youth are the majority of social media platforms in Zimbabwe. The youth also constitute the largest support base of the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile social movement.

Unlike the #ThisFlag citizen movement which claims political impartiality and neutrality, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile constitutes of civic society organisations and opposition political parties. Promise Mkhwananzi, #Tajamuka national Spokesperson stated that Tajamuka is comprised of 14 political parties and more than 30 civil society organisations and youth pressure groups. Political parties include, PDZ, Zunde, the NCA, EDP, PDP, MDC-N and MDC-T (International Business Times UK, 2016, August 1). What is important to note is that #ThisFlag and #Tajamuka compliments each other's efforts with overlapping membership and following. #Tajamuka is less international compared to #ThisFlag. Moreover, #Tajamuka's members are often on the ground compared to their counterpart. Tajamuka is also radical in its approach, Mkhwananzi notes that #Tajamuka follows a 'hard way' whereas #ThisFlag follows the 'soft way' to achieving peace (International Business Times UK, 2016, August 1). On his Facebook pageand in his usual combative and radical style, #Tajamuka's Spokesperson, Promise Mkhwananzi said: "In 2017, we will resist ZANU PF on the streets, in valleys, on mountains, in bars, kitchens and even in our bedrooms" (Mkhwananzi, 2016).On the other hand, #ThisFlag's stance could be influenced by its guiding principle of non-violence emanating from its founder's (Pastor Evan Mawarire) Christian background. While he was in Zimbabwe, the author of this article witnessed some of the activities of #Tajamuka in Harare which included; occupation of the Africa Unity Square, street protests (sometimes violent), petitions, addressing people at bank queues as well as lobbying and negotiating with the Reserve Bank Governor, John Mangudya to stop the introduction of bondnotes as a currency in Zimbabwe.After the 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe, the #Tajamuka/Sesijikile movement is has also become less active and visible even online.

4.3. #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare

The Occupy Africa Unity Square is closely associated with the abducted journalist-cum activist, Itai Dzamara who was abducted by suspected state security agents in Harare on 9March 2015. The #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare movement is against government corruption and state brutality. On its Facebook account, Occupy Africa Unity Square says it mission is to: "To demand an end to Zimbabwe's cycle of national failure and suffering" (Occupy Africa Unity Square, 2015). The movement seem to have been inspired by the Tahrir Square occupation protests in Egypt; hence they wanted people to occupy the Africa Unity Square in Harare until their demands were met. Occupy Africa Unity Square also uses the Zimbabwean flag and is also active on Facebook. As of 26 February 2017, the movement had 14, 470 followers on its Facebook account (Occupy Africa Unity Square, 2017). After the abduction of Itai Dzamara, the movement's leadership is working closely with #ThisFlag and #Tajamuka; a case of overlapping membership and interests. Occupy Africa Unity Square seem to favour street protests compared to online activism.Dr. Patson Dzamara, brother to the abducted activist Itai Dzamara, and Dirk Frey are leading names in the Occupy Africa Unity Square social movement.

Most importantly, it is crucial to note that the current citizens' movements in Zimbabwe no longer rely on anonymity to protect their identity in most cases. The leaders of these groups are well known and even their supporters sometimes show solidarity with them at courts and other public spaces. This shows that the state's strategy of "harvest of fear" is fading away.Members of this movement meet from time to time to deliberate on Itai Dzamara, a victim of suspected state sponsored forced disappearance.

5. Use of Social Media for Activism by Social Movements: Success and Shortcomings

This section deals with the citizen movements' use of social media as an instrument of political activism in Zimbabwe, the achievements of such movements, shortcomings and lessons that can be drawn from such experiences. Before delving into the discussion, it is important to define the terms social media, civil resistance and social movements. "The term social media refers to a wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing, 2012.p.1). Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Viber and YouTube. Moreover, it is equally important to define civil resistance. "Civil resistance is a type of political action that relies on the use of non-violent methods. It is largely synonymous with certain other terms, including 'non-violent action', 'non-violent resistance' and 'people power'" (Roberts, 2009, p.1). Dr Martin Luther King Jnr and Mahatma Ghandi are dominant figures in the philosophy of civil resistance and disobedience. In relation to social movements, Batliwala (2012, p.3) cited in Gender and Social Movement (2016, p.19) notes that, "Social movements are forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands."

The utilization of social media platforms by citizen protest movements in Zimbabwe can be linked to the proliferation of ICT equipment and internet in Zimbabwe. In 2009, during the inclusive government, duty was scrapped on ICT products and people imported ICT equipment free of charge. ZIMRA (2009) lists duty-free ICT equipment as, computers, laptops, I-pads, computer software, Braille computers, computer parts and accessories, cell phones, base stations/boosters, radar apparatus and aircraft navigation equipment. The result of the scrapping of duty was the "flooding" of ICT equipment in the country.

Although duty was later reinstated on ICT products after the 2013 elections, many Zimbabweans already had huge access to mobile phones and internet. The latest report by POTRAZ (2015, p.10) shows that active mobile phones subscriptions increased from the 3rd quarter to the 4th quarter of 2015 from 12,394,383 to 12,757,410 subscriptions (2.9%

increase). Furthermore, (POTRAZ, 2015, p.15) notes that in 2015 mobile data utilization increased by 27.4% to record 1,203,378,839MB from 944,268,192MB recorded in the previous quarter. The report further notes that in terms of mobile internet and data usage, WhatsApp bundles took up 34%, Facebook 3% and others (including YouTube, LinkedIn, emails, Skype, and Instagram) took the remaining 63% (POTRAZ, 2015, p.15). This information clearly shows the importance of the mobile phone, social media and internet in the Zimbabwean society. It is not therefore not surprising that citizen movements are utilizing social media for political activism in Zimbabwe. Willems (2016, p.2) notes that, the number of Facebook users in Africa (including Zimbabwe) was estimatedat 124.6 million at the end of 2015 and continues to grow. In 2014, Zimbabwe had an estimated 1, 400, 000+ Facebook users, a number that keeps changing (Chui, 2014). This is a huge number considering the population size of Zimbabwe of approximately 14 million.

The #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka, Occupy Africa Unity Square, #ThisFlower and #ThisGown all use online videos mainly on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Twitter to communicate their messages. In relation to #ThisFlag, "Evan took to a camera and decided to speak out, ask questions and act against corruption, injustice and poverty. He encouraged Zimbabweans to be bold in speaking out and seeking accountability from the Government that should serve them. It is from this moment of reflection that #ThisFlag was born" (ThisFlag/IfulegiLeyi/MurezaUyu, 2016). Zimbabweans in the country and those in the diaspora joined him and started posting videos on social media bemoaning government corruption and ineptitude. Other citizen movements like #Tajamuka, Occupy Africa Unity Square and #ThisGown were not left out. Thus, through the social media, social movements in Zimbabwe have managed to open an online democratic space in terms of freedom of expression and association; important values of democracy.This is also in line with Joseph (2012) who notes that social media creates a public sphere in the virtual space which acts as an alternative to the physical space.

Also, by providing information and updates online on social media platforms, #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka, #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, #ThisFlower and #ThisGown movements managed to counter state propaganda by providing information related to government's bad governance to the public. There is currently one television station in Zimbabwe and state-controlled newspapers like *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *Chronicle*, *Kwayedza, H-Metro* and *B-Metro* have been accused of being the ruling party's propaganda mouth-pieces (Moyo, 2017). Social media has helped to challenge this status-quo and by-passingsuch state propaganda instruments in Zimbabwe.

Citizen movements in Zimbabwe are also relying on social media in terms of recruitment of new members or followers. As shown in the last section, #Tajamuka and #ThisFlag have managed to recruit a significant number of followers online. Levin&Cross (2004) note that for political mobilisation and recruitment to be effective, social media facilitates acquisition and transfer of political knowledge through social networks. Videos, pictures and statements have been used for the purposes of recruitment and mobilization by citizen movements in Zimbabwe. This is contrary to the conventional methods of challenging state power. Christensen (2009) notes that the introduction of social media has changed the pattern people challenge political authority. This viewpoint holds much water especially when social media-reliant movements in Zimbabwe are borne in mind.

Moreover, social movements in Zimbabwe managed to promote political participation and robust debates online. For instance, in 2017, the author of this article witnessed #ThisFlag's Fadzayi Mahere hosting a dialogue (live-streamed on Facebook) where she discussed issues related to service delivery with the Mayor of Harare, Ben Manyenyeni and leaders of residents' associations in Harare. Viewers where asking questions online and getting responses from the dialogue panel. This does not only promote political participation but also brings leaders closer to the people and in some way, makes them more accountable. In relation to that, in a BBC HardTalk style, the #ThisFlag members also hold interviews with leaders of political parties in Zimbabwe to ignite debate and holder them accountable to their followers. The President of the Zimbabwe People's Party (ZPP) and the MDC's Spokesperson, Obert Gutu, were the latest interviewees.This is changing the nature of political activism in many respects. Although wary of the effectiveness of social media, scholars such as Tendi (2016) and Mutsvairo (2016) acknowledge that social media is changing the nature of political activism and the struggle for good governance particularly in Zimbabwe. Moreover, in relation to social movements, evidence reveals that, social media platforms have boosted political participation by Zimbabweans.

On 6 July 2016, in an act of civil disobedience, #ThisFlag and its counterparts organised a mass stay away where citizens were asked (through social media) to stay at home and "shut down" the country. The message code named #ZimShutDown trended on Twitter and Facebook (#ThisFlag, 2016). The majority of Zimbabweans heeded the call to "shut down" Zimbabwe.TheBBC (2016, July 6) reported that: "Zimbabwe's main cities are deserted during a nationwide stay away to protest at the lack of jobs and unpaid wages." In reaction, the state panicked and reacted by arresting #ThisFlag's leader, Evan Mawarire. On the 13th of July 2016, massive crowds carrying Zimbabwean flags gathered outside the courtroom in Harare in solidarity with Mawarire. Sensing public anger and pressure, the judge released him to his jubilant supporters (Daily News, 2016, July 13). After his acquittal, citing security threats, hefledto South Africa and later to the US with his family. On the 1st of February, Mawarire was arrested at the Harare International Airport by state security agents upon his return from the US and later charged with subversion (The Herald, 2017, February 2). His passport was seized and was reporting twice per week at a nearest police stationuntil his acquittal. What is interesting is that his arrest was captured live and instantly posted on Facebook (ThisFlag/IfulegiLeyi/MurezaUyu, 2017), WhatsApp (ThisFlag, 2017) and Twitter (#ThisFlag, 2017) yet the state controlled *The Herald*(2017, February 2) wrote the story a day later. This shows the importance of social media in terms of timely information provision and updates.

The #Tajamuka movement emphasises more on shifting from online activism to the ground. This is in line with Tendi (2016) who argues that unless social media activism is turned into concrete action on the ground, political change in Zimbabwe will remain a dream. However, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile seem to be aware of Tendi's argument and the movement is militant,and action oriented compared to #ThisFlag movement. Forinstance, #Tajamuka/Sesijikileorganized numerous

protests in Zimbabwe between 2016 and 2017. #Tajamuka/Sesijikile is also associated with violent protests that occurred on the 1st of July in Beitbridge at the Zimbabwean-South African border post. *SABC* (2016, July 1) reported the reason behind the protest as trade laws in Zimbabwe that limit the importation of basic goods from South Africa. Furthermore, Tajamuka's Dennis Juru said:

> Tajamuka is an organization which is fighting corruption in Zimbabwe which is fighting everything which is very bad like what they are doing today they want to monopolize the importation of goods. They want to give to the ministers and stop millions of people who are crossing the border into South Africa and give the contract to one person; we want to bring back the original trade between South Africa and Zimbabwe (*SABC*, 2016, July 1).

The Beitbridge protests, which turned violent, were brutally crushed by the security forces in Zimbabwe. However, the protests in Beitbridge marked the genesis of a series of protests that followed. One 5 October 2016 more protests occurred at the Beitbridge border post (*Newsday*, 2016, October 6). The protests, which later spread to Harare and countrywide were mainly organized by #Tajamuka and a coalition of opposition political parties under the banner of National Electoral Reform Agenda (Nera). In September 2016, from August to December 2016, the author of this articlewitnessed violent protests almost every week where protesters clashed with the police. *Nehanda Radio* (2016, August 25) reported that protestors looted Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko's shop and burnt police and ZBC's vehicles. The author of this article also witnessed some of this violence. It is important to note that the organization, coordination and updates on these protests were done online; on social media platforms.

Central issues to Zimbabwe's protests were the controversial stay of Zimbabwe'sVice President Phelekezela Mphoko at an up-market hotel at the expense of the taxpayer, the introduction of bond notes and corruption. #Tajamuka and #ThisFlag also met the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor, John Mangudya to voice their concerns against the introduction of bond notes. Occupy Africa Unity Square, #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka and their allies, also generated an online petition which compelled the state to act on Itai Dzamara, the Occupy Africa Unity Square founder who was abducted in March 2015 by suspected state security agents.

The #Tajamuka, Spokesperson, Promise Mkhwanazi filed a lawsuit against former President Mugabe arguing that he is too old to rule and his continued stay in power violates the constitution. Mkhwanazi's lawsuit was dismissed on technicality (Daily News, 2017, February 9). This is the work that #Tajamuka does on the "ground" outside the "bubble" of the social media.One #Tajamuka member who spoke to the author alerted the author to the fact that #Tajamuka has representatives and structures countrywide.

Although the above discussed citizen movements have scored relative success in their work, a lot needed to be done. One of the greatest challenges that these movements facedwas to turn online activism into practical action on the ground. Grossman (2009) cited in Mandikwaza (2013) acknowledges that social media allows political dissent and political participation but warns social media activists of treating social media like a "magic bullet against authoritarianism." This is an important point as social media is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Tendi (2016) notes that, social media activists in Zimbabwe "ignore the realities of power." Furthermore, Tendi (2016) argues that Zimbabwean online activist did not learn from the "Arab Spring":

> The reason is quite simple: the angry urban social media activists and pro-democracy pundits have failed to absorb two key lessons of the Arab Spring. The first is that the role of the military in times of civil unrest is pivotal. The second is that social media activism can never substitute for organized political activity on the ground (Tendi, 2016).

Tendi's above argument holds water considering the fact that in Tunisia and in Egypt to some extent, the army supported social movements, and this is highly unlikely in Zimbabwe where the military is part and parcel of the current status quo. Moreover, in Zimbabwe, activists should be more active on the ground and not put too much trust on social media. In relation to the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, Mandikwaza (2013, p.46) notes that, "it remains unclear whether social media motivated political dissent or whether it was socio-economic and political frustrations which influenced people to maximise on social media." Whatever the case; social media should be heavily complimented by hard work on the ground. #Tajamuka, #ThisFlower and Occupy Africa Unity Square have been active in terms of protests, but the protests have not achieved anything outstanding. At the time of writing street protests had faded. Apart from the Reserve Bank Governor, the government has not even negotiated with leaders of these citizen movements in order to come up with a tangible solution. Corrupt ministers like Jonathan Moyo and Saviour Kasukuwere have not been prosecuted despite tangible evidence. Furthermore, at 93, President Mugabe had announced his candidature for the 2018 elections (The Herald, 2017, February 27). This was despite his advanced age, ill-health and growing calls (including a lawsuit from #Tajamuka/Sesijikile) for him to step down. Such setbacks and lack of progress led Mutsvairo (2016) to conclude and concur with ZANU PF MP, Psychology Maziwisa that: "Mugabe cannot be tweeted out of power." Mugabe was later overthrown by the military in a coup that was supported by most Zimbabweans in November 2017. Overreliance on social media was therefore a disservice by the social movements in question.

Another challenge that was facedby social movements in Zimbabwe is the exclusionary tendency of social media. Both Mutsvairo (2016) and Tendi (2016) are wary of the exclusionary nature of social media activism in Zimbabwe as it excludes the elderly and the rural youth who form the bulk of the Zimbabwean population. This is true considering that most members of social movements like #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka, Occupy Africa Unity Square, #ThisFlower and #ThisGown are young people and intellectuals based in cities and some, outside Zimbabwe. This excludes those who live in rural areas, yet they are the majority.

The report of the last census in Zimbabwe by The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2012, p.11) showed that 67% of Zimbabwe's population lives in rural areas. What is worrying is that in rural areas, there is hardly internet

connection and most people do not afford smart phones to access social media. Besides lack of technological know-how, in most cases, old people live in rural areas and they are excluded by the social media because of low levels of technological penetration where they live. Fanon (1963:61) emphasizes on the vital role of the peasants in a revolution and argues that "peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain."It is therefore important for social movements to move away from online platforms and go to rural areas for the purposes of education (especially voter education), recruitment and mobilization in preparation for the next election. Carty (2010) cited in Mandikwaza (2013) posits that online communication and face-to-face communication are mutually important.

Another drawback to progress of social movements in Zimbabwe that the author of this article witnessed was the scourge of violence especially during protests. For instance, *Nehanda Radio* (2016, August 25) reported that demonstrations by #Tajamuka and its counterparts turned violent resulting in the looting of shops and burning of cars of state related institutions in August 2016. The danger of such a scenario is that, if left unchecked, the situation could get out of control and the country can descend into chaos or worse, into civil war. In the latter case, the aim of social movements of bringing democracy and development to Zimbabwe would remain a pipe dream. One #ThisFlag follower who spoke to the author noted that, another consequence of violent protests could be the declaration of a state of emergency by the then President Mugabe which would curtail and roll back efforts of citizen movements.

In Zimbabwe, just like in many other authoritarian countries, social media activism led to increased state surveillance, heightened propaganda, and brutality against activists.Since the emergence of social protest movements, the state under Robert Mugabe, augmented its dictatorial tendencies.In March 2015, Itai Dzamara, the founder of Occupy Africa Unity Square, was abducted and his whereabouts were still not known by the time of writing of this paper. Aljazeera (2016, September 8) notes that, a court denied bail to 58 people arrested during protests on August 26 when riot police fired tear gas, beat up several people and blocked off the site of an opposition demonstration in Harare. In the same month, former President Mugabe attacked the judiciary for being reckless in allowing several anti-government protests that later turned violent (*Aljazeera*, 2016, September 8). Police also banned demonstrations in Harare. "The police declared that no protests would be allowed in Harare for 30 days from 16 September to 15 October, a decision it said was aimed at preserving peace" (Amnesty International, 2016). Foreign Policy (2016, November 18) reported that six activists (from #Tajamuka, #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, #ThisFlag and #ThisFlower) were abducted, tortured and their car burnt by suspected state security agents. All this brutality was in reaction to the rise of social media related citizen movements and protests.

State repression continued unabated in Zimbabwe. On the 1st of February, #ThisFlag movement founder, Evan Mawarire was arrested at the Harare International Airport by state security agents upon his return from the US and later charged with subversion (*The Herald*, 2017, February 2). He had earlier on skipped the country and sought refuge in South Africa and later in the US. Correspondingly, *Chronicle* (2016, July 7) carried a story where the government was strongly warning social media users that they will be arrested if they shared "subversive" material. This was a clear sign of intimidation. On the 6th of July, the authorof this article witnessed internet shutdown amid a stay-away that had been called for by #ThisFlag movement. In retaliation, in August 2016, parliament came up with the Computer Crime and Cyber-Crime Bill to deal with cybercrime (*The Herald* 2016, August 17). The Bill is draconian anda clear reaction to online activism. In January 2017, POTRAZ desperately tried to hike internet prices to limit social media use in the country (Moyo, 2017). The above examples clearly show that social media activism has caused the state to panic and in turn deploy its deadly arsenal of authoritarianism against the people. Campaigns like Occupy Africa Unity Square had become almost impossible under such minimal democratic space.

6. Conclusion

In sum, it is important to highlight that the surge in the use of internet and ICT productsled to the widespread use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in Zimbabwe. Theafore-mentioned social media platforms became a launch pad for political activism and civil resistance by some social movements in Zimbabwe which include; #ThisFlag, #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, #Tajamuka/Sesijikile, #ThisGown and #ThisFlower, among many others. Through social media platforms, these social movements managed to generate policy debate, promote political participation, increase freedom of expression, mobilize the public, provide alternative views, inform the public and recruit new members. Also, the afore-mentioned social movements managed to organize massive protests and demonstrations in urban areas. The mass stay-away or "shut-down" of Harare on the 6th of July 2018 organized by #ThisFlag left an indelible mark in the history of political activism in Zimbabwe. The #Tajamuka/Sesijikile and #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare inspired protests that rocked most urban areas in Zimbabwe in 2016 and 2017 were phenomenal. It is therefore not surprising that the state employed its dictatorial tactics against the social movements in question. The principal shortcoming of the social movements in question was their overreliance on social media compared to their commitment to action on the ground. Also, these social movements were urban-ingrained, elitist and divorced from the rural populace which are the majority in Zimbabwe. It is therefore not surprising that these movements did not achieve their ultimate goal and, in the end, became pale shadows of their former selves. In future, there is therefore need for a paradigm shift by focusing on rural areas where most Zimbabweans live. Overreliance on social media by activist should be discouraged by making frantic efforts on the ground.

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