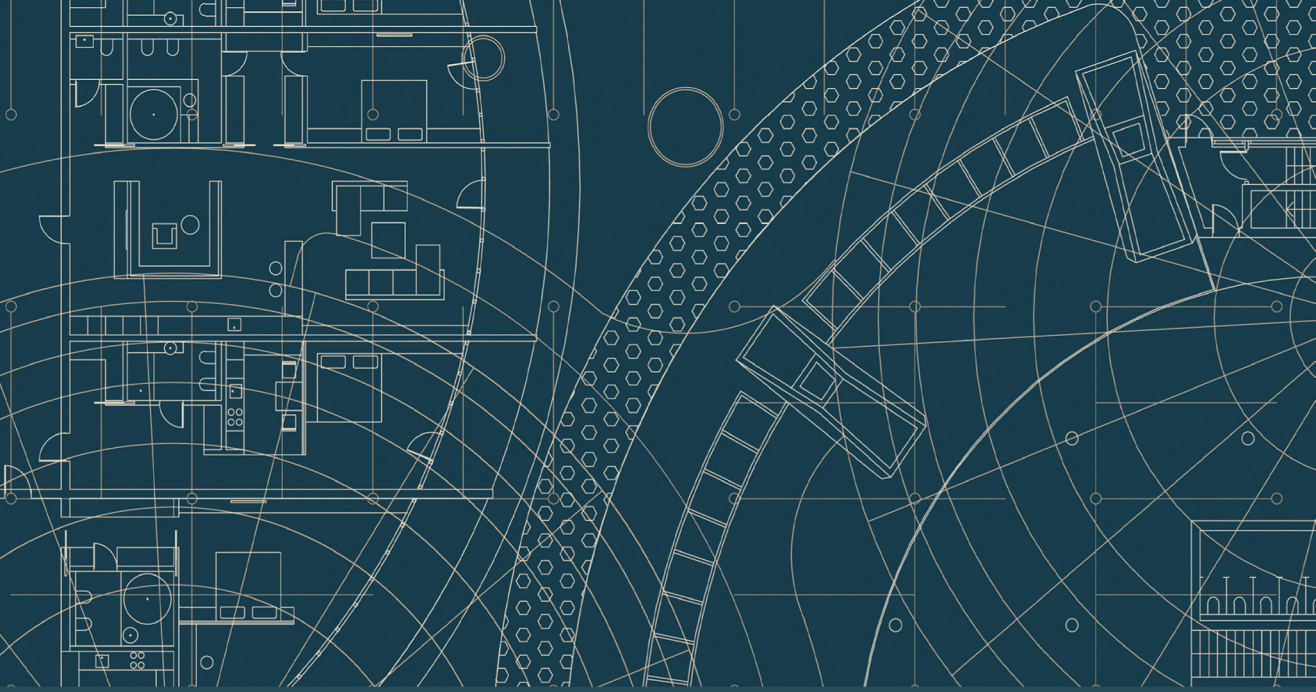

*Routledge Studies in Peace, Conflict and Security in Africa*

# YOUTH-LED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA

Edited by
Ibrahim Bangura

# Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa

This book critically examines and analyses the active role played by youth-led social movements in pushing for change and promoting peacebuilding in Africa, and their long-term impacts on society.

Africa's history is characterised by youth movements. The continent's youth populations played pivotal roles in the campaign against colonialism and, ever since independence, Africa's youth have been at the centre of social mobilisation. Most recently, social media has contributed significantly to a further rise in youth-led social movements. However, the impact of youth voices is often marginalised by patriarchal and gerontocratic approaches to governance, denying them the place, voice, and recognition that they deserve. Drawing on empirical evidence from across the continent, this book analyses the drivers and long-term impacts of youth-led social movements on politics in African societies, especially in the area of peacebuilding. Additionally, the book draws attention to the innovative ways in which young people continue to seek to re-engineer social spaces and challenge contexts that deny them their voice, place, recognition, and identity.

This book will be of interest to researchers across the fields of social movement studies, youth studies, peace and conflict studies, history, political sciences, social justice, and African studies.

**Ibrahim Bangura** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Director of Transition International Sierra Leone.

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# Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa

**Edited by**
**Ibrahim Bangura**

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# Contents

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**Justin Crowell** bachelor's degree in Community Development and Health Science afforded him the opportunity to gain knowledge about underserved and overlooked facets of society as well as the fundamental criteria on how to combat such issues. While working as an educator in China, Justin split his time to aid in ventures involving funding research, sanitation, and child sponsorships that affect vulnerable women and youth in Uganda, Ghana, and other African regions. Subsequently, his time spent researching and compiling the counter violent extremism course manual, *Women, Youth, and Violent extremism*, honed him in on extremism, radicalism, and the power of youth throughout Africa. His addition to *Youth-Led Social Movements and the Prospects for Peace in Africa* was inspired by the courage and commitment of the oppressed Sudanese women and youth.

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Ibrahim Bangura
Freetown, March 2022

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AEC | African Economic Community |
| AfCFTA | African Continental Free Trade Area |
| AfDP | African Development Bank |
| AGA-YES | African Governance Architecture – Youth Engagement Strategy |
| AMU | Arab Maghreb Union |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| APRC | African Peer Review Mechanism |
| AU | African Union |
| AUDA | African Union Development Agency |
| AYC | African Youth Commission |
| AYM | African Youth Movement |
| BAC | Black Academic Caucus |
| BEE | Black Economic Empowerment |
| CACSC | Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium |
| CANSA | Cameroon Anglophone Students' Association |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CEMAC | Central African Economic and Monetary Community |
| CENSAD | Community of Sahel-Saharan States |
| CIO | Central Intelligence Organisation |
| CMRN | Comité Militaire de Redressement National |
| CNDD | National Council for Democracy and Development |
| COMESA | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa |
| COVID-19 | coronavirus disease 2019 |
| CSO | civil society organisation |
| CSTL | Care and Support for Teaching and Learning |
| CYMN | Cameroon Youth Mediators Network |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| EAC | East African Community |
| ECCAS | Economic Community of Central African States |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| EPRP | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party |
| EU | European Union |

| | |
|---|---|
| FFC | Forces of Freedom and Change |
| FNDC | Front National Pour La Défense De La Constitution |
| FPUAF | Federation of Partnerships of Uganda African Farmers |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |
| ICC | International Criminal Court |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IRIN | Integrated Regional Information Network |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| LoYoC | Local Youth Corner Cameroon |
| MDC | Movement for Democratic Change |
| MEISON | All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| MPP | People's Movement for Progress |
| MRU | Mano River Union |
| MSU | Midlands State University |
| NEPAD | New Partnership for Africa's Development |
| NERA | National Electoral Reforms Agenda |
| NewSETA | Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All |
| NIF | National Islamic Front |
| NIF/NCP | National Islamic Front/National Congress Party |
| NOU | National Association of the Unemployed |
| NSM | new social movements |
| NTS | New Type of Senegalese |
| NUSU | National Union of Students of Uganda |
| NYSPUT | National Youth Service Pre-University Training Programme |
| OAU | Organisation of African Unity |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OHADA | Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa |
| OIC | Office for Inclusivity and Change |
| PDG | Parti Democratique de Guinee |
| POP | points of presence |
| PYM | Pan-African Youth Movement |
| PYU | Pan-African Youth Union |
| RCD | Democratic Constitutional Rally |
| RDA | Rassemblement Démocratique Africain |
| RECs | Regional Economic Communities |
| RSP | Regiment of Presidential Security |
| RUF | Revolutionary United Front |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SADCC | Southern African Development Coordination Conference |
| SAPs | structural adjustment programmes |
| SAPS | South African Police Service |
| SARS | Special Anti-Robbery Squad |
| SCNC | Southern Cameroon National Council |

| | |
|---|---|
| SCYL | Southern Cameroon Youth League |
| SPA | Sudanese Professionals Association |
| SPLA/M | Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement |
| SuWEP | Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace |
| SWAN | Southern Sudanese Women in Nairobi |
| SWU | Sudanese Women's Union |
| TMC | Transition Military Council |
| TSC | Transitional Sovereign Council |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UAFU | Uganda African Farmers Union |
| UBSU | University of Buea Student Union |
| UCT | University of Cape Town |
| UFDG | Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNC | Uganda National Congress |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNECA | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UPC | Uganda People's Congress |
| USA | United States of America |
| USD | United States dollar |
| UWC | University of Western Cape |
| VPN | virtual private network |
| Y4P | Youth for Peace Programme |
| ZANU-PF | Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front |
| ZINASU | Zimbabwe National Students Union |
| ZPS | Zimbabwe Prison Services |

# 1 Introduction

## Youth and the Quest for Change in Africa

*Ibrahim Bangura*

The continent of Africa has a long and storied history of popular mobilisation, youth and student activism, and political struggles that are defined by the dichotomies of incorporating traditional values and structures into the modern state-building project. Classical as well as contemporary social movement theories have a tendency to focus on Europe, the Americas and Asia, and fall short of considering the African experience of dissent, protest and sometimes contentious state–civil society relations. Coupled with this, there is a propensity for scholarly and research work in Africa to limit itself to the violence and conflicts that have seemingly defined political transformation on the continent since the era of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s, up until the present. In addition, what is specifically lacking is an examination of the role of African youth in civil society, *beyond* conflict, and how the actions of youth have shaped nation- and peacebuilding, constitutional democracy and economic development in the postcolonial period.

Today, Africa is the world's youngest continent, with nearly 60 per cent of its population under the age of 25. About 16 million young Africans enter the job market each year, yet there are less than 4 million jobs available for that number (Kariba 2020). Environmental degradation, political instability, conflict, marginalisation and poverty have defined the lives of many young people on the continent, giving rise to feelings of discontent, frustration and outright anger among the youth. In many instances, young people have to contend with authoritarian states stuck in a developmental statis, further undermining the confidence and trust of youth in their political systems. However, prior to delving into contemporary youth movements in Africa, we must establish who we consider the 'youth'.

### Defining Youth: The Lack of Global Consensus

As the focus of this edited volume is on the role of youth activism and political change in Africa, it is important to define what the authors have considered 'youth' in the present context. For the purposes of this book, we have taken a culturally relativist position – that the definition of who is being regarded as a

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youth in terms of age demographic, as well as a social construct, depends on the society that is examined.

The African Union (AU), in its Youth Charter of 2006 (African Union 2006),[1] defines youth as those in the age demographic of 15–35 years. The reasoning of the AU in having quite an expansive categorisation of youth is unknown, but a good conjecture leads us to conclude that this may be rooted in the social perspectives of youthhood on the continent. Despite this, the definition does not necessarily grasp the unique nature of youth in Africa and the particular conditions on the continent that prevent young people from truly embarking on a life of adulthood.

The majority of young people in Africa appear to be stuck in a kind of limbo between adolescence and adulthood – a period that Alcinda Honwana has explored further through her study of 'waithood' (Honwana 2013). This is a period that is characterised by the lack of socioeconomic opportunities that youth on the continent have been facing since the immediate post-independence era, due to unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, authoritarian excesses of the state and violent conflicts. This volume goes beyond waithood to discuss what can be described as 'youthhood'. Youthhood has to do with the fact that sometimes, despite their age, some people get permanently regarded as youth by their families and society, due to poverty, illiteracy and their consequent lack of social status. Being a youth then becomes limitless in terms of age and becomes much more about socioeconomic standing in society, the lack of agency and a dependence on family and society.

Youth in Africa is a contested identity that attracts a plethora of meanings and interpretations. What constitutes youth is too often an academic exercise in futility. The meanings vary across the continent. It has not been helped by attempts of international organisations and states which, for the sake of legality and ease of identifying different sections of the population, engage in certain chronological categorisations of who are youth or young people. Determining which categories of the population constitute youth has nonetheless been challenging, as it carries different meanings in different societies.

The first major international attempt at defining who a youth is took place in 1995, following previous reports of the Secretary General to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, with the latter adopting the definition of youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24.[2] This attempt appears to have been for statistical purposes and has been the framework for UN agencies and member states since. The UN did not bar the member states from adopting their own definitions of youth, as the UN definition does not meet the contextual realities of many societies, even those outside of Africa.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) adopted a common age bracket of 15–29.[3] Africa too has attempted to find common ground around the definition of youth. However, these attempts have not led to a consensus, as various countries maintain different age categorisations of youth.[4] The fact that the AU

definition is more expansive than previous others is interesting but could not have been more germane to the continent's appreciation of a youth. It might, then be useful to restrict our understanding of youth through the legal and statistical categorisations for the purposes of 'who can be considered a youth?' Yet this does not explain how these categorisations are operationalised within the public and private spheres of society.

Another important dimension for the categorisation of youth is the physicality of the word and, consequently, its gendered aspect. For the most part, a youth is generally viewed from a social and functional lens as an able-bodied person who exudes the strength and agility to deliver for his or her family and community. Societally it is through this same lens that youthfulness is sometimes associated with masculinity (Jaji 2021). When the call for a show of strength is made, young girls are often shielded, while the boys take the lead. In most communities, this social construction resigns girls to gendered roles such as cooking, cleaning homes and fetching water. Women often have to shoulder the "triple burden" - reproductive, productive and community management, due to being sequestered in traditional gender roles. This prevents them from reaching their full economic potential. The men work in the fields, build the roads, clear a tree from the road and participate in battles. The masculinity of youth, while it may sometimes overlap with chronological age categorisations, does not rely on it.

Youth is sometimes also perceived from a socioeconomic perspective, and this makes for the way it is regarded less as a stage of life between infancy (meaning dependence on parents or elders for livelihoods, instruction and guidance) and that of adulthood (independence of thought, economic survival and leadership). This perception is epitomised in Sierra Leone's linguistic register of 'youth man', or Nigeria's 'area boys'; someone who may be idle, jobless or poorly socialised. It can sound derogatory in most cases when one is referred to as a youth, but the reality is that society tends to perceive young people who are in need of social and economic assistance, and who rely on older members of their society, as youth, even when they may have gone beyond the age bracket. Too often, this excludes educated, employed and socialised young persons from what is in the public imagination of the meaning of youth.

The difficulty of what appears to be a statistical and operational approach to the categorisation of youth on the continent may raise serious challenges in terms of legal responsibility. The strength of an individual does not necessarily connote an age of responsibility. The problem with categorising young people below 18 as part of a bigger family of youth reinforces the social construction of youth as people below adulthood, who may have the energy but lack responsibility. This may perhaps explain why countries like Nigeria opted for the lower cut-off age of 18, signifying an age of responsibility. If youth is an overlapping stage of life that cuts across childhood, adolescence, adulthood and the aged, national policies may not be able to appreciate that stage as a political or socially relevant force within society with its own interests, aspirations, attributes, needs and challenges, since some of those in that overlapping stage are either seen as children or adults of young people in the continent have

displayed agency and a sense of purpose by enrolling in higher education and investing in their futures, the gulf between education and actual job opportunities is vast. Compounding this are the power structures in many African states that concentrate sociopolitical power in the hands of a select number of metropolitan and local elites, who bargain within what Alex de Waal has described as the 'African political marketplace' (de Waal 2009). Power is bartered for political and economic favours, and those without such resources are excluded from governing systems. In the face of these complexities, young people have exercised their autonomy by responding to their environment in a variety of ways. Some do become involved in the burgeoning criminal networks that facilitate the 'shadow economy' of the continent by joining militias or finding recourse in extremist politics (de Bruijn & Both 2017). Many others turn to more legitimate forms of income and moderate politics, involving themselves in the vast informal sector or choosing more creative outlets for their politics and ideology (Diouf 2003; Eze 2015). This failure to provide a clear definition of youth may be not unconnected with the continent's historical experiences of a malignant relationship between young people and those who emerged to govern post-independence Africa.

Thus, in many ways, African youth operate on the *outside* of the formal socio-economic and political structures that define statehood. There is minimal youth representation in the elite political class of Africa, and young people instead occupy subaltern spaces, influencing change through protests, volunteering or working in grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs), joining militias or gangs in the urban regions, or simply emigrating and, instead, becoming a part of a growing diaspora that seeks to help their cause from outside the physical borders of the continent (Hodgkinson & Melchiorre 2019). The vast majority of African states have, over the years, steadily marginalised the youth and kept them out of major political representation, centralising power and refusing to break the tradition of a gerontocratic political elite. This has not only robbed African youth of the chance to cultivate an active civil society that could make legitimate demands of its state but has also instilled a sense of deep mistrust in the youth against the regimes that govern them. State–youth relations have evolved over the years to reach their present state, and to better understand the nature of the relationship between the elites and the youth in Africa, we must examine that relationship since the immediate postcolonial period.

## The Youth and the State During Decolonisation and the Immediate Postcolonial Period (1950s–1960s)

Mainstream politics was not always so exclusive on the continent. The history of youth mobilisations in Africa highlights the importance that states would place on young people during the decolonisation period, seeing them, in particular students in African universities, as the future of independent states (Hodgkinson & Melchiorre 2019). The youth in universities considered themselves 'elites in waiting', ready to take on the mantle of nation-building. As such, they played

critical roles in independence movements against colonial powers and were highly influential in decolonisation movements. Consequently, the outlook of political elites in Africa at the time of decolonisation was heavily influenced by modernisation theories, as many of the leaders involved in independence movements were trained in European universities themselves, thus forming the basis of postcolonial nation-building (Mamdani, Mkandawire & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1988).

This 'Africanist School' that rose to prominence during decolonisation amongst African student leaders and scholars considered traditional community beliefs and governance structures as backward and not conducive to development. Nation-building was of paramount importance at this stage, and looking towards the governance infrastructure of the West, nation-building was seen as a project that should be undertaken alongside the former colonial powers (Mamdani, Mkandawire & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1988). In this immediate post-colonial period, popular mobilisations amongst the general populace against the newly independent state were considered disruptive as the focus was on building a strong state, with strong institutional foundations from which to embark on independent sovereignty. Creating safeguards for a healthy and politically involved civil society itself was not a major priority at this time, and in the majority of states, sociopolitical power was concentrated in the hands of the university trained and educated elites; the youth demographics that were not particularly urban or well educated were invariably excluded from nation-building.

With the focus on building a strong state in the hopes that it would foster rapid development, infrastructure projects and economic policies were concentrated on the centres of power in African states, often neglecting the regions outside the physical spheres of influence of capital cities and relegating rural and borderland development to the periphery. This physical isolation of regions on the periphery translated into the exclusion of those who were not part of elite circles, and in many instances, excluded many young people from mainstream sociopolitical representation – mostly those who were unable to travel into urban areas for higher education from their more rural communities (Mamdani, Mkandawire & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1988). This exclusion has continued in more contemporary times, with protest movements spearheaded by student activists often differing from those led by impoverished youth from neglected regions. Such diverse youth groups often work in solidarity, as seen in Egypt, Tunisia and Zimbabwe, but their differences serve to splinter youth-led social movements, which often lack organisation and cohesion.

## Rebellion and Freedom: The African Youth and the Cold War Era

As African nations embarked on nation-building through the 1960s, higher education was heavily subsidised (or free in some countries) and university students engaged in gaining the skills of a workforce that would help develop their countries. There was a general environment of euphoria and hope, as

country after country in Africa gained independence, and youth were seen as the future of the continent (Klouwenberg & Butter 2011). This, however, could not be sustained through the next decade, and when the financial crisis hit the African continent in the 1970s and 1980s, dissatisfaction began to creep in (Geda 2003). Though some African states had held democratic elections, most countries had a one-party system, with little-to-no genuine political opposition (Melchiorre 2019). Once freed from the shackles of imperialism, much of African civil society had rightly expected political representation and the opportunity to be included in nation-building from within the system. However, by this time, most states were solidifying the political class system that would come to define African politics for much of the postcolonial period. This was the time that saw the rise of dictators who cemented their authoritarian regimes. These leaders included Daniel Arap Moi in Kenya, Idi Amin in Uganda, Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia and Moussa Traore in Mali. The Nigerian civil war (1967–1970) was followed by a succession of military coups in the 1970s, starting with the rule of military leader Yakubu Gowon, as well as the consolidation of minority white rule in South Africa under the racist apartheid system.

Along with the rise of authoritarianism in Africa, the financial crisis of the 1970s impacted the education sector, with rising fees and unemployment hitting students hard (Atteh 1996). Universities across the continent witnessed the emergence of active student politics, where young people found a space to discuss the politics dominating their lives, and a way to mobilise in dissent. The 1970s and 1980s saw a rise in student movements – from Khartoum University in Sudan, the University of Nairobi in Kenya, to the elite universities of Uganda. However, these movements were, more often than not, met with brutal crackdowns from the regimes. State–student, and consequently, state–youth relationships, began to shift from the benign and mutually respectful foundations of the immediate post-independence period; they were now coloured by mistrust, fear, disappointment and perceptions of betrayal. There were several violent clampdowns on students across the continent, with students subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention and torture. One of the most prominent cases is Ethiopia's infamous *Qey Shibir* (Red Terror), large-scale massacre amounting to genocide (Ethiopian Red Terror Documentation and Research Center 2012). The massacre started when Mengistu and his Derg regime went on a rampage in 1977 against their former allies, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON) and other Marxist–Leninist groups, as they consolidated their power after the abolishment of the monarchy. The Derg arrested anyone suspected of being members or sympathisers of these organisations. Many of those who disappeared over the next two years were young people, students and activists who were never seen by their families again. Estimates of those who lost their lives amount to anywhere from 30,000 to 750,000, with few or no records kept of what happened to those arrested (Ethiopian Red Terror Documentation and Research Center 2012).

In Kenya, the University of Nairobi students mobilised to protest against increasing unemployment and rising fees and were denounced by the Moi regime as degenerates and criminals (Amutabi 2002). The regime even went so far as to shut down the university, then reopen it with a new paramilitary programme (the NYSPUT) designed to instil a sense of discipline and loyalty to the regime and curb dissenting activities. Not only did the programme create a rift between university students and those viewed as merely uneducated and unemployed youth pushing a pro-government agenda, but it actually succeeded in hardening the students' resolve so that they could better withstand the police brutality they faced at street protests (Melchiorre 2019). The programme was eventually shut down, but not before tensions culminated in a clash between state forces and students in February 1985; in what came to be known as 'Bloody Sunday', many students lost their lives and the relationship between the Moi regime and the country's youth suffered irreparable damage (Melchiorre 2019).

Authoritarian regimes often utilised the media to mischaracterise youth as unruly, criminal and deviant, shaping a narrative that undermined the agency of youth. Youth movements in postcolonial Africa shattered in the face of the vast resources that the state commanded, and young people across the continent were pushed to the sidelines. Youth in Africa have since spent decades cultivating various spaces that exist outside of mainstream sociopolitical circles. They cultivate their spaces so that they can express some form of agency or shape their future within the repression and marginalisation that they face. Many young people joined militia groups, using the language of violence to command the respect that they felt was so often denied to them, or engaging in illicit cross-border activities, turning to religious extremism or leaving their countries for greener pastures in the West (Bangura 2016; Brett and Specht 2004; Diouf 2003). Over the years, relationships between the state and university students became acrimonious, as popular mobilisations demanding better governance were looked on as a hindrance to a strong state. Through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the state and media depicted the youth as recalcitrant and belligerent, contributing to the prevalent narrative.

## The Post-Millennial Youth and the 'Third Wave' of Social Movements in Africa (2005–Present)

As indicated in the sections above, youth in the African context has been a marginalised and hugely disadvantaged category, often victims of gerontocracy, patrimonialism and bad governance. The dominant patriarchal approach to governance has often left youth, especially young women, outside of a functional socioeconomic and political space – a space seized by the older generation. This has, in some cases, bred a clientelistic relationship that exploits youth who are open to serving elites, with the hope of benefiting from tokens provided to them. Decades of contentious relationships between states and their youth have contributed to the eruption and prolongation of political instability

and civil wars in countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic and Angola.

Since the start of the new millennium, African sociopolitical life, as well as the African expression of political dissent, has slowly taken on a new dimension. The changing political structures, from autocracy into hybrid states governed by chaotic and often corrupt multiparty democratic systems, such as in Uganda, Nigeria and Ethiopia, coupled with increased urbanisation across the continent, have led to a clash of differing value systems. Increasing urbanisation on the continent has occurred hand in hand with an increase in the urban poor, and a greater wealth divide between the economic and political elite and the rest of society. This disparity is most starkly represented in the economic and political wasteland that young people find themselves in, leading to an increasing number of youth-led protests and social movements on the continent. Academics and researchers studying the political space of Africa have termed this the 'third wave of protests'. Recently, this has been analysed in Branch and Mampilly's (2015) book *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change*, where the authors explore the options that youth and African civil society have when both autocracy and multiparty democracy have been found to be lacking.

Submerged frustrations and grievances against states in Africa surfaced on 17 December 2010, after the self-immolation of a 26-year fruit seller, Mohammed Bouazizi, in Sidi Bouzid, a small town in Tunisia (Abdelsalam 2015). The action of Bouazizi sparked the 'third wave' of youth protests on the continent, culminating in what became known as the Arab Spring. The third wave of protests reached a zenith in 2011, with the continent experiencing an unprecedented rise in social movements (Faupel & Wojtanik 2020). Spearheaded by young people using contemporary tools such as social media and popular arts to exchange information and create inclusive movements, the Arab Spring and the consequent social movements that followed are characteristic of 'new social movements' (NSMs). As explored in some of the chapters in this volume, NSMs transcend socioeconomic boundaries and national borders, have expansive networks of solidarity that include a diversity of intersectional groups and issues and, as such, fall short of specific demands and having a rigid leadership structure, thus making themselves amenable to change as well as exploitation and disintegration.

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and the subsequent Arab Spring triggered a wave of protests across the continent that saw a culmination of sporadic protest movements from around 2014 to 2015. From Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Tanzania to Chad, Mali, South Africa and Zimbabwe, young people took to the streets to demand an end to repressive, authoritarian regimes, better economic opportunities and representation in their countries' mainstream sociopolitical structures (Branch & Mampilly 2015). In the past decade, young people on the continent have shown over and over again that they want their voice to be heard, that they want to shape their future and

the future of their countries, and that they want to free themselves from the shackles of control by gerontocratic and patriarchal systems in their respective countries.

This wave of social movements has particularly been defined by the increased use of the internet and social media and the access youth have gained to improved information and communication technologies. The use of the internet to access information that might otherwise be unavailable due to state repression, or to access and disseminate information that counters state propaganda, as well as the utilisation of social media to expose state violence, has enhanced the impact of recent social movements. Additionally, the use of social media to build solidarity networks domestically, as well as transnationally, has transformed the landscape of protest and social movements in Africa. In many ways, this wave is characterised as a 'hybrid movement' – one that exists as much in the virtual sphere as it does on the streets (De Waal & Ibreck 2013).

This utilisation of social media and the greater connectivity that it provides have been the main differences that contemporary youth-led social movements have exhibited globally. In most states in Africa like Zimbabwe, Uganda, Sudan, Egypt and Libya, the response against the emergence of youth-led social movements has been heavy-handed, with the aim of repressing them, mostly with the use of instrumentalised state security actors. Consequently, most movements were either captured by the state or neutralised and rendered less effective than they could have been, especially at a time when traditional media was largely state-owned and controlled. However, the emergence of new media, notably social media, has contributed significantly to enhancing the agency, mobilisation and effectiveness of youth in interfacing with the state, especially on socioeconomic and political issues. Additionally, increased democratisation (Amutabi 2002) and global interconnections (Bahmad 2014; Iwilade 2013) have given rise to renewed vigour among youth-driven social movements in Africa.

Of course, there are limits to the efficacy of social media and its contributions to achieving the goals of social movements. Factors such as the resilience of the movement, the quality of its leadership, the issues that stimulated its existence, the nature of the reaction of the state and the perception of the wider public of both the movement and the reaction of the state, alongside other contextual issues, are critical to the outcomes of the activities of social movements.

Since the Arab Spring, there seems to be conflicting opinions as to the success of some of the more recent social movements on the continent. This, again, has depended on what critics have considered 'success'. For instance, in Kevin Eze's (2015) report on select social mobilisations in countries such as Mozambique, Tunisia, Senegal and Burkina Faso, he labels any movement that has not resulted in mainstream political participation of the protest actors as largely unsuccessful. There is also broad analysis done by Eze (2015) as well as Honwana (2013), Mamdani (1995) and other scholars on this particular tendency for young people to be ostracised and left to act only outside mainstream politics. Honwana (2013) states that political mobilisation by civil society is largely

sustained through a combination of outside and inside networks – though this may be less possible in the African political society due to its functioning through a system of elite bargaining in the political marketplace.

## Youth and Peacebuilding in Africa

This section of the introduction examines peacebuilding in Africa and draws on how youth have been connected to or involved in conflict to peace transitions, and related activities, on the continent. Writing on peacebuilding in Africa, Kenneth Omeje (2019: 4–5) argues that there are two key features of the literature on peacebuilding in Africa and other developing regions. The "first is that peacebuilding is essentially conceptualised as a post-conflict activity … and the second … is the preponderant focus on macro-level conflict of mega-national and regional proportion". Omeje further states that there has been very limited focus on peacebuilding at micro-level communal conflicts, where the causes of potentially explosive conflicts are usually rooted. The key question then is what is peacebuilding?

Contemporary peacebuilding, as currently practiced, is largely based on the liberal peacebuilding model, which is hinged on state-building and the establishment of liberal and democratic institutions and structures that promote human rights, the rule of law and the welfare of citizens. Liberal peacebuilding as a concept gained traction in the global arena in the 1990s, with the adoption of the Agenda for Peace in 1992 by the then Secretary General of the UN, and later the Brahimi report[5] published in 2000 (Frère & Wilen 2015). However, liberal peacebuilding has been criticised over the years, and some of the criticisms include the fact that "it is often driven from above, driven by external actors, justified as apolitical, and benevolent. The assumption is that the problem is internal, but the solution is external" (Zambakari 2017: 2). However, authors such as Roland Paris (2010) have argued that some of the criticisms of liberal peacebuilding may be too harsh and there is the need for a much more nuanced understanding of its use, shortcomings and prospects.

The development of peacebuilding as a concept builds on several years of work by prominent academics and practitioners, including Johan Galtung (1976). Primarily, peacebuilding processes seek to address the root causes of a conflict, support the establishment of systems and structures that foster social cohesion and strengthen human rights, the rule of law and social justice. The existence of these conditions helps to mitigate the potential for mistrust and violence in any society and reinforce peace and stability. Thus, the use of bottom-top, home-grown approaches is equally important, as they foster ownership and sustainability of peacebuilding processes.

African youth have been and remain engaged in contributing to peacebuilding processes in Africa. However, as indicated in an AU report, the "myriad contributions of African youth to peace and security are still mostly unseen, understated and undocumented" (African Union 2020: xvi). This gap is compounded with the limited mainstreaming of youth into peacebuilding

processes in countries in transition from violence to peace. Youth organisations are mostly limited to functioning at the micro level and denied the agency and voice they require to shape national peacebuilding agendas.

This volume argues that youth present a significant demographic on the African continent, and sustainable peacebuilding can only be achieved with them owning and leading the process. Young people have the agency, access to information, knowledge and networks, are deeply rooted in their local communities and cultures and can play a meaningful role in developing a hybrid liberal and local approach to peacebuilding in Africa. The case of the Y'en a Marre movement in Senegal, for instance, provides an example of how youth-led social movements can also support peacebuilding processes in their countries, using longer term approaches and visions that help to build a grassroots peacebuilding model, which also constantly reminds the state of its responsibilities and need to strengthen democratic good governance and human security.

## Structure and Approach of This Edited Volume

Despite the contributions of youth to Africa's socioeconomic and political development, research has not centred the continent's youth in the politics and development of their societies. Even when the agency of youth is analysed, significant emphasis is placed on their clientelistic relationship with elites in some societies, and, in others, their victimisation, or contentions with elites. Yet, youth-driven social movements play a fundamental role in shaping socio-political outcomes in African societies. To address this gap, this edited volume contributes towards the vast literature on contemporary social movements, with a focus on youth-led social movements on the continent of Africa. This book draws on empirical evidence from across Africa to examine critical questions such as (i) the historical contexts, trends and patterns that have necessitated the social mobilisation of the youth in Africa; (ii) the differences in the nature, formation and approaches used by the youth-led social movements in Africa; (iii) issues related to the agency and positionality of the youth in promoting socio-economic and political changes in the different regions of Africa; approaches to and responses of governments, the AU and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs), in relation to the rise of social movements in Africa; (iv) the role of social media in facilitating the emergence and sustenance of the youth-led social movements in Africa; (v) gender relations and dynamics in the youth-led social movements in Africa; (vi) contributions of youth-led social movements to peace in African societies and, finally, attempts to answer the question – (vii) where do African youth stand today, a little more than a decade after the Arab Spring?

It is hard to find an edited volume that draws on empirical case studies from all regions of Africa to critically examine and analyse the agency of youth in social movements and their long-term impact on African societies, especially in the domain of peacebuilding. This book draws attention to the innovative ways in which young people have tried to re-engineer the social space, navigate

blockages and challenge contexts that deny them their voice, place, recognition and identity, through focusing on non-violent means of social expression.

It is important to note that at the time of researching, writing and editing this volume, many of the countries studied in this book were in the middle of critical political transitions, with the situation still evolving in most of them. In August 2021, President Kais Saied of Tunisia dissolved his democratically elected cabinet of ministers, fired his prime minister and consolidated political power by appointing a new prime minister with a little political background, which has sparked tension among the elites.[6] Sudan is currently in the middle of a violent military coup that is reversing the democratic gains made after the fall of the Omar al-Bashir government on 11 April 2019.[7] President Alpha Condé of Guinea was deposed by the head of his presidential guards on 5 September 2021.[8] Through all of these upheavals, young people have remained front and centre as they face violent, repressive and highly undemocratic states.

The book consists of 15 chapters, with Chapters 1 and 15 being the introduction and conclusion, respectively. Chapter 2 by Frank Ubachs examines the history of popular social movement theories, tracing its path from its European foundations and relating the most critical theoretical frameworks to the African experience of rights movements and nation-building. This chapter also analyses NSMs and considers the enormous influence that the advances in communication technology have had in building and sustaining social movements. The chapter concludes that although much has been made of the role of new technologies and social media within the dynamics of youth movements, the topic remains underexplored.

Chapter 3 by Mohamed Gibril Sesay critically examines pan-African institutions such as the AU and its RECs, and their approach to young people generally on the continent and specifically to youth-led social movements. As analysed in the chapter, over the years, these institutions have not fully mainstreamed young people and their associations and programmes into their activities, and while this is changing at the moment, it appears that the institutions lack the capabilities to translate these aspirations into practical gains.

Chapter 4 by Edmore Chitukutuku argues that social media has played a significant role in enhancing the agency, mobilisation and effectiveness of youth in interfacing with the state, especially on socioeconomic and political issues. The youth harnessed the virtual power of social media to open space for criticising and engaging with the state which had been closed down by the increased militarisation and securitisation of the state by the ruling elites in Africa. This chapter explores how social media has been used by youth movements in countries like Egypt and Zimbabwe to achieve their objectives.

The remaining chapters seek to utilise the examples of specific countries on the continent, showing how social movements in those countries have evolved governance, politics and the relationship between the state and its youth. The authors have used a rich variety of sources to present nuanced, analytical and holistic views that are above all – *local*. Interviews have been conducted with

various youth activists, members of CSOs, students, journalists etc., as well as state actors. The analyses from their interviews are, in turn, supported by a variety of secondary sources that range from academic works to contemporary news reports. Due to the vastness of Africa, and the diversity of experiences that its myriad populace account for, the format of examining youth social movement processes in specific countries has been chosen so as to present a subjective and culturally relative analysis of contemporary social movements on the continent.

In Chapter 5, Festus Kofi Aubyn and Osei Baffour Frimpong write on the protest in October 2020 by Nigerian youth against human rights violations committed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigerian Police, as part of the EndSARS Movement. The authors argue that the use of digital activism campaigns and the transnational support the movement gained from activists, politicians and celebrities account for the initial success of the movement. However, to instigate meaningful systemic reforms or policy changes, such digital activism campaigns must be sustained for the long term.

In Chapter 6, Philip Bob Jusu and Saatchi Sen examine how the use of music as a form of sociopolitical expression has become common among youth in Africa, especially in the last two decades. The authors used the example of Senegal where young artists came together and formed the Y'en a Marre movement to campaign against President Abdoulaye Wade's third-term bid. In the last ten years, the movement has utilised hip-hop music as a form of expression to challenge the anomalies in their country and, consequently, have influenced similar movements in the West African region.

Chapter 7 by Anna Naa Adochoo Mensah maintains that despite the innovative and strategic means employed by the youth to remove President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, their influence in the political scene was restricted after the revolution. Their contribution to political change and development becomes a mirage. This chapter examines questions such as what influences the success of youth uprisings in Africa? What justifies the restricted roles of the youth in post-revolution political governance and state development? How can the youth partake in the state's political reconstruction and development in Burkina Faso?

Chapter 8 by Ibrahim Bangura investigates the experience of Guinea's youth in challenging the third-term bid of President Alpha Condé. The chapter assesses how the state succeeded in changing constitutional provisions to guarantee the president a third term. Bangura also explores the means used by the state to undermine the youth and the Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC). While Condé got his third term, he was overthrown by the military, leaving all with the question of what this means for the youth and constitutional order in Guinea.

In Chapter 9, Mohamed Gibril Sesay, Mohamed Bakhit and Justin Crowell assess the 2019 protests by youth and women in Sudan against the government of President Omar al-Bashir. Even though the state responded violently, the persistence of the protesters galvanised international support which contributed to

the success of their movement against the regime. This chapter investigates the particular role of women and youth groups. At the time of writing, Sudan finds itself in the middle of a violent military coup, with pro-democracy protestors facing extreme brutality at the hands of the military.

Chapter 10 by Rita Makumbi analyses youth-led social movements in Uganda from the 1920s to the present day. Makumbi argues that over the years, youth activism and mobilisation largely involved educated youth. However, in the last decade, this trend appears to be changing, with young uneducated and disillusioned youth also mobilising and demanding sociopolitical and economic changes in their society. The chapter provides a good reflection on social activism in Uganda over the years, discussing how youth movements interact and deal with the daily challenges of a securitised state.

In Chapter 11, drawing on the ethnography of youth activists' everyday lives and struggles before the Robert Mugabe era and in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe, Simbarashe Gukurume examines the ways in which young people are mobilised and how they encounter and contend with the state. The chapter particularly explores the risks met by youth activists and how they navigate them. The author argues that given the precariousness of activism in the social movement terrain in Zimbabwe, youth activists have developed creative and inventive ways of subverting the state and navigating state violence.

In Chapter 12, Simbarashe Gukurume and Godfrey Maringira provide a nuanced account of arguably two of the most prominent youth social movements in contemporary Africa – the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements in South Africa. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has struggled as it reconciles with its past and the problems of race relations and socioeconomic inequality that linger till today. This chapter examines the motivations of the black students of the country, who, finding themselves marginalised have demanded the decolonisation of their education systems, escalating their protests since 2015.

In Chapter 13, Delmas Tsafack addresses the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, and how the young people in the Anglophone regions of the country have challenged decades of socioeconomic and political marginalisation, a development which has resulted in their quest for an independent Southern Cameroon. While largely focused on youth in the country, this chapter also assesses the role of Cameroonian diaspora groups in the crisis in their country. The use of violence by youth, as they respond to state-perpetrated violence against them and their communities, is also discussed.

In Chapter 14, Ibrahim Bangura and Saatchi Sen examine the aftermath of the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, which kick-started the Arab Spring in 2011. Widely hailed as a success when compared to other countries, Tunisia has since held multiple elections. However, the youth that spearheaded the protests remain on the political margins of the country and the political future of Tunisia remains a question mark. As the youth struggle for economic opportunities and political representation, this chapter examines their response to the last ten years of political transition within Tunisia.

The constantly changing situation in Africa today means that by the time this book is published, much will have occurred that we have been unable to study. Yet, there are patterns of democratisation, youth–state relations and the evolution of civil society that would apply to future conditions. However, with the outbreak of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and its effect on the civil space, it is hard to accurately predict where the many political transitions in Africa will lead the continent. While the pandemic has affected public health infrastructure and caused a global economic decline, it has also resulted in an increase in state authoritarianism, with the consequent effect of a shrinking democratic space for civil society and youth movements on the continent. This is certainly a development that will be critical towards the future of social movements and how young people interact with their governments. Thus, it is one that global and regional actors must closely watch and act on to avoid the reversal of some of the democratic gains in Africa. However, what is of utmost importance, now more than ever before, is that the ruling class of the continent recognise that youth – the largest demographic – are both the present and the future of their countries, and must be fully mainstreamed into the socioeconomic and political strata of governance, if peace, security, stability and development are to be achieved and maintained in their respective countries.

## Notes

1 See: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf (Accessed on 18 November 2021).
2 See: United Nations General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/50/81, 1995.
3 See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6783798/1-16042015-ap-en.pdf/5d120b02-c8df-4181-9b27-2fe9ca3c9b6b (Accessed on 18 November 2021).
4 In Sierra Leone, youth is categorised as persons between the ages of 15 and 35, while Nigeria maintains 18–35, Kenya 15–30 and South Africa 14–35.
5 The Brahimi Report was produced in August 2000 by the Panel on UN Peace Operations, chaired by the Under-Secretary General Lakhdar Brahimi. The report was named after him.
6 See: www.france24.com/en/africa/20211114-thousands-of-tunisians-rally-near-suspended-parliament-against-presidential-coup (Accessed on 18 November 2021).
7 See: www.reuters.com/world/africa/mobile-phone-lines-inside-sudan-are-cut-before-planned-protests-2021-11-17/ (Accessed on 18 November 2021).
8 See: www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58461971 (Accessed on 19 November 2021).

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# 2 Youth Movements and Activism

## Theoretical Approaches

*Frank Ubachs*

### Introduction

Youth activism has become a global force to be reckoned with. In the last decade, 'youth revolts' have proliferated worldwide. Among them, we count the Tunisian Revolution that set off the wave of protests that came to be known as 'Arab Spring', the emergence of the 'Indignados' in Southern Europe, the 'Occupy' movement' in the United States (US), and the 'Umbrella Movement' in Hong Kong. In Africa, in countries characterised by bulging youth demographics, underperforming economies, and non-responsive governments, youth mobilisations have been the harbingers of fundamental changes as youth-led protests contributed to the toppling of governments in many of the continent's countries (Honwana et al. 2021).

At a global scale, we witness new solidarities forming and youth movements exploiting opportunities to transnationally unite and inspire each other. Increasingly connected young populations[1] are questioning the legitimacy of states that they experience as falling short in delivering their part of the social contract. Responding to their precarious life situations and feeling abandoned, young people may find themselves torn between alternative governance systems (De Bruijn and Both 2017). Motivated to activism by 'Waithood' (i.e., a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood), experiencing injustices and a lack of socio-economic perspective, they can rally to support democratic solutions or, contrarily, support (continuation of) authoritarian rule. At the same time, the landscape of youth activism is changing. We can observe how shifting societal conditions and the availability of modern technologies produce new forms of communication and collaboration among young people. Driving societal change, young populations are testing new forms of cultural expression, reshaping languages, and embracing new media (Honwana et al. 2021).

This chapter traces the outlines of theoretical approaches to youth activism from its beginnings in the nineteenth century through its major turns into the present century. After reviewing the development of the social movement theory and its major perspectives on causes for youth activism, I examine the mechanisms and processes in youth political mobilisation. Finally, the chapter

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discusses what factors could influence the outcomes and impact of youth activism in Africa.

## Youth Activism and Its Causes

Though not all social movements are primarily youthful, many are, and young populations have been critical to the rise of impactful contemporary movements. Originally considered a form of social movement that characterised the rapidly industrialising countries of Europe, in the twentieth century, youth activism has spread globally (Braungart and Braungart 2001). Accelerating from the 1960s onwards, manifesting itself in civil rights movements, as well as fuelling former colonies' quest for independence, youth activism currently marks modern societies in all their diversity.

The study of youth movements is as old as the phenomenon itself. Historically, youth activism has included student movements, cultural (literary, artistic, musical, ethnic, religious) and countercultural movements, peace and anti-war movements, political and environmental movements. Their memberships and participation have ranged from small numbers to hundreds of thousands of active participants. The dominant role of youth in social activism has received broad scholarly attention, ranging from studies in history, sociology, political science, and psychology to anthropology, communication, and education. However, youth participation has not often been considered a determinant factor and rather treated as indistinguishable from adult activism. Additionally, the challenges and dilemmas that youth contend with, have often been neglected, both in theoretical reflections and within social movements (Johnston 2019).

Youth activism is mainly studied through the prism of the social movement theory. There is little agreement among theorists about what exactly constitutes a social movement, and how to differentiate it from political parties or interest groups (Cohen 1985). According to Della Porta and Diani, social movements can be perceived as 'distinctive social and political processes […] consisting of informal networks, linking individual and organizational actors engaged in conflictual relations to other actors, on the basis of a shared collective identity' (Della Porta and Diani 2020).

The question as to who exactly constitute 'the youth' is equally contentious and has been answered differently in various (geographical, cultural, historical, social, legal, etc.) contexts.[2] It should not surprise us, therefore, that perceptions of who should be included in 'youth movements' vary as well. According to Roberts:

> Since the mid-20th century, youth movements have been those in which substantial numbers of participants have seen themselves, and have been regarded by others, as an upcoming, usurping generation.
>
> (Roberts 2015, 837)

Analyses of youth movements have been pursued by multiple academic disciplines, and diverse theoretical perspectives have been advanced to explain and predict the emergence of youth activism. Studies of youth activism, therefore, appear in a rich variety of literature and in many fields, including history, sociology, politics, anthropology, psychology, communication, and education (Eyerman 1989; Earl et al. 2017). Depending on the discipline leading the effort, emphasis is placed on the socioeconomic context, the individual motivations of participants, the organisational form, or the framing content of a movement, to name but the most prominent aspects.

Since youth activism has increasingly become a global phenomenon, important historical, and regional differences have become manifest in its expressions around the world. International research reflects this situation and is offering a constantly expanding body of evidence for comparative studies. The starting point for any social movement study is the fact that people mobilise to activism at a particular time and place. According to Eyerman:

> Social movements are constituted in contexts where history and biography interact with social structure. Social movements require coordinated collective action and a sense of common mission. Core ideas, leaders, and organisations are thus central to their emergence and continuation. But most essentially, social movements are composed of people; people who are activated, who move, who politicise, and who become themselves politicised.
>
> (Eyerman 1989, 543)

Instances of youth acting as a generational group have been recorded in history for centuries. We have evidence of violent street gangs in urban settings already in Roman and Byzantine literature. What is new, in modern times, is the shared desire for *societal change* that mobilises young people into political action.[3]

Within the literature of social movements, studies on youth activism have been mostly concerned with its causes, focusing on what motivates this distinct age cohort – with its shared social and historical experience – to social action. The sociologist Karl Mannheim (1929) already argued that periods of major historical change were likely to produce new political generations that find themselves unable to relate to the policies and worldviews of the existing political elites.

### *The Evolution of Modern Social Movements*

Youthful activism was sometimes interpreted as a response to the values of the Enlightenment and the ideals of the French Revolution (Gleadle 2016), while at times regarded as a reaction to the tensions created by the rapid modernisation of society. In his studies on social developments in France over the last four centuries, Tilly illustrated how social movements' 'action repertoires' developed over long periods, in response to changing conditions. Emphasising the concept

of 'political opportunity', he viewed collective action as a challenge posed to political authority and its coercive tactics. His influence would centre the social movement analytical framework on anti-system and revolutionary activism.

> Governmental repression is uniquely important because governments specialise in the control of mobilization and collective action: police for crowd control, troops to back them, spies and informers for infiltration, licensing to keep potential actors visible and tame. Yet groups outside government also repress each other, in the sense of manipulating each other's cost of collective action.
>
> (Tilly 1988, 101)

During the nineteenth century, the European continent saw many manifestations of youth movements as it was experiencing rapid demographic growth and was home to large cohorts of youth among its populations. Movements included the anti-reactionary student fraternities in Germany around 1820; national youth movements in Switzerland, Italy, France, Poland, and Germany, in the 1830s; the radical reform movement of the Russian intelligentsia (*Naródniki*) in the 1860s; and at the end of the century, the 'Young Turks' who overthrew the Ottoman regime and came to power in 1909 (Reulecke 2001).

In the turmoil and unrest in France during the 1890s, the psychologist Le Bon developed his theory on crowds (Le Bon 1895). His view on street protest as a form of 'deviancy' still informs classic 'breakdown' theories that classify participation in collective action primarily as disruptive, irrational behaviour. Based on the idea of structural strains in society (like modernisation, urbanisation, demographic pressure), the classic paradigm asserts that deprivation and shared grievances constitute key drivers of participation in protest movements.

During the first half of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of young people engaged in independent social and political protests, seeking societal change. After World War II, waves of youth movements emerged regularly, developing new forms of expression. At the end of the 1950s, new themes in social activism were surfacing as the reasons for mobilisation changed (Eyerman 1989). In the United States (US) and Europe, emphasis started shifting from aspirational claims to countercultural protests and young people engaged more with issues of global importance (Reulecke 2001). For Asia and Africa, the 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference and the All-African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana in 1958, were pivotal events that forged solidarity movements and inspired activism among populations of the global South.

After the student movements of the 1960s and the 'activist subcultures' in the 1970s in the US and Europe, youth activism manifested itself in the environmentalist and pacifist movements of the 1980s, and in the high school students' mobilisations at the end of the century. From the 1990s onwards, youth activism mobilised around civil issues such as the anti-racist protests in North-Western Europe or the anti-mafia movement in Italy (Melucci 1996).

Since social conditions in industrial countries were improving, the classic perspective of deprivation as a prime driver of youth activism seemed no longer apt and a need for new theoretical approaches became apparent. From an emphasis on irrational disruption in reaction to societal strains, researchers gradually turned to theories that analysed protests as rational, organised collective action. Studies shifted attention towards movements as organisations with calculations and strategies, as well as goals, norms, and interests.

In the US, structuralist explanations began scrutinising the availability of resources, political opportunities and constraints, and mobilising structures. In Europe, a constructivist 'new social movements' (NSM) approach emerged that looked at social groups' needs and values that fed protest in post-industrial society. Social movement scholars with backgrounds in social psychology (both in the US and Europe) associated the rise of social justice activism with youth's psychological dispositions, intergenerational conflict, and the struggle between the dominant class and the youth. They advanced identity formation and emotions, meaning construction and common interests or ideologies as explanations for mobilisation to movements.

Melucci and Jasper exemplified this 'cultural turn' in studies which examined social movements' role in consensus building and framing, providing a rationale and guidance for action (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2009). It marked the transposition of the emphasis on materialist, political contention (class conflict and production structure) to cultural conflicts around social relations and symbols (collective identity and knowledge-formation). As indicated by Melucci:

> The instrumental objectives typical of political action do not disappear, but they become punctual, and in a certain measure, replaceable. I call these forms of action symbolic challenges. They affect political institutions because they modernise the culture and organisation of these institutions, and they influence the selection of new elites.
>
> (Melucci 1996, 4)

The development of NSM in pluralist, democratic countries with vibrant civil societies undermined the mass-society theory of the collective behaviour paradigm (Cohen 1985). Instead of casting youth activism as forms of deviant behaviour, research had started to recognise the benefits of student activism for political socialisation into democratic citizenship (Klemenčič and Park 2018). As both the structural and psychological theories failed to explain why these youth movements appeared in the 1960s and not before, or why students should be treated as a social class, new questions had to be asked.

Many young people were now rallying around themes addressing aspects of social justice, which included the fight against corruption and class-dominance, anti-war resistance, and the struggle for self-realisation and a better quality of life. Associating this youthful struggle with violent tendencies, some scholars regarded the new generation as more radical in their desire for a just political

system and more hostile towards any authority than before.[4] To them, the student movements appeared to be acting as a revolutionary force (analogous to the proletariat), intent on social transformation (Yaghi 2015). This view strongly resonated in different contexts, e.g., in postcolonial Africa, where governments would eventually turn against student movements as the politicised youth posed a challenge to their authority. In the US and Europe, social activism seemed to largely abate during the last decade of the century. However,

> … although the 1990s had been a decade of relatively contained conflict, questions were raised about the violent movements that, here and there, were already roiling the surface of society.
>
> (Tarrow 2011, xv)

### *The African Context*

Historically speaking, then, most work on youth activism has been weighted towards the established, industrial countries,[5] although youth politicisation and activism played an enormously important role in other regions as well. Like in the youth movements in the industrial world, high youth participation has characterised the movements for independence and liberation that emerged in (former) colonies in the global South (as early as the 1920s, and gaining pace from the second half of the twentieth century onwards). As political realities in these regions presented a very different picture, it is important not to assume that youth activism here developed along the same lines.[6]

Gyampo and Anyidoho recount how, in Africa, in the twentieth century, young people represented the vanguard of the various independence movements and the anti-apartheid struggle (Gyampo and Anyidoho 2019). After the period of Africans' encounter with and resistance to colonialism had come to an end, the period of political independence in the 1950s and 1960s saw an increase in the number of government-sponsored youth organisations. During the period of political liberalisation, the role of youth in politics and society expanded and state authorities actively encouraged the formation of a cadre of new leaders. Nevertheless, youth and, especially, student movements soon criticised the new regimes for their lack of responsiveness towards the needs of the common people, provoking a hostile reaction from governments in the mid-1960s and 1970s.

Youth activism, eventually, contributed to the toppling of several regimes and, in the 1990s, to the promulgation of new constitutions.[7] After the demise of military dictatorship, some African countries built strong and well-organised political parties, while others developed their 'election machines'. This process was linked to the decade of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s that failed to bring genuine multipartyism and deprioritised the needs of students.[8] Young people felt marginalised by political parties and governments alike and were excluded from playing any significant role in governance systems. Political parties, meanwhile, started extending their reach

to them beyond party structures, through youth clubs in urban centres and student wings in educational institutions. Young people thus saw themselves instrumentalised as 'tools for the elites', useful for mobilisation purposes and for spreading party ideology, and available as mere 'foot-soldiers' to 'fight dangerous political wars' (Gyampo and Anyidoho 2019).

These developments have continued into the twenty-first century and have even accelerated. For the period from 2005 to 2014, Branch and Mampilly documented a 'third wave of protest'[9]: more than 90 political protests in 40 African countries, many of which took place after 2009 (Branch and Mampilly 2015). In contrast to studies that mostly focus on experiences of protests in the US and Europe, the authors set out to explore what is specific to protests in Africa. To avoid preconceptions, they reject privileging protests that conform to a 'civil society' model – organised, disciplined, and nonviolent protests that work within the existing political framework. Branch and Mampilly state that:

> Protest takes many forms and can have different meanings depending on who is involved, what their demands are, and how they relate to other social and political groups.
>
> (Branch and Mampilly 2015, 34)

This stance aligns with Tarrow's recognition that social movement approaches tended to 'reify' their analytical categories and to narrowly focus on movements and institutions, giving insufficient attention to other actors in the protest environment. Tarrow went, therefore, beyond movements to broader waves of contentious politics and introduced the concept of 'cycle of contention', which he defined as:

> a phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilised sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organised and unorganised participation, and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities.
>
> (Tarrow 2011, 199)

In the post-industrial democracies, the persistence of protest, the ever-larger protest events, and the use of protest practices for new causes reflect an 'institutionalisation of protest'. Where some scholars observe an increasing 'professionalisation' of protest in social movements, others discern protest developing into a generic tool for problem-solving for new issues of contention (Earl et al. 2017). The sheer number of youth and their unprecedented access to new technologies and social media have made them primary actors in an increasingly transnational protest landscape (De Bruijn and Both 2017). For post-colonial Asia and Africa, this 'new landscape' is unfolding against the backdrop of societies with persistent inequalities and exclusions, sometimes going back

to precolonial concepts and practices, and providing the context for a youth question 'shaped by the intersection of crisis and opportunity' (Iwilade 2013).

## Mobilisation into Contentious Movements

In the previous section, we have traced the genealogy of theories that primarily focused on identifying causes for the emergence of youth activism. However, this emphasis neglected questions as to what influences youth in their decision to participate in different types of activism and how the sociopolitical context impacts specific actions. Here, an important line of research remained.

The conceptual shift proposed by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, involved looking for *mechanisms* and *processes* in various movements that lead to social change, and how outcomes differ depending on the specific contexts within which they occur. The authors suggested exploring three kinds of mechanisms, (1) environmental – generated externally, (2) cognitive – operating through changes in individual and collective perceptions, and (3) relational – modifying connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks (McAdam et al. 2001). This section integrates these three dimensions in relation to mobilisation.

In a world that has been fundamentally changed by the development of an information and network society with economic and social relationships stretching worldwide, globalisation processes are weakening national boundaries (primarily through economic interdependence, international cooperation, migration, and global media coverage) and encourage the development of local social movements as well as transnational solidarities.[10]

Although social movement studies have often prioritised the rational weighing of costs and benefits (rational choice) as driving behaviour, the role of cognitive schemas in decision-making has been increasingly recognised.[11] When trying to answer the question of how young people become active in contentious politics, the personal development perspective gains relevance. Johnston shows how youth-specific collective action reflects the intersection of cognitive structure and psychological development, and its interactions within the larger societal context (Johnston 2019).

He elaborates on the four cognitive schemas that have been established as relevant in youthful participation: (1) identity search, (2) risk taking, (3) emotionality, and (4) cognitive triggering by events or circumstances. These cognitive characteristics of late adolescence and early adulthood can energise a social movement as well as risk alienating older members and public opinion. In different contexts, the cognitive processes involved may be similar in terms of identities, ideologies, and affiliations, but dissimilar in terms of the pathways they open to social mobilisation (Johnston 2019). Where contextual conditions differ (on the local, national, and international level), additional historical analysis is required, including a description of the formation, development, and demise of youth movements (Gillis 2015).

Youthful involvement in activism is not limited to the political sphere and boundaries between engagement and activism appear fluid. Studies on youth

mobilisation can be located within broader debates over youth political engagement, linked to related literatures on (1) youth and electoral politics and civic engagement, (2) the identities of youth (intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other identities) and the gendered and racialised experiences of youth activists, or (3) on youth engagement in online activism, and online participation in non-activist political activities (Earl and Kimport 2009).

Scholarly inquiry into youth activism can be divided into two main bodies: studies related to the reasons for youth activism and those examining student movements as proxies for youth movements. As students represent a large segment of youth, scholars have often not differentiated between the two categories. While exploring themes that are at the core of social movement theories, they have tended to emphasise student engagement more. This is evident in the literature on the anti-war and civil rights movements in the 1960s in the US, where many participants in the movements could be classified as 'youth' than just students. A similar focus on student activism can be found in research on the democratic movements in Europe and Asia (Yaghi 2015).

Student campuses are rightly seen as conducive to recruitment, mobilisation, and coalition building. In general, they provide spaces that are conducive for youth in making important life transitions and are connected to students' 'biographical availability'. Student life changes young people's routines and social networks, distancing them from adult oversight, and thereby increasing opportunities for activism. They offer students their own social spaces at or near school premises,[12] and sufficient free time to discuss and organise (Earl et al. 2017). While social movement scholars were mostly interested in campus activism, the interdisciplinary field on political socialisation developed separately.

Political socialisation is discussed across various literature and disciplines, including political science, developmental psychology, sociology, and communication. Several theories have been proposed, with the 'life-course' approach long providing an analytical framework. It describes the different pathways that characterise a person's trajectory and examines how people develop through the various stages of their lives. The approach emphasises periods of stability and change, and underlines conflicts between youth and adults. Socialisation theory, on the other hand, analyses the social relationships and networks that transmit to young people the values, standards of behaviour, attitudes, and skills that are congruent with their cultural environment, such as modes of problem-solving, images of authority, and community association. According to this perspective, young people involved in activism are carrying out values learned in their homes and direct environment, with schools, universities, peer groups, and the media acting as important influences (Gillis 2015).

A prevailing perspective on youth socialisation and engagement, the 'deficit model', has been successfully challenged, as the evidence suggests that young people are as politically engaged as adults and are not just incomplete members of society in need of political training.[13] Youth are not only politicised by others, but also undertake political socialisation themselves, sometimes even politicising those around them (Gordon and Taft 2011). Nonetheless, families and social

networks impact youth's active socialisation, exposing them to the realities of politics. They offer them opportunities, by engaging them in conversations, informing them on the political system, and guiding their political involvement.

As early political socialisation and political action strongly influence further engagement, youthful involvement is crucial for a movement's development and mobilisation potential. Even so, adult-led political socialisation is often poorly aligned with how youth perceive themselves. Many young people – from diverse social categories – experience exclusion from adult-dominated activist spaces as adults neglect the priorities and involvement of youth. Therefore, some youth may feel motivated towards seizing the initiative from traditional centres of authority and gaining agency for their own concerns and alternative visions for society (Earl et al. 2017).[14] At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that broad movements for social change are frequently intergenerational and the relations between different age cohorts can prove beneficial. Offering opportunities for a division of labour, an intergenerational movement allows young people to take on the role of vanguard actors, while older members contribute and assist by mobilising their social and material resources.

## Reaching Goals and Changing Society

Once mobilised, youth activists can choose from a variety of strategies to achieve their goals. Although youth may agree on the need for societal reform, they will likely compete over long-term objectives and tactics. The literature on student activism offers analyses of diverse youthful social movements, documenting both violent and nonviolent approaches and investigating the reasons why some (domestic and transnational) movements succeed, where others fail. But social movement theories have so far paid little empirical attention to the issue of the outcomes and impacts of collective action.

In addition to the often-reported use of disruptive or violent methods, we encounter peaceful tactics such as demonstrations, petitioning, and (on/off-line) boycotting. While for a significant proportion of the participants in youth activism the use of nonviolent tactics such as silent marches, sit-ins, hunger and class strikes and the like are preferable, for others, disruptive methods and violent actions such as vandalism and physical violence are called for. The decision to use political violence appears to be influenced by several contextual factors and can be linked to experiences of disillusionment (corruption, unfair state policies, and violence) or, conversely, to experiences of empowerment (political agency and influence).

Johnston et al. (2014), who distinguish between participation in violence and support for violence, noted that for sub-Saharan Africa, in at least half of the countries surveyed, experiences with corruption, a history of political action, and frequent contact with government officials were positively correlated with a willingness to *participate in* and *support for* political violence. They also found that a history of attack in the household was positively associated with willingness to *participate in* political violence. Furthermore, perceived unfairness of

the law, unemployment, and active membership in community groups were most often associated with *support for* political violence. In contrast, youth who perceived the government as delivering in certain economic and social areas would be more willing to *participate in* political violence, although less likely to support it (Johnston et al. 2014).[15]

The use of physical or even armed violence, however, is full of peril, as it has the potential to fragment and destroy a movement. Eventually, violent tactics could result in repressive state intervention and the suspension of civil rights. Mamdani's reflection on the meaning of 'Arab Spring' associates it with the South African experience of shifting from armed to popular struggle:

> Soweto 1976 was a youthful uprising. It marked a generational shift. In an era when adult political activists had come to accept as a truism that meaningful change could only come through armed struggle, Soweto pioneered an alternative imagination and an alternative mode of struggle. Soweto changed the conventional understanding of struggle from armed to popular struggle. Ordinary people stopped thinking of struggle as something waged by professional fighters, armed guerrillas, with the people cheering from the stands, but as a popular movement with ordinary people as key participants. The potential of popular struggle lay in sheer numbers, guided by a new imagination and new methods of struggle.
>
> (Mamdani 2011, 561)

Movements differ in their objectives and they will choose their strategy accordingly as Della Porta and Diani's categorisation of the 'repertoires of protest' expounds. They introduce three types of 'logics of action' that social movements commit to: (1) the logic of numbers – displaying the strength of support for a movement; (2) the logic of material damage – demonstrating the movement's capacity to interrupt everyday routine; and (3) the logic of bearing witness – expressing the protesters' emotional commitment to the movement's cause (Della Porta and Diani 2020).

Disillusionment with governance systems often drives protest movements, but they do not always aim for greater democratisation. Schaeffer even argues that more attention should be paid to 'ugly movements': 'pro-authoritarian' or restrictionist movements that seek to preserve authority, defend inequality, and deny power to denizens and subjects (Schaeffer 2014). Activism is thus not defined by an anti-system attitude and youth activists strategically choose sides (Yaghi 2015). When youth movements choose to work towards constructive institutional change, e.g., by fighting for a safer, open society with more transparent and responsive governance, their relationships with the existing political establishment (governance structures and their representatives) become more relevant.

When looking at Africa, we see that over the past decade, the frequency of mass demonstrations has increased more than sevenfold. Recent research suggests, moreover, that these nonviolent campaigns have achieved their aims

far better than demonstrations anywhere else in the world (Faupel and Wojtanik 2020). As pointed out by Marks et al. (2019):

> Mass uprisings in Africa have accounted for one in three of the nonviolent campaigns aiming to topple dictatorships around the world. Africa has seen 25 new, nonviolent mass movements—almost twice as many as Asia (…). Since the 1970s, Africa's nonviolent uprisings have also had the highest success rate in the world. Roughly 58 percent of the uprisings aimed at overthrowing dictatorships have succeeded, in countries as diverse as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali, South Africa, Tunisia, Zambia, and, most recently, Algeria and Sudan.

According to Faupel and Wojtanik, the democracy movements in Africa have been so successful in initiating sustainable institutional change because they engaged with political, security, and electoral structures, instead of going against them. The fact that intersectional alliances, a key characteristic of NSM, were at the heart of these movements has proven crucial, building coalitions across diverse groups (Faupel and Wojtanik 2020). The degree of inclusivity in popular mobilisation thus appears to be critical for a movement's successful impact.

Recent research has started addressing how cultural variables influence the perception of political opportunities, and how framing and public visibility impact movements' strategies and chances of success (Della Porta and Diani 2020). To attract new cohorts of activists, movements must address young people's needs and (implicit or explicit) demands and offer relevant options. They can increase their mobilisation potential by using an inclusive master frame, bridging ideological differences, and creating a shared vision that resonates with various societal groups, transcends (ethnic, religious, or regional) identity cleavages (Earl et al. 2017), and facilitates consensus.

Proximity to institutional structures also plays a role when considering the autonomy student organisations have. In this context, Klemenčič and Park (2018) draw attention to the politically influential party-affiliated student organisations that are active on campuses around the world. In many countries, student organisations constitute formal branches of political parties, often participating in student elections (Klemenčič and Park 2018). The level of organisation (hierarchy, centralisation) of the participants in the protest is significant, as it will be easier for authorities to negotiate an agreement with well-led organisations ('unified leadership') or clamp down on them than is the case with the 'leaderless', decentralised oppositions, that often characterise NSM.

When confronted with state repression, responses will differ, depending on whether the participating students are autonomously organised or not. Autonomous organisations could perceive an opportunity to escalate their protest, while non-autonomous organisations are compelled to calculate whether escalation might cost them their access to the state's resources. Being (and remaining) autonomous can thus be vital for a student organisation in terms of success or failure. But whatever the immediate outcome of a confrontation

with the governance system, the relations between protesters and the respective institutions and authorities will be impacted and political behaviours will have changed (Klemenčič and Park 2018).

As the recent African experience shows, outcomes of youthful activism, either violent or peaceful, can have wide-reaching consequences for a country's future. When trying to understand its impact in the African context, it is advisable to heed this caveat:

> The political relevance of large numbers of people taking to the streets to effect change in their lives must be discerned from those people's specific political context, from their particular historical experiences and present conditions. Many of the analytical distinctions that are used to understand protest elsewhere – the division between political and economic protest, between demonstrations and rioting, between violence and non-violence, between direct and indirect action – may not be productive in analysing protest in Africa.
>
> (Branch and Mampilly 2015, 39)

## Conclusion

We have sketched, in broad strokes, the development of research into youth activism from its beginnings and pointed out the major shifts in the perspectives used to gain better understanding of political engagement of adolescents and young adults. The two poles of structure and agency seem to recur in cycles, either emphasising the objective and material or the subjective and cultural as prime reasons for contention and social action.

We have traced how the scope of youth activism research has widened from being mainly focused on political protest in industrial, democratic countries (especially the US and Europe) to encompassing the global arena, including conflict-affected and fragile regions, and broadened to study non-institutional and non-political contention.

Where, over the decades, much of the research has focused on the causes of youth activism, studies into other aspects such as the dynamics and outcomes of youth activism have been limited. However, multidisciplinary approaches are starting to fill these gaps and explore interlinkages with research in a multiplicity of domains, covering a wide spectrum – from political psychology to ethnography. Although much has been made of the role of new technologies and social media within the dynamics of youth movements, the topic remains underexplored.

As student activism is often taken as a proxy for youth activism, nuances in youth participation in social movements tend to become obscured, and the aspects of intergenerational participation as well as gender and other biases sidestepped. The existence and impact of various age cohorts in a movement, as well as their relation to the opportunities for and influence of female and minority participation, therefore, represent fruitful areas for more scrutiny.

Although the literature on socialisation into political engagement, exploring the different factors that impact on youth's involvement in activism, is strong and interdisciplinary, the study of the conditions that are conducive to democratisation have not received systematic attention. Overall, questions remain on the boundaries of youth activism, the changing forms of engagement, the validity of analytical categories in different cultural contexts, and the mechanisms of interaction between the variables involved.

## Notes

1 Compare, e.g., Afrikki Mwinda, a pan-African network that brings together some of Africa's leading youth social movements, including those in the diaspora.
2 Often the age bracket 15–24 is proposed, but 'Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. That's why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups' (UNDESA 2008). Adult status can remain out of reach until well into one's 30s (cf. African Youth Charter, 2006).
3 In the nineteenth century, the forms of collective action began to change, when a national repertoire started replacing parochial and patronage-dependent repertoires (Della Porta and Diani 2020).
4 Compare the emergence of a new pan-African student movement in the 1980s that was more radical in its challenges to the established political power (Dwyer and Zeilig 2012).
5 To such an extent that Eckert could remark:

> Writing an overview about the history of social movements in Africa is mainly an exercise in producing whipped cream out of skimmed milk. Not only does Africa remain largely absent from social science research using a social movement perspective. Social movement theory largely focuses on social political movements in Europe, North and South America and tends to neglect the African continent, with the exception of South Africa.
>
> (Eckert 2017, 220)

6 Earle (2011) presents a useful overview of literature on social movements in 'fragile and conflict-affected states'.
7 In Nigeria and Ghana, the youth, civil society, and student groups pushed for constitutional reforms and the drafting of new constitutions, paving the way for deeper democratisation.
8 Believing that they embodied the aspirations of national liberation, African students saw themselves as the vanguard of the emergent nation. In the 1980s, students in Nigeria spearheaded the fight against the government's SAPs when educational priorities were completely overhauled by structural adjustment (Dwyer and Zeilig 2012).
9 They distinguish 'classic nationalism', 1948–1970; a 'first wave' of social movement activism, 1970–1990; and a 'second wave' of popular, pro-democracy movements across Africa, in the early 1990s.
10 Gould conceptualises 'transnational solidarities' as a new phenomenon and norm that marks contemporary globalisation and a conception that considers the supportive relations we can come to develop with people at a distance (Gould 2007).

11 Benford and Snow were among the first to draw attention to the role of cognitive, affective, and ideational processes in their discussion of 'frame alignment' in people's perception and interpretation of their conditions (Benford and Snow, 2000).
12 Text-messaging and social media platforms have increasingly created additional (virtual) spaces for young people to conduct their dialogues and to connect with people even across identity and geographical borders, opening up global discourses and vocabularies of protest, and fostering transnational solidarities.
13 Gordon and Taft argue that, because of the deficit model, young women particularly suffer in terms of socialisation.
14 E.g., the State of the African Youth Report 2011 noted that African youth have been only marginally involved in civic participation, electoral participation, and political voice, and, in general, barriers to youthful participation in formal governance seem to have increased.
15 The literature is not in agreement on which factors matter most, but there is a clustering of factors that find more support in respective research. The findings Johnston et al. cite are based on the Afrobarometer November 2013 and comprise findings from surveys with youth respondents (age 18 and up) in 13 countries.

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# 3 Regional and Sub-Regional Approaches to Youth and Youth-Led Movements in Africa

## An Examination of the Policies of the African Union and Its Regional Economic Communities

*Mohamed Gibril Sesay*

### Introduction

The African Union (AU), its Regional Economic Communities (RECs)[1] and member states have provided normative reference points, institutions, and programmes for engaging youth and/or their social movements in Africa. This chapter examines the architecture of these normative references – institutional and otherwise – and their functionalities in relation to youth social movements on the continent. It makes the argument that there has been, in the last decade and a half, increasing reference to, and greater concerns about youth in AU and RECs' discourses. This trend constitutes what we call a 'youth turn'. The youth turn was initially a discussion amongst leaders and officials about youth as a threat (rather than an ally) to peace and stability in the continent, especially with the increased rate of civil wars and military coups on the continent, between 1970 and 2000. Youth were not involved in these inaugural discussions; the discussions were 'about' rather than 'with' youth. However, growing democratisation in the region and an increased emphasis on the participation of the general population in governance would lead to the evolution from 'discussions about youth' into 'discussions with youth'. This increasing reference to youth participation in AU discourses has, through mutual influencing, stimulated a similar trend at REC and member state levels.

Another reason for this increased interest in youth participation is the aspiration to accelerate economic integration in Africa. Whilst economic integration had always been a goal of the AU and its RECs, the AU and its precursor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), were more focused on political issues; and member states in the RECs mostly paid token attention to economic integration. However, there was a turn towards economic integration at both AU and RECs level, a process partly influenced by talks of an African Renaissance and the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The aspirations of economic integration would be impossible to action without

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inclusion of non-state actors like the private sector and civil society. Thus, the increasing focus on economic and development issues was not only about the expansion of AU discourses from the political and security to the economic, it was also for the expansion of the AU's participatory base which was to include women and youth.

Young people were also raising their voices using popular arts and other means of expression across the continent, especially with the student protests between the 1970s and 1990s. Additionally, youth are also creating new linguistic identities and ways of speaking, such as Sheng in Kenya, Tsotsitaal in South Africa, and Nouchi in Cote d'Ivoire, to contextualise their hybrid situations (Erasmus and Hurst-Harosh 2020). The educated amongst them are referencing burgeoning international discourses about human rights and civil society, and leveraging new information technologies to express their frustrations and grievances with the continent's elites. Some youth resorted to violent acts, especially where peaceful means of expression did not yield expected results as was the case in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

## Levels of Youth Engagement in Africa

Whilst there are intergovernmental organisations at the global level, like the United Nations (UN) and the Commonwealth of Nations, who were involved or often referenced in youth discourses and engagements in Africa, we mainly focus on continental, sub-continental/regional, sub-regional, and national levels of engagement. The AU is the prime continental level institution for engagement about or with youth, and its strategic continent-wide partners include the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the RECs; and a number of sub-regional institutions including the Mano River Union (MRU), the International Conference of the Great Lakes, and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD). At the national level there are the Ministries of Youth and National Youth Commissions.

Paralleling the various levels categorised above are a number of charters, protocols, strategies, and instruments that inspire and guide programmes, projects, and other actions related to the continent's youth. Some of these instruments directly mention youths. However, a wide array of them that do not specifically look at this generation have been used to increase youth participation and integration in policies and programmes.

At the continental level, key instruments include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the AU Youth Charter and the AU Vision 2063. At the regional level they include, amongst others, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2004, 4, revised in 2015), East African Community (EAC) Principles for Election Observation and Evaluation (2012), and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa's (COMESA) Social Charter (2015).

At the national level, the key policies and strategy documents which directly and almost exclusively relate to young people are the various national youth policies, the designs or redesigns of which are mostly informed by reference to the AU's African Youth Charter. There are also general documents and policies at the national level, which though not specifically on youth, do relate to large segments of the youth population. These include policies and programmes on health and education. They also include legislation and policies relating to employment and livelihoods, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive rights.

Recently, there has been a raft of laws, regulations and other actions relating to social media (Olojo and Allen 2021). Often governments argue that they are designed to protect their societies against crime. However, the cyber laws have also been criticised as attempts to gag expression over the internet which, as youth are the majority users of the internet, seem targeted at their online activities. Thus, youth are finding ways of circumventing the restrictions through the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPN) and other strategies (Koigi 2019). The rise of internet censorship, however, and use of spyware and other surveillance tools by states present grave challenges to youth activism in Africa.

## The AU and Youth

The AU's precursor, the OAU, was founded in 1963, a moment of great hope that marked the independence of the bulk of the countries in the continent. Prior to the establishment of the OAU, the Pan African Youth Movement (PYM) was formed in 1962 and in 1963 was recognised by the continental organisation (Amupanda 2018a). At that time youth were not viewed as a threat to the continent's political and economic fortunes, they were in fact a critical component in the struggle for independence in the continent. However, they were also not integrated into decision-making bodies and were left on the sidelines. For instance, the PYM, which would later become the Pan African Youth Union (PYU), was never fully integrated into the OAU or later the AU.

The transformation of the OAU into the AU in 2000 marked a normative shift in perspective and policymaking outlook, with the youth for the first time being perceived as a threat to political and economic peace and stability. This shift in perception occurred as a result of two major existing trends during the period when the OAU was transitioning to the AU. Firstly, the many violent conflicts on the continent between the 1970s and the early 2000s, and secondly, the second wave of social movements in the continent, with educated and non-educated youth challenging their elites through protests and demonstrations, a precursor to violent state response.

The development and adoption of the African Youth Charter signalled a desire to provide a common approach to youth on the continent and it inspired the development of several National Youth Policies, with institutions established to roll out the policies in member states of the AU. This drive was complemented by the AU's declaration of a decade of the youth from 2009 to

2019 (and its subsequent African Youth Decade Plan of Action Framework [AU 2011]); the Union's declaration of 2017 as the Year of Harnessing Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth; and the development of the AU's African Governance Architecture Youth Strategy (AGA-YES). These normative commitments have also been envisaged as aligned with the Union's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its African Agenda 2063.

Following the shift, there were also reinterpretations of documents predating the youth turn to justify youth inclusion. These included references to Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of people to choose representatives; the 1990 African Charter for Popular Participation in Development, in relation to involving people in economic and political governance; and Article 3(g) of the Constitutive Act of the AU which requires the AU to promote 'democratic principles, and institutions, popular participation and good governance'.

The AU has differential capabilities in relation to the sectors it engages with on the continent. Whilst it has grown to include other sectors as areas of concern, it had historically been more engaged in issues relating to peace and security across Africa. Thus, the youth turn and increasing mention of youth in AU documents and processes on peace and security were initially *about* youth, rather than *with* youth or even tailored *for* youth. Youth participation in essence was not on the table during those initial periods. However, another process was going on that would impact how youth are looked at within the AU. This process was related to the AU moving towards seeing governance issues in the continent as integral to peace and security, emphasising civilian democratic governance over military rule that had once plagued the continent. In line with this, at least at the declarative level, the discourses on governance emphasised inclusion and participation, and would rub off on youth issues. The AU's 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, for instance, calls on member states in Article 31(1) to promote participation of social groups with special needs, including youth and people with disabilities, in the governance process.

A vital question then was how do these declarative-level commitments to inclusion and participation of youth play out within the AU itself at the practical level? Actions at the practical level require greater commitment, in terms of resources and institutions, than declarative-level pronouncements. It is also at this level that the AU continues to face challenges, which also demonstrates the limitations of its commitment to youth inclusion and participation in the continent.

Participation is about members of beneficiary social groups taking part in a process. Participation has many facets, including the stages of the process the social group(s) are involved in: the formulative stage, decision-making stage, implementation, or evaluative and reflective stages. In an ideal world, a truly inclusive and participatory process would be a holistic one involving all social groups at every stage of the process; this in most instances does not reflect reality given the complexity of multilateral governance processes like the AU's.

Armstein (1969), Connor (1988), and several other theorists discuss participation in terms of ladders of participation, showing how different rungs indicate the quality of the participatory process. Thus, one may look at participation in terms of whether beneficiary groups control the process, are consulted, or informed in a tokenistic or performative way. The AU's approach has been largely symbolic and disconnected from decision-making processes that would truly impact youth on the ground. Despite this, the institution has appointed a Youth Ambassador to be a champion of youth affairs within the AU, and also has AU regional youth ambassadors. They serve as the organisation's political envoys to the African youth, promoting an intergenerational approach to the continent's general and youth-specific challenges.

The AU has both direct and indirect means of engagement with the African youth. Indirect engagement includes leveraging its policies and charters through RECs and government agencies in member states. Direct engagement includes involving the youth in AU traditional political processes including summits and other high-level delegation meetings.[2] Other examples of direct engagement are the establishment of the AU Youth for Peace Programme (Y4P) in 2018. These actions demonstrate some changes to the initial approach to youth.

The AU has worked over the years to set up systems and structures that will help to strengthen its capacity to bolster socioeconomic integration and development in the continent. This led to the adoption of Agenda 2063 in June 2015, and its most ambitious economic programme, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The organisation seeks to build on the African Economic Community (AEC) established by the Treaty of Abuja amongst African states in 1991 that came into force in 1994.

The NEPAD was a key development integration programme of the AU launched in 2002 and fully merged into the AU in 2010, through the establishment of the NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency. Since its transition into the AU Development Agency (AUDA), NEPAD promotes good governance through its African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and key integration programmes such as the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa.

Recognising the importance of youth participation, NEPAD launched a Strategic Framework for a NEPAD Youth Programme 2005–2015. The organisation also has a NEPAD Youth Initiative. In 2019, NEPAD launched the Continent Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategy as a comprehensive framework for developing the technical skills of the African youth. It has also created the Young Professionals Programme that coordinated its activities with the AfDB and UNECA to organise consultations on the envisaged Agenda 2063. These youth consultations resulted in the formation of the AU Youth Working Group, which later became the AU Youth Commission (AYC). The AYC held its first General Assembly during the AU Summit in 2017 and elected its founding leadership (Amupanda 2018a).

Formal discussions relating to Agenda 2063 commenced in 2013. Following consultations all over the continent (which as indicated above included youth

participants), AU Heads of State adopted the agenda in January 2015. It has seven aspirations, and particularly salient for our discussions is Aspiration Six that talks about having an Africa reliant on people-centred development and the potential of women and youth. A flagship project of Agenda 2063 is the establishment of an AfCFTA. An agreement relating to this was signed in 2018 (AfCFTA 2020).

It must be noted that AU's leveraging on the economic front constitutes an expansion beyond its traditional political emphasis and original fixation on seeing participation in its key affairs as a preserve for heads of state. Thus, AfCFTA envisages greater roles for those outside political leadership, and directly involves Africa businesses and civil society groups, including women and young people, in an agreement leveraged by the AU. Article 27(d) of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services particularly mandated state parties to 'improve the export capacity of both formal and informal service suppliers, with particular attention to small and medium size, women and youth service suppliers' (AfCFTA 2020).

Equally important in these sectoral and participatory expansions has been the AU establishment of the African Economic Forum which brings together African political leadership, the private sector and academics to promote economic transformation. Similarly integral to these processes is the inclusion of the African diaspora, as could be seen in the creation of the African Institute for Remittances. In a sense, the AU's economic turn coming at about the same time as its youth turn would result in greater involvement of young people in AU economic processes than had been the case with its political processes. However, there are still enormous challenges to even this inclusion and participation in AU discourses and action on economic processes. During consultations on an AU study on Youth in 2018, young people in every region of the continent whilst acknowledging some of the commitments already made by the AU, felt that 'it is time for the AU to "talk less and act more"' (AU Consultations with Youth 2018). This sentiment was echoed during the 2019 AUDA-NEPAD youth engagement, where participants made pleas for the youth not to be left behind (AUDA-NEPAD News May 2019).

Whilst the many institutional changes have indicated that youth participation has been well received, there are strong undercurrents of hesitance in relation to youth participation, particularly where young people seem to want to participate in a more autonomous way. In 2017, for instance, the AU dissociated itself from the African Youth Commission's (AYM) inaugural session, which elected the AYM's founding leadership, because, as it stated in a press release, 'we have not been involved in the coordination of the event' (African Union Youth Division 2017). Similarly, in 2018 the AU dissociated itself from the historic continental youth organisation – the PYU – which had been closely allied with the AU since its inception. Amupanda (2018b) argues that these two continental youth organisations were seen as seeking more autonomy, whilst the AU was keener on a bureaucratised AU-controlled youth intermediation process.

## RECs and Youth in Africa

The evolution of youth integration into the activities of the RECs fed from different streams. Streams that result from increasing emphases on youth activities at the UN and AU levels, some of which are discussed above. Then there are those that emanate from concerns with peace, especially as large numbers of youth were part of fighting forces – such as the involvement by ECOWAS in various peace-keeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, Cote d'Ivoire in the 2000s and the Sahel post 2010. The same is also true in relation to Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the conflicts in the Great Lakes and the Lake Chad Basin. In addition, there are also streams from sociopolitical and economic configurations unique to particular regions or subregions. This could be seen in actions relating to concerns about jihadist violence in some ECOWAS states in and around the Sahel; ethnic and jihadist violence in EAC member states; or youths and land rights in SADC. Lastly, social policies in the different countries relating to education and health, has impacted youth engagement in the RECs as could be seen in actions relating to maternal and infant mortality, HIV/AIDS, the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa in 2014, and the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020.

All these streams have followed a number of normative and institutional paths, including youth charters, creation of specialised agencies or specific mechanisms relating to youth, and programmes issuing from these institutions and processes. We discuss these normative and institutional structures below.

## Normative Institutional Frameworks for Youth Engagement in the RECs

### *ECOWAS*

The Treaty of Lagos in 1975 established the ECOWAS to foster economic integration amongst its member states. This soon expanded to include political objectives in a revised Treaty in 1993, mainly as a result of political instability and civil wars in the region. In relation to increasing participation, a major development at the declarative level was the resolution by the Authority of Heads of State of ECOWAS in 2007 to transform the community from one of states to an ECOWAS of people.

Article 1(a) of the ECOWAS 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance stipulates 'popular participation in decision-making' as integral to members' state governance systems. Article 42 makes reference to youth training and development and Article 43 mandates the ECOWAS secretariat put structures in place for 'effective implementation of common policies and programmes relating to the education and the promotion of the welfare of women and youth'.[3] Articles 85–88 of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework stipulate that Youth Empowerment in the region is a goal relevant to realising the ECOWAS Revised treaty.[4]

The primary institution within ECOWAS for dealing with youth issues and engaging young people is the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre. It was formed in 2005 and headquartered in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. However, though ECOWAS was founded in 1975, it was only 28 years later in 2003 that it held its first Youth Forum where youths from the region developed the Abuja Youth Development and Empowerment Strategy. ECOWAS also has a Youth Volunteer Scheme. The ECOWAS revised 1993 treaty Article 6 on Social Affairs stipulates the inclusion of youth, women, and professional organisations in its activities.

## Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

COMESA was established in 1993 and comprised 21 members, from Libya in the North to Eswatini in the South. Many of its member states belong to other RECs, including SADC and the EAC. Several articles in COMESA's Social Charter adopted by the REC in 2015 affirm the integration of youths in member states' socioeconomic development. However, by April 2020, only four out of the 21 member states of the REC had signed the Charter and none had ratified it. To facilitate implementation of the objectives of the Social Charter, the REC developed a Youth Programme in 2015. The REC's declarative commitment to youth was reaffirmed in June 2021 when its Assistant Secretary General in Charge of Programmes stated that, 'we cannot continue to do business as usual without the participation of the youth who hold more than half the sky. We are obliged and mandated to develop policies to engage the youth more meaningfully'.[5]

Whilst youth may benefit from COMESA's commitments and action for freer movement of persons and goods, they are institutionally marginalised in the association. The first-ever meeting of COMESA's Ministers of Youth took place in June 2021 and there were no specialised agencies dealing with youth issues. A Technical Committee on Gender was established in 2002, in line with the COMESA treaty; and the Division of Gender and Social Affairs was created in 2009. This division presently has responsibilities for youth affairs. Though it has amongst its aims promoting youth empowerment and sociocultural development in member states, and within COMESA institutions, the Division's major activities are focused on women.

The REC's Project on Youth Engagement in Democratic Governance and Socio-Economic Development Processes in Africa in the early 2020s is its major project on youth. The COMESA Youth Internship and Volunteer Scheme was adopted in 2016, and the COMESA Programme on Peace and Security promotes youth as integral to its support for the AU's Silencing the Gun by 2020 campaign.

However, broader agreements amongst COMESA members, and the tripartite agreement between COMESA, EAC, and SADC members on removing trade barriers, as well as easing cross border movement of persons amongst

them, would be greatly beneficial to young people as the most mobile – electronically and physically – of the REC's population. The signing of Member states to the African Continent Free Trade Area also holds great promise for unleashing youth potential across the REC.

However, the lack of knowledge of these processes by youth is a major hindrance. Furthermore, the implementation of youth programmes is hampered by lack of funds, and limited youth participation in COMESA's activities. Often, the RECs have to rely on support from multilateral and donor agencies to implement their strategies. For instance, in 2019 COMESA relied on the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation to support its Youth Boot Camps; and in 2021, the REC offered scholarships to students doing masters courses in regional integration through funding from the European Union and the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (COMESA Newsletter Vol 1 January 2021).

## East African Community (EAC)

The EAC was founded in 1967, dissolved in 1977, and re-established in 1993. Article 120(c) of the treaty for the establishment of the EAC stipulates a common approach for involving youths in, and mainstreaming youth issues in, EAC activities. Youth participation is also referenced in the EAC Principles for Election Observation and Evaluation. The EAC has a youth policy adopted in 2013 that aims at harmonising youth policies in the region, promoting youth participation and enjoyment of the fruits of political, economic and social integration, and re-establishing regional mechanisms for promoting 'youth culture, values, morals, and ethics'.

The EAC's Vision 2050 which articulates the 'Community's desired future state' sees the huge population of persons under 35 (80 per cent of the total population) as both an opportunity and a risk. It lists as a major concern youth unemployment in the region and commits the REC to addressing this through a plethora of measures. These include those that support ICT, skills development and centres of excellence, which, without mentioning the categorisations, the term 'youth' refers to youth-oriented and youth-targeted programmes.

The EAC's major institutional platforms on youth issues include its Sectoral Council Meetings of Ministers of Gender, Youth, Children, Social Protection, and Community Development. Another major platform is the Sectoral Council on Education, Science and Technology, Culture and Sport. Part of this portfolio includes areas that are directly relevant to processes of maturation, including training, sport, cultural activities, and technology. The EAC's Directorate of Social Sector Development is responsible for the Community's youth affairs through its Department of Gender and Community Development. Though the EAC has several youth ambassadors through whom it sometimes seeks youth engagement, it mostly deals with young people in the region through the respective youth ministries in member states. The REC's direct programmes within member states are very few and far between. They include

university debates, bringing youth occasionally to its headquarters in Arusha and establishing EAC Youth Clubs, and EAC Integration Clubs.

## Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)

SADC had its origins in the 1980 adoption of the Lusaka Declaration to establish a coordinating mechanism of frontline states called the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). The major aim of SADCC at the time was to reduce dependence on apartheid South Africa, and rather institute an integration arrangement amongst its members. This move sought to align itself to changes with the end of apartheid and transform SADCC into the SADC in 1992.

Two-thirds of the population in SADC member states is below the age of 35. In 2000, the REC's Protocol on Education and Training came into force. The Protocol, amongst others, commits member states to providing universal basic education, promoting unhindered access to education for students across borders, and establishing regional centres of specialisation and centres of excellence. In 2003, the REC adopted the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights in SADC, which commits member states in Article 7(e) to provide vocational training for young persons. In 2015, the REC developed the SADC Strategy and Business Plan on Youth Empowerment and Participation for Sustainable Development. SADC Vision 2050, in its Cross Cutting Issues Section, commits towards having by 2050 a community where 'our youth are empowered'. During the SADC Youth Forum in Lilongwe, Malawi in 2015, the assembled youths prepared a draft 'SADC Declaration for Accelerating Youth Empowerment and Participation for Sustainable Development' for presentation to SADC heads of state.

The SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Plan 2020–2030 states that the REC will pay special attention to women, youth, and children in its efforts to enhance opportunities for citizens of member states. It also commits the REC and state parties to be more inclusive 'in the formulation, deliberation, adoption and implementation of regional protocols, strategies, policies and programmes… through accelerated equal participation of men, women, and especially youth in regional development, socioeconomic and political processes and both regional and national levels' (SADC 2020, 10). A key goal of the SADC Policy Framework for Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) is to facilitate access to youth education. Furthermore, the SADC Open and Distance Learning Policy Framework promotes technology and provision of relevant education through a SADC Centre for Distance Learning, and a SADC Virtual University of Transformation envisaged to promote needed skills in the region.

The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections of 2015 urges youth participation in elections. The principles acknowledge that youth, women and persons with disabilities are often excluded from

participation in decision-making processes, and envisage the principles as part of the RECs corrective response to that marginalisation. Generally, the REC and its member states start youth programmes from a non-participatory basis. This is often in reference to sectors where the states provide services for youth, mostly relating to education, skills acquisition, and employment.

## Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

ECCAS was established in 1983 but was dormant from 1992 to 1998 as a result of lack of funds and the conflicts in the region, especially in the Great Lakes region and later in the Central African Republic. Following a summit of ECCAS Heads of State in 1998, this REC became functional again with its primary focus being enhancing peace and security in the region as well as promoting economic and monetary integration.

ECCAS focuses on peace and security issues as a result of the many violent conflicts in the region, leaving it little room for activities in other areas, including youth affairs. Thus, even at the declarative level, it has not made a youth turn. Additionally, the REC's decision-making structure is dominated by its Council of Heads of States, many of whom are gerontocrats with little inclination for youth participation (Zukane and Tangang 2017). This is further compounded by the fact that the secretariat of the ECCAS is the weakest amongst the RECs recognised as building blocks for economic integration of the continent. Without adequate staff, the ECCAS Secretariat lacks capacity to design programmes, including youth programmes and mechanisms for implementing them. Up to 2017, ECCAS had no youth policy; this was also the case with several of its member states (Zukane and Tangang 2017). Member states do not feel part of ECCAS, and their involvement in its activities is limited (Elowson and Wilkund 2011). Chad is seen as mainly concerned with its relationships with Nigeria and Libya; Rwanda and Burundi are mostly committed to the EAC; and Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo are more invested in the better-organised SADC.

While economic integration has always been a goal in the region, this has been primarily driven by the Central African Economic and Monetary Union (CEMAC) rather than by ECCAS. Consequently, ECCAS has been passive on the economic front, meaning its facilitation and participation of non-traditional political players, like business people and youths, in its processes, has been poor.

The REC's greater focus on hard security issues discussed at the high political level of heads of state, conflicting loyalties of member states to other RECs, limited financial and human resources at the secretariat, and a general climate of mistrust amongst leaders who are often involved on opposite sides of conflicts within each other's territories, all hinder attention to the design and implementation of soft human security programmes relating to youths and other social groups.

## The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)

The Union comprising five North African states is moribund and as a result has no specific youth programmes. However, North African youth were pivotal in starting the Arab Spring that has had reverberations across Africa. Youth protests for political freedom and economic enhancement led to the fall of several gerontocratic regimes in North Africa. Despite this, there has not been a proactive approach by the REC to engage and constructively work with youth to promote peace, security, and stability in the region. As such, there have been several negative developments between the youth and the elites in the region, with countries such as Libya transformed into a conduit for arms and fighters into the Sahelian region in West Africa. This created its own chain reactions, such as instability in Mali, and the strengthening of jihadist movements in the region, including the Boko Haram around the Lake Chad region.

## Youth-Led Social Movements and the AU, RECs, and Member States

The goals of youth-led social movements are diverse. Some advocate for participation, such as the 'youth4parliament' and the 'not too young to run' movements in Malawi and Nigeria. Others advocate for the re-memorialisation of public squares, as in the 'Rhodes-must-fall' movement in South Africa, and for particular economic policies, such as protests against food and fuel price hikes in Mozambique in 2010 and Nigeria in 2012. Some youth groups have also been very vocal about democratisation, calling for the ousting of long-term leaders as in the case of Egypt, Burkina Faso, Gambia, and Tunisia. Yet other groups have focused more narrowly on social issues such as sexual exploitation, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and femicide; a notable example is the viral #shutitdown hashtag protests in Namibia. And increasingly, youth groups have also begun to raise awareness about environmental issues.

We distinguish between two types of youth movements – the more high-profile groups which are visible, acting in physical public spaces, and groups that are less visible. The more visible of the youth movements are often those focused on the instant, rather than the long term, often wanting a response now, rather than later, and wanting visible markers of these responses: for example, reduction of fuel prices, ousting of leaders, dismantling of police units, or a reduction in university fees. The less visible movements are those that work mostly in local communities and do not necessarily directly confront the state and its elites, but rather engage youth and other community members on socio-economic and political issues.

Whilst in some instances these youth movements address one particular issue, they often evolve to include wider social issues, as was the case in Sudan, where protests initially focused on the increases in food and fuel prices but soon escalated into demands for regime change.[6] The events in Sudan followed a pattern first observed during the Arab spring. Similarly, in Tunisia, protests began

as a reaction to the harassment of a young man by local officials and culminated in the ousting of autocratic leadership in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt (Mansouri 2020).

In the context of these social pressures, the responses of the AU and its respective RECs to these movements range from indifference to active involvement in mediation and military intervention. Typically, multilateral involvement occurs when the situation is on the brink of a dire political crisis, as was the case in Burkina Faso, Central Africa Republic, Mali, and the Gambia. However, there is an inconsistency in interventions by the AU and RECs. It seems as if the AU and RECs are quicker to intervene in situations of relatively smaller states – Burkina Faso, Gambia – as opposed to larger states or regional hegemons like South Africa or Nigeria. For example, ECOWAS was involved in seeking solutions to the protests against leaders in Gambia and Burkina Faso, but not so in relation to the youth #EndSARS protest against police brutality in Nigeria. SADC worked to find solutions to youth demonstrations in Madagascar and election-related violence in Zimbabwe, but not to the re-memorialisation movement in South Africa.

In situations relating to youth movements where the AU and the RECs seek to intervene, they have employed a number of different strategies, ranging from issuing statements of concern, mediation between parties or making threats, to sanctions and/or military intervention. Mediation was the route followed in Burkina Faso during the ousting of President Campaore; the threat of military intervention was a decisive act in the Gambia after initial mediation efforts had almost failed to get President Yahya Jammeh to step down in 2017; issuing statements of concern was the preferred option in the case of Sudan in 2019 and Egypt during the Arab Spring.

As mentioned above, many emerging youth movements take a short-term approach to effecting social change; by contrast RECs and the AU favour a more long-term approach, often perceived as inaction by disenfranchised youth. Thus, given the mismatch in outlooks there is often a crisis of understanding of what truly constitutes inclusive participation and inclusion, and what tangible solutions can be presented. Attending demonstrations or using social media tends to be more participatory and inclusive to young people than the high-level conventional political mediation organised by the AU or REC, which are not seen as youth-friendly spaces. Adding to this friction is a long history of unfulfilled promises to the youth by the political leadership of the AU and RECs, which over time has eroded their faith in long-term and less visible solutions. Ultimately, whilst there may be a rich harvest of democratic discourse in the various RECs, a sort of burgeoning idealistic democratic dividend, what we may call the material democratic dividend for youth, is limited. This imbalance has negatively impacted the youth's perception of the AU and RECs.

The integration goals espoused by RECs hinge on the promotion of a sense of 'region-ness' amongst citizens of member states – the recognition, strong feelings for, and solidarity with, the economic and political integration goals of the REC. These goals are intrinsically linked with the welfare of citizens.

A study of this phenomenon amongst youths in SADC reveals that young people generally have a poor commitment to this 'formal regionness' as promoted by the REC (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2015). This is consistent with the perspective of youths in the other RECs, where they are largely unaware of youth policies at the continental, regional, and even national level.

The youth generation are not homogenous in terms of their internet use or their taking advantage of emerging trends. There is an intra-youth digital divide, in addition to the gender divide, the urban–rural divide, and the divide between the literate, tertiary-educated and non-literate, non-tertiary educated. Young people, in relation to these divides, are differentially marginalised (Maina 2012). Youths who are male, urban, internet savvy, and tertiary educated have greater opportunities than those on the other side of the divide. They dominate across most sectors of the youth terrain, including the often-limited youth engagements with RECs, the AU and extra-continental organisations – which often bypass young people who are either poorly educated, non-literate and living in rural areas and/or who could not speak the official languages of the AU.

Even the youth organisations and social movements the RECs do engage with are often plagued by lack of research and documentation, and there is little or no information on programmes that have worked. Many movements arise as a result of an awareness of deprivations but, lacking resources, they may fizzle out prematurely. However, the digital space, particularly social media, and globalisation are creating new opportunities for various youth social movements in Africa.

These emerging spaces of participation include both youth-created and youth-appropriated spaces, the latter being organisations or spaces initially established by elders and non-youth adults but which youths have taken over, or having learned from older adults, they seceded and formed into their own spaces to pursue their interests. These youth-created and appropriated spaces could be either uplifting or troubling.

In Sierra Leone, local youth created the Bike Riders Association through which thousands of young people are securing livelihoods, youth who during the civil war in the 1990s had hitherto been used by adult political operatives and would turn their guns against the political leadership and deploy violence on their own (the youth) behalf in what Kandeh (1999) called 'subaltern appropriation of elite violence'.

Youth creation of liminal organisations – those in the twilight between the day of law and the dark of the illegal – would reinforce perceptions of youth as a threat. These often lead to what have been termed 'panic policies' – where fears relating to youths unleash a raft of policies, often punitive in orientation or murderous in intent, or one-size-fits-all in implementation, that would further alienate large sections of the youth population.

For instance, Kenya's counter-insurgency was based on a religious profiling that would alienate Muslim youth (UNFPA 2018, 27). Panic as a way of engaging or responding to youth is growing in the continent. However, not all young people are engaged in violent or illegal activities. For instance, despite

the loud musings about youth and gangs in Africa, only about 3–5 per cent of youth are in gangs. Most are engaged in peaceful activities (UNFPA 2018).

Even so, it appears that police forces are ensconced in adversarial engagements with youth, leading to negative perceptions of police by youths all over the continent (UNFPA 2018: 24). By way of example, Nigeria in 2020, saw the youth-organised '#EndSARS' social media and on-the-ground social movement protest against a particular violent wing of the Nigerian police.

Youth have in some respects, though unintentionally, influenced the organisational modus operandi of RECs. For instance, the conflicts in Central Africa, in which youth have participated in large numbers, crippled the effectiveness of ECCAS. However, in the case of ECOWAS, the conflicts led to the REC's strengthening, with the creation of regional responses that ended the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and left in their wake an architecture for interventions in crisis-prone countries.

African youth are raising their voices, using popular arts to draw attention to their concerns, forming new linguistic identities, organising demonstrations, referencing burgeoning international discourses about human rights, and leveraging new technologies to get heard. Furthermore, youth domination of the new technologies of work, of getting things done – the information revolution and its tools – provides opportunities for their visibility in the offices and processes of the AU and RECs. This, coupled with their sheer numbers in the continent – more than two-thirds of the population in member states – makes ignoring them difficult. The uptick in virtual meetings and work practices during the COVID-19 pandemic is also providing opportunities for increasing youth participation in spaces they could not earlier navigate.

Despite the points above, there remains various challenges. We agree with suggestions that often these challenges are the result of the AU and RECs being very aspirational at the declarative level – much like politicians at national state levels – but lacking the institutional capabilities to translate these aspirations into practical gains.

## Notes

1 There are eight RECs in Africa and they are the UMA, the COMESA, the CENSAD, the EAC, the ECCAS, the ECOWAS, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the SADC. See: https://au.int/en/organs/recs (Accessed on 10 August 2021).
2 For instance, in September 2018 the Peace and Security Council of the AU in commemoration of the Africa Youth Day held an open session on the theme 'Youth, Peace and Security' during which youth organisations made presentations. The communiqué at the meeting recommended the establishment of the AU Youth Envoy.
3 See the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Governance. The Protocol was under review at the time of writing this chapter, with one of the aims being to mainstream women, youth, and People with Disability in the activities of the Commission.
4 See: https://old.ecowas.int/publications/en/framework/ECPF_final.pdf (Accessed on 21 November 2021).

5 Statement by Dr Kipyego Chelegut, Assistant Secretary General of COMESA for Programmes, Three-day Virtual Regional Youth Affairs Expert Technical Meeting, 14–16 June 2021.
6 See: https://theconversation.com/how-sudans-protesters-upped-the-ante-and-forced-al-bashir-from-power-115306 (Accessed on 20 November 2021).

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# 4 Going Virtual

## Social Media and Youth-Led Social Movements in Africa

*Edmore Chitukutuku*

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of social media in enhancing the agency, mobilisation and effectiveness of youth in interfacing with the state, especially on socio-economic and political issues. I argue that the increased militarisation and securitisation of the state by the ruling elite in Africa has closed down space for criticising and engaging with the state for many actors including the youth. The youth who are marginalised and denied space and voices on governance issues have harnessed technological developments in the field of social communication to foster counter-hegemonic conversations. In this context social media has provided space for political articulation outside the control of the state. African states have invested a lot of resources in monopolising access to and circulation of information by controlling the establishment and operations of public and private media. The state has also policed spaces of political mobilisation and protests, such as the streets. I take a broader definition of 'youth' as one that is not determined by age, to reflect the diversity of actors in 'youth-led' movements (Kadoda & Hale 2015). Membership and leadership of these youth-led movements range from young to older professionals in their thirties and forties.

On what constitutes social movements, Chiumbu (2015) notes that theorists converge on a definition that views social movements as actors coming together to foster some form of change. In this chapter, I adopt della Porta and Diani's (2000) definition of social movements as interactive networks of people who have shared beliefs and a sense of solidarity and who come together to take part in collective action to challenge the status quo. This definition is useful in the context of this chapter because social media technologies have created what Gukurume (2019, 49) calls, 'a virtual community of dissent that actively fostered counterhegemonic discourses'. As a virtual community, social media enabled leaders of social movements and their supporters to congregate for purposes of strategising and organising protests regardless of their temporal and spatial locations. Sinpeng (2021) notes that 'digitally mediated political movements, or hashtag activism is a specific form of activism whereby activists and ordinary people engage in collective contentious activities on social media platforms

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such as Twitter'. He further argues that hashtags are important for political mobilisation because they link particular words or phrases making online content easily searchable and shareable *en masse*. Hashtags are not just markers of significance for particular issues or events; they also serve as agenda-setting tools and discursive frames that can be used to create shared identities (Yang 2016). Twitter algorithms can also lead people to content by listing trending hashtags based on number of mentions, retweets or likes.

In Africa, for many social movements, the idea of meeting physically, even for purposes of strategising, had become very dangerous because of state surveillance and infiltration by state security agents. In this context many ideas could not see the light of day as leaders were arrested, abducted or murdered before they could get to the implementation stage. The fear of state brutality discouraged citizens from attending meetings, marches and protests. A virtual community can take any form and shape, and can meet anytime without the need for government permission and without violating any laws. People can attend meetings in places where they feel comfortable. Social media offers the virtual community methods of making themselves invisible to the state, such as using 'ghost accounts' to hide their identities, retweeting, liking and sharing without making their position on the movement known. Prior to the emergence of social media technologies, governments crackdown on social movements incapacitated them and at times forced them to go underground. I argue that in the era of social media, social movements do not need to go underground or die, they simply go virtual and continue to shape public opinion and challenge governments to be attentive to their needs. Even without physical action such as protests, the idea of awakening and conscientisation of youth to their challenges through conversations and debates makes governments uncomfortable; this can be used to remove governments through peaceful means such as elections. Virtual is the new underground for many activists and social movements.

## Methodology

In conducting this research, I adopted online and virtual research methods which mostly focused on conversations people have on social media, especially Twitter and online media archives. Online research focused mostly on debates which individuals following several hashtags engaged in. I followed hashtags such as #ShutDownZimbabwe, #ThisFlag, as well as the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement, #EndSARS in Nigeria and The Arab Spring. I also conducted digital online media and social media research in order to understand how youth appropriated social media platforms to demand reforms, regime change and accountability, an end to corruption and exclusion from governance and decision-making processes across the continent. One of the advantages of following these conversations on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook is that they provided evidence of the confrontations, engagements and debates among activists, ordinary netizens and political authorities.

In the context of Zimbabwe, official reports and documents such as tenders and procurement agreements, court papers and Auditor General's reports are scrutinised and shared as evidence of malpractices in government. The national constitution is shared and cited as a way of showing government's responsibilities under law. Elsewhere, videos, images, experiences and stories of corruption, police brutality and other forms of misrule are shared widely as rallying points for discourses and conversations about the challenges young people face. These are used to mobilise young people to action in the streets. Government and ruling party officials are tagged in these conversations as a way of holding government officials accountable. Digital mainstream media reports gave me detailed descriptions of arrests and court processes for those who would have undertaken protests in response to what would have been shared on social media. The reports also constituted interviews with protesters as well as government officials, detailing the kind of state interventions in response to these riots.

Disadvantages of online research are that it is not possible to have follow-up and probing conversations with people on their views and opinions. However, people do probe each other in these conversations in critical ways, which allows for varied responses and deeper and critical engagements on the subject matter. It is often difficult to get background information on the people who engage activists, social movements and government officials beyond what they put on their bios, however, at times this information gives enough about a person and their opinion during conversations does help in understanding what they stand for. Recently Twitter has introduced Spaces, as additional platforms which people can use to discuss pertinent topics and themes in real time. Spaces have enabled conversations to go beyond the 140 characters allowed when tweeting. Online ethnography is not different from traditional ethnography, where the researcher is present in the field of research and interviews people in real time in their surroundings. In supporting this position, Hoolachan (2016) has argued that online ethnography and traditional ethnography are similar in the sense that both are applied to achieve similar objectives, such as understanding how people interact, construct and make sense of the world. Ethnography, both traditional and online, studies social, political, economic, religious and health aspects of people's lives. Online ethnography is traditional ethnography that has been adapted to study online communities.

This chapter is organised into three sections, first I give a broader literature review looking at how social media enhanced the agency of the youth in engaging with the government, challenging its hegemony in various countries on the African continent. I also engage with how the state has responded to this 'power' of social media in aiding protests, through abduction, torture and extrajudicial killings of activists and leaders of social movements. Lastly, I engage with three specific cases of Egypt on the Arab Springs, which are credited with inspiring all social media activism, protests and uprisings on the African continent and beyond. On Zimbabwe this chapter engages with the emergence and effectiveness of hashtag-based social movements and Nigeria's

#EndSARS protests on the ability of social media activism to bring about change and reforms. Analytically, I discuss how social media has enabled youth-led social movements to adopt going virtual as a strategy for survival and remaining relevant in the face of brutality and persecution. I also look at how social movements have used their online presence to expose state brutality and create broad-based alliances all over the world.

## Social Media in Africa: A Broader Look

I have argued in the introduction that social movements do not die or go underground in the context of social media, they simply go virtual and instead of dying, they multiply. Their effectiveness is visible in the way in which they manage to make political moves and how they provoke responses from the state and the international community. In the context of Africa, the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Twitter, as spaces for political participation and mobilisation, was enabled by the growth of mobile internet services. Bosch, Admire and Ncube (2021) have explored how Facebook is used as a communicative platform for political discourse in Zimbabwe and Kenya. They argue that social media has emerged as an arena for political communication widely used by individuals and political parties for campaigning and mobilisation, and by citizens to choreograph various forms of protests. Social media emerged as a new platform through which people organise and imagine political discourse (Omanga 2019:175). As an extension of the public sphere, social media has permeated the everyday life of citizens, creating additional space for citizens to share information and engage via innovative communication practices with elected and unelected officials. These platforms have enabled activists and social media movements to mobilise their constituencies across space and time. Social media or online spaces do not displace institutional politics but are a supplemental domain that allows citizens to engage, debate, strategise and mobilise collectively online away from traditional forms of state surveillance.

Puschra (2013), writing the preface to *The Future We the People Need*, notes that the new social movements that emerged in the aftermath of the Arab Spring are overwhelmingly young and take a fresh look at their future and the future of their country and the planet. These social movements have discovered the power to start a transformative process to change established political, economic, social and cultural structures and institutions to make them responsive to their plights. Social media enabled young people's ability to freely analyse, develop and express their needs and interests. New social movements that started with the Arab Springs in 2011 have challenged the unequal state of the world and targeted the large and increasing inequalities within and between societies and countries for direct action. They have addressed lack of governmental accountability and are creating new spaces for political analyses, debate, mobilisation and engagement through the use of social media. They are forging social networks that reach far beyond friends, neighbours and families

and creating safe spaces to discuss controversial topics, form new alliances and challenge governments. In this way they help give more people a voice and contribute to recreating democracy. Social movements highlight the need for change and for governments and political parties to take a more responsive attitude to the people's needs. In the same manner Iwilade (2013) argues that the youth in Nigeria appropriated social media applications to mobilise protest, thereby making their voices heard. Lynch (2012) noted that in Egypt young people with common experiences, goals and grievances used social media to come together to force government to listen to their concerns.

Social media was attractive to the youth movements because it offered an unprecedented space for ordinary people and journalists alike to bypass and influence traditional information flows (Mare 2013). Since the Arab Spring of 2010, all protests and uprisings in Africa and the wider world had in common the use of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube as political organising tools (Fullam 2017). There exists a growing body of scholarship investigating the nexus between social media and social movements (Bennett & Segerberg 2012, 2013; Bennett, Segerberg & Walker 2014; Castells 2009, 2012; Gerbaudo 2012, 2014; Mattoni & Treré 2014; Tufecki & Wilson 2012). Rane and Salem (2012) argued that social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, played a central role in capacitating social movements for political reform and regime change during the Arab Springs. These events have been described as 'Facebook' and 'Twitter Revolutions'. They argued that social media can be credited with the emergence and achievement of the goals of the uprisings in a number of ways. Social media facilitated inter- or intra-group communication and information dissemination. The Arab Spring prompted much interest among academics, policymakers and others on the intersection between youth activism and social media (Kadoda & Hale 2015). The effectiveness of the use of social media in the Arab Springs influenced the activism of Sudanese youth movements between 2011 and 2013. Social media played a significant role in facilitating political and community engagements in the demonstrations calling for regime change in Sudan. Kadoda et al. noted that groups that emerged in Sudan adopted names that followed the Egyptian '*Kefaya*' ('Enough') trend. These were *Abena* ('We Will Not Comply'), *Isena* ('We Rebel') and *Margna* ('We Came Out'). These groups formed a web of social media campaigns and alternative news channels, as well as bringing together progressives and members of the ruling National Party Congress (NPC).

Mateos and Erro (2021) argue that the major contribution of social media to social movements is the consolidation of a hybrid space that combines mobilisation in the streets and organisation by means of social networks. This is due to the intensive use of digital media and to the increasingly important role of internet activists in many African contexts, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso and Senegal. Young women in North Africa also took advantage of online activism and formed all-women groups on Facebook, such as 'Women for the Revolution' and 'Women Peaceful' to mobilise and strategise their engagements (Kadoda & Hale 2015). Social media

has allowed more women from conservative backgrounds to participate from safer spaces, perhaps to take on personae that do not mark them out as women. Through going virtual, social media opened up space for participation and engagement to the politically marginalised groups. This widened the virtual community and increased the voices that speak out against marginalisation and oppression. The use of social media enabled the calls for mobilisation to be more widespread, making this mobilisation visible to social media users and external observers. External observers can amplify the cause by retweeting videos, photos and statements made during demonstrations, enabling them to reach a wider international audience. Despite having less access than other countries in the Arab region, Sudanese managed to harness the potential of social media to get the attention of the government. Social media has also given youth in the diaspora an opportunity to participate in social movements in their home countries. In Sudan, this is exemplified by diaspora-based youth groups such as Girifna.

Constanza-Chock (2013) noted that youth participate in various social movements by appropriating 'new media tools of their time', which they use to create, circulate and amplify movements, voices and stories. Youth are framed in mainstream media as apathetic, disengaged and removed from civic action because this is measured through participation in electoral processes. However, for Constanza-Chock the youth are engaged in mobilising their peers, families and communities towards positive transformation. Youth have used blogs, live-streams, Facebook and Twitter to circulate messages about social justice. Social media technologies have allowed various sectors of the society to access free and uncensored information and also to compete in the production of information, narratives and frames that are creating collective identities and meanings of personhood and citizenship (Ben Moussa 2013, 56). New communication technology helps social movements in the following ways: reduction of participation costs, promotion of collective identity and creation of community. Stein (2009) points out six-point ways in which the internet helps social movements: providing information, assisting action and mobilisation, promoting interaction and dialogue, making lateral linkages, serving as an outlet for creative expression and promoting fundraising and resource generation.

Poell and van Dijck (2018) argue that from the Arab Spring to the Occupy movements major contemporary protest movements have been accompanied by intense social media activity. Millions of social media users, mostly youth, have been involved in the rapid and widespread production and circulation of activist materials, including everything from protest hashtags, second-hand rumours and photoshopped images to first-hand eyewitness reports and video evidence. In Tunisia and Egypt Facebook was largely used to share reports on the events, while Twitter was used for transnational communication of the events. The intensive use of social media transforms the organisation and communication of protest. In Angola a revolutionary movement inspired by the Arab Springs known as '*Revús'* was formed in 2011 (Blanes 2021). The Revús grew mostly due to their outspoken defiance and contestation of the regime,

demanding the end of the everlasting rule of former President José Eduardo dos Santos and his party, the MPLA. In a country with a de facto single ruling party since its independence in 1975 and with a terrible dictatorial track record about democratic rule, human rights and freedom of speech, this movement of open, public contestation was indeed a novelty at the time. Poell and van Dijck (2018) argue that contemporary activism should be seen in the context of the culture of 'sharing', where people construct horizontal networks that simultaneously take shape locally on streets and squares, and globally on social media platforms. These networks transform the dynamics of activism by creating solidarity, cooperation and togetherness. Such togetherness helps people to overcome fear and discover hope in the context of repression.

In Cameroon, #EndAnglophoneCrisis has made the world aware of the oppression of the southern Cameroonians by the largely Francophone government of President Paul Biya. Cameroon continues to experience sustained conflict between the Francophone and Anglophone citizens. Social media has provided a platform through which Anglophone diaspora, based in Germany, the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States and Belgium, have launched group discussions influencing millions of Cameroonians into obedience to and disobedience against the government. Through the #EndAnglophoneCrisis people in Anglophone Cameroon were able to share videos of extrajudicial killings and execution of children and unarmed civilians by the police and the military, prompting outrage all over the world. Online activists continue to call for secession and retaliation against the government security forces they accuse of committing genocide against Anglophone citizens (Agwanda, Nyadera & Asal 2020). In response to this outrage, the government began talks with secessionist groups to find a solution to the crisis. The Movement for Democracy, Development and Transparency (MDTT) #mddtcameroon, has harnessed the power of social media to end youth radicalisation in the ongoing conflict in the country. It has used the following hashtags to draw the youth into conversation, #Letdialoguelead, #YouthtoYouth Campaign to #StopYouthRadicalisation, #TalksNotGuns, #inclusivedialogue, #The #Youth are the Perpetrators & Victims. Social media can be a tool for peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Apart from these hashtags social media has been used as a tool to mobilise youth to participate in sporting activities as a way of highlighting peace and tolerance. Nganji and Cockburn (2020) have argued that social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp have enabled people to participate more directly in political and community life, by giving them more power to share information and contribute to decision-making by publicly holding leaders accountable. In Uganda youth took to the streets to protest against the arrest of opposition leader and activist Bobi Wine. Broadly, social media has been used to criticise the government of President Yoweri Museveni, demanding regime change and reforming of the security sector. This led to the rise of social movements such as #Pairofbuttocks and #FreeBobiWine movements (Akumu 2018; Nganji & Cockburn 2020).

## Governments' Response to Social Media and Internet-Based Activism

The history of democratisation in Africa is characterised by youth involvement in sociopolitical movements that resisted colonial rule and domination. Many anti-colonial movements and workers' unions in Africa were led by young people. Liberation movements were constituted by young people who were as young as 14 years old. As these young freedom fighters transitioned into ruling elites, they understood the power of the youth in resisting oppression, corruption and demanding social justice and change. As ruling elites, former liberation struggle activists invested in resourcing the police and the military in order to protect their political and economic interests at the same time excluding the youths from participation in decision-making. The state did not only control the physical spaces of political mobilisation such as the streets, but it also controlled the mainstream media in terms of how it represents and constructs social movements. In Uganda the government introduced a social media tax and in Zimbabwe the government introduced the cybercrime bill which was fast-tracked to criminalise social media activism. However, youth have continued to fight for inclusion in governance and decision-making processes in various African states, mobilising against military regimes, corruption, political marginalisation and demanding democracy, human rights, peace and security. The state treated youth-led movements as a security threat, justifying a heavy-handed response by state security actors. Many states have used the same methods of repressing social movements rather than engaging them in nation-building dialogue. The state preferred such conflicts because they gave it the upper hand since the state has monopoly and absolute control of the repressive state security apparatus.

Across Africa, faced with the brutality of the state security institutions, social movements went underground and activists went into exile, and with that the social movements died. In Algeria, the use of the internet to combat corruption, unemployment and political oppression started with individuals rather than collectives. As the internet became accessible to everyone, individuals mobilised to start the Collective Algerian bloggers in 2013 (Hadj-Moussa 2021). Bloggers and YouTubers are often prosecuted, convicted and abused. Yacine Zaid and Merzoug Touati were accused of espionage for Israel, Amir DZ was exiled and Mohamed Talmat died in prison. Some are accused of 'undermining state security' and are mistreated by police forces who fear the large audiences they attract by their outspoken positions or revelations. Despite persecution social media are gaining more ground, credibility and popularity by offering platforms and spaces to speak out on public affairs. Zaghlami (2020) noted that during the February 2019 street demonstrations and protests, protesters brandished the slogan: 'from platforms, blogs and websites to the street, to reality'. It is a pertinent indication that social media is having an impact on real political and social life in Algeria. New social media users and followers are empowering

themselves using new tools to exert pressure and influence on everyday political events and ultimately on the future constitutional agenda of the country.

In the face of a government-imposed ban on state media reporting on protests against the late former president Pierre Nkurunziza's third-term bid, youth in Burundi used social media to coordinate protests and inform the international community about the conflict. This prompted the presidency to join conversations on Twitter as a way of not only responding to what was being reported and posted about the country, but also to try and shape public opinion about the president's third-term bid. The Ethiopian blogging collective initiated a campaign known as Zone9, demanding that the Ethiopian government #RespectTheConstitution, and asking the government to #FreeZone9Bloggers who were arrested and accused of terrorism (Gagliardone & Pohjonen 2016).

The use of social media was effective in holding the leadership accountable for trying to dismantle the country's constitution. The emergence of social media enhanced the survival of social movements and activists in the context of state harassment and brutality. Instead of going underground or fleeing into exile social movements and activists went virtual, meaning that they continued to operate and holding the state accountable from anywhere in the world.

## Social Media and the Survival of Social Movements

### *Egypt #Arab Spring*

The fall of President Ben-Ali in Tunisia on 14 January 2011 as a result of youth-led protests, inspired an uprising in Egypt which started on 25 January 2011 (Arena 2017). In January 2011, protesters invaded Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, Egypt. A student named Rami Essar came to the Square with his guitar and started singing. He went on stage singing a song made up there and then, 'Down, Down Hosni Mubarak', a song that had never been sung before. The Mubarak government decided to end the gathering at the square using violence and many protesters were injured. Essar and other protesters vowed that they were going to stay at the Square until Mubarak goes and they stayed. The protests grew to include women, children and thousands of workers. Eight days later, Mubarak was gone. The catalyst for the protest that eventually defeated Mubarak was the role of social media in dissemination of information and in bringing people together in solidarity. A 30-year-old activist and Google regional marketing manager for the Middle East, Wael Ghonim, started the Facebook Revolution. He created a Facebook page that posts information about the brutality of Egyptian police (Ben Moussa, 2013).

Ghonim was especially angered by the killing of a 28-year-old internet activist, Khaled Said, beaten to death after trying to expose police corruption. The Facebook page Ghonim created was called 'We are all Khaled Said', and thousands of others began posting and sharing photos and videos of abuse and ill-treatment. Within months, the number of followers on the Facebook page grew to over half a million. When Ghonim and other leaders started posting

dates and places of protests, people started showing up and posting internet videos of the protests. Many of the organisers never met in person; their primary interaction was online. In an interview with CBS News' *60 Minutes*, on 10 October 2011, Ghonim said that if there was no social network the revolution would not have been sparked because the critical moment was before the Tahrir Square protests, people needed to be galvanised and to remove the element of fear which the regime relied on. The government responded by blocking or shutting down access to Facebook. For Ghonim that contributed to the success of the protests because it made people angry – even those who would have stayed at home and followed the events on Facebook were forced to go into the streets because of lack of access to news of what was happening.

Revolts against ruling elites in the Arab region were not new but can be traced back to the 1950s when people took to the streets to protest. In the past activism revolved around highly structured forms of collective action such as trade unions, political parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, the new revolutions spurred by new communication technologies and social media are marked by individual and group participation around broad coalitions and networks that escape rigid hierarchical structures. These new trends can be attributed to sociopolitical and technological transformations at local and global level. The diffusion of new communication technologies to the internet and social media enabled the emergence of new organisational structures marked by trans-local connections, horizontal communication and flexible non-hierarchical arrangements.

A new movement that has played an important role in the Arab Spring is the 'youth movement'. It can be said that the Arab Spring was 'a young people's spring' because young people constitute the backbone of the movements that overthrew autocratic regimes in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Youth movements in Arab region are not represented by structured NGOs or other institutions and are not a homogeneous group. They are social movements in the sense that they have a set of opinions and beliefs in the population representing preferences for change and reform of the social structures. Youth movements are characterised by cross-membership and fluidity of structure; many people who belong to them are members of various political parties and NGOs and they do not necessarily all subscribe to the same ideology. Youth sections inside political groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Socialist Union of Popular Parties in Morocco, defied senior leaders to join protests in the streets during the Arab Springs (Ben Moussa 2013). The role of new media and the internet in paving way for the Arab Springs is typical of new social movements' formation where the potential for the production of action is increasingly contingent on 'the ability to produce information' (Ben Moussa 2013).

### *Zimbabwe: #ThisFlag Movement*

*ThisFlag – IfulegiLeyi – MurezaUyu* is a social movement that emerged in Zimbabwe in 2016 led by Pastor Evan Mawarire. Its Facebook page, followed

by over 61,000 people, defines the vision as follows: 'Our vision is a Zimbabwe where citizens are emboldened to speak out, ask questions and act against corruption, injustice and poverty' (#ThisFlag movement Facebook page). Their mission is: Speak. Ask. Act. They also go further to describe what the movement stands for: '#ThisFlag Citizens' Movement is dedicated to empowering and partnering with citizens of Zimbabwe to be engaged and active in the national issues that affect their livelihood'. They then give a brief background of how the movement started,

> #ThisFlag was founded by Pastor Evan Mawarire in May 2016. Disillusioned and frustrated by the failed aspirations represented by the national flag of Zimbabwe, 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 belongs to every citizen of Zimbabwe with a vision for a better country.

A significant observation is in the values of the movement as defined on the Facebook page. The #ThisFlag citizens' movement is guided by six core values (integrity, dignity, courage, non-violence, citizenship and diversity) and encourages citizens to be actively involved in holding the government, opposition parties and citizens themselves to account through the promotion of transparency, good governance and adherence to the Constitution of Zimbabwe. #ThisFlag promotes non-violence and advocates for action that is peaceful and lawful. #ThisFlag is not politically affiliated and is non-partisan. #ThisFlag citizens' movement is one of the new social movements that started with the Arab Springs in 2011, that began to challenge inequalities within and between societies and countries for direct action (Puschra 2013). Shirky (2011), Diamond (2010) and Castells (2012) conceptualise social media as liberatory technology. #Thisflag movement harnessed this liberatory power of social media to remove the fear in young people to confront the brutal state.

On 22 April 2016, an unknown cleric, Pastor Evan Mawarire, posted a video on his Facebook page questioning meanings attached to the national flag in the face of endemic corruption, government excesses and worsening economic conditions. The video had the following caption, '*#ThisFlag. If I have crossed the line, then I believe it was long overdue. I'm not a politician, I'm not an activist…just a citizen*'. Even though Pastor Evan dissociated himself from politics, what he did is in line with Olsson's (2007) assertion that people use Facebook to engage in politics by starting a political group online. Facebook had for a long time been a tool for political engagement. With the Zimbabwean flag draped around his neck, shaking it with emotion, Pastor Evan bemoaned the destruction of agriculture, represented by the green colour on the flag, and the smuggling of the country's precious minerals to foreign powers and companies. He also

bemoaned the suppression of the freedoms that liberation war fighters died for. He ended his video by calling on young people to rise and fight, saying:

> They tell me…they tell me that the black is for the majority, people like me, and for some reason I don't feel like I am proud of it. I look at it and I wonder if it is a story of my future or it is just a sad reminder of my past and wherever I go and I put on the colours of Zimbabwe (pointing to the mini flag on the sleeve of his shirt) they look at me as if they want to laugh, they ask me are you from Zimbabwe, *vachiseka* (they will be laughing) … This is the time that change must happen, quit standing on the side-lines and watching this flag fly and wishing for a future that you are not at all wanting to get involved in, #ThisFlag everyday it flies, is begging for you to say something, it's begging for you to cry out to say why must we be in the situation that we are in. #ThisFlag. It's your flag, it's my flag. #ThisFlag.

This speech by Pastor Evan galvanised and awakened a nation to challenge the ruling elite in ways that had not been seen in a long time from a non-political actor. #ThisFlag video on Pastor Evan Mawarire's Facebook page has 1.1 million reactions, 281 Comments and 188,000 views. The video spread to other social media platforms and went viral triggering spontaneous protests in the capital Harare. Followers and fellow Zimbabweans began making videos of their everyday challenges with service delivery and corruption under the banner #ThisFlag. These videos were meant to hold the government accountable and force them to rethink the oath they had made to serve the nation. Zere (2020) argues that social media platforms as disrupters of the existing status quo enable users, especially youth and social movements, to speak truth to power. Social media have enabled youths to challenge the information monopoly imposed by various governments by creating horizontal communication and adding a new layer of democratisation to decision-making processes, giving activists confidence to occupy streets.

Pastor Evan, as Pastor Mawarire was popularly known during that time, encouraged people to carry the national flag with them as a reminder of the need to be patriotic and faithful to the country. Pastor Evan was invited by international television stations to articulate the Zimbabwean situation and his vision for a future Zimbabwe. He was seen as the hope of the nation and people encouraged him to seek national office. He was also invited to address Zimbabweans and friends of Zimbabwe abroad, especially in South Africa where there is a very large number of Zimbabwean immigrants. Pastor Evan's video and #ThisFlag movement is a good example of the argument (Bosch, Admire & Ncube 2020) that online spaces provide greater creativity and voice, as participants are able to produce original content using video, images and text. #ThisFlag movement inspired and reawakened the nation to demand accountability from the state, to the extent that the state 'criminalised' the carrying of the national flag. Commenting on the influence of #ThisFlag movement, Victor Chikadzi, an academic who was part of the movement, wrote on Facebook:

> I took the video below in 2016. On this day thousands came to protest for the release of Pastor Evan Mawarire. One thing stood out, there were thousands of cars and thousands of people. It was not your everyday profile of protesters; rather it was largely a gathering of middle class and the elite kids. The message of the Pastor had ignited this class that normally has apathy. This was to be the very first time we have ever seen the middle class coming out to demand justice and accountability.

The video that Victor refers to was of people who gathered at Harare magistrates court in solidarity with Pastor Evan who had been arrested on allegations of inciting public violence by the police. At Wits University in Johannesburg, where I was studying for my PhD, students who were funded by the late former President Robert Mugabe's scholarship were also motivated by Pastor Evan. They attended his meeting at the university and went around wearing the Zimbabwean flag. Obadare (2006) argues that the effectiveness of social media technologies in mobilising people should be understood within the context of prevailing socio-economic and political conditions of the day. By the beginning of 2016 it had been clear that the economy was going back into the hyperinflationary mode of the early 2000s and everyone was disgruntled; this pushed even the middle class to action. Gideon Chitanga, an activist and a former student union leader, also wrote the following about #ThisFlag movement on his Facebook page:

> Let's not mistake the #ThisFlag for a political movement or political party because it is not. Evan Mawarire is also not a politician. This does not in any way imply that the contribution he is making through the platform he leads is of less value. In fact, it has generated a national, possibly a regional conversation about the Zimbabwe crisis. As a pastor he has gone where other members of the clergy won't dare. His greatest contribution is the ability to discuss our daily experiences of life in a non-partisan way, bringing out the inner humiliation we suffer every day. Thus, where a lot of us would die inside ourselves with shame, humiliation, frustration and hopelessness, Mawarire has become an open surgery expression of all this… and indeed to the embarrassment of our government.

#ThisFlag movement galvanised online activities of citizens in holding government accountable through various protest actions. It removed the fear in people to speak out against injustices. #ThisFlag movement was influenced by the Occupy Africa Unity Square Movement led by Itai Dzamara, a man who stood up to the state and demanded that the late President Mugabe must step down. He was later abducted allegedly by state security agents in 2014 and he was never seen again. His story, sacrifice and message remained alive in the movements that were motivated by his bravery. #ThisFlag movement has continued with its online presence and has supported other movements, such as #ZimbabweLivesMatter, and was also responsible for the prominence of the

#ShutDownZimbabwe hashtag. #ZimbabweLivesMatter was a response to the brutal crackdown by the police and the army of the 2019 fuel price protests and #ShutDownZimbabwe protests. During the crackdown it is alleged that nine people were killed by the security forces. #ThisFlag movement also influenced other activists like journalist Hopewell Chin'ono to use social media to expose corruption within the state during the COVID-19 pandemic. Proponents of this hashtag movement intended to alert the world to the worsening economic and political situation in Zimbabwe and how COVID-19 regulations were used to shrink the political and democratic space available to the opposition and social movements. This shows that social movements do not die or go underground but they multiply as other voices continue to emerge calling for justice and accountability.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the Egyptian and Zimbabwean cases of youth activism through social media show that social movements do not die but they multiply. One movement gives birth to another movement nationally or internationally. The Arab Spring, especially the removal of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, gave hope to those who sought change in Zimbabwe to confront the late president Robert Mugabe's government. At one point Mugabe acknowledged that #ThisFlag movement wanted to emulate the Arab Spring way of regime change. The survival of social movements is enabled by the affordances of the material qualities of social media communication technology which allow users to archive events in a virtual space and use them to motivate others. People can participate in a movement without having to congregate in one physical place, and awareness of a situation such as arrests can be spread online. People can also use pseudonyms or ghost accounts to avoid being targeted by the police when posting messages in solidarity with the aims of a social movement.

## Conclusion

Social media has played a significant role in enhancing the agency, mobilisation and effectiveness of youth in interfacing with the state, especially on socio-economic and political issues. The youth harnessed the virtual power of social media to open space for criticising and engaging with the state which had been closed down by the increased militarisation and securitisation of the state by the ruling elite in Africa. In this context social media has provided space for political articulation outside the control of the state. The state was caught unaware by the influence of social media on mobilising citizens to demand better service delivery. Social media platforms are able to provide these spaces because they fall outside the control of the African state and are controlled by the West. The tool that governments have deployed is to shut down the internet during moments of protest and unrest. However, citizens, particularly the youth, have used VPNs to access the internet and social media platforms during shutdowns.

Governments are forced to engage with citizens and listen to their plights because of the power of social media. Social media allows the emergence of

diverse social movements, some of which seek regime changes, others of which demand economic and political reforms; some seek social justice, while others campaign for human rights and gender equality. As we have seen in the case of Sudan, women from a conservative Muslim background were able to use social media to speak out and campaign for their rights. There are limits to the value of social media in youth activism in the postcolonial crisis and these are evident through state surveillance and brutality as well as increases in data prices and draconian cyber laws and taxes.

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# 5 Digital Activism, Transnational Support, and the EndSARS Movement in Nigeria

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## Introduction

This chapter examines how digital activism and transnational support impacted on the overall outcome of the EndSARS protest movement in Nigeria. The movement evolved in October 2020 in response to the rampant brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit in Nigeria. The protest gained traction with a video that went viral on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. The video showed SARS personnel commandeering a Lexus SUV belonging to a young man they had killed in Ughelli, Delta State on 3 October 2020 (Kabir 2020; Ekoh and George 2021). The viral video provoked outrage online which led to a nationwide street protest by young Nigerians who demanded dissolution of SARS, and holistic reforms of the security sector in Nigeria.

It should be noted that prior to the EndSARS protest, previous online agitations calling for the disbandment of SARS received little attention from the Nigerian government and police administration (BBC 2020a). In contrast to past efforts, the seamless transition between the online and offline campaigns by the EndSARS protesters this time around influenced the government to act. The widespread outrage caused by the video caused the EndSARS hashtag to spread across the internet, helping to galvanise public support and draw attention and scrutiny of the international media (Kabir 2020). The online campaigns received tremendous international support from international activists, politicians, celebrities, and Nigerians in the diaspora. Numerous international celebrities, including English footballer Marcus Rashford; American musicians Kanye West, Beyoncé, and Puff Daddy; Nigerian rapper Burna Boy; and Hollywood actress Viola Davis, all issued online statements in support of the movement (Kazeem 2020). The Chief Executive Officer of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, also jumped on the bandwagon by calling for donations to EndSARS organisers to get around the Nigerian government freezing of the bank accounts of prominent activists within the protest movement. Nigerians in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other parts of the world also protested at the Nigerian embassies and consulates in support of the EndSARS movement. This transnational solidarity boosted the momentum of the movement and helped

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raise funds for bail, medical care, and coordination of protests. With increasing waves of domestic and international pressure, the Nigerian government had no choice but to dissolve SARS.

Despite the public outcry, a similar police unit was set up under a different name, leading many activists to describe the government response as symbolic. As the EndSARS movement faded from international conversations, the protesters were unable to leverage the movement's initial successes both online and offline to effect long-term security sector and governance reforms (Pinckney and Zamora 2020). In this chapter, we argue that the digital activism and transnational support did more harm than good to the long-term success of the EndSARS movement. Admittedly, while it contributed to the initial success of the group leading to the disbandment of SARS, the digital activism failed to instigate meaningful systemic reforms or policy changes, due partly to the rapidly fluctuating attention cycle of social media platforms. Furthermore, the support of the international community did not sufficiently pressure the Nigerian State to undertake far-reaching institutional and political reforms. While the style of the EndSARS protest has the potential to inspire copycat youth-led, social-media-fuelled and leaderless protests in West Africa, it is important to assess the utility of such protests in fostering real societal changes to inform future youth activism.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into six main sections: definitions of digital activism and transnational support, the context of the EndSARS movement, the objectives and organisation of the movement, the Nigerian government's response to the protest, the impact of digital activism campaigns, and transnational support on the outcome of EndSARS, key highlights from the analysis and how such movements could achieve long-terms impacts and policy changes in the future.

## Conceptual Definitions

### *Defining Digital Activism*

Over the past few years, digital activism has proven to be a powerful tool for grassroots mobilisation by youth activists wishing to engage protesters to reach a mass audience. This has become possible due to social media's ability to quickly spread messages across the world. Fuentes (2014) defines digital activism as a form of activism that uses the internet and digital media as key platforms for mass mobilisation and political action. Similarly, Rees (2020) describes digital activism as the use of digital tools (internet, mobile phones, social media, etc.) for bringing about social and/or political change. Watters (2020), just like Fuentes (2014) and Rees (2020), also explains digital activism as when digital tools such as the internet, social media, email, and mobile phones are used for mobilisation and political action with the intention to incite change. These definitions imply that all digital activism activities are reliant on online tools and resources to help instigate change in policy to address the demands of protesters.

The most popular online tools for digital activism are social media outlets such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These websites have millions of users all over the world, making it easy for activists to achieve mass engagement, allowing them to quickly raise awareness and gain support for issues of public concern (Watters 2020). Unlike the traditional media, the hashtag function on social media websites allows people to contribute to a multi-user conversation for spreading messages. Today, social media sites have become the first choice of youth activists due to how quick and easy messages can reach people on a global scale.

Another popular tool for digital activism is the mobile phone, particularly 'smartphones' which ease access to the internet and social media platforms. The use of smartphones allows activists to instantly document events and share the written, picture, and video evidence of events online. The advent of mobile money, or money transfer via telecommunication networks, has allowed easy donation of money to grassroots movements. Online petitions through websites such as www.change.org have also gained popularity amongst activists. These websites allow for the creation of shareable petitions on specific issues, helping creators to obtain signatures from people who support their cause (Rees 2020; Watters 2020). Similarly, crowdfunding is a way of raising money from large numbers of people through social media and crowdfunding platforms, allowing activists to create a digital fundraiser to mobilise campaign resources within the global community. Examples of such funding platforms include Kickstarter and Indiegogo. Blog writing has also been used in many recent digital activism campaigns. Blogs, allow for unfiltered communication, are easy to set up, and give voice for public concerns that would be ignored by more conventional forms of mass communication.

Beyond its ability to connect with a large community of like-minded people online to globalise campaign goals, digital activism is less time- and energy-consuming than traditional methods of activism which involve social contact in the form of mass gatherings, door-knocking, protests, and requesting signatures for physical petitions (Fuentes 2014; Rees 2020). It allows youth activists to mobilise faster and provides a platform for the voices of marginalised people to be heard. However, in the parts of the world, especially in Africa and Nigeria, where internet access is limited and digital literacy is low, using digital activism may not prove useful in causing positive changes. For the social media sites, the lack of staying power affects its utility as an effective means of long-term engagement (Gibson 2010; Watters 2020). Within the competing economy of attention on social media, public interest is often very short-lived. This undermines the efficacy of digital activism to build lasting engagement, thereby affecting long-term changes. Critics have also described digital activism as armchair activism, implying that it can be done from the convenience of one's armchair. This is because while well intentioned users online may wish to express solidarity, they just typically share Tweets, videos, or images of issues instead of contributing meaningfully to a cause and driving real-life changes. Overall, the success of most digital activism depends on the

'popularity' of the contested issue and the context of the campaigns, as well as the harmonisation of digital activism with traditional methods of protesting (Makhwanya 2018).

### *Definition of Transnational Support*

Transnational support in the context of this chapter is defined as a network (mostly loose networks) of activists, supporters, or partners that coalesce and operate outside the physical geography of a national protest (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Thörn 2006). Or more simply, transnational support could be understood as the international solidarity that national protests attract due mostly to the influence of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. The provision of such transnational support has helped national protests to attain a cohesive global identity on social media, while remaining a localised action. Historical examples of such transnational support include global solidarity on antislavery, the apartheid system in South Africa, and women's suffrage campaigns (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Pinckney and Zamora 2020). Transnational feminist solidarity, for instance, has been very effective in bringing about social change in local and regional contexts. In past decades, the influence of transnational support has been instrumental in protesting against human rights abuses, racism, and social and political oppression across the globe. It has become a useful platform for unifying people across the world to fight against illiberalism, social injustice, individual, and mass violence, as well as exploitation.

In the current fast-paced, globalised environment, advancements in information and telecommunication technologies have facilitated human interconnectedness and bridged the distance gap in interactions. This has been critical in enabling transnational support for social and political movements and protests across the world. In Nigeria, the evolution of technology and the rise of the internet and social media have made transnational solidarity a common feature of some recent national protests on security and governance issues. An example is the transnational solidarity received in the wake of the #BringBackOurGirls campaigns via social media which pushed the Nigerian government to negotiate the release of the 264 Chibok girls kidnapped by Boko Haram in April 2014 (Habila 2016; Parkinson and Hinshaw 2021). However, it is useful to note that the utility of transnational support as a catalyst for the success of social movements is predicated on its sustainability and capacity to direct attention towards the proponent and opponents of social movements (Pinckney and Zamora 2020). The subsequent analysis of the EndSARS protest movement in Nigeria illustrates the strength of this assertion.

## Context of the EndSARS Protest Movement in Nigeria

To comprehend the EndSARS protest movement, it is crucial to understand the political and socio-economic context within which the protest flourished

in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. As of March 2021, the population of the country was estimated to be 209,843,780. With an annual growth rate of 3.2 per cent, Nigeria has one of the world's most rapidly growing populations, with 41 per cent of the population being under the age of 15 (UNOCHA 2021). With such a high population growth and fertility rate, the Nigerian population is projected to increase to 263 million in 2030 and 401 million in 2050, becoming the third most populous country in the world (Fayehun and Isiugo-Abanihe 2020). In terms of demographic disaggregation, about 43 per cent of the population consists of children of 0–14 years, 19 per cent are aged 15–24, and 62 per cent are below the age of 25 years (UNECOSOC 2019). By contrast, less than five per cent of the population is aged 60 years and above, which makes Nigeria a youthful country with a median age of about 18 years, that is lower than estimates for Africa and the world of 20 and 29 years respectively (Fayehun and Isiugo-Abanihe 2020). The aforementioned data highlight the fact that about 70 per cent of the country's population are young people, who continue to bear the enervating consequences of preponderant governance fault lines bedevilling the country.

Aside from an expansive demographic structure, a sluggish economy further accentuates the pressure on socio-economic livelihoods of the population. As the largest oil and natural gas producer in sub-Saharan Africa, the economy is heavily reliant on oil exports as the main source of foreign exchange earnings. Oil accounts for 80 per cent of all exports, half of the government revenues, and a third of banking sector credit (World Bank 2020a). This has made the dividends of the foreign exchange generated from oil exportation vulnerable to volatility in the international oil market. Additionally, the non-oil industrial and service sectors are heavily dependent on the economic activities and revenue generated by the oil and gas industry (World Bank, 2020a). In light of this, the performance of the oil sector steers the wider Nigerian economy, driving rates of employment, determining government revenues, influencing investment, and credit market growth (World Bank 2020a). Over the years, endemic corruption, mismanagement, infrastructure gaps, persistent insecurity, and an inability to diversify the economy from petroleum production have constrained economic growth and the level of development expected to be driven by the country's oil revenues (Abraham and Michael 2018).

Ominously, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant effect on the global economy have aggravated the already troubled Nigerian economy. In 2020, the economy experienced its worst recession since the 1980s, largely due to the pandemic and the fall in world oil prices (World Bank 2020b). According to the International Monetary Fund (2021), the economy contracted by an estimated 3.2 per cent. The negative impact of this on revenue has impeded social service delivery and adversely impacted safety net programmes the government had in place to support vulnerable populations (World Bank 2020b). In particular, inflation in food prices has affected household consumption and impeded access to food for the most vulnerable Nigerians (World Bank 2020b).

Closely related to the above, persistent bad governance arising out of mismanagement, institutional corruption, profligacy of the political elite, nepotism, and neopatrimonialism continue to stagnate the economic development necessary to improve the wellbeing of populations in the country. The cumulative effect of this is reflected in increased poverty, inequality, unemployment, infrastructural gaps, and limited access to good-quality education and health, particularly amongst the growing youthful populace. According to the World Bank, 40 per cent (83 million people) of Nigerians live below the poverty line (i.e., US$1.90 per day) and a further 25 per cent (53 million) are marginally above the line and remain vulnerable. As of August 2020, the World Economic Forum highlighted that 27 per cent of Nigeria's labour force (over 21 million Nigerians) were unemployed. The youth (between 18 and 35 years) account for the largest proportion, 13.7 million, of the unemployed in the country. The onset of the COVID-19 crisis has heightened governance fault lines and further disrupted the socio-economic gains achieved in recent years. Notably, in the informal sector that engages an estimated 56 million of the labour force, mostly young people and women, many have had their livelihoods devastated by the pandemic (Schwettmann 2020). Restriction measures introduced to curtail the spread of the pandemic have led to a spike in unemployment, food prices, poverty, and inequality, especially among the country's young population.

Despite constituting most of the population, youth continue to remain at the periphery of the decision-making process in Nigeria. The lack of inclusive participation in the governance process is largely attributable to the gerontocratic and neopatrimonial political system entrenched in the body politic of the country. For this reason, youth participation in governance is largely limited to voting. The lack of resources continues to hinder youth representation in national decision-making bodies in the country. This is further deepened by the general framing of youth as a negative social force at the forefront of crimes, violence, and conflicts in national security conversations (Eze, Addae-Mensah, and Frimpong 2021). This has resulted in waning trust of the youth in the institutions of the Nigerian State and has had a ripple effect on social cohesion in the country.

Over time, a constellation of structural vulnerabilities, coupled with the demand for better socio-economic conditions, have triggered youth agitations and protests which often result in violent clashes with the state actors. On the other hand, lack of opportunities, increased poverty, and unemployment have pushed a number of youth into organised crimes, including armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, and drug trafficking, among others, as tools for economic sustainability (Oluwaleye 2021).

In response to the increased spate of such violent crimes, the SARS was established as a unit within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) in 1992 (Malumfashi 2020). Originally set up to operate independently to target criminal groups, the success of SARS was hinged on its anonymity, and secrecy

in its operations (Ayandele 2021). Over the years, however, SARS officials gained notoriety in perpetrating widespread systemic human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, extortion, unlawful detention, extra-judicial killings, and profiling of young Nigerians (Ayandele 2021). Although the SARS unit operated under the supervision of the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) of the Force Criminal Investigations Department and Commissioners of Police in each federal state of Nigeria, personnel are hardly held accountable for their unlawful actions against civilians (Ayandele 2021). Besides, the Nigerian authorities have failed to prosecute a single officer from the notorious unit, despite anti-torture legislation passed in 2017 and evidence that its members continue to use torture and other ill-treatment to execute, punish, and extract information from suspects (Amnesty International 2020b). Previous assurances and efforts from the Nigerian authorities to reform SARS to respect and conform to international human rights principles have also failed to change the modus operandi of the unit (Amnesty International 2020b; Ogbonnaya 2020). In a nutshell, the failure of real reforms, weak oversight of the Nigerian police administration, lack of accountability, and prosecution of SARs operatives who commit human right abuses account for why the unit operates with such impunity. Between January 2017 and May 2020, there were more than 82 documented cases of abuse and extrajudicial killings by SARS officers, with many of the victims aged between 18 and 35 years (Ayandele 2021; Ogbonnaya 2020). Additionally, the socio-economic challenges induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for young people, also served as a pre-cursor to the discontent. Against this backdrop, the EndSARS campaign started on Twitter in December 2017 to protest the harassment and fatal brutalities Nigerian youth suffered at the hands of the SARS (Dambo et al., 2020).

## The EndSARS Protest Movement

In a similar fashion to the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States, the EndSARS youth protests in Nigeria were triggered after a video circulated on social media purporting to show an extrajudicial killing by SARS officers in early October 2020 amid the surging COVID-19 pandemic. The protesters amplified their demands on Twitter and other social media platforms via the hashtag EndSARS, calling on the Nigerian government to disband SARS. The overwhelming majority of the protesters were youth, who make up the bulk of victims of SARS brutality and were mobilised through various social media platforms – Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, etc. The initial use of lethal force by the Nigerian security forces to crackdown on protesters, especially in Lagos, resulted in fatalities and injuries that were also circulated via social media. This led to further outrage and to the protests spreading to other cities in different states across Nigeria.

The initial demands of protesters were straightforward: the Federal Government should abolish SARS, provide justice to victims of police brutality,

and reform the NPF (Ojewale 2020). Ogbonnaya (2020) also noted that the youth protesters initially demanded the following five points:

- Immediate release of all arrested protesters.
- Justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and appropriate compensations for their families.
- Setting up an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct within ten days.
- In line with the new Police Act, psychological evaluation, and retraining (to be confirmed by an independent body) of all disbanded SARS officers before they can be redeployed.
- Increase police salaries so that they are adequately compensated for protecting the lives and property of citizens.

Realising the efficacy and momentum the youth protests were gathering across Nigeria and the globe, and fearing the reputational damage, the government of Nigeria bowed to domestic and international pressure and immediately responded to the initial demands of the protesters by disbanding SARS. Nonetheless, the protests snowballed into demands for broader more systemic reforms, particularly due to the pervasive failure by the government to meaningfully address many of the socio-economic challenges facing the country's youth. These demands included a call to end bad governance, insecurity, and corruption; revival of the educational and health systems; and creation of jobs and income-generating opportunities for the youth (Ogbonnaya 2020).

Beyond the proximate cause of the EndSARS protests, there was already simmering discontent among the youth given the deteriorating economic conditions aggravated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: the fall in global oil demand, institutionalised corruption, rising poverty and inequality, and marginalisation of young people in the country's governance processes. Thus, although EndSARS is an immediate product of SARS brutality against youth, it was indicative of a much wider problem, namely disenfranchisement and discontent of many young Nigerians, who face an increasingly difficult socio-economic and political situation.

## Government Responses to the EndSARS Protest Movement

Although the protest was directed at the SARS unit of the Nigerian police, it was actually a call for a comprehensive reform of the State security apparatus in Nigeria, as other units within the police, such as the anti-riot mobile police unit, are equally notorious for brutality. However, the protest failed to engineer major police reforms. While the Government was quick to disband SARS after a few days of the protest (BBC 2020a), the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit was established to replace SARS (Omonobi 2020). However, many EndSARS movement supporters viewed the disbandment with scepticism because successive promises for reform had been made in 2014, 2015, and

2017 (Ayandele 2021). The creation of SWAT also showed the lack of political will to address the unlawful imprisonment, extortion, and extrajudicial killings by the Nigerian police.

The government also tasked all 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to set up judicial panels of inquiry into cases of alleged violations of human rights by the SARS and other units of the police (Kabir 2020). Public distrust of the government also resulted in doubt about the sincerity of investigations by the panels and their recommendations. Presently not much is publicly known about the findings of these judicial panels and the implementation of their recommendations.

Despite these initial responses by the Nigerian state, the protesters refused to back down until meaningful reforms were undertaken, not only in the police force but also reforms affecting the country's wider socio-economic and political situation. As the tensions were rising, indefinite 24-hour curfews were imposed in Lagos and several other states in Nigeria. Nevertheless, protesters defied the curfew and gathered on the street. In response, the police and the Nigerian military fired warning shots to disperse protesters. Several people were reportedly shot dead and injured in the process (BBC 2020b). Harrowing social media videos of the shooting incident at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos caused public outrage and global condemnation. The excessive force against protesters widened the distrust between Nigeria's young population and the government, further escalating the protests.

The heavy-handed security response turned the initially peaceful protest into a violent one. Various criminal elements were able to take advantage of the situation, some rumoured to be sponsored by the government began looting shops, ATM machines, and government storage facilities (Ruppel and Arowobusoye 2020). Properties of known government officials and their relatives were attacked, looted, and burned down in Lagos and other cities. Some northern politicians and supporters of President Muhammadu Buhari also framed the movement as a southern agenda to topple the current northern political administration (Vanguard 2020a; Vanguard 2020b).

To suppress the protests, the Nigerian authorities froze the accounts of several EndSARS campaigners (Sahara Reporters 2020; Ayandele 2021). Accusing some of the prominent supporters of the movement, the government was able to convince a high court in Abuja that protesters were providing immaterial support (financing and sponsoring) for terrorism. The crackdown and subsequent arrests of the most vocal supporters weakened the resolve of the movement. Some of the protesters also sought political asylum in Western countries to evade arrest and harassment by security agents in their crackdown on protesters. The local media was also restricted from reporting on excessive force used against protesters by security personnel. The repressive approach of the State was calculated, aimed to deter activists, and defuse the energy behind the protests and its potential impact on the State. Unlike previous protests by other Nigerian movements such as the National Labour Congress, opposition political parties, and student unions, where governments have often tried

to resolve by 'negotiating' or compromising leaders of protest groups with monetary inducements (Kazeem 2020), the organisation of the EndSARS movement made it difficult to apply similar approaches. The EndSARS protest was different as it was decentralised, had no organisational structure, and was not directed by one leader or core groups of activists. The government thus forcefully clamped down on the group, treating it as a mob rather than an organised political movement, after its initial efforts to address their demand by disbanding the SARS unit and setting up a new unit under a different name was described as symbolic by many activists. Ultimately, the street protests stopped after 20 October 2020, following the killing of the unarmed protesters in Lagos. A judicial panel was established to investigate the atrocities and to date their findings have not been made public.

## The Impact of Digital Activism Campaigns

A notable feature of the EndSARS movement is that digital activism was used as a channel to mobilise and gain support and resources for protest outside the digital space on a non-partisan basis. This, to a large extent, reflects the wider support the movement attracted from the public and the limited successes it recorded. As indicated above, there have been agitations by the youth since 2017 for the government to end the SARS unit's unlawful arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings. Nonetheless, those agitations fell on deaf ears. The Nigerian government and the police force ignored those calls, the SARS operatives continued to act with impunity. By contrast, the EndSARS protests that arose in October 2020 were somewhat different, thanks to the traction the movement was able to gain via social media, and the offline protests it coincided with. As argued by Malefakis (2021), the use of digital technologies changed the rhythm of the EndSARS movement, from an online yearly banter to the most engaging youth-led movement in Nigeria. Indeed, the EndSARS protest demonstrated how social media can be galvanised as a tool to challenge established norms and demand institutional changes. The movement developed from a purely online agitation into a fully fledged offline protest in major cities, including Lagos, Abuja, and Ugheli among others in Nigeria, and in cities across the world such as London, Berlin, New York, and Toronto. The powerful influence of digital activism in how the movement unfolded cannot be ignored.

Following the incident that led to the EndSARS protest, many Nigerians also shared on social media similar stories and experiences of human rights abuses suffered by themselves, family, and friends of SARS, sparking public outrage (Ekoh and George 2021). Consequently, Dark (2020) notes that the EndSARS hashtag started trending beyond the country's borders, boosted in part by Nigerian celebrities and high-profile personalities with large followings. Unlike the previous agitations against police brutalities and other political and economic demands, the EndSARS hashtag this time around received widespread support and international media coverage. Within a week, the EndSARS hashtag became the most popular Twitter trend in the world, garnering about 28 million

tweets (Malefakis 2021). Several international celebrities, such as Beyoncé, Kanye West, and John Boyega, used their platforms to voice their support for the protesters online. Indeed, the amplification of the online protest by these celebrities and other social media influencers differentiated the October 2020 protest from earlier ones, which failed to elicit responses from the Nigerian government and police force. The protests got an extra push from Twitter's CEO, Jack Dorsey, who used the EndSARS hashtag to call for bitcoin donations to EndSARS organisers' cryptocurrency wallets to get around government freezing of activist bank accounts. The use of social media to call the attention of international celebrities, politicians, diplomats, and media corporations was crucial in influencing the response of the Nigerian government.

At the peak of the protest, young Nigerian activists used the different online platforms to coordinate protests, connect with volunteers, and share images and progress reports of the protests. Twitter, for instance, was used daily to map out specific locations where young people would converge for the street protests. Flyers were shared on various social media platforms detailing the time and location of the protest. The tech-savvy youth used social media to source funding for the protests. It is estimated that over US$380,000 was raised through crowdfunding and donation links for the movement (Malefakis 2021). Overall, digital activism became a defining force in organising the protest both on and offline. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Nigerian people, it would have been extremely difficult for the movement to garner the kind of support it received both locally and internationally without the use of digital tools and resources.

However, the excessive reliance on social media by the EndSARS movement had its own limitations, which impacted on the sustainability of their actions. First, the lack of staying power of social media affected the movement's ability to sustain long-term engagement and continued national and international scrutiny of the Nigerian government's actions, particularly after the government's heavy-handed response to the protests in mid-October 2020. Pinckney and Zamora (2020) have highlighted the limitation of transnational support to protest movements via social media, particularly as it is fuelled by rapidly changing cycles of attention. While these platforms are instrumental in mobilising huge numbers for demonstrations and protests, they often lack staying power. Owing to this, 'decision-makers are hesitant to engage in the hard work of policy reforms, and often discount social-media-fuelled protest movements and simply wait for the storm to wither even if people demonstrate support from all around the world' (Pinckney and Zamora 2020). Nigeria has experienced this dynamic in recent years in the wake of the #BringBackOurGirls movement. While the pressure mobilised via social media pushed the Nigerian government to negotiate the release of 264 girls, the international community has largely moved on even though some of the original Chibok kidnapped girls remain missing (VOA 2021). This explains why despite the massive initial global attention the EndSARS movement attracted, the movement was unable to achieve any meaningful security sector or wider government reforms. The movement trended

over a short period (in the month of October 2020) and simply fizzled out of the international communities' orbit of attention. Consequently, the messages of the EndSARS movement got drowned out by new and equally pressing developments across the world, not helped by the movement's lack of a unified strategy and the proliferation of demands being made by protesters.

Second, for most of the celebrities, politicians, diplomats, and media corporations within and outside Nigeria that endorsed the movement, apart from the alleged donation of funds and sharing hashtags, videos, and images of the EndSARS protesters, they did not contribute meaningfully to the cause by following up on online actions to drive real changes.

Third, unlike the other protest movements in Nigeria, EndSARS lacked leadership and a comprehensive strategy. While this meant that protesters could evade being profiled and targeted, the movement was diluted in its message efficacy and ability to coordinate, and the leadership vacuum posed significant challenges to its long-term effectiveness. The absence of leadership hindered mediation and negations with the government. It also weakened the capacity of the movement to control the strategic direction of the protests, unify the narrative, and ensure that the desired outcomes were achieved. Additionally, the absence of a clear leadership structure contributed to the protests being instrumentalised by criminal elements who caused widespread destruction and looting as hoodlums, street thugs, and looters highjacked the protests (Ruppel and Arowobusoye 2020).

Moreover, while social media is a space for mobilisation of transnational support for protest movements, it has also become a conduit for the spread of fake news and political propaganda orchestrated to counter the narratives of campaigners. In the context of the EndSARS campaign, while it was ongoing, the government and its agents capitalised on the looting, destruction, and attacks caused by hoodlums and criminal elements to build a counter narrative against the protesters, framing them as a destructive social force and enemies of the state. Thus, incidences of violence were exploited to undermine the credibility of the #EndSARS movement. Another narrative used to undermine the movement was the false characterisation of the protests as an attempt by southern Nigerians seeking to delegitimise President Buhari (Ojewale 2020). Playing on historical ethnic tensions failed to derail the movement and triggered a counter 'hashtag' by northern youth, #SecureNorth, which highlighted the multitude of security challenges in northern Nigeria (Ojewale 2020). Although such narratives did not gain prominent attention, the lootings and attacks by criminal networks, which resulted in fatalities and destruction of public and private property further provides a mirror reflection of the lack of coordination and leadership that often characterises social-media-fuelled campaigns.

## The Impact of Transnational Support

Transnational support was evident at the zenith of the EndSARS protests in Nigeria. First, the attack on protesters attracted widespread international

condemnation and calls by major international stakeholders to abate the use of force by the Nigerian government. Solidarity protests organised by Nigerians and other international campaigners at the US Congress, UK Parliament, and headquarters of multilateral organisations, including the UN, EU, and AU raised awareness. In turn several global leaders, including António Guterres, UN Secretary General; Joe Biden, then Democratic presidential candidate and current US President; Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State; Hillary Clinton, Former US Secretary of State; and Pope Francis, made statements to express condemnation of SARS brutality and State repression against the protesters. These sentiments were echoed by many celebrities and activists who expressed solidarity with the movement. Similarly, other non-state actors, especially international human rights and development organisations, including Amnesty International and ActionAid, demanded justice for violent repression of EndSARS protesters (Amnesty International 2020a). Third, transnational support for the EndSARS campaign also manifested in the mobilisation of resources to support the organisers of the protests. The Chief Executive Officer of Twitter, Jack Dorsey for instance called for donations to EndSARS organisers to get around the Nigerian government freezing of the bank accounts of prominent activists.

Despite the usefulness of transnational support in stimulating global pressure on the Nigerian government to disband SARS, it failed to yield any meaningful reforms as demanded by the EndSARS campaign. While the movement garnered much international support, it happened against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a global recession and millions of deaths, the international community is focused on battling the virus and the search for a lasting solution through international cooperation on global health. The deteriorating economic and socio-economic situation globally also meant a number of examples of civil unrest emerged. The EndSARS campaign had to compete with numerous other instances of public and global outcry, including other hashtag-driven protest movements such as those in Hong Kong and Myanmar against repression and human rights violations by state agents. This has meant that the Nigerian government may have escaped some of the scrutiny it may have ordinarily faced; it also means pandemic control has in many cases superseded the upholding of democracy.

Another limitation of transnational support for social-media-fuelled movements as evident with the EndSARS campaign is that it was bereft of direct engagement with policy-makers in Nigeria to force them to the negotiating table to commit to a concrete roadmap on how to proceed with the implementation of reforms. The statements of condemnation and the transnational support for the EndSARS movements, garnered via various social media platforms from global leaders and entertainment icons, were without any sustained engagement with the Nigerian government and thus lacked the necessary staying power to force the Nigerian State to embark on the needed reforms.

## Conclusion

The EndSARS protest was a movement across the whole spectrum of youth in Nigeria, fuelled by social media, and organised without a formal leadership structure. Even in the face of death, media censorship and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian youth did not back down in their fight for their dreams of systematic changes in policing and governance of the country. Unlike previous protests in Nigeria, the use of digital activism and the transnational backing changed the rhythm of the movement, demonstrating the utility of technology in fostering youth participation in security sector governance and sociopolitical reforms. Despite the disbandment of SARS, which was the key demand of the protesters, it was replaced with the SWAT unit. No major reforms in the Nigerian police took place and some police personnel continue to operate with impunity.

This shows that although digital activism is useful, real change cannot be achieved through armchair activism and celebrity endorsement. The lack of staying power of social media impacted on the movement's ability to sustain engagement with the Nigerian government and instigate far-reaching institutional and political reforms. The EndSARS campaign had to compete with other pressing international issues, like the COVID-19 pandemic and hashtag-driven protest movements such as those in Hong Kong and Myanmar against repression and human rights violations by state agents. This meant that the Nigerian government escaped the scrutiny it may have ordinarily faced, at a time when the attention of the international community was on addressing the health and socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, apart from the international attention, the transnational support received was bereft of direct engagement with policy-makers in Nigeria to force them to the negotiating table to commit to a concrete roadmap on how to proceed with the implementation of reforms. In this regard, future protests like the EndSARS movement will require sustained online and offline protests with an effective leadership infrastructure, organisation, coordination, and sustained transnational support that targets the pressure points of the Nigerian State (such as economic and diplomatic pressure points) to achieve meaningful impact.

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# 6 Making Change Happen

## Music and Youth-Led Social Movements in Senegal

*Philip Bob Jusu and Saatchi Sen*

### Introduction

It was the summer of 2011 in Dakar and the Arab Spring had been sweeping through North Africa and the Middle East. Young people had taken to the streets of those regions to demand freedom, dignity and a better life for themselves. They were protesting against decades of marginalisation, and autocratic systems that had been characterised by corruption, bad governance and the neglect of women and youth (Salih 2013).

Riding on this wave of energetic, youthful dissent that had become popular across the world and had caught the interest of young people on the African continent, Senegalese rapper and activist Cheikh Oumar Touré, popularly known as Thiat, addressed a crowd in the country's capital. He said:

> An old man can still be useful to a country when he is striving for the right path. But an old man of 90 years who goes back on his word – or who lies – should not stay in any country.
>
> (Genova 2012)

Touré was talking about the then president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, who was attempting to amend the constitution to allow him to remain in power for a third presidential term. Wade had been elected as president in 2000, aided by the very same hip-hop artist community that was opposing him now; at that time, he was seen as a symbol of change and youth representation in Senegal (Ndiaye 2021, 44). As the face of opposition in Senegal, Wade had lost four presidential bids prior to winning in 2000. Thus, there were high expectations of him as he symbolised the change that people wanted to see from the system that had been in existence since independence. However, this perception of him was short-lived as his 11 years in power had been marked by a steady decline of Senegal's economy, allegations of corruption and nepotism, and a widening wealth gap with shrinking opportunities for the country's youth.

At the age of 84, Wade was presiding over a country that was largely dependent on imports for most resources (Ndiaye 2021) and experiencing severe shortages – most acutely of electricity. The relentless power cuts that

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went on for days finally pushed rappers and political activist Thiat, a member of the Keur Gui Crew, and Mallal Talla (popularly known by the name Fou Malade) into action. Taking advantage of the heightened political representation thrust on the youth by the wave of popular protests across the African continent, the two rappers decided to form a collective of young artists yearning for change and a platform to express their anger and frustration with the government they had voted into power (Genova 2012). Thiat and Mallal Talla had cleverly decided to tap into a hugely accessible and easy mode of communication and expression: music. They became the conscience of the state as politicians got trapped in a power struggle. Their interventions through music stimulated critical conversations and narratives against the drive by Wade and his allies to entrench their stay in power.

This chapter analyses the rise of the Y'en a Marre ('We're Fed Up!') movement in Senegal and how it succeeded in influencing the elections of 2012. It also examines how Y'en a Marre contributed to creating national awareness of the need to stop Wade's third-term bid. The chapter examines the importance of the utilisation of music, specifically hip-hop music, as a form of socio-political and artistic expression in promoting civic conscious on critical issues that have to do with a state. It further interrogates how the movement in Senegal influenced the emergence of similar movements in other countries such as Burkina Faso.

Methodologically, academic literature on the use of popular arts as a means of socio-political expression in Africa, and specifically in Senegal, was researched. Additionally, news items and reports by the government were studied to add richer and more nuanced conclusions on the movement in Senegal, the approach of the government to the movement and the outcomes of Wade's third-term bid.

## Music as a Form of Artistic and Political Expression in Africa

An understanding of oral traditions is critical in any study of culture and the ways in which communities bond, socialise and interact with power structures. Undeniably, music is one of

> the most powerful oral traditions that our societies possess, and not surprisingly, Africa has a long and storied history of music, amongst other popular culture such as poems, street plays, folktales and dance, being used as a method of socio-political commentary.
>
> (Dolby 2021, 388)

Popular culture has been utilised by all parties to influence society – from the state to its opposition. Additionally, music has long been utilised as a means to communicate messages that can circumnavigate traditional power structures that might otherwise make it difficult to express them. As indicated by authors

such as Jewsiewiski (1988), there has always been a strong connection between political expression and popular arts in Africa. This connection is ingrained in African systems and cultures and has constantly played a role in the transmission of vital messages on societal issues. For instance, the griots of West Africa have been known through out history for their skills in storytelling, music and their ability to relate oral tradition.

The use of popular arts and its evolution into youth-led social movements have become common in Africa, especially in the last two decades. Through the use of music, comedy, paintings, graffiti etc., young people express their dissent against their governments, usually stimulating a sense of consciousness especially among their peers. Discussing the factors that lead to a focus on popular arts in societies, Barber (1987) wrote:

> The most obvious reason for giving serious attention to the popular arts is their sheer undeniable assertive presence as social facts. They loudly proclaim their own importance in the lives of large numbers of African people. They are everywhere. They flourish without encouragement or recognition from official cultural bodies, and sometimes in defiance of them. People too poor to contemplate spending money on luxuries do spend it on popular arts, sustaining them and constantly infusing them with new life.

Popular arts have remained vital and have a special place in African societies, as they echo the thoughts of many people who lack the access and avenue to express their frustrations against the state and its elites. Through music, comedy and other forms of socio-political expression, the harsh everyday conditions under which people live in several African countries are expressed in a realistic manner which resonates with the local populace. Thus, artists have, over the years, become the conscience and voice of Africans, especially in societies where academics and civil society have ceased to play such roles. Popular arts become even more significant in societies that experience state capture of the media and civil society, as is the case in places such as Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Today, young people across the continent have found solace in music in turbulent and post-conflict societies. In Sierra Leone, the post-war elections of 2007 were characterised by the role of popular 'youth' music as initiating political discussions (Shepler 2010). Popular music in post-war Sierra Leone expressed the goings-on of everyday life and spoke to the life that young people envisioned for themselves in a peaceful society (Bangura 2021). Young people turned to music to overcome the frustrations of a post-conflict peacebuilding period plagued by the realisation that the historical legacies of the conflict were persisting and the envisaged changes were not to be realised. In Sierra Leone, musicians such as Emerson, Dry Yai Crew, Jungle Leaders and Pupa Baja became the voice and the conscience of the Sierra Leonean society.

Several such groups emerged on the continent in the last two decades. Even in much more stable societies such as Tanzania, the emergence of Bongo Flava

music has been a major development, giving youth a voice and presence in Tanzania's political discussions. As indicated by Birgit Englert (2008, 17):

> Bongo Flava music has helped to shape a generational identity of those Tanzanians who grew up in the era of liberalisation and multi-party politics. More importantly, this youthful musical genre has helped to increase the visibility and voiceability of youth in the Tanzanian public and thus at least indirectly encouraged the political participation of youth in political discourses. … it is not so much the critical lyrics of some of the songs which have helped achieve this, than the fact that the successes of Bongo Flava musicians have conveyed self-consciousness to young people who experience that they can achieve more than hitherto thought.

Countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo have, over the years, had well-established young musicians who have revolutionised music on the continent and effectively used it to challenge systems, educate society on sensitive socio-economic and political issues, and inspire the demand for change. As with most new social movements (NSMs) that arose in Africa during the Arab Spring, what makes the utilisation of rap and hip-hop music as a tool of dissent on the continent different today, is its reach – amplified by the vast reach of the internet and the influence of social media (Englert 2008). Music now has a reach that it has not previously had on the continent and it is much more accessible to young people, who follow the performers and own the words expressed.

## Senegal – A Brief History

Senegal has long been regarded as a stable, democratic exemplar in a region that is restive and often experiences instability and political violence resulting from bad governance, corruption, nepotism and other related factors (Genova 2012). The West African nation has maintained a tradition of peaceful transfers of power since it gained independence from France in 1958 and formed its first government in 1960. The country's first president, Leopold Sedar Senghor, was an academic who during his 20-year reign (1963–1983) provided the country with a strong democratic foundation, which enhanced stability and constitutional order in the country. His successor, Abdou Diouf, who ruled the country from 1983 to 2000, continued in that path and peacefully handed over power when defeated in an election by the opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade in 2000.

As mentioned above, Abdoulaye Wade came to power riding a wave of support from a society that wanted change after more than three decades of governance by the ruling Socialist Party. There was also a perception of corruption, and economic hardship brought about by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programme, and the rampant privatisation of the 1990s. Banking on the existing economic hardship and the desire of

the people for a message of hope and potential changes in the economy, Wade coined his campaign messages to achieve immediate political gains against the government. He promised an economic and political revival through political transparency, diversification of the economy, and a focus on new construction and infrastructure projects (Genova 2012; Ndiaye 2021). Central to his victory was the support provided by young hip-hop artists who aimed at promoting change from below (Sajnani 2017). The movement used music to present the gaps in governance and the need for political change, songs that were critical to undermining any potential of the government winning the 2000 elections. The movement was very effective as it developed and transmitted messages across the country, and the songs produced filled bars, homes, rallies and other gatherings.

Wade consequently defeated Diouf, a popular victory that was widely celebrated in Senegal. However, when it came to transforming the Senegalese economy, Wade's entire time in office was characterised by his aggressive neo-liberal policies, such as doing away with caps on food and energy prices, and a fixation on transforming Dakar into an upmarket tourism and shopping destination (Genova 2012; Haque 2021).

Young people found themselves in a stagnant job market, with rising food and fuel costs, and excluded from lucrative economic opportunities. Thus, Wade started to lose the support of the country's youth, who began to question his policies and approach to governance. The growing dissent against Wade reached its climax in 2011, when he announced two major constitutional amendments that would ensure that he would remain in power as president for a third term. The first amendment introduced the new post of vice president who would take over in the event of the president's death, in an imitation of the American legislative system. Wade later announced that his son Karim Wade was to be his running mate, making him heir apparent to the presidency. The second amendment would reduce the voting requirements for a candidate to win the presidency from 50 per cent to 25 per cent (Genova 2012). Having sensed his growing unpopularity, Wade knew he would not gain 50 per cent of the votes' cast and thus lowered the requirement to allow him to stay in power, should he fail to attract significant support.

These amendments were making it increasingly clear that Abdoulaye Wade intended for political power to remain within his close circle, in a dynastic system which would be a departure from the democratic traditions and processes that Senegal had established over the years. This move by Wade immediately sparked tension in the country, with politicians and activists mobilising to challenge him and his cronies.

## The Rise of Y'en a Marre – A New Chapter in Political Expression in Senegal

In 2011, Y'en a Marre, a movement consisting of artists, became the face of the campaign and protests against Wade's third-term bid. The movement was

initially started in protest against frequent electricity outages in the country. According to Hogenboom (2018, 8),

> The group, amongst others consisting of celebrated rappers Thiat and Kilifeu (from hip hop group Keur Gui) and journalists Fadel Barro and Aliou Sané, were quickly thereafter joined by some of the major hip hop artists in Senegal, like Fou Malade and Djilly Bagdad.

The decision of Wade to run for a third term led to the group taking on the challenge of campaigning against his re-election. As indicated by Zachariah Mampilly (2018, 1):

> Along with other musician-activists, the group toured the country in a flatbed truck with a built-in sound system playing in small towns and rural villages bringing their message to distant communities. This was essential in a country where the average age is just over 18 and 70% live in rural areas. Thiat was arrested and detained following a rally in Dakar's Obélisque Square for allegedly calling the President a 'liar' and saying that the then 85-year-old was too old to govern.

The arrest of Thiat boomeranged, as the criticism against the government intensified (Mampilly 2018). The group eventually expanded throughout the country as it formed networks beyond the capital city, Dakar. Members helped organise camps where young people were informed about their rights as democratic citizens and encouraged to register to vote and usher in a new era that would eject Wade from the presidency (Bhattarai 2016). The continuous push by Y'en a Marre, its increasing popularity and reach, and its commitment to laying bare the politics of nepotism and corruption that fuelled Wade's presidency succeeded in gaining support from opposition party leaders and other prominent members of civil society such as journalists, lawyers and activists (Bialik 2017). These are people who were initially reticent about what was going wrong in the country, and Wade's bid for a third term. However, they became encouraged to speak out by the shifting public mood. Gradually, a bipartisan effort developed, with political leaders speaking out against the bid and its potential implications for Senegal (Bialik 2017; Genova 2012).

The direct translation of Y'en a Marre is 'We're Fed Up!'. Direct, no holds barred and simmering with anger, the name of this movement is emblematic of its members and their use of popular arts to express their perception of the state and its elites. The movement was led by rappers Thiat and Fou Malade, who produced songs that caught the attention of the Senegalese youth with their very direct style and content. Through the songs produced, the open campaigns and the rallies organised by the movement, many young people came to understand what was happening and rallied behind the movement.

Y'en a Marre succeeded in getting a little over 400,000 new young voters registered in time for the 2012 elections (Bhattarai 2016). The movement was

vindicated with the consequent results, as Wade was beaten by a large margin by Macky Sall, a younger politician who had formerly worked under the incumbent president as his prime minister. Continuing the Senegalese tradition, Wade conceded to Sall peacefully, and 2012 saw a new president take over the reins, in a victory that raised hope and expectations especially among the youth who had championed the fall of Wade. Sall's victory in the election was also a sign that the Y'en a Marre movement, spearheaded by young people, was massively influential in Senegalese society as a dissenting force to be reckoned with in the political mainstream. As such, since 2012, Y'en a Marre has cemented itself as one of the most prominent civil society groups in the country (Bialik 2017). Since the election of Sall, the movement has transformed itself into a watchdog, focusing its energy on identifying malpractices and excesses of state authority. As expressed by Fou Malade, 'This movement was born to have a new Senegal – a Senegal without corruption' (Gueye 2013).

## Y'en a Marre and Political Dissent Under Macky Sall

As in the case of Wade, the popularity of Sall was tested shortly after he assumed power. Sall began exhibiting authoritarian tendencies, not being open to criticism; at the same time, he began allowing for greater French participation in the Senegalese economy. One of Sall's more controversial decisions was allowing French supermarket chain Auchan to operate in the country (Ndiaye 2021). The chain is owned by French billionaire Gerard Mulliez and since its arrival in Senegal; it has opened 14 supermarkets in the capital alone (Genova 2012). Local vendors selling fruit and vegetables have found themselves unable to compete with the gigantic chain and have been put out of business (Haque 2021). This has significantly undermined local businesses, thereby entrenching economic hardship in communities and households that depended on the trading of local products now traded by Auchan. The subsequent effects have included growing anti-French sentiment among locals, compounded by the perception of the French using Sall for their economic benefit, while Sall depended on them as an ally.

The music video of the 2018 song 'Sai Sai Au Couer' by Y'en a Marre rapper Keur Gui references the heavy price that the Senegalese informal sector has had to pay as French multinationals and conglomerates sweep into Senegal under Macky Sall. The video starts with a woman asking a street vendor why he has only a table, when earlier he had an entire shop. The vendor responds that it is because Westerners are selling everything to the Senegalese people these days (Gui 2018). This stark moment in the video highlights the decreasing power of the local Senegalese economy in the face of French monopoly.

Songs and videos such as the one described above are not the only ways in which Y'en a Marre puts political elites in the spotlight. In January 2019, Thiat refused to shake the hand of Farba Senghor, a minister in the previous Wade government whom he accused of embezzling public funds. The action of Thiat and his constant criticism of the elites sparked a virtual debate in Senegal, and also among

Senegalese in the diaspora, on Thiat's behaviour and how it relates to the Senegalese tradition of respecting one's elders and being open to political engagements with one's opponent, while at the same time asserting political agency nad demanding accountability of the governing elite. (Bhattarai 2016; Ndiaye 2021).

In 2020, protests against the Sall regime intensified as the COVID-19 pandemic stagnated the Senegalese economy, increasing economic hardship and poverty across the country. As the open criticisms against Sall and his handling of the effects of the pandemic in the country grew, Sall reacted by trying to silence his critics. This culminated in March 2020 with the arrest of Ousmane Sonko[1] on rape charges, denounced by Sall's critics as trumped-up charges meant to intimidate Sonko. Sall has furthered his oppressive campaign by jailing activists and political opponents and deploying armed state security personnel against citizen protestors (Boris Diop & Sene Absa 2021). Violent protests broke out in Dakar in March and April of 2021[2], with international actors including human rights organisations such as Amnesty International appealing for peace and a halt to arbitrary arrests and state-sponsored violence (Boris Diop & Sene Absa 2021).

Though the violence subsided, it became obvious that the youth have established an understanding that the protection of democratic order in Senegal rests in their hands, and that they can no longer trust the political elites. The two democratic processes that they supported appeared to have disappointed them, as the leaders produced became autocratic and marginalised youth and women.

On 23 June 2021, thousands of protesters from across Senegal participated in a commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the protests against Wade. The celebrations were used by the organisers of the protests, principally leaders of the Y'en a Marre movement, to call for 'No third term' for current President Macky Sall. As indicated by the Africa News (2021, 1):

> This is almost like some déja vu. The anniversary on Wednesday turned a protest that called for a ban on a possible third term for current President Macky Sall. Mr. Sall, elected in the second round in 2012 against Abdoulaye Wade and re-elected in 2019, has remained silent on his intentions in 2024.

The reason behind this early call has been attributed to the silence of the president on his intentions and it appears that activists are not keen on leaving that conversation until the end of what should be his final term. As such, at the moment, they are attempting to force adialogue with the president about his future political plans, a conversation that the president appears to want to avoid.

## Africanism, Identity and Culture Through Senegalese Hip-Hop – This Is the Time of the Youth

With the focus on music and artistry, come the inevitable questions of identity, authenticity and agency. Y'en a Marre uses their music to assert the agency of the young people of Senegal in the mainstream socio-political sphere, and to comment on the daily socio-economic and political issues that affect them. This,

in turn, means that Y'en a Marre's music, and, subsequently, the community that the movement has managed to form based on formal as well as informal networks throughout the country, has become a prominent part of the youth's socio-political identity. As the movement's music is firmly a part of the hip-hop genre, and thus influenced by hip-hop and rap artists of the West, particularly America, critiques of such political artistry have focused on the co-opting of Western music by Senegalese, and indeed, other African artists, and have questioned the authenticity of such music as 'African', and the utilisation of hip-hop as a means for African youth to form a distinct cultural and political identity (Dolby 2021). After all, how can young people claiming to be a new generation and further claiming to express themselves through their art, legitimise their identity if it is merely a copy or a mirror of another culture? This question also applies in the case of several other countries in Africa including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana and South Africa, where music is largely influenced by American artists.

The criticisms above seem disingenuous, especially at a time when global cultural exchanges are rapid and fluid, enabled by the shrinking world of the internet and social media. Young people in Africa today are very much a part of the globalised world; this is clear with their massive online presence and the heavy utilisation of the internet and social media in the NSMs spearheaded by the youth on the continent in the past decade. African youth are global youth – yet they are African as well! This is the dynamism that defines the young people of Africa and that is expressed through their artistry; it is also what Y'en a Marre displays through their music.

It is true that African hip-hop takes inspiration from American hip-hop. Senegalese artists especially are immensely influenced by artists such as the late Tupac Shakur, Notorious B.I.G., Eminem and Puff Daddy. However, Senegalese artists are careful to choose the elements from such music that would resonate with their own culture (Ndiaye 2021; Wilson Centre 2015). When one listens to music by Y'en a Marre's rappers, such as Thiat, Fou Malade, Keur Gui and others, the immensely local and personal aspect of the art is evident. These rappers mainly sing in the Wolof language, which is the most common language spoken amongst the Senegalese people, with some French used intermittently (Gueye 2013). They also reject the violent and sexual nature of much Western hip-hop, are firm about their identity as young Senegalese trying to underline positive messages for the youth in their country and are mindful of the importance of Islam in the civic consciousness of their audience (Wilson Centre 2015).

It is also clear that the lyrics are for the Senegalese people and serve the specific purpose of informing Senegalese civil society on their rights and the duties that are expected of their elected officials. Fou Malade has distinguished Senegalese, and West African hip-hop, from French and American hip-hop, stating in an interview, 'in the United States of America, hip-hop has become commercialised. People are talking about "I'm driving my car; I'm riding in a boat." And in my country, hip-hop is still a tool for education' (Eastin 2014). The actions and words of Y'en a Marre's artists are specifically designed to keep the movement at the forefront of the Senegalese public and political consciousness,

with their brash words and lack of deference to elders (Ndiaye 2021). This has often led to mixed reactions from their opponents as well as their supporters. This is especially the case in a highly patriarchal and Islamic society, where, for centuries, the views of youth have been secondary to those of the adults.

While Thiat's and, consequently, Y'en a Marre's methods are not always well received, they certainly spark conversations, and they succeed in seizing the narrative around controversial societal issues. In Bamba Ndiaye's (2021) chapter, 'Hip-Hop, Civic Awareness and Anti-Establishment Politics in Senegal', he discusses how 'diatribe' is used by the movement to provoke, and as a means of jolting everyone – the State, society in danger of falling into apathy, young people, the older generation – into realising the realities of life in Senegal and the power and agency that words and actions have to shake the foundations of otherwise entrenched political structures. Diatribe – harsh words and language – is especially shocking in Senegalese culture due to the country's ingrained social hierarchy based on age: elders must be respected, must be deferred to and are usually always right.

The artists of Y'en a Marre aim to shock with their work; they aim to stimulate a thought process, especially among the ambivalent and apathetic population. Y'en a Marre also frown upon patriarchy and the premium on respect for elders as cultural means of exerting control over the young generation, a relationship that has only succeeded in disadvantaging youth and women over time. The movement has been clearly against the cultural barriers and intended to foster a change process that will benefit people of all ages and genders (Ndiaye 2021). When Thiat was arrested in 2011 for referring to Wade as a liar, the movement intensified its approach of confronting elites and speaking truth to power (Nossiter 2011).

The slogan adopted by the group in recent years is 'NTS', which stands for 'New Type of Senegalese' (Bhattarai 2016). The NTS symbolises young Senegalese who see themselves as free from the cultural entrapments that have limited their potential and enabled their marginalisation over the years. The NTS is a social consciousness that is in line with the global awareness among young people of the need to play direct roles in shaping their society and providing the agency and leadership that has been previously lacking among youth. According to Nelson (2014, 13), 'The NTS agenda proceeds from the understanding that strong national institutions can only be founded on a society of responsible and engaged citizens who act with integrity and demand the same from their leaders'.

In the last five years, the Y'en a Marre movement has been heavily involved in grassroots advocacy that goes beyond the political. Members of the movement are often on the frontlines of community outreach programmes that work with disaffected youth and regularly help young people access education, healthcare, start small businesses and utilise public resources that are specifically designed for them (Bhattarai 2016). Their involvement in community activities extends beyond the capital city and their base in the Parcelles neighbourhood (Bozonnet 2014) – they have formed deep networks in the Senegalese countryside, helping communities, especially in remote and isolated locations,

access their administrative and governing leaders by acting as a bridge between them. The movement has also helped to train local youth in villages to act as representatives of their communities when it comes to dealing with the state, and these young people associated with Y'en a Marre are often looked to for leadership (Bhattarai 2016). Furthermore, the movement has also taken up an issue that is important to the Senegalese rural poor – land rights and ownership in the face of a State-corporate nexus (Bozonnet 2014).

All of this work is driven by a very specific philosophy on the part of the movement – that of NTS or the 'New Type of Senegalese'. This is defined by the Y'en a Marre project 'Building the Future 2022', which the movement describes as the effort to change the mentality of the Senegalese civil society to believe that they can bring about change (Bhattarai 2016). The NTS is not afraid to speak his or her mind and to assert themselves in the socio-political mainstream. The NTS unapologetically holds his or her elected officials accountable for their actions and demands the changes that they have voted for. But above all, the NTS must believe that *they* are the real political power in Senegal, and that they have the power for true and lasting political change. This new approach is expressed in the song 'Das Fanaanal', in which leaders are called to undertake their duties effectively, or be rejected by the voters to whom they are responsible Gueye (2013).

## Y'en a Marre in the Larger Context of West African Youth-Led Social Activism

Since its formation in 2011, Y'en a Marre has gained significant international recognition:

> The African Studies Quarterly dedicated an issue specifically to the Senegalese movement, President Obama organised a meeting with some of the originators of the movement and quite recently the Y'en a Marre has been granted a Prince Claus Award as a 'recognition of their work in the field of culture and development', and an Ambassador of Conscience Award by Amnesty International.
>
> (Hogenboom 2018, 9)

These examples of recognition stem from the consistent commitment on the part of the movement to take on societal challenges and both contest the government when there is the need and, at the same time, support the broader society to address difficulties that they are faced with. Furthermore, Y'en a Marre has been one of the longest sustained youth-led social movements in Africa, as most groups are formed in response to specific issues and later dissolve after the issues have been resolved, or the context changes. Some groups also metamorphose into new groups or movements, as the context evolves. In some settings, such as Guinea and Nigeria, youth movements have over the years been shaped around the need to react to social injustice and as such have been very temporal, as was the case with the End SARS movement in Nigeria, and

the campaign against the third-term bid of President Alpha Condé in Guinea. Y'en a Marre has existed for over a decade and has become the most prolific opposition in Senegal.

Since 2011, the political nature of Senegal's hip-hop has become immensely influential in the West African political music scene and has inspired similar movements in other African countries, such as Cameroon and even the Democratic Republic of Congo (Lewis & Ross 2015). In 2013, a movement modelled along the lines of Y'en a Marre was formed in Burkina Faso by Sams'K Le Jah and Serge Bambara, two famous artists in the country. Called Le Balai Citoyen (The Citizen's Broom), the movement campaigned for democracy and peace in the country through their music and helped to end the regime of President Blaise Compaoré (Corey-Boulet 2016).

Cameroonian hip-hop movement Negrissim, founded by the Sadrak and Sassene brothers, also draws influence from Senegalese artists, especially since the movement relocated to Dakar in 2002 after experiencing censorship in their country (Music in Africa 2015). Their experiences in Senegal would later go on to influence one of their most prominent albums, 'La Valle De Rois', released in 2009. They interacted with most of the Senegalese artists who would later form the Y'en a Marre. Thus, the level of openness seen in Senegal and the contentions between artists and the state would inform their own approach to music.

Rather than trying to suppress and isolate Y'en a Marre, it is in the interests of the Senegalese government to see the movement as a partner, and a pressure group that is of immense significance to the growth and development of the state. The group appears to be there to stay and its growing influence in Senegal and Africa in general has provided it with the socio-political capital that it requires to challenge any government that seeks to depart from the existing constitutional order, as experienced by Wade and to some extent Sall. Any attempt by Sall to seek a third-term mandate will clearly undercut peace, security and consequently development in Senegal. As such, Sall can build on his legacy by positively engaging the movement and working with them to promote social cohesion, peacebuilding and development in Senegal. This will be a win-win for him, the movement and the people of Senegal.

## Conclusion

The Y'en a Marre movement has succeeded in pitching itself as a critical and credible voice in Senegal, gaining significant international attention and recognition. It has continuously provided the space for socio-political expression that young people lacked in pre-2011 Senegal. What started as a protest movement has now been transformed into a massive group with a following across Senegal the country and region. The issues that the group is focused on speak to the everyday life of the average Senegalese, and these are issues around the need for leaders to respect and maintain the constitutional democracy, human rights, social justice and the rule of law.

The movement has over a decade of experience in social mobilisation and has succeeded in providing the youth with the agency that they had previously

lacked. The movement has also opened the eyes of youth to how they can mobilise and challenge traditions and cultures that have marginalised and isolated them from leadership and decision-making processes in their country. Hence, there is the emergence of the NTS, a Senegalese that demands accountability and transparency from its leadership and also demands a place and voice in society.

The ability of the government to constructively engage the movement and work with them as partners in development will go a long way in strengthening peace, security and development in Senegal. This also includes the willingness on the part of Sall to not seek a third-term mandate and to peacefully transition the country, at the end of his mandate in 2024.

## Notes

1 Known for his outspoken views about Macky Sall and for exposing corrupt political practices, Sonko is considered a major political opponent to the president in the 2024 elections. He is popular with the youth, and ran as the youngest presidential candidate in the 2019 elections. Many of the young people supporting him view him as a harbringer of change. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-56341141

2 In January 2022, Ousmane Sanko was elected mayor of the southern city of Ziguinchor https://www.theafricareport.com/169945/senegal-oppositionist-ousmane-sonko-celebrates-his-election-victory-in-ziguinchor/

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# 7 The Heroes of Burkina Faso's 2014 Revolution and the Mirage of Hope

*Anna Naa Adochoo Mensah*

## Introduction

The mass uprising in Burkina Faso that ended the rule of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014 is one of many that have ended regimes of African leaders, such as Ben Ali (Tunisia), Muhammad Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), Omar al-Bashir (Sudan), and Abdoulaye Wade (Senegal). Pressure from the youth for political change is a demonstration of the frustration of unemployed and marginalised young people, suppressed by corrupt leaders, in an era of poor governance. The protests in Burkina Faso were against Blaise Compaoré's attempt to change the country's constitution, to favour himself in a bid for a fifth term in office. This action brought together youth, trade unions, academics, and politicians to protest against the bid and deny Compaoré the opportunity of continuing his stay in power. What started as small-scale protests culminated in widespread protests and riots on a national scale. At the heart of the protests were the young musicians who were fed up with the president's 27-year reign and his approach to governance. They were determined to end his regime, a determination that the president soon understood, resulting in him eventually fleeing into exile in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.

The popularity of the revolution and the innovative approach used by protesters reflected the power of the people and their ability to challenge and change a government, if they believed that government was violating the country's constitution. This was a power that the people had used in 1966, but had failed to use since then. Between 2014 and 2015, protesters were able to remove a president and also contribute to the reversal of a military coup in 2015. These contributions have helped to set the stage for Burkina Faso to begin a democratic transition and elect a civilian government in 2015.

Although the youth of Burkina Faso are marginalised and absent from the political activities of the state, they are very influential in their protests, demonstrations, and revolutions which express their resentments against different governments when they desire political change. These uprisings have become a cyclical way of expressing their grievances and frustrations with socio-economic crises in the country. The means of expressing these grievances include the mobilisation of trade unions to take strike actions, and

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demonstrations by students, civil society organisations, market women, and other groups. Despite the successes that these uprisings have gained over the years in leading to a change in political leaders, the victory has always been snatched away by a group of elites or the military, and soon the same grievances become realities for the youth to face all over again.

Despite the innovative, impressive, and strategic means employed by the youth to ensure political changes, the influence of the heroes of the revolution, the country's youth, in the political scene has remained limited after the revolution. Thus, the successful transition of power through a democratic process in Burkina Faso has not succeeded in meeting the expectations of the youth. The disappointment among the youth has led to their radicalisation by extremist groups which explains the proliferation of locally grown extremist groups in Burkina Faso, and the threatening security issues in the Sahel region.

The youth contribution to political change and development appears to have become a mirage. They have once again been left out of mainstream political processes, and the existing unresolved grievances have over time contributed to the spread of locally bred radical extremist groups. This situation also points to the persistence of bad governance, corruption, and state failure in seeking to embrace its youth as a critical mass in the development of Burkina Faso.

This chapter examines key questions including, what explains the choice of Burkinabe youth to adopt social protests as a solution to their frustrations and grievances with the state and its elites? How effective have these social protests been in responding to the expectations and aspirations of the youth? What has been the place of Burkinabe youth in the transition process that ensued in the post-Compaoré era? What are the consequences of the continuous exclusion of the youth from the political process in Burkina Faso, and the cyclical evolution of their grievances beyond their significant revolutionary efforts? What are the connections between the exclusion of the youth and the growing state of insecurity in the country?

This chapter responds to these questions and explores the way forward for a more inclusive structure which will not limit the power and agency of the youth in social protests, but rather empower them to participate in decision-making and leadership processes. This will require the state and its development partners to invest in responding to youth grievances and providing them with the socio-economic opportunities they have lacked over the years.

## An Overview of Past Revolutions in Burkina Faso

Popular revolutions and military coups have been common in Burkina Faso (Upper Volta, 1958–1984) since it gained independence from France on 5 August 1960. This trend started in January 1966, when the country's first President, Maurice Yaméogo was forced to resign (Engels 2015). Yaméogo had maintained a regime-centred approach to governance and suppressed all forms

of opposition, an approach that was deemed tyrannical by his opponents and civil society. According to (Williamson 2013, 22):

> Yaméogo did not see democracy as an adequate form of government for Upper Volta. For him, party politics did not promote national unity; strong personalities that attracted party supporters did. On the international stage, he feared that Upper Volta would be seen as a nation that lacked consensus at a time when the survival of former colonies was the most important political objective. He wasted little time in abandoning the multiparty constitution to favour a UDV-controlled one party state.

Yaméogo's departure from the democratic track, and his poor economic policies, among others, led to a shift against him in public opinion. Calls for his resignation, mainly due to an unpopular financial austerity plan he introduced, culminated in a massive uprising led by trade unions, civil society, traditional and religious leaders. This culminated in his arrest and detention on 3 January 1966 and his resignation on 4 January 1966.

With the fall of Yaméogo, the military staged a coup and declared Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana, the head of the military, as the head of the state. Lamizana tried to promote a shift from the approach of his predecessor, as he worked on transitioning the country to civilian rule, a process that led to the adoption of the 1970 Constitution, which ushered in the Second Republic and subsequently in the Third Republic in 1977. However, his time in office was characterised by a severe drought affecting the country's agricultural sector, coupled with corruption and widespread strikes by teachers and workers in other sectors. Burkina Faso was facing economic decline and political instability. Both republics were weak and characterised by tensions among political elites and a general lack of direction in relation to governance. The state was weak and that led to the country experiencing three military coups between 1980 and 1983 (International Crisis Group 2013).

Lamizana's reign left Burkina Faso in a fragile state, with constant protests against his policies, especially by civil society and the unions. As the situation declined, he was overthrown on 25 November 1980 by Colonel Saye Zerbo. Zerbo was in turn overthrown by Colonel Gabriel Somé Yorian for failing to keep to his promises of transitioning the country to civilian rule, addressing interethnic tensions and addressing economic hardship. Yorian named Commandant Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo as president of Burkina Faso, but remained the leader behind the scenes. The young Captain Thomas Sankara, who had briefly served as Secretary of State under Zerbo, was appointed Prime Minister. Guided by a strong leftist ideology, Sankara's views conflicted with those of his colleagues and on 17 May 1983, he was placed under house arrest after resigning from government. The arrest of Sankara was a controversial and unpopular move that was highly criticised. By then, Sankara was seen as an iconic figure and, with his arrest, the limited political capital that the government had was lost.

As Williamson (2013, 32) states,

> Sankara's initial anti-conformist, anti-capitalist, pro-revolutionary stance attracted many disenchanted youth from the streets to rally behind his idealism. Much of Sankara's support came from the youth in villages. They found his personal and family life appealing.

What the youth saw was a character who resonated with them, who had radical views that were different to what they were used to seeing. Thus, he was appealing to them and they were attracted to him. His friend and confidante Blaise Compaoré mobilised forces to secure his release and then overthrew the government, with Sankara becoming the head of the state on 4 August 1983. Popular among the youth, the charismatic Sankara took immediate steps that further endeared him to his people, including changing the name of the country from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, meaning 'Land of Honest People.' Sankara was viewed with a sense of hope and seen as reflecting the aspirations of the youth in Burkina Faso. He was also a skilled orator who knew how to attract the attention of the youth, and being only 33 years old, himself made it easier for him to connect with them.

As the Sankara regime started to stabilise the country, he was overthrown and killed in a coup staged by Compaoré on 15 October 1987. These events shocked the country, as people struggled to comprehend the actions of Compaoré, who was both a friend of Sankara and one of the engineers of the coup that ushered Sankara to the presidency.

## The Rise and Fall of Blaise Compaoré: 27 Years of a Strange and Uncertain Journey?

The 15 October 1987 coup by Compaoré started a 27-year political journey for Burkina Faso. Compaoré's earlier experiences in the military and at the highest levels of power in the country, helped him to understand how to navigate the political dynamics in the country. Thus, he built a strong government with the support of the military, traditional and religious leaders, and previous political opponents. This approach is described by the International Crisis Group (2013, 11):

> Blaise Compaoré's success was due to his capacity to build a semi-authoritarian regime on the foundations of a weak military dictatorship, moving towards democracy without ever achieving it, and creating a seemingly free and open political system. This regime is based on three key institutions: the military, a political party and the traditional chiefdoms… Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, political and public freedoms coexisted with authoritarian practices inherited from the end of the 1980s.

Compaoré was however, not open to criticism or challenge and in reacting to those, soon gained the reputation of targeting and assassinating his critics.

As stated by authors such as Ouedraogo (2015), Kiebré (2014), and Bianchini (2007), Compaoré targeted even students, journalists, and trade unionists for assassination. Famous cases included the journalist Norbert Zongo, managing editor of the newspaper L'Indépendant on 13 December 1998, who was burnt in his vehicle. These actions were compounded by a sense of impunity by state security actors, on whom the regime relied for its survival. An example of this was the death of the student Justin Zongo after being detained by police in the town of Koudougou on 20 February 2011 (Engels 2019). There were suspicions that he had been tortured and left for dead, suspicions that inflamed the public against the government.

The violent methods employed by Compaoré at home were replicated across the West African region, with his deployment of mercenaries in Liberia and Sierra Leone, in support of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), respectively. Both groups gained a global reputation for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Koroma 2004). Compaoré's support of insurgency groups in the region led to significant international backlash; he was criticised even though his government never accepted claims of his involvement in the civil wars in those countries.

Initially successful in his bid to silence the populace, discontent against Compaoré gradually grew and the death of Justin Zongo in 2011 fuelled protests across the country – the most severe since he became president. The increase in fuel prices and growing economic hardship also stimulated protests which started on 26 May 2012 in the capital city, Ouagadougou. By then, it was becoming evident that Compaoré had lost the attention of his people and it was only a matter of time before his regime disintegrated.

The disintegration started in 2013, when Compaoré attempted to amend the constitution to end term limits, as he was preparing to run for a fifth term, a move that was unpopular. The country then experienced very significant protests against the desired change that would have entrenched the stay of the government in power. As the protests mounted, mostly led by young people, the government closed schools and universities and deployed the military on the streets of the country. These moves only hardened the protesters' resolve such that they were determined to challenge the government regardless of the consequences (Frère and Englebert 2015).

Prominent among the protesters were popular young musicians, who were prepared to participate in protests against the government. They were an important force behind the establishment of the Balai Citoyen movement (the Citizen's Broom in English). A broom symbolised the desire on the part of citizens to sweep Burkina Faso, to get rid of corruption and autocratic leaders. It was a call to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Writing on the involvement of artists in the movement, Mateos and Bajo-Erro (2020, 11) had this to say:

> Two of the most charismatic members of Balai Citoyen (rapper Serge Bambara, known as 'Smockey' and reggae singer and broadcaster Karim

> Sama, known as 'Sams'K Le Jah') initiated a strategy of 'subversive' activities, as they themselves acknowledge, to encourage the responsibility of citizens in the construction of a democratic system.

The involvement of musicians and their use of popular arts caught the attention of youth, who rallied behind the movement and popularised its messages. The movement was determined to stop the voting process that would lead to the constitution being changed. On 30 October 2014, they attacked the National Assembly, stopped the voting and the country was embroiled in violence and riots, as people challenged the security apparatus (Mateos and Bajo-Erro 2020). It became obvious that the government was not going to survive, and the protest had evolved forcing the president to resign. Sensing that even his life was at risk, with the protests only growing, Compaoré resigned as the President of Burkina Faso and went into exile in Côte d'Ivoire.

The resignation and eventual fleeing of Compaoré led to the military taking control, an action that was resisted by protesters, who apparently had lacked confidence in the military and wanted a democratic transition organised, with a civilian in charge. The control and instrumentalisation of the state's security apparatus by the government over the years has strained the relationship between them and Burkinabes. Thus, when Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Zida was announced as the interim head of the state, he was immediately rejected by the people. A veteran diplomat, Michel Kafando, was later named acting president, with Zida becoming interim Prime Minister and Minister of Defence – a decision that was a compromise between the military, the protesters, and political actors.

One of Kafando's first major actions was to eliminate from the transition process, and also from positions of authority, those who had supported Compaoré's decision to change the constitution. Another major decision probably taken too soon, in the absence of a gradual Security Sector Reform process, was the announcement by a Commission drafting recommendations for reforms by the Transitional Government, of a proposal to dismantle the elite presidential guards, the Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP), with the members to be dispersed into the other units of the military (Bonkoungou and Bavier 2015). Used to exercising unlimited powers, and facing the potential of being dismantled, there was every possibility that the RSP would react: 'A force 1,200 men strong, the RSP is known amongst the Burkinabé people for its substantial weaponry, and its autonomy from any other armed force, since it exclusively operates under the president's command' (Rakotomalala and Nadia Karoui 2015).

Three days after the proposal was made, the RSP staged a coup on 16 September 2015, detaining President Kafando, along with Prime Minister Zida, and other cabinet members (France 24 2015). They named the head of the state General Gilbert Diendéré, a close ally of Compaoré's.

These events appeared to have been a spontaneous reaction by the RSP, rather than a well-planned coup. The sudden changes that were happening and

the fear of losing relevance and power, may have played a role in the decision of the RSP to stage a coup. However, the public's reaction sent a clear message that the coup was not going to stand. The youth mounted barricades in the city, burning tyres and defying curfews and demands by the military for people to stay in their homes. The state-owned media were shut down, but the youth used social media, which was much more accessible, easier to use and a more reliable way to spread their messages and connect with and mobilise their peers to participate in protests.

Young people, both educated and non-educated, urban and rural, joined the protests and defied the threat of violence from the RSP. The unions also played a leading role in the struggle and their actions were complemented by international actors such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the French government. President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria as the then the head of ECOWAS, engaged the coup leaders in Abuja, Nigeria and encouraged them to restore the government that they had overthrown. These meetings, alongside threats by the French President François Hollande, were reported to have paved the way for the restoration of the government and order in the country (Rakotomalala and Nadia Karoui 2015). Apart from the internal and international pressure, the fact that the coup was a reaction and not a well-planned event led to the coupists being unsure whether or not to stay. They had experienced the protests against the previous regime and they may have realised that insisting on staying would only lead to bloodshed in the country, so they capitulated and agreed to reinstate the government.

The reinstalling of President Michel Kafando was a big victory for the youth. Any success of the RSP would have been a success for Compaoré and his cronies, as had been seen with the naming of General Diendéré as the head of the state. That possibility, alongside the potential for the derailing of the democratic path that Burkina Faso had taken, energised the demand by the protesters that the coup should not hold.

## The Mirage of Hope: Reviewing the Expectations of a Youthful Revolution

The reversal of the RSP's coup and the holding of democratic elections on 29 November 2015 ushered in significant hope, especially to the country's youth. For the first time, they were participating in elections that were deemed free, fair and credible, and they were having the freedom to decide who their leaders would be (National Democratic Institute 2015). Kafondo lived up to expectations and the struggle of the youth and other actors yielded fruit, at least in achieving a democratic transition. Veteran politician Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress (MPP) was elected as president. Kaboré had previously served as Prime Minister (1994–1996) and President of the National Assembly (2002–2012). Thus, he was also part of the old guard, as one could not have served in those positions unless within the circle of Compaoré.

While the desire for change was strong, the actual results for young people were very minimal. The youth were to a large extent left out of mainstream politics and denied the possibility of playing a leading role in both the transition process and the subsequent turn to democratic governance. This exclusion and the re-emergence of leading people in the Compaoré administration disillusioned the youth and bred a sense of frustration among them.

The reign of Kaboré has been fraught with several challenges, specifically the poor economy, the negative impact of climate change, terrorist attacks and the radicalisation of especially young people, and economic inequality between the north and other regions of the country (Institute for Peace and Security Studies 2020). The marginalisation and economic hardship in the north of the country has contributed significantly to the growth and spread of violent extremism. The country has suffered immensely from several attacks since 2015, the most being on 14 November 2021. As reported by France 24 (2021), 'an attack on November 14 saw hundreds of fighters storm a gendarmerie camp at Inata in the north of the country, killing at least 48 military police officers and four civilians.' The news network also indicated that 'Militant groups linked to al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) group have plagued the landlocked West African nation since 2015, killing about 2,000 people and displacing 1.4 million from their homes' (France 24 2021).

The factors responsible for the insecurity and the growth of radical extremist groups could also be attributed to the fall of the Muammar al-Gaddafi regime in Libya, the inflow of fighters from Libya, and the exploiting of socio-economic and political vacuums in the region by terror-related groups to further their objectives. The internal challenges in Burkina Faso made it easier for groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS to establish themselves and carry out violent acts within the country.

Despite the existing challenges, Kaboré was able to win a second term in November 2020, with 57.7 per cent of the votes cast. What was remarkable about the election was that the voter turnout was only 50 per cent (Bonny 2020). This low voter turnout points to the unwillingness on the part of most youth to participate in elections, as they have been continually disappointed by succeeding regimes.

A year into the second term of president, it could be seen that challenges persist and there are several other major issues facing the government, including inter-communal conflicts that have to do with accessing and owning land, the limited resources and services available in local communities, and the marginalisation of women and youth – the very minimal presence of the government having intensified insecurity and undermined the development and growth of the youth in affected communities (Maglo and Grathwohl 2020). The neglect of youth in isolated communities, the growing spate of violent extremism, and the increasing economic challenges that have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic are challenges which the Kaboré government has not been able to address. This has led to the eruption of several demonstrations around the country.

In November 2021, the protests against the government heightened with people calling for the resignation of the president and his cabinet. The state reacted by shutting down the internet for eight days and forced protesters to disperse (Wilkins 2021). The reaction of the state has not helped the situation, especially given the fact that it has not effectively embarked on engaging the public and other actors and working with them to support the fight against violent extremism. The government has not appeared ready to strengthen democratic good governance and institute reforms geared towards transforming the context and addressing the reasons young people choose to join violent extremist groups.

Apart from the youth's concerns, there is also a need for gender-based reforms and for the country to critically assess and adopt change processes that would address decades of gender inequalities and the abuse of women and girls in Burkinabe society. Providing data on women in Burkina Faso, UN Women (2021) states:

> Work still needs to be done in Burkina Faso to achieve gender equality. 51.6% of women aged 20–24 years old who were married or in a union before age 18. The adolescent birth rate is 132.3 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 as of 2016, up from 129 per 1,000 in 2014. As of February 2021, only 6.3% of seats in parliament were held by women.

The continuous marginalisation of women and girls, and their lack of opportunities, had augmented their fear and doubts, and their loss of confidence in a system that was expected to be different from previous systems.

Added to this, is the emergence in powerful positions of elites that the youth fought against in 2014. These factors, similar to those experienced in places like Tunisia, are contributing to the desire on the part of youth to become involved in terror-related groups, in most cases to take revenge against the state and its elites.

## The Future and What It Holds for Burkina Faso's Youth

Burkina Faso is currently trapped in a trajectory of insecurity and political decline. Kaboré's inability to address the spread of violent extremist groups, and their attacks against state officials and civilians, has increased the lack of confidence in him and his regime. Apparently, several factors could be contributing to the rise of violent extremism-related activities, including youth unemployment, the lack of socio-economic and political opportunities for youth, the marginalisation of youth in the transition process that ensued after the Campaoré era, social injustices in the country, poverty and lack of opportunities among youth, and the perception of neglect, especially among people in the rural areas. As indicated above, terror-related groups are taking advantage of these gaps, to identify, mobilise, and use vulnerable youth as agents of terror.

The failure of the democratic process to change the state of the country's youth is seen as a disappointment, especially as the protests in 2014 and 2015 had generated high hopes among them. The election of 2015 succeeded in returning power to the people who had held influential positions under Campaoré and that has not gone down well with the youth, hence the increased political apathy and the widening gulf between the youth and the state.

The Balai Citoyen has remained key to social consciousness in the country and its members, especially the musicians, continue to produce songs and use other popular arts such as comedy and graffiti to express their frustrations and disappointment with the state and its leadership. The frequent demonstrations against the government have created a sense of sociopolitical instability, with Kaboré appearing to be losing political control.

According to the World Bank (2021), in 2019, youth unemployment in Burkina Faso was 7.6 per cent, and has increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the country's economy.

Despite the agency shown by the youth in 2014 and 2015, the biggest beneficiary of the outcome, Kaboré, has not adopted an approach that would build on that agency to enhance the success of his government. Movements such as Balai Citoyen have the potential to rally youth, civil society, and other actors in the country to lead public education efforts against violent extremism. They could mobilise youth, and engage community, religious and traditional leaders, and other actors in society to support the government's effort to prevent and counter violent extremism.

Alongside such efforts, the government should open the sociopolitical space, to enhance the inclusion and participation of youth and women in leadership and decision-making roles. This would enhance their sense of identity and enable their contributions to policy making and implementation, especially policies that directly affect them. Opening the sociopolitical space will reduce the youth's suspicions of the elites, and will allow them to be partners in decision-making, with the youth also being in a position to take responsibility for the outcome of decisions that they participated in making. This may require reviewing some legislative, institutional, and political frameworks which currently impede youth access to political positions. Changing focus from the youth's challenges to their potential will also contribute to helping the youth focus on their roles in building the state. At the moment, their limited awareness of, and participation in, decision-making processes, alienate youth from mainstream governance and leadership roles and processes.

Government can work with young people in creating innovative, youth-friendly initiatives that are geared towards lifting youth out of poverty. Initiatives undertaken by development partners at the moment are very limited and mostly target youth in urban areas, leaving rural youth disconnected from the state. A principal reason for this is the fact that the decentralisation process which was initiated with the introduction of the 2 January 1991 Constitution and the 1998 Decentralisation Policy (Sebahara 2004), has not been effectively implemented. Though municipalities were created, power is not truly devolved

and there are several unfunded mandates in the municipalities, as the central government continues to exercise political and economic control over the councils. Consequently, while there have been high expectations over the years, the municipalities have been unable to provide the services that citizens require. This failure undermines the relationship between citizens and the municipalities and the central government.

The importance of prioritising the creation of jobs for the youth, and investments in agriculture and other trades, cannot be underestimated in the quest to respond to youth grievances. The absence of decent jobs for the youth makes them vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremist/terrorist groups (Loada and Romanuik 2014). Mobilising and supporting the youth to build resilience against violent extremism must start by providing alternatives for their survival. Such actions should be led by youth, with investments made by the government and its development partners.

Even more crucial than all the factors mentioned above is the need for the promotion of democratic good governance in Burkina Faso. This requires a process that will strengthen democratic and governance institutions, investment in the promotion of human security and social justice, the enhancement of gender equality, coupled with transparent and accountable leadership. At the centre of the approach to democratic good governance has to be the nation's youth and women. The failure of the Kaboré administration to shift from what can be referred to as 'business as usual,' will only lead to increased security risks and instability in the country. In turn, this may fundamentally threaten the current administration, with the potentially of Kaboré being forced out of power before the end of his second term, through protests and riots.

It appears that the current administration has not learnt from the lessons of previous administrations. The tendency to underestimate the youth and neglect their needs, poses immense risks to Burkina Faso. Additionally, instead of taking a human security-based approach to the fight against violent extremism, the government is relying on a militarised approach. Since 2015, this approach has not yielded any positive results, and has in fact only succeeded in driving people and communities into supporting violent extremist groups, with a consequent rise in attacks over recent years.

Rather than being suspicious of youth movements, the government can work with youth movements to stabilise the country and overcome the challenges related to violent extremism. The earlier this realisation is embraced by the government, the better it would be for Burkina Faso.

The role of ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the international community cannot be neglected in ensuring democratic principles are respected. Blaise Compaoré was instrumental in brokering peace in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Togo, Niger, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, despite his alleged history of backing rebels and fuelling civil wars in the region (Salihu 2015). His intention to amend the constitution to gain a fifth term in office was no secret to the international community, but the world watched till the uprising forced him

out. While the AU and ECOWAS are consistent in condemning unconstitutional changes of government, similar effort has not been made to condemn and sanction the practices of constitutional amendments.

At the moment, the threat of insecurity continues to loom and the country is at a crossroads, faced with an uncertain future. There is an urgent need for a shift to a youth-led approach to preventing and countering violent extremism.

## Conclusion

Since 1966, Burkina Faso has experienced several protests against the state in relation to bad governance, state failure to meet the needs of its citizens, corruption, and the breach of constitutional provisions. The removal of Yaméogo from power in 1966 sent a clear message at an early point in the post-colonial history of Burkina Faso, that citizens were prepared to challenge the state and demand their rights and freedom. Since then, the country's path has been tumultuous, with military coups experienced right through to 1987, when Compaoré came to power, after a coup that led to the death of the head of the state, Captain Thomas Sankara. While Compaoré's 27-year rule provided some sense of security, it was characterised by the intimidation, targeted killing, and oppression of perceived political opponents. His desire to change the constitution was a tipping point that led to his removal from power. Young people, especially the youth-led Balai Citoyen movement, played a central role in his removal and in protecting the constitutional order, right through to 2015 when democratic elections were held.

The high expectations of the country's youth were dashed as the country returned to the initial status quo of youth neglect and marginalisation. The widespread poverty, corruption, and bad governance, alongside foreign interests, have led to the rise and spread of violent extremism across the country. Vulnerable youth, disconnected from the state, have been recruited by terror-related groups which target both state security actors and innocent civilians. The frequency of the attacks and the inability of the government to effectively prevent and counter violent extremism have led to confrontations between the youth and other actors, and the state.

There has been a gap in relation to the state investing in its youth and opening the sociopolitical space for their inclusion and participation in governance. Youth movements could play a critical role in supporting the prevention and countering of violent extremism; however, the government needs to understand their agency and work with them in promoting democratic good governance, human security, human rights, and the rule of law in the country. Alongside this, the government should strengthen the decentralisation process and open the socio-economic and political space for youth, adopting a youth- and women-centred approach to governance. The lack of proactiveness on the part of the government to address the current challenges will deepen insecurity, and further undermine the relationship between the youth and the elites, a path that the government should work on avoiding.

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# 8 Confronting a Brutal Present

## Guinean Youth and the Struggle Against Constitutional Breach

*Ibrahim Bangura*

### Introduction

Between 2018 and 2019, Guinea experienced violent protests against President Alpha Condé's bid to change the country's 2010 constitution. This move by Condé was a constitutional breach geared towards extending his stay in power, after what should have been his second and final term. What started as peaceful protests quickly degenerated into confrontations between protesters and state security actors, who used extreme violence to clamp down on the protests. The establishment of the Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC) in April 2019, consisting of opposition parties, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), members of trade unions and human rights and democracy activists, provided a central rallying point for push-back against Condé and his elites.

At the centre of these protests were the country's youth, who, for over a decade and a half, had been continuously demanding socioeconomic changes and constitutional order in Guinea. The youth represented diverse backgrounds (rural and urban, educated and non-educated etc.), with a host of reasons for challenging the state, including years of marginalisation, economic hardship, unemployment and frustration directed against Condé's breach of the 2010 Constitution. However, governments, including those of Lansana Conté, Moussa Dadis Camara and Alpha Condé, all reacted violently, rather than constructively engaging with the protesting youth. In the face of harsh state action, young people mobilised their peers and participated in demonstrations, with some of them subsequently either losing their lives, or being subjected to torture by state security actors. However, a significant lack of cohesion was observed in the social mobilisations that were emerging, and a centralised youth leadership was needed to organise and connect the various movements and provide them with a strategic direction. The formation of the FNDC provided a focal point for the different movements to rally to, and connect with each other. Thus, in spite of the roles played by Guinean youth in the protests, the focus has mostly been on this umbrella movement, the FNDC, with very limited literature on the specific roles that youth played in mobilising their peers and opposing the actions of Condé.

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To address the gaps identified above, this chapter critically examines the following questions: why does youth mobilisation and movements matter in the broader political struggle in contemporary Guinea, especially in relation to the country's constitutional order? What is the relationship between the country's youth and the state, and how has that relationship enhanced or undermined youth agency and the ability of Guinean youth to effectively mobilise and contend with the state on issues related to legality and legitimacy? How did the state react to youth mobilisation and how has that succeeded in framing the post-elections relationship between the youth and the state? And finally, what does the 5 September 2021 coup against Condé mean to the youth and their struggle for constitutional order in Guinea?

Methodologically, a survey was conducted with 279 youth (191 males and 88 females). The respondents were selected on the basis of falling into the category of 'youth' and having participated in the protests against the referendum and the third-term bid of Condé. The definition of youth is based on that given in the African Youth Charter, that is, the age bracket between 18 and 35 years, as Guinea is a signatory of the Charter. As indicated above, demographic factors including sex, rural or urban location etc. were taken into consideration to include youth from diverse backgrounds in the study. Forty-seven (29 males and 18 females) key informant interviews were conducted with government officials, members of the FNDC, youth leaders and CSOs. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used for the selection of respondents. Alongside the survey and interviews, an extensive review of existing literature on Guinea and reports from human rights organisations and media outlets within and outside of Guinea was conducted, which helped to further enrich the analysis in the chapter.

The study was conducted in the capital city Conakry, Nzérékoré and Labé between June and September 2021. These locations were targeted as they were the cities where the demonstrations against Condé were largely centred. Additionally, Conakry, as a cosmopolitan city, has youth from a variety of backgrounds that participated in the protests, while Nzérékoré is considered to be a stronghold of Condé and his party, the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG), and Labé is considered to be the stronghold of the opposition party, the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea.

Six research assistants (three males and three females) supported the process of collecting data, with two of them focusing on each of the cities included in the study. Being themselves young Guineans familiar with the context, they were able to better engage with their peers, which was critical for the study, and provided nuanced perspectives that have enriched the analysis in the chapter.

## Youth Mobilisation and State Resistance in Guinea: A Historical Perspective

Guinea has a rich history of youth mobilisation that predates the country's independence in 1958. At an early age, Ahmed Sekou Touré[1] became a union

activist who played a critical role in the establishment of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) an inter-territorial political party for all the French-speaking West African countries,[2] alongside other activists such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire in 1946. This movement, consisting of young activists in Francophone West Africa, became critical in framing independence movements in the region, and engaging with France on the question of the future of their countries. The Guinean chapter of the RDA, Democratic Party of Guinea (Parti Démocratique de Guinée, PDG) led by Touré, used a populist approach that succeeded in attracting and mobilising a wide range of actors across all sectors and classes of society. At the centre of the movement were mostly uneducated youth and women who rallied behind and supported the ideology of Touré. Touré understood the grievances existing against the state amongst military veterans, urban workers, peasants and women, and harnessed them into mobilising these various groups to push for independence (Schmidt 2005), which was subsequently gained on 2 October 1958. However, since gaining independence from France in 1958, Guinea has had a contentious history characterised by nepotism, corruption and the instrumentalisation of state institutions against civil society by the political elites that emerged. This class of the postcolonial political elite adopted a gerontocratic approach to politics and governance that has, over the years, favoured them at the expense of the country's youth and women. Thus, while the government continued to focus its politics and policies on youth and women immediately after independence, it was for the purposes of furthering an agenda for the consolidation of Touré's power. The agency of women and youth has been constantly undermined, thereby limiting their participation in leadership and governance (Philipps 2013), a pattern that successive governments have followed.

The 26-year reign of Touré (1958–1984) was marked by significant violence against political opponents. As reported by Amnesty International, there was a clampdown on any form of opposition and in fact Camp Boiro, the largest political prison built in 1962, still stands as a symbol of the unpunished crimes committed by the regime against its citizens (Amnesty International 2010). However, Touré, as indicated by respondents, had an effective propaganda machinery that succeeded in conscientising the country's women and youth and inculcating in them a deep sense of nationalism and loyalty to him and his elites, with his approach based on a socialist and anti-Western ideology. While this served his agenda, he failed to empower women and youth and rather, continued to instrumentalise them. As stated by Bangura (2019, 40):

> Touré and his Democratic Party of Guinea (Parti Démocratique de Guinée [PDG]) mobilised women and youth and positioned them as the face of the revolution. However, it appears that the government was more interested in consolidating and maintaining its hold on power than genuinely providing women and youth a place and a voice in their society.

Prominent young Guineans that he suspected of not being loyal to him were either forced into exile or killed. Examples include Guinea's most celebrated

novelist, Camara Laye, who died in exile in Senegal in 1980 (Blay-Amihere 1991), and Diallo Telli, the first secretary of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), who died in Camp Boiro in 1977 (A. Diallo 1985).

With the death of Touré in 1984, the military seized power and established the Comité Militaire de Redressement National (CMRN); the head of the junta, Touré's successor Colonel Lansana Conté, eventually transitioned the country to democracy in 1990 (Kaye 2018). This political change initially raised the expectations of Guineans, as they had craved socioeconomic and political transformation for decades (Blay-Amihere 1991). However, the optimism was short-lived, as the political elites from the Touré era re-emerged and became part of the Conté administration. In December 1990, Guinea adopted a democratic constitution, with a two-term limit of five years; democratic elections were first held in 1993, which Conté won. However, in November 2001, Conté overhauled the constitutional order through a referendum that lifted the limit on presidential terms and extended the term length to seven years (Bangoura 2015).

Unlike the Touré era when youth were reticent and readily rallied behind the government, Guinea experienced several youth-led protests during the Conté administration. This could be attributed to the growing consciousness among the youth of their rights, and the failure on the part of the state to address their concerns and needs. The country was plunged into political instability and constant protests between 2005 and 2008 (Camara 2016). On 22 January 2007, during a demonstration calling for the resignation of Conté, 20 people were killed, with several others wounded and tortured. Reporting on the reaction of state security actors, the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN 2007) stated 'security forces shot dead at least 20 people… as tens of thousands of Guineans turned out to demonstrate against President Lansana Conté in the biggest nationwide show of discontent in his 23-year rule.'

Despite the protests, Conté maintained his grip on power until his death in 2008, leaving the country in chaos, with the military eventually seizing power on 23 December 2008, immediately after he was pronounced dead. Captain Moussa Dadis Camara established the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD). Shortly after, 'Camara's erratic leadership sparked increasing civilian unrest and concerns that military fragmentation could lead to violence' (Arieff 2010). The violence that ensued escalated when Camara started hinting at the possibility of contesting during the presidential election planned for 2010. On 28 September 2008, 'security forces opened fire with live ammunition on a crowd of some 50,000 civilian protesters who had gathered in and around an outdoor stadium near the center of Conakry' (Arieff and Cook 2009, 1). Reporting on their findings on the 28 September massacre, the International Commission of Inquiry established by the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) stated:

> The Commission is in a position to confirm the identity of 156 persons who were killed or who disappeared: 67 persons killed whose bodies were returned to their families, 40 persons who were seen dead in the stadium or

> in morgues but whose bodies have disappeared, and 49 persons who were seen in the stadium but whose fate is unknown. It confirms that at least 109 women were subjected to rape and other sexual violence, including sexual mutilation and sexual slavery. Several women died of their wounds following particularly cruel sexual attacks.
>
> (United Nations 2009, 2)

Disagreements between Camara and his Aide de Camp, Aboubacar Sidiki Diakité, who had carried out the stadium attack, led to Camara being shot in the head and subsequently taken to Morocco for treatment (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012). Camara's deputy, General Sékouba Konaté, with the support of the international community, organised the presidential election in 2010, with veteran opposition politician Alpha Condé[3] emerging victorious (B. Y. Diallo 2010).

Given his history, exposure and contestations against the autocratic rule of Conté, there was a general sense of hope that he would be different from his predecessors. This hope was short-lived as young people and opposition parties started organising protests bent on challenging his persistent attempts to delay long-awaited parliamentary and municipal elections,[4] coupled with growing economic hardship in the country. Importantly, some of the key campaign promises of Condé which underlined the need to end state collusion with foreign investors in the plunder of Guinea's resources, and the return to ethical policies in the attribution of exploration and exploitation licences for Guinea's mines, were not kept. In 2016, the president and some of his confidantes became embroiled in what became known as the Simandou Scandal, in which recordings and leaked emails provided evidence of bribes being paid for mining concessions. As reported by France 24, 'In mid-November, the Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto admitted to paying a commission to a close adviser of President Condé to win mining rights over the Simandou project, regarded as one of the world's largest untapped iron ore deposits.'[5] The failure of Condé to meet the expectation of Guineans and the emerging scandals highlighted by the respondents are the reasons that led to them losing faith in him. Furthermore, like his predecessors, he continued the practice of youth marginalisation, which led to youth mobilising to question his actions and their legitimacy.

Condé responded violently to the protests, with the disproportionate use of force by security actors further weakening the relationship between the state and its youth. The stage was thus set for future confrontations between the gerontocracy and the country's youth.

## The Question of Constitutional Breach and Youth Contestations in Guinea

Midway into his second and final term, rumours started making the rounds that Condé intended to change the 2010 Constitution, to extend presidential term

limits. As indicated by some respondents, people were generally of the opinion that Condé was going to respect the provisions of the constitution relating to the two-term limit, with most believing the rumours to be untrue. However, it gradually became apparent that Condé and his allies were determined to change the constitution and extend his stay in office. Most of the youth who participated in the study – 212 out of 279 – indicated that they were surprised when Condé and his party, the RPG, began the campaign for amending the constitution. With his long history of political opposition to the previous oppressive regimes, Condé had been seen as a symbol of democracy by many young people. The 67 respondents that indicated that they were not surprised stated, among other factors, that Guinean leaders have always been self-seeking and hence, they expected the same from Condé.[6] One of the 57 youth[7] had this to say:

> Condé is no different from our previous leaders; he was never fighting for the Guinean people prior to him ascending the presidency. He wanted access to the resources of the state and for him that was to be gained through having access to power. People rallied behind him as the hope of the nation, but he only fooled us all. Now that he has power, he will do everything to continue holding on to it. I was never surprised when I heard of a change of the constitution, it was business as usual.

The debate on the constitution engulfed the nation for a while and the government mounted its propaganda campaign to shape the narratives around the constitutional amendment. As explained by a senior official[8] of the Condé administration:

> Our administration came to realise that the president needed more time to fully carry out his development agenda. Ten years is never enough. We have to fix the education, health, agriculture and other sectors and the president needed more time for this. So, his desire to extend his stay was not for his personal interest, it is rather in the interest of Guinea, a country that needs good and effective leadership. That decision was the best decision he ever made, as it was based on the national interest.

When questioned on the comments of the government official, critics were quick to dismiss them as false, stating instead that the interest was based entirely on the desire of Condé and his political elites to continue their looting of the Guinean economy.[9] Opposition parties, civil society and youth activists quickly reacted by mobilising and establishing the FNDC in April 2019.[10] The movement which, according to one of its founding members, was geared towards educating the people of Guinea on the need to collectively stand up against the abuse of the constitution, came to rely on the youth to reach out to their peers within and outside of Guinea as a means to challenge the president's decision.[11]

These young people had their own reasons for opposing the third-term bid and had previously done so against the Conté administration in 2001. Through the youth's own motivations, and the FNDC's reliance on them to strengthen the anti-Condé movement, it is important to note that it was not the FNDC that mobilised the youth but the local youth leaders that rallied their peers in different cities. Nevertheless, unlike countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, the Guinean youth lacked a strong and well-organised leadership that would have provided recognisable and credible faces and voices for a protracted social movement. This gravely limited the potential for a coordinated and nationally unified approach to the protests, with some of the youth leaders consequently turning to the FNDC for leadership and direction.

The eventual announcement of a date, 1 March 2020, for the referendum sparked nationwide protests, led by the FNDC and the youth. The protests were met with stiff resistance from the military and the gendarmerie, a paramilitary wing of the Guinean police. Despite this, young people in cities across the country mounted protests and in some cases confronted the state security actors. As pointed out by one of the organisers[12] of the protests:

> Our protests were not based on support for the opposition or the FNDC, for us young people, it was a position of conscience that we took. It was about our future and the future of Guinea. What was happening was simply wrong and we were not going to sit back and do nothing. It was obvious that the gendarmerie and the police were prepared to kill us, as they shot live bullets at us and tortured those they arrested. We got no help from the international community or neighbouring countries. There was no pressure on the Guinean government to stop the killing of its youth and that allowed the government to get its way at the end. We did the best we could but at the end the referendum was held.

As indicated by the respondent above, there was stiff resistance to the referendum by FNDC and the Guinean youth, with heavy violence ensuing in the streets of the capital city Conakry and other major cities in the country. Consequently, the referendum was postponed twice but was eventually held on 22 March 2020, alongside the long-awaited parliamentary elections.[13] By then, approximately 42 lives had been lost, most of them young people. The government was not interested in debating their actions and was prepared to extinguish protests through the use of excessive force. Eventually, the voting process was boycotted by the opposition parties, coupled with voters' apathy as a result of the intimidation. The National Independent Electoral Commission announced that 92 per cent of the votes cast were in favour of the proposed changes.[14] A total of 61 per cent of registered voters participated in the elections.[15] The announcement of the result was followed by widespread unrest across the country, with protesters and the government blaming each other for the violence.[16]

With the referendum out of the way, the next question was whether or not Condé was going to pursue a third-term agenda. This question was also raised in an article published by the *Guardian* newspaper on 2 April 2020:

> The new constitution permits the president to sidestep his two-term limit, and questions linger. Will he now run for president again? And how could Condé – a former law professor at the Sorbonne who was opposition leader for more than four decades who was exiled and imprisoned by dictators, and welcomed as a champion of change by international leaders – consider undermining the still fragile system of democracy that he helped implement?[17]

When asked this question during our interviews, most respondents stated that there was a glimmer of hope that Condé would not pursue a third-term bid. This was, of course, wishful thinking as Condé would not have held the controversial referendum, with all the chaos that followed, if he had not made up his mind to pursue another presidential term. Condé cut short the debate on the action he would take by announcing that he was presenting himself as a candidate in the presidential election slated for October 2020.[18]

## The Pharaohs Should Not Win: The Third-Term Bid and the Struggle for Democracy

As indicated by some respondents, this announcement was a perpetuation of generations of stratified politics based on a foundation of gerontocracy and an unwillingness to concede power to the next generation. A student[19] of Political Science at the University of Conakry recounted:

> Even though we had lost all faith in Condé after a few years of him becoming president, we were not sure that he would want to go down the third-term road. Unlike his predecessors, we considered him enlightened, as he is educated, lived in France for decades and challenged Lansana Conté's third-term bid. He shocked us, the youth, and we immediately responded by coming together as young people in the different regions of the country to challenge him and his elites. We were determined to not let the Pharoahs win.

Similar sentiments were expressed by a youth in Labé:[20]

> I was very sad when I heard that Condé was intending to change the constitution and run for a third term. I asked myself the question, what can we do as young people to stop him from achieving his desire? For me, it was about trying to save the soul of Guinea and to ensure a good future for its youth and children. When we heard on social media that protests were

> planned in Conakry and other cities, I got some of my friends and we went to Conakry to monitor the situation and join the protests.

Out of the 279 youth engaged in the study, 211 indicated that they joined the youth-led protests out of a desire to challenge Condé and send a message to the international community that Guinean youth were not prepared to accept what had emerged to be a dictatorship. Ironically, Condé claimed in his declaration speech that he was running as the candidate of the women and youth, 'We can't do anything in Guinea without women. I will be the candidate of young people and women.'[21] These words underscored how out-of-touch Condé was with the realities of his rule, and were especially difficult for the youth to believe, as he had ruled for two terms but merely succeeded in further alienating youth from leadership and governance.

According to respondents, the ensuing demonstrations attracted a mix of protesters with varied reasons for participating in them. Seventy-two per cent of the respondents indicated that there was an urgent need to save Guinea from autocracy, especially after the experience with Conté. Despite the varied reasons for their involvement in the protests, there was common consensus amongst the youth and the FNDC to challenge the third-term bid. Thus, the messages that were sent out by the FNDC and the Guinean youth who were in the struggle were critical in mobilising other youth to join the protests.

In Conakry, the protests were largely focused in locations that were known to be anti-Condé, including Hamdallaye, Ratoma, Kaporo, Wanindara, Gnariwada, Bambeto, Coza, Simbaya, Sofonia, Ansoumania and Cimenterie. Social media was critical to the mobilisation of youth, providing a platform for Guineans in the international diaspora to participate in the protests by building links of transnational solidarity through messages and posting videos encouraging Guinean youth and the international community to stand against Condé's assault on democracy. Youth in Guinea also posted online videos and messages about their ordeals, which were then widely distributed on social media. For the youth, it was crucial that the actions of the government be documented and published. When questioned on the effectiveness of social media in relation to the youth protests, 243 out of 279 indicated that it was very effective and helped to draw the world's attention to what was happening in the country.

## Dictatorship Fighting Back: The Quest to Unpack the Movements

It became apparent after the protests started that Condé had already instituted plans to suppress them. According to respondents, he understood the weaknesses of the movement, which included lack of cohesion and no centralised youth-based leadership, and he used three approaches in a bid to undermine it: violence and intimidation, ethno-regional sentiments and cash to buy out protest leaders. All of these attempts, and their subsequent consequences, are discussed in this section.

Condé and his cronies embarked on building ethno-regional alliances among the Madinka (his ethnic group), the Susu and other minority groups, against the Peul, which is the ethnic group of his political rival, Cellou Dalein Diallo. Using this approach, he tried to transform the narrative built around his third-term bid into an ethnic contest for power. This form of identity politics succeeded in rallying his kith and kin around him. The notion of losing power and state resources to the Peul became a central point for a third-term campaign, which, according to a respondent, was about 'greed, self-interest and corruption, and had nothing to do with the need to foster development and national cohesion in Guinea.'[22]

With the support of his ethnic group and their allies, cronies of Condé embarked on mass mobilisation of youth and other actors, using state resources to organise pro-third-term protests, aimed at undermining the movement against him, hoping to present his campaign as popular and widely accepted. This approach proved to be effective, as these protests were organised on the same days that the anti-third term campaigns took place, thereby dividing the attention of the nation and the media.

According to the respondents, the government engaged young people, cajoling them with money and other items to participate in pro-third-term demonstrations. An anti-third term protester[23] recounted his frustration:

> Government agents were so desperate to have the third-term campaign of the president succeed that they paid young people with money, food and non-food items to either join the pro-third-term demonstrations or desist protesting against it. To my surprise, even those of us that were at the heart of the protest movements were approached. Poor, unemployed and vulnerable youth joined the side of the government easily, to access the resources provided by the state officials. It greatly undermined what we were doing.

The mass recruitment of youth by the government appeared to have put pressure on opposition leaders, who also wanted to present the protesting youth as representing their interest. As indicated by 57 per cent of the respondents, they were against being referred to as supporters of the opposition, and being labelled as such discouraged some of the young people from continuing their participation in the movement. This labelling was also said by the respondents to have been used by the government to dismiss protesters, especially the youth, as agents of Condé's political opponents.

The strategies of the government proved to be effective, especially given the weaknesses in the youth movements. The youth mobilisations in the different regions of the country were isolated and not connected to their peers in other parts of the country. These weak links needed to have been strengthened so as to form an organised national movement that could have effectively challenged Condé. Out of the 279 respondents, 102 have never been to school, and 89 of these 102 respondents indicated that they had been looking to students to provide them with leadership. They did not want to rely on CSOs and the FNDC;

they wanted a movement that was youth-based and youth-led. They believed that such a grassroots movement would have helped Guinea much more than one that was led by a coalition, including politicians.

The lack of leadership among the youth was compounded by the heavy-handedness of the military and gendarmerie in quashing the protests. Reports by human rights institutions such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch noted the violence. As reported by Human Rights Watch:

> In the lead-up to the March elections and the October presidential poll, Guinean security forces frequently used excessive and at times lethal force to suppress sometimes violent demonstrations by those opposed to a new constitution, with at least 23 people allegedly killed by security forces. Members of the security forces continued to enjoy almost total impunity for the excessive use of force and other human rights abuses.[24]

Amnesty International also noted the violence and impunity demonstrated by the government:

> Among other alleged abuses, mortuaries refused to receive people killed during protests, resulting in few official reports on demonstration deaths… the government failed to investigate the killings and hold the perpetrators to account.[25]

The heavy-handedness of the security actors was also extended to a social media clampdown,[26] especially during the days leading up to elections when the incidence of violence was high. This happened intermittently until the presidential elections were finally held on 18 October 2020. Thus, for more than a year, Guinea was trapped in violence and chaos.

Apart from the strategies used by the government, groups such as the FNDC were also plagued with internal disagreements, which undermined its efficacy. The agreement among the members of the FNDC was that no party was to present a candidate for the 2018 elections, and any party going against the agreement would be expelled from the movement. The main opposition party, the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG), decided to go against this resolution and presented Diallo as a presidential candidate. This caused a split in the movement and weakened it, as it mostly depended on the supporters of the UFDG, the largest opposition party, for its rallies.[27] Additionally, the government used the state media to take control of the narrative and push pro-Condé propaganda. The state media continuously reminded the public that Diallo was part of the Conté regime, played a principal role in campaigning for his third term, and was part of the elites that helped him retain power until his death in 2008. Thus, as argued by a senior member of the Condé administration, 'Diallo is never concerned with constitutional breaches, he supports them when it is in his favour, like he did severally, under the Conté regime. What he cares about, is gaining control of political power.'[28]

The electoral commission eventually declared Condé the winner of the elections with 59.5 per cent of the votes cast. However, the days leading to the declaration of the results were particularly violent, with at least 12 people killed by security forces in Conakry, including 2 children.[29]

The opposition party condemned the results and called on their supporters to demonstrate. These demonstrations were met with violence by the security forces, with Condé's supporters also occupying the streets of Guinea and other cities, celebrating his victory. Despite efforts made to petition the result and continue demonstrations, it gradually became clear that Condé was going to have his third term, especially when the Supreme Court upheld the result on 8 November 2020.[30] Though this ruling came as expected, as indicated by the respondents, by a court that was criticised by respondents as being instrumentalised by the state, it eventually appeared to have succeeded in putting an end to the protests, paving the way for Condé and his allies to begin their third term in power.

As indicated by 78 per cent of the respondents that participated in the study, they were discouraged by what happened, but their frustration was mostly reserved for the regional and international actors, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the UN. Expressing his frustrations at the international community, a teacher[31] in Nzérékoré said:

> We can never believe or count on the international community for any form of support against dictators in Guinea. It was obvious that Condé had the support of the French and his colleagues in the region. President Alassane Ouattara did the same in Côte d'Ivoire and nothing came out of it. All this talk of strengthening democracy, good governance and the rule of law in Africa is all ordinary words, with no action. They failed us woefully and that breaks my heart and the desire to continue protesting against Condé's third term.

Similarly, a youth activist[32] in Labé said:

> Condé won at the end and that should be a shame to ECOWAS and the rest of the world. We had hopes that the international community could stand with us against tyranny and autocracy. However, as usual that did not happen, we are on our own and we know that we should never count on external support for the protection of democracy and human rights in Guinea.

According to the respondents who indicated that they were discouraged by the inaction of the international community, Condé could have been dissuaded from changing the 2010 Constitution and running for a third term if the international community had not wanted him to do so. Actions that they could have taken included applying international pressure and targeted sanctions, and freezing the accounts and assets of Condé and his supporters in the West.

It was observed that despite the strategies used by Condé, an organic, well-organised youth-led movement would have posed a stronger challenge to his bid. What emerged instead was a weak, fragmented and ill-coordinated movement that was contesting against a state machinery that was bent on succeeding. Examples across the continent have shown that better organised movements have the potential to succeed, despite the force and violence meted out against them. However, Guinea's post-colonial political structures have been entirely suited to serving the interests of the political elite and, therefore, it has been quite hard for a significant youth social movement to emerge. Additionally, civil society has never been allowed to flourish on its own but has been guided by the agendas of the political elite and identity politics. Therefore, the outcome was not surprising to some respondents, as the Guinean state has always wanted a weak and disorganised youth base that cannot challenge the state's power and the abuse handed out by the elites.

## The Pharoahs Have Not Won: It Is All a Matter of Time

When questioned on his words that the 'Pharoahs' ended up winning then, the student in Conakry[33] argued:

> Yes, Condé succeeded in getting his third term and that was sad for Guinea and the rest of Africa. It appeared that the Pharoahs had won, but they actually had not. That moment was a moment that allowed us as young people to take a step back and reflect on the kind of Guinea we would like to see and what we can do to achieve that Guinea. What will emerge soon, will be a strong national movement that will challenge the status quo and protect and defend democracy and human rights in Guinea.

Apparently, most of the youth that participated in the study had envisaged that it was going to be difficult to stop Condé and his cronies, based on the fact that they had control over state institutions. Additionally, the young people indicated that Guinean culture and traditions discourage youth from challenging their elders and leaders. Furthermore, prominent youth leaders have failed to make a mark over the years, and most of those that had shown promise have been co-opted by political elites in power. According to 67 per cent of the respondents, political elites even have the leadership of gangs and cliques under their control and use them to intimidate their opponents and those who are critical of them, especially young people. This is also the reason why there is low motivation from those in power to curb gang activity, as they are needed to help the regime retain power.

Despite the challenges that young people have to contend with, a significant percentage of respondents appear to be optimistic that there is a growing consciousness among Guinean youth that they need to seize the opportunity and lead the conversations and narratives around democracy and good governance in their country. As indicated by youth activists, these conversations are ongoing

among both educated and non-educated youth in the communities studied. A youth activist[34] interviewed in Conakry noted:

> Youth in countries like Tunisia did not succeed with the first instances when they started to challenge their leaders and demand changes in their society. They were arrested and tortured, with some killed but they persisted and gradually they succeeded in demonstrating to other countries in Africa that they are much more powerful than their leaders. Our case is no different, we are gradually gaining the consciousness we lacked and we are talking among ourselves on this.

To a significant percentage (87 per cent) of the youth that participated in the study, future success of youth movements in Guinea will depend on the following factors: the ability of youth to establish cohesive, well organised, diverse, youth-owned and led movements; disassociation of youth movements from political parties; the ability to effectively engage the international community and to mobilise youth in the diaspora to support their cause; the resilience to withstand the heavy-handedness of state security actors and the ability to, to a certain extent, control the conversations and narratives around the protests and win and maintain the public on their side.

By August 2021, it appeared from the interviews conducted with government officials that they were worried that the young people were becoming restless and very critical of the government. The growing dissent against the government had an unexpected outcome, when at the time of writing this chapter, on 4 September 2021, the presidential guards staged a coup and arrested Condé.[35] Among the reasons for the coup provided by the leader of the new regime are corruption, breach of the constitution, bad governance and economic hardship.[36] The coup has at the time of writing received widespread support, especially amongst the youth, who are rallying behind this new regime.[37] This sudden change in context has left even the youth engaged in the study wondering as to what the fate of Guinea and specifically its youth will be in the near future. This is especially the case as previous regimes have made promises, with none of them being kept. As a respondent describes the situation, 'it is all a matter of wait and see.'[38]

Most of the regime's leaders are themselves young military officers, who apparently were frustrated with the gerontocratic system and reacted against it. Whatever the case may be, the Guinean elites and the new regime should seek to constructively engage with and invest in the country's youth by giving them a chance to represent themselves in leadership and governance positions, while amending the constitutional order in Guinea to be democratic and inclusive. Years of marginalisation of the country's youth have only led to confrontations and protests that have further undermined the relationship between the state and its youth, with generations of youth lacking the access and capacity to take care of themselves and meaningfully contribute to the development of their society.

## Conclusion

Between 2019 and 2020, Guinea experienced several protests as a result of Condé's actions to extend his rule by changing the country's constitution and running for a third term as president. The protests attracted a wide range of actors, especially the country's youth, opposition parties and other civil society activists. However, the protests were faced with a range of challenges including the heavy-handedness of the police, and the use of ethno-regional sentiments and cash by the regime to undermine the efficacy of the movement. This was compounded by the lack of effective leadership among the youth, and the drive by political parties to hijack the movements. In the end, Condé and his elites succeeded in securing a third term in power, which, however, was short-lived as he was overthrown by the military in September 2021.

It has been pointed throughout this chapter that years of marginalisation and the lack of investment in the capacity of the youth have limited their ability to effectively mobilise and lead social movements against the state. However, it must be reiterated that despite decades of youth and civil society suppression, there is now a growing consciousness and action among the country's youth to demand their rights and a place in the political order in Guinea. Unlike previously, when they were less organised and worked alongside groups such as the FNDC, the conversations among both educated and non-educated youth are now centred on the need to have more structured and stronger youth social movements that can act as a foil and participate in building a new political order in Guinea, so that the youth can have their say in mainstream politics and be involved in the country's political transition.

Inasmuch as most of the new leaders are themselves young, there is uncertainty as to what this means for the country's youth. The new government should seek to harness and build on the growing consciousness and increasing demand of the country's youth for a place in their society and also for the government to promote socioeconomic and political changes in the country. Any unwillingness on the part of the state and its elites to do so will have significant implications for peace and security in Guinea.

## Notes

1 Touré was the first president of Guinea.
2 See: http://kawa.ac.ug/Africannationalismebook/ahamed_sekou_toure_19221984.html (Accessed on 21 September 2021).
3 Condé had lived in France since his youth and challenged Conté in the 1993 and 1998 elections. He was arrested and jailed after the 1998 elections under the allegation of illegally leaving the country and recruiting mercenaries to destabilise the country. He was released in 2001.
4 See: www.news24.com/news24/Africa/News/guinea-holds-first-local-elections-since-military-rule-20180204 (Accessed on 22 September 2021).

5 See: www.france24.com/en/20161201-exclusive-audio-recordings-guinea-president-conde-simandou-mine-bribery-rio-tinto (Accessed on 19 September 2021).
6 Based on interviews conducted for this chapter.
7 Interview conducted in Nzérékoré on 27 June 2021.
8 Interview conducted in Conakry on 13 July 2021.
9 Based on interviews conducted for the chapter.
10 Based on interviews conducted for the chapter.
11 Interview conducted in Conakry on 21 July 2020.
12 Interview conducted in Conakry on 21 July 2020.
13 See: www.iremos.fr/blog/guinea-1-march-2020-legislative-elections-referendum-on-constitutional-reform (Accessed on 22 June 2021).
14 See: www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/02/protests-postponements-and-the-last-stand-of-an-african-strongman-alpha-Condé (Accessed on 8 July 2021).
15 See: www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/328206/guinea-electoral-commission-upholds-constitutional-changes-amid-referendum-results-march-28-update-17 (Accessed on 21 September 2021).
16 See: https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/08/12/FNDC-activists-arrested-intimidated-six-people-killed-protest-against-COVID19-police-roadblocks/ (30 July 2021).
17 See: www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/02/protests-postponements-and-the-last-stand-of-an-african-strongman-alpha-Condé (Accessed on 26 June 2021).
18 See: www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-09/guinean-president-announces-third-term-bid-despite-opposition.html (Accessed on 26 June 2021).
19 Interview conducted in Conakry on 12 July 2021.
20 Interview conducted in Labé on 13 July 2021.
21 See: www.reuters.com/article/us-guinea-politics-idUSKBN25T2ZG (Accessed on 21 June 2021).
22 Interview conducted in Nzérékoré on 17 July 2021.
23 Interview conducted in Conakry on 19 July 2021.
24 See: www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/guinea (Accessed on 1 July 2021).
25 See: https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/10/01/amnesty-denounces-guineas-lethal-protest-crackdown/ (Accessed on 1 July 2021).
26 See: https://netblocks.org/reports/guinea-blocks-social-media-on-eve-of-elections-ryb3rn87 (Accessed on 30 June 2021).
27 Based on interviews conducted for the chapter.
28 Interview conducted virtually on 1 August 2021.
29 See: www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/guinea (Accessed on 2 July 2021).
30 See: www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/guinea-supreme-court-approves-Condé-s-election-victory/2035953 (Accessed on 30 June 2021).
31 Interview conducted on 11 July 2021.
32 Interview conducted on 3 July 2021.
33 Interview conducted on 12 July 2021.
34 Interview conducted on 2 July 2021.
35 See: https://guineenews.org/guinee-une-junte-militaire-dit-avoir-pris-le-pouvoir/ (Accessed 19 September 2021).

36 See: www.guinee360.com/05/09/2021/mamady-doumbouya-nouvel-homme-fort-de-la-guinee-le-president-est-avec-nous/ (16 September 2021).
37 Based on interviews conducted.
38 Interview conducted virtually on 16 September 2021.

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# 9 Leading the Change

## Women, Youth and the 2019 Revolution in Sudan

*Mohamed Gibril Sesay, Mohamed Bakhit and Justin Crowell*

### Introduction

Decades of ostracism by a patriarchal and repressive regime under Omar al-Bashir undermined the relationship between women, youth and the state in Sudan. However, the experience of the Arab Spring and the collapse of powerful regimes in the Middle East and North Africa stimulated socio-political consciousness among women and youth in Sudan, a consciousness that was eventually to place them at the heart of the demand for democracy, human rights and the rule of law in their country.

Inasmuch as the focus on women's and youth activism in Sudan has become a topical issue since 2019, Sudan has been a land of many social movements – Islamist, Arab supremacist, nationalist, labour, democracy, resistance, women/feminist and youth. Of these, women's and youth movements have often been marginalised in discourses about the Sudanese polity, until these movements became decisive formations in the Sudanese revolution that saw the ousting of the authoritarian Islamist government of Omar al-Bashir in 2019. This chapter discusses the roles played by youth and women's movements in the Sudanese revolution, examining their evolution and arguing that they have been part and parcel of several of the key movements in Sudanese history, sometimes not only collaborating with the dominant Islamist and praetorian formations, but also being part of the resistance to the hegemonic projects of the praetorian and Islamist movements.

It also analyses the reaction of the state and its security actors; the factors that enhanced the ability of the protesters to contribute to the overthrow of al-Bashir; the prospects and challenges of the transition process for Sudan and its women and youth; and the 25 October 2021 coup and the implications for Sudan's experimentation with democracy.

While providing a broad analysis of the involvement and roles of women's and youth-led social movements in Sudan over the years, this chapter specifically seeks to draw attention to the challenges that these movements face at the moment. It provides the perspectives of women and youth on how they will overcome the coup and set Sudan on a democratic path. The chapter argues

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that while suppressed over the years, Sudanese youth and women have never lost their agency and determination to contest the ills of the state and have continually done so over the years. Despite the risks faced, they are now challenging a military dictatorship that was part of the al-Bashir regime that they previously protested against.

A qualitative methodology was used to collect data for this study and interviews were conducted with 42 youth activists, 37 women activists, 18 government officials and 19 staff of international organisations working in Sudan. Three research assistants (two males and one female, all youth) supported the process of data collection and some of the interviews were done by telephone, as the internet connection was regularly shut down by the military.

## The Sudanese State and Its History of Revolutions

Sudan is a country of young people: 68 per cent of the population are under 30 and only 3.2 per cent are over 65 years of age (Carter Center 2021). However, youth and women's political participation has been limited and this is especially the case when their participation is gauged in terms of limited involvement in formal institutionalised political processes. It is in this respect that youth and women's involvement in social movements have often been invisible. A corrective to this view would be to look at youth and women's participation in non-state informal civic activities within neighbourhoods, civil society, family and other groupings. Abdel Aziz and Alfaki (2021), in discussing the separation in Sudan between social and civil activity on the one hand and partisan politics on the other, state that women's roles in social and civic activities and organisations are often considered social or charitable, while political participation, where women are often seen as less engaged, is linked to partisan politics. In a sense, understanding women's participation would be useful where the action space is divided into the political and civil realms.

McCarthy (2013) observes that social movements build on relations and structures developed at work, at worship, in associations and through daily activities. Activists in Sudan build upon pre-existing social relations; they draw upon both formal and informal networks to push for change. Various regimes in Sudan, and especially the two longest serving ones – those of Nimeiry and al-Bashir – restricted participatory spaces through the emasculation and/or capture of some of the more established professional, trade union and women's groups. In the run-up to the uprising in 2019, with the state having captured the formal participatory structures, youth, including young women, drew on the more informal networks to form neighbourhood resistance committees. These types of informal, loose and mostly leaderless horizontal groups would be pivotal in the uprising that ousted the three decades old al-Bashir regime. A total of 62 out of the 79 youth and women that were engaged in the study indicated that they were convinced to participate in the protests by people they are close to, including family members and friends. They also succeeded in convincing others who are close to them. This chain effect was the key in

encouraging people who have over the years remained frustrated with the government, but not particularly keen to take to the streets, to eventually do so.

The Sudanese state was built to cater to dominant factions or ethnicities in the riverine Arab-Muslim power bloc. The three most important ethnicities are the Shayqiya, Ja'alin and Danagla. Other important groups that would play significant roles in Sudan's history are the Mahdi and Mirghani families, which dominated the two main competing political parties in the country (Woodward 2011); Islamists led by Hassan al-Turabi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood of Sudan; professionals and graduates; and the security forces.

Whilst these different groups competed for dominance, the social and geographical peripheries of the Sudanese state became gradually excluded. The geographical peripheries included areas outside what has been called the Hamdi triangle of central riverine Sudan: South Sudan, Darfur, Kassala and the Nuba Mountain region of South Kordofan (Abdel Aziz and Afaki 2021). The social peripheries included women, youth, non-Arabs and non-Muslims. Even among Arabs in the central riverine areas, the educated one sought to exclude those that were not educated. As indicated by a government official[1] interviewed:

> The Sudanese state has been a complex state and there have been too many exclusions of people who are Sudanese but treated as if they are foreigners and slaves. The history of Sudan is what has come back to haunt the country in the last decade. Government supported the exclusionary approaches adopted and now what we have are reactions and chaos.

Sudanese regimes historically played off different actors against each other to maintain control. Berridge (2015) introduces the concept of liberalised autocracy to discuss this phenomenon where autocracies somehow play off one section of society against others. A liberalised autocracy creates its own political opportunity processes with some groups, having been allowed to exist so that they may oppose others, finding strength and through that becoming dominant forces in the state. For instance, President Jaafar Nimeiry, who ruled Sudan from 1969 to 1985, thought he was playing off the Islamists against other groups, but their leader Hassan al-Turabi used his position as attorney general in the Nimeiry regime, to advance Islamist policies and infiltrate the state with Islamists, a tactic that would enable them to become dominant voices in the subsequent regime of al-Bashir.

There have been three notable uprisings in Sudan that were successful in bringing down praetorian governments. These were the 1965 uprising which brought down the General Ibrahim Abboud[2] regime, the 1985 intifada that ended the Nimeiry government and the 2019 revolution that ousted the al-Bashir dictatorship. These uprisings tended to follow a particular script: student demonstrations receiving backing from trade unions and professionals, leading to mass protests in which influential sections of the military refused to repress protesters, resulting in the regime losing power. There were no great changes or reprisals against former regime members and minimal disruption of the

economy. This was what happened in 1965, 1985 and, to some extent, 2019. The major difference between 2019 and the earlier regime changes was the use of social media, the relative absence of trade unions and that the uprising started not in Khartoum but in an outlying town, though Khartoum soon emerged as the uprising's major theatre. Also, women took more prominent roles than in earlier uprisings. However, the Sudanese revolutionary script shows organised civilians, political parties or formations initially seizing the opportunity to win elections, but with the army eventually toppling them. For example, the 1965 revolution led to elections in which the leader of the Ummah Party, Sadiq al-Mahdi, emerged as Prime Minister only to be overthrown by the army headed by Nimeiry. The same pattern was followed in 1985 when al-Bashir overthrew the civilian regime that was established after an uprising.

Protests and riots against the state have been common throughout the history of Sudan. At the heart of protests in Sudan from independence to 1985, there were trade unions. As stated by Tossell (2020, 3):

> During the 1964 uprising, an allegiance between trade unions and opposition parties helped mobilise large demonstrations of collective non-violent protest. The Gezira Tenants Association, the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation and the Sudan Communist Party formed the crux of this allegiance, known as the National Front for the Professionals. Before the 1985 uprising, leaders of trade unions and professional organisations gathered to form the Trade Union Alliance, which grew into the National Alliance for National Salvation, a central component and organiser of the subsequent uprising.

By 1985 other unions, such as those made up of lawyers and doctors, were more influential and were seen playing leading roles in demanding changes in their welfare and also on issues that had to do with the state generally. The sections below examine the involvement of women and youth in protests in Sudan.

## The Women's Movement

Though attention to women in Sudan became topical during the 2019 uprising, women had, for several decades, been active in socio-political mobilisations in the search for freedom and democracy in Sudan. Women were active in the struggle against colonialism, under the umbrella of the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU). The Union, formed in 1952, was even prior to independence leading demonstrations demanding voting rights for women. The SWU was preceded in 1947 by the League of Cultured Girls, founded by two women graduates of Gordon College, but dissolved due to partisan politics. Another notable women's organisation during the period was the Republican Sisters (Abdel Aziz and Alfaki 2021).

The SWU became more political after independence, making demands for pay equity, maternal leave, new custody laws and abolition of the House

of Obedience, which allowed husbands to compel wives to return to them. However, the organisation was accused of being elitist and comprising only educated women, a criticism they took seriously and sought to change through opening their membership by 1964 (Abdel Aziz and Alfaki 2021). Having secured the right to vote (Abbas 2010), the SWU was able to support one of their peers, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, to be elected as the first female parliamentarian in Sudan. However, the entrenched patriarchal system in Sudan reacted and again limited the rights of women, and soon after the election of Fatima, women were denied access to electable offices.

With independence gained, and with internal politics intensifying in Sudan, the SWU became susceptible to political fragmentation. It soon split into two wings in the 1970s, one of which was co-opted by Nimeiry (Abdel Aziz and Alfaki 2021). When the Nimeiry regime created its own Sudan Women's Union, the Old SWU went underground. Later, as al-Bashir and his National Islamic Front/National Congress Party (NIF/NCP) took over power, they established the Sudan Women's General Union. ElSawi (2011) argues that the Women's General Union promoted a culture of jihadist war during the country's Second Civil War.

The women's movement in Sudan is historically fractured along several gender frames – the main two being northern Sudanese women and southern Sudanese – which tended to follow different trajectories towards different goals. Women in the north of the country have long struggled against patriarchal interpretations of Islam, though they are often careful not to offend the conservative Ulema and Imams. Their struggles have often been aimed at creating greater civic spaces for women within the dominant hegemonic northern formation, rather than an overhauling of a system which not only oppresses northern women but also women, men and other social groups outside the riverine heartland of the country. However, several factors would soon lead to the emergence of a more expansive and inclusive gender frame that includes both southern and northern women (Abdel Aziz and Alfaki 2021). These factors include war, rising educational levels of northern women, the Islamist takeover and their intensification of what has been called the Mishra Hadari (civilisation project), which was made operational through disciplinary legislation such as the Public Order Law of 1996 that targeted women even at the micro level of how they dress. The Mishra Hadari was a pivotal project of the Islamists, which aimed not only at women in the north but also at non-Muslims and non-Arabs in the south and other parts of the country.

As the effects of patriarchy, marginalisation and the civil war between the north and the south intensified, Sudanese women stood up to present their voices on national issues. Southern Sudanese Women in Nairobi (SWAN) inaugurated the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP) (ElSawi 2011). Northern women also formed newer organisations and networks.

It has been argued that despite his authoritarianism, al-Bashir was unable to penetrate the family, which remained a site of freedom (S. Young 2020). Even in relation to rising Islamism, there were zones of 'practical Islam' and

other species of religious activities, as James (2011) argues, 'vernacular ideas' are created by women barely inhibited by the formalities of the mosques. These familial and vernacular sites allowed women in the north-relative freedom to organise, to influence polity and society in ways often missed by a focus on formalised politicking and social movements.

The actions of women's networks and organisations culminated in women from across the country mobilising and engaging their peers from both the north and the south. Eventually, Sudanese would utilise SuWEP as 'an umbrella body bringing together women from the two regions, and also from different ethnic, socio-economic and political backgrounds' (ElSawi 2011, 1).

Out of the 37 women engaged in this study, 32 indicated that women have never been dormant in Sudan, as they have continuously engaged their relatives and community members on the need to expand the socio-economic space for women and girls. They indicated that women have been the leading advocates for peace in the country and have over the years advocated for an end to conflicts in the country, a call that went unheeded. This, they indicated, led to the slogan of 'We are Fed Up', and their persistence in ending years of autocratic dictatorship in Sudan.

## The Omar al-Bashir Era

Omar al-Bashir came to power after staging a coup against the government of Nimeiry in 1989 and established the Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation (Ingham and Mckenna 2020). Initially, al-Bashir's leadership was expected to be short-lived, as happens with many coups. However, his strong reputation in the military and support from neighbouring countries helped him and he further consolidated his grip on power by establishing an autocracy (Ingham and Mckenna 2020). According to Assal (2019), soon after assuming power, al-Bashir took an Islamist turn, purged civil servants whose loyalty were in doubt and gained a global reputation for being a tyrannical and divisive leader of a regime 'antagonising the world through its jihad policies in South Sudan and its provision of support to radical Islamic groups, including al-Qaeda' (Assal 2019, 3).

One can look at Sudan's regimes through the partnerships they made to sustain their rule. In this light, there are the regime's instruments of coercion, the state security apparatus and their ideological partners. The key ideological partners were the influential Islamists Hassan al-Turabi and Ali Osman Mohamed Taha. There would be a falling out between al-Bashir and al-Turabi when al-Bashir took a more pragmatic turn to ensure his regime's survival, rebuild his international image, seek new international partners and make peace in Southern Sudan. However, this pragmatic turn would make the regime more reliant on security forces for support. Al-Bashir's poor handling of the crises in South Sudan and Darfur, coupled with his transformation of Sudan into a police state, his alignment with terror-related groups, and the perception of corruption among the country's elites, eventually turned the public against him.

The NIF allied with Bashir formed what Vice President Taha called 'shadow battalions', and Bashir relied on these to protect the regime right up to the revolution of 2019. However, the youths and women responded with what we may call shadow structures – the resistance committees. These committees operated below the radar of the authorities, who thought they had control through their own neighbourhood structures called 'popular committees'.

## The Resistance Movement and the Weakening of the Bashir Regime

The repressive approach of the government and its marginalisation of people in Darfur and other parts of the country led to the emergence of rebel groups in Darfur. The conflicts which started in February 2003 soon escalated into a major crisis, with the government using excessive force to quell the rebellion. The Darfur crisis was a major humanitarian disaster with an estimated 1.9 million people displaced, more than 240,000 people forced into neighbouring Chad, and an estimated 450,000 people killed (Dagne 2011). Out of a total of 116 respondents including government officials, 107 indicated that the government of al-Bashir was very repressive, massacred innocent people in the name of fighting civil wars and targeted his opponents. It was also deduced from the respondents that al-Bashir could have ended the war in Darfur, had he chosen to use peace as an option, but that he refused to do so. The nine, who indicated that the al-Bashir government was not repressive, thought that he had no option but to present himself as a strong leader to be able to maintain his hold over the state, as he had many enemies, with their own interests. However, in presenting a strong image, al-Bashir gained the reputation of committing the crime of genocide in Darfur and the massacre of South Sudanese communities.

On 4 March 2009, an indictment and an arrest warrant were issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for al-Bashir for 'allegedly committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide during an internal conflict in the western region of Sudan, Darfur between March 2003 and July 2008' (Needham 2011, 219). The indictment of al-Bashir isolated him, so that he resorted to further surrounding himself with actors that could help to protect his regime, including the military, intelligence agencies and hard-line Islamists.

The latter years of the Bashir regime were also dominated by what has been called the politics of divorce between the north and the south. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the al-Bashir regime and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), signed in 2005, led to some opening up of spaces for civic and political participation by students, especially of the University of Sudan, civil society and other groups (Zunes 2019).

The split with South Sudan led to the loss of significant oil revenue, as the bulk of the major oil fields is in South Sudan. There was also the weakening of the al-Bashir regime from within due to conflicts between the various factions

within the ruling coalition. In addition, al-Bashir's more pragmatic approach tended to increase the powers of the military and security forces over civilians in the government who had been the key to providing ideological and popular support for the regime.

By 2013, al-Bashir had become very unpopular and faced regular protests. Additionally, he started purging some Islamists who were either opposed to him or deemed expendable. By 2015, al-Bashir's bid for re-election became contentious, as it was clear that even within his own ranks, he had lost the support he once enjoyed. A number of major Islamists opposed his candidature (Assal 2019). Bashir sidelined them and strengthened his partnership with the security forces, particularly the Rapid Support Forces, which he saw as a counterfoil against any possible coup by the regular Sudanese Army.

In 2013, protests 'broke out in Wad Madani, Khartoum, Omdurman, and other towns across Sudan after President Omar al-Bashir announced an end to fuel subsidies and introduced other austerity measures' (Human Rights Watch 2014, 1). Several protesters, mostly youth, were killed by security actors. Despite the crackdown, the protesters stood their ground and youth and women's movements emerged with names and slogans that resonated with the context that existed then. These slogans included 'Kefaya' ('Enough'), 'Abena' ('We Will Not Comply'), 'Isena' ('We Rebel') and 'Maragna' ('We Came Out'), along with the slightly older youth groups like Girifna ('We Are Fed Up'), 'Youth for Change' and others. These groups created a web of social media campaigns and alternate news channels (Deshayes and Vezzadini 2019; Bashri 2014, 77). Though al-Bashir was eventually able to stop the protests, it was clear that the dissatisfaction remained and he only succeeded in pushing his people further away from himself and his regime.

## Youth and the 2018–2019 Uprising

The immediate triggers of the revolution were rises in the price of bread as a result of government removal of subsidies. But these came in the wake of the people framing the government as authoritarian, disrespectful to its youth and women, and being corrupt and violent.

And there was the belief amongst the Sudanese that civilians could bring down governments, a belief rooted in Sudanese history. Two major uprisings by civilian forces, in 1965 and 1985, had brought down military governments that were seen as authoritarian and corrupt. The al-Bashir government had sought to prevent these beliefs from being seen as applicable to their own regime when, in the wake of the Arab Spring, al-Bashir said that Sudan is a land of intifadas, implying that the intifada had already occurred in Sudan and that it would not happen on his watch. He actively sought to ensure this by attacking the forces that were responsible for the 1965 and 1985 uprisings. He dissolved the Sudan Women's Movement and created an alternative one; he also emasculated the trade unions, which had been key players in the earlier uprisings.

With these actions, the regime thought it would stave off civilian uprisings. But youth rose to the challenge of igniting the uprising by establishing and often leading grassroots organisations in urban areas, known as resistance committees (G. Young 2020). As explained by a protester[3]:

> The resistance committees were set up to help mobilise and keep the momentum of the protests alive. We were determined to see the regime fall, and we knew that our lives were hanging on it. Had we failed, we would have been sought and killed by al-Bashir. So we set up the committees of young people in communities which 'stood up against the government.

These resistance committees emerged from the 2013 uprisings, drawing lessons from them in order to be more horizontal with invisible leadership, so as to escape regime repression and/or capture (Zunes 2021). They became like a substitute working class, taking up the role that the unions had played in earlier uprisings (G. Young 2020). Resistance committees formed the grassroots base of the more formal Sudanese Professional Association (SPA), 'passing on their messages received through social media to neighbours' (Zunes 2021, 16). The generational dimension challenged the authority of the elders and of the state. Youth, though they have Islamic socialisations, also have globalised mentalities, and these played roles in their uprising. Women had long been angered by the Islamists' focus on them through the regime's civilisation project and disciplinary legislations. Women also had higher levels of post-secondary school education, but poorer job prospects, and they were increasingly drawn to working in civil society organisations, which impacted their awareness.

The government attempted to frame the protests as instigated by outside agents but failed; it also tried to frame the protestors as drug addicts, in this it also failed. The slogans of the youth, and the very names of their organisations – Gerifina (enough) and Sharara (spark) – resonated more than the messages of the regime. The youth also dominated the emerging framing fields of the social media, blunting the government's edge in using the mosques controlled by its supporters as ideological messaging fields. Messages by the youth accused several imams of selling out to the regime and of being 'merchants of religion', weakening the imam's traditional role in transmitting the regime's messages in the various neighbourhoods (Zunes 2019).

Alongside youth and women were the prominent SPA and the umbrella Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), which had been protesting against the government since 1980 (El Gizouli 2020). SPA consisted of three professional bodies: the Sudan Doctors' Central Committee, the Sudanese Journalists Network and the Alliance of Democratic Lawyers.

Inadvertently, a 22-year-old woman, Alaa Salah, became the face of the revolution through the social media (Onyango 2021). Soon called the Nubian Queen, the hashtag #SudanUprising and an iconic photo of her in a traditional Sudanese 'toub' garment helped garner waves of national and international support for the revolution (Onyango 2021). The social media became what

broadcaster Kholood Khair called the 'melting pot of the aggrieved'. It became a space where nationalism was allowed to thrive and enabled the Sudanese diaspora to be involved in real time in the uprising – a revolution from a distance (Onyango 2021). Youth posted videos of protests that then went viral, and when the regime shut down the internet, they used virtual private networks (VPN) to circumvent the shutdown and sent messages of the uprising all over the world. The hashtag #KeepEyesOnSudan helped to sustain international support for the revolution, and its activists worked to prevent a quick return to, or acting out of, the traditional Sudanese revolutionary script where uprisings are soon taken over by the military. Social media forced the world and the government to pay attention to the protesters. However, the largest march, the 'millions march', was organised when the military shut down the internet. 'BlueForSudan' helped keep the spotlight on Sudan during the social media blackout.

The driver of social media as a tool of protest was generational and this showed in the large number of tweets and other social media messaging that youth and women utilised to talk about and organise the uprising. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study of social media during the uprising revealed that a major organising and influencing slogan was 'Taskot bas' (Just Fall). Arabic hashtags dominated the tweets. General topics posted and activities covered included protests at Arkaweet, the removal of al-Bashir, violence at the Qiyada area, agreement between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and FFC, the appointment of Hamdok as Prime Minister and formation of a new cabinet (UNDP 2020). During the post-Bashir era, hashtags included 'it has not fallen yet', 'the general command protest', 'handing over power to the people' and 'Sudan strike solidarity'. In protests relating to demands for the TMC to go, hashtags included 'it must fall again' and 'it has not yet fallen', reflecting public scepticism. Later, in the wake of the protests at the general command and killing of protesters, the trending hashtags included 'MillionMarch', 'IAmTheSudanRevolution', 'Martyr's Eid', 'civil disobedience', 'internet blackout in Sudan' and 'stand with Sudan' (UNDP 2020).

The success of the revolution could be attributed to both male and female youth, as they were all actively involved from the onset of the revolution. As indicated by both male and female youth respondents, the question in the immediate post-revolution period was what will be the place of the youth in both the transition process and in the future of Sudan.

## The Transition Process: Prospects and Challenges

After the fall of the al-Bashir regime, the FFC, SPA and the military agreed to establish a Transitional Sovereign Council (TSC) to transition the country to democracy. However, unrest continued as protesters insisted that the military should not be included in the transition process. This led to the African Union and Ethiopian government intervening to mediate a transitional agreement which provided for an adjustment period of three years and three months to prepare for national elections in 2022 (Zunes 2021, 11). Eventually, Abdulla

Hamdok, a former United Nations staff member, became prime minister, with the head of the military, Lt. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, heading the TSC. The TSC quickly moved to unify the country by signing a peace agreement with rebel groups in 2020 and including them in the TSC (Al Jazeera 2020). Additionally, an interim constitution was developed, which guarantees the protection and promotion of human rights, decentralisation of power and so on (Freedom House 2021). However, the transitional process had to deal with immense challenges including turning around the poor economy, healing the nation after decades of tyrannical rule, the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the huge expectations and demands on the part of the public for essential services and the restoration of democracy and constitutional order. The country also started taking steps to normalise its relationship with its neighbours and international partners.

Despite the initial gains made, from the outset, the civilians and the military in the transitional government could not find common ground on the kind of direction they would like the country to take. This led to delays in adopting policies, which had effects on the economy, a situation made worse by the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

According to Aalen (2020), the transition process in Sudan ostracised youth from decision-making processes and they continued to face economic hardship. There were proposals for a 40 per cent quota of youth in parliament, a proposal that civil society and the FFC could not get through. The continuous marginalisation of youth gradually affected the hope they had for change in the immediate post-revolution period (The Carter Center 2021). They were essentially left on the fringe with the military exercising significant power, which gradually discouraged the youth and stimulated their desire to recommence protests against the state.

Women faced similar challenges during the transition process, as only a handful was included in senior leadership positions. Although the government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, the TSC refused to endorse sections that demand equality, especially in marriage and parenting (Gikandi 2021). The feeling of neglect was expressed by 28 out of the 37 women engaged in this study. One of them even jokingly indicated 'Sudan went back to factory setting'.[4] In other words, Sudan reverted to the status quo that marginalised and suppressed women.

The tension between the civilians and the military gradually led to civilians including Alaa Salah and activists limiting their interaction with the military. Consequently, spontaneous protests started in 2020, centred on issues such as the slow pace of reforms, and security forces often responded with teargas or live ammunition, though their use of violence was less severe overall than in 2019 (Freedom House 2021).

By September 2021, it became obvious that the military was less interested in a democratic transition. As the dissension between the civilians and the military

deepened, Lt. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan abruptly ended the transitional reforms by orchestrating a coup on 25 October 2021. Civilian leaders including the Prime Minister were arrested and detained (Washington Post 2021).

The coup led to instant mobilisation and protests by youth, women and other members of Sudanese society. The military retaliated using heavy-handed means and shut down the internet (Kirby 2021). The coup has been criticised locally and internationally. Under mounting pressure, both domestically and internationally, the coup makers reappointed Hamduk as Prime Minister.

## How Could This Have Happened?: Youth, Women and Uncertainty in Sudan

There appear to be mixed feelings about the coup, as a good number of respondents engaged in interviews indicated that there were suspicions that the military was going to make a move to remove the civilians from the transitional government. Several factors were proffered by interviewees in support of their suspicions, including the fact that the Sudanese military has been used to being in charge for decades and wielded significant political power and authority, as al-Bashir depended on them for his prolonged stay in power; the military is not used to being subjected to civilian rule and struggled with the challenges to their decision-making posed by civilian authorities; the top leadership of the military benefited heavily from corruption during the al-Bashir regime and would be unprepared to give up the extensive power and resources available to them. As indicated by a female activist[5] in Khartoum:

> The ascension of General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to the leadership of the transitional government was problematic. The military took control then, something we had insisted against but were convinced by the international actors to accept. We also thought that they were genuine and wanted to support the process of transitioning the country to democracy. His initial speeches were good and promising but apparently, they were all lies and he was buying time to turn things around in favour of the military.

Similar to the views expressed above, a youth activist[6] said:

> We were always suspicious of the military. A lot could have been achieved in the last two years if they genuinely wanted change in Sudan. They kept stalling the process and frustrating the civilians in the transitional government. The way they handled us when we started protesting pointed to the fact that they were not open to youth protests and the demands for democracy and human rights. For me, that was a red flag, it was only the time that they were going to take over that we were waiting for.

The quotes above provide a clear indication of a sense of despair and lack of faith in the transition process long before the coup eventually took place.

In the wake of the coup, there was a state of uncertainty as deposed civilian authorities were incarcerated and youth and female protesters targeted by the military. Essentially, Sudan's experimentation with democratic transition was in danger of being halted, with the gains made being reversed. When questioned on whether they expected the military to have respected the transition to democracy, 96 out of the 116 respondents indicated No and 20 indicated Yes. The 96 indicated that they have always been suspicious of the military and the continuous disagreements with the civilians signalled potential problems. The 20 that indicated Yes noted that they thought the military could behave differently this time, given the rough history of Sudan and the fact that the military solidarised with the people at the end of the 2019 protests. So they were disappointed in the sudden shift by the military away from the transition pathway.

The prospect of the military entrenching itself in power and using heavy-handed methods to thwart opposition appears to be frustrating to some of the youth, as expressed by an activist[7]:

> We need international support – the UN, USA, European Union and others need to back their words with action. If not, this government will stay for a very long period. Our movements have tried and we will continue trying but we need the international community to act fast and discourage them from staying in power. So far, all the press releases have yielded nothing and the military I am sure does not even read them. The international community should not disappoint us, as we will be killed in dozens any time, if we challenge the military.

There is a strong desire among respondents to see the international community rid Sudan of the military regime. Most of the respondents believe that while the youth are prepared to sacrifice their lives, they count on the support of the international community to enhance their potential for success in getting the regime out.

## Conclusion

The history of youth and women's social movements in Sudan has been one in which the movements were initially hobbled by the dominant patriarchal and emergent Islamist hegemony. Whilst there had been trends within some of the movements for more expansive and inclusive objectives, these were not major concerns for many of the social movement actors in the north of the country. Social movement actors were mainly concerned with seeking more space for themselves within the parameters of the dominant riverine hegemonic structure, rather than a wider objective of creating more expansive, inclusive restructuring of the polity. However, in the last two decades, the civil war in Sudan, increasing restrictive orientation of the various regimes, as well as poverty and lack of opportunities have pushed social movement actors to support more

inclusive, expansive and democratic projects that embrace larger numbers of hitherto peripheral social and geographical groups.

Whilst the social movement actors would build upon existing networks to advance their objectives, newer ways of organising social movements and uprisings have also emerged, propelled by youth and women, and by memories of how earlier uprisings were hijacked by the elites. To avoid state capture, youth and women are developing informal, more horizontal networks, as seen in the resistance committees. Professionals are also establishing alternative organisations outside those captured by the state. Newer ways of organising social movements have also involved the use of social media. This change has created newer avenues of political and civic participation where youths and young women have greater control than was the case with earlier participatory avenues, such as political parties, trade unions and the mosques.

Social media has increased the resilience of youth – rather than engagement for a shorter period, their demonstrations now take place over several months, and the social infrastructure exists to mount protests and demonstrations and brings to bear other forms of action to challenge threats to the objectives of the uprising.

The Sudanese revolution is home-grown, mainly propelled by youth and women responding to situations unique to their country's history. Previous uprisings evidence this – uprisings for more democratic space in 1965 and 1985 occurred long before democratic changes in Eastern Europe and the Arab Springs that many scholars have often given as reference points and catalysts for contemporary democratic uprisings and revolutions. However, the ongoing political settlements have involved non-Sudanese who brokered negotiations between the civilian and military groups in the aftermath of the uprising.

The transition process largely marginalised women and youth, and the coup by the military has made the situation in the country more complex. There is the potential for further deterioration, as the youth may not necessarily give up and allow the democratic change that they have been struggling for to be lost to the military. International actors have a vital role to play, in avoiding violence from protesters and encouraging the military to hand over power to a civilian government. Whatever happens next, it has become obvious that Sudan's youth and women are much more conscious and protective of their agency, and how to use it to get the kind of Sudan that they would like to see.

## Notes

1 Interview conducted virtually on 14 November 2021.
2 General Abboud served as the head of the state of Sudan from 1958 to 1964.
3 Interview conducted in Khartoum on 25 November 2021.
4 Interview conducted on 22 November 2021.
5 Interview conducted virtually on 14 November 2021.
6 Interview conducted in Khartoum on 24 November 2021.
7 Interview conducted via telephone on 21 November 2021.

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# 10 Youth Activism in Uganda

## Causes and Methods

*Rita Makumbi*

### Introduction

This chapter explores activism trends among the youth in Uganda. Activism is the practice of deploying campaigns of direct vigorous action in order to bring about change in a given socio-political space (Osiebe 2020). Youth activism has been rising incrementally over the years (Maher 2017), and so also has the use of the internet as a medium of communication. With the increase in internet use, young people who are familiar with these technologies have been able to take advantage of their ubiquity to express themselves through digital platforms and to mobilise in order to advocate for critical causes.

In Uganda, the definition of youth is within the age range of 15 and 30, and the 2014 census reported that 78 per cent of the population is below 30 years old (UBOS 2014). Thus, the youth are the largest demographic in the country and naturally are the highest users of digital platforms. This scenario has changed activism participation amongst the age bracket, as they now use modern methods to attract their peers. It has further allowed the youth to easily convey information and be able to express themselves on issues that involve their well-being in the country. The main objectives of the study were to find out the pull factors that have led to this new trend among Ugandan youth, to identify the basis for supporting this explosion in youth involvement and examine what impact this would have on the future of youth. I carried out this study to identify the reason for the rise in youth mobilisation and their recent increase in socio-political participation and expression od dissent. Additionally, the study further identified the similarity in ideology among the urban and rural youth, as they continue to use to express their demands for changes in Uganda.

This chapter presents trends in modes of activism that the youth have adopted as a way to show their grievances. In particular, it presents the status of youth today, as opposed to earlier youth activists. Currently, Uganda youth today are facing problems such as unemployment and underemployment, irrespective of their level of education and regardless of their economic and social background. Thus young people in Uganda have turned to the internet to search for economic opportunities to improve their livelihoods. However, the networks they have explored have increasingly created solidarity networks that faces the same

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issues in life. In addition, digital platforms allow easy exchange of opinions and ideas, and information sharing. This is a strategic recipe for youth bonding and planning. As such, the electoral process in Uganda has witnessed a variety of scenes displaying the different dynamics expressed physically and virtually.

## History of Youth-Led Social Movements in Uganda from the 1920s to the 1990s

There are several philosophical influences on youth activism throughout history. These include Enlightenment, Religion, Liberalism, Peace, Human Rights, Development Philosophy, Democracy and Youth Employment, to mention a few. Youth activism was led by many African politicians of the 20th century as they professed their support for social movements (Maganga 2020). These included, among others: Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Modibo Keita of Mali, Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea (Friedland & Rosberg 1964). In Uganda, youth activism has, in recent times, led to the formation of groups such as the Youth Affairs Department in the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, National Union of Youth Organisation, National Union of Students of Uganda (NUSU) and Youth Farmers Union. These groups have provided the basis to understand how Ugandan youth activism was demonstrated in the 20th century.

In the 1920s youth activism was based in Buganda, an active colonial region in Uganda, with the expectation of ensuring equality in power holding strategy in the region. The Young Buganda Association was a political party created in the Uganda protectorate in 1919 by Z. K. Sentongo (Atieno-Odhiambo 1985, 658). The composition was of educated but not necessarily privileged youth who mainly worked with the colonial administration. The end goal of this movement was to create a platform where young people's grievances could be constitutionally expressed. The main cause of dissatisfaction was the removal of "Real Governance Power". This power was mainly held by the chiefs who had been awarded huge pieces of land as a way to gain their loyalty to the colonial masters (Hanson 2009).

Contemporary youth activism in Uganda can trace itself to youth movements based in Buganda. As such, youth activism up to the 1940s was mainly driven by economic and political factors (Summers 2006). The young people involved were mainly the youth in Buganda who had the support of British officials like Sir Philip Euen Mitchell and Sir Charles Cecil Farquharson Dundas. These Ugandan young activists were impatient with older doctrines of high colonialism such as an indirect rule. The philosophy of this movement was to promote the politics of a new leadership from among the newly educated class. This economic liberation ideology was helped by Mitchell's support of Makerere College (MacPherson 2009). The colonial masters assisted the activists by pushing for local government reforms that would offer the youth activists publicity through introducing ambitious investment programmes in social welfare and economic development. This was to reduce the older cultural (Buganda) kingdom-based dominance and its influence on the masses.

Another notable movement in the 1940s was led by Ignatius Kangave Musaazi (Engholm 1962). He was a teacher at the Makerere University College (later Makerere University), a job he quit to support African farmers in fighting unfair and exploitative trade regulations that were prevalent at the time. Musaazi formed the Uganda African Farmers Union (UAFU), which was banned by the British colonial administration. He later formed the Federation of Partnerships of Uganda African Farmers (FPUAF) union. This activism shows that the educated youth at the time were able to lead changes that would enable Ugandan representatives in the local government to replace the chiefs appointed by the British colonial government. In addition, Musaazi believed in the right to bypass the price controls on the export sales of cotton imposed by the British colonial government and the removal of the local Asian exclusive rights over cotton ginning. The actualisation of these requests led to protests that resulted in the leader, Musaazi, being imprisoned and the other youth activists going into hiding. However, these efforts were rewarded by the recognition of their demand (Sabiti 2009) and access to the technical expertise of political scientist George Shepherd. His work in Uganda helped change the country's agricultural policies which had greatly disadvantaged Africans in favour of Asians and Europeans. As a result, the FPUAF was able to work out better transport strategies to help the union members.

The youth activism philosophy in the 1950s was Pan-Africanism. This movement had a focus on economic empowerment in Uganda as a result of economic hardships that included exploitation of farmers, fluctuating prices, trade monopoly and exploitation of African workers. These conditions compelled the farmers and other African workers to create a pressure group. In 1952, youth activism led to the formation of the first nationalist party, the Uganda National Congress (UNC). It created a platform that would unite youth leaders from across the country, with the election of leaders based on tribes and religions (Engholm 1962). This was the first step towards a united movement in the country, one more widespread than any other before. Youth-led activism contributed to the success of the UNC, which provided a platform for proper transition of power for self-rule. In addition, the activities of the UNC led to an increase in the number of political parties. These included the formation of the Democratic Party in 1956, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) in 1960 and the Uganda People's Union. Some of these political parties still exist today.

In the 1960s, the philosophy driving the UNC was the actualisation of self-rule in Uganda (Semugabi 2013). The colonial administration agreed to the Legislative Council's recommendation of an expanded Legislative Council which would champion the holding of popular elections based on universal franchise in 1961. The prospect of forming political parties to fight elections, and the ultimate possibility of internal self-rule in which the winning political party would take control of much of the country's affairs, was a big step for the movement. The UNC was composed of youth from the western and eastern parts of the country and had majority representation in the Council.

This was the result of a merger that led to the UPC, led by Milton Obote. The Democratic Party was not part of the Legislative Council. The UPC and the Democratic Party emerged as the two largest countrywide political forces. Both of them started organising for the elections which were due in 1961. The youth representation was very clear; Mr. Obote, the UPC party president himself, was only in his mid-thirties. This trend continued throughout the UPC as most of the strategic positions were held by young people who had just finished tertiary education. The UPC effectively recruited youth into its ranks, for example, J. Kakonge, the founding Administrative Secretary of the Party, became its Secretary-General; he had just finished his studies in India at the time of assuming those positions. Grace Ibingira, who became the Party's Publicity Secretary and Legal Adviser, had also recently returned from studying in Britain. These young people spread the ideology of self-rule and the need to work democratically to attain independence from British Rule. The opportunity to actively participate in the elections and subsequent governance in the country appealed to the youth.

In 1963, the National Union of Youth Organisations was created. However, the Democratic Party youth league also announced the formation of vigilante groups for the protection of the Democratic Party leaders.

In the 1970s, the philosophy driving youth activism was the actualisation of good governance in Uganda (Mujaju 1972). In this era, Uganda was under the leadership of Idi Amin, who had ousted Dr. Milton Obote from power. The struggle against Idi Amin was led by students from Uganda's only university at the Makerere University. The students started with subtle protests which escalated towards the end of the 1970s. Earlier, the youth were agitated by the expulsion of Asian traders, and the student protests led to the termination of the NUSU by the government. This was followed by the self-exile of the guild leadership and the collapse of the guild office at Makerere University. These protests were not able to bring about change immediately; however, these continued activities awakened other forces, such as the labour movements, with young people across the country joining them, that eventually overthrew the Amin administration in 1979.

In the 1980s, the philosophy that guided youth activism was the desire to have constitutional order restored. The 1980 election results were endorsed, by the Electoral Commission of Uganda despite evidence of malpractice, and Uganda plunged into a civil war within months. The period was chaotic and largely characterised by violence and insecurity, which further affected the confidence of Ugandans in their state (Mujaju 1972).

Activism at this stage was mainly led by youth but not necessarily students. This was because most of the vocal youth were in exile, mainly as a result of the political instability which followed the Uganda-Tanzania war which ended the reign of Idi Amin.

A difference with student activities of the 1990s, compared with the 1960s, was a shift from a focus on rights to paying greater attention to opportunity, especially in terms of improving higher education access and campus climates for underrepresented and marginalised populations (Cole & Heinecke 2018).

## Youth Activism in the 21st Century

Youth activism in the 21st century is driven mainly by commitment to specific causes, most notably economic equity and political tolerance. These are an expression of authentic societal grievances and injustices rooted within Ugandan society. The youth bond is beyond the academic and cultural boundaries that were the norm in the movement earlier. Youth activists forge their own path. They leverage technology that allows more authentic and unconstrained expression. Youth activism is guided by the need to be more involved in economic and governance strategies. This is fuelled by reduced democratic accountability for the ruling socio-political elite, amid increased reports of nepotism and corruption (Keating 2011). The majority of youth seem to be unable to participate peacefully in demonstrations around governance and accountability issues, as a result of the heavy handedness of the state. Hence, they prefer to join political parties and use that platform to challenge the government. It has become common for the youth to be actively involved in the political opposition as a strategy to improve their livelihoods (Muwanga et al. 2020). Uganda has seen the majority of its youth expressing themselves through participation in violent activities. The government commonly retaliates by using an 'iron fist', quelling violence using violent means, including the use of rubber bullets, tear gas, water cannon and live ammunition. Each time this happens businesses will come to a standstill, yet the majority of the affected businesses belong to the youth. This has increased the youth's negative perceptions of the government and suggests the reason for their continued involvement in protests and violent dissent.

The causes of youth unrest include the closure of Makerere University in 2006 after a mass strike by students and staff; the raid by the military and police on the Rwenzururu Kingdom's administrative offices and palace compound in November 2016, where 100 people were killed according to Human Rights Watch (HRW); and the social media tax of 2018 that, according to popular opinion, was meant to curtail freedom of expression contrary to the reasons given by the government for the same tax. During the 2016 and 2021 elections, a growing number of people were arrested for posting online critical statements against the administration.

In the 2021 elections, Robert Wine alias Bobi Wine, has risen as one of the more notable youths in Uganda. A presidential candidate under the National Unity Platform, he is also known by supporters as 'the ghetto president'. Despite being a musician, he broke into formal politics in 2017 when he won a seat in Uganda's national assembly. Wine had a strong profile among the youth and this was evident on the main social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. These platforms were a communication channel used to follow all presidential campaign trails. The youth used protests to exert political, social and/or cultural influence on the Ugandan authorities. A number of violent incidents happened with different sides claiming the right to act with both sides blaming the other. For example, the government had a duty to impose civic restrictions due to outbreak of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, while the youth activists and their supporters claimed that their human rights were

being violated. Most notable is the incident on 18 November 2020 in Luuka, Eastern Uganda, when the police arrested and detained Bobi Wine for allegedly breaching COVID-19 regulations by mobilising a large crowd. He was charged with 'undertaking actions that may lead to the spread of the infectious disease'. The offence of contravening the Public Health Act attracts a sentence of up to seven years in prison in Uganda.

In retaliation, groups of young people, mobilising themselves through digital means, set up barricades, burnt tyres and piled rubbish on the streets, firstly in Uganda's capital, Kampala, before protests extended to other mainly urban areas in the country. The speed with which the protests spread out, in addition to the majority involvement of the urban-based youth, suggests that the use of digitalised modes of communication played a key role. The use of social media in the coordinator of these protests, influenced urban youth to get involved in what was effectively a stand against state bullying. A number of incidents involved people being stoned, others being killed, vehicles being vandalised and tyres being burnt everywhere.

This warlike situation led to escalating state action, such as the deployment of the army, since the police alone could not effectively restore law and order, as explained to Reuters by military spokesperson Brig Flavia Byekwaso. A number of times when riots erupted, police and soldiers fanned out across Kampala with armoured vehicles, responding with tear gas, beatings and live bullets.[1]

Digital platforms were also used by the youth to put the spotlight on protest activities in other towns in the country. For example, they were able to record and distribute video evidence of police in Kampala firing indiscriminately at people in buildings overlooking the protests; as well as unidentifiable men in plain clothes, believed to be security personnel, firing automatic weapons. More than 350 people were arrested in the protests of 2020, the majority of which were young people.[2]

## Activism

It is common to find that the majority of youth have relatively less representation or access to institutional power and therefore use other means to influence opinions, policies or practices for normative or democratic purposes (Woodhouse et al. 2002). These activists share a common ideology, background or plight which allows cohesion amongst the group (Sonoda 2012). This is strongly associated with the voluntary role that one plays in the community or society in which they operate. It is common to view youth activism as involving violent means, where what is planned is to win against the other side; in short, this is seen as a power game. However, this is not necessarily the case with most forms of activism, as those that tend to turn violent are usually as a result of the reaction of state actors and their desire to suppress youth activism, usually through the use of force, as has been the case with the Arab Spring, and in settings such as Uganda, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Youth activists believe that they are able to challenge governments regarding pressing societal issues and that addressing these issues has the potential to

improve their environment (Martin 2007). There are a variety of ways in which youth dissatisfaction can be expressed (Isopp 2015; Jordan 2002), including, but not limited to, petitioning elected officials, contributing to political campaigns, staying away from a profession or trade, and other actions expressed in the form of rallies, street marches and/or strikes.

According to some scholars, activist groups can accrue a positive impact on their communities which includes strengthening their values, increased self-esteem and the acquisition of new skills and abilities (Clary & Snyder 2002). Purposive incentives such as money and jobs, and shared identities may promote engagement (Oberschall 1993) since purposive incentives include a shared ideology (Irons 1998).

### *Offline Activism*

Offline activism is defined by high commitment levels and the exclusion of those who are less educated or from socio-economically backward communities (Di Gennaro & Dutton 2006). Offline activism commonly engages the highly educated in society and involves acceptance of serious risks that activists face. These risks include threats to life, emotional and psychological strain, and the basic costs of neglecting one's livelihood and/or studies as a consequence of devoting time and energy to organising the movement. However, activists' decision-making rarely involves a cost-benefit analysis (Hirsch 1990).

Earlier youth activism had different forms of participation that included protests, boycotts, campaigning, volunteering and leading civil society groups (Prince & Brown 2016). Youth activism in the 1990s was mainly among youth educated at tertiary level, witnessed by student affiliations to the political parties in the country.

In the early 21st century, the Uganda youth activism was increasingly being noticed in the political arena. This was seen in response to the partial acquisition of Mabira forest by SCOUL, a sugar-making factory. The protests that followed involved a majority of educated youth and a minority of semi or uneducated youth. This was the point at which all youth seemed to understand that they can have a common agenda despite their different backgrounds. Another major characteristic of offline activism is that the youth involved were backed by different political parties within the country.

Offline participation is believed to fuel online activism, which can be considered a tool that offline activists use to further their influence as well as maintain existing relationships and networks. In this case, online activism is considered being subsequent to offline activism (Krueger 2006; Yunhwan et al. 2017).

### *Digital Activism*

Over the years, there has been growing dissent over the manner in which the country of Uganda is governed, expressed through conventional media and more recently, increasingly expressed through digital platforms. Given the way information moves in the digital space, the government has introduced measures

to control the way online platforms operate. However, with time, there has been a growing needs towards the economic well-being and livelihoods of the masses as a movement. This has drawn the semi-educated and uneducated youth into the activism arena. The linking factor is the use of digital activism where social media platforms, blogs and virtual environments have been a huge enabler.

Digital activism, also known as online activism, electronic advocacy or internet activism, involves the adoption of electronic communication platforms which work well virtually and support fast and efficient information flow. The main characteristic in all forms of digital activism is the increased collective action among people who have an interest in a known social or political agenda (Postmes & Brunsting 2002). The communication sent out is able to reach a wide audience within a short time. A number of scholars support the idea that the internet is able to stimulate activism activities (Harlow 2011; Rolfe 2005; Wojcieszak 2009).

The internet has assisted pressure groups to contest issues that they feel are a violation to the self or the environment they find themselves in (Boulianne 2015). Usually, information on these platforms may spread faster than in the mainstream media, and, in addition, the messages that are counter to mainstream media are also accessed through the internet. The internet is also a good platform to mobilise fundraising activities (Nekmat et al. 2015). In addition, as the youth use the internet in connection with trade, jobs and business opportunities, they are creating and sending out information that supports both their professional and personal causes.

Today, given that the youth represent the largest percentage of the population and the age group making the most use of virtual technologies, there has been an inevitable trend towards digital youth activism involving participation by all groupings of young people, regardless of their educational attainment or ethnic background – a revolution that had not happened before.

According to Kemp (2021), there were 12.16 million internet users in Uganda by January 2021. Increasing access to the internet has led Ugandan youth to significantly embrace the use of online media as a way to receive, refine and work with digital platforms. By contrast, the mainstream conventional media outlets were not as accessible to them. This trend has also brought the activists' messages to a wider audience, more accepting towards activism.

In the process of planning and searching for economic freedom and social justice, there are certain industries that have been a key in this agenda. For example, the Ugandan hip-hop industry raises issues of age, race and social background (Singh 2020). There have been other activism activities in Uganda, such as on climate issues and on traditional kingdoms, and increasingly the internet has been the lifeline on which information is shared.

Digitisation may be a preparatory base for offline activism (Alberici & Milesi 2018). Scholars have argued that there is a high possibility for digital activism to be the springboard that assists the recruitment, planning and implementation of future physical participation (Rohlinger & Bunnage 2018). This may suggest a positive relationship exists between offline and online activism, since online

activism facilitates offline protests by providing the information for advertising and organisation purposes (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020).

## The Efficiency of Digital Activism

The youth today are attracted to websites that allow interaction with other users through message boards, forums, live chatting features, creating or collaborating on work that can be posted or reposted online (Montgomery 2001). According to Agre (2002), the internet enhances the visibility of activism. The youth are involved in both proactive and reactive communication styles in the digitalised media environment by incorporating information-transmitting behaviours (Jeong-Nam et al. 2010) and connective-type collective activities (Bennett & Segerberg 2012). This trend has widely enhanced youth interaction with online content creating explicit spaces for them, or by inviting engagement directly. As such the designers of these platforms are aware that there is a need for spaces that are designed with features that appeal to youth activists (Bachen et al. 2008).

Similarities are sought for congeniality among the different youth. This works to attract more members to a common platform (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993). The internet has been instrumental in recent years in mobilising young people and sustaining their involvement in real-time social mobilisation and protests across the world. It has been an effective tool that has also been used to connect people and provide them with a platform to engage and present their voices and aspirations. In Africa, this became more evident during the Arab Spring than ever before. The efficacy of social media during the Arab Spring sent clear lessons that youth in countries such as Uganda were able to learn from.

In recent years, voluntary associations and political organisations have increasingly switched to internet-based mobilisation campaigns, replacing traditional forms of face-to-face recruitment and mobilisation (Vissers et al. 2011). Furthermore, the government has put in place the Uganda Rural Development Fund. This entity is to enable the establishment of hundreds of internet points of presence (POPs) as a strategy to enhance rural Information and Communications Technology skills. However, an average young person in the rural areas may have limited digital access, given the inability to afford gadgets like smartphones, not to mention the limited technological literacy (Baguma & Eilu 2015).

Despite the widespread and growing use of the internet in activism, there are scholars who have questioned the impact of digital activism, arguing that this trend is more of an awareness platform for exchange of information (Chuma 2006). Or in extreme cases, this activism may merely assist with plans and participation in protests (Wolfsfeld et al. 2013) and may not be able to bring about targeted political or social change (Ndlela 2009; Wasserman 2010). Further representing the cynical attitude is the thought that social media does not craft new forms of protest but reinforces conventional schools of thought (Morozov 2009; Valenzuela 2013).

In addition, there has been a repeated tendency that further weakens the effects of digital activism: in most cases when governments feel threatened by protests, the internet, which is the bloodline of digital activism, is disconnected. What this trend suggests is that the youth have to become more innovative in order to find alternate ways of working which may not necessarily be reliant on the internet if youth activism is to be supported.

## Current Status of Ugandan Youth

In spite of the policy promulgated in 2001, two decades later the rate of youth unemployment is still high. Even when the Youth Livelihood Programme and Youth Livelihood Funds were initiated in 2013, the rate of youth unemployment remained higher than the national average.

It is clear that the rate of unemployment at the time of formulating the National Youth Policy was higher than the national average. This meant that it was the youth category of the population which experienced higher incidences of unemployment in the country. The situation continued to 2016 unabated. In addition to the above, a group of former students who have formed the National Association of the Unemployed (NOU) demanded that the government sponsor and create jobs for them.[3]

In addition, due to their inability to be employed or self-employed in the country, several thousands of Ugandan youth accepted promises of jobs abroad, a strategy which has ended up being a mere farce (Johnson 2019).

Furthermore, the youth are underemployed in non-economically viable activities, such as subsistence agriculture and artisanship. Although these are on the increase, the majority of the youth either earn no wages or receive only a pittance (Makumbi 2018). This situation plunges the country into a vicious cycle of poverty. The economy cannot sustain the current structure as this situation creates a high dependence burden on the economically active population which is not as big as the youth population.

In regard to the dependency ratio, which compares the number of people of non-working age with those of working age, the figure for Uganda is above 100 per cent. This reflects the fact that working people are burdened by looking after so many people with no income of their own, including the youth. Looking at other states in the East African Community, it is noted that the dependency ratio for Tanzania is 93.80; for Kenya, 80.87; for Rwanda, 78.07; and for Burundi, 89.65.[4] This means that Uganda has the worst dependency ratio in the region, because a high number of young people who could be working do not have meaningful jobs.

What is appalling about the current state of the Uganda youth is that there is continued marginalisation by a police state – a state that has denied the youth their place in both the present and potentially the future. The state continues to be iron-handed, and the harsh treatment it metes out to those that have ventured to challenge the system has discouraged several other youth from sacrificing their time and lives to be involved in protests. The methods used by the

youth are all methods that show how the youth dodge direct confrontation with the state and use non-direct confrontational means to express their grievances and frustrations against the state. This is a clear indication that Uganda may be experiencing negative peace, and it is just a matter of time before the youth take to openly challenging the system, a move that may affect stability and security in not just Uganda but also the region as a whole.

## Conclusion

The final analysis suggests that the youth in Uganda express their opinions through demonstrations as a way to improve their livelihoods. They perceive the political systems as incompetent and responsible for their plight. The rapidly changing nature of internet technology is a factor that catalysed youth activism in the 21st century, increasing recruitment and participation in youth activism because it is a multipurpose platform which offers lower-cost modes of participation.

The strategies (online and offline activism) deployed clearly have not been able to install the much-expected change in youth participation. The absence of impact in Uganda as a result of these demonstrations suggests that these protests at the moment are merely a channel being used to send messages that challenge institutions of power, but their influence has failed to go beyond to bring about post-protest change. As such, these activities are mainly at an advocacy level by making information available to wide audiences (Vegh 2003). Such information may not have been so easily accessed if it was spread through the traditional channels of communication.

Online activism may not have the expected impact for a while yet, given that government-led structural barriers have the ability to de-escalate its momentum. In addition, the youth have inadequate resources, a setback that affects the sustenance of activism. However, the link between offline activism and online activism is undeniable, given the actions taken overtly or covertly. This suggests that the dominance of activism, if better organised, has the potential to become transformative for the youth activism to gain legitimacy nationally.

## Notes

1 See: www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/20/uganda-authorities-weaponize-covid-19-repression (Accessed 12 November 2021).
2 See: www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/19/bobi-wine-protests-death-toll-rises-in-ugandas-worst-unrest-in-years (Accessed 15 November 2021).
3 See: www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiBmOuL4cX0AhWvR_EDHTe7CRw4FBAWegQICxAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.populationpyramid.net%2Fhnp%2Fage-dependency-ratio-of-working-age (Accessed 15 November 2021).
4 See: www.voanews.com/a/uganda-youth-demand-government-action-on-unemployment/2439988.html (Accessed 12 November 2011).

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# 11 Navigating Precarious Spaces

## Youth, Social Movements and Political Activism in Zimbabwe

*Simbarashe Gukurume*

### Introduction

Since 2016, youth-led social movements have emerged and confronted a predominantly authoritarian state in Zimbabwe. Although there is an increase in youth-led movements in Zimbabwe, there is very little research on the lived experiences of youth in these movements. As such, little is known about social movements and the everyday realities of young people active in these movements. Through these movements, youth have deployed their angst against joblessness, government corruption, police brutality and poor service delivery in urban spaces. Indeed, youth social movements played a key role in the demise of former President Robert Mugabe in November 2017. Scholarly work has shown how social movement organised protests helped to sanitise the November 2017 coup that ousted Mugabe. Drawing on the ethnography of youth activists' everyday lives and struggles in Zimbabwe, this chapter examines the ways in which young people are mobilised and how they encounter the state, exploring in particular the risks encountered by youth activists and how they navigate them. The chapter argues that given the precariousness of activism in the social movement terrain in Zimbabwe, youth activists have developed creative ways of subverting the state and navigating state violence.

On 9 September 2020, the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) president Tafadzwa Ngadziore was arrested and spent more than a month in prison without trial.[1] Several attempts to secure his bail failed. His arrest came after he organised and led a demonstration at Impala Car Rental after their vehicle was used in the abduction of a Midlands State University (MSU) journalism student Tawanda Muchehiwa.[2] Muchehiwa, a cousin of the former *Chronicle* editor, was abducted and tortured by the state security apparatus, which led Ngadziore to organise a protest to demand answers from the car rental company on the identity of Muchehiwa's abductors. During the protest, Ngadziore asserted that:

> Impala is responsible for Tawanda's abduction. We need answers from them because they provided the vehicle that was used to abduct Tawanda. We believe that Zimbabwe should be a safe country and justice for Tawanda

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> should be served. Impala should give us answers on other abductions that have been happening in this country. We are not going to stop the protests otherwise they will have to abduct us all.[3]

Instead of investigating the abduction of Muchehiwa, the police responded by arresting Ngadziore for organising the protest. He was charged with inciting public violence and sent to the country's maximum-security prison.[4] Upon his release, Ngadziore declared that he will continue to fight for justice, human rights and democracy in the country, especially when it concerns the abuse of members of his constituency – the students and the youth. In a speech given outside the Chikurubi maximum security prison after his release, Ngadziore defiantly stated:

> Tawanda Muchehiwa was not and was never abducted, he is just but a mirror incident of the victims, but the victim at large is not the student at Midlands State University, but the students around the continent and around the globe. What was abducted was not Tawanda Muchehiwa, what was abducted was the mothers across the continent, across the globe, because he is born from a mother, what was abducted was a labour movement because his father is a worker, he is a member of the proletariat … thus a month in prison will never break me. There was a prison inside me before I was in prison that should be noted, if they fail to respect our existence, and then they should be assured of our resistance. They should know, the regime should know, the kakistocracy[5] of Dambudzo Mnangagwa, the gerontocracy of ED Mnangagwa should know that the barometer of class consciousness stand resolved staunch on the position that justice for Tawanda Muchehiwa should be served…

Takudzwa's speech is interesting in what it reveals about the ways in which the post-Mugabe regime operates and deals with 'activists', human rights abuses, corruption and state-sanctioned violence. In referring to Mnangagwa's government as a kakistocracy, Ngadziore offered a scathing critique of Mnangagwa's leadership and his political henchman:

> Let me make this clear to the oppressors of this country. The bail we need is not one from prison. What we need is bail from economic mismanagement, political instability, abject poverty, unemployment … [all of] which students and citizens are currently facing. We must continue fighting because we will lose the battle the moment we keep quiet.

Ngadziore's experience and encounter with a repressive state is neither unique nor peculiar to him. Instead, it resonates strongly with the experiences of many other activists in Zimbabwe. Many other civil society activists have faced similar fates including violence, intimidation and imprisonment. This clampdown on dissenting voices and opposition is not new in Zimbabwe and

other authoritarian regimes in Africa. Activism in many authoritarian spaces like Zimbabwe represents a precarious practice. Indeed, one of the activists highlighted in an interview that it is dangerous to be an activist in the country, especially when your activism is critical of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government. Yet, despite the state's brutal and repressive 'strategies' of silencing dissent from social movement and civil society activists, these activists have continued to critique and subvert hegemonic forms of political power. In fact, since 2016, activists deployed social media to launch movements and campaigns, which led to contentious actions that gained traction and in 2017, culminated in the overthrow of the country's long-serving President Robert Mugabe. Between January and October 2016, there were more than 40 youth-led protests against the Mugabe regime (Gukurume 2017). Many of these protests mobilised through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp transformed the country's political landscapes. In the context of durable authoritarianism, marked by state repression and police brutality, these protests would not have been possible without the use of social media.

Drawing on civil society and social movement leaders from #ThisFlag, ZINASU, #ThisGown and #Tajamuka, this chapter examines the ways in which members of these groups encountered and experienced the state from 2015 to 2021. It is important to note that the social movement groups discussed in this chapter emerged and tried to assert themselves as active citizens in a context where the ruling ZANU-PF party actively sought to marginalise and silence dissenting voices from the public sphere. This silencing and the strategies deployed by the state to do so make political activism in Zimbabwe a precarious terrain. The ZANU-PF government established and deployed offline and online surveillance systems that made it difficult for citizens, and in this case activists, to freely express themselves, let alone mobilising dissenting voices.

Even though the country's constitution provides for freedom of expression, the Ibrahim African Governance index in 2017 revealed that the freedom of expression index in Zimbabwe was a low 37.6 per cent.[6] In the 2019 and 2020 governance index, Zimbabwe remained below 50 per cent. Attempts at subverting and criticising the state were often accompanied by a brutal clampdown on dissenting voices by the state security apparatus. In fact, in 2015 the leader of #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, Itai Dzamara, was alleged to have been abducted by state security agents; his whereabouts remain unknown today.[7] This highlights the precariousness of political activism in the authoritarian context of Zimbabwe. Worse still, in Mnangagwa's first year in power, there have been more abductions and arrests of activists than ever before. However, in spite of this precariousness, I contend that activists have devised creative ways and tactics to circumvent these risks. From 2016 up to the eventual demise of Mugabe in the November 2017 coup, the voices of dissent continued to intensify regardless of the government's repressive nature.

The chapter is divided into five sections covering: the various social movements that emerged and challenged the state and the ways in which they

mobilised; the state's attempt to supress dissent through brutality, arrests and imprisonment; the ways in which civil society activists encounter the state through secret agents and surveillance techniques; the creative ways in which activists resist and subvert the state while simultaneously avoiding open confrontation in the streets; and final conclusions and reflections.

## #Hashtag Movements and Insurgent Citizenship

Since 2016, Zimbabwe has witnessed a massive increase in social media movements. Deteriorating economic performance, skyrocketing unemployment and corruption, all coalesced into motivating people to organise protests challenging the then Mugabe regime. Although there is an emergent and growing body of research on these movements (Gukurume 2017; Chitanana 2020; Sacks 2020; Nenjerama 2021) few of these studies examine the ways in which activists encounter and navigate the repressive state apparatus deployed to intimidate and silence their voices. As such, little is known about the lived realities of activists in Zimbabwe's social movements that transformed the country's political landscape between 2016 and 2017. Indeed, the #ThisFlag social movement led by Pastor Evan Mawarire was arguably one of the largest forms of social media resistance in post-independent Zimbabwe. Sacks (2020) noted that #ThisFlag mobilised an international protest movement that rattled the Mugabe regime from April to September 2016.

In his study on the Brazilian margins, Holston (2008) deployed the concept of 'insurgent citizenship' to articulate how the urban poor on the margins devised various ways of contesting established entrenched systems of authority and power. Drawing on Holston's analysis, social media activism in Zimbabwe can also be framed as a creative way through which subaltern citizens redefine citizenship through activism. Following Holston (2008), I assert that the everyday struggle to make do and get by, by many ordinary citizens, triggered new forms of collective political consciousness which crystallised into insurgent nationalism.

This chapter is based on qualitative ethnographic research with youthful activists in Zimbabwe. Since 2015, I have conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with youth political activists from various civil society organisations. However, for this chapter, I used data collected from 18 activists from several groups such as #ThisFlag, #Tajamuka, #ThisGown and ZINASU, among other groups. Most of the interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2017 when the aforementioned groups organised several online and offline protests that mounted a serious challenge to the Mugabe regime leading to his eventual overthrow through a military coup in November 2017. Apart from interviews, the author also engaged in participant observation during this period, attending meetings and protests organised by some of the groups. Additional interviews were also conducted from 2018 to 2019 when protests started to re-emerge after Mnangagwa's controversial victory in the July 2018 elections. Interview questions focused on activists' everyday lives and struggles in the context of

unprecedented state repression, including the ways in which activists organise and mobilise resistance, and how they encounter(ed) and subvert the state. Through in-depth interviews and conversations, the author was able to understand the lived experiences of activists, capturing what it meant for them to be activists in a repressive environment.

As such, the questions particularly examined how and why, in spite of state repression, activists remained resolute and resilient in their challenge of political power. To augment primary data from in-depth interviews and participant observation, the author also made use of secondary data from newspaper articles, YouTube videos and other reports on and about the activists and protests. Secondary data on the #ThisFlag movement and #Tajamuka campaign, as well as #ThisGown, are particularly rich. Activists in these movements created social media spaces on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp which they used as tools for mobilising and posting information. Additionally, they also conducted many interviews and press conferences with various media houses available on YouTube. All these secondary sources helped to corroborate information collected through interviews, conversations and participant observation. The following sections provide a brief introduction to some of the key groups that organised several protests from 2016 to 2019 which transformed the country's political landscape.

### *#ThisFlag Movement*

A poetic video posted on 20 April 2016, a couple of days after Zimbabwe commemorated its independence, by a youthful cleric Pastor Evan Mawarire, sparked the birth of an international protest movement. In the video, Mawarire bemoaned the deteriorating economic crisis and its effects on the everyday lives of many Zimbabweans like him. Through the video, Mawarire built on the poetics of anticolonial resistance and nationalisation to create a rallying cry (Sacks 2020). Mawarire's video quickly went viral on Twitter and Facebook (Gukurume 2017) as thousands of Zimbabweans within and beyond the country shared and retweeted the video on social media platforms. Mawarire (2020) noted that he was driven to record the video out of frustration with the state of the country, which made it difficult for him to provide for his family. His message resonated with the experiences of many Zimbabweans at home and abroad who responded overwhelmingly to the call to demand government accountability and transparency. Indeed, the video inspired and empowered Zimbabweans to voice their concerns and reclaim their dignity and political voice (Gukurume 2017).

After the impact of his first video, Mawarire and a few activists started a social media campaign demanding accountability, transparency and an end to corruption in the country. Mawere (2020) noted that the #ThisFlag movement seized a unique form of political activism that united ordinary citizens around shared suffering and aspirations. Mawarire did this by asking ordinary Zimbabweans to take selfies sharing their own experiences and their

demands with the caption #ThisFlag. He initially declared 25 days of cyber dissent and urged citizens to move around with their flags as a sign of protest against growing corruption, injustice, economic decay and deepening poverty. As such, the #ThisFlag movement deployed the national flag to resist and subvert grand and established dominant discourses of nationalism and citizenship to foster new imaginings of the nation (Mawere 2020). Indeed, the #ThisFlag movement appropriated the symbolism of the flag in ways that not only redefined nationalism, citizenship and belonging but also contested top-down and imposed meanings of what it means to be a citizen and patriot.

Mawarire's subversive and creative appropriation of the national flag as a tool for protests reconfigured and contested Mugabe's and ZANU-PF's hegemonic construction of a patriotic, historical and nationalistic narrative, symbolically imbued in the flag for political legitimacy. Interestingly, the #ThisFlag movement used the same flag to question the political legitimacy of a corrupt and brutal regime. Mawarire (2020) noted that what the flag stood for and the state of the nation were worlds apart. The use of the flag as a rallying point and mobilising strategy was creative and powerfully appealed to the 'affective' sensibilities of the suffering citizens. Within a few months, the movement gained traction and became transnational while shifting from online and offline spaces. Indeed, Mawarire called for a national #ShutdownZim stay-at-home protest in July 2016 which brought the country to a standstill. Thousands of Zimbabweans in support of the movement moved around with their flag as a symbolic and powerful act of protest. In response, the Mugabe regime criminalised the use, carrying or display of the flag through invoking the Statutory Instrument (SI) 184 of 1987. The government's move to criminalise the commercialisation and wearing of the national flag can be viewed as an act of state surveillance on the burgeoning influence of the #ThisFlag movement which, at its peak, became the most powerful opposition and threat to Mugabe's rule. Indeed, Mugabe himself openly castigated Mawarire at a political rally by calling him a 'fake pastor' who had no place in the country. In the speech, Mugabe framed Mawarire as an unpatriotic sell out (*mutengesi*) working for the Western agents of regime change and subsequently questioned Mawarire's citizenship. Consequently, Mugabe viewed Mawarire as a political opponent and therefore an enemy (*muvengi*) of the state. Scholars argue that Mugabe always portrayed his political opponents as enemies who should be sniffed out. As such, Mugabe's threats sought to warn Mawarire that he was treading on precarious ground. However, Mugabe's denouncing of Mawarire and the movement also highlights the extent to which #ThisFlag unsettled the corridors of power.

### *#Tajamuka*

In early 2016, one of the most significant forms of civil disobedience and resistance to the Mugabe regime was the #Tajamuka (we are agitated) campaign organised by a group of youthful activists. The campaign arose out of frustration with the protracted economic and political crisis. Led by young

people like Promise Mkwananzi, the #Tajamuka campaign emerged in solidarity with the abducted leader of the #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare campaign Itai Dzamara. However, its political visibility and influence grew significantly around 2016 when vendors' associations and the National Electoral Reforms Agenda (NERA) protested together. NERA and #Tajamuka joined hands in their demands for electoral reforms. The meaning of the term *Tajamuka* relates to subversive unruliness, outrage, anger and revolting against an oppressive system. Indeed, the group's repertoires of protest action symbolised the deeply ingrained frustrations with the status quo. The leader of the #Tajamuka campaign asserted that the campaign is an expression of the feelings of Zimbabweans in general and young people in particular. It is an expression of feelings of disenchantment and disappointment with the state of things in the country. The campaign was an amalgamation of young people from various political affiliations, the informal sector, youth pressure groups and civic groups coming together to confront the excesses of the state.

The #Tajamuka campaign's most effective protest, in the border town of Beitbridge, kick-started a series of protests in 2016. The Beitbridge protest was in response to the government's imposition of a controversial SI 64 around June 2016, which banned the import of goods without a licence. This ban was viewed as an emotive issue given that the majority of Zimbabweans relied on imported goods for survival. In response, #Tajamuka mobilised vendors and cross-border traders, who relied on imported goods and viewed the SI 64 as an attack on their livelihoods, to demonstrate, demanding its removal. By promoting active citizenships and establishing cyber communities of activists, #Tajamuka was able to mount meaningful resistance against the ZANU-PF government and challenge its political hegemony, through a combination of online and offline acts of civil disobedience.

### *#ThisGown*

The #ThisGown movement started as a national coalition of disgruntled unemployed graduates who organised to register their displeasure and frustrations over skyrocketing unemployment and underemployment in the country (Gukurume 2017, 2019b). The group emerged in July 2016 and worked closely with other social movements and pressure groups to mobilise protests against the government. In August 2016, they joined hands with other groups like #Tajamuka to reject the government's introduction of a surrogate local currency called the bond note (Gukurume and Mahiya 2020). They demonstrated and petitioned the treasury and parliament over the bond notes and on other issues such as unemployment, injustices and growing poverty levels. During the protest, many of them wore their graduation regalia while others encouraged graduate vendors to trade in the city's streets with their graduation regalia as a form of symbolic protest. Some of the unemployed graduates asserted that 'Education is the key to success, but our government removed the door, so we have the keys but no doors to open'.[8]

Interestingly, in 2016, some of the unemployed graduates played football in the city while wearing their academic gowns. This act was a powerful critique of the government's failure to create employment for graduates. In an interview, one of the activists noted that this was a message to the president that the 'gown' which used to be a symbol of success, and a springboard for upward mobility, has instead been reduced to a symbol of poverty, unemployment and hopelessness.

## Suppressing Dissent: Police Arrests, Brutality and Imprisonments

Although the 2013 Zimbabwean constitution provides for the right to peaceful protests, my interlocutors, such as Andrew, told me that in Zimbabwe, people continue to get arrested for exercising their constitutional rights to protest or organise. In fact, the majority of my interlocutors noted that for them, arrests and police brutality constituted an everyday experience and reality in the civil society and social movement space. In an interview, one of the interlocutors complained:

> We have police brutality on an enormous scale now, and what is worse is that this is now backed by military police and armed soldiers. You see the military in the streets more than before now and they are just sending a message that any mistake we are here to deal with you.[9]

Indeed, the majority of the activists had experienced police brutality and imprisonment due to their activism. For instance, in July 2016, the leader of the #ThisFlag movement Evan Mawarire was arrested and charged with treason. Although Mawarire was acquitted of the serious treason charges and left the country for several months, he was rearrested upon his return in February 2017. At the airport, Mawarire reported that the state intelligence stripped him naked and searched him before handing him over to the police. Mawarire was taken to the notorious Chikurubi maximum security prison on charges of attempting to overthrow a constitutional government. Speaking of his experiences in prison, Mawarire noted:

> That's where you begin to see the brutality; you begin to see the abuse that happens to other prisoners, the beatings that would take place. The solitary confinements. The threats to be murdered whilst you're inside. You go for days without eating because you're afraid that poison is going to be put in your food.
>
> (Mawarire 2020)

Brutality and abuse of political prisoners, especially activists, is not new. A number of activists have reported similar experiences. This resonates with arguments made by Alexander (2013) that the ZANU-PF government has politicised and

militarised the Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) and uses the prison to deal with their political nemeses. This militarisation of the judiciary and the ZPS enable the regime to invoke criminal law to weaponise the detention of political and human rights activists as well as opposition members and critics of the regime. This resonates with Verheul (2020) who highlighted ZANU-PF's preoccupation with the law's coercive rather than legitimating utility, leading to dilapidating material conditions of the courts. Interestingly, the everyday prison experiences of activists were often mediated by the militarisation of the institution highlighted by Alexander. Mawarire highlighted the abuse by prison guards at the Chikurubi maximum security prison:

> Guards force a whole baton stick into your rectum. There are moments which are still very difficult for me to talk about. (Mawarire 2020)
>
> When you are in prison as an activist you are stripped of your rights, you don't have any freedom. You are ill-treated and it seems like the prison guards are trained to violate all political activists. The conditions are horrible and knowing that you will not get bail easily made it even worse.[10]
>
> They put me in a cell that is called Baghdad; it is regarded as the most notorious cell with the most notorious prisoners. We didn't have running water and blankets. Staying in that cell was like living in hell. Sometimes you are abused and assaulted if you ask any questions.[11]
>
> We were denied food and water for days and spend the whole day in leg irons and locked up. Even when you are ill, you are denied medication. This happened to many of us, and remember Rebecca Mafikeni was detained and denied bail and she died in prison, this happens a lot.[12]

The above stories from four different activists are illustrative of the gruesome abuse that political activists encountered inside the prison. They also reveal the depravity and brutality of prison life, especially for activists perceived as enemies of the state. One of my interlocutors called it 'a belly of the beast', where one's safety and return were not guaranteed. Some of my interlocutors noted that beatings and ill-treatment of political opponents and critics of the government are normalised practices and condoned in and outside cells. One activist indicated in an interview that the arrest and incarceration of activists was a way to clamp down on freedom of expression and speech. As such, the state uses the prison as a tool to discipline and punish real and perceived critics of the state. Ironically, while such a traumatic experience detailed in the quotes above is expected to silence the activists, many of them noted that state repression has instead emboldened them to speak out against abuses even more. For instance, one prominent activist noted:

> They made a mistake sending me to prison because they have armed me with more evidence of the decay, the suffering and the abuse that is going on in this country. I will use this evidence to continue fighting for

> democracy, human rights and the rule of law that we have been denied for a lifetime.[13]

Instead of breaking his spirit, Tonderai told me that the arrest and imprisonment instead empowered him and re-energised him to become more critical. For many ordinary Zimbabweans, the mention of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), a notorious government secret agency responsible for spying, abductions, torture and disappearances, instils fear. However, for Tonderai and some activists I interviewed, the CIOs have become part of their everyday encounters; most told me that they knew they are under constant surveillance from the state security and CIO. For instance, one activist said:

> If you are an activist in Zimbabwe, then you know that your every move is always being followed and monitored. There are eyes and ears all over to see and hear if what you are doing is not threatening to the regime.[14]

Indeed, scholars such as McGregor (2013) and Gukurume (2019a) have asserted that the ZANU-PF regime deploys CIOs and a huge number of informers to spy on real and perceived political threats, by infiltrating activists' networks to collect intelligence. Such a scenario has created an environment where activists cannot trust anyone, including their acquaintances.

## Encountering the State: Surveillance, CIO and Military Intelligence

Participants noted that for any activist perceived to be political, state surveillance and intimidation becomes an everyday reality. For instance, in an interview with the *Journal of International Affairs*, on 29 October 2020 Mawarire noted:

> Growing up under Robert Mugabe meant living under a constant sense of fear. There's no other way to explain it. Ask anyone who grew up during the era. As a Zimbabwean, one of the things that defined us was being afraid of the state.

Indeed, similar stories were shared by many other activists who noted that the state always deploys its apparatus for intimidation and silencing dissent. For many activists like Mawarire, this fear of Mugabe, ZANU-PF and the state was reproduced over generations and became embodied in the people's psyche, creating a culture of silence and self-censorship. Consequently, many Zimbabweans suffered in silence for fear of speaking out against Mugabe and his ZANU-PF. In such a context, Mawarire had to embolden citizens, by calling for boldness and bravery. To do this, he deployed the mantra '*Hatichada, hatichatya*' (we are fed up and we are not afraid). In his interviews, Mawarire asserted that he intended to strengthen people to overcome this fear and reclaim their voice

and political space (Gukurume 2017). Fear of the state and its apparatus was a recurrent narrative in the stories told by many activists during conversations and interviews. For instance, one activist noted:

> Being a political activist in Zimbabwe is not safe, wherever you are, you know that you are being followed, being watched, and being monitored and, at times, threatened.

Surveillance has become the modus operandi of the ZANU-PF government to deal with dissent (Gukurume 2019a). This surveillance not only involves monitoring of activists' movements and plans but also remote surveillance of their private telephone calls and mobile messages (Karekwaivanane and Msonza 2021). Interestingly, the state has also deployed and used social media to attack civil society and opposition. This has been done through the deployment of 'cyber spies' and 'cyber critics' (*Varakashi*)[15] of opposition opinion makers and other government critics. For instance, activists, opposition politicians and ordinary people have been arrested for insulting the President in WhatsApp groups.[16] Varakashi are used to quash online government critics and spread government propaganda. Karekwaivanane and Msonza (2021) asserted that the emergence of *Varakashi* demonstrates the regime's transition to appropriating similar technology tools and platforms utilised by its critics and opponents. Indeed, Karekwaivanane and Msonza (2021) noted that the *Varakashi* pro-government trolls succeeded in intimidating opposition voices and shutting down civic space. This shows how authoritarian regimes have also used social media to silence critical voices and entrench political hegemony.

Despite the removal of Mugabe in the November 2017 coup, *Mugabeism*, the system that sustained Mugabe's rule, remains intact. Mawarire (2020) noted that finding out that Emmerson Mnangagwa would be taking over brought an equal sense of fear because of his role in propping up the Mugabe regime. Similarly, Melber (2017) asserted that the continued military backing of ZANU-PF merely inaugurated an era of 'Mugabe-ism without Mugabe'. As such, there are continuities with regards to the modes and logics of governmentality. Some scholars have shown that Mnangagwa's rule has indicated greater continuity than change vis-à-vis the Mugabe era (Southall 2017). In fact, Mnangagwa's presidency started with bloodshed, with two key events of the post-Mugabe era solidifying this claim. The first one was the deployment of the military and police with live ammunition in August 2018 against young people demanding the early release of election results. In the clash between protesters and the armed state security forces, six people were killed by the military and police and a crackdown on opposition and civic activists soon followed (Hodgkinson 2019).[17] Many activists went into hiding after this brutal crackdown. The second event which demonstrated the brutal nature of the Mnangagwa regime was his response to the January 2019 fuel protests. The fuel protests erupted after President Mnangagwa announced an increase in fuel duty that hiked the price by 250 per cent. In response, Mnangagwa deployed the army and police

to suppress dissent and several people were killed and others seriously injured in the clashes (BBC 2019).[18] There was a concerted crackdown on activists including the leader of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the #ThisFlag movement leader Evan Mawarire who had jointly called for a protest. After spending a few days in prison on 30 January 2019, Mawarire noted;

> Once again, we have to run and hide, once again we have to be afraid and quiet, we have to be silent because prisons like Chikurubi will be waiting for you if you speak out.
>
> I had expected that Mnangagwa would be different from Mugabe, but I was wrong. Mnangagwa has turned out to be the worst version of Mugabe. I now believe what people were saying that Mnangagwa was largely the architect of Mugabe's repression.
>
> (Interview, Peter, July 2020)

Mawarire (2020) asserted that what Mugabe used to do secretly, Mnangagwa was doing openly, and this has continued with arrests of journalists exposing corruption, activists peacefully protesting and comedians who use humour to critique the state and its excesses. Indeed, during interviews, participants noted that state surveillance on civil society has intensified since Mnangagwa came into office. This was also echoed by Källstig (2021), who noted that despite the departure of Mugabe, the intimidation of critics continued and the legislation used to regulate people's freedom of expression has remained in place. In fact, some participants noted that the Mnangagwa government has doubled surveillance with the deployment of the military intelligence in addition to what the former president used to rely on – the CIO. As such, state surveillance is now jointly carried out on civil society actors by the two organisations, with the aim of suppressing dissent and silencing opposition voices. Many participants complained about the shrinking civic spaces in the country since President Mnangagwa took office in November 2017.

Social movement and civil society activists in Zimbabwe have been victims of abductions[19] by alleged state security apparatus, with the high-profile abduction case similar to that of the leader of the #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare movement and pro-democracy journalist, Itai Dzamara, in 2015. Since then, the whereabouts of Dzamara remains unknown.[20] Similarly, in 2016, two #Tajamuka activists were also abducted by state security.[21] Recently, Tawanda Muchehiwa, a student activist, and three Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) female activists, Joanna Mamombe, Cecelia Chimbiri and Netsai Marova, were also abducted[22] and tortured by state security agents after raising concerns about the suffering of the people due to lack of social support and security from the state during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.[23] These activists were brutally beaten and sexually assaulted before being dumped at a farm on the outskirts of Harare. Instead of investigating the case of sexual violence and assault, the government arrested the activists and imprisoned them without trial. Charged with allegedly lying about their abduction and torture, all three

were also denied bail on several occasions[24] and kept in Chikurubi maximum security prison for two months.[25] The activists were rearrested after holding a press conference in solidarity with another incarcerated pro-democracy activist, Makomborero Haruzivishe, who was arrested and sentenced to 14 months in jail for allegedly resisting arrest and inciting violence.[26] Makomborero was arrested while protesting the arrest of another youth activist, Allan Moyo, who had been arrested and imprisoned for weeks without trial.

While in prison, Joanna Mamombe fell sick and was admitted to a hospital outside the prison, but prison wardens were ordered to take her back to prison without her doctors' clearance. Although Mamombe complained that she was in pain, the prison wardens claimed that they were following instructions from higher authorities (Ndebele 2021).[27] Similarly, in August 2019, popular comedian Samantha Kureya, better known as 'Gonyeti', was abducted by state agents, beaten, stripped naked and forced to drink raw sewage.[28] Kureya was warned that she was too young to mock the government and its leadership. Interestingly, such warnings speak to an intergenerational struggle in the country where young people are labelled as 'born frees' and as future leaders. Being labelled as 'born free' strips young people of certain entitlements and rights to question a gerontocratic political leadership. I assert that these acts of abductions and intimidation tactics are meant to silence activists and other critical voices.

## Creative Subversive Resistance

In light of police brutality and violence, youth activists switched from offline activism to online activism as a way to navigate the precarity posed by street activism. Karekwaivanane and Msonza (2021) noted that social media has become an important space for political activism because of the brutal and excessive policing of offline street-based activism. For them, the burgeoning of civic cyberspace is a consequence of the suppressive shrinking of corporeal civic space. As such, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and to some extent WhatsApp, provided alternative spaces of participation within which activists mobilised and engaged political elites.

Online activism was enabled by the increase in the number of smartphone and internet users, especially in urban areas. According to the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ 2019), mobile phone users had surged to 90.6 per cent, while internet users rose to 60.6 per cent by 2019. Many urbanites have become active on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, which is arguably the most popular social media platform in the country. Young (2021) noted that social media has become a powerful tool and instrument for citizen mobilisation in autocracies across the world. In Zimbabwe, the turn to symbolic and subtle forms of protest should be understood in part as an innovative way of circumventing the risk posed by confronting an authoritarian and brutal regime. The social media space provided a relatively safer terrain

for articulating and mobilising counter-hegemonic activities (Gukurume 2017). As such, cyberspace enabled the subaltern groups like the #ThisFlag and #Tajamuka to mobilise the masses for nationwide protests against the authoritarian ZANU-PF regimes. However, social media has also widened the repressive capacity of the authoritarian state, becoming an instrument of state control and a space for political distortions. Indeed, while social media has been used as an instrument of resistance and disrupting power, it has also been used by African dictators to reproduce the status quo. For example, in Zimbabwe, social media have been used to promote the regime propaganda and the spread of fake news, as well as becoming a conduit for state surveillance and electoral manipulation. As such, digital authoritarianism in repressive regimes like Zimbabwe has increased simultaneously with the popularity and growth of social media.

Such was the efficiency and impact of social media in 2016 that the government had to totally shut down the internet for more than two days in July to stop social movements' utilisation of the internet for popular mobilisation. Days after POTRAZ ordered all the telecommunication companies to shut down internet services, the same regulator had issued a warning that citizens using social media to mobilise for protests will be identified and arrested. When the internet was finally restored, the government forced telecommunication companies across the country to hike data prices so that they were beyond the reach of many. Although the government denied any interference with the internet and the recent increase in data prices, many people felt that this was an attempt to stop social media use for the burgeoning anti-government protests. Similarly, in 2019 at the height of fuel-related protests, the government again shut down the internet and all social media platforms which people utilised for protests.[29] These actions curtailed and violated citizens' digital freedom and compelled many to use virtual private networks (VPN) to circumnavigate cyber-surveillance and shutdowns.

In response to growing and continued violation of human rights under the Mnangagwa regime, activists launched a #ZimbabweansLivesMatter movement which was widely supported by prominent politicians and celebrities.[30] Inspired by the American #BlackLivesMatter movement,[31] activists used social media to expose the abuse of Zimbabweans by state security agents deployed to silence political dissent. This movement gained traction after the killing of protestors in January 2019 and grew after arrests, abductions and torture of prominent political activists and the incarceration of anti-corruption journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, and renowned author Tsitsi Dangarembga.[32] Within a week, the #ZimbabweansLivesMatter had gone viral on social media and reached a million Tweets. Many people used Twitter and Facebook to register their outrage over the growing arbitrary arrests of activists and deepening human rights abuses by the government. This forced the government to respond by issuing a statement on issues of brutality, abductions and broader issues around human rights violations in the country (Harding 2020). By exposing the brutality of the state through tapping into the global reach of social media, activists successfully

reignited global debates on the human rights situation in the country. This also helped to increase diplomatic pressure on the Mnangagwa regime to stop abusing activists. For example, in June 2020, the US ambassador to Zimbabwe, Brian Nichols, met with the Zimbabwean foreign minister over the country's deteriorating human rights record. In an official statement, the Embassy of the United States of America asserted:

> I urged the Zimbabwean government to end state sponsored violence against peaceful protestors, civil society, labour leaders and members of the opposition in Zimbabwe, and to hold accountable those responsible for human rights abuses… Peaceful protestors Joana Mamombe, Cecilia Chimbiri, and Netsai Marova were arrested, abducted, assaulted, and left for dead. To those who deny America's right to speak out on their fate, let me remind you, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere…'

Indeed, it did not take long for the government to release some of the incarcerated activists who had spent weeks in a maximum-security prison.

In light of the brutality with which the government crushed large-scale protests concentrated in the city centre, groups like #Tajamuka resorted to sporadic and widespread protests in various places. They urged people to mobilise around common concerns and engage in small-scale protests in different locations. For #Tajamuka, this was a way of evading police brutality. While these small-scale protests were viewed as less impactful, they managed to increase citizen activism and indeed brought the plight of Zimbabweans into the regional and international political milieu. The use of these widespread protests was not only strategic but also highlights the agency of the subaltern in navigating the repression and violence of an authoritarian state. One activist noted:

> We realised that every time we mobilised in the city centre and protested there, the police and the military response was heavy-handed and brutal so we decided to have small and sporadic protests in many places because we know the police will not be able to contain them and go to all these places at once.

This shows that in spite of the authoritarian and repressive nature of the state, activists have not been passive victims of state brutality; instead, they have devised multiple creative ways of subverting the state. Indeed, some groups like #Tajamuka penetrated the ruling party's rural strongholds through campaigns to conscientise the rural people about their rights and mobilise them for protests. #Tajamuka was fairly successful in mobilising small rural groups for sporadic protests and other forms of less confrontational resistance. However, while sporadic and small-scale protests engaged people beyond the urban space and those in the peripheries of traditional power regimes, it was less effective given that

they reached fewer people and hence struggled to build momentum. Similarly, social media activism tended to alienate the rural and urban poor who do not have internet access and who cannot afford smartphones. This meant that only a section of the elite population can be mobilised and engaged in cyberspace activism (Gukurume 2017).

Although the legal system in Zimbabwe is largely captured and used by the regime as a penal weapon to punish activists critical to the state, many activists have noted that some good judges have tried to maintain professionalism. As such, using the court to challenge repressive laws, policies and abuse of human rights emerged as a strategy of fighting back and avoiding the brutality of the repressive state apparatus. Indeed, in July 2016 when Pastor Evan Mawarire of the #ThisFlag movement was arrested, the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights used the court to challenge his arrest. Through the court, Mawarire's charges were dismissed. While judges that rule against the state are framed as 'bad boys' (Verheul 2013) and often victimised with demotions, transfers and even dismissals, some have remained professional in executing their duties. Similarly, in April 2021, anti-corruption journalist Hopewell Chin'ono's charges were dismissed by a high court judge who argued that Chin'ono was arrested under a non-existent law and so freed him. Verheul (2020) noted that although many scholarly works revealed how the ZANU-PF regime had replaced rule of law with rule by law, the law remained an important space of political contestation in Zimbabwe.

Similarly, some activists resorted to petitions. For instance, a change.org petition meant to bar the country's security forces from following unconstitutional orders by the Mnangagwa regime attracted close to 90,000 signatures.[33] One activist supporting the petition explained to me that all the security services have become an extension of ZANU-PF and are used as a weapon to hoard and monopolise power, a narrative that many activists I interviewed reiterated. She bemoaned that:

> In this country, the uniformed security forces are constantly deployed against the people, to violate people's rights, instead of being deployed to protect the people and their rights.

Petitions against state repression, corruption and other retrogressive policies were also deployed during the Mugabe regime. In 2017, social movement groups like #ThisGown and #Tajamuka delivered a petition to the government against its introduction of bond notes. Although the petition did not stop the introduction of the bond notes, activists managed to voice their concerns over the issue. Interestingly, popular art including music and comedy has emerged as an alternative way of critiquing the state and its excesses, especially corruption and economic mismanagement. Although comedic humour and popular youth music is less susceptible to brutality, it has not been immune to surveillance and policing (Willems 2011; Källstig 2021).

## Conclusion

This chapter examined how activists in Zimbabwe encountered and critiqued state power through their everyday struggles. My findings revealed that activists encountered a very hostile and brutal state. In this environment of authoritarian repression, activism became a risky endeavour. However, regardless of this repression and violence, activists continued to critique hegemonic forms of political power. They did this through devising multiple creative strategies of subversion such as cyber-activism, deploying the law, petitioning the government and the use of popular art, including comedic and musical resistance. This chapter shows that the deployment of these symbolic 'tactics' of resistance is an exercise of agency and should be understood within the material realities of an authoritarian regime.

## Notes

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2 Zimbabwe: Student thought he was going to die after 'abduction by state security services'. World News, Sky News (Accessed on 10 June 2021).
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8 Interview conducted in May 2019.
9 Interview with Tafadzwa, May 2019.
10 Interview with Amon, June 2017.
11 Interview with Tinashe, February 2018.
12 Interview with Mark, February 2020.
13 Interview with Tonderai, January 2020.
14 Interview with Simba, 2018.
15 Varakashi have been framed as online mobs of individual pro-government trolls and 'sock puppet' accounts that actively close online civic space by harassing opposition voices and coordinating disinformation campaigns.
16 See www.news24.com/News24/WhatsApp-slur-against-Mugabe-gets-Zim-man-arrested-report-20151004 (Accessed on 25 July 2021).
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25 Judge flays Mamombe and Chimbiri as he ends their two-month detention (zimlive.com) (Accessed on 16 June 2021).
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# 12 Confronting Legacies of Apartheid

## The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall Movements in South Africa

*Simbarashe Gukurume and Godfrey Maringira*

### Introduction

While in post-apartheid South Africa, the majority of young people were caught up in the euphoria of attaining political independence in 1994, the country remains an unequal society, with most black people languishing in and confronted by the triple socioeconomic and political challenges of unemployment, poverty and social inequality. In a context marked by racist and gerontocratic structures, young black people have been pushed to the margins of the country's political and economic landscapes. Scholars have emphasised that even though young people continue to live in precarious socioeconomic conditions and locations marred by violence, they are not passive victims of structural forces that embed and marginalise them (see also Gukurume 2019b; Hoffman 2012; Honwana 2014; Ugor 2013; Ugor and Mawuko-Yevugah 2017). Instead, they engage the state in a myriad of ways. In this chapter, we examine the ways in which student protests, in particular the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, have become productive social and political spaces in which we can begin to unpack and theorise youth agency in South Africa.

While the concept of 'social spaces' is not a new phenomenon (Skelton and Valentine 1998), we are interested in how particular spaces reconfigure the ways in which youth act in context of crisis. We assert that student protests through #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements signify young people's active responses to the failure by the modern South African state to transform the structural remnants of apartheid on and beyond the University campus spaces. Through these movements, student activists' concerns transcend campus-based struggles but include broader societal struggles against racism, poverty and inequality. These youth struggles are neither new nor surprising, having a protracted political history dating back to the apartheid regime. Demands for free and decolonised education dovetail with the everyday struggles of many poor black people domiciled in the townships. These youth movements confront several critical intersectional issues around racial, social and political class struggles. Consequently, we frame the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall

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movements as counter-hegemonic spaces through which students engage the state; push for social, economic and political transformation; and negotiate and contest their socioeconomic marginality. From their marginal positions, young people mobilise and creatively unsettle the economic and political structures that reproduce the remnants of the apartheid system in post-apartheid South Africa. We begin by tracing the history of these youth-led social movements in South Africa.

From 2015 to 2019, South African University campuses became battlegrounds for youth angst as students protested over economic and political issues. While student protests are not a new phenomenon, the protests by University of Cape Town (UCT) students who demanded the removal of the nineteenth-century British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes statue from their campus ignited further countrywide student protests. These protests culminated in the emergence of a transnational social movement called the #RhodesMustFall movement at UCT and the University of Oxford. The fall of Rhodes's statue at UCT galvanised students and motivated them to fight what in their eyes hindered complete transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. For the majority of students, although the country had gained political independence after attaining democratic governance in 1994, the structures that produced and perpetuated apartheid were still intact and functioning in much the same way as during apartheid. For instance, some of our interlocutors asserted that the majority of black people were still suffering from economic apartheid and other remnants of political apartheid. Many students raised economic inequality and access to land as fundamental issues which have accentuated the marginalisation of many black people, students included. Indeed, the #RhodesMustFall students wanted more than just the fall of the Rhodes statue; they also fought to unsettle and challenge deep-rooted institutional norms and cultures which valorise colonialism and imperialists like Rhodes and reproduce white supremacy in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, the students' attack on Rhodes's statue should be viewed as a decolonial symbolic gesture of confronting a system of apartheid and colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). In the aftermath of Rhodes's statue falling, there emerged another student movement termed #FeesMustFall in which all South African university students demanded more than just the fall of tuition fees, but free and decolonised education, as well as a radical transformation of the curricula and pedagogies in their respective disciplines (Maringira and Gukurume 2016, 2021; Mupotsa 2020; also Hungbo 2021; Kenyon et al. 2021).

Students felt that their curricula and pedagogies did not reflect their lived experiential realities and contexts. Scholars argue that the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests have widely been seen as a reckoning of the limitations of post-apartheid citizenship and young people's frustrations over the slow pace of socioeconomic transformation (Maringira and Gukurume 2021; Webb 2018). Scholars like Nyamnjoh (2016) have also argued that in post-apartheid South Africa, the social and economic field remains largely unequal, as revealed by how racism and its systemic privileges persist.

## Youth Protests During the Apartheid Era

Apartheid South Africa has always been mirrored by young black people protesting against the apartheid regime and its attendant discriminatory policies (Brewer 1994). It is important to note that the South African liberation war was mainly fought in black townships, in which young people operated underground. On New Year's Eve in 1984, Oliver Reginald Tambo, the then ANC President, called on South Africans 'to make themselves ungovernable, to make the apartheid institutions unworkable, and to challenge these institutions…to challenge the very citadel of white racist rule…' (Sales 1984, 2), and disrupt all social, economic and political activities through banditry and sabotage of apartheid infrastructure. The call for ungovernability of South Africa was reminiscent of the 16 June 1976 mass protests, when an estimated 20,000 black students took to the streets of Soweto, a low-income neighbourhood in Johannesburg, South Africa, to protest against the imposition and mandatory use of Afrikaans across all segregated Bantu schools. In response, the apartheid police responded with sheer brutality and unrestrained force. They fired live rounds of ammunition towards the unarmed protesters, killing and injuring thousands. Healy-Clancy (2016) noted that the Soweto student protests inaugurated a militant new phase of struggle against apartheid, ushering in a decade-long era of violent protests and school boycotts that paralysed the education system (Franklin 2003; Koen et al. 2006).

There is a huge body of scholarship on youth participation in the fight against apartheid and their role in South Africa's transition from apartheid to 'non-racial democracy'. For instance, Reynolds (2013) details youth fighting for freedom in apartheid South Africa and the consequent vicious retaliation by the apartheid regime. Reynolds argued that young people were compelled to fight the apartheid system because of constraints it imposed on their quest for adulthood. Healy-Clancy (2016) asserts that students played emblematic roles in the making of African nationalism and the anti-apartheid struggle. During the peak of the apartheid system, student protests wracked mission schools, as predominantly black African students questioned the racist attitudes and physical abuse of some white missionaries, and the poor quality of their education and infrastructure (Hirson 2016). Indeed, during this time, Bantu education was designed in such a way that black students were trained merely to take up semi-skilled jobs while excelling black students only worked as teachers, nurses and officials to run the ethnic reserves (Healy-Clancy 2016; Kros 2010).

Consequently, around the 1950s, apartheid education designed to assert a racist state-building project provoked further protests from students and parents in black townships. Similarly, after the 1976 Soweto massacres, university students at black universities boycotted lectures and others burned school property. Explaining the protracted youth-led protests from the mid-1970s onwards, Nieftagodien (2014) asserted that young people emerged as the most serious threat to the apartheid system; students particularly had grown into a major political force (Gerhart 1978; Troup 1977). Youth leaders like Sobukwe

and Steve Biko rejected, and fought for the overthrow of, white supremacy, while simultaneously mobilising through Africanism and Black Consciousness ideologies. Through a creative appropriation of Biko and Fanonian ideologies, students enacted the formation of new political subjectivities that manifested in student protests. The movement thus instrumentalised Biko in a way that challenged many students to invest in collective agency and insurgent participation in the various projects that contested and challenged the structures of apartheid governmentality.

Describing the influence of students in the late 1970s, Healy-Clancy (2016) concluded that students' revolt had rendered the apartheid regime a global pariah spiralling in a cycle of repression and reforms. The establishment of the South African Students Movement in Soweto high schools, and SASO at universities, was due to the everyday experiences of inequality which fanned more student protests at these institutions (see Healy-Clancy 2016; Nieftagodien 2014). For Badat (2016), revolutionary national student political organisations like SASO and SNSCO during apartheid constituted black students as an organised social and political force within the anti-apartheid and national liberation movement. While these protests targeted the apartheid regime, they should be understood as part of the wider continuation of pan-Africanist struggles that swept through the continent during this time. Indeed, we frame them as an extension of the broader decolonisation struggles in the African continent, what Harold Macmillan, the then British Prime Minister speaking in 1960, described as the strong 'wind of change blowing' across Africa. It is in part through these youth movements that the liberation of many African countries was delivered.

At independence in 1994, the ANC government inherited a largely racially segregated higher education sector. While the country was politically free, the process of transformation remained elusive and political freedom and/or justice hardly corresponded to economic freedom and/or justice. We situate the #FeesMustFall movement within this context of enduring racial segregation, racial inequalities, and deep-seated economic injustices marked by the underfunding and exclusion of disadvantaged black students. The government and universities' failure to socially transform and address these inequalities, in part, triggered the re-emergence of student protests in a post-apartheid era which peaked with the birth of the #RhodesmustFall and #FeesMustFall movements (Maringira and Gukurume 2021).

## The Birth of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall Movements

The #Fallist movements in South Africa started with #RhodesMustFall. This series of student protests began on 9 March 2015 at the UCT when student activist Chumani Maxwele threw human waste on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on campus. This act galvanised other marginalised students at UCT who

demanded the immediate removal of the Rhodes statue from the UCT campus due to its symbolic representation of white supremacy. Pillay (2016) noted that Maxwele's symbolic act of defiance would prove to be the tipping point for an international movement calling for the decolonisation of higher education, captured by the phrase #RhodesMustFall (RMF). Indeed, the movement quickly mutated from a local to a transnational protest, with some students at the University of Oxford mobilising around the same hashtag to demand the removal of Rhodes's statue at their own campus. Lemon (2016) notes that the #RhodesMustFall campaign spread rapidly from the slopes of Cape Town's Table Mountains to Oxford's High Street, like a veld fire. Across these universities, the figure of Rhodes brought together students and moral communities and opened up discursive spaces through which students articulated shared grievances and frustrations with imperialism, apartheid and its lingering legacies (Chigudu 2020). For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), #RhodesMustFall was sparked by the decolonial perspective. The movement received widespread media and academic attention and reinvigorated critical debates on the legacy of not only Cecil John Rhodes but also the empire and the (re)production of historical memory (Newsinger 2016). In analysing the emergence and growth of the movement, Gjyljeta (2018) argued that the collective identity of blackness and marginalisation was critical and weaponised for mobilisation purposes. Gjyljeta (2018) asserts that identity-driven politics circulated on social media allowed the growth of a collective consciousness, which was sustained using social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. In the same vein, Bosch (2017) framed #RMF as a Twitter-mediated student movement, while Luescher et al. (2017) viewed it as an internet-age student movement. That the removal of Rhodes's statue at UCT on 9 April 2015 did not halt the student protests revealed that they were more than just a demand for the removal of the statue. Interestingly, the student protests at UCT occurred simultaneously with the global resistance against colonial legacies. For instance, in the United States of America, young activists protested against confederate statues in Charlottesville (McAuliffe and Lewis 2019; Sinclair-Chapman 2018). As such, we read the #RhodesMustFall movement as part of a global and wider social ecology of anticolonial activism challenging the enduring remnants of white supremacy.

Laurore (2016) asserts that the #RhodesMustFall movement was never merely about the statue but was a material manifestation of the frustrations with deep-seated racial inequalities that incited students to protest in the first place, a slice of the colonial past bleeding into a neo-colonial present. In the same vein, regarding structural racism on campus, Wanelisa noted:

> Unsurprisingly, today UCT opens its doors to Black students on two conditions: assimilate into whiteness and actively participate in anti-Blackness or die. Many students leave the university in body bags due to high rates of suicide because of a racist institutional culture and alienating environment.

This was also echoed by other activists who complained about the institutional structure and culture at UCT. For instance:

> For black students and staff, arriving at the university, the statue was a constant reminder of how and for whom the university was designed. Many black students and staff express disgust at the expectation of assimilating to white standards and white values of excellence.
>
> (Matebeni 2018)

The above extracts speak to the discourse of belonging and placemaking, and how black students and staff alike are compelled to invest a lot in attempting to assimilate to whiteness and white spaces. This is what Anderson (2015) refers to as situations in which blacks are expected to understand white spaces. The idea of expectation is central as it serves the interest of whiteness. Thus, for Matebeni and many other #RMF activists, the university was not only a spatial or architectural representation of whiteness but also a technology of instilling a hidden curriculum that (re)produced white privilege and glorified colonial conquerors. Matebeni further noted that both the curricula and the culture, reinforced by several colonial symbols, imposed an everyday psychic manipulation enforcing one's complicity in glorifying and commemorating statues of white imperialists as protagonists. As such, for activists like Wanelisa, it was this racism, the housing crisis as well as financial and academic exclusions, which compelled the #RhodesMustFall movement to adopt radical positions and actions. To this day, many #RMF activists assert that their struggle was never merely about statues, but about social injustices and bigger structural forces that reproduce coloniality, white supremacy and privilege in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, students demanded a transformed and decolonised, inclusive university space and curricula where their experiences and lived realities are not marginalised and othered. At many South African universities like UCT, African epistemologies and ontologies represent what Foucault calls subjugated knowledge(s) (1997). For Foucault (1997, 7–8), subjugated knowledge(s) refers to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledge(s), as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges and knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. As such, as a purveyor of western epistemologies, UCT has been criticised for accentuating coloniality. What students were demanding was the centring of Afrocentric epistemologies and access to subjugated knowledges embedded in their histories and philosophies. These Afrocentric historical contents have been buried or masked in functional coherences and formal systematisations (Foucault 1997).

Students were driven by the meta-narrative of decolonising, as pathways to deal with and confront the long-standing whiteness. Thus, what initially emerged as the #RhodesMustFall protests seamlessly metamorphosed into a myriad of hashtag movements across many university campuses, with the most widespread being #FeesMustFall. Although several campus-specific

movements such as #OpenStellies, #TransformWits, #PatriarchyMustFall and #Uprising emerged (Mashayamombe and Nomvete 2021), what became more ubiquitous, galvanising students across all university campuses in South Africa, was the #FeesMustFall movement. In the nationwide protests, students demanded free, quality and decolonised education (Booysen 2016; Maringira and Gukurume 2016).

## Ethnography with #RMF and #FMF

The data we use in this chapter was collected through ethnographic qualitative research with student protesters in the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements at two universities in South Africa: UCT and University of the Western Cape (UWC). Our active and affective presence in these spaces helped us to think through why an ethnography of being in places was the best-suited approach to gather data. While we knew the students who were participating in #FeesMustFall, we were also well aware that collecting data from the familiar might be difficult. Hence, we adopted the ethnography of 'hanging-out' with our participants, exploring their lived experiences and their understanding of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements. We conducted in-depth interviews with students and academics in 2015, and thereafter sporadic informal conversations were carried out with activists in the two movements in Cape Town. We also had several 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou 2006) in which the participants talked about what happened 'last night', and 'this morning'. This helped us to understand the events as they unfolded and give meaning to the here and now and/or the just-ended events. For Georgakopoulou (2006), 'small stories' are about the heuristics of the story rather than just telling the story. The story is given the meaning of the experience because it is told within the closeness of time. The people and places are remembered vividly, their actions, their tone and their dressing codes. We also augment our primary data with an extensive review of secondary sources such as newspaper articles and reports on the two movements. This triangulation of primary and secondary sources helped us to develop a holistic understanding of the movements and people's perceptions of these movements while simultaneously allowing us to develop thick descriptions of the movements. This process of triangulation was the key for enhancing the reliability and validity of the information collected and the rigour of our data and analysis. Although we conducted many interviews, in this chapter we draw on in-depth interviews with 20 student activists. For our interviews, we utilised convenient and purposive sampling techniques to select participants – accessing what we felt were the information-rich cases, those who were actively involved and knowledgeable about the dynamics of the two movements, mainly the student leaders.

This research took place at a time when armed police and private security personnel were being deployed to deal with protesting students (see Gukurume 2019a) and violence was still visible on black students' bodies. Even though we were on university campuses, we had not participated in the protests and

therefore thought of ourselves as outsiders; however, we also considered ourselves as insiders due to our familiarity with the people and places. Thus, our research approach was also driven by the zeal to understand the insiders' perspective.

Only students living in the university residences were allowed to be on campus, so the challenge was how to enter the campus and interview the students who organised and were active participants in the movement. Security was tight: at least eight-armed private security guards manned the gates and entrances to the university. Hence, we had to devise innovative ways of gaining entry with the help of a close friend of ours, one of the leading students in the movement who stayed on campus and who had participated in the protests. He agreed to help us gain access to the university residences to meet up with other students who were part of the #FeesMustFall movement. He thus became our focal point. While on our way to the university we encountered the armed state police, and it felt as though we were in enemy territory. The material space ceased to be a university. It transformed into a war zone, one in which the enemy is snuffed out. We felt emotions associated with spatial violence; the armed police and private security were inflicting violence on both the university landscape and the people who lived within it (Woodward 2013). This was a different experience of being at 'our' university: the space that hitherto belonged to students was now colonised by armed police and private security guards who intimidated us by carrying guns and patrolling in a war formation around the university. The familiar landscape of the university became unfamiliar; the visible university landscape became invisible (Woodward 2013). The university had turned into a ghost space with hardly anyone loitering around as we had been accustomed to seeing. On reaching the university residence, we were introduced to members of the #FeesMustFall and the Free Decolonised Education movements, whom we had not met before. Their frowning expressions revealed that we were not welcome.

We had to produce our university cards, with a 2016 sticker on them, and the slow nod of their heads still showed some wariness and disbelief. They later asked us about the purpose of our research, to which we replied: It is to understand student protests and the ways in which they had engaged with management. However, this explanation was far from sufficient. Interestingly, they asked us about our position on student protests. This was a protective tactic due to the continued physical presence of the police, and intelligence operatives and informers infiltrating the movement on campus. They seemed satisfied with our response. However, had we not been accompanied by one of the student protesters, it would have been impossible to conduct our research. The students were very worried about our position and intention in doing this research at a time when some of them were being arrested, detained, prosecuted and sentenced. They viewed us as spies, either from private security or the state. They finally agreed that we could record the conversations provided we didn't mention their names. We interviewed the leaders of the Student Representative Counci, and student movement groups. The female students also participated

in these group interviews. Interestingly, after one group interview with eight students, one of the female black students said, 'I want to talk to you after this'. She later asked us if we had a smartphone with a good camera, which we had. She took the phone into the bathroom and on returning showed us a photograph of her wounded buttock. She then showed us the black rubber bullets which she had picked up the previous day from the 'battlefield' at the university main gate. Her wound was fresh, deep and rounded like the rubber bullets. She became quite emotional in conversation about what she always referred to as 'black bodies' (her body) as targets of violence. We then had follow-up interviews with other students. As a way of protecting their identities, we intentionally did not ask the students their names. Hence, we use pseudonyms in our presentation.

## Institutionalised Racism and White Supremacy

Many black students from the townships felt that their presence on campus was out of place because of the accentuation of white supremacist institutional cultures. For many of our interlocutors, the campus was replete with norms, values and symbols that reinforced how black students and staff were made to feel 'out of place' and that they did not belong at the university. At UCT, students noted that the mere presence of Rhodes's statue on campus marginalised the experience of the colonised African in favour of racist and imperialist memory. As such, students mobilised to reject their colonial educational curriculum and also the hidden curriculum embodied by the statue of colonialists like Rhodes (Chantiluke et al. 2018). During our fieldwork, participants talked of how seeing the statue of Rhodes on campus reminded them of painful histories and the loss accompanying Rhodes's imperial exploits. One student told us that erecting a statue to honour an imperialist like Rhodes was in itself a form of violence and reproduction of social injustices on campus. He said, 'Some of us remember Rhodes for perpetrating gross human rights violations over our people, expropriating their land and impoverishing them'. For him, black people are still languishing in poverty because of the colonial legacy of Rhodes.

Since the country's historic democratic elections in 1995 which officially ended apartheid, the economic growth of the country has not percolated down to the majority of the black communities in the townships. Although the ANC government has made attempts at economic empowerment of black people through their Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies, these have not done much to alleviate poverty among the majority of South Africans. Consequently, many of the students from the black townships can hardly afford to pay their tuition fees at the country's top universities like UCT. For some of the students, the ANC has not done enough to empower the black people and dismantle the structural inequalities incubated by the apartheid regime. During protests, some students carried placards saying 'Mandela sold out the revolution'; and 'Our parents were SOLD dreams in 1994. We are just here for

the REFUND'. These messages reveal how young people felt betrayed by the ANC's delay or unwillingness to transform the country and widen economic opportunities for black people. Importantly, young people present themselves as people with willing agency to correct the imbalances of the past/present/future. Many felt that the ANC government has not adequately dealt with the legacies of oppression, and continues to limit the opportunities available to the black majority. Similarly, on-campus students also felt that there was a lack of attention to the symbols that acted as physical, symbolic emotional reminders of white supremacy, and the subjugation and oppression of black people.

Chumani Maxwele carried a placard saying, 'Exhibit White @ Arrogance U.C.T.'. Maxwele's message alluded to the university's arrogance in preserving certain forms of history and memory over others (Laurore 2016; Matebeni 2018). Maxwele's brazen act of protest was a powerful symbolic objection to the university's enduring institutional racism and a display of the lack of faith in higher education institutions to effect meaningful transformational changes on campus (Naicker 2016). Additionally, by throwing human waste on Rhodes's statue, students made a political statement, engaging with the colonial past by shaming the colonial gaze. Human waste was therefore instrumentalised to deal with political and economic imbalances in post-apartheid South Africa.

Furthermore, students constructed a makeshift shack labelled '#Shackville' in the middle of UCT's upper campus. The shack represented the material and existential realities of blackness in white-dominated spaces such as the UCT campus. We frame the makeshift shack as a symbolic and material marker of the oddity and impoverished situation of blackness in wealthy white spaces. For our interlocutors, erecting an informal shack was a form of resistance to white supremacy and privilege. We argue that in spotlighting the marginal status of blackness in white spaces, the shack functioned both as a reminder of the poverty of blackness and a form of a bluff to whiteness. While scholars such as Anderson (2015) assert that blacks are expected to navigate the white space, we argue that Shackville was an instrument with which to confront rather than to navigate the white space. It was meant to question the continued existence of the white space in the majority of black youth. It was a redefinition of the white space in a way that is provocative. It reconfigured the life of black people, in particular the youth, in the post-apartheid era. Shackville became the protest headquarters for students. As Anderson (2015) states, 'blacks are made to navigate the white space'. Hence, in this regard, Shackville was a way of confronting the UCT white-dominated space, with its symbols of what it means to be white – the colonial infrastructure including Rhodes's statue. Thus, Shackville resonated with what it means to be black in a white space. We contend that the 'illegal' construction of Shackville at the heart of a 'white' space was a powerful form of symbolic protest, resistance that succeeded in bringing the everyday realities of post-apartheid blackness to global attention. These active and symbolic forms of protest highlighted the everyday existential challenges that many people in townships like Khayelitsha, Langa and Gugulethu experience; the majority of the residents live in shacks and encounter raw human waste every day due to

poor service delivery by the state. The students' utilisation of #Shackville and faeces as political tools for protest served as a powerful representation of the difficult and often dehumanising aspects of life in a township and forced the affluent white students, academics and administrators at UCT to experience first-hand what it meant to live in such conditions. Conditions perpetuated by the apartheid era and its enduring legacies in the present trigger widespread discontent in the townships.

Through Shackville, students also protested the university's accommodation crisis, which disproportionately affected black students. Critical questions around accessibility and affordability of campus accommodation, which is a fundamental need for students, were raised. During the time of fieldwork, UCT had a student population of 27,000 and the university could only accommodate about 6,800 students in its various halls. As such, there was stiff competition for accommodation. For many students, campus accommodation was not only scarce but also expensive. Consequently, only well-to-do students from affluent backgrounds could afford accommodation. In an interview with City Press, one #RhodesMustFall activist, Wanelisa Albert, asserted:

> People seem to think decolonisation is about rallying peacefully around statues, while we wait for colonial administrators to take them down. Decolonisation is the self-discovery of the natives' humanity and the struggle to destroy the system that continuously dehumanises them…

For Wanelisa, UCT formed part of the anti-black system. He reiterated that:

> Even though it absolves itself from colonisation and apartheid, the fact that it is built on stolen land, received apartheid funding and consulted colonial governments on how to further subjugate black people proves that its very foundation is held firm by the bones of enslaved and dispossessed black people.

Similarly, pertaining to Rhodes's statue, Matebeni, a member of staff and #RMF activist at UCT noted:

> In many ways, the statue attested to the ideas that Rhodes himself promoted: the elitism of the white race, his own colonial conquests from Cape to Cairo, and how the land in the Cape should be distributed, to whom and by whom. These ideas are still evident at the University of Cape Town, where Rhodes's statue towered prominently over the campus and the city of Cape Town at large.

Matebeni further noted that the location of Rhodes on the upper campus close to the towering table mountains was symbolic in that it was almost as if Rhodes was gazing on his conquest 'wondering how far and for how long into time his colonising powers could reach in taking over the land'.

As such, #RhodesMustFall also speaks to discourses of the emotive 'land issue' in post-apartheid South Africa. In fact, Matebeni argued that in a democratic South Africa, access to land and infrastructure for the most marginalised and dispossessed should be given urgent priority ahead of colonial artefacts (Matebeni 2018). Given that UCT was built on stolen land bequeathed by Rhodes meant that the university was implicated in the subjugation and oppression of black people. By invoking the land issue, #RMF activists challenged the state to address the social injustices of the apartheid system through a land reform programme. Interestingly, homelessness on campus was creatively tied to the broader structural problem of landlessness for many people in the townships and former Bantustans. Therefore, while Rhodes's statue and other colonial artefacts on campus signified and represented white privilege and supremacy, Shackville can be viewed as an embodiment of blackness and its attendant forms of objectification, poverty and suffering. Indeed, after the Shackville protests, the UCT issued a statement highlighting, '…the lived realities of many of our students are a struggle against deep-seated poverty and inequality in society'. Many of the students we spoke to asserted that Rhodes's statue was just one of many symbols of white supremacy and privilege on campus. For instance, at the peak of the protests, some students burned the university artworks and photographs which they interpreted as glorifying colonialism. #RMF activists accused the university of maintaining colonial legacies and white supremacy through the dehumanisation of black students as subservient beings. This was also echoed by Matebeni (2018):

> While Rhodes has made significant investments in higher education through scholarships and other resources, it is also true that it is in universities such as Oxford and UCT that black students (and staff) were dehumanised and felt alienated from the academic project.

For #RMF activists, the burning of paintings and photographs was a symbolic act of defiance and resistance to the continued valorisation of colonial and apartheid persona and memory on campus. In an interview, one of our interlocutors, Melusi, complained:

> It is not just about Rhodes, it's more than that, it's about the symbols that you see all over the campus, it's about the curriculum, it's about the racial profiling that you encounter whenever you are on campus. It is the structures that reproduce white privilege and limit access to people like me.

Melusi's experiences and concerns were not unique to him but were in fact shared by many other students we interviewed. Following this, Matebeni noted that:

> The tragic irony of Rhodes' statue positioning, backed by the hall named after colonial politician Leander Starr Jameson, where prestigious events

> and graduations are conferred, symbolically attests to the relationship that these two iconic figures had to the land they occupied. It also demonstrates how knowledge production is undoubtedly deeply political.

Many of them highlighted that the fall of the statue was just the beginning of their struggle to confront the remnants of the apartheid system which have accentuated white supremacy on- and off-campus. Indeed, after the fall of Rhodes, students started confronting what they called 'invisible statues'. This was forcefully articulated by Matebeni (2018) who argued that:

> The space that Rhodes occupied is not empty. Rather, it is filled with her-stories and movements. The plinth where the concrete statue was cemented is still in place. Symbolically this foundation represents the institutional establishment that is based on things that do not change. There may be aesthetic changes, but the core remains intact.

For Matebeni, and indeed many other #RMF activists, what was urgent was redressing social injustices, social and economic reform that would transform the lives and livelihoods of many poor black people in the townships. Interestingly, students framed their movement as a struggle to complete the unfinished business of liberation and transformation not only on campus but also in the country at large. It is important to note that the idea of transformation on campus and beyond is neither monolithic nor homogeneous. Instead, black and white South Africans often approach the question of transformation in fundamentally different and sometimes contested ways. Such contestations were reflected in debates about the removal of the statue and other pertinent issues around race, land and inequality.

Through #RMF and #FMF, students questioned hegemonic and fantastical narratives of a single 'Rainbow Nation' project. In contrast to these narratives, students constructed and experienced post-apartheid South Africa as a 'bifurcated state' (Mamdani 1996). For the #RMF activists, UCT was a microcosm of this broader national racial bifurcation – what we could call 'two universities in one': one black and one white, with the black being the minority due to alleged discriminatory admission policies that privilege(d) white students. The bifurcation we discuss in this chapter relates to the ways in which students perceive(d) themselves as belonging to the university, its cultures and its curriculum.

## #Free Quality and Decolonised Education

One of the central analytical questions in our paper has to do with not just the provision of decolonised education but quality education which enhances competing skills among young black South Africans. According to Nyawasha (2016), notwithstanding all the promises and hopes that democracy and modernity have come to be associated with, political modernity for the poor

living in the 'other South Africa' has not resulted in economic liberation and emancipation together with quality education. Interestingly, at the peak of the #FeesMustFall protests, thousands of students across different universities in the country carried placards saying '*Asinamali*' (we don't have money) and 'Free Education Wanted', in a passionate appeal for funding and protest over a proposed 10 per cent tuition fee increase. At the heart of the #FeesMustFall movement was the issue of student funding in the South African higher education landscape. Demands for free education and funding bring to the fore the economic injustices of the apartheid system and the urgent need for economic redress. Most of the ordinary black South African people living in the townships are still on the margins of the country's economy. Indeed, the townships in South Africa symbolise what Nyawasha (2016) framed as the 'other' South Africa, which has yet to realise the gains of political modernity. So, a demand for free and quality education was not reckless by a greedy generation wanting a free pass, but for equity, for a reorganisation of the educational system to address the inbuilt imbalances of the colonial past that continue to impede a more meaningful and productive future for South African youth.

Students bemoaned white monopoly over the economy and claimed that economic apartheid is still very much intact in post-apartheid South Africa. As such, for many of them, whiteness and economic power were not only synonymous but intricately intertwined in the South African fabric. Thabo Mbeki, the former South African President, and many scholars have largely constructed post-apartheid South Africa as 'two nations in one' in reference to the pronounced inequalities (Ansell 2004; Natrass and Seekings 2001; Nyawasha 2016). These inequalities are largely racial and a consequence of the legacies of apartheid (Natrass and Seekings 2001). Mbeki described post-apartheid South Africa as racially divided into two nations: one white and largely wealthy and prosperous, the other constituting the black, poor and disenfranchised majority (see Natrass and Seekings 2001; Nyawasha 2016). For Mbeki (1998), the white nation has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. In sharp contrast, the black nation live(s) under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure (Mbeki 1998; Natrass and Seekings 2001). For Natrass and Seekings (2001), this imagined nation of the black and poor majority has effectively no possibility of enjoying what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity.

Students felt that their curricula, teaching and learning did not reflect their lived experiential realities and contexts. Many #RMF activists felt that the apartheid and colonial ideals were not only manifest in infrastructural symbols but were also deeply ingrained in the curriculum and pedagogy of the university and the South African education system at large. In our interviews with students at UCT and UWC, students asserted that #FreeDecolonisedEducation (Gukurume and Maringira 2020; Maringira and Gukurume 2016) should not only be about indigenising or localising a curriculum but also about how and who is teaching it. For instance, students at UCT noted that social injustices

were reflected in the university staffing at both academic and administrative levels. At both UCT and UWC, black employees largely occupied the low-paying jobs such as cleaners, groundsmen and drivers, some of whom were in positions of precarious outsourced labour. As such, students demanded an end to outsourcing through #OutsourcingMustFall, and fair and equitable recruitment for academics and other senior administrative posts. According to the students, this should be top of the list on the transformation agenda and institutional reforms. By perpetuating the outsourcing of labour from white-owned companies, students assert, the university was reproducing the colonial logic of cheap labour, where black people are viewed as exploitable and expendable.

Interestingly, an institutional critique of outsourcing of labour was creatively tied to a national critique of the 2012 Marikana incident where the state unleashed security agents on unarmed and helpless Lonmin mineworkers who demanded better salaries and working conditions, massacring 34 of them (Cairncross and Kisting 2016; Chinguno 2013; Naicker 2016). For the students, the Marikana massacre by the South African Police Service (SAPS) implicates the state and the ANC in the (re)production of structures that accentuate and exacerbate economic marginality, political alienation and the general subjugation of the poor black people of South Africa. Many #RMF activists asserted that the brutal massacre of the Lonmin miners at Marikana is reminiscent of the apartheid era bloodbaths such as the Sharpeville massacre.

The most immediate impact of the student protests in South Africa was to challenge the government and universities to respond to their concerns and demands. Regarding #FeesMustFall, the government committed to increasing funding for university education to enable access and affordability for disadvantaged black students. Similarly, the proposed tuition fees hike was also immediately suspended. As such, both the government and universities made concessions to address some immediate concerns around funding, accommodation and transformation, among other issues. Interestingly, at UCT, the leadership established an Office for Inclusivity and Change (OIC) which spearheaded the transformation process. They also set up an Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission and related committees to deal with institutional culture and curriculum transformation as well as employment equity issues. This saw the appointment of Professor Loretta Feris as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for transformation. However, in spite of these early strides, some of the initial gains of these movements are beginning to diminish. For example, Professor Feris left her position at UCT in April 2021. Feris was replaced by Emeritus Professor Martin Hall – a controversial appointment that attracted widespread criticism and led to the resignation of the head of convocation, Mr Eddy Maloka.[1] He complained about the 'unceremonious' departure of Feris in his resignation letter, saying that:

> They left me wondering whether I am at the right place – at UCT of the year 2021; and whether I still have any value to add to the university and its convocation.

Following this, the Black Academic Caucus (BAC) at UCT bemoaned the appointment of a retired white professor as a celebration of whiteness and a reversal of the initial gains of transformation at the institution. Similarly, university funding issues continue to cause political instability and tension at various university campuses in South Africa. This points to the unsustainability of current university funding regimes.

## Conclusion

The chapter examined the ways in which young people in South African universities engaged with the unfinished economic and political issues of post-apartheid South Africa. It is important to note that the university is only a space for struggles, where young people engage with the post-apartheid state and seek to redress the past and present imbalances that bedevil them, both at the university and in their places of residence in the townships. This testifies that the transition to democracy failed young people, who continue to demand social, economic and political transformation. Thus, young people at universities in South Africa deployed and weaponised the #RhodesMustFall and the #FeesMustFall movements to confront the ruins of apartheid within and beyond university spaces. We showed how these movements were instrumentalised by students to enact new forms of political subjectivities and agency that challenged universities and the state on broader issues of transformation, institutionalised racism, funding and the imaginings of a post-apartheid rainbow nation project. The chapter reveals that young people are not 'waiting' for the government to dispense and provide social, economic and political rewards. They demand them through various forms of struggle, often employing methodologies of action. While it is difficult to produce tangible results from every protest, student movements in South Africa have managed to provide a political space in which to engage with the government. This can therefore be a clear testimony of student agency to be involved in post-apartheid social, economic and political changes.

## Note

1 'Convocation head resigns after white professor appointed as acting head of transformation at UCT'. News24, 8 April 2021.

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# 13 Youths and the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon

## A Reflection on the Sociology of Social Movements in a Complex State

*Delmas Tsafack*

### Introduction

Since 2016, the socio-political crisis in the two English-speaking regions in Cameroon, popularly known as the 'Anglophone crisis', has dominated political discourse in the country. The Anglophone problem[1] has been a long-standing issue in Cameroon ever since the federal system was abolished for a unitary state in 1972. On 11 October 2016, lawyers from the Northwest and the Southwest regions of the country went on strike in Bamenda, capital of the Northwest region. This was after the government failed to respond to their demands for the translation of the Code of the Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) into English, and for the replacement of Francophone magistrates in the English-speaking courts untrained in the English Common Law system and lacking English language skills.[2] The lawyers reiterated their demands during further strike action on 8 November 2016, and added a further demand for a return to the federal system which existed prior to 1972.

The peaceful protest attracted lawyers and young people, including taxi drivers and motorbike riders, but was violently dispersed by security forces; some of the lawyers were arrested.

Protesters came with petitions, which pointed to the growing dissension and frustration on the part of the Anglophone community with the Francophone elites, who dominate Cameroon's political and economic spheres. In their petition, teachers castigated the growing dominance of Francophone teachers in the English-speaking schools in the Northwest and Southwest regions. According to them, French-speaking teachers transferred to these regions to teach in Anglophone schools were unable to speak English fluently, undermining the quality of education with implications for the children attending their lessons. About 80 per cent of Cameroonians speak French and the public administration is largely dominated by French-speaking civil servants, with few documents translated into English. Over the years, this policy has led to feelings of marginalisation and loss of identity among the English-speaking Cameroonians.

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The repressive measures taken by the government of Cameroon against protesters caught the attention of other actors who joined the demonstrations. In solidarity with the lawyers, teachers' trade unions in the English-speaking regions called for a school boycott movement from 21 November 2016. During the teachers' march in Bamenda, several people joined the rally to ask for the improvement of their living conditions in Cameroon and to have an end to their marginalisation by the state. The state security forces again responded violently, resulting in the loss of two lives, with others injured. After unsuccessful negotiations between the government and the Anglophone civil society, the demonstrations escalated into a general strike of the Anglophone community involving youths.

Young people have taken their place at the forefront of the issue demanding employment and basic infrastructure in both regions, and the situation gradually deteriorated into violent confrontations and an armed insurgency from 2017. Youth participation in this struggle is the main focus of this chapter. Young people in Cameroon constitute the largest segment of the population. Half of the population here is under 17.7 years old and the average age of the population is only 22.1 years (Central Bureau of the Census and Population Studies 2010, 13). Young people in Cameroon have long been the object of prejudices, which see them stigmatised as 'backward', 'social cadets', 'weak', 'unimportant', 'incapable', 'children', etc. (Bayart et al. 1992; Ela 1998; Mbembe 1985). They are often viewed as 'actors who are instrumentalised, exploited and abused individuals or, rebellious, outlaws, thugs, etc.' (Manga Lebongo & Marcelin 2009, 10). Young people are also, wrongly, seen through the prism of laziness and expectations based upon pre-established social norms and roles.

However, attention nowadays turns to the production of a 'youth culture' by adolescents themselves; the emphasis is on the capacities of youth for 'rebellion, opposition, resistance or counter-hegemony' (De Boeck & Honwana 2005, 7). This new approach makes it possible to take into account the potential of young people to intervene in social change processes. In Cameroon, youth indeed make up a large proportion of social movements. Their demands mirrored those of the larger community (Fokwang 2003, 2009; Jua 2003; Konings 2002, 2006; Takougang & Krieger 1998). The status of young people in the country has remained stagnant, both in the political and economic spheres, making it difficult for them to effect change (Konings 2006; Simone 2007). Anglophone youth movements have managed to gain considerable success in effecting policy change, but they have failed to bring systematic political, social and economic change because of a lack of influence in post-protest politics and government.

Based on an anthropological and historical perspective, this chapter analyses the ways in which Anglophone youths have challenged their marginalisation from formal socio-political processes in Cameroon, the roles that they play in the quest for independence of Southern Cameroons, and the escalation of the Anglophone crisis. Youth involvement in the crisis is analysed from the perspective of social actors whose abilities to act are dependent on different times

and spaces (Fokwang 2007, 308–326). To understand the role of youths in the Anglophone crisis, it is important to present a brief history of the Anglophone problem. The chapter also analyses the place of young people in the search for solutions to the crisis affecting the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon.

## Historical Background to the Anglophone Problem in Cameroon

The root causes of the so-called Anglophone crisis can be seen as the loss of the First World War by Germany and the partition of Kamerun in 1916 by France and Great Britain under the mandate of the League of Nations, and latterly under the trusteeship of the United Nations (UN). The British administered two regions bordering Nigeria, named Northern and Southern Cameroons. These territories represented about 20 per cent of the former German protectorate of Kamerun. This 'partitioning of the territory into British and French spheres had important consequences for political developments, laying the historical and spatial foundations for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities in the territory' (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2019, 59–89).

Francophone and Anglophone regions of Cameroon were administered in different ways; education, law and ways of life were also quite different in the two areas. In January 1960, the Francophone area gained its independence while the Anglophone regions were still governed as part of the British colony of Nigeria. In 1961, when Nigeria was preparing to gain its independence, the question of the independence of English-speaking Cameroon arose and a referendum was organised despite the fact that Southern Cameroonians wanted an independent state. Northern Cameroons decided to join Nigeria and Southern Cameroons decided to join French Cameroon. Constitutional talks were then organised in Foumban to determine the form of the new Cameroonian state composed of independent Francophone Cameroon and Southern Cameroons. Despite the fact that Francophones wanted a centralised state, the parties decided at the end of the conference to create a federal state. Latterly, Anglophones felt marginalised in Cameroon and this situation led to the Anglophone problem in the country.

The Anglophone community claims that reunification with Francophone Cameroon in 1961 has led to their marginalisation in a Cameroon ruled and controlled by the Francophone political elite and this endangers their Anglophone cultural heritage and identity (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2019, 59–89). According to Anglophones, the federal state very quickly became a theoretical reality with the non respect of the federal constitution. 'The long-standing grievances among the Anglophone population in the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroon have been caused by the post-Foumban disequilibrium' (Tazoacha 2020, 3).

The unification of May 1972 accelerated the frustration of Anglophones and they felt increasingly marginalised politically, economically and socially. The new constitution, adopted on 2 June 1972, abolished the governments and

assemblies of the federal states as well as the post of vice-president and that of federal prime minister (Ndi Mbarga 1993, 21). In 1975, the reintroduction of the post of Prime Minister and the appointment of Paul Biya to this role once again fuelled protest among Anglophones (Ndi Mbarga 1993, 21).[3]

When Paul Biya became President in 1982, he chose Bamenda in the English-speaking area to make his first visit to the provinces on 9 February 1983. According to his speech there, the choice of Bamenda was not spontaneous. In an interview with Henri Bandolo, he explained:

> I am very tempted to start with Garoua, but you know the Cameroonians. They will say that I am going there on a pilgrimage to make an act of allegiance (to Ahidjo). Of course, there is no way I will go to Sangmélima. First of all, it is not a provincial capital. And you can imagine, from here, the criticisms that my first contact with the populations would be raised with those of my place of origin. And even if I started with Yaoundé, which is the capital city, people would still see the call of the south there, the call of blood. Cameroonians are sharp and very critical. It must always be taken into account. With them, you always have to watch where you put your feet.
>
> (Bandolo 1986, 81)

During this visit, Paul Biya chose to address the crowd in English – an unprecedented gesture with immense symbolic and sentimental significance which made the Anglophones forget their frustrations at least for a while (Ndi Mbarga 1993, 21). Biya's discourse was based on concepts of moralisation and national integration. Promises of increased infrastructure spending were also made. His speech touched Anglophones to the point where they inducted him as *Fon of Fons* – *Fon* in the tradition of the Grassfields of Western Cameroon means 'king'. Hence, Paul Biya was made 'King of Kings'. However, towards the end of the 1980s, the Anglophone problem and the idea of secession from English-speaking Cameroon resurfaced on the political scene – Anglophone Cameroon even applied for admission to the Commonwealth. To counteract this, the Government of Cameroon itself applied for membership in the organisation and was successful, after two previous attempts were refused due to the Anglophone crisis, at the New Zealand summit on 1 November 1995.

These various frustrations are passed on from generation to generation among Anglophones, hence the involvement of youth in social protests.

## The Role of Youths in the Anglophone Crisis

### *Overview of Youth Participation in Social Movements in Cameroon*

Young people play a vital role in social movements – not least because they have the energy to organise strikes and uprisings. One of the main examples of youth engagement in social movements in Cameroon is their participation

in the protest of February 2008 that marked a very memorable moment in the country's history. Youths in urban cities used their voices to express their grievances: 'ethnic and regional rivalry, political and economic corruption, chronic unemployment, and social and urban decay were the main causes of a mass protest' (Leke et al. 2020, 15). These grievances were symbolic of larger societal problems which led to the Head of State ordering his government to address the issues raised, so as to provide lasting solutions to this crisis (Leke et al. 2020).

The other area of youth engagement that has impacted social life in Cameroon is student-led movements in universities. The first Cameroonian university, the Cameroonian Federal University, created in 1962 in Yaoundé, seems to have experienced weak student mobilisation during its first decade with only four student strikes in ten years (Morillas 2018). This can be explained in part by the climate of brutal repression of any protest by state authorities. At this time, students enjoyed a good status with monthly scholarships, and therefore no great motivation to protest against the state. Two significant student protests in this period were, first, in 1963, a student strike demanded scholarships and better supervision (Mbia 2011), then in 1965, students demonstrated during the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of Rhodesia by Ian Smith to protest against the refusal of UK to accept the unilateral declaration (Bella 2010, 689; Mokam 2012, 290).[4] This was done in support of a growing Pan-Africanism in Africa at this period. From 1979 to 1981, several student strikes brought forward protests that were no longer political but, rather, of an economic and social nature. The students of the University of Yaoundé were demanding that the scholarship be awarded to all students and revised upwards along with salary increases. They also demanded a qualitative and quantitative improvement in the meals distributed to the university restaurants and the assumption of responsibility by the State of the rents of the students living in the neighbouring apartments. Due to the deterioration in living and study conditions for students, linked to the economic crisis, and as a prelude to the political liberalisation movement of the early 1990s, 'agitation has been increasing since 1987 and has developed throughout the early 1990s among students' (Pommerolle 2005, 46–47). In February 1987, the students organised a demonstration; in reaction, 'the soldiers occupied the campus for nearly a month' (*Le Messager*, 8 May 1991).

Young people also played a vital role in the transformation which led to the introduction of multiparty systems in Cameroon in the early 1990s. Partly as a result of this, there was a new evaluation of the role of youth in the post-colonial state (Amin 2013, 678). On 11 May 1991, during a meeting in Bamenda, the National Coordination of Political Parties, which had been established in October 1990 (Pommerolle 2005, 49), allowed associations to be part of its membership, thus becoming the National Coordination of Political Parties and Associations. A group of students were associated with this coordination: the Student Parliament, commonly called 'the Parliament', was the first association of autonomous students in Cameroon under the multiparty system. The leaders

of the Parliament were inspired in particular by the student mobilisations of 1987. They organised demonstrations and boycotts of lectures in 1991–1992, calling for the return to a real multiparty system, and then fought against the university reform of 1993 which abolished scholarships, increased university fees from €5.50 to €76 and increased the number of public universities from one to six. Student mobilisations continue to this day in the university environment. Youth engagement in the Anglophone crisis is shown in this history of their participation in social protests, with their struggle based in particular on the defence of their identity in Cameroonian society.

### *The Identity Dimension of Youth Engagement in the Anglophone Crisis*

The identity dimension is an integral part of any movement, insofar as identity is, in the broad sense, the feeling of belonging to a collective that any group mobilises against a policy or against a different group (Massicard 2009, 119–137). In the case of the Anglophone crisis, young people identify themselves as citizens of a country that is different from French-speaking Cameroon and mobilise to claim this identity. In a circular fashion, the identity of a mobilised group is maintained to sustain and strengthen the mobilisation. Young people, by engaging in the Anglophone claims, confirm their belonging to, and rekindle their identification with, a certain community much more than pursuing individual interests.

The rise of 'particularistic' claims – claims made by a particular group within society – has been erected as a real public problem, that is to say, it has become an issue of public debate or state intervention (Neveu 1999, 41–57). This development is most marked in relation to English-speaking nationalism in Cameroon. Indeed, English-speaking nationalism not only demands recognition of particular identities but also directly challenges the official national identity, based on the marginalisation of the English-speaking community. For state institutions and some political actors, Anglophone demands are not only demands for the integration of diversity but also question the very foundations of the nation; they reaffirm the unitary dogma. Thus, separatism is the ultimate crime. This framing by the authorities is accompanied by concrete sanctions, such as the use of force, to dissuade young people who claim recognition of their Anglo-Saxon identity.

The fact of having grown up with parents interested in political issues, even those who are activists themselves, explains why individuals turn, often from their teenage years, to political or social activism. The engagement of young people in the Anglophone cause in Cameroon is very much in this vein. Young Anglophones have been impacted either by calls for a return to federalism or to independence – a demand and fight that has been championed by their parents. From this perspective, interest in political questions is largely inherited, and in other cases acquired during engagement with the University Association, political discussions and watching political broadcasts. The University has been a breeding ground for the federalist and independents' ideologies, for example

the banned University of Buea Student Union (UBSU) was ruled by some of the prominent secessionists in the ongoing Anglophone crisis as Ebenezer Akwanga.

Young Anglophones regularly accompany their parents to the annual demonstrations[5] to demand the best living conditions and to protest against their marginalisation. At first glance, individuals who join social movements share, at least in large part, their positions and demands (Mathieu 2004, 63). The engagement of young people in the Anglophone crisis follows this pattern as they share the demands and positions of their parents and condemn the marginalisation of the Anglophone community by the Francophone majority in Cameroon. Young people complain about the prevailing unemployment in the Anglophone community as well as their multiple frustrations regarding the unfair allocation of jobs or positions of responsibility in the Cameroonian administration. These frustrations are likely to motivate the youth to join the social movement in order to force the authorities to solve the challenges that they and their communities contend with.

Individuals subjected to an injunction issued by an authority to perform an act that offends their sense of justice, regularly resist this injunction and attempt to enlist other members of the group in their revolt. It is in this sense that young people have mobilised to defend what they believe to be their absolute right, flouted by the French-speaking majority in Cameroon. For these youths, the ban by the Cameroonian authorities of the commemoration of the independence of the Southern Cameroons on 1 October 2017 is perceived as an injustice. Several variables significantly affect the propensity of each group to rebel, such as its cohesion, but above all the presence among its members of people with experience, know-how or anti-establishment dispositions. It is these individuals who, in each group, have become the spokespersons and the main leaders of the protest (Mathieu 2004, 65). This is the case with the young leaders of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC or Consortium) who sparked the protest movement that led to the current Anglophone crisis. This is also the case for the Anglophone diaspora made up of former protesters against Anglophone marginalisation who were forced into exile. They have been actively involved in encouraging young people to defend their autonomy.

### *Anglophone Youth Movements in a Francophone-Dominated Country*

Young people from the English-speaking regions of Cameroon are at the heart of the Anglophone crisis, having always participated in the struggle against the marginalisation of these regions. Anglophone students at the University of Yaoundé were among the first to document the grievance of Anglophone youth in higher education after Paul Biya took power in 1982 and decided to base his governance on liberalisation. This situation enabled students of the University of Yaoundé to talk about their marginalisation. Although the university was officially bilingual, in practice it was based on the francophone system

and dominated by French-speaking lecturers. For example, an English-speaking lecturer, Dr Bisong, was replaced by a Francophone because French-speaking students protested that the course could not be taught in English (Konings 2005, 161–188).

The incident fuelled protests from Anglophone youths at the University of Yaoundé, where, on 19 November 1983 English-speaking students issued a petition to the Minister of National Education demanding a 'fully-fledged English-speaking university based on the educational principles [they] cherish'. They threatened to use violence in the future if the problem was not solved. At the creation of the opposition party, Social Democratic Front (SDF) on 26 May 1990, hundreds of Anglophone students joined the protest rally, with several of them arrested. The political liberation process in Cameroon was a moment for Anglophone youths to express themselves and present the grievances of their community. In order to address the perceived marginalisation, the youths in 1993 organised the All-Anglophone Conference where an Anglophone student association, the Cameroon Anglophone Students' Association (CANSA), was established, under the leadership of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC).

Youth agitation for change drew inspiration from the renowned youth association fighting for the freedom of the Anglophone regions from marginalisation: the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), the youth wing of the SCNC.[6] The SCYL, founded in 1948 in the former British Southern Cameroons, played a prominent role in the struggle for independence of Cameroon (Fokwang 2007, 308–326). On 28 September 1959, they petitioned the UN to urge for secession from Nigeria and continue trusteeship for a short time. On 28 May 1995, to strengthen the participation of Anglophone youth in the liberation struggle, the SCYL was launched. The main objective was to 'revive, defend, protect and preserve the independence and sovereignty of the once nation, the Southern Cameroons, and to serve as the militant youth wing of the SCNC'.[7]

The association was composed of university student leaders fighting for the liberation of the Anglophone community and the creation of a Southern Cameroons state. According to members, only the creation of an independent state could solve their problems. A few months after its creation, SCYL was opposed to the strategy of SCNC which was based on the 'force of arguments'. They thought the argument of force is the best way to lead to the creation of a Southern Cameroons state. In 1997, SCYL initiated a violent strategy and failed in an attempt to steal explosive weapons in the Northwest province. Its leader, Ebenezer Akwanga, now one of the main figures of the Anglophone crisis, was arrested by state security forces. Many other members of the SCYL were arrested by government forces and imprisoned (Konings 2005, 161–188). The brutal repression of the members of the youth league forced them to operate as a guerrilla movement. The brutal and violent conflict faced in the Anglophone regions is the continuation of such battles in the past. Repression by government forces forced SCYL members into exile, from where they continued fighting for the cause of the Anglophone community.

### *Youth-Based Violence at the University of Buea and the Escalation of the Armed Conflict in 2016*

Youth involvement in social protest in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon is the result of anti-youth violence by government authorities. In November 2016, youths were the target of violent repression at the University of Buea, and the arrest and torture of students by Cameroonian security forces aggravated the crisis. For example, police forces violated the rights of students at the University of Buea, where a peaceful protest was organised on 28 November 2016,

> to call for the payment to students of the president's achievement bonus,[8] denounce the banning of the University of Buea Student Union (UBSU) in 2012 and protested the introduction of a penalty for late payment of education fees and the additional fee charged for accessing examination results.
>
> (International Crisis Group 2017, 10)

The Vice Chancellor (Rector) called the police, leading to 'Female students being beaten, undressed, rolled in the mud and one was allegedly raped' (International Crisis Group 2017, 10). The strike in Bamenda spread to Buea with the involvement of more young people who protested against police brutality.

From September 2017 to date, the Anglophone crisis turned into a violent conflict between militias and the Cameroon government. Militias, mostly composed of young people, are used for terrorist attacks against schools, public infrastructure and security and military forces. At the outbreak of the violent conflict, young people became exposed and vulnerable to armed or political recruitment and exploitation. Due to the shutdown of schools, many of them were recruited by militias to defend the independence of 'Ambazonia' – the self-declared state comprising the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon. The hardships of life for displaced persons in the bush have made the youth increasingly attuned to the separatist movements' recruiting efforts.[9] Several videos of separatist fighters published for propaganda or showing captives of the national army strongly suggest that armed groups are mainly composed of young people. In an interview for the German radio station *Deutsche Welle*, an Anglophone leader told the journalist that young men had

> dropped out of secondary school and have become barbarians of their community, they lost their basic sense of civilisation and only see the option of carrying guns. The sense of desperation has even attracted fighters as young as 15 years.[10]

The predominance of youths in the struggle explains the name of fighters as 'Amba-Boys' – the boys from Ambazonia. Despite the name, these groups also include females and the young people have been enrolled either by choice or

by force. Youths who refused to be part of armed groups were seen as traitors and either killed or they fled the region. Youths living in the two Anglophone regions are supported by their counterparts in the diaspora by peacefully protesting and bringing international attention to the cause.

### *The Diasporan Youth and the Anglophone Crisis*

The Anglophone youth of the diaspora have undertaken several actions to demand secession or a federal state. In 2002, members of the SCYL in North America organised 'Operation Stamp Your Identity' and printed thousands of leaflets calling for secession of Southern Cameroons and sent them to Cameroon (Konings 2005, 161–188). These leaflets were presented in the Anglophone provinces on 20 May 2002 and destroyed by the Cameroonian authorities. After the brutal repression of the SCYL, its leadership was forced into exile, from where they continued their struggle. Using the internet, they were able to increase the visibility of the Anglophone problem and raise the Anglophone consciousness. These youths in the diaspora continued to refuse to celebrate Cameroon National Day on 20 May and insisted on the restoration of 1 October as the Independence Day. Each year on 1 October, youth leaders in the diaspora regularly organise celebrations and attempt to hoist the flag of their Southern Cameroons state in Cameroonian embassies around the world. This was done by Ayaba Lucas Cho, accompanied by members of the SCYL, at the Cameroonian embassy in Germany in 2002. The same action was carried in 2018 at Cameroonian embassies including in Canada, England and Germany.

Prior to the declaration of the republic of 'Ambazonia' in October 2017, the Cameroonian government arrested and imprisoned hundreds of Anglophone activists. Many of those arrested were leaders of the protest which started one year earlier. The arrest and detention of these leaders created a vacuum in the leadership of the struggle within the country and the diaspora then took the lead in defence of the freedom of Anglophones from the Francophone-dominated system. In a report, International Crisis Group (2017) highlighted the impact of the youth in the diaspora on the Anglophone crisis, as they took a dominant role after the 17 January 2017 arrest of Consortium leaders.[11] Political unrest has been organised by diasporan youth, most notably in Commonwealth countries and the United States of America, to spread the claims of the Anglophone community of Cameroon around the world. To defend their cause, they organised protests in Cameroonian embassies abroad and recruited lawyers to help them achieve their goal. These protests sustained the profile of the Anglophone cause across the world.

In addition, Anglophone youths in the diaspora used the internet to sensitise their global community and promote their cause within and outside Cameroon. Their

> internet-based campaigns contributed to mounting public anger and increased the popularity of secessionist ideas. The diaspora helped to

> give the crisis a higher profile at the international level by organising demonstrations outside the parliaments of Western countries and through diplomatic initiatives.
>
> (International Crisis Group 2017)

On 22 September 2017, mass protests were also conducted by the diaspora in major capitals across the world, including at the UN Headquarters in New York, to coincide with President Paul Biya's address to the 72nd Summit of World Leaders at the UN (Okereke 2018, 8–12).

> The crisis also marked a generational renewal within the Anglophone movement and the diaspora. Militants of the 1990s from Cameroon University, who emigrated in the period after 1995, were succeeded by young people from Buea University and the University of Buea Student Union, who left Cameroon more recently.
>
> (International Crisis Group 2017, 10)

## The Youth in Search of Solutions to the Crisis

Young people have been regularly marginalised in the political and social spheres in Cameroon; they are absent from the country's decision-making structures. Despite their marginal role in society, Anglophone youths are being mobilised to propose solutions for peace in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. There is reason for hope that their involvement in violence and their participation in fuelling conflicts can be turned to positive actions.

On 9 December 2015, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security which recognises that 'young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security'. The UN then urged member states to increase youth representation in the decision-making processes at all levels. Young people are not only perpetrators of violence and victims of the Anglophone problem, they are also working to build peace in the two affected regions. Since the escalation of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, 'young people are leading peacebuilding efforts through civil society, student groups, and faith-based movements'.[12] Such groups include, for example, Local Youth Corner Cameroon (LoYoC),[13] Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All (NewSETA), DefyHateNow and others.

Chaired by Achaleke Christian Leke, LoYoC focuses on promoting the empowerment of young people in the domain of peacebuilding, as well as preventing and countering violent extremism, and on sustainable development. Since the escalation of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, LoYoC has initiated many projects to train and empower youth to advocate for peace, in Cameroon in general and in the English-speaking regions especially. One of these – Building Peace project – 'mobilised 35 young people from conflict-affected regions to

strengthen their capacity and brought together government, UN Agencies, international organisations and diplomatic missions to develop a road map for youth participation in the peace process in Cameroon'.[14]

Another youth group, NewSETA was created to strengthen youth and institutional capacities and actively engage communities in initiatives that improve social well-being. It promotes youth participation in governance and democracy and has gathered young people to promote peace in the English-speaking regions.

Similarly, the DefyHateNow initiative builds media and information literacy, sensitising young people to combat hate speech and misinformation. It aims to strengthen the 'voices and support the actions of primarily youth, community and media oriented civil society organisations to counter social media-based hate speech, conflict rhetoric and directed online incitement to violence in response to Cameroon's "Anglophone Crisis"'.[15]

UNESCO also organised a contest for Cameroon youth to speak against violent extremism through pictures and graphics, and distributed prizes: 'Young people through this contest were engaged in a dialogue and creative process to create awareness in other young people on the consequences of the evils of violence and hate speech as well as advocate for the plight of youths in Cameroon'.[16] Seven youths were recognised for their work that tackled barriers to peacebuilding in Cameroon. The campaign was under the banner of a project implemented in the context of the Anglophone crisis.

Cameroonian youths have fostered their involvement in peace processes in the country and there is evidence that suggests that young women and men can and do play active roles as agents of positive and constructive change (Leke et al. 2020). Despite the fact that young people are usually excluded from peace processes, 'youth advocacy has bought a place for young people in the negotiation table, participation in a technical team as well as observers' (Leke et al. 2020, 9). At the Major National Dialogue organised in October 2019 by the Government of Cameroon to solve the Anglophone crisis, hundreds of youths were part of negotiation committees and Fadimatou Iyawa Ousmanou, President of the Cameroon National Youth Council, was made one of the Vice Presidents. LoYoC chaired a cohort of mediators from the Cameroon Youth Mediators' Network (CYMN) and provided training on mediation for youths in affected regions of Cameroon. One of the trained mediators shared his experience on the importance of the training he gained:

> Since this crisis started, I noticed most of my friends went into the bushes. One day, while speaking to one of them on phone, I realised I was so convincing and he agreed to leave the bush and drop his arm. It was so exciting to me. So, when I came for the training and learn more, I realised that gradually I have spoken to over 10 with the support from my trainer and mentor. But before I officially acquired training in mediation, I never knew it was mediation I was into.
>
> (Cited in Leke et al. 2020, 14)

## Conclusion

Youths have played and are playing a vital role in the Anglophone crisis. Since the pre-independence period they have been at the forefront of the political struggle. Youth involvement in the Anglophone problem is enshrined in the identity dimension of social protest in the sense that they fight for the interests of their community. The Anglophone problem is the result of a failed decolonisation and the response to the frustrations of the English-speaking community by the dominant French-speaking area of Cameroon. To tackle the frustrations and marginalisation of the Anglophone community, young people have been engaged in a battle against the Government of Cameroon that turned into an armed conflict. Anglophone youth associations played an important role in mobilisation against the marginalisation of their community. The involvement of youth in the crisis since 2016 could be described as the riposte of youth-based violence to the actions of Cameroon's military forces on university campuses. The escalation of the conflict has been the tipping point for a massive recruitment of youths into armed groups in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. Despite the involvement of Anglophone youths in the conflict in Cameroon as fighters, some youths are engaged in peacebuilding efforts to end the crisis. Even if many of the grievances of the Anglophones have been addressed by the government, the social movement has not significantly changed the dominance of Francophones over Anglophones in Cameroon.

## Notes

1 The Anglophone crisis is an old problem that occurred in the early 1970s when Ahidjo, the then president of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, decided to ban the federal state and created a united state combining the Eastern and Western federal states. Anglophones started claiming for the respect of the Constitution of 1961 and the end of their marginalisation. In 2016, the old problem turned into a violent conflict between separatists from the English-speaking regions and the state's security forces.
2 Cameroon has a bijural system, a pattern inherited from the English and French colonisation. English Common Law operates in the two English-speaking regions, the Southwest and the Northwest, and French Civil Law operates in the other eight French-speaking regions.
3 When Anglophones learned in 1979 that with the revision of the constitution the Prime Minister would replace the president in the event of the resignation, prolonged incapacity or death of the president of the republic, they felt cheated. The choice of Paul Biya to succeed Ahidjo, and his devotion to his predecessor, were far from reassuring for the English-speaking community.
4 It was the National Federation of Cameroonian Students (FENEC) which led students through the streets of Yaoundé.
5 On 1 October each year, some separatist movements organise marches to celebrate the anniversary of the United Republic of Cameroon, comprising the former French Cameroun and British Southern Cameroons. During this regular event, they claim the secession and independence of the English-speaking part of Cameroon.

6 The SCNC is one of the most influential secessionist movements in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.
7 SCYL, "Seventh Anniversary of the SCYL", BSC Nation, 27 May 2002.
8 The president's achievement bonuses are subsidies of 50,000 FCFA ($95) given to all successful students in state universities in Cameroon each year.
9 https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/13/cameroons-separatist-movement-is-going-international-ambazonia-military-forces-amf-anglophone-crisis/ (Accessed on 25 June 2021).
10 www.dw.com/en/who-are-cameroons-self-named-ambazonia-secessionists/a-50639426 (Accessed on 10 June 2021).
11 In a press briefing issued by Nkhongo Felix on 17 January 2017, the latter announced the transfer of Consortium operations to Europe and month-long 'ghost town' economic shut-downs.
12 Achaleke Christian Leke, "Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: Youth Is the Key to Peace," retrieved from https://peacelab.blog/2021/04/cameroons-anglophone-crisis-youths-are-the-key-to-peace (Accessed on 10 July 2021).
13 LoYoC is a national, non-profit, non-governmental and youth-led organisation founded in 2002 by a group of young people who migrated from remote communities across Cameroon into the capital Yaoundé for better opportunities. It was later registered as an association in 2004 with a base in Yaoundé and a mandate to work across the ten regions of Cameroon.
14 Retrieved from www.loyocameroon.org/youths-and-peace-processes-in-cameroon-opportunities-and-challenges/. According to organisers, this initiative trained 600 young people in four regions and 20 communities, led advocacy on radio and in schools on youth and peace processes. Over 5,000 people were reached and a National Youth Mediator Network consisting of the first cohort of 18 youth mediators (13 male and 5 female) was developed.
15 Retrieved from https://defyhatenow.org/defyhatenow_cameroon/ (Accessed on 10 August 2021).
16 Retrieved from https://en.unesco.org/news/cameroon-youth-speak-against-violent-extremism-through-pictures-and-graphics-and-win-prizes (Accessed on 20 July 2021).

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# 14 Embracing Change

## Young People and Social Movements in Post-Arab Spring Tunisia

*Ibrahim Bangura and Saatchi Sen*

### Introduction

In the post-revolution political transitions and regional shifts in the Arab world, Tunisia has emerged as an important example cited by prominent academics and democracy watchers as the true success story of Arab democratisation (Arbi and Geri 2021). Since the Jasmine Revolution of 2010 sparked one of the most critical waves of popular mobilisations in the twenty-first century, the Tunisian experience has been recognised as one that has defied long-held notions of Islam's incompatibility with a democratic political structure (Fish 2002) and has in the years since 2011, held multiple successful elections and peaceful transfers of power (Chograni 2021). Despite these gains, the North African country continues to suffer from many of the same problems that had pushed its young people to the streets to call for the resignation of their long-ruling authoritarian president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in 2011.

A little over ten years after the Jasmine Revolution triggered the most widespread democracy movement in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, the question remains as to where Tunisia finds itself today. The Arab Spring has defined itself as a pivotal point in social movement history due to the intersectionality it displayed as a New Social Movement (NSM), being primarily a youth movement as well as a class struggle, while seeking to challenge authoritarian systems deeply entrenched in hierarchical power structures. Tunisia has been hailed as the most successful post-revolution society in terms of the Arab Spring – but what does that mean in real terms, not just to commentators, but to the youth and average citizens in Tunisia who experience the everyday realities of life in the transitional state?

Several writers, including Fabio Merone (2015), Mounir Saidani (2017) and Fethi Mansouri (2020), have indicated that post-revolution Tunisia is still reeling from high unemployment, deep regional socioeconomic inequalities, corruption, and political and bureaucratic apathy and stagnation. These continuing challenges, coupled with the public health crisis caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic (Corona Virus Disease 2019 [COVID-19]), a recent rise in Islamic fundamentalism, as well as a struggle for greater women's rights and youth political representation (Tarinturier 2016; World Bank 2021), have

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plunged the country into the political crisis it finds itself in, at the time of writing this chapter, in August 2021 (Abdelhadi 2021).

The 2011 Tunisian revolution was largely a youth movement, driven by the actions of disaffected young people across the country (Honwana 2013; Chograni 2021). Today, Tunisia has seen a resurgence of these actions as a consequence of the continued exclusion and underrepresentation of youth in the political economy of the country (Chograni 2021; Roberts, Kovachevs and Kabaivonov 2017).

It is worth remembering that Tunisia is a country in political transition and as such, displays many of the characteristics of a transitional state, such as weak policy implementation by unstable governments, socioeconomic challenges and the struggle for political control by elites, coupled with upheavals caused by attempts at dismantling old systems of governance. This explains the difficulties that many Tunisians face as they contend with the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy – from rising unemployment and Islamic fundamentalism to exclusionary sociopolitical practices.

This chapter examines the relationship between the transitional Tunisian state and its youth. Reinforcing the relatively contemporary analyses of 'hybrid states' (Ekman 2009; Menocal, Fritz and Rakner 2007), it establishes that the current Tunisian state, due to its transitional nature, faces instability due to a variety of factors. The aim is not to measure the success of the revolution in Tunisia in absolute terms, i.e. through the traditional parameters of successful peaceful elections, transfers of power and the inclusion of democratic systems of governance, free speech etc., but to provide an understanding of the socioeconomic and political spaces Tunisia's youth have occupied in the last ten years of the country's transition, and the various ways in which they have displayed agency and contested the state to promote the changes they fought for. Importantly, this chapter critically examines the factors that have undermined the inclusion and active participation of youth in Tunisia's transition, and how that has further affected the relationship between the youth and the state.

A wide range of relevant secondary sources have been used, such as news articles, academic literature and data sets from prominent data collation organisations such as Freedom House, Afrobarometer and Statista. Additionally, to further enrich the analysis, the voices and stories of Tunisian youth have been represented through interviews conducted with 125 young people (73 males and 52 females) in Tunis, Sfax and Sidi Bouzid. Furthermore, 13 government officials (9 males and 4 females), and 23 academics, activists and leaders of civil society organisations (12 males and 11 females) also participated in the study. All the youth that participated in the study were included as a result of their active roles in youth movements in Tunisia. Similarly, all the other actors that were engaged in the study were selected as a result of their knowledge of youth movements, governance and the transition process in Tunisia.

The cities selected for the study were included for specific reasons. Sidi Bouzid is where the Arab Spring started and has a rich history in relation to the inception of youth movements in Tunisia. Tunis and Sfax are two of the main

cities where the protests were concentrated – Tunis being the capital city, and Sfax as one of the country's largest cities, with a concentration of elites. Both have a youthful population and continue to experience regular protests.

Field consultations took place in July and September 2021 and the authors were assisted by three (2 females and 1 male) research assistants in Tunisia.

## Understanding the Past: Tunisia Before the Arab Spring

To better understand Tunisia's contemporary political situation, it is necessary to revisit and contextualise its past. This will not only help distinguish the changes taking place in Tunisian political society today but also identify the many linkages that can be found in the evolution of Tunisian politics and civil society, and how they function today.

Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956, following a long struggle for freedom which had turned violent towards the end. Led by the hugely popular Neo Destour party, the newly independent country drafted a new constitution and abolished its monarchy in 1957, electing the charismatic Habib Bourguiba as the president of the new Tunisian Republic in 1959 (El Houssi 2017). Consistent with postcolonial state-building, the new political class in Tunisia was mostly composed of the middle class and elite, themselves a product of the French colonial education system and modernisation ideals; the poor and working class were excluded from political participation due to their perceived backwardness stemming from adherence to religious and cultural traditions (Merone 2015; Tainturier 2016). Bourguiba consolidated his power through the constitution that introduced an autocratic one-party system of governance and set about developing Tunisia with a strict separation of religion and state. His nearly 30-year reign was defined by high literacy levels, a neutral foreign policy, political authoritarianism and intensely secular values that pushed for gender equality and women's rights through the 1956 Code of Personal Status. This was a highly progressive document that granted equal status to women for property, marriage and employment (Honwana 2013). Following a downward spiralling economy, rising unemployment and increasingly erratic policies, Bourguiba was deposed in a peaceful coup by General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 1989. Ali had risen steadily through the ranks in both the military and the politics of Tunisia under Bourguiba.[1] With the accession of Ali to power, the elite political class in Tunisia, consisting mainly of those closely associated with him, consolidated their grip on power and gradually Tunisia continued down a path of increasing corruption and political repression.

Ben Ali's regime saw economic growth in Tunisia following its implementation of the World Bank's structural adjustment policies, but while it was hailed as a development success story by the international financial infrastructure, economic development within the country itself was deeply unequal (Merone 2015). Much of the development in Tunisia focused on tourism and a service sector that was concentrated along the coast, and in and around the capital Tunis, in the Eastern region of the country (Merone 2015). The rural interior

and the Western and Southern regions were slowly left behind. While capital from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund flowed into the country, regional inequality and an increasing wealth gap between the emerging middle class and the labour class bred class division and resentment, as political power and wealth were concentrated amongst the elites that surrounded the Ben Ali family (Tainturier 2016). In addition to this nepotism, the regime grew more repressive, clamping down on civil and political rights (Honwana 2013).

Dubbed 'The Family', the Ben Ali regime came to be defined by its corruption and clientelism, controlling financial flows within Tunisia by granting business licences to its supporters and sycophants within the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) party and gatekeeping entrepreneurial activities (Honwana 2013). As Tunisia emerged as the most developed North African country, the Ben Ali regime grew further detached from the internal realities of rising unemployment and income inequality, and resentment over an increasingly oppressive regime. With a high literacy rate of 79.13 per cent (87.38 per cent male and 71.09 per cent female), Tunisia in 2010 was churning out graduates who were ready to enter the workforce. However, with an unemployment rate that rose to a staggering 18 per cent in 2011 (Statista 2021), many young graduates found themselves with no jobs and limited future prospects. By 2010, all indicators pointed to the potential for a revolution in Tunisia.

## Tunisia and the Arab Spring

As indicated by a youth activist[2] that participated in the protests in Tunis in 2011:

> By 2010, the country was tense; people were dissatisfied with Ali and his ministers. There was so much suffering among people and it appeared that they did not care. They were living in luxury, while to even buy bread was becoming a challenge for some people and young people had to struggle for jobs when they left the university. It was too much and we knew they were not going to last longer. We were waiting for the right moment to challenge the system and we were prepared to sacrifice our lives in doing so. It was certainly going to come at a cost and we (young people) knew that.

These were the conditions that propelled Tunisia to the revolution in late 2010: a skewed economy built on corruption and nepotism, harsh political repression and disaffected youth boiling with frustration and anger (Honwana 2013). The situation reached a breaking point with the self-immolation of 26-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in the interior town of Sidi Bouzid, who became a symbol for the rural youth and the revolution at large once he succumbed to his injuries (Chograni 2021). In January 2011, the revolution started in the impoverished interior of the country, with chants of '*Shugl, hurriya, karama wataniyya!*' – work, freedom and national dignity (Yerkes and

Ben Yahmed 2018). The protests spread across the country through cyberspace, with Twitter and Facebook utilised as major tools by young cyber activists to circumvent mainstream print and broadcast media, which at first largely ignored the rapidly changing mood of the nation. The revolution eventually reached Tunis and the surrounding urban areas, where soon the defining slogan that reverberated across the country and indeed, the world, was '*Ben Ali Dégagé!*' – Ben Ali Go! (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2018).

The young people who clamoured for the departure of Ben Ali would not be satisfied solely with his departure from the country; there was a desire amongst the youth to completely overhaul the political system and to have their voices heard by the state, for what some claimed would probably be for the 'first time'.[3] As stated by a student in Sfax[4]:

> The call for Ali to go, was resounding across Tunisia, and to some of us, it was not just about him and his family, it was about all those sycophants that had worshipped them over the years and denied us a place in our society. Some youth wanted only to see economic and political reforms and were scared of how Ali and his people would react. For someone like me, it was about changing the system, nothing else. All bridges had been burnt over the years, as they never listened to us. They simply ignored us and pretended we were not there. We were determined to let them listen to us and see our faces for the first time.

It was interesting to observe from the data collected that there were various reasons for the revolution in Tunisia. Out of the 125 youth who participated in the study, 89 indicated that for them, the revolution was based on their desire to witness the removal of Ali from power, as he was an autocrat and led a corrupt regime that marginalised youth and women; 27 indicated that they merely wanted to put pressure on the government to open socioeconomic and political spaces for youth and invest in their empowerment, which the Ali administration had failed to do over the years; and the remaining nine indicated that for them, it was not just about removing Ali, they wanted to see him and members of his administration punished for what they did to the people of Tunisia. However, it was observed from the data collected that some of the female youth participants had other reasons for wanting to oust the regime. These reasons included entrenched patriarchy which had undermined the agency and quality of life of women across Tunisian society. A female activist[5] had this to say:

> Ali built a patriarchal empire around him and all the progressive laws that favoured women under his predecessor were either repealed or outrightly disrespected. It was obvious that women had a very limited place in the Tunisia he had in mind. We had to stand up against him and try to demand a place in our homeland Tunisia; women are Tunisian too, and we did not fall from space.[6]

Interviewees from the Ali administration argued that while youth and women kept blaming Ali for promoting patriarchy, it was not really his fault, as patriarchal customs have been embedded in the cultural structures not just of Tunisia but of the entire MENA region for centuries. This argument was countered by his critics who indicated that Ali's predecessor instituted laws that mainstreamed gender and promoted the rights of women and girls.

The anger and frustrations against the system that had been deeply rooted in Tunisian society, cut across all sectors and ages, overwhelming the regime. Critical to the discussions on the Tunisian revolution is the conduct of the country's military. In the face of the degenerating situation in the country, they stayed neutral and professional, ensuring the safety and security of both protesters and properties. This was very different from the way state security forces reacted to protests in places like Egypt and Libya. Writing on the professionalism of the Tunisian military 25 years before the Arab Spring, Ware (1985, 37) states, 'Of the military establishments in the Arab world, Tunisia is almost unique. It is a non-praetorian, highly professional body of officers and men which, as an armed force, never mounted a coup or fomented revolution against the state'. It could be concluded that several factors were responsible for the professional conduct of the Tunisian military. These factors could be attributed to years of previous governments seeking to limit the powers and influence of the military and keep them out of politics (Lutterbeck 2011). They had been trained to stay apolitical, so that there was an unwillingness on the part of the military to side with the regime, even when Ali wanted them to do so. This perhaps demonstrates the Tunisian military's ability to recognise the ills of an autocratic regime that was destroying the fabric of their country, along with their integrity in maintaining their longstanding tradition of neutrality.

Sensing that the military was not going to take his side:

> President Ben Ali unleashed gangs of thugs and his elite Presidential Guard against the protesters. He also ordered General Rachid Ammar, the army chief of staff, to deploy troops in support of the regime's Zoltan Barany security detachments. General Ammar rejected this order and was soon placing his men between the security units and the protesters, thereby effectively saving the revolution and forcing Ben Ali into exile.
>
> (Barany 2011, 30–31)

The professional conduct of the military provided new life to the protesters, who became relentless in calling on Ali to resign. Though largely led by young people using social media as a platform to mobilise and engage their peers, all generations of Tunisians participated in the revolution, which spread across all cities and towns in the country.[7] Consequently, Ali fled the country on 14 January 2011 with his family and his confidantes and aides, thereby bringing an end to his 24-year reign. Recounting the day, she heard that Ali had fled Tunisia, a teacher[8] in Asfax said:

> The news of Ali fleeing Tunisia hit social media like lightning, even though we knew that it would be difficult for his government to survive the protests, we did not think he will give up so soon. It was a clear picture of the fact that leaders can only be as powerful as their people want them to be. At the end the people's power prevailed in Tunisia; we were happy, shocked and relieved at the same time. It was the end of an era for Tunisia; a dictator was brought to his knees. It was an example for the rest of the world to learn from.

## Youth, Democracy and the Post-Arab Spring Transition in Tunisia

Amidst the jubilation that erupted after Ali's departure came the challenge of setting up a transitional arrangement to stabilise the country. The immediate obstacle that presented itself was that of Ben Ali's party. The ruling RCD had controlled every aspect of the state infrastructure for the past two decades – from legislature to judiciary to law enforcement, the RCD *was* the state. Thus, dismantling this entrenched system was not going to happen overnight. Additionally, the power struggle to fill the vacuum left by the old regime was dominated by the political elite that had been a part of the Ali administration.[9] Any attempt to completely overhaul the system was going to undermine 'the very essence of the revolution, it was going to tear Tunisia apart. Change had to be approached cautiously with the aim of having a unified and socially cohesive society, after more than two decades of Ali's rule'.[10]

According to some of the respondents, this realisation set in for the first time only after Ali's departure, it caught them off guard.[11] Despite this, there was immense pressure for the RCD to be dissolved – the party, to some of the respondents, was symbolic of the Ali regime and its dissolution cemented the end of the oppressive system that Ali had put in place. Inasmuch as the party was officially dissolved in 2011, its members soon joined the transitional government, as part of the Nidaa Tounes party established in 2012 by Beji Caid Essebsi, a former member of the Ali administration. The transitional administration, then, saw the re-emergence of the old elites and the marginalisation of the youth through the very power structures that the young activists had fought against. A gender activist[12] in Tunis expressed her frustration:

> All we fought for faded away right in front of our eyes soon after Ali left the country. Old, rich and corrupt politicians, who had been with Ali, found their way to the heart of government again. They became part of the transition team and only one youth was there, Slim Amamou. We were even annoyed that he became part of that system. For us, it was a painful experience, after all we went through, and to end up giving power back to those we had taken it from earlier. It brought a feeling of disappointment and frustration that led to us preparing again to contend with the state.

Similar views were expressed by a local preacher[13] in Sfax:

> The disappointments with the outcome of the Arab Spring for Tunisia were immediate. The struggle we went through was to foster change but it only laundered the elites and reinjected them into the system. The ones who were taken out were those that were identified as being the very closest to Ali, the rest survived and retook the Tunisian state. Some youth gave up and went about their business, others decided to begin the long-drawn clash with the state.

It appears from the interviews that the youth may not have fully comprehended how entrenched the system that Ali had built was. The sudden re-emergence of the elites shocked them and the realisation set in that those who will take over the transitional Tunisian state were the very same elites that had controlled the state systems they had fought against in the revolution. Two immediate challenges became obvious as indicated by respondents, firstly, the unwillingness on the part of the youth to support the transition process due to the large involvement of the previous regime's actors, who they viewed as corrupt and unwilling to change. Secondly, the new transitional government, while making allowances for more democratic functioning (more freedom of speech, the inclusion of opposition parties in mainstream politics etc.), was still unwilling to let young people represent and involve themselves in shaping their country's future. Consequently, some young people became disillusioned and politically apathetic, while others became emboldened to continue engaging and protesting against the emerging system, by some respondents.

The immediate post-Arab Spring period was plagued with an intense struggle between the youth and the old political guard, which one youth described as a 'struggle for the soul and future of Tunisia'.[14] In the end, the old guard won and the youth had very limited place or voice in the transitional arrangements, as noted by the gender activist referenced above. Protests ensued across the country once more, but they were less robust and were mostly on specific issues, such as the exclusion of youth from the post-revolution political process and the composition of the transitional government. Nonetheless, it was apparent that the youth were losing interest in the politics of their country (Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Tür 2018). This became evident during the 2014 elections that had Caid Essebsi elected as the first democratic president of Tunisia in 2014. Voter turnout was very low, especially amongst the youth, who by then had become ambivalent and not very confident of the changes that they had fought for (Roberts, Kovacheva and Kabaivonov 2017).

What Tunisia experienced mostly between 2011 and 2015 was a struggle to reposition the country and re-engineer a political system that had been based on autocracy and political dominance by the Ali family. The quest to build a democratic state was acknowledged as being difficult by the respondents interviewed for this chapter; they pointed to the internal struggles among the

elites and the political opposition against Essebsi as very minimal, due to the long tradition of Tunisians rallying behind, rather than contesting, leaders that bid for power. In effect, the political parties that emerged could not provide credible alternative policies against Essebsi. Thus, some of the youth, now confident in their ability to mobilise and challenge the system, withdrew from the political mainstream and instead began to occupy more subaltern spaces to advocate for themselves. This is the new youth opposition that the post-revolutionary Tunisian state faces.

## We Can't Give Up: The Experiences of Tunisian Youth 2015–2021

There are varied accounts provided by state actors and the youth engaged in this study, on both the current trajectory of the country and the place of the youth in it. The youth, on the one hand, argue that the elites make conscious efforts to deny them a place in decision-making and leadership structures and processes. The elites argue that despite all the uncertainty that Tunisia is facing, freedom of speech and expression that had previously been denied to Tunisian civil society is now a right that young Tunisians can exercise. A government official[15] in Tunis stated:

> We understand the exuberance of the youth and the need for changes to happen rapidly but in the real world, changes take time and is even more difficult as it requires resources and planning. No matter what the youth say, at the moment, they have freedom, can openly express themselves, and they do not feel threatened by the state. They can protest and we listen to their views and try to do the best we can to turn things around. However, Tunisia is faced with economic challenges and the transition has been a challenging one for both the young and the old.

When questioned on the arguments of government officials, the youth dismissed them and argued that the fact that the governing elites are treating freedom of expression as a privilege accorded to Tunisian youth, defines their perception of young people and their treatment at the hands of the state. What young people indicated that they need is a place in every aspect of leadership and governance, to be able to meaningfully contribute to the transformations that they continue to fight for. To them, socioeconomic policies should evolve to include the youth and ordinary citizens, and not focus around central power structures that have hijacked the system yet again. As such, the distrust between the youth and the state has deepened over time.

The ineffectiveness of the government and the main opposition party, the Ennahda Movement,[16] has only served to incense the country's youth and reignite similar passions that led to the revolution in 2011. The government in Tunisia has battled an increasing number of challenges that have been exacerbated by its continuous power changes (ten different governments in the

last ten years). The frequent changes are an indication of the instability in the political system and have had negative implications for the constitutional order that the country is trying to establish. The instability has affected the transformation process and has contributed towards making the life of the everyday Tunisian difficult, with the government unable to address their needs and aspirations. Since the revolution, unemployment has been steadily increasing – it stood at an all-time high in 2020 at 18.6 per cent; while 34 per cent of youth with advanced degrees are unemployed – the highest it has ever been in the last 20 years (Statista 2021). Over the years, this has resulted in forced migration patterns and a severe brain drain. Some young people have made the choice to cross the Mediterranean to look for better prospects in Europe. At the height of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) insurgency in 2018, Tunisia gained the dubious distinction of being the highest exporter of ISIS fighters apart from Syria and Iraq (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2018).

According to the respondents, this rise in extremist views post-2015 and the involvement of Tunisian youth in groups such as ISIS could be attributed to several factors, including lack of trust in the Tunisian state, the perception of being denied a place and identity in their society, the desire for adventure, unemployment, and the ability of extremist groups to exploit young people's vulnerability and find effective methods to recruit, radicalise and deploy them. For the excluded youth, all these factors point towards the absence of the state in their lives. Some youth went in search of a purpose in life in the face of a stagnant economy and lack of opportunity to involve themselves in domestic politics or state-building – even though that purpose was dangerous, and would ostracize them from their communities.[17]

Youth activists have also used popular arts to highlight their political awakening. Music, graffiti, talk shows, comedy and soap operas became common methods utilised by youth to propagate their views in local communities (Saidani 2017). Typical messages produced deliberate on bad governance and the fragility surrounding the Tunisian state, signalling that especially in the rural areas, that the revolution has largely excluded the youth and only benefited the elite and the relatively well-off middle class in urban areas, thereby deepening the regional and class divide (Arbi and Geri 2021).

The concerns of the declining state of Tunisia's democracy were succinctly captured in a Freedom House policy brief on the country in 2018:

> Of all the Arab states that experienced popular uprisings and political upheaval in 2011, Tunisia alone navigated the crisis through civil debate, free elections, and constructive negotiations, avoiding the violence and repression that have racked so many other countries in the region. Its comparative success demonstrated the feasibility of peaceful democratic transitions, even in settings where authoritarian rule has prevailed for decades. Nearly eight years after its revolution, however, Tunisia remains far from consolidating its new democracy and is showing signs of backsliding.
>
> (Fassihian 2018, 2)

The report of Freedom House shows that the country is sliding from the gains it made prior to 2015 when it was rated as Free (Fassihian 2018). Factors such as the political instability, heavy-handedness of the government, marginalisation of youth, gender inequality and the regular protests have all contributed to the poor ratings of the country in relation to freedom and democracy.

By mid-2019 it had become apparent that the frustration among the country's youth was reaching boiling point, especially with the growing inflation and unemployment. In the midst of this, president Essebsi passed away on 25 July 2019 and the speaker of the house was appointed interim president (Mansouri 2020). This set the stage for a transition, with all political actors preparing for the upcoming elections. Kais Saied,[18] a law professor, declared his intention to run for president as an Independent Social Conservative candidate. He gained prominence, especially among the country's youth, and became a key contender for the presidency. By October 2019, the Ennahda Movement had won the majority in parliamentary elections and Saied had been voted in as president (Mansouri 2020).

In spite of the transition that took place, the country's youth were not keen on accepting the economic hardship that pervaded the country. Out of 125 respondents, 101 indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic postponed what was an inevitable confrontation between the government and the country's youth. The pandemic also made matters worse for a government that was struggling to stabilise the Tunisian economy. Consequently, Tunisia was once again rocked by youth protests that demanded an end to the crippling unemployment and public health crisis that held the country in its grip (Cordall 2021a). These protests also saw the return of the police brutality that had defined scenes in the Jasmine Revolution (Gouvy 2021). The seven months of unrelenting protests and clashes between state security forces and citizens have culminated in a political crisis that has left democracy watchers wondering about the future of Tunisia. Consequently, president Kais Saied suspended parliament in late July, relieving parliament members of their various perks and salary, dismissed prime minister Hichem Mechichi and removed laws which gave serving ministers immunity against corruption charges (Abdelhadi 2021).

President Kais Saied has appointed Tunisia's first woman prime minister, 63-year-old geologist Najla Romdhane. While this is a boost for women's representation in mainstream politics, and a progressive move in the Arab world, Romdhane seems to have limited experience, as such, will be working under reduced powers compared with the previous prime minister (Amar and McDowall 2021). Saied has appointed the new prime minister without the approval of parliament and major opposition parties, and the legitimacy of this appointment has been called into question by Saied's opponents. Following these developments, Tunisia has been rocked by both pro- and anti-Saied demonstrations, with the speaker of the house calling for the resumption of parliament amidst the chaos (Al Jazeera 2021). While it seems that many of the youth and a vast number of Tunisians are supportive of Saied, international

observers have warned that the escalating political crisis in Tunisia is bringing the country dangerously close to instability.

While Saied's opponents have accused him of straining Tunisia's fledgling democratic system and conducting a coup, his approval ratings amongst the youth have shot up as most have seen his actions as necessary in the face of a parliament mired in policy fatigue and internal squabbles (Cordall 2021). Saied seems to be following up on his promises and has pursued corruption charges against his former ministers (McDowall 2021). A total of 103 out of the 125 youth respondents have said that the president's actions are in line with their expectations. They perceive him as being radical and driving change in a positive direction. A youth activist[19] in Sfax noted:

> Saied is gradually becoming the man of the youth, a leader that for the first time in the history of Tunisia is standing up against the elites. He is a true radical and a strong defender of the power of the people. What he has demonstrated is the will to stand up against the political elites that have destroyed our country. The parliament is full of self-seekers who only care about themselves and their families. Saied did the right thing to suspend parliament.

Of notable interest to the respondents is the fight against corruption, which they indicated is critical to enhancing the envisaged transformation in Tunisian society. A senior staff member in the Ministry of Information[20] said this when being interviewed:

> Corruption has been endemic in Tunisian society since independence and it had become obvious that something needed to be done and someone needs to do it. It inspires both the old and young in a society when they see their leader leading the fight against corruption and holding to account even those that are close to him. That shows that the leader means business and is truly representing the change that people want to see. He has the support of his people and he has a lot to offer Tunisia during his presidency.

The words of the government official are in line with the views and expectations of the youth respondents. However, 22 respondents noted their scepticism, indicating that they do not trust politicians, even those coming from outside of the mainstream political circles in Tunisia, as Saied is not considered to have been what they described as a 'typical politician'. A vegetable seller[21] in Tunis expressed her doubts:

> They seem okay when they just come in, as was the case of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, who was a soldier and not a politician. With time they become worse than the typical politicians, who end up surrounding them and give them bad advice. I will reserve my praises for Saied and see what the future holds for Tunisia as a nation.

According to writers such as Acemoglu and Robinson (2001), highly unequal societies find it difficult to transition to democracy and elites usually manipulate the process, leaving the country caught between authoritarian and semi-democratic rule. This is the case with countries such as Egypt, with the emergence of al-Sisi as noted by the respondent, and Tunisia currently fits that profile, as argued by some respondents.

Despite the existing challenges and fears, between 2020 and 2021, Tunisia has made significant progress in relation to its freedom ratings. For instance, in 2020, the country scored 71/100 (32/40 in political rights and 39/60 in civil liberties) in the Freedom House Report.[22] This is a sharp twist from the conclusions of the 2018 Policy Brief on the country. While the efforts signify progress, female respondents are not particularly satisfied with the lack of gender-related reforms, which could have contributed to enhancing the freedoms, agency and participation of women in leadership and governance in Tunisia.

In assessing data on gender in Tunisia, it is interesting to note that while women's participation in governance improved dramatically – from 37 per cent women in government in 2016 (Ohman 2016) to 47 per cent in 2018 (UN Women 2018), most of these positions are in the lower house of parliament and local municipal posts. High posts in government are still held overwhelmingly by men and there is little representation for women. Violence against women is still a troubling factor in the country, and seems to be increasing, as indicated by respondents. A female teacher[23] in Sidi Bouzid expressed her desire to see specific gender-related changes under the Saied administration:

> Many of the discussions in Tunisia have been around what should be done to end the marginalisation of male youth, with little attention paid to women and girls. We want to see Saied improve on the provision of services to women and girls, introduce and enforce laws that will mitigate sexual and gender-based violence in Tunisia, invest in the education of women and girls, and provide them with economic opportunities that will enhance their position and respect in society.

## Conclusion

More than a decade after the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisia has been experiencing a challenging transition that has been characterised by mistrust between the youth and elites, tension among the elites, economic hardship and regular youth-led protests. Coupled with this, the emergence of the pre-revolution elites, with some of them leading the transition, has led to ambivalence and disillusionment among some of the country's youth. Though there is a mix of reasons for the protests by young people as they are not a homogenous entity, it was concluded that the most common factors for the continuous protests include the need to open the socioeconomic and political space for women and youth, the inclusion of youth in governance and leadership, and strengthening of human rights and the rule of law in Tunisia.

Currently, the youth believe that they are marginalised and need to be represented in mainstream political participation, as they are currently mostly active as outliers. The emergence of Saied and his radical reforms, especially those related to corruption, has ushered in a sense of hope among some of the country's youth. However, there is a deep sense of uncertainty on the part of others, as to the future of Tunisia and the place of the youth in it. Many young Tunisians are mistrustful of mainstream politics due to experiences of corruption, nepotism and a clientelist state during the Ben Ali regime. Trust needs to be built between the political class and the youth – something that seems to be slow going due to the largely similar political structure that has been retained from pre-revolution Tunisia. The fundamental questions are whether the country will in the near future successfully move out of the current trajectory in which it has been trapped for more than a decade, or whether it may fall into authoritarian rule once again, as some critics are suggesting.

Rather than continuing to alienate youth-led social movements and youth generally across the country, the government and its development partners should open the socioeconomic and political space, invest in them and positively harness their energy for the growth and development of their country. Their voices and active participation in governance and leadership are critical for Tunisia's transition to a democratic country in the real sense. Failure to address the contentions of the youth and the other challenges that have undermined the democratic transition will continue to have negative consequences for Tunisia.

## Notes

1 He held several positions, for instance, from 1964 to 1974 he served as the head of the Tunisian military security, from 1974 to 1977 he served as military attaché to the Tunisian Embassy in Morocco, from 1977 to 1980 he was the head of national security, from 1980 to 1984 he served as ambassador to Poland. In 1984, he served as State Secretary for National Security and was appointed as Cabinet Minister in 1985. In 1986, he served as Minister of the Interior and was appointed as Prime Minister, a position he held until 7 November 1987 when he staged a bloodless coup. See: www.britannica.com/biography/Zine-al-Abidine-Ben-Ali (Accessed 14 August 2021).
2 Interview conducted on 12 August 2021.
3 Based on interviews conducted for the chapter.
4 Interview conducted on 11 August 2021.
5 Interview conducted in Tunis on 30 July 2021.
6 Fish, in his 2002 paper "Islam and Authoritarianism", proposes that Islamic countries may be less conducive to democracy due to their suppression of women's rights. As the Ben Ali regime grew more oppressive towards Tunisian civil society, its exclusion of women and increasingly patriarchal outlook reflects this hypothesis.
7 NSMs are characterised by diverse groups merging and working towards a common cause. The Tunisian revolution saw not only young people coming together from all walks of life, but also lawyers, journalists, various activists and CSOs as well as opposition party members joining hands for the immediate goal of ousting the Ben Ali regime.

8 Interview conducted in Asfax on 13 August 2021.
9 Based on interviews conducted for the chapter.
10 Interview conducted with a local government authority in Sfax on 11 August 2021.
11 Based on interviews conducted.
12 Interview conducted in Sidi Bouzid on 9 August 2021.
13 Interview conducted on 11 August 2021.
14 Interview conducted on 12 August 2021.
15 Interview conducted virtually on 13 August 2021.
16 The Ennahda Movement which had been banned for years by Ali re-emerged after the revolution and established itself as a 'Democratic Islamic Party'.
17 Based on data from the interviews conducted for this study.
18 A constitutional law expert who taught at the University of Tunis since the early 1990s, Kais Saied was part of the commission that redrafted the Tunisian constitution in 2014. With no prior political experience, Saied was voted in as president in the 2019 elections after he contested as an independent candidate with limited funding against the then imprisoned Nabil Karoui. His voter base comprises mainly the youth, with whom he is hugely popular due to his 'outsider' status in Tunis and the threat he poses to the elite. Saied holds conservative social beliefs, but maintains that he will uphold the progressive laws and constitution of the country (www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/23/kais-saied-who-is-tunisias-new-president).
19 Interview conducted on 12 August 2021.
20 Interview conducted on 11 August 2021.
21 Interview conducted on 29 July 2021.
22 See: https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2021 (Accessed on 14 August 2021).
23 Interview conducted on 9 August 2021.

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# 15 Moving from Contentious to Collaborative Relationships

## Youth-Led Social Movements, Good Governance and the Prospects for Peace in Africa

*Ibrahim Bangura*

In the last decade and a half, Africa has experienced several youth-led protests, as presented in this book. The daily lived experiences of youth have played a critical role in shaping the evolving dynamics between the state and various other power sharing groups. Poverty and the resulting lack of economic opportunities, plus the continuous infantilisation and marginalisation of youth across the continent, have undermined confidence in governing authorities. This general sense of despair cuts across nations, cultures and communities, most of which are trapped in poverty and economic hardship.

It was observed from studies undertaken for this book that there are several critical factors that contribute to the exclusion of youth in shaping their future; foremost amongst them is the perception of youth by the state and its elites as rebellious, as adversaries to be contained. In addition, bad governance, a gerontocratic approach to administration and rule, corruption, patriarchy, patrimonialism and clientelism have resulted in the lack of trust between young people and the state. These have contributed significantly to military coups, civil wars, violent protests and, consequently, the death of young people on the continent.

The marginalisation of youth and lack of recognition of their autonomy and identity by the state as well as their communities, have led many young people to attempt to re-engineer the sociopolitical arena and create structures that will enable them to act on their aspirations. In turn, this has brought about the emergence of physical spaces where young people might gather, such as the coffee booths in several African countries. These places are used for socialisation, giving youth a voice and an ability to be heard by their peers and the leadership – an order they can establish in spaces they control. Within these spaces, they speak boldly of their vision for the future – for their communities, their countries, their lives. However, these 'youth chambers' are not regarded as a function of the future state, as those in power seeks to mobilise, enhance capacity and tap their energy for the development of society at large, wherein the youth are often seen as adverserial. There, these youth spaces are often mischaracterised these chambers are often mischaracterised as being driven by idle minds and hence, criminalised (Bangura 2018; Gegbe, Muffuh & Sheriff 2015).

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In several societies on the continent, especially those that have experienced conflict, or have rigid, hierarchical social structures that can be dysfunctional upbringing, youth are susceptible to criminal behaviour – ranging from acts of personal to societal harm – and utilise these as a means to bond and express agency (Abbink & van Kessel 2005; Keen 2002). In countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, there is a growing spate of youth-led gangs and cliques. These groupings reflect two dichotomies: first and foremost, years of neglect, poor parenting, grievances against society, and the lack of education and economic opportunities. Secondly, a need to belong, to be part of a 'tribe' (Abbink & van Kessel 2005; Abdullah 2020; Phillips 2013).

In the past decade, Africa has experienced growing involvement and active participation in extremism. The majority of participants are youth. The Horn of Africa, Sahel, Lake Chad, Great Lakes, North Africa have all been heavily affected by this movement and its transnational nature. Terror-related groups in African countries like Nigeria and Somalia (Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab respectively) are known for their recruitment and use of youth as fighters (Kajjo & Kaina 2020). Reports have also indicated that youth in post-Arab Spring countries such as Tunisia leave their countries to join violent extremist groups in the Middle East (Mulroy, Oehlerich & Baddorf 2020). Interviews conducted for this book point to two factors: the re-emergence of the pre-Arab Spring elites and their ability to retake the political space and monopolise the legitimate use of violence through state apparatus, alongside the marginalisation of youth from the transitional processes that ensued. This is alarming as the activities of violent extremist groups are increasing in Africa, and the approach of elites to governance, young people and women appears to be unchanging.

Even so, it is important to note that though there are increasing instances of youth participating in violence, young people have also been engaged in efforts to build peace and bring economic development and prosperity to their countries (Agbiboa 2015). They utilise the limited resources available to them to mobilise their peers, mainly through grassroots networks, and, over time, have built reliable reputations in many communities, as is the case with Y'en a Marre in Senegal. There is an urgent need for the state to work in tandem with these youthful networks, and to include them in the sociopolitical structures of governance and conflict resolution. Unfortunately, more often than not, the state is yet another obstacle for the youth to overcome in the pursuit of peace and prosperity.

During the research conducted for this book, it became increasingly evident that there remains a gerontocratic approach to governance, with leadership and decision-making centred on the older generation. This limits the participation of youth in decision-making processes, including decisions involving their welfare. In countries such as Cameroon, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria, the presidents are all over 70 years of age, with very few young people in senior government positions. Usually, a tokenistic approach to inclusion in governance is adopted

through which a few youth and women, with strong ties to the elites or political parties, are appointed in government. Even in post-Arab Spring Tunisia, there was a symbolic gesture with the inclusion of youth activist Slim Amamou, as the sole young person in the transitional government (Khosrokhavar 2012). This move was widely criticised by youth engaged in the interviews for the Tunisia chapter. That very experience provided an indication to Tunisian youth that the political elite they had struggled against had not learned from the lessons of the revolution. The consequent disillusionment and apathy in the political transition of Tunisia have been pointed to by our respondents as having pushed some youth into violent extremist groups within and outside of their country.

A concern in relation to the engagement between elites and youth is patrimonialism and the clientelistic manner in which elites relate with youth. This feeds into the instrumentalisation of youth, with some of them depending on the largesse of elites for their survival. Young people are expected to serve the interests and ambitions of the elites. In most African contexts, this clientelistic relationship is usually built on the need to use young people for the intimidation and perpetration of violence against political opponents and critics (Söderberg Kovacs & Bjarnesen 2018). These violent engagements have immense implications for the youth, who are usually marginalised at the end of electioneering processes, to be turned to again only in the next election cycle.

Critical to all the factors mentioned above is the lack of democratic good governance in several of the societies studied in this book. Democratic good governance has key components which include transparency, accountability, representation, equality, social justice and fair access to opportunities (Gisselquist 2012). States have failed to respect these principles and continue to engage in corrupt practices that foster inequality, socioeconomic injustices, and limit freedoms and opportunities – practices that have negative implications for peace, security and stability in the affected societies. Since their independence from colonial powers, several countries in Africa have ignored the need to embrace democratic transformation. The lack of such transformation processes has continuously undermined human development and minimised the potential for growth.

The failures analysed above have contributed to the emergence and evolution of youth movements in African societies. Inasmuch as there are different typologies of youth movements and there are also contextual differences that inform their formation and shape their actions, what is obvious is that in the last decade, youth have demonstrated an ability to mobilise and contend with their leaders on key issues that determine their future and quality of life. This book has sought to provide clarity on the factors responsible for the emergence of youth-led social movements by analysing the key struggles in Africa over the last decade through delving into the nature, formation and approaches used by youth groups; dissecting the response of the state towards this display of frustration and agency by the youth; exploring the role of communications technology, in particular social media, in these movements; the gains made by

the movements and the challenges that they contended with or continue to contend with, including gender issues and the approach of regional and sub-regional organisations to social movements.

The main findings and conclusions of this edited volume are summarised in the sections below, tied with policy recommendations for the future.

## Youth-Led Social Movements and Socioeconomic and Political Changes in Africa in the Last Decade

The Arab Spring, which lasted from December 2010 to December 2012, set off a chain of youth-led social movements in Africa. Inasmuch as there have been several youth-led movements and protests from pre- to post-independence Africa, the Arab Spring succeeded in drawing global attention to the concerns of African youth and their demands for changes in the contexts within which they live. The protests that started in Tunisia lit a fire that spread through the continent and the Middle East. However, a little more than ten years after the Arab Spring, the question remains as to what changes have youth-led movements inspired on the continent? This book argues that even though youth movements have been faced with astronomical challenges in all the countries studied here, they have succeeded in forcing the political and economic elite, who dominate most aspects of sociopolitical life, to understand better the agency and ability of young people to self-mobilise and take on issues that are of concern to them. The ability of youth to challenge very powerful regimes in countries like Tunisia, Sudan, Libya, Egypt and Burkina Faso provides a clear indication of the extent to which youth can go, and what they can achieve if they unite and effectively challenge the system.

The ability of movements in the countries listed above to bring down powerful regimes' points to the fact that leaders can only be as powerful as their people want them to be. The fall of long-term powerful dictators and once perceived African strong men is an indication that power actually lies in the hands of the youth, but such power was ill-understood prior to the Arab Spring.

In Guinea, the protests against the third-term bid of Condé brought to the fore the constitutional breach by the elites and stimulated a wave of events that led to a military coup by young officers in the Guinean military. What became evident was that the state was unprepared to listen to the voices of its youth and rather sought to dismiss legitimate concerns that contributed to the fall of the regime and plunged the country into a military coup.

The protests led by women and youth in Sudan was long expected, as there were several conflicting and competing scenarios for a revolution. However, the turn of events that brought about the sudden fall of the Bashir regime appears to have shocked even the protesters, paving the way for the military to step in. The eventual arrest of Bashir and his cronies provided a powerful message of how civic action can influence change and bring down regimes that have been considered as untouchable.

In South Africa, protests, especially those led by students, are stimulating changes in the education sector. While it can be argued that South Africa is a much more liberal society compared to its neighbour Zimbabwe, it is obvious that some of the historical inequalities resulting from the legacies of apartheid still persist. As indicated in Chapter 12, a significant percentage of youth are trapped in unemployment, poverty, and social inequality. Thus, the protests succeeded in drawing attention to the plight of youth in universities and the changes that the state needs to effect to address inequality in the education sector in the country.

In Zimbabwe, the continued existence of the autocratic elites of the Mugabe era has undermined the anticipated changes of the post-Mugabe era. The state remains heavy-handed towards expressions of opposition and dissent, discouraging youth mobilisation and activism through violent means. However, youth have developed creative and innovative ways of subverting the state and navigating state violence. The use of popular arts is proving to be very effective in inspiring local consciousness, with civil society demanding accountability, and engaging the state and engaging the state on issues related to good governance and human rights.

Youth-led movements in Nigeria led to the state disbanding the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, a paramilitary unit that was accused of human rights violations. It also brought to light the perception of several Nigerians on issues related to human rights, the rule of law and social injustices. These conversations and narratives around them presented a clear call for reforms in the security sector of the country – reforms which have been long overdue.

In Senegal, the establishment of the Y'en a Marre Movement by prominent young artists went a long way in denying President Wade his unconstitutional third-term. Since its establishment, the movement has continued to play a critical role in enhancing the agency of youth in the country, and providing them with the voice and presence in the political arena that they previously lacked. The movement has in the last decade being a credible and consistent one, that Senegalese depend on to question and challenge the excesses of the state and its elites.

What is evident in most of the chapters in this volume is that youth-led social movements have become a principal platform for sociopolitical expression, especially in countries where there is limited respect for human rights and the rule of law. These movements have, over the years, succeeded in demystifying regimes and leaders, and confronting them, in some cases breaking decades of silence as was seen in North Africa and the Middle East. While most of the aspirations of the movements in relation to socioeconomic and political changes may not have been met, there is a growing awareness among African elites that they can no longer ignore, suppress or dismiss the views and aspirations of young people.

## State Response to Youth-Led Social Movements

The responses by states in Africa to youth-led movements differ, depending on the nature of the movement and the issues that spark a protest as well as

the nature of the state. Generally, however, states are heavy-handed and use maximum force when dealing with youth protests, as analysed in the cases in this book. The immediate response of elites is not to seek constructive engagements with youth but rather to dismiss, criminalise and label them anti-social and idle.

The reaction of Alpha Condé in Guinea is typical of African autocratic leaders, who view youth movements as anti-regime and as voices that must be silenced. Similar approaches were used by governments in North Africa during the Arab Spring. For instance, in Libya and Egypt, the use of force on protesters by security attracted international criticism, with Libya eventually plummeting into a violent civil war. However, in Tunisia, the military chose to take a different approach and to remain neutral, which resulted in saving lives, in contrast with events in neighbouring states.

In Zimbabwe, as indicated above, youth have re-engineered their movements to be less confrontational, given the repressive nature of the regime. The use of grassroots, community-based approaches that employ popular arts as a means of mobilisation and education of their peers has gained traction. The more the state seeks to be repressive, the more innovative the youth become. For them, confronting the state will only lead to loss of lives, as the state is prepared not to engage but rather to discourage and neutralise them.

The failure on the part of states to engage with and address the concerns of youth has, for decades, affected the relationship between youth and their leaders. In places such as Guinea and Burkina Faso, the government promoted the emergence of parallel pro-government protests aimed at silencing the youth. The use of money and promise of government positions led to some youth abandoning their movements to take the side of the government. Additionally, while the internet and social media can certainly aid young people in their quest towards revolution, they can also be weaponised by the state (Dwyer & Molony 2019). In countries such as Sudan, Guinea and Tunisia, social media was intermittently blocked to reduce the distribution of media materials, thereby undermining the efficacy of the protests and violating the rights of protesters. While these measures were meant to limit the potency of the protests, youth found ways through the blocks to transmit messages to their peers outside of their countries.

The diaspora in most cases is critical in helping, through the use of social media and other engagements, to draw international attention to protests in their home countries and the need for diplomatic pressure on states to stop the use of violence against protesters (Dwyer & Molony 2019; Fadlalla 2019). It appears that the effective mobilisation and participation through virtual means of the Tunisian diaspora in the protests against the Ali administration had multiplier effects as it contributed to stirring demands and protests for socioeconomic and political changes across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The usual mischaracterisation and desire to get rid of youth-led social movements by state actors have only deepened mistrust between the state and its youth. Additionally, the heavy-handedness of governments against protesters

appears in several contexts to be counterproductive. Even in cases where a regime succeeds in suppressing protests without addressing their concerns, the quiet that ensues is temporary, as the people will eventually rise up again and demand a change of government and their socioeconomic conditions. This is the experience of Burkina Faso, Tunisia, Sudan, Libya and Egypt, where once powerful and oppressive regimes fell, after decades of ignoring the calls for positive transformations in society. Governments that utilise constructive rather than violent routes to engaging youth on their concerns tend to have positive outcomes, as could be seen in some societies in Western Europe. Positive outcomes help to shape policy development and also transform the relationship between youth-led movements and the state.

## Usurped Revolutions – Re-Emergence of Elites/Military Regimes/Autocrats

A major setback for youth movements, particularly those that succeeded in changing governments, has been the re-emergence of elites, and the fierce competition with other new actors for domination of the political space (Boubekeur 2016; Boukhars 2017; Josua & Edel 2021). In countries such as Sudan, Tunisia and Burkina Faso, the post-revolution transitional processes have marginalised youth and women, with mostly the re-emerged elites playing a defining role in shaping the approach to governance. Thus, the leadership changes that take place mostly affect incumbent heads of state and their cronies.

What appears to be a common trend in some of the countries that have experienced changes resulting from youth protests is the gradual re-emergence of autocrats or military regimes. In Egypt and Sudan, the youth largely perceive their revolution as stolen. In Guinea, the military took over citing the constitutional breach by Condé and his brutality against protesters, and the need for a democratic transition as some of their core reasons for the coup.[1] However, the same regime has refused to provide a timeline for a democratic transition and is refusing to heed international calls for a transfer of power to a civilian. This indefinite stay has raised concerns of the future of Guinea and its youth. In Tunisia, Kais Saied has been criticised for his drastic reform and radical approach to governance, raising concerns of a potential drift to dictatorship (Ebel 2021). Interestingly, as indicated in the chapter on Tunisia, he has a large base of support from the youth, who have grown disillusioned and frustrated with their experience of political exclusion from their previous democratic government and its lack of action against economic downturn (Ebel 2021).

The eventual transition into governance structures that are similar to those the youth had fought against has devastating effects, with longer term implications in relation to loss of faith and confidence in political systems in their country. This sense of apathy and defeat is seen in post-conflict societies like Liberia and Sierra Leone, where former combatants tend to shy away from society and its politics, out of a feeling of despair and defeat, due to the relapse

into the pre-war status quo (Bangura 2016; Bangura & Specht 2012). In Egypt, youth movements are submerged, out of frustration and fear of a militarised state, and a decreased social space in which to air opinions. In Sudan, the recent coup and the show of force by the military has drastically changed the perception held by the public, of a military that was on their side during the revolution.[2] The emergence of the country's military head, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, as head of state has led to serious clashes between the military and civilians in several cities in the country, with the coup facing widespread international condemnation.[3]

According to respondents of the research studies for the chapters on Sudan and Tunisia, young people feel that their revolutions have been co-opted from them by the very elites they have struggled against, be they political or military. These elites have taken advantage of the instability and vacuum that preceded the fall of long-term autocracies to install themselves (indicative of a strong/entrenched political structure that will be hard to dismantle). The youth of Egypt have had a similar experience, where the hope for a strong democratic system was cut short by the emergence of el-Sisi and his military dictatorship. Thus, a once vibrant youthful population now appears to be less active, and largely excluded from governance in Egypt – the direct opposite of what they fought for during the anti-Mubarak protests. The emerged military leaders in Sudan, Guinea and Egypt were all playing leading roles in the previous governments. For instance, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Abdel Fattah al-Burhan were the topmost generals in the Egyptian and Sudanese militaries. In Guinea, Doumbouya was the head of Guinea's presidential guards,[4] while in Zimbabwe, Mnangagwa held influential positions in the Mugabe administration and rose to the position of Vice President, prior to falling out with Robert Mugabe and his wife, Grace Mugabe (Lubombo 2018). These leaders were all part of the previous systems that marginalised youth and they have resorted to the use of the same practices, after benefiting in most cases from the fall of previous heads of state.

Inasmuch as there appear to be autocratic that now dominate some of the countries mentioned above, it is apparent that there is no guarantee of peace and stability in affected countries. This period of seeming quiet is best described by Johan Galtung's concept of 'Negative Peace' (Galtung 1969), and is usually a period of calm before the storm. The new regimes could learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. These lessons could help guide current leaders on how to approach and deal with young people. In Tunisia, Kais Saied has the opportunity of transforming the state relationship with its youth through opening the socio-economic and political space for them and building their capacity to effectively contribute to governance and peacebuilding in the country. Failure to do so could further plunge Tunisia into chaos, as the youth appear to be determined to continue challenging the status quo and demanding that their voices be heard.

## Measuring Successes of a Youth-Led Social Movement

An important question that needs further investigation is what constitutes success for a youth-led social movement and how can that success be measured?

Answers provided for such a pertinent question may be subjective as there are several typologies of youth-led movements, with different reasons for their mobilisation and differing goals. Additionally, initial goals may change as the groups evolve and needs changes. Thus, success has to be contextualised to have reasonable answers that will speak to specific groups. For instance, for some groups it is about opening the socioeconomic and political space, while for others, it may be a demand for a change of the government. Nonetheless, across all the countries included in this volume, there are basic demands: freedom, dignity, economic opportunities, affordable education and agency, so that the masses can shape their own destinies and that of their countries.

The Arab Spring succeeded in drawing global attention to decades of oppression of youth in the MENA region and destabilised once powerful regimes. The ability to do so showcased the agency and power of mobilised youth. It also brought to light the suppressed desire for freedom, constitutional order and democracy in countries in the region. Despite the fact that the revolutions may not have ended as anticipated, the youth (as concluded from some of the data collected on Tunisia) did not initially believe that they could bring down the regimes in their countries. The eventual ability to do so cast light on the fact that leaders can only be as powerful as their people accept them to be.

The re-emergence of the elites and military leaders in some countries undermines the initial successes of youth-led social movements, but cannot consistently suppress the calls for freedom and democratic order from young people – why has this re-emergence happened? The regular push by elites to counter the demands of youth and to entrench systems that marginalise them, presents long-term challenges and also provides the potential for what can be described as 'postponed revolutions', as may be the case in Egypt and Zimbabwe. As such, protests cannot be said to be unsuccessful if the goals are not immediately achieved as they contend with multiple layers of resistance from the state. Entrenched political systems take a long time to uproot and the expectations of overturning a system overnight may lead to frustration, as has been the case in Tunisia. This calls for youth movements to manage expectations, as failure to do so may result in desperation, demoralisation and frustration among youth activists, which can unsettle a movement and weaken its ability to achieve its goals.

While it may be argued that youth protests have not led to the kind of democratic societies that the people seek to achieve, and in fact have resulted in further regression into autocratism in some cases, it cannot be denied that there is increased consciousness of demands for rights and freedoms on the continent. Coupled with this, young people are aware of their agency and waking up to their power to self-mobilise. Even in societies where youth movements have not reached their maturation point, like Guinea, young people are willing to confront the state on critical issues.

In countries such as Senegal, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau, there has been success in relation to the transformation of relationships between some movements and the respective states. Parties involved have been more

collaborative and hence productive, especially in dealing with global challenges such as COVID-19 and violent extremism.

Young people in many countries are trying to adapt to the nature of the state's response to their movements. Through the use of social media, they have formed links of transnational solidarity, learning from the successes and failures of one another. Though there are many struggles that young people across the continent have in common, the subjective nature of state responses and cultural nuances demand that young people find creative ways of subverting authority to continue their expressions of dissent.

## Bridging the Gap: A Common Future for All Generations

One of the common questions asked by some respondents engaged in studies related to this book is whether African youth will be able to break free from the shackles of gerontocracy, corruption and political exclusion There is no simplistic and generic response as this may depend on several variables including the desire of society, especially the elder generation, to change their mindset and see young people as the critical demographic and partners in development. This will help countries move beyond the mere development of unenforced policies to the adoption of practices that mainstream youth propose, and letting the youth own developmental processes and constitutionalism. The lessons from most of the chapters indicate that where an intergenerational approach is not adopted, the outcome is lip service, with elites submerging during protests, only to re-emerge and seize the political arena again.

Despite the points made above, it will be difficult for most states in Africa to stem the power of youth, now the most populous of all age demographics on the continent. Keeping the youth on the sidelines and forcing them to occupy subaltern positions will be detrimental to peace and socioeconomic development on the continent. Youth are now much more conscious of their agency and ability to effect changes or disrupt a system regardless of the obstacles presented by elites. A positive intergenerational relationship could foster trust and confidence between all generations. Trust existence of trust could help youth to emerge from years of justified disillusionment with the state and will foster their political mainstreaming. Additionally, the use of an integrated intergenerational and intersectional approach to governance could help African states better understand and embrace the benefits of youth as agents of peace and change in their societies. Examples of movements in the chapters on Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso and Senegal show how youth groups could work with state actors to identify and address challenges in their communities.

Investments by governments in Africa in the development of youth are vital for the cultivation of their imagination and creativity, which the youth have in abundance, but is mostly untapped and underutilised. Investments in education, agriculture and career development could build the capacity of youth and lift them out of poverty and economic hardship. Such investments could support

the growth and development of communities, thereby limiting vulnerabilities that contribute to violence and instability at the local level.

The older generations and elites could look at youth-led social movements with a positive lens, as watchdogs and whistle-blowers that can alert society to the shortcomings of government. The identification of gaps in governance could help governments take strategic decisions that will strengthen constitutional democracy, with governments becoming more transparent and accountable to their people. Such movements in Western societies have contributed to the strengthening of democratic practices, which successive governments adhere to.

Gerontocratic practices, as seen in most of the countries examined in this book, entrench the period of 'Waithood' and the deliberate and perpetual neglect that have stolen the youthhood of the young generation on the continent. Such deliberate neglect has only widened the gap and suspicion between generations, a phenomenon that could be termed 'lost generations of youth' in the affected societies (Honwana 2013). These are youth who are trapped in an endless transition from youthhood to 'adulthood' with the potential of being permanently confined within that trajectory. This is further exacerbated in societies where adulthood and where adulthood and an advanced age are valued, and tied to economic resources and social status (Branch & Mampilly 2015).

In countries such as Guinea, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Tunisia, it was observed that elders and elites largely dismiss young people as the "future" of their countries in order to justify their marginalisation, and even tend to wonder why they want to be involved in governance issues at an early age. Questioned on this mindset of the elites, a Guinea youth activist[5] said:

> Why discuss the future when the present is dark, uncompromising and dismissive of young people? Why discuss the future when the present is chaotic and unfixed? As young people, our business is to focus on fixing today, so we do not have to face the same challenges tomorrow. The way tomorrow will look will depend strongly on the kind of actions we take today. Today is what is most important to us, and we will work on fixing it.

The ability of societies to fully enact policies and practices that will mainstream youth into governance and decision-making, and to have them lead processes that would enhance their voice, place, identity and recognition in society, will go a long way in overcoming existing challenges on the continent. Gerontocratic practices limit the potential of youth and their societies, and an intergenerational approach to governance yields productive results.

## International Actors and Youth-Led Social Movements in Africa

Intergovernmental organisations have crucial roles to play in promoting peace, security and stability in their member states, and they could do so by

encouraging and working with those states to comply with laws and protocols at the regional and sub-regional levels. For instance, the African Peace and Security Architecture, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the AU Conventions are all central to promoting prevention of conflicts and instability if they are implemented by the states.

However, in spite of the policies and protocols adopted by intergovernmental organisations such as the African Union (AU) and its Regional Economic Community (RECs), their approach to youth-led social movements has been highly criticised by young people. The chapter on Guinea provides examples of how young people have expressed their disappointments in these organisations, especially the silence of these organisations in the face of state repression and violence against youth led social movements. While there is the question of sovereignty, most states are signatories to international conventions and covenants that are geared towards protecting and promoting human rights. Even in cases where it is evident that there has been a gross violation of human rights by the state, action taken by these agencies amounts to little more than media statements and verbal commitments within the right circles.

With the increase in existential and emerging threats to democracy and quality of lives in Africa, there is an immediate and urgent need for the AU and its RECs to move from rhetoric to action, otherwise they will gradually become irrelevant. Investments in capacity building for state actors on youth issues, political engagements and preventive diplomacy could help prevent violence against youth-led social movements. Furthermore, states will benefit from the creation of platforms for government actors to learn from the experiences of other countries on how to constructively engage youth movements and seek common ground on national issues and those concerning the youth.

The AU and its RECs should therefore take the lead by prioritising and mainstreaming issues relating to youth, women and children in their agendas. This action will stimulate and promote a change in approach within member states. Certainly, international actors such as the United Nations and other development partners have their role to play and could be more effective if their actions were harmonised.

## Looking to the Future

There is mixed appreciation of what the future holds for African youth. The Arab Spring ushered in a period of hope for Northern African youth, but the failure to sustain the momentum in some countries, the harsh reactions of elites, and the re-emergence of the political old guard that young people rose up against diluted the initial gains made. Additionally, military coups are becoming more common. Together with the growing threat of violent extremism in Africa, factors such as bad governance, systemic corruption and lack of socioeconomic and political opportunities have trapped the African youth in many societies in a difficult place, with an uncertain future. This uncertainty becomes much more precarious with the unwillingness for change on the part of the governing elites.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic presents two trajectories for African societies and their youth. On the one hand, it has contributed to the transformation of the space for political dissent. Despotic regimes in countries such as Zimbabwe, Uganda and Sudan are taking advantage of the pandemic shrinking civic space to control the everyday lives of their citizens, curb political expression and thus increase state suppression of human rights and disregard for the rule of law. As a result of the effect of the pandemic on the international community, there is a tendency for human rights violations to go unnoticed, as countries tend to be much more inward looking at times of crises. Compounded with this is the economic distress and social losses through death and disease. All these factors have consequences for the future of state–society and in turn, state–youth relations.

On the other hand, the pandemic also presents a potential demand for greater transparency around the world as governments must demonstrate that they are doing what is needed to protect public health and the welfare of their people. Additionally, as the world moves deeper into the digital age, the power of communication through technology has opened up new avenues for youth to explore and utilise internet-based tools in their struggle for power and agency.

With the expectation of COVID-19 subsiding in the near future, there are prospects for several protests in various African countries, with young people demanding changes in their welfare and constitutional democracy. It will be nearly impossible for governments to silence their youth and failing to address their concerns and meet their needs would have negative consequences for peace, security and stability in those societies. Political actors should understand that youth inclusion in governance does not dilute the participation of the elders; it strengthens the state and reduces the potential for instability and violence. Young people may no longer be suppressed for lengthy periods, as they now better understand their agency and ability to self-mobilise and confront the state. The postponed revolutions may soon spring up in some countries, global increase in economic hardship/global incrase in financial insecurity.

The constructive transformation of the relationship between the youth and the state, and the ability of the state to promote youth inclusion in governance and support their mobilisation for national development and peacebuilding, could have immense positive outcomes for all.

## Notes

1 See: Al Jazeera. 2020. "Timeline: A Year of Bloody Protests in Guinea." www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/14/timeline-a-year-of-bloody-protests-in-guinea (Accessed on 18 November 2021).
2 See: British Broadcasting Corporation. 2021. "Sudan Coup: Military Dissolves Civilian Government and Arrests Leaders." www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59033142 (Accessed on 17 November 2021).
3 See: www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59052260 (Accessed on 11 November 2021).
4 See: www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58461971 (Accessed on 17 November 2021).
5 Interview conducted in Conakry on 13 July 2021.

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