# AJIS

## African Journal
## of Inclusive Societies

## Humanities and the Democracy Project in Africa: Challenges and Prospects

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The African Journal of Inclusive Societies (AJIS) is published by SIVIO Institute and aspires to address the problem of ineffectual participation in public processes by non-state actors in Africa. The journal features independent research and promotes knowledge generation by African scholars by creating a publication space centred on collective action, civil rights, democracy and development in Africa. SIVIO Institute (SI) is an independent organisation focused on ensuring that citizens are at the centre of processes of socio-economic and policy change. It aims to contribute towards Africa's inclusive socio-economic transformation. It is borne out of a desire to enhance agency as a stimulus/catalyst for inclusive political and socio-economic transformation.

# FOREWORD

## Making the Connection between the Humanities and Democracy

There are two pertinent questions that are being raised separately: (i) do we need the Humanities and (ii) does democracy have a future. The questions are seemingly isolated, yet they are deeply connected. Let me start off by clarifying what we mean by the Humanities. A common understanding is provided by Encyclopedia Britannica of the Humanities as 'those branches of knowledge that concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and of the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself'[1]. They include the study of all languages and literatures[2], the arts[3], history[4], and philosophy[5]. They are distinct from the study of physical[6] and biological[7] sciences and, somewhat less decisively, from the social[8] sciences. The relationship between the Humanities and Social Sciences is not clear to many but it exists. Humanities, as a field of study, faces an existential threat - the 4th Industrial Revolution based on the idea of disruption and globalisation presents a new challenge to the ways or investments in higher and tertiary education. Is it still necessary to teach

literature, the arts, history, and philosophy? There is a new emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The public budgets allocated towards STEM subjects are increasing rapidly and the Social Sciences and the Humanities are not receiving similar support. Is there a future for the Humanities?

Democracy, that dominant framework of politically organising countries since, maybe Fukuyama's now contested end of History thesis[9]. Yet democracy has suffered various mutilations- increasingly many others think of it as only focused on the conduct of elections and ensure transfer of power from one regime to the other. In this instance we have reduced democracy, an otherwise very powerful idea, into a stale event, that is dominated by elite political interests that have no relationship with what the rest of the country needs. The contests in the name of democracy are many and varied but few of them are connected to the original idea. It is greed that has taken over and not the equality and egalitarianism that democracy was meant to foster. Many surveys point to

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1.  https://www.britannica.com/topic/Humanities.

2.  Literature | Definition, Characteristics, Genres, Types, & Facts | Britannica

3.  The arts | Creative Expression, Visual Arts & Performing Arts | Britannica

4.  History | Definition & Discipline | Britannica

5.  Philosophy | Definition, Systems, Fields, Schools, & Biographies | Britannica

6.  Physical science | Definition, History, & Topics | Britannica

7.  Biology | Definition, History, Concepts, Branches, & Facts | Britannica

8.  Social science | History, Disciplines, Future Development, & Facts | Britannica

9.  https://pages.ucsd.edu/~bslantchev/courses/pdf/Fukuyama%20-%20End%20of%20History.pdf

the increasing unpopularity of democracy, especially amongst the youths. Is it really democracy that they are rejecting? It is probably the corrupted version of democracy that narrowly focuses on elections that they detest. No doubt elections are necessary. But is that enough to achieve democracy? We hold to the thought that 'free and fair elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition to achieve democracy'. What needs to be done? Perhaps we have been looking at the question of democracy in parts. We have not devoted significant attention to the other components of democracy namely citizens and their agency. There is an urgent need to pay greater attention to civic associations, the informal economy, street protest and the emergence of new forms of civic engagement. Democracy should not be limited to what takes place during elections, but it is also about what citizens do. What if citizens hold the key to complete democratisation? In its pure sense then, democracy is a culture of public life and not an event.

What then is the connection between democracy and Humanities? In the absence of an ongoing inquiry into human behaviors in terms of their history, public discourses in the form of languages spoken, various artistic expressions and both old and modern philosophies, we risk stagnation as a society, and thus negatively impacting upon democracy. Even the arguments being made in favor of STEM miss an important point, that is, it is our way of life that has sparked the 4th Industrial Revolution. The origins of Facebook are based on the classic philosophy of the need for community. For Plato, the very genre of philosophical writing is dialogue with others. At the beginning of Nicomachean Ethics, when Aristotle argues for the supreme good for humans, he includes community as a necessary ingredient. He says, "For while it is satisfactory to acquire and preserve the good even for an individual, it is finer and more divine to acquire and preserve it for a people and for cities" (1094b9-11). The ubiquitous chat platform (WhatsApp) is based on the recognition of the importance of families and communities to keep in touch. Dialogue, family, and community drive technological innovations. Yet STEM does not contribute anything new to understanding everyday lives from this perspective. Imagine for a moment what would happen if we closed the studies of Humanities. The answer is too ghastly to contemplate. STEM will become irrelevant. It would lose its inspiration or guiding North Star. Democracy would become even more transactional without understanding the role played by language, poetry and prose as used in defense of the public space, in articulating public issues. The learnings from previous historical blunders would be missed. Citizenship, understood here not referring to the legal occupation of a territory but as a verb meaning the act of being engaged in public collective action (the engine of democracy), will not adequately flourish.

We are at the crossroads. Democracy and the Humanities are under attack. Few of us are making the necessary connections. This special volume on the connections between the Humanities and Democracy is a necessary and urgent intervention on the issues at play. The authors, from various Humanities disciplines have brought to the fore various issues affecting our 'democracies' in Africa. A task that can only be accomplished meaningfully when viewing is done through

the Humanities lens. The idea of repairing the public space through building trust requires re-centering the Humanities in nation building projects. There is need for renewed vigor in making sure that we tell our stories (past and present) through history, using different forms of art including satire (works of fiction, drama, poetry etc.). The democracy we envision depends on a thriving Humanities.

**Tendai Murisa**
*Editor in Chief*

## INTRODUCTION

## What's humanities got to do with it? Locating the node between humanities and democracy in Africa

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*Key words*: humanities, democracy, Africa, theory, method

# INTRODUCTION

This volume is premised upon the objective of bringing together papers within the broad area of humanities and to illustrate the interconnections of humanities and democracy in Africa. Contemporary knowledge making systems in Africa, and indeed across the globe, are predominantly branded by a relentless pushback against humanities studies. This pushback emanates from assumptions about the lack of relevance of humanities research and learning in the political development of African nations (Omonzejie, 2017). So, when faced with the waning value of humanities, scholars, researchers, activists and practitioners have to continually defend their value and applicability to the improvement of nations and societies. One of the most abiding themes in African political practices is that there is ample room to improve on existing good governance and democratic practices for the overall development of African nations, yet still, the relevance of humanities in theorising and practicing democracy in Africa is highly disputed. It is therefore, this volume's purpose to re-center the humanities by illustrating how humanities are indispensable for democracy in Africa and showing the particular ways in which humanities conceptually and methodologically motivate democratic practices. The volume theme is dictated by a firm belief in the significance of the humanities' ability to achieve sustainable democracy projects in Africa. This significance is particularly located in the ways in which the humanities are closely related to societal concerns and how they seamlessly intermesh the personal and the political. The volume takes a cue from the emancipatory potential of humanities by bringing together papers which theoretically and practically tap into this emancipatory potential. Human voice, self-expression and dialogue are values that are at the core of humanities and the same values are equally integral to the achievement of democracy. The volume, thus, emphasizes the importance of intracontinental and transnational conversations through a collection of interlocked contributions by African scholars, cultural activists and practitioners whose work illustrates the symbiotic relationship between humanities and democracy in Africa and develop innovative practices which invigorate an agenda for the future of the humanities and democracy in Africa.

# MAKING SENSE OF HUMANITIES

It is Nzimakwe (2014) who emphasises that the quest for those things which are good, valuable, and majestic lies at the heart of humanities. For Nzimakwe, humanities represent the most vibrant human culture which aims at making rulers accountable and to make society open. Humanities research, therefore, focuses on what it signifies to be not just a whole human being, but collective beings. The study of human interaction, experiences, and transformation at the individual and social level is what comes under the umbrella of humanities. Humanities research and practice affords human beings the chance to confer their experiences and situations through subjects such as philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language (Isiramen et. al, 2016). The issue of BEING is central to humanities and in many ways, humanities teach us not just about who we used to be and who we currently are, but also who we can be based on our imaginations and from our aspirations. Humanities have a huge impact on how people see the world and how

they interact with others by utilising a variety of concepts and methods which are derived from human lived experiences. There is an implicit element built into much humanities research and practice, which is both a symptom and cause of an undertaking to view human life in processional rather than static terms. This is because the human experience is dynamic and aspects of human culture transmute as they are passed down from one generation to the next. Humanities are flexible enough to adequately capture the fluidity of human culture across space and time. They achieve this by posing questions about common assumptions, uncovering new meanings and finding new ways to understand cultural interactions, existential problems and challenges. One of the most common of these assumptions is that the relevance of humanities in theorising and practicing democracy is highly doubtful.

In different ways, the chapters in this volume broadly dispute this assumption and use different African contexts as case studies for how humanities are indispensable for democracy in Africa. The nexus between humanities and democracy in Africa is carefully highlighted through a diverse range of theories and methods which apply well to the study of language, literature, culture, popular arts gender and the media. Contributions to this volume support the argument that humanities involve concepts and methods which have a huge potential of advancing the way we make sense of African cultural realities and their entanglements with democratic governance issues.

# HUMANITIES AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: A SNAPSHOT VIEW FROM THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME

The humanities democracy node influences the theoretical and methodological structure and manner in which this volume's contributors interpretively and empirically discuss the overt and covert ways in which African values and norms play a deterministic role in democratic governance issues. It is Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro who, in the first chapter considers the interactions between African feminist activism and democracy by problematising social media publics and the online activities of Zimbabwean women in politics. Chikafa-Chipiro locates social media as a provenance for Zimbabwean feminist activist transformations and democracy initiatives. She theoretically posits that the contentions around Zimbabwean women's political participation and violations against women in politics not only reflect the complexities within African feminism but also the coloniality of gender and how these, together with theories of the public sphere can further feminist activism. To support her arguments, Chikafa-Chipiro expertly uses online ethnography of purposively selected Facebook posts and Tweets by Zimbabwean women in politics, feminist activists and/or gender organisations. She concludes her study by insisting that Zimbabwean women politicians across the political divide should brave online publics and represent themselves and their causes without fear of intimidation by inventing online and offline strategies that protect them in their private and public lives and inspire local and transnational feminism.

In the second chapter, Tsiidzai Matsika conceptually and methodologically draws her analysis on a fundamental humanities research tool, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to debunk the political personalisation of democracy and the ways in which Zimbabwean political parties insert their parties in the narrative of the modern manifestations, conceptions and practices of democracy. Matsika insists that democracy is not one dimensional, but, it incorporates multiple layers of meaning and practices. The author places laser focus on how Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) narratives and stylistic designs are incorporated into their agenda-setting strategies, identity construction and discursive legitimation. Her analysis of the theory and discourse of democracy illuminates the conventions, logics and dictates of language, knowledge and meaning. She exposes the inherent politics, nuances and paradoxes of democracy and through CDA, and manages to show how democracy works as a political strategy that on the one hand contests power but on the other hand gestures to a political alternative and a sustainable development plan. Mastika proficiently considers CDA as a qualitative and narrative analysis method which she focuses on generic features of whole political texts rather than isolated features of the text. By doing so, the chapter critically illuminates into the politics of democracy discourse and its relationship to Zimbabwean politics in the context of broader narratives of the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political crisis. Matsika interpretively reads selected political party manifestoes so as to dissect these discourses and the power contestations characterising contemporary Zimbabwean politics. She conclusively contends that normative representations in political discourses are entrenched in specific cultures and these cultures denote institutionalised practices of decision-making and means of legitimation.

In the third chapter, Aaron Mukandabvute draws on the work being done by various Kiswahli associations to make a case for how language can be used as a bridge towards the attainment of inclusive societies. Mukandabvute shows how a good number of African cultures and academic associations exist through Kiswahili language which becomes not just a communal construct but also an individual construct which is in fostering numerous categories of inclusion. The author achieves his study objectives by situating his argument within humanities which he deliberately conceptualises as the study of human interactions, experiences and human transformations which occur at both the individual and collective levels. He argues that at the center of diverse human interactions, lies a fundamental device, which is language. The author further posits that language plays an important role of bridging the communicative gaps which occur across multifarious communities. In his attempt to make sense of the intimate correlation between humanities and democracy in Africa, Mukandabvute makes a case for a critical inquiry into the specific role played by Kiswahili academic associations to foster democratic features of inclusivity and diversity. Mukandabvute illustrates how Kiswahili language, which is the glue that binds these academic associations, connects individuals, academics, communities, cultures, nations and cultivates a sense of inclusivity. As the most widely spoken and studied language in Africa, Mukandabvute shares the conviction that Kiswahili is a strategic instrument for creating inclusive African societies. The author uses Therbon's framework of inclusivity and the

Social Role Valorisation theory as its guiding conceptual frameworks for illuminating into various dimensions of inclusion and exclusion in Kiswahili academic associations as well as the underlying intricacies of inclusion and exclusion. Mukandabvute however, does not fall into the trap of romanticising the role played by Kiswahili to promote inclusive societies, he also shows the existing barriers to inclusion as a result of complex socio-cultural and political dynamics. Nevertheless, Mukandabvute maintains his main convictions on the significant role played by Kiswahili as a strategic language of inclusion for African citizenry which bridges communication barriers by connecting individuals of diverse cultures, religions, ideologies and languages.

In chapter four, Kudakwashe Bandama compels us to think beyond the formality of politics and to consider informal politics, that is, culture, in African democratic governance processes. Bandama explores the intricate connection between culture and social norms, which together mold the framework for all democratic practices. Bandama defines culture as that which encompasses a rich array of customs, rituals, religious beliefs, traditions, music and enterprise. The author insists that culture exerts significant influence in shaping human conduct and, by extension, democratic norms. Bandama shows how, through its pervasive impact, culture intricately weaves together the social and political realms unveiling the nuanced effects of norms and practices on accountability, inclusivity, tolerance and transparency within democratic systems. Bandama draws specific examples from The Gambia to evaluate the distinct campaign and voting processes in this country, and provides an analysis which is aimed at affirming the practical significance culture has on democracy. Bandama's exploration of the interplay between

cultural norms and democratic processes is used to emphasise their sway over civic participation, pluralism and the core tenets of democracy. Bandama further highlights how culture, as a formative force, shapes individual outlooks toward political engagement, spotlighting the substantial influence of factors like religion, tradition and socialisation. Bandama's analysis successfully elucidates on this relationship by underscoring the fundamental association between humanities and culture. He explains that humanities serve as the cornerstone upon which various aspects of culture, particularly modes being, are constructed. The chapter decisively emphasises that culture wields substantial guidance on democratic practices, by acting as the foundation upon which societal norms and political behaviours are constructed. For Bandama, making sense of the ways in which culture molds democratic involvement allows policymakers, cultural activists and scholars to develop strategies for harnessing cultural strengths.

The fifth and final chapter brings the volume full circle by foregrounding the important but often overlooked connection between creative arts and social engagement. With specific reference to contemporary Kenya, Brian Otieno illustrates the ways in which selected Kenyan creative arts nurture the kind of wisdom and social engagement that is required of individuals and communities within a democratic nation. Otieno positions Kenyan creative culture and art as democratic philosophy which is central to ensuring that people freely engage with issues of the day thereby promoting democratic practices. Specifically, Otieno selects digital narratives, popular music and participatory theatre and considers the social role that they play in observing, evaluating and developing artistic

models for addressing social problems and to create collective forms of social engagement.

## CONCLUSION

In many ways, the contributions in this volume indeed answer the question "What's humanities got to do with it?" The epistemic knot which ties the five contributions in this volume is the way in which they demonstrate how humanities concepts and methods are not neutral to democratic governance issues as commonly assumed. The authors' interventions unanimously show the diverse ways in which humanities question the link between knowing democracy and being democratic and possessing democratic values in different African contexts. Ultimately, the chapters all set an invigorating African political studies agenda by way of re-asserting the significance of humanities subjects and presenting humanities that are democratically affirming and aspirational and not just about disappointment.

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# African feminist activism and democracy: Social media publics and Zimbabwean women in politics online

Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro (iD)

## ABSTRACT

*"We need to begin our questioning, activism and theorising from the spaces from which we are dying,"* Funmi Olonisakin.

The political landscape in Zimbabwe is largely a post-colonial hetero-patriarchal domain that pushes women politicians to the border of politics. Constraints in civic engagement and political participation that is characteristic of a shrinking democracy and exclusionary public sphere subsist. The 2023 election and its campaign period has shown that the socio-economic and political landscape is unpredictable with serious threats to women's participation in politics. The lives of Zimbabwean women in politics are continually subjected to multiple forms of violence online and offline. Meanwhile, African feminist activism in the country has seemingly taken several steps back. Zimbabwean feminist activists risk being co-opted into the hetero-patriarchal socio-political structures. There is evidence of a considerable disconnect between feminist/gender activists and women in politics that needs to be addressed. In Senegal and South Africa among other countries, protests by younger generations of feminists have addressed this divide through innovations in protest strategies resulting in the re-formation of radical politics (Dieng, 2023; Hassim, 2023). With social media at the disposal of the younger generation of women politicians the movement is set on a revolutionary trajectory. The sustained social media presence of the new crop of women politicians has created active intimate and counter-publics who engage in vital Zimbabwean political dialogue. The new crop of women politicians referred to here are younger women politicians who unlike their predecessors are very active on social media and have no liberation war experience. The study locates social media as a provenance for Zimbabwean feminist activist revolutionising and democracy initiatives. Theoretically, I posit that the contentions around women's political participation and violations against Zimbabwean women in politics are revealing of intricacies in African feminism and the coloniality of gender and how these, together with theories of the public sphere can further feminist activism. The study will utilise online ethnography of purposively selected Facebook posts and Tweets by Zimbabwean women in politics, feminist activists and/or gender organisations.

*Key words*: women in politics, African feminist activism, social media, publics, democracy

# INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean political landscape continues to be unpredictable especially with the just ended disputed 2023 elections. Statistics indicate that women's participation in politics is decreasing steadily. A research by Women Lead Africa shows the steady decline in women's representation in the National Assembly with figures of women directly elected via the first-past-the-post system being 15% in 2008; 12% in 2013; 11.9% in 2018 and 10.5% in 2023. A lot has happened in the obtaining period with a transition from the Robert Mugabe regime which ended in November 2017 to the current ED Mnangagwa reign which is under scrutiny after the recent harmonised elections. The Robert Mugabe regime was characterised by violence against women in politics which gender activists among other stakeholders had hoped would come to an end at the behest of the 'Second Republic' that came into power after the coercive removal of Mugabe. 2017 marked the dawn of a new era of politics in Zimbabwe with the populace having high hopes for democratisation including women's equal participation in politics. However, a number of events quashed most of these hopes as women in politics continued to be discriminated against and subjected to many forms of violence online and offline. Brutal examples of violence against women in politics include the alleged abduction and sexual abuse of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC-formerly MDC Alliance) trio – Joanna Mamombe, Cecilia Chimbiri and Netsai Marowa by state security agents in May 2020 and the gruesome murder of CCC activist Moreblessing Ali. Violence against women in politics does not only happen to opposition party members but also happens internally within political parties including the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). ZANU PF women politicians have long been labelled prostitutes with narratives of rape, sexual harassment and promiscuity stretching back to the liberation struggle. The stereotype of prostitution among women politicians has continued unabated.

The proliferation of social media has to a larger extent exacerbated the violence against women with 'generic trolls' and 'gender trolls' bullying women in politics and continuously subjecting them to structural violence online. Trolls are online bullies who attack people or cause trouble by posting derogatory comments and they thrive on social media largely because of the anonymous nature with which one can engage on the platforms. In the Zimbabwean social media scape even well-known individuals using known accounts participate in trolling. For example, George Charamba the presidential spokesperson using the moniker 'Jamwanda' called Fadzai Mahere "Nyembesi" (a prostitute) on Twitter. A number of researches speak to this and show that structural violence online and offline may be linked to women's withdrawal from political participation. There are a number of initiatives that civic organisations have spearheaded and continue to lead but more still needs to be done. Recently Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and/or gender organisations including UN Women, Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe and Women and Law in Southern Africa among others launched the #EndViolenceVoteForHerCampaign in order to encourage the populace to vote for women candidates. The campaign included video content with women from various spheres of influence campaigning through addressing the constraints to gender equality in the political field. However, active engagement with the campaign online was rather low and suggestively

signals a disconnection between women in politics, gender and civic organisations in general. Women politicians could have taken advantage of the campaign and retweeted about it to rally votes from their supporters. The campaign videos mostly included some prominent Zimbabwean personalities who are not politicians which could possibly have alienated the women politicians it sought to garner support for. NGOs in Zimbabwe have played a huge role in matters affecting women in general and have carried out successful campaigns such as the 16 days of activism against gender based violence but when it comes to politics most of their involvement is relatively covert. This may likely be because of the constraints that civic organisations and NGOs face in the country but may also be due to the sensitivity of politics in the country. More often than not NGOs have to tread carefully. Civic organisations' activities are hampered by statutes such as The Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill which 'will give the government unjustifiable control over civil society groups' (International Federation for Human Rights, 2023).

Other feminist scholars have argued that women's civic organisations/NGOs pay lip service to women's participation in politics and are mostly enthusiastic and pro-active on occasions like the instalment of a new government (Mama, 2020). This seems to have been the case among gender organisations in Zimbabwe who expressed hopes for gender parity when the new government came into power. These hopes were extinguished at the onset of violence against women in politics. Thus, women's civic organisations have since been pushed out and necessarily have to organise from the border of Zimbabwean politics resulting in the weakening of the movement's capacity. In a study I carried

out on *African feminist and postcolonial ecologies: Communions of black womanhood in academic and activist narratives in Zimbabwe*, I found out that most activists in the country prefer covertly non-confrontational approaches to gender struggles and many have resorted to working within the country's traditional, albeit hetero-patriarchal structures. Most of them have had to work with traditional leaders such as chiefs and village heads so as to make headway in a rather conservative society that has gatekeeping structures at every turn.

In some instances of political upheaval where women in politics or women with political links are violated, gender organisations' responses are conflicted and to a certain extent subtly selective for reasons that could vary from internal-censorship and fear of political and cultural correctness. Cases in point are on the CCC trio's alleged abduction and arbitrary arrest after being accused of faking their abduction and the case of the ailing Marry Chiwenga, the Vice President's former wife who was made to attend court proceedings while critically ill. Normally, NGOs and civic organisations issue statements against unfair treatment or abuse of women. These statements are shared on their websites and across media platforms including social media. Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe as the mother body of women's rights organisations in the country usually takes the initiative and their cautious approach was apparent in both matters. Social media publics decried the 'silence' of women's organisations in the Marry Chiwenga case which was highly sensitive because of the nature of accusations against her and because she was the spouse of the Vice President. If anything, the uproar by social media publics on the women's organisations' minimal to non-existent response in such cases is a clear sign that

they are watching and social media could actually be a vibrant platform that civic organisations can tap into on a larger scale. Whatever the reasons for the gap between women's civic organisations and women in politics may be, it is apparent that it needs to be bridged aside from the normal stakeholder workshops where they often engage offline. This is not to undermine the invaluable role that gender organisations play in the country but necessarily reflects on the need for solid sustainable structures for vibrant online and offline democratic feminist organising in the country.

## AFRICAN FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

African feminist activism remains an innate militant movement that serves as a robust archive and repository of African women's resistance to all forms of racial, gendered and classist domination. As African feminist activism continues offline the digital public sphere has become a viable vehicle for the movement and for women to fight back. This is especially because the digital media landscape has facilitated the transmission of domination and oppression of women across offline and online spaces. This is a double edged sword in the sense that the transmission, while diminishing women on one hand also offers them a new platform for activism and resistance that can facilitate their emancipation while also enriching the movement. Where offline activism has posed physical barriers for women politicians and women in general, online activism has been enabled by the democratic and free space of individual expression and self-representation offered by digital media.

Funmi Olonisakin (in Magadla, 2020) articulates the magnitude of this in the words, "We need to begin our questioning, activism and theorising from the spaces from which we are dying" which I adopt to address Zimbabwean women in politics' confrontations with structural violence online. It is important to highlight that women politicians' sustained social media presence has created active intimate and counter-publics who engage in vital Zimbabwean political discourse including gender inequalities. Furthermore, the digital sphere enhances connections for African feminists across a wide range of geographies thereby enabling the capacity for furthering transnational organising and quick responses (Dieng, Haastrup and Kang, 2023). A case in point are the global responses to Tsitsi Dangarembga's arbitrary arrest which she posted on her Twitter account. Dangarembga was arrested together with fellow activist Julie Barnes for 'inciting violence' through staging a protest calling for political reform. The arrest happened in 2020 during a highly charged political climate characterised by arrests of activists and journalists including Hopewell Chin'ono (Chingono, 2023). Her tweets garnered immediate global outcries that somewhat disarmed the state and possibly saved her from the worst possible fate. This was a rare feat that proves the potency of social media and its publics. Dangarembga's and Barnes' conviction has since been overturned by the High Court of Zimbabwe. Thus, the movement can capitalise on the power of digital convergences and African feminist synergies to further local and transnational activism.

Research on digital activism across the globe has shown the effectiveness of alternative public spheres, more so for the furtherance of feminist political agendas and democracy in constrained

political environments (Tonnessen & Al-Nagar, 2023; Ndengue, Atsem & Maveun, 2023; Molyneux et. al, 2021, Nyabola, 2018). The typical public sphere as propounded by Habermas (1992) is exclusionary and favours educated and political elites who may well be guardians of 'thin democracies' (Barber, 2004). The general citizens hardly partake in discourses to do with their governance and are normally represented by these elites. This poses racial, classist and gendered exclusions with little concern for the poor, the women and people of diverse races and ethnicities. Thus, diverse political ideas and feminisms are most likely to thrive in the digital sphere where there are infinite possibilities for counter-publics and intimate publics. Where counter-publics constitute "parallel discursive arenas where subordinate groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Felski 1992: 123) intimate publics are imagined communities brought together through linkages facilitated within scenes of collective representation (Berlant & Prosser, 2011).

Opposition parties in Zimbabwe, especially CCC thrive in these alternative public spheres as they are alienated from mainstream media and have an oppositional political representation agenda from that of the ruling party. Similarly, women in politics and civic organisations have the advantage of creating alternative public spheres as they become foregrounded as alternative arenas of public trust, information and representation (Fenton, 2010). Nonetheless, this study reveals that political polarisation may have an impact on the extent to which the alternative public sphere offers more traction to and trust in women politicians. Where the CCC party thrives in the alternative sphere, so does the party's women. In addition to that, the alternative public sphere offered by social media favours the younger generation of women in politics who, unlike their counterparts and predecessors in the ruling party whose history goes back to the liberation struggle, are adept at using digital technologies. The ruling party also has a young generation of women politicians who are competitively using social media against the opposition parties. Thus, in addition to class and gender, generation is critical to understanding protests and activism in the digital era (Dieng, 2023).

To understand the contextualisation of African feminist activism on social media especially in the Zimbabwean context, I foreground gender and coloniality which has a bearing on gender relations in Zimbabwe. Studies on gender relations in Zimbabwe have revealed that the country is largely patriarchal and riddled with gender inequalities across all spheres of society (Mateveke & Chikafa, 2020; Gwatirisa & Ncube, 2020). Lugones' coloniality of gender (2008) speaks to the role of coloniality in the entrenchment of patriarchal logic. Lugones' theoretical postulation of the coloniality of gender is grounded in her interest in the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality in postcolonial contexts as it relates to men's indifference to their female counterparts' struggles despite the fact that both men and women in the post colony suffered colonial exploitation and oppression. Her theory is formulated through a discursive trajectory that brings intersectionality and decolonial thought to bear on Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power which is based on the argument that all power is structured on relations of domination, exploitation and conflict as social actors fight over control of sex, labour, collective authority

and subjectivity/inter-subjectivity, and their resources and products (Quijano, 2008). The coloniality of power is premised on the workings of global, Eurocentred capitalist power and modernity whose 'civilising' perspective negates the humanity of the colonised man as 'not-human-as-not-man' and the colonised woman as 'not-human-as-not-woman" (Lugones, 2008; 2010). Thus, Lugones' coloniality of gender questions capitalist modernity and the colonial imposition of gender whose ripple effects are felt to date.

Lugones' approach has close affinities with African feminisms which also critique racialised and capitalist gender oppression. African feminisms motivate for gender equality and men's co-operation by hailing the role played by African women together with their men in the struggle against colonialism and its attendant oppressions although the African men seem keen on being reductive of African women and the role they have played. This is particularly poignant in Zimbabwean politics where the weight of women's role in the liberation struggle depends on the narrative that the ruling party deems fit depending on the prevailing context. An example of this is the story of Joyce Mujuru, the former Vice President of Zimbabwe who was said to have shot down a helicopter during the liberation struggle but the narrative changed once she was deposed from power.

Political power dynamics in postcolonial contexts and in Zimbabwe in this instance only reflect the extent to which colonial modernity facilitates women's continued oppression especially in politics where democracy is in question. Women's position is retrogressively placed in the domestic sphere to the extent that women's participation in the public (especially political) sphere is continually bridled by conservative traditions and cultures. Zimbabwean politics smirks of modern capitalist and patriarchal egocentrism where women in political circles are often reduced to servants and sexual objects of their male counterparts as exemplified by the first lady's women's initiatives and ZANU PF's Women's League. Often, women in the ruling party are groomed to push a second class citizen, matriarchal and community servant status where they kneel and curtsy before male leaders, cook traditional dishes and dance seductively at political gatherings. Attempts by women to get out of these strictures have often been met with physical, verbal and emotional abuse online and offline. It is historic that social media is offering Zimbabwean women in politics and women in general the platform to redefine and represent womanhood in the digital public sphere.

# WOMEN IN POLITICS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Using online ethnography, I observed Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) profiles, of selected Zimbabwean women in politics in the three months leading to the August 2023 elections and the one month post-election period. I identified Facebook posts and tweets according to the diverse range of their messages, that is, general socio-political messages, advocacy messages and mobilisation messages. I selected younger Zimbabwean women politicians on the basis of their social media activities, their popularity or unpopularity and political party for balance. The selected women politicians are Fadzayi Mahere and Lynette Karenyi-Kore from the CCC party, Linda Masarira from the Labour Economists and African Democrats Party (LEAD) and Barbara

Rwodzi and Tatenda Mavetera from the ruling party ZANU PF. A future study which will be bigger will include more Zimbabwean women politicians and more political nuances. Except for Linda Masarira these women contested for election into the national assembly and won. They all have Facebook and X accounts. In some instances they post the same content on both platforms, especially in Mahere's case. Some of their Facebook content is restricted but their X accounts are public. I considered both platforms as important given that each platform has a different set of users who engage at different levels – X is thought to be more intellectual, elite and rigorous while Facebook is more open and relaxed and the so called ordinary people of varying intellectual levels are free to express themselves without the level of intellectual scrutiny that they may be subjected to on X.

Fadzayi Mahere (@advocatemahere on X, Fadzayi Mahere on Facebook) is a lawyer, lecturer and has been CCC's (formerly MDC Alliance) spokesperson until her recent election to the national assembly, representing Mt Pleasant constituency. She has 721.8k followers on X. Mahere's Facebook posts and tweets straddle socio-political messages, advocacy messages and mobilisation messages. She usually cross posts messages between the two platforms although her Facebook posts are more personal and intimate. She effectively uses Facebook to forge a virtually intimate relationship with her followers and identify with their interests such as music and sports among other trending issues. She also achieves virtual intimacy through the posting of her images in what I have termed the 'maswerasei posts' where she posts a picture of herself with the caption maswerasei (good afternoon) or 'happy Sunday everyone' on Sundays. These posts endear her to followers who usually respond with likes and compliments or with responses to her greeting. These posts seem to serve the purpose of shedding the 'iron lady' politician look that makes followers also view her as an ordinary young woman going about her everyday business. In some of her pictures she is dressed in yellow, the CCC Party colour, as a campaign strategy. In addition to these she also shares videos of her gym sessions which usually come with motivational captions and are typical of popular online celebrity content. She also runs the 5am club in which she posts motivational messages on Facebook and X.

Mahere also uses the two profiles for her personal campaign and party political campaigns. She has shared on personal experiences like her prison experience which speaks more to the plight of women in politics and women in general. Her prison experience posts are accompanied by pictures of her in the green prison uniform and the red and white jersey. Through these she shares on the plight of women prisoners in the country's prisons and on the debilitating conditions which show loopholes in the country's correctional service and judicial system. Her posts are not self-centred and consciously stir public consciousness towards political and social inequalities as they affect fellow women like Moreblessing Ali, the CCC trio, and fellow male politicians such as the incarcerated Job Sikhala and Jacob Ngarivhume among others. In some posts, she includes pictures of offline campaign activities such as the #RegisterToVote pictures and videos, social commentary posts on prevailing social, economic and political events which she uses to campaign for her party and against the ruling party. In these posts she comments on the challenges faced in the country or the failures of the ruling party and ends with the hashtag #Zanupfmustgo or with phrase "We

Need New Leaders". She has also posted as the Spokesperson for her party where she relays information on the party's position on specific issues or planned activities.

Lynette Karenyi-Kore (@karenyikore on X, Lynette Karenyi-Kore on Facebook) is the elected Member of Parliament for Chikanga constituency and has held the position of MDC Alliance's second Vice President. She is also the Regional Deputy Treasurer General of Women's Academy For Africa (WAFA). She cross posts on X and Facebook but posts more on X where she has 61.6k followers. In the period under study she has largely posted her campaign activities and those of the party asking the people of Chikanga to vote for her and endorsing Nelson Chamisa for the presidency. Where Fadzayi Mahere seems to resonate more with the youth especially young women and girls, Karenyi-Kore cuts a motherly African feminist figure with her campaign posts reflecting family and community orientation. Her stock phrase in her campaign posts is 'Zimbabwe for Everyone'. She has shared her door to door campaigns in Chikanga and interviews with vendors selling wares at the market, widows and the elderly and has shown concern for the youth and addressed issues to do with drug abuse and unemployment. Her videos begin with greetings and a brief exposition, with a background gospel song by Dorcas Moyo, introducing the concerns covered in her interviews and end with an epilogue which is a promise to address concerns raised by interviewees. Comments on her Facebook posts and tweets show the social media public's appreciation of her as a humble, grounded motherly figure. She is mostly addressed as mama, an endearment and form of address reserved for mothers and respectable motherly women in Zimbabwean society. She also shares pictures of herself on X with captions like 'Blessed Sunday everyone' on pictures and videos of herself during political rallies mingling with and sometimes dancing with party supporters. She presents herself as a humble figure who addresses her constituents' needs from the grassroots levels.

Linda Masarira (@lilomatic on X, Linda Tsungirirai Masarira on Facebook) is the president of the Labour Economists and African Democrats (LEAD) Party and a member of Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD). She ran for presidency in the 2018 elections but could not run in the 2023 elections because of failure to raise the nomination fee. Masarira is one of, if not, the most trolled Zimbabwean woman politician online (Mutongwiza, 2022). She is at the receiving end of 'hate politics' because she is thought to have associations with the ruling party ZANU PF instead of the preferred main opposition party CCC. She is viewed as an ugly duckling and is body shamed and accused of not bathing. Nonetheless, she has marked herself as a force to be reckoned with by standing her ground. She distinguishes herself as a human rights defender and feminist who fights for gender parity especially in the political field. Most of her posts are advocacy posts for women politicians. On 19 July she shared a video interview of herself done by Identities Media TV on the success of Elisabeth Valerio's successful court application to run for presidency in the 2023 elections. In the interview she smiles with tears of happiness for Valerio who became the only woman presidential candidate. Her X account is highly active with 95.8k followers. She uses the Twitter sphere to air her political views. Her political messages are sometimes controversial and even her position is conflicted. For example, on 7 October 2021 she twitted that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) should raise nomination fees to a range of

US$25000 to US$50000 to "limit the number of fly by night chancers and opportunists causing confusion in the political economy by the unending mushrooming of briefcase political parties" only for her to fail to raise the US$20000 nomination fees resulting in her exclusion from running for presidency this year. This was an oversight on her part for which social media publics mock her.

What is striking about her politically oriented posts is her sense of agency and incisiveness. She is an active citizen who proves herself by word and action although social media publics are wont to question her intentions. Her advocacy and mobilisation does not end online but is decisively accompanied by action. For example, she made a court challenge seeking the nullification of party lists for provincial councils and challenged the constitutionality of SI 114 which was gazetted on the eve of the nomination courts to allow both male and female candidates to be nominated for party lists as opposed to having each metropolitan province have a council where 10 women are elected to those positions through proportional representation. She shared the News Day article about it on her Facebook account. She has also unequivocally shared her opinion on the CCC leadership and categorically tweeted her reasons for not endorsing Nelson Chamisa in the 2023 elections. Aside from these rigorous posts she bravely posts pictures of herself on Twitter and Facebook and speaks about her personal mandate while also motivating her Facebook friends and followers. She shared one such heartfelt post on Facebook on 20 July 2023, the first paragraph of which reads; 'One thing I have done in my life is to believe in me. Even when some people tried to bury me because I didn't believe in their normative leverage strategies, they failed because I am a seed. A seed

does not die. It might germinate late, but it will germinate'. The post ended with encouragement for peaceful conflict resolution and the end of political violence during the campaigning period.

Barbara Rwodzi (@BarbaraRwodzi on X, Barbara Rwodzi on Facebook) is the ZANU PF Member of Parliament (MP) for Chirumhanzu and is the Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industries. She is also a member of the Pan African Parliament (PAP). Rwodzi posts across Facebook and X and her X account is active with 19.4K followers. Rwodzi mainly posts about activities in her constituency and ministry. In the period under study she was doing the same. On 11 June 2023, she posted pictures of her meeting and visit to the Holy Cross Dam construction site. In the pictures she is standing with members of the construction team, mostly males, and blending in with them. Her posts and tweets are accompanied by the captions 'Chirumhanzu inovakwa neVene vayo' (Chirumhanzu is built by its owners) which is crafted from her party slogan Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo (the country is built by its owners) and mantra 'Brick by brick, stone upon stone', 'simuka Chirumhanzu' (stand up Chirumhanzu), and her mantra 'impossible nothing' and concludes with 'May God Bless Our Zimbabwe'. She receives mixed responses including praises for her good work in her constituency and vulgar insults which she received when she posted an audio of herself insulting and threatening a police officer for removing her party posters. In some of her tweets and posts there are trolls who accuse her of having killed her husband and of being a loose woman.

Tatenda Mavetera (@TateMavetera on X, Tatenda M on Facebook) is the ZANU PF Member of Parliament for Chikomba West Constituency, the Minister of ICT, Postal and Courier Services

and the Young Women 4ED Spokesperson. She has 11.3k followers on X. Mavetera is also a former actress in the Zimbabwean soap opera Studio 263. In the three months before the 2023 elections Mavetera hardly posted with a tweet on 31 July with pictures of her rally in Chikomba West with the caption "Our numbers never like [sic] today in @chikombawest we appreciate the love and trust. President @edmnangagwa victory is certain." She also tweeted about ZANU PF's Bulawayo rally on 2 August. Responses to these tweets are mostly filled with vitriol against her party, her as a person and against the president. It seems she posted less because of the negative responses. I could not access her Facebook posts as she has restricted her access to her account to her friends only and does not use the follow option like her counterparts. Lately, she is posting her activities as the minister of ICT and does a lot of retweeting of party news and activities or mocking the opposition CCC.

## SOCIAL MEDIA PUBLICS

The study of Zimbabwean women politicians' social media engagements shows that social media publics favour opposition party women leaders over those from the ruling party, with the exception of Linda Masarira. The thrust of the posts of women in the opposition parties is more diverse and militant because they arguably are the underdogs in the Zimbabwean political landscape. Their counterparts in the ruling party's posts reflect that they are in a comfort zone especially because they already were sitting MPs in the period under study and were assured of their party's leverage. Rwodzi's posts and social media public's responses show that she is a powerful representative of women politicians with great potential who has, however, become

unpopular because of the arrogance and impunity reflected in her leaked audio which has made social media publics associate her with the male violence that is characteristic of her party. Rwodzi was particularly respected and celebrated for her gutsiness in the Pan African Parliament alongside South Africa's Julius Malema in their fight for Southern African representation. She has also produced tangible results and has been commended for them in her constituency and ministry. She has a staunch group of social media supporters who encourage and support her. Tatenda Mavetera on the other hand has largely been degraded for being a mere actress who has not made her way into politics through merit. Thus, her posts in the period under study are rather timid although she seems to be developing thick skin after winning the elections and being appointed to the post of minister of ICT. Thus, she has potential to redeem herself.

The militancy and assertiveness of the opposition women politicians serve as a microcosm of how the social media presence of Zimbabwean women in politics and the typical thrust of their online communications can revolutionise African feminism in Zimbabwe and Africa. Their sustained online presence has proven that women in politics can no longer be ignored online and that in itself is a positive outcome for African feminism, democracy and equal representation of women in politics. An analysis of women politicians in the opposition party CCC reflects the mellowing of responses towards women politicians. For example, Karenyi-Kore's X account hardly has any typical stereotyping and insults thrown at women politicians across all parties. She has successfully branded herself as a respectable womanly and motherly figure who people can easily call 'mama' without coercion, something close to what

Mateveke and Chikafa (2020) observe on Joyce Mujuru's (former Vice President of Zimbabwe under ZANU PF) treatment by social media publics. Responses to Karenyi-Kore's posts show that the people are ready to give her a chance to prove herself.

In instances like Mahere's, one notices that she has gained respect and trust over time because of her intellectual and strong character as she has successfully fought discrimination and trolling and balanced her private and public life online. For example, she was able to refute one Edmand Kudzayi's allegations of her having an affair with a married man. She used her legal acumen to challenge Kudzayi. She had the support of intimate publics including gender organisations who swiftly rose to her defense in what some termed selective sisterhood because Linda Masarira and Marry Mubaiwa did not have the same support (Nameda, 2022). Most of her activism posts on social media have been taken up in and outside Zimbabwe and raised awareness to political and gender atrocities. Her posts, among others, on the gruesome murder and rape of CCC activist Moreblessing Ali in May 2022 roused militant counter-publics who identified with Ali's demise because she was not only from the opposition party but she was an ordinary working class woman and mother whose plight many citizens could identify with. Ali's demise escalated political hostilities offline and online and resulted in the arrest of some CCC members who became known as the Nyatsime 7 and is still raging with hashtags demanding justice for her and the release of her lawyer, Job Sikhala, a former CCC Minister who was arrested for inciting violence while seeking to represent Ali. The impact of the #JusticeForMoreblessingAli and subsequent #FreeWiwa, #FreeJobSikhala hashtags pushed by Mahere and her party

colleagues is significant for feminist activism in Zimbabwe and reflects potential of the margin reached in the Cameroonian case of #JusticePourMirabelle (#JusticeForMirabelle). Mirabelle Lingoum was a working class woman who was falsely identified as the woman on a sex tape. She was abused online, raped and then died mysteriously (Ndengue, Atsem & Maveun, 2023). She had bravely shared her experience and side of the story on broadcast television and the hashtag #JusticePourMirabelle was taken up after her death together with protests. Ndengue, Atsem and Maveun (2023) highlight that the chain reactions to her case not only reflected the affective intersectionalities of classism and gender but stirred the resurgence of a radical transnational feminist tradition and challenged the authoritarian status quo.

The online activism about the CCC trio's alleged abduction, arrest and the accompanying trauma had a semblance of the success of the #JusticePourMirabelle campaign and protests as opposition online publics rallied behind them. Two members of the trio, Joanna Mamombe and Cecilia Chimbiri continued with their party duties and were successfully elected in the 2023 elections. They were also acquitted of allegations of faking their abduction while the state, through mainstream media decried the opposition party's politicisation of crime and also accused civil society and NGOs, some western embassies and alternative media of being the culprits working in cahoots with the opposition (Mugwadi, 2022).

Those women politicians who have personalised their campaigns on social media have gained the support of citizens online and offline. They have taken virtual encounters to the offline campaign sphere where they meet voters. Lynette Karenyi-Kore, like Mahere took

her campaign to the Chikanga neighbourhood and market place where she physically met with women selling their wares, youths and pensioners and listened to their grievances which she also shared online. This among other interactions not only furthered her personal and party campaigns but sold her image as a nurturing mother figure who the populace can identify with and trust with the leadership role. Her followers respond to her posts on X (formerly Twitter) with words of praise and encouragement. Other researches have shown that the competitive position of candidates also plays a role in the success of social media use (Enli & Skorgebo, 2013), and this is highly likely in personalised campaigns given the popularity of the CCC party and the women politicians who won the elections. Where ZANU PF women politicians are popular offline the younger generation of CCC politicians is popular online.

The social media users-cum-publics that serve as pillars for the support of women in politics and for the furtherance of the feminist movement in the country have also made huge contributions to the open mindedness that has characterised the reception of Zimbabwean women politicians online. The likes of Nyaradzo 'Nyari' Mashayamombe on X and her Identities Media TV channel which has 37k followers on Facebook, and UN Women Zimbabwe among other gender organisations' accounts have also cultivated online engagements that facilitate intimacies between social media publics and women in politics. Where the politicians are partisan they remain neutral and celebrate gender parity wins across political parties and advocate for requisite policy and constitutional changes. Influential online personalities such as Hopewell Chin'ono and Nick Mangwana among others are called to order when they post misogynistic and hateful comments about women politicians. There is one significant incident when Chin'ono was taken to task over a not bathing insult targeted at Linda Masarira.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The support that women politicians from the opposition party have gained goes a long way in showing the inroads that have been made by women in politics in Zimbabwe. The other reason for the success is also a result of the CCC's reliance on social media platforms for their activities due to denial of access on national broadcast channels. Thus, the opposition has created its own intimate publics and use social media as a counter-public sphere against the dominance of the ruling party. Further research may be needed to establish whether instances of trolling on opposition women's participation comes from the generalised public or from rival party supporters. The acceptance of CCC women politicians online and offline may signal the gradual success of gender equality advocacy initiatives. Even Joanna Mamombe and Cecilia Chimbiri who were trolled and insulted after accusations of having faked their abduction were successfully elected this year. They bravely maintained an online presence despite being trolled by misogynistic 'Varakashi' a group thus named because of their tendency to lambast opposition party politicians online. The 'Varakashi' phenomenon has arguably become popular in opposition political circles where ZANU PF women politicians are bashed and trolled online. Hence, most of the women ZANU PF candidates shy away from a viable online presence. However, women politicians from all political parties should brave online publics and represent themselves and their causes without

fear of intimidation. Like Mahere, Masarira and Rwodzi women politicians should invent online and offline strategies that protect them in their private and public lives and inspire local and transnational feminism.

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# Alternative democracy? Crisis, discourse and versions of democracy in Zimbabwean politics in the post-2000 context

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## ABSTRACT

Democracy is a much contested concept in political movements and politics. The post-2000 context reveals a multiplicity of complex political, social and economic challenges linked to the Zimbabwean crisis which can be best unpacked and understood through critical discourse analysis (CDA). These challenges reflect multiple contestations to the conceptualisation of democracy. This chapter will debunk the political personalisation of democracy and how political parties insert their parties in the narrative of the concept's modern manifestations, conceptions and practices of democracy. Democracy incorporates multiple layers of meaning and practices. This chapter focuses on how Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) narratives and stylistic designs are incorporated into their agenda-setting strategies, identity construction and discursive legitimation. Analysis of the theory and discourse of democracy illuminates the conventions, logic and dictates of language, knowledge and meaning. It exposes the inherent politics, nuances and paradoxes of democracy. Analyses of democratic movement(s) through CDA highlight democracy as a political strategy that at once contests power but also gestures to a political alternative and a sustainable development plan. Considering that CDA as a qualitative and narrative analysis method focused on generic features of whole texts rather than isolated features of the text, this chapter analyses the politics of democracy discourse and its relationship to Zimbabwean politics in the context of broader narratives of the Zimbabwean crisis. The paper problematises selected party manifestoes to illuminate and dissect the discourses and power contestations characterising Zimbabwean politics since the emergence of a strong opposition contender, the MDC in 2000. In contrast to normative representations in political discourses, knowledge is embedded in specific cultures, that is, institutionalised practices of decision-making and means of legitimation. In this regard, insights from cultural enquiries necessitated by CDA create the prerequisite for the analysis of political texts.

*Key words:* democracy, language, power, politics, critical discourse analysis

# INTRODUCTION

The post-2000 context reveals complex political, social and economic challenges linked to the Zimbabwean crisis. These issues present multiple challenges to democracy, as conceptualised by different political parties within the context. Widdowson (2000, p. 126) characterises context as "those aspects of the circumstance of actual language use, which are taken as relevant to meaning". He expands this concept by highlighting that, "context is a schematic construct [... and] the achievement of pragmatic meaning is a matter of matching up the linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context" (Widdowson, 2000, p. 126). This implies that meaning permeates the context in which language is used and that notions like democracy have multiple layers of significance that are institutionalised in organisational thought patterns and processes. Context either facilitates or constrains the frames and meanings that can be generated. This accounts for different conceptualisations of democracy by different parties. They vary depending on the political identities and interests of the people using them.

Given the ambiguity of political concepts such as democracy, analysis of such prompts definitions and explanations. Because democracy is a buzzword, it is rarely defined by its users. It represents what everyone 'knows' and wants. It is deliberately equivocal and euphemistic. Due to this conceptual and semantic malleability, it is important to comprehend the limits of democracy in its implementation by various political parties in the context of Zimbabwe. One of the oldest and most popular concepts of democracy was proffered by the American President Abraham Lincoln who defined democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people" (Lincoln, 1863). A related and useful notion of the concept was made by De Dora (2010) who characterises democracy as "a form of political governance that secures basic natural rights of citizens within a society and allows them to collectively and openly work toward their goals both socially and through government". Noting the critical influence of context makes certain conceptions of democracy more meaningful than others.

According to Tendi (2010), the crisis engulfing Zimbabwe since 2000 cannot be reduced to the nation's economic meltdown and the struggle against absolute rule. Instead, the conflict involves the crisis of discourse, that is, philosophical disagreements and enduring historical problems related to the unfinished task of decolonisation. Fayemi (2009) bemoans the conceptual problems inherent in conflating democracy as a concept and as it is applied in various political systems. So, concepts like democracy itself and democracy projects need critical attention as they become problematic due to the ways they are conceptualised by different actors. Since one major aspect of the Zimbabwean crisis has been depicted as the polarisation of ideas caused by the discursive struggle to establish and maintain systems of social meaning, it becomes imperative to understand how defining concepts like democracy are exploited to appeal to people. Critical analysis of such illuminates how social processes and relations have been constructed and cemented through the use of discourse.

This chapter primarily focuses on ZANU PF discourse as represented in its 2013 election manifestoes, *The People's Manifesto 2013*. This text is critical as it gives an overview of ZANU PF's discourse within the whole post-2000

spectrum. #Team ZANU PF as inscribed on the title on the 2013 manifesto illuminates how ZANU PF as a party plays to score and win. This is best captured by the election motto *Bhora Mugedhi/Ibhola Egedini*. *The People's Manifesto 2013* highlights ZANU PF's orders of discourse[1] and modus operandi which are even representative of the post-Mugabe era. In November 2017, Mugabe was removed through a coup that was dubbed Operation Restore Legacy. Mugabe was accused of having decimated the ideals of the liberation struggle together with a clique of criminals that surrounded him, hence the need for a 'restoration of a legacy'. Emmerson Mnangagwa took over as ZANU PF's leader. The post-Mugabe period was christened the New Dispensation and the Second Republic. Though there was a shift in treatise in the New Dispensation discourse as reflected in dominant metaphors characterising *The People's Manifesto 2018* and official discourses such as "Zimbabwe is open for business", "The voice of the People is the voice of God" and the "Servant Leadership" ideology deployed to sustain a new world order, ZANU PF's order of discourse remained the same. The legacy ideals of "the land, economic emancipation, independence, sovereignty, democracy, patriotism, ubuntu, national pride and dignity" (ZANU PF, 2018, p. 1) which ZANU PF claims to be restoring still run through the 2013 manifesto and any other of its official post-2000 narratives. The post-Mugabe trajectory with its nuances of an alternative, renewed democracy after Mugabe's waning respect for democracy and the essence of ZANU PF's discourse, are all catered for in the 2013 manifesto.

This chapter will also examine the framing of democracy in the main opposition party/parties, with a special focus on how the discourse of democracy is packaged and instrumentalised to foreground politically convenient identities in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC[2]) discourses. Analysis of the 2013 manifesto/policy statement, "Jobs, Upliftment, Investment Capital and Environment" (JUICE) also captures the major thrusts of democracy discourses in the main opposition party as reflected in MDC-A's 2018 *Sustainable and Modernisation Agenda for Real Transformation* (SMART). JUICE is sufficiently representational of the democratic tenets that permeate the main opposition's democratic rhetoric. MDC-A which in 2023 had mutated to Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), positions itself as the more politically and economically viable alternative to ZANU PF's nationalist and conservative strands of democracy.

## METHODOLOGY

Versions of democracy constructed and incorporated in ZANU PF and opposition parties such as MDC reflect the influences of the political and economic times – that is, the time of crisis. In light of this, this discussion will deploy Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology that enables critical reflection on how democracy is functionally used within the socio-cultural and political context. CDA is closely related to narrative analysis and broadens the concept of discourse beyond utterances and texts to social practices. As a multi-perspective qualitative research method, CDA explores the relationships between "discursive practices, events and texts; and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes" (Taylor, 2004) which is the Humanities discipline's forte. It examines

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1. Rules, systems and procedures that constitute and are constituted by how things should be known and talked about.

2. MDC and MDC-A will be used interchangeably to denote the main opposition party, not other immaterial MDC party splinters.

how texts construct "representations of the world, social relationships and social identities, highlighting how such practices and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power" (Fairclough, 2001; 2003).

Considering the controversial politics of democracy within the post-2000 Zimbabwean context and in Africa in general with its hyped politics of change, and animated struggles for political power it is critical to explore how language is deployed as a resource for shaping knowledge production and providing frameworks for different kinds of democracy. It is important to recognise how speech uniquely connects challenges of national development, political ideas, and knowledge. Language plays a significant role in valuing some possibilities and devaluing others throughout the negotiation of various democratic threads. Analysis of the democracy movement(s) provides insight into the politics of democracy as a political strategy that at once contests power and also gestures to political alternatives and development plans.

## #TEAM ZANU PF

The inclusion and establishment of democracy in Zimbabwe's development program is political, and all political contenders frequently politicise it. ZANU PF portrays itself as a crucial political force in Zimbabwe, emphasising the connection between democracy and the country's liberating past and present. Debunking this political personalisation of democracy and incorporating their parties into the narrative of the idea's contemporary manifestations, beliefs, and practices are therefore challenges for opposition parties. The Zimbabwean setting itself defines the democratic discourse that may emerge, not just

in establishing the kind of issues to be addressed but also in defining the contexts in which people can compete, dominate or cooperate.

Neo-nationalist essentialisms and universalisms serve as the rigorous foundation for how ZANU PF frames national values and liberation history. ZANU PF mainly derives its legitimacy from the liberation struggle, which certifies the party as the defender of democracy. Its discourse certifies itself as a party with a revolutionary record which is characterised by a liberation armed struggle that overthrew colonial settler domination and ushered in independence, freedom and democracy. It synonymises all forms of machinations afflicting the nation as part of its waging the liberation struggle against Western forces. These stretch from colonialism to the crisis which is largely blamed on Western sanctions and framed around machinations by the West to sabotage the constitutionally elected government. As a result, by inference, ZANU PF portrays cherishing the liberation fight as cherishing ZANU PF. The liberation struggle values include independence, unity, peace, equity, freedom, democracy, and sovereignty, as stated in #Team ZANU PF 2013. These principles have become ingrained in the fabric that creates, underpins, and upholds the country. From this perspective, the ideals of independence, the liberation fight and democracy essentially become metonymic. ZANU PF's political beliefs reflect hegemonic goals which delegitimise competitors as well as maintain the status quo. Social systems as sources of culture ostensibly mediate social values and favour some interests over others.

ZANU PF as a political party institutionalises efforts to develop and maintain consensual hegemony through carefully crafted discoursed

rationalities, which Foucault (1977) terms "governmentality." This refers to ways in which the state governs, shapes or controls bodies as a way of exercising control over its populace. This is accomplished through policies, institutions, and ideologies. A governmentality optic "enables recognition of political processes and power relations that become institutionalised, embodied in rules and practices that acquire predictability and staying power" (Leach, Scoones and Stirling, 2010, p.78). This governance is linked to a single, strong, exclusive, and exclusionary overriding narrative. Discursive exclusionary mechanisms in political ZANU PF texts reveal a pervasive self-alignment with historical orthodoxy and a desire to "naturalise" the created annexure of Zimbabwe being ZANU PF. This is the context in which ZANU PF asserts; "Only Zanu PF can achieve these (people's) goals while working with the people because only Zanu PF has fought for all and not just some of the goals of the people. When Zanu PF wins at the polls, the people win their goals" (Zanu PF, 2013, p. 108). It is critical to see how effect is created in ZANU PF texts in relation to the democracy gambit. In the quotation above, the repetitive use of the word "only" not only reinforces ZANU PF's self-legitimation but also serves to underline that there are no alternatives with regard to who exemplifies real understanding of democracy. The absence of alternatives is induced as common-sensical because ZANU PF depicts itself as the embodiment of the people. Subjective forms of self-construction reflected in #Team ZANU PF are typically discoursed in political rhetoric that is dressed as objectivity. Pragmatically, partaking in the liberation movement does not in itself automatically translate into guaranteed capacity to ensure democratic governance. Depicting the Zimbabwean problem as a continuation of the liberation movement with roots in colonialism is a purposefully exclusionary political ploy meant to legitimise ZANU PF and delegitimise its opponents for power.

In ZANU PF's discourse, history serves as a venue for self-legitimation and concretisation of the opposition's political illegitimacy as they are labelled as Western political puppets. The political use of this historical expedient is seen in the party's propensity to portray itself as an exclusively privileged player. Exclusive self-identification is evident, among other things, from the extensive use of the adjective 'only' in constructions of ZANU PF as the solution to the problems gripping the nation. We are told, for instance, that "[a]s the only liberation movement in Zimbabwe, ZANU PF ensured that the people were given an opportunity to freely express themselves" (ZANU PF, 2013: 67). "Only" functions as an adjective reinforcing the exclusivity of ZANU PF as a liberation movement. Beyond this, the adjective is used in the context of the constitutional-making process that culminated in the adoption of a new constitution in 2013 since independence. Although the constitution-making process was done during the period of the Government of National Unity when ZANU PF governed the nation with the opposition, the party gives the process a liberating spin that amplifies its participation and dwarfs that of the opposition. This association between the liberation movement, the drafting of the constitution, and concerns about free expression runs counter to the MDC's advocacy of the democratic discourse. ZANU PF has mostly been accused of being authoritarian, unconstitutional and predisposed to curtailing the people's freedoms[3].

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3.   See scholars like Bond and Manyanya, 2003; Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009 and Sachikonye, 2012.

One of the main tenets of the liberation movement was democracy, hence ZANU PF cannot afford to be regarded as failing to uphold it. ZANU PF invokes its well-known anti-imperial rhetoric to reconstruct the constitution-making process as a teleological democratic process that is part of ZANU PF's decolonising history and identity, cementing this binary construction of a democratic liberation movement (ZANU PF) and an undemocratic opposition. Democracy was/ is a site of political battle in re-negotiations of the nation's political culture. ZANU PF not only synonymise itself with democratic principles symbolised by the constitution but also subtly fixes any alternative dispensations without ZANU PF as fundamentally undemocratic. According to the ZANU PF, "the Party was vigilant throughout the constitution-making process to guard against treachery and to protect the process from being hijacked by foreign or regime change interests" (ZANU PF, 2013, p. 67). Ironically, the concept of free speech is put to the test by the phrase "enabling democracy" as it relates to "guarding" against neo-colonial forces in the constitution-making process. Here, ZANU PF betrays its proclivity for dictating and monitoring which is contradictory to notions of democracy.

When considering ZANU PF discourses, it is possible to see how the party, acting as political agents, appropriates and mobilises discourses like democracy in order to solemnise its founding, engulf itself in convenient silences, impose ritualised forms around the history of its capacity, and float within the environment. These ideas are described as "taboo on the object of speech, ritual of the circumstances of speech, and privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject" by Foucault (1981, p. 52). These exclusions benefit some strong organisations, as is the case with ZANU PF. In Foucault's words,

"it does not matter that discourses appear to be of little account, because the prohibitions that surround it ...soon reveal its link with desire and with power" (1981:52). Naturalised contingencies and what seem unquestionable truths always unfold within fields of power.

Historical (re)contextualisation disrupts alternative discourses of the nation. Derived from liberation history, ZANU PF discourse creates uneven ground as it renders other voices powerless and alien to concepts such as democracy. This fixes alternatives. That ZANU PF alone can champion the people's aspirations as the sole liberators has nothing to do with guaranteed democracy. Rather, it is more about the appropriation of liberation war credentials to incorporate all that people aspire for as an extension of the liberation struggle. As a ruling party, ZANU PF's agency to take action on behalf of the nation is a manifestation of power and a form of legitimacy that is exclusivist.

## RE-SITUATING DEMOCRACY

When political organisations employ speech to battle (for) power, according to Bourdieu (1991), "ideologies become more and more autonomous, like a game with its own rules and conditions of entry" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 27). A component of the MDC's rhetorical tactics of opposition is to portray the political bastions of ZANU PF as democratically untenable. Strategically, this establishes a foundation for the MDC to position itself as the obvious replacement.

Real democracy, at least in theory, enables types of control through proportional representation, giving voters the power to affect change through participation and giving political

leaders the freedom to act in the best interests of the country. The MDC, a self-described social democratic movement, promotes a neoliberal interpretation of democracy that challenges the frequently radicalised interpretations of the idea advanced and utilised by the ruling party. Given the ruling party's stranglehold on the political capital of the championship of democracy, the MDC perceived strong incentives to engage in what Feindts and Oels (2005) refer to as the politics of "scaling" to influence Zimbabweans to suspect the genuineness of a 'democracy' that caused so much suffering during the crisis years. Scaling refers to the skilful projection of the dynamics of the crisis and development challenges through the efforts of various players, with the goal of reorganising, reconfiguring, and enhancing their political relevance. It entails different levels of analysis and representation of causes and effects, ensuring that what is circulated as democracy in the crisis context is invested with the 'right' scale of political interests. Therefore, ZANU PF, MDC, or any other party can accept the idea of democracy and frame it in accordance with their ideologies, political objectives, and rationalised goals.

JUICE is a policy framework developed by the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC T) to meet institutional objectives. The reflections in the text are conventionalised to reflect preferred interpretations of democracy. Understanding Zimbabwe's politics of democratisation entails an appreciation of how development is discussed in relation to democracy. MDC-T effectively encapsulates the principles of sustainable development within their democratic framework by asserting that, it is their "historic mission to meet the demands of the present generation, to fulfil the dreams of ... cadres no longer with us and the aspirations of

generations that will come after" (MDC-T, 2013, p.1). It thus becomes a matter of determining how the "scale" of a desired national future supports the need for neoliberal democracy and undermines ZANU PF's staunchly conservative nationalist stance on political legitimacy and democracy.

The MDC's opposition discourse, which is largely based on democratic value systems, portrays Zimbabwe's escalating socioeconomic and political crisis as a result of democracy's failure. Its argument is that the current system of government is undemocratic and that the economic downturn is a direct result of this absence of democracy serves as both its point of departure and its reason for implementing an alternative democracy. ZANU PF and its notions of democracy are depicted as (in) the past. The past – a site of ZANU PF's self-legitimation is identified by MDC as a source of the nation's problems. The pastness of ZANU PF democracy, mired in the party's political ills, is seen in MDC political discourse as diametrically opposite to the MDC's professed modernity and the efficiency it is poised to provide, tainted by how it connects to the current state of crisis. MDC represents itself as the future and ZANU PF's ideas of democracy as the past. The binary understanding of itself and ZANU PF as being members of opposing temporal domains (respectively, the future and the past), seek to denote symbolic consequences for how Zimbabweans must go forward.

Modernity in MDC discourse is first and foremost "not the past" because the past has been reduced to democratic paradigms that have plunged the country into catastrophe. Thus, the MDC invoked as the future, is in contrast to the past. It promises freedom from oppression, poverty and unpredictability. Good governance,

constitutionalism and respect for the rule of law are the hallmarks of MDC's asserted democracy. The MDC asserts that, as part of its democratic agenda, it has pushed for a new Constitution in Zimbabwe. The party believes it would perform national duties anchored on delivery alone and without political entitlements connected to the liberation struggle past as demonstrated by ZANU PF. JUICE (2013, p. 8) illuminates that, "[t]he MDC believes peace and stability are the absolute cornerstones of the construction of a viable state. We will create this environment for our society by upholding the rule of law and defending the principles of freedom and democracy". The crisis-ridden Zimbabwean context presents justification for this self-identification in comparison to ZANU PF. This ensured the MDC's relevance as a political alternative as the Zimbabwean crisis escalated.

Historical internal disputes within ZANU PF, where members disagreed about the necessity of reforms and transformation in the party's practice of democracy, provide justification for the deliberate association of MDC with newness, modernity, and efficiency and the ensuing synonymisation of ZANU PF with a failed past in MDC political discourse. Since the early days of independence in 1980, ZANU PF has come under fire for allegedly breaching essential freedoms and rights for people. For example, the Gukurahundi violence - a series of massacres of Ndebele civilians by a specially trained military wing called the 5th Brigade in the early 1980s – killed an estimated twenty thousand people (The Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice, 1997). Edgar Tekere, the former secretary general of ZANU PF, is well known for speaking out against the party's desire to create a one-party state and leadership corruption in the late 1980s. Tekere, who formed the Zimbabwe Unity Movement

(ZUM), lamented the lack of democracy and compared it to a patient in an ICU (Sachikonye, 2012). His stance led to his expulsion from the party and ultimately, like many other similar-minded former ZANU PF stalwarts such as Simba Makoni, Dumiso Dabengwa, and Joyce Mujuru who have at different times formed breakaway parties, in a quest to implement alternative forms of democracy. This context serves as the backdrop for how the MDC frames and defends its rhetoric on democracy, which it imbues with undertones of novelty, modernity, the future, and inferred connotations of effectiveness and development.

The MDC's mission is naturalised by the fact that other notable ZANU PF members left the party to pursue fresh iterations of democracy. Therefore, the MDC presents its mandate as justified by a demonstrated crisis of democracy in ZANU PF. It is affirmed that the MDC "... was formed in direct response to the needs and expectations of the people of Zimbabwe regarding better governance" (MDC-T, 2013, p.3). This sets the tone whereby ZANU PF is evoked as the epitome of a phoney democracy and the MDC as "the change agent" (MDC-T, 2013: 3). This is why in 2022 the movement extended to be a Citizens Coalition for Change as the quest for change remains the defining factor. In opposition discourses, there is always the binary characterisation of the good, democratic opposition versus the bad and autocratic ZANU PF. The Zimbabwean crisis is seen by MDC as a collective violation of fundamental human rights that is manifested as "political and economic turmoil, international isolation, and severe hardships" (MDC-T, 2013, p.1). It requires meticulous conceptualisation of the Zimbabwean problem as a crisis of, among other things, human rights in order to claim moral

justice in opposition to ZANU PF. As a result, the MDC portrays itself as a force for redemption as well as a means of reducing the political and economic risks connected with ZANU PF, hence the assertion: "Government had become arrogant, corrupt and repressive against the citizens. It did not care enough for the people" (MDC-T, 2013, p.3). To show ZANU PF's political immorality as a site for defending the MDC's assertion of strong political moral aptitude, the grammar of caring is purposefully entwined with the idea of morality. More crucially, the MDC's use of language portrays the 'facts' in a self-redemptive way, emphasising the morality of its political interventions in addition to outlining the necessity of the party's existence. This can be inferred from the following description of the party's origins in JUICE: "The party was created to promote and protect citizens' rights; to promote a government based on constitutionalism and to manage the economy fairly and efficiently, ensuring just and equitable distribution of resources (MDC-T, 2013, p.3).

The MDC's narrative of the democratic crisis is accompanied by a vocabulary of conflict that uses the spectacle of political and economic victimisation to support the moral ideals of freedom and democracy that the MDC has pledged to uphold. In addition to being packaged metaphorically by people's cries and "yearnings" for change, these spectacles are also manufactured by the MDC's descriptive depiction of what it sees as ZANU PF's ingrained propensity to do harm and destroy the country. Thus, fighting for the people is interpreted as supporting them. This is purposefully contrasted with ZANU PF's perceived lack of empathy for the suffering of the country as a result of its estrangement from the populace. Thus where the MDC imagines a 'democratic' government

whose actions are inspired by the agency of the generality of the people, ZANU PF is evoked as keen on the "centralisation of power in the hands of the executive"– a political practice that the MDC finds "openly dictatorial" (MDC-T, 2013, p.3). This centralisation of power is depicted as creating a hierarchised society with clear demarcations of agency as the following shows: "[o]ver the last three decades the relationship between the government and the people disintegrated into one of predator and victim" (MDC-T, 2013, p.27). ZANU PF is depicted as the protector who turned predator in a way that makes the victims objects of sympathy. MDC constructs themselves as the heroic agents bent on rescuing the people from their ill-fated hopes.

Being the predator of the people involves betraying them. In the MDC's manifesto, betrayal is utilised to arouse emotions, not just to persuade people of the goodness of the MDC and the evil of ZANU PF, but also, and more crucially, to discursively show the moral elements of such beliefs. The people's aspirations, which were fuelled by the liberation promise, are the object of MDC's linguistic portrayal of ZANU PF's betrayal. The quotation "[o]ver three decades ago, we engaged in a liberation struggle and were successful" (MDC-T, 2013, p. 1) demonstrates how the MDC revisits and revises history, which ZANU PF frequently solely uses to justify its rule. Intentionally inclusive and designating Zimbabwe as a nation, the pronoun "we" is used. This indicates that the liberation war was led by Zimbabweans, not ZANU PF in particular. The story implies that ZANU PF, which was given control of the nation after "Zimbabweans" achieved their liberty, began ruthlessly governing it. The predator picture magnifies ZANU PF's treachery in a way that imbues the relationship between the people and ZANU PF with agony and

passion. Nothing is done in the public interest under a predatory system because the masses become the prey. As Galbraith (2006) implies, in a predatory economy, the rules imagined by the law and economics do not apply as there is no discipline. To convince the victims to avoid ZANU PF as well as to align with the MDC's promise of salvation from ZANU PF, the MDC creates a visual representation of the predator and its predation.

There is a significant polarisation between good and bad when every aspect of the Zimbabwean situation is defined as a confrontation between what ZANU PF has done incorrectly and what MDC will accomplish well. MDC moralises both the problems attributed to ZANU PF and the remedies assigned to MDC. Assertions such as, "[t]he MDC formed the Inclusive Government with other parties in 2009 because it cared for the people of Zimbabwe and had observed that the political, economic and condition of the people was extremely desperate" (MDC-T, 2013, p. 5) is one aspect of the ways that the MDC orders discourse for affective purposes. The demise of ZANU PF is purported to have reached a national scale, which supports the necessity and the need for urgent action, hence the MDC's infusion of urgency in the party's motto: "A New Zimbabwe – The Time is Now!" (MDC-T, 2013, p. 31).

Semantic connections of words conjure meanings, connotations, arguments, and explanations that associate democracy with the resolution of the country's crisis in the context of oppositional discourse. Words and phrases with ideological connotations like "democracy," "modern," "a New Zimbabwe," "transformation," "change," and "people-driven" facilitate the use of and connections between themes, deeds, and ideas. Particularly *JUICE* exposes languages and discursive structural patterns that exhibit

regularities, coherences, and consistency in the creation of an alternative democracy. The party's reform philosophy and the civic understanding of politics as the pursuit of public interests based on citizen engagement and participation are both grounded in the lexicon. The diction used in *JUICE* shows how the incumbent government is stereotyped and fixed as an institution that "did not care enough for the people" who are in turn characterised in hyperbolic terms as "tired", "yearning for change" and have the "desire" for an open and democratic society (MDC-T, 2013, p. 3). These predetermined political symbols reaffirm MDC's status as a party that was founded on necessity rather than "politics." The word "JUICE" is a component of a complex expressive scheme that appeals to viewers' visual, auditory, and cognitive abilities. The phrase is metaphorical by definition. It builds the opposition's political response to the country's predicament in physiological terms, which increases the potency of the MDC's responses. The MDC defines its manifesto, which it refers to as "JUICE," as the answer to the problems with the country's economy. Consequently, the metaphor frames Zimbabwe as a 'house of thirst and hunger' (to adapt Marechera, 1978), characterised by deficiencies in various aspects of people's lives. MDC accounts of the nation as a result of ZANU PF misrule are rife with associations of deprivation. The nation is shown as being depleted by corruption, resource abuse, and political patronage, among other maladies, in the metaphor of "JUICE" and thirst. The MDC portrays itself as the institution that would be able to satiate the nation's economic thirst and revitalise the failing socio-economic "body" by invoking the typical connections of juices as life revitalisers that nourish an exhausted body.

Democracy itself is metaphorised in addition

to the juice metaphor. The MDC assumes that democracy is the answer to the problems facing the country, which supports the underlying metaphor DEMOCRACY=MDC. Democracy's prosodic link with politically charged concepts such as "freedom", "responsibility" "good governance", "devolution", "civic participation", "constitutionalism" and "inclusivity" strengthens its function as a political armament. The vocabularies are chosen for the layers of meaning they communicate and the cognitive effect they have. The diction is also instrumental in setting the tone for change. This can be inferred from the way that the word "hope" is used in the MDC's encouragement of the people to vote "the MDC to bring HOPE back to Zimbabwe" (MDC-T, 2013, p. 31). The word "hope" is capitalised – not only to emphasise the importance of hope in a crisis setting but more importantly to define hope as a force that can only be guaranteed by the MDC. Political discourses of democracy exhibit specialised fixations of terms and meanings intended to fix identities of the self and the rival other, as would be expected in language-mediated contestations. Associating with these established identities has both overt and covert political repercussions. Democracy is shaped and affected in its practicality by the fact that it is one of the most important and enduring political concepts that is vulnerable to "verbal hijacking" (Arblaster, 2002, p.9). Democracy discourses offer unique ways of framing problems and justifying certain policy responses while avoiding contradictions present in political actors and their political ideologies. Various components of the concept of democracy are projected using their own metaphors, images, and analogies, some of which may be incongruous. Democracy is essentially a contested concept that exists in theory and is very fluid in practice.

As Arblaster (2002) argues, to discuss democracy objectively, we have to acknowledge that it is "a concept before it is a fact." Its contingent structure makes it unrealistic to believe that politics can be separated from its politics. Analysis of oppositional language and narratives reveals the rules, logics, and tenets of democracy discourse that are intrinsic to and influenced by the inevitable complexities and paradoxes of power struggles in Zimbabwe. Ironically, these paradoxes explain some inconsistencies within the democratic movement(s), as seen by the divisions that exist within the largest opposition group, the MDC. It is ironic that splinter organisations like the Movement for Democratic Change -Ncube (MDC-N) opposition parties "fought for democracy within the fight for democracy" prior to their ultimate unification with the mainstream MDC before the 2018 elections. This means that democratic discourses should be seen as the primary and possibly only, as reflexive. The reflexivity of democracy makes it open to abuse. Ambiguities in the rhetoric and practice of democracy reveal its instability as a political philosophy, principle and practice. The ontological inconsistencies of democracy as a political philosophy inform the political identity crisis that cripples the Zimbabwean opposition. Its fluidity as an ideology erodes ideological grounding in opposition parties.

## CONCLUSION

Discussions of discourse-mediated constructions of democracy illuminate relativism and reflect the place of discourse in strategies of (un)making power. The analysis draws attention to discursive practices deployed by major political parties in managing authority and agency over the narrative of the Zimbabwean

crisis and politics. Analysis of ZANU PF and the MDC's situated discourse within the context of contested notions of sustainable social, economic and political development helps to unveil "specifically, the incentives, relationships, and distribution and contestation of power between different groups and individuals". To understand the meaning espoused in different texts, there is need to understand how democracy discourses are constructed and how their constructedness establishes the ideological potential for action or even inaction. The chapter therefore explores how political manifestoes reflect strategic discursive strategies steeped in the historical context, realities and needs of the present. Leveraging its argument and political identity on the urgency of reacting to the failures of ZANU PF's 'democracy', the MDC's democracy discourse re-imagines what it means to be democratic, laying a special premise on how the national crisis symbolises the trigger factor setting in motion counter-democratic imaginaries of democracy. ZANU PF and the oppositional parties foreground the Zimbabwean crisis to re-imagine the nation as urgently in need of an alternative democracy. As highlighted in this chapter, democracy is a subjectively experienced reality because it comes in a variety of ideological and functional forms. In this way, regarding democracy as monolithic and characterising its outward manifestations as objective is equivalent to dismissing the ambiguous and concealed features that are present in politics. An examination of the politics of development in connection to various concepts of democracy is necessary for Zimbabwe to address some of its bedevilling national challenges.

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# Language as a bridge: Exploring the role of Kiswahili in fostering inclusion

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## ABSTRACT

The study broadly conceptualises humanities as the study of human interactions, experiences and human transformations which occur at both the individual and collective levels. I argue that at the center of diverse human interactions is the tool of language which plays an important role of bridging the communicative gaps which occur across multifarious communities. In an attempt to make sense of the intimate correlation between the humanities and the democracy project in Africa, I make a case for the study of the role played by language to foster democratic features of inclusivity and diversity. Particularly, the study investigates the role of the Kiswahili language in bridging and connecting individuals, academics, communities, cultures, nations and cultivating a sense of inclusivity. Kiswahili is the most widely spoken and studied African language and this makes it a strategic tool for creating inclusive societies. Specific reference is given to Kiswahili academic Associations across Africa which are formed by students, teachers, lecturers and other stakeholders, with the primary goal of promoting research and the development of Kiswahili in Africa and beyond.   Therbon's framework of inclusivity and the Social Role Valorisation theory are the guiding analytical frameworks of the study.  The study reveals various dimensions of inclusion and exclusion in Kiswahili academic associations as well as its underlying intricacies. I argue that while Kiswahili is strategic in promoting inclusive societies, barriers of inclusion still exist as a result of socio-cultural and political institutions. The study provides recommendations and conclusively emphasises the significant role of Kiswahili as a strategic language in fostering inclusivity of African citizenry as well as bridging communication by connecting individuals of diverse cultures, religions, ideologies and languages

*Key words*: language, Kiswahili, inclusion, exclusion, democracy

# INTRODUCTION

There has been a global increase on the attention given to the concept of inclusive societies, its nuances and dynamics, in response to systemic inequalities that continue to disproportionately affect individuals from various demographic groups (World Bank, 2013; Madzima & MacIntosh, 2021). Despite the multiplicity and diversity of attempts to define an inclusive society, many schools of thought seem to converge on the notion that inclusive societies are premised on creating conditions for equal opportunities and equal access for all. Demographics such as age, gender, location, financial literacy, religion and education can be used to measure and promote inclusivity (Kebede et al., 2021). Researchers, scholars, organisations, governments, practitioners and policy makers continue to search for sustainable ways in which societies can become more inclusive and democratic. Studies have shown that more inclusive societies reap many benefits ranging from sustainable socio-economic development to peace and sustainable political development (Carter, 2015). While there are no concrete and comprehensive global estimates of inclusion and exclusion, an estimated 32% of the world's population is at risk of facing exclusion based on identity, circumstances, or socio-economic background, with the highest incidence of about 52% in sub-Saharan Africa (Cuesta et al., 2022). As such, the need to achieve more functional inclusive societies where everyone enjoys equal participation in all facets of life is imperative especially in the context of Africa in order to address and reduce incidences of exclusion.

Despite there being numerous efforts and initiatives committed to addressing global challenges of exclusion, the fundamental role of language in promoting inclusive societies is no exception and can never be overemphasized (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2020; American Psychological Association, 2022). Essentially, language is the means by which human beings express and communicate ideas and emotions. Likewise, language has the potential to reduce barriers which emanate from cultural, political, religious and socio-economic differences. Undoubtedly, a shared and common language is an indispensable tool in fostering inclusivity and acting as a bridge of communication among individuals. Accordingly, the place of and the case for an inclusive language in fostering inclusive societies and bridging communication becomes central. In this study, special reference is given to Kiswahili as that inclusive language and an agent of bridging communication on the African continent. The study adheres to a humanities disciplinary trajectory by assuming the nexus of language and inclusive societies and showing how Kiswahili academic associations have used Kiswahili language to foster inclusive societies.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualising Inclusive Societies

While the idea of inclusion can be loosely tracked back in history through various developments and movements, the concept of "inclusive societies" was primarily conceptualised at The World Summit for Social Development in March 1995 where participants lobbied for social integration through "a society for all." (UNDESA, 2009 p. 4). Since then, the concept of inclusive societies has been defined by many schools of thought from different perspectives. However, in order to grasp the concept of inclusive societies, I will start by looking at the basic terms associated

with this concept which are; inclusion, exclusion and diversity.

Inclusion is the policy or practice of making sure that everyone in society has access to opportunities for participating in economic, social and civic activities to amplify their chances of pursuing ambitions, goals and realising their creative potential (Okolo, 2015). It aims to provide equal opportunities for all individuals irrespective of their background. As a result, at the very center of inclusion is full participation in all aspects of life, access to resources and equal opportunities. Conversely, exclusion refers to a situation whereby not all individuals have equal access to the opportunities and services that allow them to live a decent and happy life. This may include not being able to contribute to and have their voice heard on the norms of the society in which they live. Generally, exclusion is birthed from exclusionary practices which destroy the much-needed bond of solidarity and places some members of society beyond the margins, who then cease to be a cause for concern for those within the margins. Over time, the enhanced homogeneity and sense of shared identity among the insiders reinforce the social exclusion of those outside (UNDP, 2011, p. 11). To that end, at the core of social exclusion is limited participation in all aspects of life, limited access to resources and unequal opportunities. Finally, the term diversity simply entails recognising the differences among members of a society (UNDESA, 2009). While the nuances of understanding diversity and inclusion may seem complex, the two are complementary. Diversity is the practice of recognising differences in a society while inclusion is the practice of making sure that everyone in society has equal access to resources and equal opportunities despite their background.

Consequently, an inclusive society is "one that rises above differences of race, gender, class, generation and geography to ensure equality of opportunity regardless of origin, and one that subordinates military and economic power to civil authority" (UNDP, 2011, p.75). Other scholars define an inclusive society as a society that embraces diversity and the fundamental equality of all individuals (Lutfiyya & Bartlett, 2020). Based on these definitions, it is clear to see that an inclusive society is a society that values and respects diversity and promotes equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background or identity. However, there seems to be no general consensus on what exactly an inclusive society should look like (Muzondidya, 2023) because inclusivity is deeply contextual and is largely shaped by socio-cultural norms of each society.

Arguably, this reveals that promoting inclusion is simpler in principle than it is in practice since there are multiple conscious and unconscious biases towards marginalised and vulnerable groups such as women, individuals of alternative genders and persons with mental and physical impairments. Essentially, throughout African history, these groups have been victims of the patriarchal society, the majority, the physically strong and the ruling classes. In the face of such exclusionary practices and institutions, there have been various attempts to push back against these practices and institutions and one of the ways of pushing back has been through academic research associations. The following section provides a snapshot view of the correlation between academic associations and inclusivity.

## Academic Associations and Inclusivity

Academic associations are societies or organisations made up of individuals by virtue of shared interest in a particular academic discipline (Harvey et. al, 1995). These associations serve as a platform for researchers, educators, students, practitioners and stakeholders to converge and advance knowledge in their respective disciplines. There are many and varied purposes of academic associations which include but are not limited to organising academic conferences and events, promoting research, academic publishing and advocating for members' best academic interests (Speight, 2014). Typically, academic associations are non-profit and non-state funded organisations. As such, their activities rely on membership subscriptions or donations. Furthermore, academic associations may focus on a particular discipline, or, they may be multidisciplinary, focusing on multiple disciplines. This study focuses on academic associations which represent the promotion of research and education of Kiswahili language and culture. Kiswahili academic associations engage in a broad range of activities and events which may involve yearly conferences, symposiums, publishing in academic journals and books, poetry anthologies, training workshops, visiting tourist destinations and places of attraction. These associations' membership largely consists of educators, university lecturers, university students as well as language and cultural practitioners and stakeholders across and beyond Africa. Ordinarily, an individual can be a member of more than one academic association.

The role of academic associations in promoting inclusivity has become topical in recent years. Academic associations engage in activities and initiatives which have the potential to foster diversity, equity and inclusion within and beyond academia (Tzovara et al., 2021). In light of this truth, the present study critically explores the particular ways in which Kiswahili academic associations promote inclusive societies. However, before these may be fully explored, it is important to contextualise Kiswahili language and culture within the rhetoric of inclusion.

## Contextualising Kiswahili and Inclusion

Kiswahili is a trans-border African language with over 150 million speakers solely in Africa and about 200 million speakers across the globe (Dzomba et. al, 2023). As such, it is the most widely spoken and studied African language on the continent spoken by an estimated 12% of Africa, followed by Hausa with an estimated 6.6% and Yoruba with an estimated 2.5%. Kiswahili is one of the ten most spoken languages in the world. Originating from East Africa, Kiswahili is the lingua franca of more than eight countries in East Africa including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda (Ndiritu et. al, 2016). It is also spoken in Southern Africa in some parts of Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Somalia (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995). Following UNESCO's 2022 pronouncement that the World Kiswahili Day falls on the 7th of July of each year, the language has continued to thrive not just in Africa, but globally. While Kiswahili is already one of the official working languages of the East African Community (EAC) and the Pan African Parliament Union, it was in 2019 nominated as one of the four working languages of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and in 2022 was adopted as one of the working languages of the African Union (Nhongo, 2019). Kiswahili is now being taught in countries outside East Africa such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia.

From a historical perspective, Kiswahili played a fundamental role in the attainment of independence in a number of African polities. In East Africa, during the decades leading up to the early 1960s when Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania gained their independence, Kiswahili served as a shared inclusive language amongst various ethnic groups, thus, facilitated communication and political cooperation. It was the language of political rallies, mass mobilisation, speeches and publications and educating the masses about their shared aspirations despite the fact that their first languages were different. Kiswahili music and literature were also instrumental tools in disseminating nationalist democratic ideologies and the agenda of fighting for freedom. In the ensuing years, Kiswahili served once more as a unifying language in the liberation of Southern African polities of Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola, when liberation fighters were expatriated to East Africa for military training (African Union, 2022). Not only did Kiswahili contribute to the unification of Tanzania, it also played a significant role in advancing Julius Nyerere's "Ujamaa" philosophy which aimed at achieving economic and social equality in Tanzania upon the attainment of independence from British colonial rule in 1961 (Delehanty, 2020). Undeniably, Kiswahili became a linguistic and cultural symbol of African liberation, unity and democracy. Based on this background, the privileged status of Kiswahili becomes apparent and I present the argument that this privileged status affords Kiswahili many opportunities for fostering inclusivity and democracy and this may be achieved through the work of academic associations involved in research and teaching of Kiswahili.

## METHODOLOGY

**Theoretical Framework**

This study places Therbon's framework of inclusivity in conversation with the Social Role Valorisation concept so as to theoretically explore the role of Kiswahili in fostering inclusion. Therbon's framework outlines the actualisation of inclusive societies as a five-step incremental process characterised by visibility, consideration, access, rights, and resources (Lutfiyya & Bartlett, 2020). Therbon posits that these five steps are critical in creating environments that are conducive for the promotion of inclusivity, diversity and social cohesion. Therbon's framework is premised on the view that these five incremental steps are key to fostering participation and equal opportunities for all individuals regardless of their characteristics or background. In common parlance, inclusivity cannot be achieved in an environment where one or more of the five steps are absent.

On the other hand, the Social Role Valorisation theory is an analytical framework that explores social devaluation by focusing on the negative experiences faced by marginalised individuals in society, including experiences such as rejection, negative roles, stigmatisation, and distance from society. Often times, these experiences may unconsciously and systematically cause damaging and hurtful outcomes to victims of marginalisation especially in environments where norms of exclusion continuously persist (Therbon, 2007). As such, the Social Role Valorisation theoretical framework lays emphasis on recognising the significance of the unique roles of marginalised individuals despite

their inability or disability; hence it aims to create a comprehensive roadmap for promoting inclusion, diversity and social cohesion.

**Data Collection**

A mixed methods approach was used to collect the primary data for this study. Data was collected using online interviews, open ended questionnaires and observation methods. Open ended questions were designed to allow interviewees to answer in the way that they prefer, to agree or disagree and to raise new issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2016). Generally, the questions sought to gather information on the participants' perspectives on how Kiswahili academic associations promote inclusion and/ or exclusion and the possible solutions to the problem of exclusion within Kiswahili academic association. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom. A sample of 16 participants, who are members of various Kiswahili academic associations and based in different African countries was selected. The study sample was obtained using purposive random sampling. Five participants were in leadership committees while 11 participants were members of academic associations. Due to time constraints, 2 participants were available for online interviews while 14 participants managed to respond to the questionnaire. For the reason that the researcher is a member of some of the academic associations under study, the observation method was also used to elicit relevant data from the academic associations' WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp is one of the communication platforms widely utilised by Kiswahili academic associations. Interviews and questionnaires were drafted in Kiswahili, therefore, the researcher first translated collected data into English, classifying it into themes according to research objectives. The

following is a sample of academic associations represented by research participants:

**Table 1: Sample of academic associations under study**

| Name of Association | English Gloss |
| --- | --- |
| UKUTA (*Usanifu wa Kiswahili na Ushairi Tanzania*) | Kiswahili Poetry Association in Tanzania |
| CHAKAMA (*Chama cha Kiswahili Africa Mashariki*) | Kiswahili Association in East Africa |
| CHAWAKAMA (*Chama cha Wanafunzi wa Kiswahili Africa Mashariki*) | Kiswahili Students' Association in East Africa |
| CHAUKIDU (*Chama cha Ukuzaji wa Kiswahili Duniani*) | Kiswahili World Association |
| CHALUFAKITA (*Chama cha Lugha na Fasihi ya Kiswahili Tanzania*) | Kiswahili Language and Literature Association in Tanzania |
| CHAKITA (*Chama cha Kiswahili cha Taifa*) | National Kiswahili Association (Kenya) |

Hereon on, this research will refer to the English titles of the Academic Associations under study.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data is analysed and discussed thematically by exploring the possible dimensions of inclusion as they appear based on the opinions of research participants and those of the researcher.

## Economic Inclusion

While there has been increasing awareness and attention given to the issue of economic inclusion in academia (Rocha et al., 2021), the integration of inclusive economic practices has gained traction in academic associations by going beyond the traditional roles of research and supporting economic development and innovation. As such, in the context of Kiswahili academic associations, economic inclusion seeks to foster equal opportunities and participation in income generating academic initiatives. When asked to elaborate on the ways in which Kiswahili associations achieve economic inclusion, Participant A, who is a member of the Kiswahili World Association and Kiswahili Language and Literature Association in Tanzania had this to say:

> **Kiswahili associations have also transformed into income generating platforms. On our WhatsApp platforms we share so many opportunities such as teaching and lecturing jobs in Africa and beyond, translation jobs, dictionary making projects especially for lexicographers. In some instances, when clients approach us we simply refer them to our members with the relevant expertise. We also conduct seminars to orient upcoming poets and writers on writing and publishing.**

Resultantly, such inclusive initiatives promote carrier development as well as financial independence, especially at individual and community levels. Participant A provided concrete examples of academic activities conducted by his association to advance economic inclusion. Particularly, he made reference to a scholarship fund by the Kiswahili Language and Literature Association in Tanzania which is used to educate underprivileged students wishing to study Kiswahili at university level but have no financial means to do so. The funding is also used for Kiswahili related academic journal publications.

## Social Inclusion

Academic associations play a critical role in advancing social cohesion and inclusion by providing members with opportunities to build new social ties and develop a sense of belonging. These associations create a platform for collaboration and interaction among educators, students, researchers and stakeholders from diverse social backgrounds. Hence, social cohesion is fostered in Kiswahili academic associations by engaging in an array of multifaceted activities relating to the social fabric of members and the community at large. Ten research participants expressly elaborated that academic associations have also transformed into social platforms where people interact both physically and virtually without geographical limits. When asked about social inclusion within Kiswahili academic associations, Participant B who is a member of the National Kiswahili Association, explained how social experiences continue to be shaped in the interactions of Kiswahili academic associations. He alluded to how, for instance, sympathising and comforting each other during difficult times is a common practice within these associations. It is driven by Kiswahili cultural expressions of care and kindness for those in need. Thus, when a member loses their immediate family, fellow association members organise financial contributions towards funeral expenses and such organising transcends national boundaries. However, the same participant raised an issue that he thought was a cause for concern and deserved rethinking.

He expressed that while it is good for associations to extend financial support to the bereaved, he felt that more could be done in terms of helping members and non-members who are facing various social challenges. However, he also acknowledged such efforts may be limited by the financial constraints typically affecting most members.

Another participant [Participant C] who is also a member of the Kiswahili World Association similarly highlighted that Kiswahili academic associations have taken it upon themselves to influence policy on social issues, such as the adoption of Kiswahili language on road signs. This was not only a strategic move towards the promotion of the language but also an inclusive initiative to accommodate populations illiterate in the English language, ensuring that a wider audience is reached. Participant C reiterates how social inclusion has been advanced particularly through activities such as the participation of Kiswahili Poetry Association in Tanzania in the 16 days against Gender Based Violence Campaign which took part in Lindi, Tanzania. Kiswahili poetry was used as an inclusive linguistic tool to disseminate information against gender based violence and the use of Kiswahili meant that this important message reached a wider audience.

**Religious Inclusion**

Faith plays an important part in the lives of many Africans. Conceptually, religious inclusion is a practice which appreciates diversity of individuals from diverse religious traditions as well as non-religious individuals (Mokotso, 2022). It generally emphasises equity and respect for all religions and beliefs. Diversity of religious and non-religious individuals is characteristic of Kiswahili academic associations and this has succinctly been explained by Participant D, a member of Kiswahili Association in East Africa and the National Kiswahili Association when he highlights that Kiswahili academic associations are home to religious and non-religious individuals sharing the same space in harmony. Religions which are represented by various Kiswahili academic association members are predominantly Muslim, Christianity and African traditional religion, with Muslim and Christianity having the most members.

Notably, the researcher observed that among Kiswahili speakers, one is quick to identify a Muslim by dressing and speech accompanied by linguistic overtones such as "Assalam aleykum' (Greetings) or "In Shaa Allah" (God willing). Similarly, Christians commonly identify themselves with linguistic overtones such as "Bwana Yesu asifiwe" (Praise be to Jesus) as a greeting. While religious inclusion fosters urgency to know more about others and better appreciate their religious or non-religious values, such overtones can be sensitive in shared spaces and tend to promote exclusion rather than inclusion[1]. Moreover, some religions may avoid handshakes and direct physical contact with the opposite sex in public spaces, a situation which can be equally confusing to those of different faith or to the non-religious. Such situations can be difficult to manage but the use of neutral and inclusive language may be an alternative solution (Workhuman, 2023). From the interviews, I gathered that religious diversity sometimes comes with some kind of discord, but, Kiswahili academic associations actively promote religious tolerance through activities such as religious tours during conferences so as to allow members to appreciate religious differences.

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1.  Born and raised in Zimbabwe where Christianity and African traditional religion are predominant, these were some of the researcher's observations and experiences when he moved to Tanzania for his studies in MA Kiswahili.

## Academic Inclusion

The core business of academic associations is centered on advancing academic development and excellence. Ideally, academic environments where diversity is visible and appreciated potentially foster academic inclusivity. As such, academic inclusion refers to practices which are centered on increasing participation in learning, research and career development in a secure environment where all members are valued and respected (Talavera, 2022). All 16 participants echoed the sentiment that Kiswahili academic societies inspire academic inclusion by means of engaging in a variety of academic activities such as seminars, collaborative publications, workshops, training sessions and related scholarly dialogues. Central arguments gathered from participants highlighted that such activities bring together academics from diverse backgrounds and provides them an opportunity for exchanging ideas, professional development, collaborative research, networking, skills development and staying abreast with latest and current trends in the field.

However, Participants E and F raised contrasting concerns when they exposed instances of academic exclusion whereby Kiswahili academic associations focus only on higher education activities at the exclusion of primary and secondary school learners who are still in the lower levels of academia. The two participants argue that these young learners' lived experiences, perspectives and knowledge equally matter, and are central in shaping and advancing the agenda of promoting Kiswahili as an inclusive African language. In the same vein, Participant G pointed out that while Kiswahili has gone beyond the borders of East Africa, opportunities such as scholarships and employment are largely accessible to East African citizens, therefore, it is also important to avail equal accesses of opportunities in every region where Kiswahili is adopted and taught. When asked how this kind of challenge may be resolved Participant G suggested that Kiswahili academic associations must get involved in work that influences policy so that policymakers can come up with inclusive policies on equal access to academic opportunities.

## Political Inclusion

Political inclusion generally emphasises freedom of expression and participation for all. It encourages the community's involvement in political spheres such as running for office, voting, civic education and offering input in the development of policies and legislation, hence, creating a sense of agency and belonging (German Marshal Fund, 2019). While political inclusion recognises the ways in which civic and political rights are exercised (Sivalo, 2023), it is also central in promoting democracy. Kiswahili academic associations potentially contribute towards achieving politically inclusive and democratic environments, from leadership of association to national and international politics of the day (Atchison, 2017). Participant H explained that academics exercise freedom in expressing their political views through journal publications and academic and creative book anthologies where they are free to interrogate, to support and to critique political issues of the day. Participant I, a member of Kiswahili Poetry Association in Tanzania, supported the idea of academia as a viable political activist space by giving the example of how since the 1950s, poetry associations such as Kiswahili Poetry Association in Tanzania published anthologies that questioned colonial rule and pushed

nationalist ideologies. Therefore, Kiswahili academic associations are untapped sources for giving voice to the voiceless in oppressive societies.

## Gender Inclusion

Gender equity is equally imperative to peaceful societies and human rights (UNFPA, 2005) and one of the most significant ways of achieving gender equity is through gender inclusive practices. Significant efforts have been made to increase participation of women in the labor force in Africa. Gender inclusion is stemmed on equal rights and access to opportunities to all genders without gender bias, discrimination and prejudice. However, research reflects that gender disparities continue to bedevil African societies (Siziba & Wood, 2015), influenced by underlying social, cultural, religious, legal, regulatory and institutional barriers. On the issue of gender inclusion, Participant J, a member of National Kiswahili Association shared that Kiswahili academic associations generally have a supportive framework that gives preference to leadership positions for women. However, another Participant H a member of Kiswahili Association in East Africa expressed the view the terrain of gender inclusivity in Kiswahili academic associations is uneven. This is because the subject of alternative gender identities still remains excluded and at the margins of the works of many Kiswahili academic associations. One of the major reasons for this is that members feel that alternative gender identities such as those of LGBTQI+ individuals are in contrast to the norms and cultural values of most African societies. While this may be the general sentiment shared amongst many African cultures and societies, it is also a reality that the exclusionary practices against alternative gender identities impose

a huge barrier on the achievement of gender inclusion within Kiswahili academic associations. Resultantly, Kiswahili academic associations collude with prevailing social norms and legal institutions to strip alternative gender identity individuals of their civic and democratic rights.

## Disability Inclusion

Disability inclusion is the practice of affording access to equal opportunities, human rights and fundamental freedoms to persons with disabilities (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). In this study, all 16 participants agreed that in Kiswahili academic associations, people with disabilities are underrepresented. Participant K who is a member of Kiswahili Association in East Africa shared the view that many times, the lack of support systems for people with disabilities and those with special needs promotes exclusion. Provision for special arrangements such as sign language interpreters and braille materials is essential but financial constraints limit the funding for these arrangements. The same participant also explained that although disability exclusion is a cause for concern, it is mostly done unconsciously because of the small number of individuals with disabilities in these associations. It was recognised that this was not a justifiable cause for underrepresentation of disabled individuals in academic associations. Additionally, Participant L who is a member of the Kiswahili Language and Literature Association in Tanzania felt that it is good to promote the participation of disabled persons and other minorities in academic associations but it is also prudent to assess the significance of a certain group in line with the vision and mission of an association as some associations believe that issues of people with disabilities are outside the mandate and vision of their core activities as an

association. In light of this, it is imperative for Kiswahili academic associations to come up with alternative sources of funding and partnerships to create disability friendly environments when carrying out academic activities in order to attract and accommodate all persons including those with disabilities. It was also agreed that it is important to identify and include persons with disabilities and incorporate them in leadership positions so that they can take part in decision making processes and make sure that their needs are met.

**Cultural Inclusion**

Cultural inclusion is the practice of recognising, respecting and valuing diverse cultural identities and traditions in a society. Cultural inclusion essentially places emphasis on creating environments where individuals from different cultural backgrounds feel respected, included and afforded equal opportunities to fully participate in an organisation's activities. Participant L a member of National Kiswahili Association had this to say on cultural inclusion:

> **Even though we do not have an explicit policy on diversity and inclusion in our constitution, however, we do appreciate and acknowledge that every culture represented in our association is important and unique in its own way, be it a minority or a majority group. This is why our doors are open to everyone who wishes to join or participate in our activities at any given time. So far, we have members from various countries in and outside the continent who attend our annual conferences. We have also published many great works in our journal from people of various cultural backgrounds."**

The presence of diverse cultures in these academic spaces fosters cultural pluralism whereby identities of underrepresented subcultures remain visible and valued, hence creating a healthy, equitable and harmonious cultural ecosystem for all (Ziółkowska, 2020). While the Kiswahili culture remains more predominant in many aspects such as language, dressing and food, minority subcultures in Kiswahili academic associations remain visible. Simultaneously, a more culturally inclusive Pan African identity is established, where all represented African cultures have equal opportunities to influence Afro-centered research and policy making.

## OUTCOMES

Results of this study have established that there is inclusion as well as exclusion of certain individuals and populations within Kiswahili academic associations occurring in various forms. While the dimensions are intersectional, the degrees of inclusion and exclusion vary. Nevertheless, inclusion and exclusion occur at the individual, group, national and regional levels. The study's analysis revealed that although complexities of inclusion and exclusion are intricate; cultural, social and academic inclusion are more predominant while gender and disability inclusion are the less prevalent. Additionally, the results have shown that although Kiswahili academic associations do not have explicit diversity and inclusion frameworks; inclusion is implicit as evidenced by efforts made to promote inclusion in various ways. However, as highlighted in the case of disability inclusion, associations appear to choose who they want to target for inclusion in line with their vision and mission. Therefore, it seems there is no uniform blueprint for inclusive initiatives and so, there is

urgent need for Kiswahili academic associations to come up with a long term plan for addressing issues of diversity, inclusion and equity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Intentional inclusion seeks to include all excluded individuals at whatever cost. It is focused on systematically identifying and targeting marginalised and underrepresented groups in order to increase diversity, equity and participation (Grill, 2020). Considering this, Kiswahili academic associations ought to conduct a thorough survey of underrepresented individuals in order to establish and understand their barriers to inclusion. Following this, support systems should be put in place to accommodate such groups and individuals. Inclusion is not only a question of moving those in the margins into the center, it equally involves a change of perspective by governments, non-state actors and individuals. As such, raising awareness on diversity and inclusion is critical and key in educating non-marginalised individuals in leadership spaces to enhance their awareness, eliminating unconscious bias and understanding of the intricate issues affecting minority and excluded groups (Madzima & MacIntosh, 2021). Various initiatives such as academic seminars, workshops and calls for personal commitments are central in creating platforms for discussion, policy framing and implementation towards inclusion of marginalised groups. It is also imperative for Kiswahili academic associations to design explicit diversity and inclusion frameworks in order to promote inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Seeking alternative sources of funding is also critical for Kiswahili academic associations to amplify inclusion initiatives which largely depend on funding. Academic associations can engage organisations, stakeholders and government agencies which advocate for the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised groups. In the same vein, there is need for Kiswahili academic associations to influence policy positions among African governments, stakeholders and organisations to lobby for an inclusive open door policy for economic opportunities to all individuals, not on the basis of their nationality or geographical location, but, on merit or expected qualifications.

## CONCLUSION

This study was an exegesis of inclusion in Kiswahili academic associations specifically focusing on dimensions of inclusion within these associations. Discussion and outcomes of the study established the intricacies and intersectionality of inclusion within Kiswahili academic associations and how these persist in shaping inclusive and exclusive perspectives in Kiswahili academic activities. Nevertheless, the study has revealed the potential of Kiswahili as a language that can promote inclusion and diversity in Africa. The study also showed the ways in which Kiswahili language can act as an African bridge for common understanding as it is a shared inclusive language which connects individuals of different nationalities, cultures, religions, ideologies and languages through Kiswahili academic associations.

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# Exploring the influence of culture on democratic norms and practices: A case study of electoral campaign and voting processes in The Gambia

Kudakwashe Bandama iD

## ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate connection between culture and social norms, which together mould the backdrop of all democratic practices. Culture, encompassing a rich array of customs, rituals, religious beliefs, traditions, music and enterprise, exerts fundamental influence in shaping human conduct and, by extension, democratic norms. Through its pervasive impact, culture intricately weaves together the social and political realms unveiling the nuanced effects of norms and practices on accountability, inclusivity, tolerance and transparency within democratic systems. This study focuses on The Gambia as a case study, evaluating the distinct campaign and voting processes in this country, and providing an analysis aimed at affirming the practical significance and impact of culture on democracy. An exploration of the interplay between cultural norms and democratic processes emphasises their sway over civic participation, pluralism and the core tenets of democracy. The study examines how culture, as a formative force, shapes individual outlooks toward political engagement, spotlighting the substantial influence of factors like religion, tradition and socialisation. The study elucidates on this relationship by casting a spotlight on the fundamental association between humanities and culture. It highlights how humanities serve as the cornerstone upon which various aspects of culture are constructed (Bewaji, 2017). The study conclusively underscores that culture wields substantial guidance on democratic practices, by acting as the foundation upon which societal norms and political behaviours are constructed. Making sense of the ways in which culture moulds democratic involvement allows policymakers, cultural activists and scholars to develop strategies for harnessing cultural strengths. Overall, the study enriches the broader discourse on democracy in Africa by showing the intricate interplay between culture and the operational dynamics of democracy

*Key words*: culture, democratic norms, The Gambia, political campaigns, voting systems

# INTRODUCTION

The epistemic decline of the humanities is a reflection of the general decline of humanity (Ikpe, 2015). The ongoing global pushback against humanities subjects has been justified by the argument that humanities have failed to evolve enough to offer contemporary solutions to contemporary problems. However, within the African democracy project, the utility of humanities is supported by history which highlights that the resilience and vibrancy of Africa's culture is sufficient to effectively respond to current political challenges (Omonzejie, 2017). This is particularly illustrated by the collective (social organization) principle of Ubuntu which is hinged on the collective strength of the society to remedy challenges, to celebrate, to support and to exist (Mbiti, 1969). It is these humanistic practices and principles inherent in Ubuntu which are commonly termed culture in Africa.

It is Amilcar Cabral who stresses the importance of culture when he says:

> **...to dominate a nation by force of arms is, above all, to take up arms to destroy or at least, to neutralise and paralyse its culture. For as long as a section of the populace is able to have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation. (Cabral, 1974).**

Cabral's sentiments solidify the fact that culture is the foundation of society and any attempts to destroy the fabric of society requires a systematic dismantle of its culture. The interplay between culture and democratic practices today stands as a cornerstone of societal development and political progress or regress. It is an intimate relationship which binds social development and politics and has far-reaching implications in the formation of norms, the exercise of civic participation, and the functioning of democratic principles.

While this may be so, in many African states, political accountability and transparency are increasingly being placed under scrutiny and the utility of elections is incessantly being questioned. Makahamadze (2019) states that the challenge to electoral outcomes is generally caused by a common belief that the electoral vote has been mishandled and this makes the polls a "lightning rod for social discord." Adejumobi (2000) adds that electoral processes and outcomes have found themselves as victims in the "...gradual, but dangerous re-institutionalisation of autocratic and authoritarian regimes clad in democratic garb" (p.59). Cognisant of these challenges, I proffer the argument that the democracy project should harness the power of humanities concepts and practices because they offer innovative human-centred solutions that go beyond questions of moral dilemma which they have been resigned to settle.

This study thus, provides a unique moment of reflection within the humanities discipline by exploring the different humanistic tools which have the capacity to provide timely solutions for the present and the future of democracy in Africa. The study endeavours to achieve this by looking at the particular ways in which culture, an integral humanistic pillar, influences democratic norms and practices and the ways in which this important relationship may be leveraged to devise democratic solutions for governance in Africa. However, culture is a broad subject and for the purposes of achieving this study's objectives, it is important to unpack the definitional issues within the broad spectrum of what is known as culture.

## DEFINING CULTURE

Culture has proven to be a vast and intricate field rich in subtleties which warrants in-depth exploration. Cognisant of this, it is not the objective of this study to deeply delve into the definitional issues related to the subject of culture. However, it is also crucial to provide a working definition as I am well aware that within the humanities, meanings are both encoded and decoded. The term culture generally incorporates a wide range of concepts, including lifestyle, values, etiquette, preferences, and practices (Mirfenderesky, 2002). The cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1976), suggests that culture, broadly or precisely "indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group" (p.6). Similarly, culture is also taken to involve the literature, music, film theatre, paintings, or sculpture of a people (Williams, 1976). Culture can therefore, be defined as the foundation of any given society and within this foundation, religion is central as it is regarded as that which orients society to find its identity (Beyers, 2017). As a result of the existence of culture, society is designed in a manner which is distinct and adaptable to the particular requirements of its environment, thereby, shaping the behaviours and customs of the people. Culture can also be viewed as a framework of how the society engages with itself, that is, endogenously, and with the outside exogenous environment. If one is to also consider the historical definition of "culture" as that which is rooted in agrarian practices, culture is also that which produces within a specific environment (Jahoda, 2012). In light of these definitions, it is reasonable to argue that the formation or establishment of a culture can be traced to a given set of circumstances within the environment. The word "circumstance" here is better placed than

"challenge" because the formation of a culture is not entirely founded in reaction to adversity but, can similarly be developed to harness positive outcomes in society. These practices, customs, actions, values, and preferences shape norms which influence not only social development, but also politics and democracy at large.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted through ethnographic research in The Gambia during the months of October to December 2021 on the prelude to the presidential elections. As defined by Brewer and Sparkes (2011) ethnography is the study of people in their natural contexts. The central aim of ethnography is to generate profuse accounts of peoples' lives and is especially effective in making sense of the messy particularity of lives in different contexts and cultures. It is the central aim of ethnography to make the strange, familiar. Accordingly, an ethnographic approach was important to my empirical enquiry into the ways in which cultural norms and practices of The Gambia influence democracy. Ethnography gave me access to the Gambian people's socio-cultural lives, their often hidden social-cultural reality and the meanings they attach to these. The research was specifically conducted in the Upper River Region (URR), employing the staple ethnographic tool of participant observation. During the research period, I assumed the role of a long-term election observer and this role provided me with valuable information to develop profound understanding of governance in The Gambia and to gain an appreciation of the socio-cultural diversity characterising this nation. As Moriarty (2011) explains, participant observation in ethnography allows the researcher to acquire insights beyond

what can be obtained through interviews alone, thereby potentially opening new avenues of inquiry and understanding. Participant observation, therefore, opened up new avenues of socio-cultural inquiry and comprehension of the nexus between cultural practices and democracy in The Gambia.

## THE NEXUS BETWEEN CULTURE AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

The nexus between culture and democracy in Africa cannot be fully understood outside the history of colonialism which imposed Eurocentric cultures and practices in Africa and sought to establish them as the norm. Cabral (1974) explains this when saying:

> **...experience of colonial domination shows that, in the attempt to perpetuate exploitation, the coloniser not only creates a whole system of repression of the cultural life of the people colonised, but also arouses and develops the cultural alienation of a section of the populace by the so-called assimilation. (p.14).**

Mimoko (2010) expands on this issue by arguing that traditional African systems of conflict resolution were destroyed by colonialism, and, in their place, nothing was given. Mimoko further argues that the democratic processes in Africa were brutally uprooted by a deliberate erasure of African indigenous cultures. This shows how culture and democracy in Africa and perhaps beyond Africa, have an intimate correlation. Cultural norms influence the development of political habits and these habits, in turn, inform democratic practices. Elections, constitutionalism, pluralism, and tolerance

are some of the democratic practices that are rooted within strong cultural foundations. The prevailing attitudes and behaviours of the society can provide a disabling or enabling environment for the exercise of democratic customs, thereby, accentuating the importance of culture in the attainment of democracy (Inglehart & Welzel, 2003). The practice of democracy formalises civic and political participation based on an established framework (Inglehart & Welzel, 2003). For this formal structure to function, it is highly dependent on the informal organisation within a particular community and the foundation for such informal organisation is culture. If the culture within the environment is cultivated to be intolerant of divergent views, the application of formal democratic practices becomes difficult. The nexus between cultural norms and democracy lies in the fact that for democracy to flourish, the cultural foundations of society must create a conducive environment for that to happen. The flipside to this perspective is that democracy has the potential to shape the culture of a society. This implies that democracy might impose its values on culture instead of culture naturally engendering democracy. Scholars such as Hu (2013) stress the importance of harnessing the influence of culture in the realm of politics, suggesting that this approach is more effective than resorting to the tools of warfare.

Up to this point, culture has been defined as a distinctive way of life within a specific group and time frame. Additionally, it has been shown that culture is linked to the origination of religion, norms and values through socialisation thus, highlighting an inherent contrast between norms and values on one hand and attitudes and beliefs on the other. While both are encompassed within the framework of culture, the notable resilience of norms and values against external influences

compared to attitudes and beliefs strengthens the argument that culture plays an important role in shaping democratic norms. It is, important to emphasise that culture is not static, it is fluid and dynamic and reflects the proclivities of the times. However, despite this fluidity, traditional norms and values remain the substratum of society undergirding democratic principles and practices. The Gambia presents a perfect example of the intimate correlation between culture and democracy, particularly the ways in which the Gambian culture has been used during elections to influence democratic practices. In order to fully appreciate how socio-cultural norms have been utilised to advance democratic practices in The Gambia, it is necessary to provide a brief historical background of the country.

## THE GAMBIA: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

The Gambia is a West African State which was the last British colony in West Africa to gain its independence in 1965 (Edie, 2000). It is characterised by a fusion of cultures emanating from various ethnic groups including the Mandinka, Fulani/Tikular, Wolof, Jola/Karoninka and Serahuleh among many others. Additionally, the country's religious set up is comprised of 90% Islam, 8% Christianity, and 2% indigenous traditional religion (Sanneh, 2017). Like numerous African nations, The Gambia has experienced a tumultuous past marked by periods of both peace and conflict, where the state has sometimes resorted to force and other times adhered to constitutional principles to assert its authority. The nation's political trajectory has been extensively chronicled, with a significant milestone being the unveiling of the Truth

Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) report in 2021. This comprehensive report meticulously recounts historical events within the country, spanning from the 1994 coup, the 1999 witch hunts, sexual and gender-based violence offences, the president's Alternative Treatment Programme and various other historical atrocities. While the TRRC report's intentions were noble, there is a glaring absence of the role played by cultural norms and practices within the grand scheme of all these atrocities. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that culture has played and continues to play a substantial role in Gambian politics, past and present. It is therefore this study's objective to place Gambian cultural norms and practices in conversation with political practices in order to show the specific ways in which cultural norms and values influence election campaigns and voting processes. For this objective to be achievable, it is correspondingly important to provide a general overview of the drivers of culture in The Gambia.

## DRIVERS OF CULTURE IN THE GAMBIA

The drivers of culture in The Gambia are varied and nuanced but the most common drivers of Gambian culture are religion and tradition. In The Gambia, cultural practices and customs largely follow the Islam religion. It was the former President Jammeh of The Gambia who boldly declared that The Gambia would become a truly Islamic country, and that the country's constitution shall be the Quran. Following up on this declaration, Jammeh pronounced that female government employees had to wear headscarves in accordance with the dictates of Islam religious practices. While this new law was

quickly shut down, Jammeh's pronouncements illustrated the ways in which religion entangles with political processes in The Gambia. Scholars such as Sanneh (2017) share the view that Jammeh's actions reflected the genesis of a wider political campaign tactic which was targeted at thwarting political opposition in the country. While Jammeh's motivations for imposing Islam religious norms and practices in The Gambian state craft may be contested, what is clear is that religion cannot be separated from The Gambian political practices and governance issues. This is made clear in the TRRC report where it says:

"

**The Gambia is a multi-cultural and religious society where religious leaders are held in high esteem and have the power to sway public opinion. They are often perceived as the intermediaries who interpret God's word and laws. Culturally, the belief in spirits and spiritual knowledge, and supernatural beings comes from a belief that some people (mostly religiously trained people) possess supernatural knowledge about these things.[1]**

The religion and politics node in The Gambia is made even more apparent by the fact that political practices such as Local Government Elections do not coincide with Ramadan, a sacred month in the Islamic calendar (Jaiteh, 2022). Ramadan is observed by Muslims across the globe as a period of prayer, fasting, deep reflection and community. In The Gambia, Ramadan should not coincide with elections based on the argument that the electorate's attention is drawn to prayer and fasting and this hinders their ability to fully participate in politics. This underscores the substantial role of religion in shaping the socio-political fabric of The Gambian society.

Tradition also plays an important role in shaping the political culture in The Gambia. For example, the *Alkalo*[2] and the chiefs are the traditional leaders who have the political and governance reigns at the village level (Hughes & Perfect, 2008). The *Alkalo* holds significant authority to the extent that they have in the past, been regarded as part of the political architecture of the People's Progressive Party of Dawda Jawara. Their immersion with the local communities and their religious hold on the people was used strategically to push the party's political agenda (Edie, 2000). Within the framework of post-colonial governance, the *Alkalo* have been accorded defined administrative duties but they would also use these duties to register and coerce the electorate towards the ruling party using incentives from the central government (Edie, 2000). This demonstrates how the *Alkalo* traditional leadership has been strategically placed to influence the vote outcome at the expense of opposition political parties.

Communal living remains a prevalent traditional practice in The Gambia and the role of the *Alkalo* has evolved to encompass conflict mediation, preservation of tradition, and the facilitation of voter mobilisation within the communities. Furthermore, within the traditional context, gatherings take place at the *Bantaba*, typically beneath a *Bentennie* tree where discussions driven exclusively by men take place. These discussions range from social challenges faced by the communities to issues of community development. Typically, traditional culture in The Gambia profoundly shapes societal norms, delineating specific roles and restrictions for men and women and these restrictions in turn spill over into the political arena. My exploration

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1.  Volume 1 Part A TRRC Report https://www.justiceinfo.net/wp-content/uploads/Volume-1-Compendium-Part-A.pdf

2.  The Alkalo is the traditional Gambian village Chief of the founding family however, today they are elected.

of the influence of culture on democratic norms and practices in The Gambia, confirmed the central role played by religion and tradition in driving cultural practices in this country. It also revealed the existence of many other unique cultural practices and these were made more apparent during political campaigns.

## UNIQUE CULTURAL PRACTICES AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE GAMBIA

In The Gambia during elections, as in many election environments, political campaigns become vibrant spectacles of music and political grandeur as candidates compete to outshine one another in their quest for political victory. The political campaigns are set with custom trucks, mobile screens, live music bands, dazzling lights, and motorcades, which are all strategically employed to convey political force and dominance (Paget, 2023). In many African countries, electoral campaigns are typically held during the day so as to maximise on the number of people who can attend these political "shows." However, in The Gambia, campaigns distinctly take place during the day and night as illustrated in Figures 1 & 2 below:

**DAY 3: THURSDAY 11ᵀᴴ NOVEMBER 2021**

| PARTY | TIME | VENUE | REMARK |
|---|---|---|---|
| NPP | 11AM -2PM<br>3PM -6PM<br>7PM -12AM | NGAYEN SANJAL<br>KAUR<br>FASS (UPPER SALOUM) | NIGHT STOP<br>JANJANBUREH- |
| -GDC | - | - | - |
| PDOIS | 11AM -1PM<br>1.30PM -3.30PM<br>4.30PM – 6PM<br>6.30PM – 7.30PM<br>8PM – 9PM<br>9.30PM -12AM | TALLINDING<br>FAJIKUNDA<br>TABOKOTO<br>WELLINGARA<br>NEMAKUNKU<br>ABUKO | CARAVANS<br><br><br><br>RALLY |
| UDP | 11AM – 12PM<br>12.30PM – 2PM<br>3.30PM -5PM | FAJIKUNDA<br>BUNDUNG CENTRAL<br>TALLINDING | CARAVANS |
| NUP | 11AM – 2.30PM<br>3PM – 5PM<br>6PM – 8PM<br>9PM – 12AM | GUNJUR MISSIRA<br>JALAMBANG<br>JAMBUR<br>LAMIN | |
| IND./EMF | 10PM- 12PM<br>12.30PM – 2.30PM<br>3PM – 5.30PM<br>6PM – 9PM | SABACH SANJAL<br>SARA KUNDA<br>NGAYEN SANJAL<br>BALANGHARR | NIGHT STOP IN KAUR<br>FROM 10PM |

Figure 1: Campaign programme, 11th November 2021

*Source: Composite political campaign programme presidential election 4th December 2021 Independent Electoral Commission The Gambia.*

**COMPOSITE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN PROGRAMME**
**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 4ᵗʰ DECEMBER 2021**

9ᵗʰ November - 2ⁿᵈ December 2021

**DAY 1: TUESDAY 9ᵀᴴ NOVEMBER 2021**

| PARTY | TIME | VENUE | REMARK |
|---|---|---|---|
| NPP | 11AM -2PM<br>3PM -6PM<br>7PM – 12AM | FASS OMAR SAHO<br>NDUNGU CHARREN<br>KUNTAIR | • CROSSING AT 9AM.<br>• NIGHT STOP IN KEREWAN. |
| GDC | - | - | |
| PDOIS | 11AM-1PM<br>1.30PM -3.30PM<br>4.30PM -6.30PM<br>8PM-12AM | EBO TOWN<br>KANIFING LAYOUT<br>MANJAI KUNDA<br>LATRIKUNDA GERMAN (MOSQUE) | |
| UDP | 11AM -12PM<br>1PM-1.45PM<br>2PM – 2.45PM<br>3PM – 3.45PM<br>4PM -4.45PM<br>5PM – 5.45PM | SANGHAJOR<br>KEMBUJEH (KINTEH KUNDA)<br>BRIKAMA MISIRA (DAFFEH KUNDA)<br>BRIKAMA WELLINGARA (DRAMMEH KUNDA)<br>BRIKAMA WELLINGARA (TALIBO SAIDY)<br>FARATO BOJANG KUNDA | -<br>COURTESY CALL<br>COURTESY CALL<br>COURTESY CALL<br>COURTESY CALL<br>COURTESY CALL |
| NUP | 5PM – 10PM | MANDINABA | RALLY |
| IND./EMF | 10AM- 12PM<br>1PM - 3PM<br>3:30PM-5PM<br>9PM-11PM | KANUMA<br>NDUNGU KEBBEH<br>MEDINA SERING MASS<br>DARSILAMEH | • CROSSING AT 6AM.<br>• NIGHT STOP ILLIASA. |
| | 1.30PM - 3.30PM<br>4.30PM – 6.30PM<br>7PM – 8PM<br>8.30PM – 12AM | BUNDUNG BOREHOLE<br>DIPPAKUNDA CHUPE TOWN<br>BAKOTEH BANTABA<br>LONDON CORNER (MARCHE NGELEW) | RALLY |
| UDP | 11AM -11.45AM<br>1PM -2PM<br>2.30PM – 3.45PM<br>4.30PM – 5.30PM<br>6PM – 6.45PM<br>7PM -7.45PM<br>8PM – 8.45PM | WELLINGARA<br>SINCHU ALHAGIE<br>LABAKOREH<br>BUSUMBALA<br>BANJULINDING<br>LAMIN<br>MANDINARI | CARAVANS |
| NUP | 2.30PM – 4.30PM<br>5PM – 7PM<br>7.30PM – 12AM | BABYLON<br>MAKUMBAYA<br>MANDINARY | RALLIES |
| IND./EMF | 10AM -12PM<br>12.15PM – 2.30PM<br>2.45PM -5PM<br>5.30PM -8PM<br>8.15PM -12AM | ILLIASSA<br>CHAMEN<br>FARAFENNI AREA COUNCIL JUNCTION<br>JENOI<br>PAKALINDING | NIGHT STOP |

**Figure 2: Campaign programme, 9th November 2021**

*Source: Composite political campaign programme presidential election 4th December 2021 Independent Electoral Commission The Gambia.*

Political campaigns in The Gambia are methodically allotted times which range from 11a.m to 12a.m and these times are uniform across the political party divide. One of the major reasons for such an arrangement is so that political activities during elections do not disrupt the usual business of the day. The time slots are meant to be inclusive and they represent a regular and integrated process within the country's political milieu. Gambian election campaigns are designed in such a way that they do not bring the country's daily business to a halt. They are amalgamated into the daily business of the day and night so as to be as inclusive as possible and not leave behind or exclude anyone who may be interested in attending or participating in the campaign performances. This typically reflects The Gambia's traditional cultural values which are communal in perspective. Traditional governance politics in The Gambia is decided by everyone, it is communal and for these communal political values to succeed, everyone should be involved.

Within this framework of inclusivity, political campaigns in The Gambia practice what is popularly known as "crossing". "Crossing" is a situation whereby different political parties are expected to cross paths at an intersection or along the highway during a campaign trail. Usually, crossing happens when one political party is headed to the location where another party is leaving.[3] While this kind of political party intersection is not common in many African countries, in The Gambia it is encouraged so as to promote political tolerance and dialogue. Political tolerance is a practice engrained in Gambian traditional culture and emanates from the recognition that while there may exist political differences, these differences do not overshadow the fact that they are one people. Consequently, contemporary election campaigns in The Gambia are characterised by peace and not chaos. The climax of peaceful campaigning was played out in the first ever presidential debate which happened on the 20th of November 2021 when the two presidential candidates were given a public platform to debate their policies and presidential plans for the country. At the centre of presidential debates is the idea of public dialogue which is a common feature of traditional political culture in The Gambia. In addition, the fact that some political rallies can go on until the middle of the night is a testimony to how tolerance and respect for political differences provides safe spaces for doing politics. Safe spaces for political campaigns continue to be cultivated through early cultural socialisation to tolerance and the doctrines of dialogue and respect for everyone are insisted upon. The practice of "crossing" political routes, which is illustrated in Figure 3 below, becomes a practical method of achieving political tolerance and dialogue. Tolerance is thus, not just a buzzword which Gambian politicians throw around, it is a way of life intricately connected to the cultural norms and practices of The Gambia. Beyond the political campaigns, the influence of culture on democratic process is also evident in the voting systems of The Gambia as will be discussed in the following section.

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3.  Observed by the author in the Upper River Region in The Gambian election of 2021.

DAY 23: WEDNESDAY 1ST DECEMBER 2021

| PARTY | TIME | VENUE | REMARK |
|---|---|---|---|
| NPP | 3PM – 12AM | TALLINDING- FOOTBALL FIELD | |
| CDC | 10AM – 3PM<br>4PM – 7PM<br>8.30PM – 12AM | EBO TOWN – PARKI JOLA<br>BANJUL CENTRAL<br>NEMA KUNKU | RALLY<br><br>ROUTE: WESTFIELD-<br>SERREKUNDA –<br>BUNDUNG |
| PDOIS | 10 AM – 12PM<br>1.30PM – 4PM<br>5PM – 12AM | LATRI KUNDA SABIJI<br>NEMA KUNKU<br>NEW JESHWANG – SENFURR NEAR AGIB | CARAVAN<br><br>RALLY |
| UDP | 3PM – 12AM | BANJUL – ARCH 22 | RALLY<br><br>ROUTE: PIPELINE- KOTU-<br>MANJIE- BAKOTEH |
| NUP | 10.30PM – 11PM<br>11.30PM – 12PM<br>4PM– 12AM | BAKAU<br>OLD JESHWANG<br>ABUKO- GARAGE | CARAVAN<br><br>RALLY |
| IND./EMF | 10AM – 2PM<br>2.30PM – 7.15PM<br>7.30PM – 12AM | BANJUL SOUTH<br>BANJUL CENTRAL<br>BANJUL NORTH | CARAVAN<br>RALLY<br>CARAVAN<br><br><br>ROUTE: KERR SERIGN-<br>BERTIL HARDING-<br>BANJUL<br><br>THE SAME ROUTE BACK<br>TO KERR SERIGN |

DAY 24: THURSDAY 2ND DECEMBER 2021

| PARTY | TIME | VENUE | REMARK |
|---|---|---|---|
| NPP | 3PM – 11PM | BANJUL McCARTHY SQUARE | GRAND RALLY |
| GDC | 3PM – 11PM | BUFFER ZONE | GRAND RALLY |
| PDOIS | 12PM – 11AM | SERREKUNDA – EBONY | RALLY |
| UDP | 3PM – 11AM | BAKOTEH- FOOTBALL FIELD | GRAND RALLY |
| NUP | 4PM – 10PM | BRIKAMA - SSP | GRAND RALLY |
| IND./EMF | 12PM – 11AM | BAKAU – INDEPENDENT STADIUM | MEGA RALLY |

**Figure 3: Campaign programme, 1st December and 2nd December 2021**

*Source: Composite political campaign programme presidential election 4th December 2021 Independent Electoral Commission The Gambia.*

# VOTING SYSTEMS

While contemporary elections and voting processes in The Gambia appear to be open and tolerant, it must be said that its past processes were not as smooth sailing. One of the major challenges faced by the country during elections was the problem of vote buying in exchange for basic food commodities such as rice. There is a sense in which The Gambian politicians of days past took advantage of the electorate's generally impoverished conditions and political illiteracy to lure them into voting for them with food and other basic commodities. According to Foon (1961), vote buying happened in such a way that the voter would receive their ballot papers as is the standard procedure. However, upon getting into the voting booth, the voter would not cast their vote but would instead leave the voting booth with their ballot paper and proceeded to trade these for food and other commodities. The rampant problem of vote buying resulted in the introduction of the marble token and the bell drum ballot which is now common in contemporary Gambian elections. The ballot drum (Figure 4 below), works in such a way that the marble token is deposited in the drum when a vote is cast and whenever the marble falls in the drum, a bell rings signifying that a vote has been cast. The polling officers therefore listen for this sound as a way of making sure that the voter has placed their ballot in the drum and does not sneak out of the polling station with their ballot papers.



**Figure 4: Ballot drum pre-deployment sorting**

*Source: Kudakwashe Bandama (2021).*

To identify the candidate of the voter's choice, the ballot drums are coloured according to the candidate's campaigning colours thereby minimizing the risk of votes being cast for the wrong candidate (see Figure 5 below)

The marble and drum voting procedure may not be at par with international voting systems which have evolved technologically and continue to be re-dynamised, however, it remains an inclusive system of voting which takes into consideration the needs of all the electorate. Before the marble ballot and drum, the terrain of participation in political processes was not even, as it tended to disadvantage those people who were not literate. It also exposed them to manipulation from scheming political candidates. The marble and drum created an even platform where even the most illiterate people are able to understand the voting systems and how to go about casting their vote. The concept of the marble ballot speaks well to the communal nature of governance which is characteristic of The Gambian traditional culture. One can argue that it aligns well with democratic practices in the way it shuts down electoral fraud caused by vote buying. The fact that this new system was not imposed from the top, but, was a result of



**Figure 5: Ballot drum pre-deployment assessment**

*Source: Kudakwashe Bandama (2021).*

collective agreement shows how power is not something that comes from the top, but is enabled by people from the grassroots. Democratic electoral practices are often shaped by integrity and it is the integrity of the polls which the new marble ballot endeavours to uphold. The fact that The Gambian people were open to a new electoral system which is good for all cements the idea not just of the fluidity of culture, but of how culture may evolve to meet the new political needs of the society.

Foon (1961) has this to say:

> **By cutting out the possibility of fiddling before, during or after the election, each person can truly, without fear, favour or intimidation, vote in complete security according to his own conscience. We might then be able to consider policies rather than personalities, for upon those who, by threat or bribes, endeavour illegally to influence for their own ends a person's constitutionally guaranteed right to vote, will rest the full responsibility for any recriminations, bitterness or actual disturbance arising from The Gambia's first general election under full universal adult suffrage. (p.37)**

Foon rightly points to the democratic values that were meant to be upheld through the new voting system. This is not to say that the new system is without its weaknesses. One of the major challenges with the marble ballot is that it sometimes fails to cater for the increase in the numbers of the candidates which in turn requires more marbles and drums. Despite these challenges, it goes without saying that The Gambian cultural norms and practices which are rooted in tolerance and inclusivity make way for equally inclusive democratic practices which enhance electoral confidence and integrity allowing for social cohesion during elections.

## CONCLUSION

As the study has revealed, it cannot be overemphasised that humanistic tools such as culture provide valuable guidance, much like a compass, for addressing society's core challenges and for enabling democratic norms and practices not just in The Gambia, but potentially across the African continent. Looking at how the African continent continues to grapple with democratic governance issues, I proffer the argument that African countries should consider all possible ways for achieving democracy. Culture is collective and the collective is always political, thus, culture provides an untapped resource for concepts and methods of doing democracy in Africa. The study rightly showed the significance of culture on democratic principles and values. Through the case study of elections in The Gambia, the study showed that a society's capacity to adjust, to coexist, and to operate hinges on the foundation of cultural norms and values which are fostered within that community. Socialisation through religious and traditional beliefs are shown to play a dominant role in developing the core democratic values in The Gambia. Hence, culture is some sort of internal compass that is developed through socialisation and can be very useful in building tolerance, inclusivity, respect and transparency.

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# Creative arts and social engagement in contemporary Kenya

Brian Otieno iD

## ABSTRACT

The chapter defers to the general principles of the Kenyan Government's National Policy on Culture and Heritage (2010), this study foregrounds the important but often overlooked connection between creative arts and social engagement. The study specifically illustrates the ways in which selected Kenyan creative artists across three distinct artistic genres creatively and imaginatively use their art to foster the kind of wisdom and activism that is required of citizens in a democratic nation. The chapter positions Kenyan creative cultures art as democratic philosophy which is central to ensuring that citizens freely engage with politics of the day thereby promoting democratic governance. Specifically, the study locates three distinct creative artistic genres, which are digital narratives, popular music and participatory theatre and considers the social role of creative artists to imaginatively observe, evaluate and develop artistic models for addressing social problems and to create collective forms of citizen engagement. To achieve its objectives, the study uses a qualitative research approach involving discourse analysis of creative artistic works by contemporary Kenyan artists within the selected genres. The discourse analytical tool helps to sift through key discourse related to Kenyan creative arts and social engagement. The information gathered is interpreted, organised and described thematically.

*Key words*: creative arts, culture and heritage, social engagement, democracy, Kenya

# CREATIVE ARTS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

On the one hand, creative arts refer to the kinds of activities which use creative expression and imagination through art forms such as music, visual arts, dance, storytelling and other related forms of art. Arai (2013) contents that creative arts denote the kinds of special skills that are required to create a symbolic representation of human and social experience. Arai points to the role of creative arts in orchestrating a holistic experience that creates a deeply humanising social space in which individuals and communities use art's symbolic representations to come to terms with their identities and their lived experiences.

On the other hand, social engagement refers to the extent to which one can participate in a community or society. Carpenter (2019) insists that to engage is to provoke new and prolonged interest and participation, thus, social engagement speaks to the degree to which people are able to get involved and to interact with other people, events and expectations. It also involves the process of working collaboratively with groups of people so as to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. Other scholars conceptualise social engagement as a group of people working collaboratively through inspired action and learning, to create and realise bold visions for their future (Born, 2012). Thus, key characteristics of social engagement include participation and collaboration which are both aimed at achieving a common goal or addressing a common problem. It is the objective of social engagement activities to build trust and communal relationships which lead to sustainable collaborations and positive impacts

that improve the lives of community members as well as public processes. Social engagement is pivotal to well-functioning democracies and is desirable for democracy because it holds the potential to achieve more equitable and sustainable public decisions.

There is a strong connection between creative arts and building capacity for social engagement as well as democratic transformation. Although governments and bureaucrats are in control of overt democratic governance processes, this study shows that creative artists are the force behind the community democratic practices. This study illustrates this connection through an exploration of the ways in which Kenyan creative artists stimulate and support democracy through arts based social engagement activities.

# CREATIVE ARTS IN KENYA: GUIDELINES FROM THE NATIONAL POLICY ON CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Anchored on the national Constitution, Vision 2030, regional and international guidelines, the National Policy on Culture and Heritage (NPCH) which was revised in 2010 is aimed at promoting culture as a pillar for cohesion and development. Article 11 of the Constitution particularly binds the Kenyan government to promote all forms of national and cultural expressions through literature, the arts and other forms of cultural heritage. Additionally, the Constitution identifies the aspirations of all Kenyans for a government which is based on values and principles of human rights, equality, freedom, democracy, social justice and the rule of law. In consequence, the NPCH essentially recognises that democracy is not mutually exclusive to arts and culture. The

basis of democracy is steeped within Kenya's socio-cultural practices. The NPCH draws on the national constitution's recognition of the role played by culture as a national base and the cumulative civilisation of the Kenyan people. The NPCH was, therefore, put in place so as to increase the options of every Kenyan citizen to contribute to the socio-economic and political development of Kenya. It is meant to:

> ...provide an enabling environment for appreciating, protecting, safeguarding and promoting the culture of the people of Kenya as well as to reinforce national unity and pride while stimulating creativity and innovation. (NPCH, 2010, p. i)

There is something implicit in the NPCH which acts as a road map for Kenya's ambitions for depicting and exploring the possibilities and potentials of its citizens through creativity and collaborative national imagination. One of the ways that creativity and a collaborative national imagination is realised is by way of vibrant creative artistic practices. The NPCH underscores the important role played by creative arts in representing the nation's evolving morals, aesthetics and people and societies' aspirations. The NPCH distinctly states that the arts play a crucial role in fostering individual and communal identities and have been critical in engendering dialogue. It is, therefore, clear based on the NPCH's principles, that democratic practices of dialogue and social engagement are most achievable through arts and culture. This study thus, theorises arts and culture as soft power which is able to covertly activate social engagement for the democratic transformation of Kenyan communities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To make sense of the role played by creative arts to effect social engagement in Kenya, this study defers to Ugandan writer and philosopher, Okot p'Bitek's theorisation of the artist as the ruler of society. In his celebrated essay titled "Artist the ruler", p'Bitek (1986, p. 39) has this to say:

> I believe that a thought system is created by the most powerful, sensitive and imaginative minds that the society has produced: these are the few men and women, the supreme artists, the imaginative creators of their time who form the consciousness of the time...[The] artist proclaims the laws but expresses them in the most indirect language: through metaphor and symbol, in image and fable. He sings and dances his laws.

p'Bitek suggests that the role of the African artist is not just to entertain and to teach, but, it is the artist's vocation to boldly speak the truth to power. According to p'Bitek, art is deeply rooted in culture and culture is lived. So, art can only be able to have deep meaning when it reflects and celebrates a society's philosophy and when members of that society are able to imagine their identities and their lives through that art. p'Bitek further claims that artists create and proclaim the law at a central level in society. He says; "[The] artist creates the central ideas around which other leaders, law makers, chiefs, judges, heads of clans, family heads, construct and sustain social institutions" (1986, p. 39).

It is p'Bitek's views which provide theoretical angle from which to understand the role played by contemporary Kenyan artists in regulating democratic practices, particularly, social engagement. If as p'Bitek contends, the artists

create and disseminate principles that form the foundations of a people's system of thought and action, this study similarly exposes the principles created and disseminated by Kenyan artists to form the foundations of social inclusion.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is epistemologically anchored within humanities research and because of the very nature of humanities enquiry, the study adopts a qualitative research methodological approach. Three creative artistic genres were purposively selected, namely, digital narratives, music and participatory theatre. The data collected from these genres is systematically analysed, organised and interpreted through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is any form of written or spoken language which is interested in the underlying social structures which may be played out within a conversation or a text. Discourse analysis is a suitable data analysis tool because it is not restricted to the description of linguistic forms as commonly assumed, but, it is also committed to the purposes or functions for which the linguistic forms are designed and serve in human affairs (Halliday, 1985). Van Dijk (1988) argues that Discourse analysis is concerned with words used in discourse so as to reveal the source of power, abuse, dominance, inequality and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced and transformed within specific social, economic, political and historical contexts. The selected creative artistic genres will, through discourse analysis, illuminate into the underlying ways in which arts engender social engagement in contemporary Kenya

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**Digital Narratives and Social Engagement**

The digital revolution has had a powerful impact on the way everyday life is lived and one of the areas in which its impact is visible is the art and business of writing. Writers have had to make significant changes in response to the ubiquitous effects of the digital revolution. Writers in contemporary Kenya have taken full advantage of the versatility of information and communication technology and the omnipresence of the web to publish multifaceted digital narratives. One of the ways in which digital narratives enhance social engagement lies in how they effectively breakdown the barriers previously imposed by the formal complexity of traditional narratives. Digital narratives enhance fast mobility of information and where readers do not understand certain phenomena, they instantly look up words or passages for quick comprehension. Digital narratives are flexible and it is this feature which enhances social engagement because they are fluid enough to meet the diverse needs and capabilities of their audiences. Whereas, traditional narratives such as literary texts were characterised by formal and ideological complexity which excluded many who did not possess the taught skills required to study literature, digital narratives come with the necessary tools such as computer based literary analysis which help audiences to keep up with the writer's imagination. Digital narratives are, therefore, democratic and open; and democracy and openness are fundamental ingredients for effective social engagement. The following are some examples of popular digital narratives in Kenya which are being creatively utilised by writers across a diverse range of writing genres to mediate social engagement:

- **Blogging** is one of the most popular form of digital narratives in Kenya, and blogging is particularly popular among those who are critical of the government. One of the bloggers is Robert Alai who is also a politician who has used the attention of his 1.7 million followers on Twitter to critically engage the government. Social engagement is effectively achieved when his followers actively engage with his posts and use his posts to launch their own forms of social engagement. Like Arai, many Kenyan bloggers use their platforms to discuss political issues and to express their opinions on the state of democracy in the country. A range of political and social issues are brought to the table for audiences to discuss and share their opinions and it does not matter whether their opinions agree or disagree with the blogger's opinions.

- **#stopthesethieves** is a digital narrative developed by Kenyan citizens to participate in protests against government corruption which citizens hold accountable for the major economic hardships faced by the Kenyan citizenry. The movement gained momentum in 2020 and drew attention to massive corruption in government.

- **Digital storytelling** is a powerful tool for sharing personal and collective narratives and experiences. In Kenya, digital storytelling projects by popular writers such as Billy Kahora and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor have given a platform for relatively unknown writers to share their work, to engage their readers and to dialogue pressing socio-economic and political issues in post-colonial Kenya.

- **Online comedy** clips in Kenya have gained popularity for their humor, satire, political commentary and criticism. Through humorous skits, shows such as the XY2 Show and The Churchill Show have used political, social and religious parodies to speak to a wide range of Kenyan audiences especially the Kenyan youth. Thus, online comedy is a form of digital narrative which uses humor and satire as narrative strategies for social engagement and in the process providing the audiences their own forms of social engagement when they react to and comment on these comedy shows.

- **Citizen journalism** provides unique forms of digital narratives when citizens act as amateur journalists, reporting on events and incidents happening in real time. The forms of citizen journalistic narratives include images, videos and updates that traditional news outlets might not cover immediately.

The impact of digital narratives on social engagement must, however, not be romanticised. Digital narratives come with their own unique set of problems. Indeed, digital narratives have the potential to increase social engagement through public awareness and mobilisation of citizens to demand change and accountability from the government. They also provide a platform for marginalised voices to be heard and to contribute to a more diverse and inclusive public discourse. However, the Kenyan government has a history of cracking down on dissent and limiting freedom of expression, both online and offline. The government has been known to

censor and regulate online content, arrest and harass journalists and activists, and shut down social media platforms during periods of unrest. Despite these challenges, the impact of digital narratives on social engagement still remains. They offer citizens various opportunities to respond to democratic concerns by creating a record of public opinion and holding officials accountable for issues such as corruption and human rights abuses, and provide evidence for legal action or international pressure.

**Popular Music and Social Engagement**

Popular music denotes the kinds of music that are not only popular with the masses, but also subversively speaks against oppressive forces. Winston Mano (2007) argues that popular music can act in the place of journalism because as a form of cultural expression, it inscribes the world that is informed by what takes place in society every day. Kenyan popular music exhibits the journalistic features which Mano alludes to. Popular music in Kenya indeed compliments and more effectively expresses what journalists may not be able to communicate. This is because, as Mutero and Kaye (2019) suggest, music tends to offer a platform through which individuals and communities can find voice in contexts where freedom of speech is not always guaranteed. Popular music is therefore a useful tool for enabling cohesion and social engagement when public communication platforms are inhibited and where political discussions are controlled by those in power. Mano (2007, p. 62) rightly articulates:

> Popular music communication emerges in spite of its disapproval by officialdom. It is probably such disapproval together with its ability to raise issues affecting the generality of the people that makes it popular among the powerless.

Social engagement and popular music are mutually constitutive in the sense that popular music expresses social reality and dictates the agenda for society by generating forms of knowledge for its audience. At the center of both social engagement and popular music is the idea of participation for social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Kenyan popular music has contributed to social engagement in the way it builds strong, inclusive communities by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to develop meaningful relationships and social networks through popular music consumption and production. Kenyan popular music is rich, diverse and has evolved over the years, blending various genres and styles to create a uniquely Kenyan sound. The following are the different forms of popular music in contemporary Kenya which have made huge strides in constructing the social fabric of Kenya through a diverse range of social engagement activities:

- **Gengetone** is a popular music genre which mashes up rap, reggae and dancehall. It emerged from the streets of Nairobi and is inextricably tied to the everyday experiences of youth living in the streets of the city. It is therefore not just a music form, it is also a lifestyle, a subculture reacting to the urban impoverished conditions in which the youth are compelled to exist. Gengetone is immersed in youth activity and is emblematic of youth subalternity. As an opposition art form and culture, Gengetone provides the subaltern a subversive artistic platform for expressing their concerns. Popular

Gengetone artists include Sailors, Ethic and the Ochungo family (Odidi, 2020). One of the most popular ways in which Gengetone artists enhance social engagement involves the use of explicit street language as a communal construct of urban Kenyan youth identities. Street language is subversively used to alienate mainstream Kenyan culture which is characterised by conservative traditional values. In so doing, it is like the Gengetone artists are proclaiming that the Gengetone lifestyle has got nothing to do with anyone existing outside its confines. The outsider can only take a peek into the culture but will not be able to recognise themselves within this subversive culture and the outsider does not have to validate its value for it is music for and by the subaltern. Because of its subversiveness, Gengetone music is not distributed through mainstream channels. It is popularly distributed through the moving public minibuses known as Matatu. Social engagement effectively happens when the Matatu passenger comes face to face with Gengetone mixtapes which are played throughout the day. In the Matatu bus, communities and social networks are thus formed as the passengers consume the music.

- **Afrobeats** embrace a distinctive indigenous fusion music identity by tapping into Kenyan traditional music culture in an effort to create a distinct Kenyan identity. Artistic collaborations are a common practice and artists augment social engagement through merry live concert shows. Popular

Afrobeats artists in Kenya include but are not limited to Sauti Sol, Bensoul Waumba, Ayub Ogada, Suzanna Owiyo and Eric Wainana.

- **Gospel music** easily fosters social engagement by appealing to popular Christian values which are characteristic of Kenyan mainstream culture. One of the most remarkable social engagement initiatives involves the work of a musical collective known as Stories and Songs. The group came into prominence during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic when people were forced to remain at home and were prohibited from physical socialising outside the confines of their homes. Stories and Songs brought gospel music and stories on social networking sites, particularly their YouTube account. They used gospel music and stories as strategic narrative tools to preach to their audience who came on social media to find community and solidarity. Stories and Songs managed to grow a community of viewers who were eager for innovative ways of worship when faced by the disappearance of traditional ways of worshipping in church.

Based on these three examples of popular music in Kenya, it is apparent that creative artistic practices such as music making are open to many and can be enjoyed by large groups of people. So, popular music becomes a strategic way for initiating a sense of community when artists and audiences engage especially in times of strife and difficulty. Artists produce music and audiences consume music for the same reason, to imagine and to discourse pressing social, economic and political issues of the day in a

way that gives non-threatening voice to people's concerns (Mutero & Kaye, 2019).

**Participatory Theatre and Social Engagement**

Participatory theatre refers to the kind of theatre productions which make use of participatory approaches to allow the audience to probe, reflect on and respond to issues which concern them. Kenyan participatory theatre is dynamic and is an influential form of artistic expression which engages communities in addressing social, political and cultural issues affecting those communities. It serves as a powerful tool for community engagement, awareness-raising, and social change. In Kenya as in many other countries, participatory theatre has been utilised to address various issues, including healthcare, gender equality, environmental conservation, and political advocacy. Below is an outline of some theatre groups which have used participatory theatre to address different challenges faced by Kenyan communities.

The Ujamaa Theatre Group is a community based theatre group, located in Nairobi which has been using participatory theatre to raise awareness about social issues, including HIV/AIDS, female genital mutilation (FGM), and gender-based violence. They conduct interactive theatre performances and training workshops to encourage open discussions and to promote positive behavioral change.

Safe Spaces Theatre is focused on issues such as sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and violence against women. By involving community members in theatre production and performances, they have so far managed to create safe spaces for discussing

culturally sensitive topics and encouraging behavioral change. This is a huge achievement because in Kenya, like in many African societies, issues of sexual reproductive health are always enshrouded in taboos, silences and secrecies.

Political advocacy is another area where participatory theatre thrives. Here, it has been used in Kenya to get the citizens to be aware and to be involved in democratic governance processes. For example, during election periods, community theatre groups organise plays and educational forums which are meant to encourage voter registration, to educate people about their constitutional rights to vote, and to promote peace during elections.

Environmental advocacy is another common theme for many participatory theatre performances. Some organisations which are involved in environmental conservation and climate change issues have used participatory theatre to address these issues and to promote sustainable environmental conservation. By involving local communities in theatrical productions and discussions, participatory theatre helps to promote responsible environmental practices and raises awareness about the importance of protecting natural resources.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

After all is said and done this study was effectively an exploration of the impact of creative arts in social engagement in contemporary Kenya. The study explicitly illustrated that democratic practices such as social engagement are not a blind spot for creative arts. It is, therefore, crucial that organisations and associations for

creative artists must run collaborative programs with artists and citizens so as to augment further, social engagement which in turn encourages democratic practices. Additionally, the Ministry of education should implement compulsory arts based curriculum in schools for early appreciation of the value of social engagement in modern democracies. Finally, there is a need for the government in collaboration with creative arts and cultural organisations, to come up with a clear roadmap for increasing knowledge on digital narratives and to implement online activist strategies for funding and supporting online creative cultural practices.

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