CHAPTER

13

TRANSNATIONALS, SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEMOCRATISATION OF AFRICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: LESSONS FROM ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The democratisation process in Africa has recently taken a twist with the increased usage of social media platforms by citizens living and working abroad to champion democratisation in their countries of origin. The role of social media as conduits of participation for Diasporas is widely accepted, yet scholars have not explored how transnationals from Africa are using social media to contribute towards democratisation of their countries of origin. This chapter discusses the opportunities brought by social media (WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook), its diverse usage, and the complex challenges faced by Zimbabwean transnationals in utilising the cyberspace for democratisation of their home country. The chapter observes that social media platforms are convenient, affordable and have been adopted by transnationals as sources of information, platforms for airing individual opinions as well as supporting domestic events for democratisation. It contends that the influence of social media was felt during the 2016 activism in Zimbabwe, as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook platforms provided avenues for transnationals to unite, support and join fellow nationals back home into action against despotic leadership. It argues, despite the growing importance of social media, the utilisation of these platforms is affected by the state's negative attitude towards transnationals and the platform itself, trolls, jamming of signals, threats and criminalisation of its use. The chapter recommends that African governments must appreciate the advent of social media, and its wider significance for effective participation of citizens living and working abroad in the democratic processes of the countries of origin.

1   Introduction

Democracy is a contested concept, especially in repressive societies, where claims of state security and sovereignty are often used to undermine constitutional freedoms and human rights of minority groups. Democratic societies promote people's freedoms,[1] and cultivate as well as appreciate relations between government and civic groups, resulting in improved

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1   A Sen 'Democracy and its global roots: Why democratisation is not the same as westernisation' (2003) 14 *New Republic* 28.

attainment of rights and freedoms.[2] Democracy is also inclusive, and accommodates even those opinions of groups or individuals who are part of the minority such as transnationals. Transnationals provide important contributions to the development of their countries of origin through remittances that provide a lifeline to relatives and friends left behind. De Haas[3] highlights that remittances sent to developing countries increased from 31.1 billion in 1990 to 167 billion in 2005. In Ghana, remittances from transnationals remain higher than donor and multilateral aid.[4] A study of Zimbabweans in Leeds, UK reported over 80 per cent of respondents were sending basic necessities back home.[5] Similarly, a study by Bracking and Sachikonye[6] revealed that half of families in Bulawayo and Harare (main cities in Zimbabwe), with relatives abroad were recipients of remittances from 2005 to 2006. However, the contribution of transnationals goes beyond remittances. Transnationals provide an important avenue for knowledge and information exchange.[7] The knowledge and information sharing role of transnationals has transformed with the advent of technology and social media platforms (such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, personal blogs and YouTube). Courtesy of social media platforms, transnationals have become a force to reckon with in the democratisation process of their home countries. The Portland 2015 survey on 'How Africa Tweets' revealed that Twitter continues to provide an important platform for political discourse in Africa, with 8.6 percent of tweets in Africa being political as opposed to 2 percent in Europe and US.[8] Despite these indications, studies have not extensively documented the innovative role of social media in influencing political participation of transnationals in affairs of their home countries. An attempt to document the contribution of transnationals in democratisation of their countries of birth tended to focus on transnational institutions and companies,[9] and not

2   D Ammar-Attoh, & A Robertson *The practice of democracy in Ghana: Beyond the formal framework.* (Centre for Democratic Development: Accra 2014).
3   H De Haas 'Migration and development: A theoretical perspective' Paper presented at the conference on 'Transnationalisation and Development(s): Towards a North-South Perspective.' Centre for Interdisciplinary research, Bielefeld, Germany, 31 May-1 June 2007.
4   A Higazi *Ghana country study: A part of the Report on Informal Remittance Systems in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific* (University of Oxford, ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society: Oxford 2005).
5   F Magunha *et al Remittance strategies of Zimbabweans in Northern England*(2009) http://www.zimbabweinstitute.net/File_Uploads/docs/Remittances%20Paper.pdf (accessed 20 November 2016).
6   S Bracking & L Sachikonye *Remittances, poverty reduction and the informalisation of household wellbeing in Zimbabwe* (GPRG-WPS-045. Global Poverty Group (GPRG) 2005) http://www.gprg.org/ (accessed 20 November 2016).
7   S Plaza & D Ratha (eds) *Diaspora for Africa's development* http://siteresources. worldbank.org/EXTDECPROSPECTS/Resources/476882-1157133580628/DfD_ FullReport.pdf (accessed 20 October 2016).
8   S Binem – Onabanjo 'Digital insurgency' *New African* (2016) 27.
9   G Audu 'The role of trans-national corporations in economic development of host nations' (2009) 4 *African Journal of International Relations* 20-30; E Aja 'The evil consequences of trans-national corporations' (2009) 4 *International Journal of Politics* 45-50; O Ambe 'Globalisation and the rest of Africa' (2009) 5 *Journal of International Politics* 5-10.

individuals *per se*. An attempt by previous studies[10] to research on individual transnationals rather focused on their vital economic contribution in their home countries through remittances sent back home. However, very little was written on how social media has transformed transnational citizens' participation in democratisation in their home countries.[11]

The participation of African transnationals in political processes of their home countries faces numerous opportunities in this age of social media. This chapter seeks to examine the quest for public engagement by transnationals in the age of traditional media platforms, the migration to social media, and the opportunities that social media offer in public engagement of transnationals in events in their home countries. The chapter further highlights the various ways transnationals use social media and the challenges faced in utilising social media platforms as their avenues for advocacy, lobbying, capacity building and effective engagement in democratisation in their home countries. This chapter is divided into four sections. It commences with this introductory section, followed by some background information on the conceptualisation of transnationalism, social media and democratisation. In the third section, the chapter presents the migration from using traditional media to social media platforms by transnationals, and the opportunities that come with social media as an avenue for transnationals' engagement in their home countries. The fourth section dwells on the challenges faced by transnationals in utilising social media as platforms for engagement in democratic processes in their home countries. The chapter ends with a conclusion section, which summarises the discussion, and proffers policy options on how African governments should reconsider social media as an avenue to tap into the best from their nationals abroad in discourses around democratisation, and ultimately, development. The study utilised document review of academic literature, and relevant online posts and documents from prominent bloggers and print media.

2 Defining transnationalism

This paper employs the concept of transnationalism, as different from the terms *migrant* and *diaspora,* which seem to paint a picture of a person who has permanently changed place of residence and dissociated herself or

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10 A Bloch *The development potential of Zimbabweans in the diaspora* (2005); J Muzondidya 'The Zimbabean diaspora: Opportunities and challenges for engagement in Zimbabwe's political development and economic transformation' in T Murithi & A Mawadza (eds) *Zimbabwe in transition: A view from within* (2011) 112; Bracking & Sachikonye (n 6 above).

11 S Mpofu 'Participation, citizen journalism and the contestations of identity and national symbols: A case of Zimbabwe's national heroes and the Heroes' Acre' (2016) 37 *African Journalism Studies* 85.

himself from their home country.[12] The concept of transnationalism portrays a migrant as a person who maintains interests in both the destination country as well as in the country of origin.[13] This is unlike the term migrant, which connotes assumptions of being '*uprooted*' from one place of origin to be '*planted*' in a place of destination. The term migrant suggests a shift in belongingness from the migrant's country of origin. Transnationalism therefore takes into cognisance the maintenance of links and identity in both countries. The term *transnational* was borrowed from transnational companies, reflecting the links that an individual maintains even after moving to another country.[14] Transnationalism views people around the world as being in a single social and economic space where they interact and contribute to consolidation of democracy through information sharing on approaches to deal with despotism. Transnationals of African descent often maintain links with family and friends in their countries of origin, and have an ultimate desire for their home countries to democratise, and develop. The theory is utilised in this chapter to illustrate the ties that continue to exist between transnationals and their home countries through various media platforms in contributing to democratic initiatives. The transnational perspective also helps to bring out the interactions that happen between transnationals and their home governments allowing for a move away from traditional methods of analysing the state and its citizens within the state borders.[15]

The population of African transnationals increased from 23-34 million in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century.[16] This number is likely to be significantly higher factoring the issue of undocumented African migrants around the world. The increase in African transnationals results from social, economic and political instability in countries of origin. Migrants from poor performing economies voluntarily emigrate to better economies for better jobs and a higher quality of life. In repressive societies, journalists and political activists are harassed, persecuted, and forced to flee their countries of birth by non-state purveyors of violence, security agencies, and government officials, thereby creating transnational media and political experts in exile. In Zimbabwe, the socio-economic and political crisis that rocked the nation since the year 2000 pushed over 3 million skilled and unskilled Zimbabweans into mainly: Botswana, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Australia and America.[17] In 2015, Reporters Without Borders ranked Zimbabwe number 34 out of the 52 African

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12 Schiller *et al* 'Transnationalism: A new analytical framework for understanding migration' (1992) 652 *Annals New York Academy of Sciences* 1.
13 Schiller *et al* (n 12 above).
14 Schiller *et al* (n 12 above).
15 Schiller *et al* (n 12 above).
16 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division *Internaitonal Migration Report 2015: Highlights* (2015).
17 Unpublished: DM Pasura 'A fractured diaspora: Strategies and identities among Zimbabweans in Britain' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick; B Raftopoulos 'The Crisis in Zimbabwe, 1998-2008' in B Raftopoulos & A Mlambo (eds) *A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008: Becoming Zimbabwe* (2008) 201.

countries in the 2015 Press Freedom Index,[18] which suggests relatively low levels of press freedom. The absence of press freedom forces journalists and like-minded individuals into the diaspora. The media cohort of transnationals from Zimbabwe include ex-Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation employees, who now run the SW Radio Africa in London and Studio Seven in Washington in an effort to keep news about their homeland flowing. Whilst some transnational media experts are working with broadcasting media, the bulk of exiled journalists and other transnationals utilise the cyberspace to debate about political processes and developments in Zimbabwe.[19]

Transnationals are directly and indirectly affected by developments in their home countries. A majority of Zimbabweans in South Africa, the UK, the USA and other countries have strong desires to partake in their home country's developments, and to return home.[20] World Bank[21] notes that interests of voluntary and involuntary African transnationals often intersect when it comes to matters of Africa's development. The desire by transnationals to formally partake in the democratic processes of their home countries has been affected by many factors including lack of citizenship, negative almost hostile attitude from African governments and limited participation modalities. In most African countries, citizens are not able to exercise their citizenship rights such as voting when they reside outside the borders of the country. Additionally, most constitutions in Africa deny citizenship rights to individuals who obtain citizenship or are 'naturalised' in other countries because of the absence of provisions for dual citizenship rights.[22] Zimbabwe's 1980 Lancaster House Constitution did not recognised dual citizenship and those transnationals whose other citizenship in another country was known to the state, could be stripped of their citizenship. This has had implications on the ability of transnationals to formally belong, and contribute to democratic discourses in Zimbabwe in a significant way until 2013 when the new Constitution[23] repealed the prohibition of dual citizenship. Indeed, the new Constitution of Zimbabwe brought a ray of hope, as it provides for dual citizenship for Zimbabwean transnationals though the major drawback remains the alignment of other

18 J Adeyeye 'How digital media displaced print' *New African* (2016) 35.
19 E Witchel & GL Wilson 'Zimbabwe's exiled press: Uprooted journalists struggle to keep careers, independent reporting alive' https://cpj.org/reports/2005/10/zim-da-fall05-2.php (accessed 30 October 2016); Muzondidya (n 10 above).
20 A Bloch *The development potential of Zimbabweans in the diaspora: A survey of Zimbabweans in the UK and South Africa* (IOM: Geneva 2005).
21 World Bank *The African Union and World Bank: Mobilizing the African diaspora* (World Bank: Washington DC 2008) http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21936148~pagePK:146736~piPK:22 6340~theSitePK:258644,00.html (accessed 31 October 2016).
22 C Bill 'Dual loyalties: What are the effects' September 2004; C Rumpf 'Citizenship and multiple citizenship' (2000) presented at Managing Dual Nationality workshop, Berlin, 14-15 July 2000.
23 The Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013 (as set out in sec 36 guarantees the right to citizenship for anyone who was born in Zimbabwe, and with a possible dual citizenship for a Zimbabwean who has gained a foreign citizenship.

local laws meant to operationalise this constitutional provision on citizenship. In including this progressive clause in the Constitution, Zimbabwe must have learnt from African countries such as Ghana, Côte D'Ivoire and South Africa that are conscious of the need for every citizen to participate in national activities through allowing for dual citizenship. As a beacon of democracy, Ghana adopted a Citizenship Act[24] in 2000, which enables the acquisition of the citizenship of another country in addition to Ghanaian citizenship. Courtesy of the dual citizenship law, Ghanaians abroad have been able to identify themselves with their home country, and to meaningfully participate in Ghana's political and economic transformation. Higazi[25] documented how transnationals from Ghana are mobilised through the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches and ethnic associations to contribute towards the country's development. Through the internet and social media links, Ghanaians abroad are working closely with their diplomatic missions to partake in their home-country's activities. In 2001, Ghana made headlines for organising the Homecoming Summit for Ghanaians Living Abroad to explore synergies for nationals to partake in the development of their country.[26] Since this summit, the National Council of Ghanaian Unions UK, and the Homecoming Organising Committee are continuously engaging and harnessing the potentials of Ghanaians abroad to invest in Ghana. The efforts of these stakeholders resulted in yet another Homecoming Summit held in Accra, Ghana from 5-8 July 2017,[27] to afford Ghanaians abroad an opportunity to tap into the expertise of others and to give back to the society.

The emergence of the internet and social media platforms has necessitated the participation of transnationals in civic and public life in their home countries.[28] In countries like Ghana that endeavour to engage its transnationals, social media has enhanced the government and its consular missions' efforts to reach out to their nationals around the globe to partake in socio-economic and political development back home. In Eritrea, the diaspora community together with their connections within Eritrea created platforms such as the website www.dehai.org, which they used to effectively influence urban Eritreans into demonstrations and mobilise resources for lobbying government to adopt a new Constitution.[29] Paradoxically, countries that disregard their nationals

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24   Citizenship Act, 2000 (ACT 591) of Ghana stipulates that a citizen of Ghana may hold the citizenship of any other country in addition to his/her citizenship of Ghana http:/ /www.ghanaimmigration.org/ACTS%20AND%20REGULATIONS/ACT%20591. pdf (accessed 30 September 2016).
25   Higazi (n 4 above).
26   JO Oucho, 'The African diaspora and homeland post-conflict reconstruction in sub-Saharan Africa' (2009).
27   Gov't launches diaspora homecoming summit http://citimonline.com/2017/05/04/ govt-launces-diaspora-omecoming-summit/ (accessed 14 June 2017).
28   M Shoko '"Home sweet home": An analysis of adaptation mechanisms used by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa' (2015) 30 *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 7.

abroad have seen an unwieldy army of transnational bloggers, digital entrepreneurs and citizen journalists thronging the cyberspace to serve a burgeoning online population with information, which is critical of the state of affairs back home. Of particular interest to this paper are the opportunities presented to transnationals by the advent of social media as their conduit of information and to freely contribute to democratic processes of their countries of birth. Social media has taken the world and Africa by storm since the turn of the twenty-first century.[30] Studies[31] in Egypt and other countries affected by the *Arab Spring* indicate that social media platforms increased linkages between people living within Africa and African citizens around the globe. On several occasions, transnationals have used social media platforms to freely discuss issues pertaining to transparency, accountability, rule of law, respect for human rights and ultimately, the development of their home countries.

3 Advent of social media: An opportunity for transnationals' public engagement

Despite their zeal for participation in home-country's political processes, this was a mammoth task for transnationals before the advent of internet and social media platforms. Only a few transnationals were able to voice their concerns through print media. Contributions of transnationals in print media have been through articles and *letters to the editor* section of newspapers. This often faced the challenges of limited space to publish one's views, especially in state controlled media[32] where only those few letters selected by the editor could be published, and absence of the opportunity to respond to previous letters. Both private and government controlled print media have only been able to provide a platform for a few transnationals to express their views through them. Many print media in Africa are a near exclusive preserve of the government, and a handful of the powerful, rich, and politically connected individuals in society. Old media platforms (print and electronic) are often monopolised, tow political party lines, making them not conducive for broader debates. For several years, the old journalism in several African countries has been blighted by the 'brown envelope' syndrome, with politicians and the rich paying petty bribes to obtain positive coverage.[33]

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29 V Bernal 'Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: The Eritrean Online' (2006) 6 *Global Networks* 161.
30 Mpofu (n 11 above).
31 H Chorev 'Social media and other revolution' (2011) 5 *The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies* 1.
32 D Moyo 'The independent press and the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned Daily News' (2005) *Westminister papers in communication and culture* 109.
33 Adeyeye (n 18 above) 35.

In Zimbabwe, the print media has traditionally been split between state owned media (Zimpapers)[34] and independent media, mainly (Alpha Media Papers[35]).[36] The state controlled daily media have been castigated for maintaining a pro-governmental stance, and being a mouthpiece of the government.[37] Before 1999, only three independent newspapers existed, namely Alpha Media Papers (The Zimbabwe Independent and The Standard), and the Financial Gazette but these were mostly accessible to middle class urbanites.[38] A daily tabloid, the Daily News was only added in 1999, and was strongly attacked by government from its inception for giving too much voice to the opposition resulting in two bombings at its offices and forced closure in 2003.[39] The closure meant that transnationals had to battle to air their views in the state controlled media, and the then reduced independent media platforms. The Daily News reopened in May 2010, and together with other independent, and state controlled media, provide a handful of transnationals some space to voice their concerns. As a result, transnationals continued to seek other favourable platforms to circumvent a state and elitist control of media forums to enable them freely express opinions.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century the media landscape went through constant mutation courtesy of the internet and social media which created opportunities for faster, more efficient and cheaper means of communication. Social media is unregulated, creates new content and accommodates new audiences owing to availability of new and cheaper mobile devices that can easily connect to the internet at lower costs. The advent of social networking sites such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook attracted millions of users,[40] and has led to the democratisation of information for anyone with interest in society. By May 2017, Facebook had 1.94 Billion monthly active users[41] while Twitter had 328 million

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34   Zimpapers is a state owned company running several daily and weekly newspapers including The Herald, The Chronicle, The Sunday Mail and Sunday News in Zimbabwe. All the newspapers have an online edition linked to social media.
35   AMH is an independent media house free from political ties or outside influence. The media house publishes four newspapers: The Zimbabwe Independent, a business weekly published every Friday, The Standard, a weekly published every Sunday, and NewsDay, Southern Eye -our daily newspapers. All the newspapers have an online edition linked to social media.
36   A Chatora 'The role of new media in fostering democracy in Africa's dictatorships: Zimbabwe a case study' unpublished Master's dissertation, University of London, 2009. https://www.scribd.com/doc/48525399/The-Role-of-New-Media-in-Fostering-Democracy-in-Africa-s-Dictatorships-Zimbabwe-a-case-study (accessed 20 November 2016).
37   Moyo (n 32 above).
38   Moyo (n 32 above).
39   Chatora (n 36 above).
40   DM Boyd & NB Ellison 'Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship' (2007) 13 *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 210 http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html (accessed 20 October 2016).
41   Zephoria Digital Marketing 'Top 20 Facebook statistics – updated May 2017' https://zephoria.com>top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/amp/(accessed 15 June 2017).

subscribers worldwide in the first quarter of 2017.[42] The development of the leading social media platforms has improved communication among the world's citizens. As Biven[43] notes, these new platforms are transforming traditional journalism and even bringing the minority public (including transnationals) into the media arena to publicly engage with friends, relatives, social justice advocates and policy makers at home and abroad. However, as will also be shown later in this chapter, social media creates an un-regulated flow of information which may have both positive and negative effects. In Zimbabwe, most government departments, and officials (including Parliamentarians and Ministers) possess Twitter and Facebook accounts, where they share public developments within their portfolios, and engage with followers. Such platforms have bridged the communication gap between officials and citizens, especially transnationals. With social media, the posts and activities of government officials are scrutinised by transnationals who have expertise on the relevant field and suggestions for improvement are generated by way of comments. While it is difficult to evaluate the effect of suggestions provided through such channels, the fact that government officials hit the 'like' button or 'share' their posts means that they would have read the comments.

Social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) have become avenues for citizens to fight corruption and embezzlement of funds by public officials. In 2016, Zimbabwe's Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, Professor Jonathan Moyo was accused of embezzling state funds. Transnationals took turns to seek answers from him on Twitter.[44] Courtesy of his Twitter account the accused Minister was quick to clarify the position, and answer questions from citizens in a more targeted manner and vice versa. Twitter and Facebook accounts expose accused public officials to question and answer sessions, and sometimes embarrassments, thereby breaking the traditional syndrome whereby corrupt officials shy away from journalists covering stories on them. Similarly, social media platforms make it difficult for public officials to threaten inquisitive journalists and followers, and to use the 'brown envelope' to stop media from reporting corrupt practices. Fear for reprisals can only grip local social media users whereas transnationals comment on the accused's wall freely because it is often not possible to target these individuals for reprisals since they are out of the reach of local authorities. For these reasons, social media has transformed and revolutionised the media fraternity and political discourse in Africa, through breaking of barriers to communications and forcing government

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42   Statista 'Number of active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to first quarter 2017' https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/ (accessed 15 June 2017).

43   RK Bivens 'The internet, mobile phones and blogging – how new media are transforming traditional journalism' (2008) 2 *Journalism practice journal* 113.

44   https://twitter.com/ProfJNMoyo (accessed 17 November 2016).

officials to account for all their actions. For instance, a motion was raised in the Zimbabwean Parliament concerning a video footage that was circulated on WhatsApp, showing police beating up citizens.[45] The motion compelled the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee responsible for human rights, and the responsible Minister to investigate the issue.

To many democrats, social media is 'best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, debate, and connectedness'.[46] For transnationals, the advent of social media has become a blessing: a platform for communication and access to information from their home countries. Print, online, and diaspora newspapers (The Zimbabwean, ZW News, Zimbabwe Situation, www.newzimbabwe.com, www.zimnews.net) and broadcasting media have become closely linked with social media platforms, and this has given transnationals access to news from their home countries at low cost, on their mobile devices, and enabled them to effectively engage under the comments column. Transnationals also get breaking news from their home countries through their relatives and friends, or prominent bloggers courtesy of Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp forums.[47] Indeed, the practice of blogging is growing in developing countries where repressive governments are stifling demonstrations and freedom of expression.[48] Faced with such a challenge, citizens abroad resort to behind screen activism through blogging, sometimes using pseudo names. Fortunately, one important attribute of social media is its capacity to allow for pseudo or anonymous comments from readers after each post, story or article, opening up opportunities for freedom of expression and speech for transnationals[49] without fearing for reprisals from state agents. In most cases, social media platforms have brought together, and ensured coordination of activities of transnational activists, who often do behind the screen activisms, and those back home, who often participate in field activism. Online discussions between transnationals and field activists stimulate the later to coordinate activities, and share ideas and strategies to

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45 Zanu PF MPs walk out on Police Brutality Motion http://www.newsday.co.zw2016/08/20/zanu-pf-mps-walk-police-brutality-motion/ (accessed 14 June 2017).

46 A Mayfield 'What is social media?' (2008) http://www.icrossing.com/uk/sites/default/files_uk/insight_pdf_files/What%20is%20Social%20Media_iCrossing_ebook.pdf (accessed 20 October 2016).

47 T Towner 'All political participation is socially networked?: New media and the 2012 election' (2013) 31 *Social Science Computer Review* 527; C Gil de Zúñiga *et al* 'Political consumerism: Civic engagement and the social media connection' 16 *New Media & Society* 488; K Holt, A Shehata, J Stromback & E Ljungberg 'Age and the effects of news media attention and social media use on political interest and participation: Do social media function as leveller?' (2013) 28 *European Journal of Communication* 19; J Pasek & D Romer 'Realizing the social internet? Online social networking meets offline civic engagement' (2009) 6 *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 197.

48 A Magaisa 'Social media – a critical analysis of the new big frontier of the democratic struggle in Zimbabwe. The Big Saturday Read' (2016) http://alexmagaisa.com/2016/08/12/the-big-saturday-read-social-media-a-critical-analysis-of-the-new-big-frontier-of-the-democratic-struggle-in-zimbabwe/ (accessed 27 September 2016).

49 Bivens (n 43 above).

strengthen field and online activism back home. In the words of Mayfield,[50] 'new ideas, services, business models and technologies emerge and evolve at dizzying speed in social media'. Indeed, social media platforms have the positive communication effect of breaking the physical barriers to civic and public engagement: through free debates and discussions on the situation back home. Conversely, there are some instances when social media platforms limit activism, and coordination of activities, including distraction of discussion and issues by trolls as discussed in the next section.

An overwhelming majority of Facebook users are exposed to online news through social network ties with colleagues and relatives online, without having to actively seek for it.[51] As postulated by traditional media theorists, users of media platforms get news and access information, and become politically knowledgeable and engage in events taking place.[52] This is made possible due to social media's capacity to enlarge social networks which increases chances for posts to diffuse to a wider network of followers.[53]

With social media, local and transnational bloggers are quick to remind government officials of the best democratic principles whenever they lose track. In a majority of cases, messages and videos are quickly developed and posted on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter conscientising citizens to rise against the abuse of power, and in some cases mobilise citizens to take to the streets to show their disgruntlement. In Zimbabwe, #This Flag #*Tajamuka* (enough is enough) #Shutdown Zimbabwe activists and their leader, Pastor Evan Mawarire, used social media to instigate and mobilise Zimbabweans to demonstrate against socio-economic meltdown, and the proposed introduction of bond money[54] in mid-2016. The movement, which just started as Facebook and

50   Mayfield (n 46 above).
51   D DeSilver 'Facebook is a news source for many, but only incidentally (2014) http:// www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/04/facebook-is-a-news-source-for-many-but-only-incidentally/ (accessed 28 October 2016); Pasek *et al* 'Realizing the social internet? Online social networking meets offline civic engagement' (2009) 6 *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 3 4; G Tang & FLF Lee 'Facebook use and political participation: The impact of exposure to shared political information, connections with public political actors, and network structural heterogeneity' (2013) 31 *Social Science Computer Review* 763; V Xenos & BD Loadermen 'The great equalizer? Patterns of social media use and youth political engagement in three advanced democracies' (2014) 17 *Information, Communication & Society* 151.
52   McLeod *et al* 'Community integration, local media use, and democratic processes' (1996) 23 *Communication Research* 179.
53   J Gil de Zúñiga & S Valenzuela 'Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation' (2012) 17 *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 319; Tang & Lee (n 51 above).
54   Bond money was introduced in Zimbabwe in two forms. The first which was introduced in 2015 were the Bond coins, with the objective of providing small denominations for change during transactions, and this was met with little resistance. However the proposal for Bond notes (though still in small denominations of $2 and $5) was met with resistance because people feared the slow return of the Zimbabwe dollar which was wiped away by Inflation in 2008.

WhatsApp snowballed, and Zimbabwean transnationals[55] took turns on various social media platforms to publicly share their thoughts of the events, and to mobilise more citizens to the streets. When Evan Mawarire self-exiled himself to South Africa[56], and later the US, social media forums were used to coordinate and mobilise people through YouTube,[57] WhatsApp and Facebook to partake in more strikes and demonstrations. Similarly, US based, self-exiled Zimbabwean musician Thomas Mapfumo expressed disgruntlement with the government, and supported the movement through his videos posted on Facebook and YouTube on 19 July 2016.[58] Similar developments occurred in Nigeria, where the use of social media by demonstrators and protestors across the world with regards to the return of the 'Chibok girls' built up the international profile of the matter and piled pressure on Nigeria's government, and the kidnappers to act on the issue. As Bivens[59] noted, social media provided an opportunity for transnationals to share their opinions with fellow countrymen and to add their voices to the democratisation process.

Taking advantage of their command of large followers, transnationals' concerns on social media have the likelihood to reach many people, including policy makers, and powerful organisations that join hands to remind government and its agencies on the need to uphold democratic principles. A case in point is that of Itai Dzamara, a Zimbabwean human rights activist who led lone protests and inspired people through a call to '*Occupy Africa Unity Square*'[60] in 2015. He disappeared after being allegedly abducted by state security agents.[61] His case was publicised through social media, periodic vigils were held by transnationals abroad, and human rights activists in his memory back home.[62] Stories of his search and the vigils were posted on social media platforms, which generated momentum for social media users raising concern about his whereabouts, and calling the abductors to release him. The issue saw many actors, including government officials castigating the abductors, and pleading for his release. By so doing, transnationals and social media activists remind government of its duty to protect human rights and freedoms of it citizens. As social media groups are used to mobilise people for vigils, these informal gatherings and groups grow into permanent, transformational institutions holding events annually for transnationals to share political

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55   Transnationals demonstrate at Zimbabwe's UK Embassy https://twitter.com/hashtag/freepastorevan?f=videos&vertical=default&src=hash (accessed 20 August 2016).

56   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sPrqK1c6G0 (accessed 20 August 2016).

57   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sPrqK1c6G0 (n 53 above).

58   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18t31UjotSs (accessed 20 November 2016)

59   Bivens (n 43 above).

60   Occupy Africa Unity Square – A campaign that was led by human rights activist Itai Dzamara with a demand for regime change, improved livelihoods for Zimbabweans and reduced corruption.

61   'Itai Dzamara Abducted by CIO' *ZimEye* 9 March 2015 http://www.zimeye.net/breaking-news-itai-dzamara-abducted-by-cio/ (accessed 20 November 2016).

62   http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit_w_protest-in-support-of-itai-action-dzamara/ (accessed 10 October 2016).

views and devise solutions for political situations back home. Institutions of transnationals (such as the Restoration of Human Rights in Zimbabwe) have become important offline groupings for lobbying embassies and United Nations agencies to advance democracy and respect for human rights in Zimbabwe.

The social media revolution came with radical transformations of advocacy work. Beitbridge border post between Zimbabwe and South Africa was temporarily closed when migrants and transnationals demonstrated against the introduction of Statutory Instrument Number 64 of 2016 by government of Zimbabwe, to stop importation of some commodities, which were deemed available in Zimbabwe.[63] The demonstrations were well coordinated and shared on WhatsApp and Facebook platforms between transnationals in Messina, South Africa, and those in Beitbridge, Zimbabwe resulting in the shutting down of the border for half a day.[64] In June 2016, Zimbabweans abroad and locally mobilised citizens in Zimbabwe through social media to protest against Vice President of Zimbabwe, Phelekezela Mphoko's 550 days stay in a luxurious hotel room (forcing the cash-strapped government of Zimbabwe to pay around US$1 023 for the presidential suite per day).[65] This was a result of the fact that the Vice President was refusing to relocate to a US$2 million state mansion allocated to him as he claimed the house did not match his stature.[66] After a series of protests organised through social media, and continued attacks by mainly transnationals on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, the Vice President vacated the hotel to occupy his allocated house. Similarly, transnationals have used social media to mobilise Zimbabweans back home to reject the introduction of bond money by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. Transnationals and social media activists convinced Zimbabweans that the bond notes could not be money and they would be used to steal real money from locals who would then be used to fund-raise for the forthcoming (2018) elections. Even with the basis of the arguments being unclear many Zimbabweans took time to listen and read the messages, culminating in sporadic demonstrations against the bond notes. These events forced the government to defer introduction of bond notes for several months (from May to 28 November 2016) in a bid to sensitise people on the basis, and how the notes would work. Of importance is the fact that government was taken to task through social media advocacy to stop the hurried introduction of the bond notes

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63   'Statutory instrument 64 of 2016 illogical-MDC-T' *The Observer* 29 June 2016 http://
      theobserver.co.zw/statutory-instrument-64-of-2016-illogical-mdc-t/   (accessed
      30 November 2016).
64   'Beit Bridge Fires: Activists close border, business slumps' ZimEye 9 August 2016
      http://www.zimeye.net/beitbridge-fires-activists-close-border-business-slumps/
      (accessed 20 August 2016).
65   'Mphoko moving to $2m mansion' https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2016/07/22/
      mphoko-moving-2m-mansion/ (accessed 20 August 2016); https://www.youtube.
      com/watch?v=TLEp6WypRT0 (accessed 20 August 2016).
66   As above.

until effective sensitisation of citizens on the merits, and on how the notes will be used. These events clearly remind government that with social media 'gone are days when do-gooders' can launch misguided policies with impunity.

Transnationals have also used social media platforms for capacity building of citizens, and that of local human rights defenders. Transnational bloggers, especially intellectuals enlighten followers on events in their home countries, and use their intellectual capacity to freely advice fellow comrades back home. When intellectual bloggers take to their social media walls to post or comment about events back home, followers know that it is 'time to take notes'. One Zimbabwean transnational that comes to mind is Dr. Alex Magaisa, the University of Kent Law lecturer who often takes to his blog,[67] and other social media platforms to give legal and political meaning to events unfolding in Zimbabwe. When Pastor Evan Mawarire and Linda Masarira were arrested and appeared before Harare Magistrate Court on 13 July 2016 for mobilising people against the government through social media, a defence team of about 100[68] lawyers (affiliated to Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights) was mobilised through social media. In addition, the defence team had continuous engagements with Dr. Magaisa and other concerned legal and human rights experts[69] sharing notes on how to go about the case. The collaboration forged a strong defence that strengthened human rights litigation, and justice for human rights activists.

4   Challenges faced by transnationals in utilising social media for democratisation

While it is possible to find minimal consensus on the traditional roles of social media to inform, educate and entertain – it is almost impossible to clearly identify a common agenda on the goodness of social media platforms. The unquenchable thirsty for social media spaces comes with insatiable appetite for some transnationals to use the cyber-space to undermine their governments back home, and abuse other people's rights. Because of the uncontrolled nature of social media platforms, virtually anyone who happens to be technologically literate can take to the cyberspace to write whatever the person thinks and sign off as a concerned citizen. In some instances, social media platforms are used to circulate false, misleading and oversimplified information that is detrimental to state security and may even infringe on an individual's privacy. On several

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67   'The Big Saturday Read Blog' by Dr Alex Magaisa https://www.bigsr.co.uk.
68   'Over 100 lawyers turned out to help this guy – for free' *Metro* 13 July 2016 http://metro.co.uk/2016/07/13/over-100-lawyers-turned-out-to-help-this-guy-for-free-6004404/#ixzz4RVuqoN7P (accessed 20 October 2016); https://twitter.com/hashtag/freepastorevan?f=videos&vertical=default&src=hash (accessed 20 August 2016).
69   https://twitter.com/Wamagaisa (accessed 17 November 2016).

social media platforms, influential leaders are defamed, and their characters, dignity and names are dragged through the mud simply because of belonging to political parties or associations that oppose the ruling party and vice versa. Indeed, some transnationals view themselves as in a foreign land because of the mismanagement and bad governance in their countries, hence social media presents an opportunity for them to hurl insults at the leadership back home. This class of transnationals have developed a negative attitude towards political dialogue; instead of constructive engagement they may expect a confrontational approach to completely overthrow the ruling government back home. This negative attitude towards dialogue by some transnationals results in a war of words on Twitter and Facebook with government officials. This has often resulted in government officials developing a negative attitude towards transnationals, and viewing them as enemies of the state bent on a regime change agenda.[70]

Already, the government of Zimbabwe has been sceptical of engaging transnationals, worse still through the cyberspace. Many African governments hold negative perceptions against their citizens abroad, and especially those who emigrate during hard times are demonised[71] as unpatriotic cadres, whose views and comments about state of affairs back home are always unwelcomed. Indeed, many people view outmigration as a resemblance of government failure, and Weeks and Weeks[72] further emphasises that this has inadvertently led to transnationals being viewed as a threat to state sovereignty. Clearly, African governments have little interest in engaging those who have turned their backs on Africa for a new life elsewhere.[73] In Zimbabwe, this view emanates from the liberation struggle, when it was important to have physical presence in the struggle for one to be accredited with being part of the fight against colonialism. As a direct result, patriots and lobbyists in the democratisation process have neither been accepted nor even listened to when they are not present in the country. While this dislike of foreign based Zimbabweans has been largely blamed on the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF)[74] party, McGreggor[75] notes that some opposition leaders also complained about how transnationals make many demands but are unwilling to contribute meaningfully to the development of their country.

70 B Mbiba 'Zimbabwe's global citizens in Harare North: Livelihood strategies of Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom' in S Chiumbu & M Muchaparara *Crisis! What crisis? The multiple dimensions of the Zimbabwean crisis* (2012) 100.
71 N Glick & NB Salazar 'Regimes of mobility across the globe' (2013) 39 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 183; S Glick *et al* 'Transnationalism: A new analytical framework for understanding migration' (1992) *Annals New York Academy of Sciences* 1.
72 G Weeks & J Weeks 'Immigration and transnationalism: Rethinking the role of the state in Latin America' (2015) 53 *International Migration* 122.
73 B Mbiba (n 70 above).
74 ZANU PF is a political party in Zimbabwe that has been ruling Zimbabwe since the country attained its independence in 1980.
75 J McGregor, 'Rethinking the boundaries of the nation: Histories of cross border mobility and Zimbabwe's new "diaspora"' (2011) 4 *Critical African Studies* 47.

For an example, Professor Welshman Ncube who has been part of the opposition political parties since 1998 criticised transnationals during his time as Deputy Prime Minister in Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity (2008 – 2013) for continuously attacking government initiatives yet they themselves do not contribute to national economic development.[76]

The antagonism between transnationals and home country governments pushes the later to adopt measures meant to curtail the involvement of transnationals in events back home. African governments, including Zimbabwe, Uganda, Ethiopia, Congo Brazzaville, Sudan and Burundi accuse civil society and opposition members of using the cyberspace to undermine democratically elected governments, and to disturb the peace and tranquillity in countries of origin.[77] Social media users have seen their social media platforms and accounts being periodically hacked, and the bloggers being persecuted. In Uganda, the government has been hunting Tom Voltaire Okwalinga, or TVO, the anonymous anti-Museveni social media activist.[78] At the height of Evan Mawarire's *Tajamuka*[79] *(enough is enough)*, government through the Post and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) informed mobile phone users that any abusive messages sent via social media will be traced back to their original source for prosecution.[80]

In many African countries, attempts have been made by governments to contain the use of social media platforms: through blocking of social media sites and tempering with internet speed during periods of political upheavals. In some instances, new legal frameworks are mooted to govern the use of social media by citizens. Amidst civil unrests sparked by social media forums, the government of Zimbabwe moved quickly to draft the Computer and Cyber Crime Bill[81] to regulate the use of social media by citizens staying abroad and locally. In Nigeria, the Cybercrime Act led to the arrest of many Facebook bloggers before its withdrawal in May 2016, while in Kenya online bloggers and activists are frequently arrested, and detained for anti-President and government posts.[82] In April 2016, the ruling party in Egypt proposed a new legislation to contain the excesses of Facebook, especially in relation to critical comments against the government.[83] Similarly, many journalists and online bloggers are

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76   B Mbiba (n 70 above).
77   Adeyeye (n 18 above) 35.
78   Adeyeye (n 18 above) 36.
79   Tajamuka is a Shona slang which is used by individuals to mean that they have decided to demonstrate. The slogan also included the Ndebele version 'Sesjikile' which carries the same meaning.
80   K Hellen 'Potraz threatens Whatsaap users' 7 July https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2016/07/07/potraz-threatens-whatsapp-users (accessed 7 November 2016).
81   'Zim's cyber laws – Going nowhere quickly' *Newsday* 25 August 2016 https://www.newsday.co.zw/2016/08/25/zims-cyber-laws-going-nowhere-quickly/ (accessed 20 November 2016).
82   Binen-Onabanjo (n 8 above) 27.
83   Binen-Onabanjo (n 8 above) 27.

languishing in prison without trial for their use of social media platforms to question government policies and leadership decisions. In most cases, these are draconian measures adopted by the state to cripple the critical mind of society, and freedom of expression. To some extent the enmity between bloggers and the state reduces the keenness and eagerness by to-be transnational bloggers to publicly engage in political processes of their countries of birth through social media platforms.

Another challenge pertains to social media platforms' vulnerabilities to manipulation by people with differing agendas. In the case of Zimbabwe, transnational bloggers including Dr. Alex Magaisa have complained that there is an eruption of *'trolls'* who operate in a bid to disrupt online democratic movements.[84] Dr. Magaisa explains that *troll*s are individuals who join online groups or follow individuals online with the deliberate intention to disrupt, de-market or cause despondency.[85] Such individuals or strategies are often so effective that they have been used for high profile sabotage activities. African politicians often use this strategy to demoralise transnationals' democratisation initiatives on twitter using various ironic themes such as Professor Jonathan Moyo's '*handeitione*'[86] (roughly translated to mean 'bring it on'). Resultantly, lay social media followers may be swayed by such counters, and end up following blogs to enjoy such distractions. In some instances, *trolls* post false messages or counter messages to denigrate the blogger, sometimes false information disguised to portray a false picture of togetherness, and discredit the message posted. Some *trolls* go to the extent of impersonating the blogger or activist to counter a post meant to unite people against undemocratic tendencies by the state. By so doing, unsuspecting potential partakers to democratisation are forced to think that their efforts have failed.

In some scenarios, Twitter and Facebook collaborations or unity purpose is affected by *trolls* who join the discussion by adding racial, tribal or ethnic connotations to the issues. Cooperation among transnationals themselves for a single purpose of democratising their home countries is often limited especially in countries where there is conflict between races, tribes or regions.[87] Instead of uniting social media together for a common cause, some social media platforms have become forums to widen the

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84   A Magaisa 'Social media – a critical analysis of the new big frontier of the democratic struggle in Zimbabwe. The Big Saturday Read' (2016) http://alexmagaisa.com/2016/08/12/the-big-saturday-read-social-media-a-critical-analysis-of-the-new-big-frontier-of-the-democratic-struggle-in-zimbabwe/ (accessed 27 September 2016).
85   Magaisa (n 84 above).
86   https://twitter.com/profjnmoyo/status/702932176199929856 (accessed 20 November 2016); https://twitter.com/profjnmoyo/status/743317533998997504 (accessed 20 November 2016).
87   T Ndlovu 'Escaping home: The case of ethnicity and formal education in the migration of Zimbabweans during the Zimbabwean crisis' in S Chiumbu & M Muchaparara (n 66 above); K Newland 'Voice after exit: Diaspora advocacy' (2010).

Ndebele-Shona[88] tribal feud emanating from the pre-colonial era. On racial terms, white and black Zimbabweans are always at loggerheads on social media platforms, with some white transnationals (especially those who lost their property during land reform programme) blaming all Black Zimbabweans for their dislocation.[89] As previously documented,[90] Zimbabwean transnationals in South Africa, UK and the US form tribally and racially exclusive lobby and advocacy social media groups to advance their different agendas, including conflicting expectations on what constitutes a democratic Zimbabwe. As a result of these disjointed efforts, transnationals have sometimes failed to become a true and effective cyberspace force to advocate for democratisation back home.

5   Conclusion

Transnationals are increasingly utilising social media platforms to publicly engage in issues happening in their home countries. There is however, controversy over this use of social media platforms in democratisation, with many African governments viewing it in a negative way. Despite these negatives, social media forums have been important to foster transparency, accountability, activism, advocacy, capacity building and public engagement between transnationals, fellow citizens, national and global policy and development partners. Social media forums break censorship barriers to citizen participation, and have become conduits for the struggle for rule of law and respect for human rights. With social media platforms, transnationals have gained a sense of belonging through advocacy, lobbying, awareness raising, and capacity building of citizens, and mobilising of fellow citizens to demand respect of human rights, accountability and other facets of good governance principles. This influence of social revolution has been visible mainly in public engagements and other informal processes of democratisation meant to facilitate public dialogue about democracy.

While it is difficult to quantify the effect of cyber-democracy, this chapter views the successful adoption of social media as an informal platform to publicly engage in matters of concern, to be an eye opener to the government of Zimbabwe, and that of other African governments must re-think the role of such platforms in the democratisation and development of their countries. Rather than stifle the use of social media, governments should be responsive and tap the best out of their citizens abroad. Africa's beacons of democracy have only been those countries that endeavour to

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88   Ndebele and Shona are the two main tribes in Zimbabwe, the Ndebele are pre-dominantly found in the South-Western parts of Zimbabwe while the Shona, which is the biggest tribe are found in the central, Northern and South-Western parts of the country.
89   Muzondidya (n 10 above).
90   Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni 'Echoing silences: Ethnicity in post-colonial Zimbabwe 1980-2007' (2007) 27 *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 275.

tap the better of their nationals, both locally and abroad. This gives an impetus for Zimbabwe, and other African states to reconsider their perceptions against transnationals, and their use of social media platforms. Instead of responding to social media revolutions with arrests, use of threats, *trolls*, jamming of signals and criminalising its use, the government should endeavour to embrace the platforms to improve citizens' participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, efficiency in service delivery and ultimately, development. Delivering a speech at the 2007 African Ministerial Diaspora Conference, the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki argued rightly that 'there is an urgent need for knowledge sharing and economic cooperation between Africa and the Diaspora'.[91] With the advent of social media African governments should create synergies to cement public engagements with transnationals, in good faith. Without efforts to publicly engage the African diaspora, a large skill and knowledge base that can be utilised for Africa's development continues to go waste. The time to be receptive of the views of African transnationals is now.

91 T Mbeki 'Address at the AU-African Diaspora Ministerial Conference' Gallagher Estate, Midrand, South Africa, 16 November 2016. http://www.polity.org.za/article/ sa-mbeki-african-unionafrican-diaspora-ministerial-conference-16112007-2007-11-16 (accessed 21 November 2016).