

MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY



FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES

**Dissertation topic: A SOCIAL-SEMIOTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH
OPPOSITION SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS IN
ZIMBABWE. CASE OF #THIS FLAG IN THE HERALD ONLINE.**

BY

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF SCIENCE
DEGREE IN MEDIA AND SOCIETY STUDIES**

NOVEMBER 2017

ABSTRACT

The study set out to establish the social-semiotic engagement of oppositional social movements with online newspapers with specific focus on The Herald Online and #This Flag in the period between April 2016 and June 2017. While a lot of work has been done around online media globally and in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular a gap still exists in how mainstream media, particularly The Herald newsier has used digital media in its engagement with opposition political forces, particularly opposition social movements which have been critical in the removal of entrenched authoritarian regimes elsewhere. The study took a qualitative approach and used archival digital data gathering methods and interviews whilst social-semiotics and critical discourse analysis were used to interpret and present the data gathered. Theoretically the study employed Robert Merton's structural strain theory to explain the causes of social activism whilst The Herald online texts were explored through Gramscian lenses. The study also employed Vannevar Bush's hypermedia theory in exploring the role of The Herald Online audiences in the engagement of the newsier and #This Flag. The study established that The Herald Online sought to defend its support of the government of the day resenting #This Flag as an imperialist project through the use of editorial cartoons, hard news and opinion reports. The study also established that The Herald Online sought to downplay #This Flag activities referring not to recognize the social movement by name. The study therefore recommended that The Herald Online would not lose anything by accommodating dissent in its mainstream reports yet maintain its pro-government position as a way of authenticating its defence of the status quo where the latter's policies are justifiably beneficial to society.

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ACRONYMS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSAC	British South African Company
CAZ	Casals Associates Zimbabwe
CCOSA	Christian College of Southern Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDs	Compact Discs
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGI	Computer-Generated Imagery
CNN	Cable News Network
CPE	Critical Political Economy
DIY	do it yourself
DNA	Donetsk Peoples Republic
DP	Democratic Party
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
GNU	Government of National Unity
GZU	Great Zimbabwe University
ID	Independent Democrats
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MDC-R	Movement for Democratic Change – Renewal
MPLA	Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MSU	Midlands State University
NANGO	National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations
NNP	New National Party
NUST	National University of Science and Technology

PAC	Pan-African Congress
PDP	People's Democratic Party
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
PPP	Progressive People's Party
RDZ	Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe
RF	Rhodesian Front
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Democratic Convention
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WWW	World Wide Web
ZAMPS	Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey
ZIDERA	Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act
ZIMRA	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority
ZMC	Zimbabwe Media Commission
ZMMT	Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust
ZPF	Zimbabwe People First

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Africa has had its share of social movement activism from the liberation struggle against colonialism in Southern Africa to the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in 2010 and 2011 whose results remain contested owing to the political instability that followed in some of the countries involved at the time of writing. Of interest has been the role of media, particularly new digital media such as websites, social media and the mobile phone in the staging of these demonstrations in the Arab region covering Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Syria, and Algeria among other countries where communication and mobilization during the protests was largely through internet-based media platforms like Facebook and Twitter

In the Southern African region, South Africa and Zimbabwe share an almost similar social activism experience from the days of their liberation wars (Moyo, 1993; Ndlovu, 2006, Sadomba, 2011; Willems, 2011, Dwyer and Zeilig, 2012) to the postcolonial era characterized by the “hashtag-based” protests largely riding on new digital media in their attempt to challenge or dislodge the countries’ revolutionary regimes. The contemporary protests include among others the #Tajamuka, #ShutDownZimbabwe and #This Flag in Zimbabwe as well as the #BladeMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, #ANCmustfall and #Feesmustfall in South Africa and existing research has laid the foundation with more focus on the appropriation of new digital media in these protests, the funding of the protest organizers and their roles in redefining society. It is within this contest that this study hopes to contribute to the gap that exists with regard how mainstream media, particularly government-controlled media, in this case Zimbabwe Newspapers-owned (Zimpapers) *The Herald* through its online channel has engaged with the opposition social movements with specific reference to Evan Mawarire’s #ThisFlag. The study also explores how mainstream media including those controlled by governments have appropriated new digital technologies in their attempt to consolidate their hegemonic dominance against dissenting voices which had arguably found space through online media

1.1 Background to the study

Historically, social movements have largely been proved across the globe to challenge the status quo and in some cases usurping despotic governments to replace them with more democratic

regimes. These new regimes in some instances like the Latin American and Asian cases have arguably tended to renew themselves into authoritarian regimes in order to entrench their rule thereby giving perpetuity to the discourse of social movements. At the center of discontent have largely been life threatening issues such as lack of social security, environmental issues, human rights and corporate exploitation of the working class (Buechler, 2000 in Dobbin, 2012:3-4; Tilly, et al 1975 in Marks and McAdams, 1996:05; Martin, 2015:08).

Social movements, focusing on North American countries first, in the 1930s were perceived negatively although their motive was stimulated by the quest to effect social change for the better with civil rights being the main driver (Chesters and Welsh, 2011). Cited in Chesters and Welsh (2011), Ardono and Horkheimer (1976) and Arendt (1958) contend that the fight for civil rights was a result of social alienation with mainly black people feeling unrecognized thereby motivating themselves into social activism, joining or initiating social movements. The social movement evolution therefore transformed into a 'normalization' period around the 1960s as the movements also formed counter-movements giving birth to new political world orders with the US being characterized by black civil rights movements fighting for identity and recognition.

Similarly, in Latin America social activism is rooted in the fight for social equality with hunger being the main motivating factor, leading to leftism and challenging sitting governments in Bolivia and Brazil. During this transformation, Bolivia saw the rise of miners in the 1950s to overthrow the Conservative Party giving birth to the movement backed Nationalist Revolution Movement (MNR). The trend was almost similar across Latin America with the rise of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the inheritance of his legacy by Nicolas Maduro after 2013 whilst in Ecuador, Chile and Cuba among other nations protests leading to new government establishments centered on the fight for equality and the subversion of liberalism (Eckstein, 2001: Dangl, 2010; Alemeida, et al, 2006; Stahler-Sholk, et al, 2006).

This trend has overtime repeated itself in other parts of the world with the Middle East having experienced unique digital media-backed social movement protests as late as 2010 resulting in subversions of sitting governments in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya among other disturbances across the Arab region (Dabashi, 2012; Prashad, 2012; Brownlee et al, 2015; Howard et al, 2013; Lazar, 2017).

Just like in the other parts of the world, social movements in Southern Africa are historically rooted in the quest for emancipation from colonialism. The region has also experienced a fight for transformation against liberalism as well as the need to unshackle society from the hegemonic grip of revolutionary movements which campaign on the basis of having liberated the countries from colonialism (Ndlovu, 2006; Sadomba, 2008). Thus whilst social movements like the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the revolutionary political party African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People Union (ZAPU) in Zimbabwe achieved political independence in their respective countries, it can be argued that the same establishments have been a target of post-colonial counter social movement protests after having been perceived hegemonic and repressive. This bears testimony to Chomsky's (n.d, in Chesters and Welsh, 2011:04) argument that when populist social movements take to power they usually turn into new tyrannies.

It is within this context that Zimbabwe has experienced sustained social movement activism dating from the colonial era when protests were largely organized against colonial settlers by local revolutionary movements which were largely an aggregate of many players including farm workers, peasants, nationalists and liberation war fighters (Sadomba, 2008a; Sadomba, 2011b; Dwyer and Zeilig, 2012). Like in Latin America, Asia and Europe, Zimbabwe's post-independence era has seen a transformation from anti-colonialism activism to the rise of anti-liberalism social movements through the land-reform protests emerging around 2000 that saw the occupation and repossession of farms from white farmers (Martin and Johnson 201; Southall 2013: 231; Mamdani, 2009, Helliker, 2013). The shift has latterly transited into an era of protests against the revolutionary government of President Mugabe, perceived hegemonic over time, and peculiar to these has been the role played by internet-based media technologies such as websites and social media among others. These latter protests which are largely backed by civil society and riding on online media have manifested through #Tajamuka, #ShutDownZimbabwe and #This Flag protests and have also largely been similar in their use of new digital media to South Africa's #BladeMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, #ANCmustfall and #Feesmustfall (Daniels, 2016; Ramluckan, 2017; Mutsvairo, 2017).

This study therefore is interested in exploring the meaning *The Herald Online* has sought to create around opposition social movements using various multimedia digital elements that define online media. The study also explores the extent to which the audiences of *The Herald Online* have contributed in this meaning making process through their own engagement with the newspaper's representation of #ThisFlag as argued by Hall in the decoding and encoding theory which gives media texts a polysemic nature, resulting in more different meanings being obtained other than the intended dominant meaning. Little is presently known about how *The Herald* has fared in its attempt to defend the status quo by appropriating the same digital media which have largely been proved to be an alternative for dissenting voices, particularly social movements.

1.2 Problem Statement

Opposition social movements across the globe, with the support of traditional media have been critical in redefining the social order by challenging and usurping repressive governments (Buechler, 2000; Tili, et al 1975, Marks and McAdams, 1996). In Zimbabwe traditional media have also been actively involved with opposition social movements since the days of the liberation struggle with anti-colonial radio broadcasts through revolutionary movements ZANU and ZAPU which broadcasted the *Voice of Zimbabwe* from Mozambique and *Zimbabwe People's Voice* from Moscow respectively. Newspapers like the United Methodist Church-owned *Umbowo* and the Catholic-published *Moto* were supportive of the anti-colonial national movements alongside the privately owned *African Daily News* during Zimbabwe's liberation war (Lazarus, 1999; Turino, 2000; Fauvet and Mosse, 2003; Thondhlana, 2011).

Latterly social movements in Zimbabwe have adopted the use of digital media which have largely been argued an alternative and emancipatory (Chiumbu, 2009:10, Moyo, 2009; Mano and Willems, 2010; Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013; Mapuwei, 2014). It would appear that Zimbabwean social movements in adopting digital media would enjoy space to dissent and express themselves, and that *The Herald Online* would appropriate the same platforms to defend the status quo, the way it has always stood for the government of the day (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999). It is in this context that this study seeks to explore the social-semiotic representation of Zimbabwe's opposition social movements in online newspapers in Zimbabwe with specific focus on #This Flag's engagement with the state-controlled *The Herald Online*.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

- critically demonstrate how *The Herald Online* used social-semiotic elements in its engagement with #This Flag.
- identify the various social and political discourses *The Herald Online* produced around #This Flag
- explore the meaning-making role of *The Herald's* online-audiences in the newspaper's engagement with #This Flag
- explore the appropriation of the national flag by opposition social movements and the government's subsequent reaction.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 Main Research Question

- In what ways has *The Herald* represented This Flag Movement on its online platform in its role to defend the government of the day?

1.4.2 Sub-questions

- How has The Herald online engaged with hashtag-based opposition social protests in Zimbabwe?
- What role have *The Herald's* online audiences played in the newspaper's engagement with #This Flag movement?
- What social and political discourses did *The Herald Online* produce and circulate around #This Flag?
- How has The Herald Online portrayed Zimbabwe's opposition social movements in their appropriation of the national flag in their protests?

1.5 Research assumptions

Research assumptions are basic entailments of what could be held true of a study, and “without them the research problem could not exist (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:62 in Simon, 2011). Assumptions help place the research into context through a broad generalization of what could

be true of a study (Carson et al, 2001:42). As such, this study is premised on the following assumptions:

- *The Herald online newspaper, as a national mainstream news channel provides for fair and balanced coverage of all national events.*
- *The Herald Online, like other internet-based mainstream websites possesses features that allow for user-generated content.*
- *The Herald Online largely replicates the editorial policy of its print version*
- *#This Flag by virtue of its use of the national flag in its protests, is largely motivated by national interest*

1.6 Justification of the study

Since the digital media wave wafted across Africa over the last two decades, new media technologies have largely been perceived emancipatory and an alternative communication platform with scholars researching around society and opposition political forces' adoption and adaptation to these as they seek to be heard and participate in democracy and good governance processes. Existing research work has also focused on how digital media have redefined citizen journalism and the emancipatory promise of user-generated content (UGC) in regions largely argued despotic and authoritarian where different opinions are muffled. The use of digital media in this regard has largely been pronounced more in countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe where campaigns for the involvement of society in election processes have taken place through hashtag-based platforms like #NigeriaDecides and #reclaimnaija (Siopera and Veglis, 2012; Eriksen, 2007:08; Olorunnisola, 2000 and Bernal, 2006 in Langmia, 2010:69-70) with emphasis on the role played by privately owned digital media platforms. Zimbabwe has had pronounced studies around such platforms like *Zimdaily.com*, *New Zimbabwe.com*, *Kubatana.net* among others and how these have come as a relief to a society previously confined to state-controlled media like *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)* and *The Herald* newspaper (Moyo, 2009; Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013; Chiumbu et al, 2009; Mano and Willems, 2010; Mudhai 2014).

Other studies (Mabweazara, 2010; 2011; 2013; Lister et al, 2009; Kavoori, 2010) have also focused on the adoption of digital media technologies by mainstream media such as the state-

controlled *The Herald* and how they have appropriated these new technologies in the face of mounting pressure from opposition political forces threatening to subvert President Mugabe's rule. Research in this regard has also argued the digital case from an economic and business perspective for mainstream media tracing cultural newsroom trends and the redefinition of the journalism profession as well as media business models in the era of new media (Mabweazara, 2014; Ahlstrom et al, 2001, Ihlström, 2005; De Waal, et al, 2005; Schönbach,2005; Tewari, 2015). A gap still exists in how mainstream media, particularly *The Herald* newspaper has used digital media in its engagement with opposition political forces, particularly social movements which have been critical in the removal of entrenched authoritarian regimes in the Middle East as well as challenge time and again the government of Jacob Zuma in South Africa.

Although strides have been made in the area of social movements protests riding on new media, focus has mainly been around the Middle East's Arab Spring and South Africa's hashtag-based protests which include #BladeMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, #ANCmustfall and #Feesmustfall among others (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Daniels, 2016; Ramluckan, 2017; Mutsvairo, 2017; Mpofo, 2017;) and how they helped the subalterns usurp repressive governments. Whilst some work has been done around Zimbabwe's own hashtag-based protests which include #Tajamuka, #This Flag and #ShutDownZimbabwe among others, the studies have tended to touch more on the role and influence of social media in challenging the Zimbabwe government (Mawere and Marongwe, 2016; Masawi, 2017). Little is still known about the hashtag-based social movements' socio-semiotic engagement with the state-controlled media and how the latter, particularly *The Herald*, through its online channel has sought to create a various discourses through a semiotic personification of the former. It is in this context that this study seeks to establish how *The Herald* online has represented #ThisFlag on the same digital turf, where the latter has taken its fight against President Mugabe's government.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

Several online newspapers have sprouted across Africa, and Zimbabwe has had its fair share of these digital media channels with platforms such as *New Zimbabwe.com*, *Kubatana.net*, *Zimdaily.com* being among the pioneers of this trend around 2003. Similarly other internet platforms like personal blogs, social media platforms and live-stream radio platforms have also contributed to the expansion of the public space to accommodate dissenting views. Mainstream

media have also taken to the internet with ZBC running *Newsnet* initially before reverting to a group website, *zbc.co.zw* whilst Zimpapers has significant internet presence through *The Herald Online* (Moyo, 2009; Muzondidya, 2011; Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013; Mapuwei, 2014; Mabweazara, 2014). For feasibility purposes, therefore this research narrows on *The Herald Online* out of the several mainstream online platforms as the newspaper largely remains the biggest government daily known for serving the interests of the government of the day alongside its sister publication, *Chronicle*. The study is also conducted from the headquarters of *The Herald*, Herald House in Harare, where the researcher also operates from.

The study also narrows down to #This Flag, also known as The Flag Movement organized by Evan Mawarire since this protest arguably marked the beginning of hashtag-based protests in Zimbabwe. In this context the study appreciates the existence of other social movements and protests before, and their appropriation of digital media as widely argued by other scholars (Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013; Moyo, 2009; Moyo, 2011; Murithi and Mawadza, 2011; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016; Masawi, 2017).

The study seeks to establish the online engagement of *The Herald* with #This Flag from April 2016 to June 2017, the period during which The Flag Movement came into and carried a series of protests before its leader Mawarire sneaked into exile. Mawarire would however come back in February 2017 and subsequently got arrested. Mawarire's return marked a second phase of activism and battles against the status quo, all activities which found significant coverage in *The Herald Online*. The time frame is therefore adequate in that at least up to the period of this study, #This Flag movement had arguably enjoyed peak attention whilst *The Herald* had arguably also consolidated its online presence since going digital in 2011.

1.8 Limitations of the study

This research is limited in its ambit to *The Herald Online* newspaper and its findings shall not be transferable to the newspaper's sister publications under Zimpapers whose editorial policy and stance might be more or less the same towards opposition social movements. Whilst other online newspapers emerged before the *The Herald* had established an online presence, findings to this study shall be confined to *The Herald Online* and shall not be transferable to any other

online newspapers, government controlled or privately run which might also have social-semiotic engagements with opposition social movements.

There have been countable hashtag-based anti-government campaigns in Zimbabwe since the concept of digital media based campaigns came into being probably after the 2010 to 2011 Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East region, which arguably might have triggered the notion of hash-tag based movements. Therefore, this researcher acknowledges the existence of these hashtag-based social movements in Zimbabwe, but confines this study to #This Flag movement for feasibility purposes.

The researcher is engaged with Zimpapers, the publishers of the newspaper under study tasked with online management duties of the newspaper. This situation could raise skepticism among the researcher's principals and influence objectivity among participants on data gathering. The researcher is also cognizant of the perception with which findings to the study might be comprehended owing to his relationship with the organization and newspaper under study and this needs to be observed in advance.

1.9 Conclusion

Chapter 1 of this research presents the topic, objectives, questions, and the background to this study whilst it also sets forth the delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 introduces sections on literature review and theoretical framework as well as the main essence, which is a review of related work by other scholars on the origins and development over time of social movements and their engagement with online newspapers. The chapter also reviews the role of media in general as well as that of online newspapers in particular in the context of global opposition politics and social movements. Chapter 2 also reviews literature on the country Zimbabwe, the global history of media and social movements as well as a review of work on the colonial history of the country, the origins of liberation movements and their transformation into full-fledged governments and subsequent perceived entrenchment into authoritarians to be latterly faced with a new breed of opposition social movements and how they have engaged with media in their protests against the status quo.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

The study has so far laid down the topic under research, problem statement, objectives, questions, background as well as the limitations and delimitations of the work. Chapter 2 thus presents works by various scholars related to this study starting with the history and evolution of social movements across the globe and their role in politics. The chapter also expounds on the nature of social movements in African politics and the extent to which they contributed to the liberation struggle against colonialism, their transition into sitting governments, and subsequent perceived entrenchment into despotic establishments. The chapter also delves into the renewal of the opposition social movement discourse to discuss how new movements are born to challenge the entrenched governments born out of earlier opposition social movements.

Chapter 2 also discusses existing scholarly work on the role in general, of newspapers in politics and in particular how digital media including social media and mainstream websites have been appropriated by interested parties in opposition politics and social movements across the globe and in Zimbabwe, where this study is situated. Within the same context the chapter explores the leadership styles of Zimbabwean politicians, opposition parties, and their role in the political history of the country as well as an insight into new works on #This Flag. The chapter concludes the discussion with theories from within which this research is undertaken. Media theories help to understand a phenomenon when used within context (Fourie, 2001:230; Baran and Davis, 2015).

2.1 Literature review

Reviewing literature related to one's study helps in identifying insights for new research opportunities which are identifiable through the examination of earlier works in order to establish connections and existing synthetic ideas which guide further researches. Existing literature should be relevant to the topic under study in order to strengthen the overall

justification of the new study whilst contributing to the existing body of knowledge (Hart, 1988a, 2001b; Oliver, 2012; Rubin and Babbie, 2009).

In reviewing literature relevant for this study, this researcher takes cognizance of earlier work which have justifiably over-interrogated the areas of opposition social movements, role of media in politics and the advent of new internet-based media and their place in global contemporary politics. This section therefore looks at related literature broadly based on contextual fields of social movements, opposition politics, and online newspapers, role of newspapers in global opposition politics, history of the country Zimbabwe, political leadership of Zimbabwe as well as the birth of #This Flag.

2.1.1 Global history and evolution of social movements

Social movements in the Global North, from where scholarly theorization of the phenomenon mainly emanates, are largely argued to have emerged as a response to the birth of the modern state which tended to centralize power as opposed to the ancient way of living. This was during the transition into modernity which was characterized by the growth of capitalism to replace feudalism in the Global North. Social protests then, as voluntary as they have been proved to be, were targeted against the processes of industrialization in Europe, which saw the creation of the working class society as capitalism took center stage. Initially known as collective behaviour, social protests in the contemporary world largely remain a direct opposite of the corporatist organizational behaviour and they lack formal division of labour as well as a hierarchical leadership structure thereby lacking formal regulation or guiding policy. Collective behaviour has therefore remained rooted in this history and today social movements are argued to challenge the status quo and question the existing social order not for political reasons but to question public policy and address life-threatening issues such as lack of social security, environmental issues, human rights or corporate exploitation of the working class (Buechler, 2000 in Dobbin, 2012:3-4; Tilli, et al 1975 in Marks and McAdams, 1996:05; Martin, 2015:08). Pleyers and Sava (2015) contend that collective behaviour has evolved to be known as ‘civil society’, the ‘third sector’ and latterly ‘social movement’ in the modern-day world.

However the definition of social movements remain contested with theorists giving varying explanations. Nevertheless, they all agree on the element of spontaneity and structure of these

bodies (Freeman, 1999). The ideal core business of social movements has largely remained the same; to challenge the political quo on social issues and to seek to cause change on policy issues as well as to fight for identity. In this context the history of social movements is rooted in early protests like the eighteenth century French Revolution and the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century in Europe, themselves protests which are observed as having been chaotic, giving birth to the term “the madding crowd” (Durkheim, 1951 in Tarrow, 1994:08). The French Revolution was littered with incidents of violence against those that were perceived to be sabotaging the programme, but the revolutionaries are posited to have argued for cooperative methods and strategies to cause social change.

In the same realm, The Glorious Revolution (1688) was largely viewed as “bloodless” with society viewed to be migrating to more peaceful means of settling for just systems. Even the violent French Revolutionaries are argued to have been of the firm belief that they would achieve a peaceful just system (Alpaugh, 2015). Thus, these protests largely contributed to the contemporary political and economic order in these regions through their ability to reshape policies, values and priorities. In England the early protests influenced by the French Revolution led to the birth of the Social Democratic and the Labour Parties. Elsewhere the influence of the French Revolution manifested itself in Nazism in Germany and Soviet Stalinism as well as in the Italian radical authoritarian regime. The protests of the early nineteenth century were populist in nature, seeking to fight corruption in the subsisting political establishments as well as resist the capitalist power of business corporations (Durkheim, 1951 in Tarrow, 1994:08; McAdam et al, 1996; Freeman, 1999; Pleyers and Sava, 2015). Whilst these scholars explore the history of social movements, their nature, motivation and success or lack of it, they ignore the protests’ engagement with media, particularly online newspapers, a gap that this dissertation seeks to pursue with focus on *The Herald Online*’s social semiotic representation of social movements and #This Flag in particular.

However the birth of fascist governments in Italy and Nazism in German can actually be argued to be a failure of social movements as Cox and Fomiyana (2013) argue that nation states born out of the latter were markedly distinct from the movements themselves, with objectives and results of their own. Cox and Fomiyana (2013) cite how revolutionaries were crushed in these countries as well as how the governments enthusiastically grabbed colonies in other continents. Chesters

and Welsh (2011) posit that in the 1930s, social movements in North American countries were perceived negatively even though the eruptions then were pushing for social change and civil rights. Consequently, Ardonio and Horkheimer (1976) and Arendt (1958, cited in Chesters and Welsh, 2011) posit that people, feeling isolated and unrecognized were most likely to join these mass movements and subsequently viewed as dangerous and aberrant by the authorities. The social movement evolution however manifested into a 'normalization' period around the 1960s as the movements also formed counter-movements which would give birth to new political world orders with the United States of America (USA) being characterized by black civil rights movements which fought for identity and recognition. It is plausible how the scholars take note of the role of social movements in their propagation of the human rights and good governance discourse, but they are explicit in their omission of media's coverage of social movements' agendas.

In the 1970s, the protests pressed for more identity issues like the recognition of gays and lesbians as well as the disabled through policy reviews. In this context, Freeman and Johnson (1999) observe that subsequent communities born out of social movements usually became the new societal order sometimes up until new movements were born to press for further social change. This is confirmed in McAdam et al, (1996:37) who note the birth of the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a product of social movement which became the basis for more legal and political opportunities in that land whilst Blumer (1939 in Stryker, et al, 2000) contend that movements arguably are established to redress impact of social disruptions. Although the evolution of social movements in Europe and America moved into a period of normalization, Tarrow (1994:09) argues that the stereotyping of social movements as violent is rather "movement framing" emanating from their clash with police and this cannot be concluded to be of the social movements' own making. This situation is argued to have been exacerbated by nationalist tensions that followed the fall of communism in the early 1990s and later the creation of terrorist assaults that saw the emergence of Al Qaeda and Islamic movements in the Middle East and Europe (Tarrow, 1994).

Whilst in Europe and North America social movements rose as a result of resistance against industrialization, in Latin America hunger is noted as a key concern that would lead to leftism or uprising against the establishment in countries that include Bolivia and Brazil. Bolivian miners

took to the streets in the 1950 Revolution with dynamites and managed to overthrow the authoritarian Conservative Party to replace it with the elevation of the social movement leadership of the Nationalist Revolution Movement (MNR). Of note in this case is how the revolutionaries were elevated to power through protests to form a government which initiated new policies for the miners to retain their mines whilst the new authority was forced to follow through with land reform policies in order to legitimize the occupation of large estates by peasant farmers. Foreign interests such as the United States described the Bolivian and Brazilian situations as anarchy whilst the latter's natives viewed the revolution as 'popular democracy.' This trend was similar across Latin America where most social movements emerged as resistance against neoliberalism (Eckstein, 2001; Dangl, 2010; Alemeida, et al, 2006; Stahler-Sholk, et al, 2006). In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez's rise in the late 1990s was a result of the social movements whose membership was naturally the poor and popular masses. Chavez's party, the Fifth Republic Movement (FRM) had its roots in social movement and the legacy continued after his replacement by Nicolas Maduro (up to the period of this study). Chavez had ascended to power through a 1998 civil society coalition, the Polo Patriotico.

Whilst in Europe and North America social movements rose to resist the status quo, and later influencing policy changes, in Latin America social movements are observed to have sided with governments at some stage that saw the ascendance of civil society leadership to the throne in Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela. Venezuela's coalition organizations were latterly known as the Chavistas and their movement as Chavismo (Ramirez, 2007; Dangl, 2010). The resultant government was to rule under the name United Socialist Party of Venezuela and was popular for its anti-neoliberal and pro-poor policies (Fernandes, 2010:23).

As such, Ramirez argues that hegemony in Venezuela assumes a new meaning, of course with the conceptual Gramscian meaning remaining the same, but the difference being that the dominating elements are those elsewhere generally expected to rise against the status quo. This is a deviation from the traditional Gramscian notion whereby the state becomes the target of resistance by the subalterns. In the same context Eckstein (2001:04) posits that generally in Latin America "the interests of the movements intersected with those of the government" noting other countries like Bolivia and the social movements' defense of president Evo Morales who remains president up to the period of this study. Within the same perspective, in his earlier work

Benjamin (1974) had observed that in Cuba for example every president who had tried to find peace with the domineering USA had been accused by the nation of betrayal. Thus, when social movements happen in Latin America, they usually result in the sitting presidents being forced out of power, followed by an elevation of the movements' leadership into office on the basis of populist policies thereby resulting in a mutual support between government and social movements.

The scenario subsisting in Latin America is similar to that in the Arab world, but with dissimilarities in the executions of the protests. The Constitutional Revolution of Iran (1905-1906) and the Young Turks Revolution in 1908 mark some of the earliest mass movements of the Middle East, with the latter having ushered in a multiparty political system in Turkey, then under the Ottoman Empire (Arjomand, 1984). In Iran, the Constitutional Revolution changed the future of politics, arguably for the better leading to the crumbling of King Naser al-Din Sha Qajar's empire to be replaced by the Shah Empire in that region. The former's reign had been subjected to Western dominance both politically and economically and Western cultural imperialism had manifested itself amongst the elites who embraced its educational system, secularization as well as general practices (Keddie, 1993:603; Wiktorowicz, 2004). The revolution was led by many other participatory groups, a similarity to the Latin American social movements particularly the Chavistas which was a grouping of several other elements fighting for the recognition of the mass (Arjomund, 1984; Ansari, 2016). This was followed by the Arab national movement in Greater Syria and of note is the fact that the success of these movements was mainly due to the collapse of empires in the region.

The notable similarities are that social movements in both circumstances still retain the goal of challenging the 'status quo,' with the Middle East between 1945 and 1960 entering a new phase of identity searching after coming out of Western colonialism (Humphreys, 2006:26). The social movement-backed regimes that swept to power during this era in the Arab world sooner or later turned into autocratic regimes that forgot to follow on their promises. The regimes were hardened by the foundering of the subsequent protests in the 1980s, which however were largely confined to regions in which the United States had interests. This literature is rich in its assessment of the mutual relationship of social movements and governments in Latin American postcolonial countries. The literature is also explicit on the likely demise of social movements-

backed governments that dared develop cordial relations with the US, including in Cuba, but it is also noticeable how the literature ignores the role of the media in the interplay between governments and these activist movements, a gap which this dissertation seeks to contribute towards.

However, Chomsky (n.d in Chesters and Welsh, 2011:04) argues that when populist social movements take to power they usually turn into new tyrannies. This could be argued to have been the case with the Middle East authoritarians which were however challenged latterly through a series of protests that began in 2010, uniquely thriving on digital media, mainly Facebook, and this saw the demise of autocrats like Ali Abdulla Saleh of Yemen, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and Ben Ali of Tunisia. The most famous of these protests was the 18-day Tahrir Square occupation in Cairo and the pioneer one-man demo by street vendor Mohamed Bouaziz in Tunisia before thousands more joined him to dislodge the sitting government. The spontaneous protests in some cases involved armed conflict whilst in some, the military was kind of supportive by merely standing down (Dabashi, 2012; Prasad, 2012; Brownlee et al, 2015; Howard et al, 2013; Lazar, 2017). From their works, the role digital media played in the Arab Spring is explicit. However the literature is largely silent on the role of online mainstream media usually out to defend the status quo from a Marxian perspective when media is in the hands of the powerful.

In south of the Sahara, notable social activism can be traced back to precolonial eras in such countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe with the former having had on the forefront of colonial resistance the African National Congress (ANC), Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) (Willems, 2011: 392). The most prominent mass protests in South Africa in the apartheid era are arguably the Soweto Uprisings which were triggered by an estimated 20 000 school children of Soweto in Johannesburg demonstrating against the introduction of Afrikaans as the official language in a predominantly African setting. The uprising of June 26 1976 is annually observed through a public holiday, the Youth Day in post-independent South Africa. However it is critical to note that the causes of this historic movement were not merely the resistance against the imposition of the Afrikaans but a build-up over time evolving around changing social security issues owing to apartheid system

(Ndlovu, 2006;317). Notable is also how the uprisings were thwarted by the apartheid police with several students getting killed in the melee.

However, South Africa's liberation was also built on social movements led mainly by ANC, COSATU and UDF, and the goal was to challenge the colonial status quo. As was the case in Middle East and elsewhere, the social movements eventually triumphed in dislodging the authoritarian apartheid system. Social movement activism continued in post independent South Africa and was latterly motivated by government's failure to meet the basic services demand for all. Prominent movements to emerge in the post-apartheid era include the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF), the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) and the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) (shack dwellers in Zulu language). Similarly, these were targeted at the new liberation government of ANC around the turn of the millennium with AbM challenging what they perceived an authoritarian housing policy which advocated for their eviction for resisting water and electricity cut-offs as well as the introduction of prepayment systems for power. It is of interest to note that the new policies being resisted by the emerging social movements, were now being initiated by the old social movements (ANC and COSATU) which now composed the new liberation government (Willems, 2011: 492). It is in the same context that #This Flag protest challenges the ZANU-PF government using the flag symbol a position that arguably regards the latter as deviating from the founding principles of a social movement it stood for during the liberation struggle.

In the realm of the South African scenario where activism can be traced back to the precolonial era, Kenya also has its social movement roots grounded in the pre-colonial era and notable is the fact that women's activism was already alive during the colonial era. Oduol and Kabira (1994:194-195 cited in Daniel, 2016:57) observe how the colonial British system influenced women to form self-help groups in order to overcome economic hardships and be able to provide for the family then. The "empowerment" of Kenyan women during this period worked to the advantage of the Mau Mau movement which was already leading the colonial resistance revolution. The women became crucial in the provision of food to the liberation movement. However, it is of interest to also note that the colonial regime had in 1952 helped the formation of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO) founded by white female farmers and other white women from the colonial administration with the goal to

cultivate and promote Western culture, morals and values. Consequently, women generally became dominated by the colonial system. Nzomo (1998:170 in Daniel, 2016:57) argues that MYWO became the movement through which both the colonial government, and latterly the independent government of Jomo Kenyatta tried to influence women and the organization had to soldier on under such conditions up to the period of Daniel Arap Moi. Apart from the women's movement as well as the revolutionary Mau Mau, Nasong'o (2013) also notes the existence of radical religious movements such as the Dini ya Msambwa, a situation that largely subsists in the Middle East where religious movements are so much embedded in politics. The scenario in Kenya is of interest with regards how the colonial British government attempted to embrace a social movement whose black elements backed a liberation movement. This differs with scenarios found in other countries such as South Africa and Latin American nations where movements were all out to dislodge the colonial governments either through direct confrontation and outright violence. Notable is also how the postcolonial government of Kenyatta in Kenya went on to create a hegemonic relationship with MYWO in which the latter was dominated. This literature acknowledges the colonial interest in Kenya in the initiation of social movements, and how postcolonial governments sought to appropriate the same for their interests. However, the silence over the interests of erstwhile colonial masters in African social movements as noted in Kenya would make the arrival of digital media on the continent appear more important ahead of a possibly interesting discourse of imperialism embedded in activism.

The role of revolutionary movements is also significantly traceable in Zimbabwe, where Sadomba (2008:147, in Sadomba, 2011:07) and Dwyer and Zeilig (2012:07) emphasize the composition of the liberation movement not as a one party movement but an aggregate of various players consisting of farm workers, peasant land movements, nationalist movements and the guerrilla movements. Regardless of their social and or cultural different backgrounds, these groups share common political ideologies and if unchallenged they may result into a hegemonic entity. As such Sadomba (2011) contends that the guerilla movement dominated the other players and became synonymous with the liberation movement itself. The guerilla movement was also rooted into a complex background defined by the underground operations in which the banned ZANU and ZAPU operated. These nationalist movements took charge of the recruitment of cadres to wage an armed struggle against the colonial establishment of Ian Smith until Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980. It is in this context that this study seeks to

demonstrate #This Flag's attempt to challenge the dominance of President Mugabe's government, itself born out of social movement elements of different social and cultural backgrounds, and how the former in that attempt has been represented through online media.

As per the trend elsewhere, it is argued that the new ZANU-PF government neutralized other groups that had been equally active during the liberation struggle. This is despite the fact that "it is a well-known fact that, during the colonial period, social movements such as trade unions, student groups, community organizations and political parties in the Black community were trampled upon in an attempt to relegate them to permanent political irrelevance" (Moyo (1993:08). Muzondidya (2009:173) from the same perspective posits that the new government inherited and embraced the 'colonial apparatuses' which helped it consolidate its position in an environment with a muffled civil society. However, Moyo (1993) notes that stronger were those activist groups aligned to the white community, a community which was still active and strong despite having pulled away from electoral politics. The community's business and social interests were thus represented through such organizations like the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU), the Employers' Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ) and the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC).

The absence of activist groups to genuinely represent the interests of the marginalized resulted in the emergence of dissent from within the ruling party and subsequently led to the expulsion of one of the dissenters, Edgar Tekere who then formed the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), a party which contested the 1990 general elections. This followed the first students' protests which forced the closure of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) in 1989, for the first time (Muzondidya, 2009; Tendi, 2010). The implementation in 1991 of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) as recommended by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following a "relative unity between political authoritarianism and neoliberalism" (Sutcliffe, 2012:03) led to massive job cuts across the industry thereby giving life to the workers union, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) which had been created by ZANU-PF soon after independence to represent workers interests (Moyo, 1993:09). ZCTU parted ways with government as it went on to organize massive crippling protests in 1998. The 1998 protests followed food shortages, job losses and a spiraling inflation which made life difficult for many as a result of ESAP. ZCTU's notable activism succeeded the formation by former liberation

warfighters of an organization titled Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) in 1988 after the signing of the Unity Accord by ZANU-PF and ZAPU, the other nationalist movement during the liberation struggle, which had garnered significant votes but not more than ZANU-PF (Mamdani, 2009). Mamdani (2009:05) argues that ZNLWVA stood a better chance against ZCTU in that the former had a larger following across the country, mainly from the countryside with an estimated initial membership of 200 000, and that the group advocated for immediate land redistribution and payment of pensions to all veterans of the liberation war across the two nationalist movements, ZANU and ZAPU. Notable is a trend here of generally similar causes of social movements across the globe, mainly to do with social security and in former colonies, an ideology rooted in the fight against colonialism.

The war veterans' movement backed by peasants, villagers, spirit mediums, chiefs and the youth led a land invasion in Svosve, a communal area in Mashonaland East in 1997, clashing with government and soon the protests had gone viral to cover the whole country. On the other side the ZCTU formulated the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) backed by churches, students' movement and white commercial farmers who had just lost farms to the farm occupations by members of the ZNLWVA. The two organizations, ZCTU and NCA mooted the idea to form a new opposition political party and in September 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) which was born under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai who was the secretary general of the ZCTU. Land occupations continued, whilst the workers movement continued on the other side to rally behind the newly formed MDC. Meanwhile a number of lobby groups had latterly been formed as a response to the need for better economic participation by the indigenous blacks. These included the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), probably to counter the white-backed CFU, Women in Business (WB) and the Indigenous Business Development Center (IBDC) among others. The IBDC was then followed by another economic empowerment group, the Affirmative Action Group (AAG) founded by Philip Chiyangwa and Peter Pamire with the goal to foster economic participation by the blacks. This was followed by the formation of the Indigenous Business Women's Organization (IBWO), which together with Sangano Munhumutapa, a University of Zimbabwe students' organization led by Lawrence "War Lord" Chakaredza, IBDC and AAG organized marches against "institutional racism" in the financial business sector in the country. Of interest are also the relationships, as noted in Ncube (2010 cited in Helliker, 2013:41) that develop between the state and some of these activist

organizations such as the ZNLWA, AAG, ZFU and IBWO being linked to the government whilst counter-hegemonic civil society organizations were aligned to the MDC and ZCTU (Muzondidya, 2009:192; McCandless, 2011; Mamdani, 2009, Helliker, 2013:40-45). What remains largely unexplored is the engagement of these social movements with mainstream media, from an online social-semiotic perspective and the subsequent discourses built around the protests.

Since its formation the MDC under the leadership of Tsvangirai has been the figurehead of opposition politics with the party forcing a marriage of convenience with ZANU-PF in 2009 following disputed elections in March 2008 which both parties failed to garner the required winning vote of 50 per cent plus one vote. These were followed by a run-off in June the same year, a round which Tsvangirai boycotted citing excessive political violence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016; Mwanaka, 2013). The MDC foundered in the 2013 elections and subsequently exited government resorting back to be the major opposition party up to the period of this study, and since then activism in Zimbabwe has been given a lifeline through the emergence of social movements which thrive on internet-based social media platforms such as #Tajamuka and #ThisFlag led by Evan Mawarire which have protested against government's National Pledge introduced in schools as well as demanding the resignation of President Mugabe for failing the country both economically and politically (Mpofu, 2017:110-111; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016; Masawi, 2017). It is within this perspective that this study seeks to explore the social semiotic engagement of one of these movements, #This Flag with *The Herald Online* in the latter's quest to defend the government of the day.

2.1.2 World Opposition political approaches

The term 'opposition' has its roots in the Latin word, *oppositus*, which means to be positioned against, and from that other meanings have been developed to imply publicly expressed resistance against something, be it opinion, ideology politics or any such resistance against a dominant factor. However, opposition can be general resistance (Kubat, 2010:15). Lonescu and de Madariaga (1972:14, cited in Kubat, 2010:16) describe opposition as "rooted in human nature, more or less controlled or repressed according to the degrees to which the society we live in allows its open manifestation." However opposition politics therefore has a universal identity globally and is more distinct in democratic and non-democratic modern political systems

(Machelski 2001:10 in Kubat, 2010:16). Opposition politics is expected to position itself against the rule of the state, but this position is not permanent as political tables can turn anytime resulting in an exchange of roles. It is the role of opposition political parties therefore to criticize, control and prop up alternative solutions to government in a normal democracy where everyone has a right to contribute towards the development of their country. This argument is premised on the definition of politics itself which recognizes this phenomenon as a process to organize how society lives (Hofmeister and Grabow, 2011). Without opposition, there wouldn't be no checks and balances resulting in complacency. It is within this context that Lonescu and de Madariaga (1972, in Kubat, 2010:19) assert that opposition politics has to be recognized as legitimate and institutional in a normal political environment. This is so because by virtue of parliamentary representation, opposition political parties have a role to play in the running of government.

Abraham Lincoln, president of the US (1861-1865) is remembered for his famous statement that democracy is the “government of the people, by the people, for the people,” (Hofmeister and Grabow, 2011) and probably in the modern day world this is hold true in the Global North, arguably to a certain extent though, but surely cannot be compared to what subsists in most former colonies as is discussed further in this section. The opposite of Lincoln's wish is usually a dictatorship which could lead to politicization of state structures. GrzymańA-Busse (2003:1125) described the ‘state’ as a set of institutions that legitimately dominate policy-making and the enforcement of legal sanctions. The political management of the state may change through governments chosen at every election period but state structures normatively would remain in place (Lawson, 1993; McFaul, 1995 in GrzymańA-Busse, 2003). Politicization of state structures would therefore imply control of the arms of the state by political interests, for example army generals being given orders at party level.

It is from this context that Konitzer (2014:03) argues about the definition of democracy from a European Union (EU) perspective in view of the conditions set up by the organization for admission of new members since. The argument is that what EU member states do is now strongly linked to Europe resulting in member-states' political parties and governments being lowly regarded back home. On the other side, this political manifestation is giving birth to a new political opposition in Europe, of populist parties opposed to Eurocentrism, to describe the opposite of what Taggart and Szczerbiak have described as Euroscepticism or anti-EU-ism

(Sitter, 2002; Konitzer 2014). Citing this development, developments in Europe show a declining trust of political parties marked by voter apathy, declining political party membership and lack of political enthusiasm. Of interest are the accession conditions of EU aspirants such as the Balkan countries which include achievement of stability in human rights record, the rule of law and protection of minority ethnic groups (Konitzer, 2014). Balkan countries that are non-EU members up to the period of this study include Kosovo, Ukraine, Serbia among others and these have histories of instability resulting in human rights issues. However the EU conditions for aspirant members include democracy and good governance, which conditions are usually tough for member states which have war records similar to postcolonial Latin American and African situations where democracy by Global North expectations has been difficult to achieve.

Britons are one of the latest examples to have expressed displeasure against their country's continued stay in EU, which led to the ouster of Conservative leader Prime Minister David Cameron in 2016. This followed growing political opposition over a period of twelve years which saw the birth of a new player, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and pressure for the country to exit the EU in a tumultuous processes dubbed 'Brexit', to mean 'Britain is exiting the EU' (Clarke, et al, 2017; MacShane, 2015). The major motivating issues to exit were economic with the majority of the population feeling tax payers' money was being spent more to meet the needs of EU rather than grow the country's economy.

Europe has therefore had its own fair share of political problems especially in the Balkans with regards dictatorships such as the Slobodan Milosevic regime in the former Yugoslavia land, which ended with the leader dying in a prison cell at The Hague. Milosevic had been awaiting trial at the International Tribunal Court for war crimes that had caused the death of more than 100 000 people in Serbia and therefore faced charges of genocide, rape, looting and property distraction all because he had been holding on to power in the face of wide opposition whose leadership felt he had stolen elections in Serbia. Milosevic's misfortune took place on October 5, 2000 when he was ousted through an election, but refused to surrender to the winner Vojislav Kostunica resulting in a mass movement protest as people took to the streets with the army and police not intervening. Milosevic was subsequently arrested and brought to trial (Bieber, 2004; Armatta, 2010:03). Whilst Milosevic was ousted through social movement pressure, a similar

process proved crucial in Ukraine when in 2012 Svoboda (Freedom), the opposition political party swept to power riding on its nation-wide network activists and grassroots supporters. Although Svoboda went on to dismally perform in 2014, managing a paltry six seats out of 37, this arguably shows how retrogressive it was to go it alone outside an opposition coalition movement which had formed and performed well in previous elections (Ishchenko, 2017: 47).

As much as the Global North might be viewed as the role model of a democratic political culture, the situation in the Balkans could be argued to be equal or worse than in other regions like Latin America and Africa, where Global North media arguably have a feast on the regions' political systems. For Latin America though, scholars argue that the region could be fast deteriorating into an authoritarian crisis with observable muffling of democracy in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez after his ascendance to power in 1998 until he succumbed to cancer in 2013. Chavez's ascendance to power followed rampant corruption and a deteriorating economy under the previous government. Chavez had also staged a failed putsch in 1992 before landing the chance in 1998 to later entrench authoritarianism before Nicolas Maduro took over along the same path (Weyland, 2013:18-19; Root, 2016). However, it should be acknowledged that as much as it is not a passport to abuse of power, Chavez's ascendance was aided by an outgoing corrupt government which had presided over a dying economy. Thus, it can be argued that Chavez can easily join the league of other Latin American opposition political parties, whose embryotic formation has been made possible through social protests, in some cases followed by opposition coalitions which gain mass support before ascending to power as noted by some scholars, but regrettably falling into authoritarianism entrenchment (Ramirez, 2007; Dangl, 2010; Fernandes, 2010:23; Eckstein, 2001:04). Morgenstern et al (2008) observe that most Latin American nations have therefore tried to borrow the notion of coalition governments from Europe, owing to mergers of opposition parties formed from social movements. This is arguably the reason why presidents of Latin American nations may offer government posts to other parties in order to sustain their own rule resulting in politics of patronage and the subsequent entrenchment of despotism. In Zimbabwe, the formation of coalition governments born out of social movements from the ZAPU-ZANU days of the liberation struggle up to the era of the Government National Unity (GNU) has not been investigated much from a media engagement perspective save from

the context that digital media are viewed as alternative media in a continent largely dominated by perceived despotic governments.

Similar slides into authoritarianism are however observable in other Latin American countries which include Ecuador where Rafael Correa ruled from 2007 to 2017 before being replaced by Lenin Moreno in an arguably normal election though, Nicaragua where Daniel Ortega has sort of slid into a career president since 2007 after initially having led the country from 1979 to 1990 as head of the Junta of National Reconstruction, and Cuba which is argued to be the biggest challenge for democracy despite economic isolation spanning more than half a century. Other nations placed in the same league are Argentina, where President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner had her supporters inspired by Chavez. Cristina ended her term in 2015 with corruption allegations over her head (Weyland, 2013; Root, 2016:8-9). However scholars (Morgenstern, 2008; Vargas-Hernandez, 2003; Thomas, 2005; Wayland, 2013; Root, 2016; Bogdandy et al, 2017) tend to concur that Latin American politics have been a pendulum between social movements, opposition politics, democracy and authoritarianism to show an ever dynamic political system which is in opposition of Global North neo-liberal policies in favour of leftist and populist policies. There is arguably not much literature on pro-government social movements in Zimbabwe that are largely against neoliberalism and their engagement with media, particularly online media. Neither is there much on neoliberal social movements in Zimbabwe and their online engagement with mainstream media save for their perceived liberation through digital media against President Mugabe's establishment argued to be repressive (Aluya, 2009:08; Sadomba, 2011:42; Msindo, 2016:148; Meredith, 2002:95; Marcovitz, 2011:78; Mario, 2009; Herbst, 2010:02; Bond and Saunders, 2005:43; Kinni, 2015:186).

While Latin America can be argued to be a political pendulum, Asia could be described as a region of bipolar political culture when looking at the Chinese and North Korean systems of governance which speak to absolute communism against most of the systems that exist on the continent. North Korea's system arguably has no room for opposition politics as it exists under a "vanguard party" whose system seeks "to perpetuate the guidance of the leader through hereditary succession" (Sakai, 2013). The country has known leaders from the same family with Kim-Jon-un having inherited the presidency of the Workers Party of North Korea (WPK) after

his father's death. While China has one of the biggest economies in the world, the country is arguably thriving absolutely under one party system whose authority is the Communist Party of China (CPC). This is ostensibly premised on the late nationalist Mao Zedong's observation of China's political reality that either "there are parties outside the ruling party" or "there are factions inside the ruling party," (Yongnian, 2010:194). Therefore the few "dissenting" voices that exist in China like the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL), Shanghai Gang, Qinghua Clique and others have largely remained under the armpits of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through a communistic coalition (Yongnian, 2010:195). Literature on Zimbabwe has the most dissenting voices arguably from outside ZANU-PF, yet the revolutionary party is an aggregate of various social movement elements including ZAPU and ZANU, the liberation war fighters among others. Of the outside dissenters, not much exists on their online engagement with mainstream media, a gap that this study seeks to contribute towards.

In Burma, now known as Myanmar the situation has almost been similar to China and North Korea except that economically the isolated nation remains poor, but until 2015 since 1962, the country oscillated between military rule and "guided democracy" with changing leadership, but not much of diverse voices (Church, 2017:118). Malaysian opposition parties have similarly been muffled because of a religious system that tends to amalgamate all religions into a single coalition thereby making it difficult to have any dissenting views going against the Barisan Nasional government (Jesudason, 1996:110). In the context of this study, it is of interest to establish the notion of religion in Evan Mawarire's #This Flag protests since he claims also to be a clergyman.

However some countries in Asia have had vibrant opposition parties that have managed to break authoritarian monopolies, with Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) having come a long way since 1955 to be lately challenged by the Democratic Party (DP) formed in 2016 and being the second largest party. Nevertheless, the ruling party, LDP thrives on a coalition system which is built more or less along the path of China's CCP, the difference being that opposition politics has been more pronounced with no history of violence or outright authoritarianism (Johnson, 2000; Nakano, 2017).

The dual kind of governance found in Asia could be described as unique when compared to other regions, but the element of prolonged dominance of ruling parties found in China, Japan and Malaysia among other countries could be argued to be similar to the situation that prevails in most African countries. However the latter is dominated by insurgency as has been the case with Liberia where opposition parties have been harassed by the government resulting in armed conflict (Teshome, 2009:1625). In 1980, Liberian Judge, Gladys Johnson recognized and registered the country's first opposition party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP) in more than 20 years, a decision which plummeted the country into armed conflict following resistance by the ruling True Whig Party whose parliament in a short time sat to ban the PPP. Confusion also reigned in the ruling party with the military led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe staging a coup that killed President Tolbert before three more senior leaders of the ruling party were publicly assassinated (Kieh (2008:76). Doe left his own history of repression marked by intimidating into exile several opposition leaders, including Charles Taylor who later found his way back to stage an armed conflict against his former leader. Sirleaf (2010:43-44) opines that Taylor "matched Doe's brutality by killing members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups encountered by his forces" as he strongly believed that these supported Doe's regime. Taylor after assuming power in 1997 later resigned in 2003 amid a litany of war crimes accusations leading to his trial at The Hague and subsequent incarceration for 50 years. This study is plausibly grounded in this scholarship which largely interprets social activism as key in defining new social orders whether confrontationally or bloodless with analysis on the role of media, largely digital media as emancipatory and key for social activism. It is within that context that this study explores the gap that exists in the interplay between social movements and online media, and to establish that the study uses *The Herald Online*, arguably Zimbabwe's definition of mainstream media and #This Flag, a social movement with a religious element.

The Liberian situation is similar to the Rwandan culture which saw the breaking out of an ethnic-political war in 1990 before the situation deteriorated into a globally recorded genocide that killed an estimated 800 000 people in 1994 following the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana as he returned from a trip in Tanzania. The subsequent rise to power of Pasteur Bizimungu and Paul Kagame who had been fighting Habyarimana's administration largely accused of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, brought to an end the wanton massacres but not before Kagame's political grip grew to the extent of hogging the lime light as an

authoritarian who could not tolerate dissenting views even from within his own Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). It is noteworthy that the genocide, although instigated by politically motivated ethnicity discrimination, was largely inflamed by media, specifically Radio Mille Collines (Sebarenzi, 2011; Longman, 2017; Endgenocide.org, 2016 available online; Gahima, 2013), and it is within this context that this study explores media's social semiotic engagement with social movements in Zimbabwe with specific focus on *The Herald's* online channel and Mawarire's #This Flag movement. This is in cognizance of the power of people in the meaning making process of media texts, in this case premising the research on *The Herald's* intended meaning in their representation of The Flag Movement. However, Rwandan opposition politics is mainly dominated by elites who fled into exile, some of them fearing retribution from the new Tutsi dominated government, considering that during Bizimungu's era it had been the Hutus who were largely accused of perpetrating the genocide. The opposition therefore is largely Hutu and based outside Rwanda (Gahima, 2013:115).

While elsewhere in Africa opposition politics is marred in bloody insurgency, closer to home South Africa has largely been argued to be a beacon of modern democracy on a continent where one of the largest acts of genocide has been committed. At independence from the apartheid era in 1994, South Africa adopted a proportional representation system based on the number of political parties winning seats. However the revolutionary ANC has largely dominated the political arena since then, with opposition players such as the Democratic Party (DP), Inkatha Freedom party (IFP), Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and a few others largely remaining in the periphery from 1994 up to the turn of the millennium following the successful 1999 plebiscite which gave hope for a sustainable modern democracy (Southall, 2001). Southall (2001) posits that as feared, opposition political parties felt ANC was moving into a phase of authoritarian entrenchment, and that a possible solution to that was to create an internal alliance to ensure government accountability. The Democratic Party with its history dating back to the apartheid era in the 1950s, and the New National Party (NNP) immediately provided an answer in June 2000 through a merger (Southall, 2001) and since then the party has grown through coalitions with Independent Democrats (ID) in 2010 and in 2011 absorbing the South African Democratic Convention (SADC) thereby creating a theoretical chance of winning against the ANC (Southall, 2001; Beck, 2014:209; Muriaas, 2014). The ANC itself had arguably had vibrant "internal democracy" through COSATU, itself a part of the ruling alliance with ANC and the South

African Communist Party (SACP) (Willems, 2011:492). This literature though does delve into the early role of traditional media in Africa to trace the roots of contemporary hashtag-based protests sweeping across the continent from the Middle East to Southern Africa. That trace could probably help understand in a broader context the engagement of contemporary internet-based protests with online media in African politics.

However in South Africa real challenge against the dominance of ANC was felt after the formation of a new opposition in 2013, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) by a group of Youth League members of the ruling party led by their chairman, Julius Malema. Malema had been a key figure in ANC politics and immediately went on to participate in the 2014 plebiscite and garnered 6.35 per cent of the votes and landing 35 legislative seats under the EFF banner (Ashman and Pons-Vignon, 2014; Posel, 2014). Since then EFF has been a thorn in the flesh of ANC, mobilizing and participating in parliamentary bids to impeach President Jacob Zuma, efforts which the latter has survived, at least up to the period of this study.

The political trends subsisting in Africa, particularly the Arab region and neighbouring South Africa becomes interesting in the context of Zimbabwe's opposition politics as it emanates from a social movement background and attempting to shake the dominance of President Mugabe and ZANU-PF. Specific reference in this case is on Evan Mawarire's #This Flag movement within the context of its social portrayal in *The Herald* online.

As such, Mawarire joins a host of other opposition political forces that have emerged in Zimbabwe since independence. These forces either started as worker-social movements as was the case with Edgar Tekere's ZUM which was sympathetic to the workers against President Mugabe's government accused of corruption. ZUM participated in the 1990 elections and only managed a paltry two legislative seats. The party was to be followed by Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009:327-329; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016:36; Mwanaka, 2013:77; Muzondidya, 2009, Tendi, 2010) which however has largely been accused by ZANU-PF of being a puppet of the British and an advocate of economic sanctions against Zimbabwe. Chung (2006) posits that the sudden support of the MDC by white commercial farmers empowered Zanu-PF to push the discourse of the opposition as a surrogate of the British, a label that arguably impacted on the party's rural performance in elections that followed. The rhetoric was that being a surrogate of the British, the MDC intended to return land

to white farmers and these accusations would be perpetuated during each election period (Dashwood, 2004; Mugoti, 2009; Chung, 2006; Madzokere and Machingura, 2016). Rutherford (2001) opines that some of the white farmers helped the MDC in establishing and coordinating support units during and immediately after the party's embryotic stage and subsequent participation in the 2000 elections, and this arguably gives weight to Mugabe's argument.

The white community sympathy that the MDC enjoyed as well as the international support leading to the crafting of such economic embargoes as the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA) (2001) by the US under Bush's administration has often led to suspicions on the real interests of opposition parties not only in Zimbabwe but the whole of Africa and probably elsewhere in the world. LeBas (2011) in exploring the formation of opposition political parties in Zimbabwe mentions the role played by German's Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, an organization known to support political parties and trade unions overseas, including in Africa and how they facilitate training workshops in trying to capacitate these parties, which in most cases are opposition parties. This brings into debate the role played by civil society in Africa and their political influence. In this context Palmer (2005:62-63) notes the long history of nongovernmental organizations promoting democracy and good governance in postwar regions since 1941 with notable activities in Germany, Italy and Japan among others. Notable organizations then, include Freedom House and its fight against fascism and communism in Europe and the Stiftungen foundations of Germany, whilst in Spain and Portugal, Franco and Salazar were on the forefront.

Arguably, alongside these organizations have always been George Soros' Open Society Institute which led the way in eastern and central Europe in the 1980s. It is Soros' major philanthropic organization, the Open Society Foundation whose objectives place Africa's opposition parties under the limelight as its objectives are clearly stated as to "build open and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable to their citizens" (Wisor, 2017:77). However in that case the objectives are argued to be externally defined. These are the kind of situations that have sort of crippled Zimbabwe's MDC's political career as ZANU-PF is quick to point out that in times of crises, sympathy significantly emerges from external forces. Nevertheless, Chikuhwa (2013:209) opines that even though Zimbabwe's Political Parties (Finance) Act forbids external funding of political parties, the liberation movements (ZANU and ZAPU) themselves received support from

such countries like China, Russia, Sweden, Denmark and Norway among others during the liberation war. This then exposes ZANU-PF when it has largely been quoted accusing MDC of receiving funding from external forces bent on causing regime change in Zimbabwe. In this context *The Sunday Mail*, a state controlled weekly (2011, p.1 cited in Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013:409) alleges that Casals Associates Zimbabwe (CAZ) had been funding nongovernmental organizations opposed to President Mugabe's rule through locally based organizations like Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe, National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (NANGO), ZimRights and Kubatana Trust.

However Dundas (2011:102) notes that funding in some cases actually comes from local private donors but argues that such funding of political parties in Africa still has often been criticized for promoting politics of patronage even where opposition parties are looked up to in authoritarian regions as the would-be saviours. This would most likely lead to parties serving the private elites who will be paying their activities. Murunga and Nasong'o (2013) observe too, that in Kenya the private sector is the only source of funding for the opposition parties, but this is also prone to stifling as the donors can only do that covertly for fear of harassment by the government. Wisor (2017) also notes such private financiers like Mo Ibrahim of Sudan who made his fortune from telecommunications as active in funding governance and leadership activities in Africa. This study therefore also seeks to explore the possible funding, and if any of the #This Flag movement and the origins and nature of its sympathizers. Political economy has influence on meaning, as noted in the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky (1988). It is also within the context of political economy of the media that this study seeks as well, to establish the extent of *The Herald's* use of semiotic codes and the resultant discourses produced around #This Flag.

2.1.3 Zimbabwe opposition politics

Zimbabwe has its history embedded in issues to do with land premised on two aspects namely minerals and agriculture. The land issue dates back to the colonial era when Europeans under the leadership of Cecil John Rhodes invaded the area bounded by the Zambezi River in the north, the Limpopo River in the South and Indian Ocean in the East. Agriculture had been practiced by late stone-age hunter-gatherers and later in the period of more than 1 500 years, agriculture had expanded (Martin and Johnson 2012: 36).

Between 1836 and the invasion of Mashonaland in 1890, a series of treaties had been concluded between white missionaries and Ndebele Kings namely Mzilikazi and his son who later succeeded him, Lobengula. Lobengula had purportedly signed an agreement in which Rudd, Maguire and Thompson undertook to pay a monthly rental of 100 British Pounds, 1 000 Martin-Henry breech rifles, 100 000 rounds of suitable ball cartridges and a steamboat to patrol the Zambezi River. The concession gave exclusive rights over all natural resources, metals and minerals, situated and contained in the Kingdom to Europeans, their heirs and representatives. The concession was however sold to Cecil John Rhodes' British South African Company (BSAC) for 1 000 000 British Pounds and it was only then that Lobengula had become suspicious of the settlers' real motive (Roberts, 2012; Samkange, 1968; Mazikana and Johnston, 1982:183; Hickman, 1970).

The fight for land inspired nationalist leaders in Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia to engage in the liberation war (Southall 2013: 231). The colonial past hence became the driving force behind the struggle giving land a huge symbolic status during liberation wars. Rhodes' settlers led by his lieutenant Leander Starr Jameson defeated Lobengula in 1893 and began parceling out land to each other as compensation to those who had been part of the first settlers dubbed the Pioneer Column (Samkange, 1968; Roberts, 2012). According to Martin and Johnson (2012:46-47) the Europeans confiscated over 90 000 cattle and established African reserves in the south and north-eastern Matabeleland. In Mashonaland, the settlers and the BSAC overruled traditional authority of the chiefs, enforced their own brutal and punitive justice, introduced forced labour, seized land on the basis of Lobengula's purported treaties and expropriated cattle. The European settlers, expropriated 15 million acres of the county's 96 million acres from African inhabitants without any form of compensation between 1896-7.

The British settlers also annexed much of the land and by 1923, they had freed themselves from the rule of the British South Africa Company by voting for the Responsible Government (Gale, 1962). The settlers also persuaded the British government to grant them self-governance. Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) note that the Europeans, taking a cue from the South Africa's Natives Land Act 1913, created a dual economy and created an apartheid state soon after 1923. The number of white farmers increased from 948 to 2 675 from 1905 to 1911 (Martin and

Johnson 2012:47). They created an agricultural base for the BSAC to make profit, introducing cheap land policies to encourage expansion. Murray (1970:58) thus contends that the colony's politics revolved around agriculture since the shift from mining to farming in the early years of self-rule until independence in 1980. Barber (1967) states that in gaining control while empowering the settlers, the colonial government passed laws that promoted agricultural production on the farms. Two main legislations passed were the Land Apportionment Act (1930) and the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951.

On attaining independence, the land question arguably continued to shape Zimbabwe into the country it has been up to the period of this study. As had been the case during the colonial era where *The Herald* was key in driving the interests of the settlers (Gale, 1962), the newspaper continued after 1980 to align itself with the government of the day (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999) (also see Chapter 4 for a detailed account of the history of the press in Zimbabwe). After independence, Zimbabwe's new government adhered to the Willing-Buyer-Willing-Seller policy as dictated by the 1979 Lancaster House Conference. The revolutionary nationalists through a Patriotic Front, a coalition of ZAPU led by Joshua Nkomo and ZANU under the leadership of Robert Mugabe led the negotiations on behalf of the black majority and accepted the Lancaster House Constitution, begrudgingly, under pressure from the Front Line States (Southall 2013:233).

Although the land issue arguably remained a pressing issue, the independent Zimbabwe had to go through a dark phase characterized by shocking politically motivated killings dubbed Gukurahundi, mainly targeted against ZAPU supporters. This saw the murder of thousands of civilians in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands in the southern region of the country before Nkomo conceded to a political truce under the Unity Accord in 1987 bringing to an end the disturbances with him assuming the vice-presidency of the new ZANU-PF party under an arrangement where the coalition still had another vice-president from Mugabe's side (CCJP, 2008; Mario, 2009; Tendi, 2010; Eppel, 2005 in Scarnecchia, 2017; Eppel, 2004).

Latterly Zimbabwe was to have its first opposition political party, ZUM led by Tekere after his expulsion from ZANU-PF following intolerance of his divergent views over the rise of

corruption in the revolutionary party. ZUM was followed by the MDC in 1999 under the leadership of Tsvangirai, leading to the first significant challenge of Zanu-PF during which the revolutionary party lost seats in Parliament. The MDC forced another major victory in the disputed 2008 elections although it failed to garner a winning vote thereby forcing the birth of a coalition in 2009. Tsvangirai citing political violence and intimidation by ZANU-PF had opted out of the subsequent run-off (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009:327-329; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016:36; Mwanaka, 2013:77). The MDC however flopped in the 2013 elections leading to its exit from mainstream government administration to go back to Parliament as the major opposition party with Tsvangirai arguably remaining the face of opposition politics up to the period of this study (Mpofu, 2017:110-111; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016; Masawi, 2017; Tofa, 2013; Muzondidya, 2009, Tendi, 2010). While the MDC faltered, the literature is silent on the nature of African opposition politics with regards accepting or resisting election results, and the reaction of the international community. In this realm, this study is also interested in establishing the relations of #This Flag and the international civic society.

2.1.4 Zimbabwean politicians and leadership approaches

President Robert Mugabe, the only leader Zimbabwe has known since independence, at least up to the period of this study, largely remains the face of Zimbabwe's mainstream politics. President Mugabe is described as authoritarian in approach, a racist and a dictator whose leadership thrives on divide and rule tactics (Aluya, 2009:08; Sadomba, 2011:42; Msindo, 2016:148; Meredith, 2002:95; Marcovitz, 2011:78; Mario, 2009; Herbst, 2010:02; Bond and Saunders, 2005:43; Kinni, 2015:186). President Mugabe is arguably the only leader Zimbabwe has known, mainly because the country's first president, Reverend Canaan Banana is argued to have been more of a ceremonial head (CIPU, 2001; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2003; *The Telegraph*, 2003; all available online; Williams and Hackland, 1988; 27). Reverend Banana became president in 1980 after revolutionary movements ZANU and ZAPU had won 57 and 20 of the 80 seats respectively with Mugabe assuming the post of Prime Minister to lead the new coalition government (CIPU, 2001). Mugabe led the liberation government as Prime Minister until 1987 when ZANU and

ZAPU struck a coalition agreement to merge the two parties into one, following bloody politically motivated massacres code-named Gukurahundi in Matabeleland and some parts of the Midlands provinces in the southern region of the country. This development arguably consolidated Mugabe's hegemony through fear and consent on the part of Zapu (Eppel, 2004:46; Mario, 2009; Tendi; 2010; Rupiya, 2017:76-77; Compagnon, 2011:27). CCJP (2008) argue this proved Mugabe to be indeed an authoritarian who thrived on intimidation and fear as thousands were massacred during this sordid period of Gukurahundi, during which ZAPU was accused of attempting to subvert a constitutionally elected government.

Within his own ZANU-PF party President Mugabe is also argued to thrive on a divide and rule leadership style in which he arguably surrounds himself with loyal cadres, a culture which then generates politics of patronage. It is argued that Mugabe has employed this tactic since the liberation era around 1976 when he took charge of ZANU and that resulted in selective recruitment of new liberation war cadres (Tungamirai, 1995 in Sadomba, 2011:42) as the liberation war leader surrounded himself with loyalists in order "to feel secure," as noted by one of his comrades, Edgar Tekere (Holland, 2008:51 in Sadomba, 2011: 42). Sadomba (2011) therefore argues that one of the tactics that has made President Mugabe survive politically has been this divide and rule tactic where loyalists and dissenters would then be set against each other whilst Mugabe stands out to remain the neutral and unifying factor. Msindo (2016:148) also argues that President Mugabe thrives on politics of factionalism within and without ZANU-PF, and this history is visibly traceable to the liberation struggle, and at least up to the period of this study this had almost left him as the party's only elder.

Within that context, it is argued that it is this divide and rule tactic that led to the split of the country's major opposition party in 2005, Tsvangirai's MDC when Mugabe initiated a new chamber of parliament, the Senate. The opposition party was then split between joining the Senate or not with those who opted to join feeling this was the only opportunity to participate and oppose Mugabe regime from within whilst others felt joining was tantamount to playing to the gallery. Consequently, those who joined the Senate ended up getting favourable coverage from state-controlled media which identified with Mugabe (Arnold and Wiener, 2008:72-23).

President Mugabe's divide and rule tactic is also argued to be the source of the factional-based succession fights occurring in ZANU-PF from around 2013 up to the period of this study.

Compagnon (2011) contends that President Mugabe has for many years manipulated factionalism in order to manage possible internal threats to his rule by literally setting the factions against each other. After the death of Vice President Joshua Nkomo in 1999, from the ZAPU wing following the 1987 Unity Accord, Mugabe promoted Joseph Msika to vice-president and from the same side, John Nkomo had the backing of the Joice Mujuru and Sydney Sekeramayi faction to assume the chairmanship of Zanu-PF. This was a perceived defeat to the Karanga faction whose candidate Emmerson Mnangagwa lost the position, but was still promoted to Speaker of the House and secretary for administration in the party. Mnangagwa in the company of retired army general Vitalis Zvinavashe is reported to have later approached MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai behind Mugabe's back to plot an exit deal for the Zanu-PF leader. After the death of vice president Simon Muzenda in 2003, Mnangagwa expected to be elevated, but Mugabe had not forgotten the Mnangagwa-Tsvangirai deal. Despite Mnangagwa having secured the backing of provincial chairpersons to be nominated for the vice-presidency, Mugabe passed the promotion to a party junior, Mujuru, in 2004 and this neutralized Mnangagwa. However, to keep Mujuru under check, Mnangagwa despite losing in his constituency too, was appointed a non-constituent legislator (Compagnon, 2011:20-21). Through the backing of her husband Solomon, Mujuru subsequently gained influence over the candidacies of most provinces in the 2005 elections and to neutralize her, Mugabe used the anti-corruption campaign to keep the vice president under check whilst Mnangagwa rose to become Mugabe's election agent during the 2008 disputed elections which later led to the coalition government in 2009 (Compagnon, 2011:21-22).

The strategy was employed again in 2014 when Mujuru was accused of plotting to dethrone President Mugabe and it became her turn to play victim of the divide and rule strategy. The pony was First Lady Grace Mugabe, who during rallies code-named "Meet the People" started teasing and accusing Mujuru "of being lazy, corrupt, a gossip, a factional leader, and plotting to usurp power from Mugabe" (Chibuwe, 2016:1660; Murray, 2015:25). The First Lady had just been elevated to the position of secretary of the powerful Women's League in the revolutionary party. Chan (2017:161) observes that Mugabe "ostensibly to preserve party unity, issued an appeal against 'factionalism'," and the crusade to get rid of Mujuru reached higher heights two months away from the December 2014 congress, at which the vice-presidency positions were expected to be filled through nominations. During this crusade, Mugabe did not attack Mujuru personally

with the disenchantment appearing to be coming from the party's grassroots. The crusade reached the climax as Mujuru failed to attend the Congress on the date and was eventually expelled and replaced by Emmerson Mnangagwa (Chan, 2017:163; Santos and Ndhlovu, 2016:26), who had the backing of king-pin Jonathan Moyo, who apparently had been expelled in 2004 for allegedly plotting to topple the president after a clandestine meeting under what became known as the Tsholotsho Declaration.

During the period of this study, guns are after Mnangagwa with accusations now flying from Grace Mugabe and those aligned to her side including Jonathan Moyo and Saviour Kasukuwere among others, a faction code-named G40, accusing the vice-president of being a factionalist with the intention to topple the president. The trend is arguably similar to what happened to Mujuru in 2014 (*Chronicle*, June 3, 2017; *Zimbabwe Daily*, June 21 2017; *The Standard*, July 31 2017; *Zimbabwe Independent*, August 11, 2017, Lebas, 2017:10).

The chronology of events from pre-independence period up to the period of this study can arguably define Mugabe's leadership style as reliant on authoritarianism and chiefly the divide-and rule tactic. However, not all would see Mugabe as an authoritarian and dictator as argued in Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009:238) in what he terms Mugabeism, a phenomenon which is a "summation of political behaviours, ideas, utterances rhetoric and actions" and have different meanings to different people. Thus in Mugabe, others see a redeemer through his radically anti-imperialistic policies under which the ZANU-PF leader expropriated white owned farms (previously expropriated from black Africans during the colonial period), subdivided and parceled them out as agricultural plots to thousands of landless black Zimbabweans under the Fast Track Land Reform programme. The programme was adjudged controversial in some media quarters and code-named 'Third Chimurenga' (Machingura, 2012:262) to imply a third revolution in the decolonization process. Moyana (2002) and Mamdan (2008, both cited in Mackay, 2016:229) argue that Mugabe's land reform had managed to accomplish the long-standing colonial imbalances, yet these are the same actions that earned him the authoritarian and dictatorship labels.

Zimbabwe's political story would arguably be incomplete without Joshua Nkomo, former vice president of Zimbabwe who earned a nationalistic figure and commanded respect, not only among his ZAPU supporters, but across Zimbabwe, yet amongst ZANU-PF supporters he also

was arguably viewed as a weak leader who compromised and relied heavily on white advisors such as Terrence Ranger, John Reed and Leo Baron among others (Tekere, 2007:113 and Chung, 2006:61 in Ndlovu-Gatscheni and Willems, 2010:05). Shamyarira, (1966:173-177 cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2010:04) also argue that Nkomo was largely viewed as a weak leader following his unwillingness to pursue a confrontational route during the liberation war. This arguably led to the split of ZAPU, and the splinter group formulated ZANU-PF in 1963. However Nkomo (1984 in Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2010) himself argues that the split was motivated along ethnic lines. This literature however ignores the role of media in the political upheavals of Gukurahundi and the demise of Nkomo, a gap that this study aspires to contribute towards with specific reference to contemporary internet-based protest #This Flag and its socio-semiotic engagement with *The Herald Online*.

Despite his negative portrayal, Nkomo earned monikers Father Zimbabwe and Chibwechitedza (the slippery stone) due to his tolerance of different opinion as well as his fatherly approach to issues (Glostard, 2011: 262; Marembo, 2014:60; Akyeampong and Gates, 2012: 484; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2010:04-05). Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2007:73) argues of what he terms a period of metamorphosis in Nkomo's life, which was characterized by the deconstruction and reconstruction of the politician's persona from being Father Zimbabwe to 'father of dissidents' and back to Father Zimbabwe, the latter being conveniently reconstructed after the ZAPU leader's death in post-independent Zimbabwe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007) argues that Nkomo had to dismantle PF-ZAPU through the 1987 Unity Accord in order to stop the politically motivated state-driven massacres against the majority of his supporters and civilians by the Five Brigade military wing in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands during the Gukurahundi era. This brewed comfort in Mugabe, who went on to describe the late vice-president as a "hero of heroes" in further reconstructions of Nkomo (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2007:74), despite the fact that at the height of their tiff, the latter had been forced into exile. Thus whilst Nkomo was largely viewed as a dissident leader in ZANU-PF circles, it is equally arguable that Nkomo's leadership was more embracing as noted in the monikers 'Father Zimbabwe' and Chibwechitedza (Chivandikwa and Muwonwa, 2011:84; Ndlovu-Gtshanei and Willems, 2010:05). Ranger (1999:211) argues within the same context that Nkomo was a unifying figure who managed to bring together the Karanga, Ndebele and Shona ethnic identities into national entities.

While Nkomo arguably played both a nationalistic and opposition role, it would be agreeable that Morgan Tsvangirai largely remain the face of opposition politics at least up to the period of this study. Tsvangirai arguably waged the most significant opposition to ZANU-PF, for the first time wresting away 56 seats of the 120 contested in 2000, barely a year after the formation of his MDC (Amutabi, 2008 in Tofa, 2013:85). As much as the MDC might have appeared to wane between 2000 and 2008 owing to splits in 2005 arguably along ethnic lines to produce the MDC-Tsvangirai and MDC-Ncube (Welshman Ncube), the latter which apparently nominated Arthur Mutambara as its president (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2009:222-223), the opposition came back a rejuvenated entity in the 2008 elections forcing a run-off after Tsvangirai emerged the winner in the first round but failed to get the mandatory 50 per cent plus one vote in the first round (Chiumbu, 2009:10, Moyo, 2009; Mano and Willems, 2010). Explicit in this development is the role new digital media played in according opposition politics alternative platforms to unleash opinion diversity (Chiumbu, 2009:10, Moyo, 2009; Mano and Willems, 2010; Mapuwei, 2014). A gap however still exists with regards how mainstream media appropriated the same internet-based platforms to engage with opposition political forces.

Previous doubts by the Mutambara and Ncube faction about Tsvangirai's leadership capabilities, describing him as weak and indecisive soon after their split (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008:492), could probably be confirmed during the term of the Government of National Unity (GNU) when Tsvangirai was Prime Minister. The opposition leader was again argued to have been weak, uncharismatic and indecisive and this is arguably visible through the allocation of ministries in the coalition government (Africa Research Bulletin, 2007 in Chan and Primorac, 2013:06). Key ministries on agriculture and defence were taken by ZANU-PF whilst Mugabe remained the President of the coalition government with Tsvangirai the Prime Minister, a position which was widely perceived as submissive to Mugabe's (Chan and Primorac, 2013:06).

Like Nkomo, who was labeled by his deserters following the split of ZAPU, Tsvangirai is further described by Ncube as having dictatorial tendencies, a character that is argued to have contributed to the split of the MDC. However, unlike Nkomo whose monikers were externally constructed, Tsvangirai tries to portray his character from an egocentric perspective (Kangira, et al, 2013: 25) in order to construct a nice persona of himself and probably appear like he is 'the saviour'. At least Tsvangirai realizes that he has to shake off the 'puppet' tag and in his

autobiography tries to represent from a nationalistic perspective the liberation war narrative but remaining mum on the source of his party's finances (Kangira, et al 2013) which are widely suspected to be foreign sourced with imperialistic taints. While Tsvangirai attempts to portray a nationalistic figure of himself, Mawarire through #This Flag adopts the national flag as a sign of patriotism. This study therefore also seeks to demonstrate the interpretation by online audiences through UGC, of #This Flag's adoption of the national flag as a sign of patriotism.

Latterly Tsvangirai's MDC would however split further with key founding figures Tendai Biti and Elton Mangoma exiting the opposition party in 2014 following accusations of undermining their leader after calling for his resignation for persistently falling to Mugabe since the establishment of the party in 1999. Biti and Mangoma formed the Movement for Democratic Change-Renewal (MDC-R) with the latter going solo later on, forming Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe (RDZ) whilst Biti renamed the other remnant to People's Democratic Party (PDP) (Marongwe and Makaye, 2016:167; Lebas, 2016:11; Teddy and Vhutuza, 2017).

Whilst Tsvangirai is arguably the face opposition politics in Zimbabwe (Chan and Gallagher, 2017:07), the country at the time of this research had just witnessed the formation and subsequent split of Joice Mujuru's Zimbabwe People First (ZPF), a formation by former ZANU-PF 'dissidents' expelled for allegedly siding with Mujuru to topple Mugabe. Mujuru after an internal plot to oust her from the presidency of ZPF ended up "expelling" the accused, Rugare Gumbo and Didymus Mutasa who then retained the name ZPF whilst the former rebranded to National People's Party (NPP). During the period of this study, the country's main opposition parties oscillated between a grand coalition and individualism ahead of the 2018 elections with Tendai Biti (PDP), Ncube (MDC-N) and Elton Mangoma (RDZ), all remnants of Tsvangirai's MDC negotiating and setting conditions for the grand merger. On the other side Mujuru was also declaring that she would not work as Tsvangirai's deputy, with independent legislator Temba Mliswa urging individual opposition parties to ignore the coalition calls and go it alone. New presidential aspirant Nkosana Moyo also dismissed the idea for an opposition grand coalition calling the move "an insult" to the people of Zimbabwe (*Newsday*, 5 August 2017; *Newsday*, 2 August 2017; *Newsday*, 28 August 2017; *dailynews*, 24 August, 2017; *dailynews*, 25 August 2017 all available online).

2.1.5 Online newspapers and coverage of social movements

Slightly more than two decades ago the global media industry saw new digital technologies swathing across the globe, disrupting the old media order and forcing some traditional newspapers to close shop in some parts of the developed world. The pioneers of online publishing are *The Chicago Tribune* which went live on internet in 1993 followed by *The Palo Alto Weekly* in 1994 and later that year most newspapers in the United States followed suit. That period was characterized by issues around newspaper design, structure with regards media business models and most importantly the issue of changing audience preferences. Meanwhile in Sweden *Aftonbladet* led the pack in that country in 1994 to have online representation and join the global leaders. The biggest motivation of going online was the idea to reach a wider and younger audience by taking advantage of the new internet technologies which made it possible to update news throughout the day. Subsequently there would be prospects of increased advertising revenue as a result of the high audiences accessing the content for free. Thus online newspapers can be argued to be an “alarm medium” whose duty is to break news for later development by the traditional media. Although later after the turn of the millennium most online newspapers sought to charge for content, the idea did not work in some sections as businesses tried to balance between protecting their print editions and growing audiences online. The latter became a success for many as readers had a wider choice of platforms to access news on the same trending issues locally or globally (Ahlstrom et al, 2001, Ihlström, 2005; De Waal, et al, 2005; Schönbach,2005; Tewari, 2015).

Thus the emergence of online media has created hype among mainstream content producers in view of the larger audiences with whom they are likely to interact with. These larger audiences also mean a totally new generation of followers who are capable of creating their own content either from scratch or from that which is initially published for them. The simplicity with which online media are produced has also given hope to the ordinary people who have identified the internet based platforms as alternative channels through which to participate in the public fora thereby providing own content to compete with mainstream channels (Nielsen, 2015:08-09). Digital media have therefore created a new information terrain which Dahlgren (2013) contends is also a terrain of activist media through websites, blog spots and social media citing such platforms as Youtube on which anyone with access to internet and interested is free to post anything for access by anyone from anywhere around the globe.

As such, due to the ubiquity nature of digital media, Luxmore (2015) notes how they have largely been used in political disputes between Ukraine and Russia during the last few years. The platforms have largely been exploited by rebel groups in Ukraine to spread their propaganda messages across and popular among these being *VKontakte*, a Russian language social media platform regarded as one of the largest in Eastern Europe. However Luxmore is quick to note that of these online platforms, few are recognized as official thereby bringing under spotlight the issue of authenticity of some online newspapers. However one of the self-proclaimed state, the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) in Ukraine actually established two newspapers, the *Novorossiia* and *Golos Naroda (Voice of the People)* which are free-sheets and have an online presence too. *Golos Naroda* is actually managed through the administration's media services department and these regularly carry content meant to promote the state's case for global attention. Another is the *Russkaya Vesna*, launched in 2015 and publishing in German, English and French whilst the *Information Agency of Novorossiia* also thrives on its online version to fight for the cause of the DNR by denouncing the Ukraine government and its military wing (Luxmore, 2015).

Kosienkowski et al (2015) explores the importance of user-generated content (UGC) on social media and how Eastern Europe states have realized their power in information warfare, public diplomacy and conflict resolution. Niekerk and Mharaj (n.d in Kosienkowski et al, 2015) also posit that in Ukraine, DNR and Russia social media have been used to win audiences ideologically whilst achieving stability in some hot spots. Away from troubled spots, Michailidou and Trens (2013:262 in Heller et al 2013:05) note the use of online newspapers in promoting political public participation in European Union (EU) parliaments owing to the digitization of traditional media thereby enabling people to air their own views as well as share content. This development has resulted in more accountability by politicians and legislators through participating on the same platforms with the general public as they work to boost their chances of re-election. Heller et al (2013:06) also contend that public scrutiny allows greater accountability on the part of parliament as a result of public debates and question time. Generally European policymakers contend that media, particularly online media are a critical component in the democracy machinery and therefore are expected to promote the development of a participative citizenry (Harrison, 2009:06). User-generated content and the participation of citizens in media production is not a new phenomenon but can be classified as old and new

forms of participation as traditional media allowed interaction with readers through letters to the editor for newspapers and phone-ins for radio or television. It is therefore the development of the relevant tools that is more important and how they have widened the choice for audiences as well as easing the interaction process by allowing real time or instant communication.

The developments cited above have given birth to what Deuze (2006:19 in Franquist et al, 2011:224) calls “citizen journalism.” Citizen journalism has been consolidated by the advent of the mobile phone which has seen many going online globally with significant participation of marginalized groups in protests such as the 1992 Thailand uprisings and the California strike by truck drivers in 2004 among the early adopters of the gadget (Walzt, 2005:20). Over the past decade, global internet penetration and the improvement of the mobile phone have seen a wide adoption of these media to become big communication tools in the engagement of authorities on various topics from environmental to agricultural issues in Asia and Africa (Wang, 2015). A significant shift in internet use and adoption of online media has also been observed over time across age groups as new generations develop thereby contributing to the use of online media.

However increased citizen participation has not necessarily translated into political use of the internet, although in South Korea it meant increased participation from around 2002 to 2007 during the election and eventual rule of President Rho Mu-Huyn. Furthermore, increased access to internet may also not necessarily translate the online newspapers into alternative media as some of the online platforms would still be owned by large conglomerates (Kwak, 2012, 127-128). Tewari (2015:2-3) also assert that in India for example major traditional newspapers like *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Tribune*, *The Indian Express* and *The Hindu* are significantly represented online and enjoy sizeable traffic although they compete with American publications such as *New York Times*, *Huffington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* among others. Tewari (2015:05) also posits that in that country it is however most likely that when people visit the internet for news updates, they would go for online platforms of traditional mainstream media. In Latin America, movements and academics have demanded for a more accessible public sphere through deregulation of media markets, and the results have been a shift in the political tide with the rise of new governments that are argued to be more of center-left from the late 1990s. Media reform activists then saw opportunities in calling for media democratization and the resultant relationship between media conglomerates and the populist governments took

the watchdog role of the former beyond limits as the media suggested and intended coups against the latter. Cases include a 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela whilst one of the country's local oppositional radios in 2008 waged an assassination incitement against the Bolivian president. Extreme cases were recorded in Honduras and Paraguay where successful coups were staged in 2009 and 2012 respectively. As such it is argued that social movements in Latin America and their access to media is not a passive act but an active one capable of determining new communication orders (Mauersberger, 2016:35).

In the same realm as discussed above, global media conglomerates in the Global North have created new visual audiences for their online platforms on which they shore up propaganda as entertainment yet real against the targeted country. Hall (2009:55) terms this new use of online media by the conglomerates and their government "virtual war tours" whereby in one instance the US' army together with Cable News Network (*CNN*) carried out a war tour against Saddam Hussein live online. American citizens, in the comfort of their homes could watch the war tour as entertainment, as the US army went about hunting the former Iraqi leader, and hyperlinks on the online platform could allow viewers to reenact Saddam's capture offline. Online slideshows could also be viewed and hyperlinks could create access to digital archives of the leader's capture in a commemorative way made possible by reenacting the event as a computer game through Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) yet, at most it would be propaganda against the Middle East. From a business perspective, *CNN's* Special Report would be a paid-for prime show, whilst accessing the archives is possible through subscriptions to the channel's *CNN Pipeline* (Hall, 2009:56-59). Thus media in the Global North have also been used to build political agendas, just like they in Latin America have incited coups, with online media particularly providing a user experience that would engage audiences in a commemorative way as followers dig and replay events from the digital archives of the platforms. De Franco (2012:69-70) in this regard argues that *CNN* actually took the lead in framing the narrative of Osama Bin Laden after the US' 9/11 attack, and consequently President George Bush's government had to be seen to be fighting terrorism after it had been defined as such by the channel. Thus the importance of Bin Laden's capture was played up more by *CNN's* Larry King than it was by the government, and the latter under pressure had to subsequently act. Eventually, the US' attack on Afghanistan became justifiable in the eyes of some Americans (Nacos, 2002:

151-152). This research explores how *The Herald Online* has been used to construct political agendas in the representation of #This Flag as an oppositional social movement.

While online media have been politically active in Asia, with traditional media owned platforms dominating, in Latin America they observably determined the political destiny against governments deemed unfavourable whilst in the United States, they played a leading role in defining political leaders like Saddam and Bin Laden as terrorists worth annihilating and subsequently influencing the US government to act. In Africa, Mudhai (n.d, in Mabweazara et al, 2014:09) observe that owing to new media digital technologies the continent has registered progress in the field of freedom and civil liberties although notable actions against media in Kenya could be viewed as restraining this development. Such tight controls of media however may not easily restrain forms of new media as observed in Egypt leading to the 2011 revolution which started in the town of Tahrir Square leading to the demise of Hosni Mubarak. Egyptian online newspapers and social networks with the help of foreign media like the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* and *The Guardian* kept the world abreast of the uprisings (El Gody, 2014 in Mabweazara et al, 2014:10), whilst citizens also heightened communication amongst themselves through personal social media accounts. The influence of online media in these uprisings gave rise to such terms as “Twitter Revolution” and “WikiLeaks Revolution” in Egypt and Tunisia respectively. Normatively the role media in general played in these uprisings would be expected to strengthen the checks and balances they helped create through the protests (Douai and Olorunnisola, 2013).

While Africa continues to register growth in new digital media, the phenomenon should be understood as a scramble for African audiences by both local and global media conglomerates. Such media channels like *China Central Television (CCTV)*, United States’ *CNN*, *BBC*, *Al Jazeera*, and others continue to grow their markets with *CCTV* having partnered Kenyan media players and opening a regional office in the East-African country. Meanwhile mobile telecommunications and internet access providers continue to provide services which have seen the reduction of data costs, with *Facebook* in 2014 having developed packages with *Internet.org* for the *Zambian* market to access *Facebook* social medium for free while Chinese mobile telephone firm, *Huawei* has made strides in the provision of low-cost internet enabled smart phones in Africa (Willems and Mano, 2017:02). Meanwhile in countries like Zimbabwe and

South Africa internet costs continue to become not a big deal with the permeation of English language online platforms creating competition among news organizations as media fight for Africa's audiences via online platforms (Mavhungu and Mabzweazara, 2014:36). This study therefore also seeks to establish the place of *The Herald Online* newspaper in the fight for internet audiences with other news media platforms, in this case #This Flag movement as a source of political news and its representation in the newspaper under study.

The affordability of internet data points to an increased access of online media for the African audiences thereby opening opportunities for their democratic participation in governance issues in a continent where Nyamjoh (n.d) contends that "liberal democracy and Africa are not good bedfellows." However Salgado (2014: 112) contends, as argued in Kwak (2012) and Tewari (2015) that plurality of online news platforms does not necessarily imply plurality of ideas citing the environment that subsists in Angola and other Lusophone African countries where these platforms are owned and controlled by members of the ruling elite, thereby negatively portraying anti-government social movements. In Angola 'private media' are owned by individual elites of the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Thus such a scenario would most likely see the government enacting laws that are stringent enough to suppress the voices of social movements and disrupt the alternativeness of online media. It is in this context that this study seeks, from a social-semiotic perspective to explore political economy dimensions of *The Herald Online* and #This Flag as two internet-based media fighting for attention of the audiences, and how their ownership, structure and control have a bearing on their ideological objectives.

However significant political usage of online media is observed in Nigeria during the 2011 plebiscite following the establishment of citizen journalism initiatives in order to monitor and publicise the election process after reforms to the Independent National Electoral Commission. Ogala and Bamidele (2011 in Siapera and Veglis, 2012) posit that even the government was defeated in its attempt to prohibit cameras near or at the polling posts owing to the digital wave that had gripped the electorate. The election proceedings were widely shared all over the world via microblogs, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Youtube* among other online platforms. This was made possible through internet-enabled smartphones. The most popular of such initiatives was the *ReclaimNaija: Election Incident Report System*, an online platform that availed to election

observers mobile phone subscriber identification module cards (SIM cards) for them to send updates on election proceedings. People from different backgrounds such as civil society, peasants and the working class were also given a free internet software that would enable them from their mobile phones to send out tweets using *Twitter* handles such as #NigeriaDecides and #reclaimnaija (Siapera, and Veglis, 2012). Whilst those at home are seen to have a wider chance of participating in democratic processes of their countries, it is argued that those in the diaspora have actually found a new public sphere in online media to discuss and try to influence issues about their home countries (Eriksen, 2007:08; Olorunnisola, 2000 and Bernal, 2006 in Langmia, 2010:69-70). Cameroonians in the diaspora are among those who took advantage of a commentary section created by *The Post News Online* and immediately started participating in democracy processes, in an environment they previously had their voices stifled. However Langmia (2010) cites the digital divide that exists in many parts of Africa as a limitation to the purported digital wave which has widely been viewed as enabling citizen journalism or promoting citizens' participation in their countries' democratic processes. This study in the same context seeks to establish the engagement of dissent voices on the comments platforms of *The Herald Online* despite the fact that the newspaper is government controlled through the ZMMT. This is so because the newspaper allows for reader feedback.

The role played by the diaspora community in Cameroon would probably be likened to that by Zimbabwean journalists most of whom went into exile owing to economic hardships and an unstable political terrain at the turn of the millennium and immediately marking the arrival of the digital media wave in the country. Apart from journalists, others who had relocated to countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the US, Australia, and largely South Africa among some included politicians and individuals of different professional backgrounds. This also marked the growth of internet as the most notable medium of communication for the new diaspora community as well as for those who had remained behind to discuss political and economic issues arguably without censorship. Offline it had not been easy owing to the restrained media operating environment subsisting in Zimbabwe then. As such several online newspapers sprouted, giving birth to *ZimDaily.com*, *New Zimbabwe.com*, *Kubatana.net* and many others which have been positive to social movements in terms of coverage. Around 2008 the websites had multiplied as the political situation in the country became tense ahead of the disputed June 2008 run-off following a controversial first round plebiscite that presidential candidates Robert

Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai and Simba Makoni failed to break as none of them had scored the required 50 percent plus one vote.

The most popular sites as per Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey (ZAMPS) then included *ZimOnline* which was based in South Africa, *The Zimbabwe Times* operating from the USA, *NewZimbabwe.com* and *ZimDaily.com*. The sites ran with the discourse of police brutality, human rights abuses by the government's and failure to uphold democratic processes (Chiumbu, 2009:10, Moyo, 2009; Mano and Willems, 2010; Mapuwei, 2014). However Chari (2013) argues that although Zimbabwe had seen this plethora of online media platforms, still the country's awareness levels on the existence of these online news platforms remained low ahead of the next harmonized elections in 2013 and suggested that this could be due to inconsistent access to internet as a result of related costs, arguably presenting limitations to social movement voices.

Nevertheless, following a media terrain dominated by state-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) publications such as *The Herald* and its sister newspapers and ZBC's radio stations and its television channel, it had not been easy for dissent voices to be heard (Chari, 2014; Rusike, 1990, Saunders, 1991). Whilst the new websites were viewed as emancipatory by preferring the previously marginalized voices of the opposition social movements, state controlled media although not significantly represented digitally, were on the forefront of carrying ZANU-PF's nationalistic discourse consistent with the country's nationalistic ideology mainly through ZBC's *Newsnet*. The argument in this regard is that the framing of the nationalistic discourse was imagined through ZANU-PF's ideological lenses (Moyo, 2009) probably as a way of creating a counter against the marauding new online publications. Within the same context, Mutsvairo (2013) opines that *The Herald*, due to the nature of its ownership structure has not hidden its support of the government and as such offers alternative political coverage in the face of a litany of propaganda from the privately run online news publications and other foreign channels opposed to President Mugabe. Most of the labeling of Mugabe is often related to his land reform policies and alleged human rights abuses which have earned him the 'dictator' label even though he ushered in the human rights discourse in Zimbabwe when he took the reins of power from the colonial Ian Smith Government (Mutsvairo, 2013). The existing literature ignores the principles of the government of Zimbabwe as represented by *The Herald* as

a newspaper that represents the government of the day in Zimbabwe, an area which this study is interested in exploring.

It can be argued that if there was ever a time that Zimbabwe's online news platforms were most significant to opposition it was during the 2008 elections during which most of the new sites took media freedom to higher heights by tracking and publishing election results as they were announced from various constituencies but before official declaration. One of these websites was *The Bearded Man* blog spot. Some of the sites even published speculative results and false reports thereby raising the issue of lack of seriousness of platforms perceived as alternative for the majority. In that regard Sandoval and Fuchs (2010:141 cited in Chari, 2013:389) argue that people ought not to be too optimistic about new media as alternative media since these have to be understood broadly in a sense that does not confine democracy only to the political arena but to other realms like structural inequalities brought about by ownership and domination of certain ideologies. In this context this study is interested in exploring how the political discourse pushed by #This Flag could be representative of society at large in view of its representation in *The Herald Online*. This is arguably observable through not only through UGC but through the existing relationship of #This Flag and other opposition political forces such as Tsvangirai's MDCT.

Those sites posting false information were not obliged to be held responsible by the public as these were privately owned, often publishing whatever they deemed fit. However, regardless of the lack of seriousness of some of these online publications, they arguably drew attention to Zimbabwe during the period of the Government of National Unity (GNU) formed after the June 2008 disputed run-off. That role is arguably a notable contribution of privately owned online publications to the democratic cause of Zimbabwe (Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo, 2013:402) as pushed by opposition social movements. Mhiripiri and Mutsvairo (2012) also argue that regardless of their likely failure to cause a change equal to the Arab Spring protests due to the use of repressive state apparatuses, the role of online media is recognizable through their ability to publicize issues of politically motivated human rights abuses. Within the same context Sabao and Chingwaramusee (2017:203) weigh in citing the role played by *Facebook* anonymous character Baba Jukwa in influencing political change in Zimbabwe. These privately owned online channels

like *Zimdaily.com* and others often immediately publish empirical footages and stories of any violent engagement of the state with civil society or the public.

The gap for research therefore exists around online newspapers and political engagement with specific focus on social movements and their social semiotic engagement with *The Herald Online* in particular. In order to focus the study, specific reference is to #This Flag, a “one man” movement initiated by Mawarire which arguably ended up with mass support as is discussed further in this study.

Thus in this regard scholars have mostly focused on the evolution of African media in view of the advent of new internet-based technologies, their adoption of these technologies, changing news gathering and consumption trends, the emancipatory elements of new media and their role in social protests as well as audiences’ participation in governance issues as a result of the new technologies (Willems and Mano, 2017; Mabweazara, 2010, 2012, 2014; Mapuwei, 2014, Moyo, 2011).

2.1.6 National flags and symbols in protests

The definition of a flag, from various works consulted by this researcher narrows down to histories of specific countries or nations in their various expeditions from colonial battles to liberation wars. However what appears to be a common definition of a flag is that it is first and foremost a piece of cloth representative of a nation’s achievements through colours. Its relevance is to embody the history, geography, people of a nation and their values. A flag is a signal. In Britain, the master of colonialism, the flag was used to mark conquered lands previously not known to the British and to send a message of control of those lands. In the US, what is arguably known from early history is that the colours of that country’s flag were adopted from General Washington’s coat of arms, again signaling the embedment of flags into the history of ancient wars (Hamilton, 1852; Curtis, 1993; Marshal, 2016; Cumberland, 2017). This study therefore also explores the significance of the adoption of the Zimbabwe flag by #This Flag and its relevance in the protest.

As such, Gerbuado (2017:118) posits that social movements or protest activists have marked the return of the “nation” to the centrality of protests by presenting themselves as defenders of the national community who are out to protect a nation’s history, identity, customs and its symbols

through the use of the national flag as observed during the so-called Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 in the Middle East. It is critical to note that organizers of the 2011 protests in Egypt on January 25 2011 advised participants to bring only the national flag colours to the protests and leave behind any political party gear and symbols that they feared would politically divide people. However participants were still arrested by police for carrying with them the national flag as the national colours immediately identified with the revolutionaries (Gerbuado, 2017). Similarly, Evan Mawarire's use of the Zimbabwe flag can be argued to have been along the same context as his pioneer video of April 16, 2016 did not identify with any political party except arguing on the relevance of the national colours which he bemoaned 'their abuse' by a government which he argued had failed the nation. As if to reclaim their identity, the protesters in Libya used the flag of the Kingdom of Libya which had long been thrown away by Muammar Gaddafi against whom they were protesting. Later, they used a replica of the flag adopted in 1932 when the country attained freedom from the Italian war which lasted ten years (Gerbuado, 2017:119).

Welch (2000:05) opines that "because the essence of the flag is imbued with patriotic qualities of sacred proportion, campaigns to preserve its integrity invoke a higher moral obligation on the part of government and people." In this context countries have developed statutes to protect, respect and honour the national flag and in developed democracies like the US, there have been debates over the years on the use of the flag as a form of speech expression unless it is likely to cause danger (Welch, 2000:05). Goldstein (1996:77) also observes that the Halter versus Nebraska 1907 US Supreme Court case however upheld as constitutional the prohibition of commercialization of the national flag where merchants, taking advantage of the emotional patriotic feelings of US citizens during the "crescendo of warfare abroad" ended up exploiting the situation. Tang (2016:107) also posits that during the 2009 Xinjiang protests in the Republic of China, the use of the national flag was symbolically crucial in showing how the aggrieved groups wished for "national-level intervention" to have their rights recognized. While the national flag in Zimbabwe has been used during soccer matches to rally the national team, it is observed that it has also been used during rallies by political parties, and the case of Evan Mawarire's #ThisFlag arguably is an opportunity for study which this research seeks to contribute towards, with regards the portrayal with which The Flag Movement has been treated in *The Herald Online*.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Media theories, when used within a context help understand a phenomenon and can also assist in the predicting possible outcomes from social developments (McQuail, 2010; Fourie, 2001; Baran and Davis, 2015). The following section thus looks at four theories within which this study is located. These theories are as follows:

2.2.1 The theory of hegemony

This study used as a primary theory, Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony in view of government's use of *The Herald* newspaper in reacting to #This Flag social movement. Hegemony is argued to be a continuous creation process as it yields counter-hegemonies time and again to remain relevant and effective. Through the theory of hegemony, Gramsci explains the continued predominance of one social class over others in Western capitalist democracies by way of propagation of preferred cultural, political and economic control. Hegemony does not only achieve dominance but also propagates the ideas of the dominant class as the general interests of society, in the process winning support from other social sub classes (Storey, 2009:79-80). Hegemony is achieved through occasional coercion where there are pockets of resistance and consent where civil society agents collectively act as a catalyst to advance among the subalterns ideas of the dominant class or classes as the "common sense" (Howson and Smith, 2008; Storey, 2009:80). Coercion implies the engagement of state institutions like the police, army and the prisons described as "repressive state apparatus" in Althusserian terms to quell dissenting voices (Storey, 2006:337; Jones, 2006; Althusser, 2004:42).

Gamble (1988 cited in Sachikonye, 1997:192) posits that hegemony is never completely achieved and what is commonly experienced are projects towards hegemony rather than hegemony itself. Thus Sachikonye (1997) further opines that as such hegemony happens when a dominant political establishment exercises minimal force and resistance, but work has to continue in order to renew the process, win and re-win consent resulting in hegemony being more of a process rather than a completely achieved situation. However, Jones (2006:51) argues that in contemporary politics, some governments have shifted from employing coercion in order to avoid the risk of losing ideological credibility. This could confirm Laclau's (2002:328) argument that hegemony is therefore bound to leave room for dissent in order to attempt at

winning hearts and minds of the dominated class. It is arguably within the same context that Femia (1987:46 cited in Harggaard, 2006:07) presents and distinguishes hegemony into two scenarios, namely proletarian and bourgeois hegemony. Proletarian hegemony is also described as “integral hegemony” whilst bourgeois hegemony is described as “decadent” or “minimal” hegemony. The distinction lies in that proletarian or integral hegemony constituting the true will of the subalterns whilst decadent or bourgeois hegemony represents a distorted consent which is achieved not entirely through the will of the repressed. Therefore the realization by some governments of the dangers of apparent coercion as noted in Laclau (2002) would arguably bear proletarian hegemony in order to appear to “embrace” the subalterns.

The researcher therefore arguably locates this study in the context of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony on the basis of ZANU-PF’s continued dominance of Zimbabwean politics despite notable eras characterized by catastrophic events after which President Mugabe’s regime still manages to come out victorious. These incidents include the Gukurahundi, Operation Murambatsvina and probably the 2008 disputed plebiscite which resulted in the birth of the GNU after reports of gross political violence and intimidation. Despite the threat of ZANU-PF’s hegemony by the MDC and civil society, the revolutionary party however smoothly romped to victory in the elections that followed in 2013, as if nothing had happened in 2008 with the victory having been predicted through polls by both local and international bodies (Chan and Gallagher, 2017; Gallagher, 2017; Sambo et al, 2016:130).

In the same context, these elections have been regular as much as they have been controversial. However the 2013 plebiscite would arguably qualify Femia’s (1987) construction of proletarian hegemony, which is built around collective will of the subalterns. It is in the same context that the researcher also argues for the theory of hegemony citing media laws that existed parallel to the new 2013 constitution before realignment such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) widely used to disrupt protests such as #ThisFlag despite the calmness which sometimes exists in the country. From the same perspective the research also explores the negotiations and contestations between *The Herald’s* online news channel and #This Flag considering the interactive nature of internet-based media platforms which may provide space for UGC as audiences react to mainstream news coverage in the context of Laclau’s (2002) observation of

governments deliberately leaving room for dissent. This is also in view of Hall's theory of meaning making which equally recognizes audiences as active partners in the meaning making process (Procter, 2004:54; Fourie, 2007:281) as this study explores the social semiotic engagement of opposition social movements and online newspapers, *The Herald Online* in particular.

2.2.2 Structural-Strain Theory as Social Movement Theory

This research is also located in the context of the structural-strain theory which is one of a number of 'social movement theories' which explain what social movements are, why and how they occur. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (n.d in Engel, 2001) describe a social movement as an industry which dwells on the development of contemporary identity-based political, sociological, psychological and historical phenomena. A social movement thus seeks to cause the birth of a sub-culture and its objectives are aimed at the state. Social movements are not just carriers of existent ideas, meaning and ideologies but are viewed more as representing agents of production of those ideas, meanings and ideologies and their sustenance. They are also profoundly entangled along with media and state authorities in what is referred to as 'the politics of signification' (Snow and Benford, 1988 and Hall 1982 cited in Benford and Snow, 2000:613).

Propounded by Robert Merton, structural-strain theory argues that society is driven into protest by inequality found in social structures. People are viewed as rational actors whose choice of actions and behaviour is prone to societal, cultural and interactive processes. However the choice of behaviour and actions is not unidirectional or rigid as it is a result of social agencies like media and other social institutions like the school and family all of whose influence people have the power to resist or appropriate in the context of Hall's perspective of encoding/decoding theory (Neil, 1962; Einstadter and Henry, 2006:154). Structural strain theory also helps to explain the roots of deviance in society as a result of the cultural break between society's goals and its means to attain those goals. The social goals society pursues include economic success elements such as landing a high paying job and achieving career growth, owning a home and so forth whilst the cultural break implies the means with which to achieve these goals such as being able to go to school, progressing and succeeding at university. The gap between the goals and the means to attain the goals forms the source of deviance as people feel the pressure to achieve their

dreams (Andersen and Taylor, 2008:174; Ferrante, 2016:221). It is within this realm that this study explores the origins of #This Flag social movement, its goals and its engagement with *The Herald Online*. From the same perspective the study also explores the representation of the social movement by online readers of *The Herald* through the newspaper's comment platforms.

2.2.3 Hypermedia Theory

Hypermedia theory was propounded by Vannevar Bush (1945) after his technological invention of a computer system named "Memex" which used voice-recognition technology as well as microfilm and automation in generation, sorting and storing of data. This technology, which sort of represented an electronic book was later expanded by Ted Nelson (1960) who coined it "hypertext". In the following years, the technology improved through the advent of computer-based science which saw the introduction of compact discs (CDs) which helped improve Bush's invention. It is in this context that hypermedia's objective is to "put the disk jockey's turntable into the hands of the dancers on the floor" (Lupton, 1996:114).

Thus hypermedia technology creates a virtual textual universe through the integration of "visual and auditory faculties" combining graphic images, video, sound and verbal signs (Delany and Landow, 1994:07). Hypermedia theory therefore helps explain how the human mind can distinguish between printed text and 'hypertext', the latter when integrated with visuals, animations, audio and verbal signs produce hypermedia texts. These are characteristically interactive at least enough to create a kind of 'do it yourself' (DIY) experience by enabling a self-sufficient communicative environment without physical face-to-face interface with other audiences or originators of media content (Hu, 2008:104). According to Nelson (1974/2003:313 cited in Koskimaa, 2016:868), hypermedia are representations that respond to user actions, and in other words this explains better the notion of internet-based media channels such as websites and their use of multiple images, visuals, audios and graphic images to achieve digital storytelling.

It is within this context that Pink (2004) explains how hypermedia contributes to research through the use of photography, video, drawing and digital images in data gathering and presentation. Thus this researcher examines through hypermedia theoretical lenses the social-semiotic engagement of #This Flag with *The Herald* online. This theory helps explain how

digital media have been appropriated in *The Herald* online in creating a representation of #This Flag through digital images, online cartoons and visuals from a state-media propaganda perspective. It is also key to note that the internet in this research has become the battleground for the two contesting ideologies as #This Flag movement was initiated, launched and run on social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, platforms on which *The Herald* is also significantly represented.

2.2.4. Conclusion

Chapter 2 introduced and discussed literature on the history and evolution of social movements from a global perspective and their coverage or treatment of opposition social movements. The chapter also discussed the nature of social movements in African politics and their role during the liberation wars in some parts of the continent. Also reviewed were media, particularly online media and their role in oppositional social politics. The chapter also discussed the origins of the flag, its global use in ancient, colonial and liberation wars as well as their contemporary appropriation by hashtag-based opposition social movements like the Arab Spring protests, South Africa's internet media protests as well as The Flag Movement in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 2 also explored leadership styles of Zimbabwean politicians, opposition parties, and their role in the political history of the country as well as an insight into new literature on #This Flag. The Chapter concluded with an exploration of media theories from within which this research is undertaken.

Chapter 3: Research methodologies

3.0 Introduction

Chapter 3 presents research methodology, research design, data collection, data presentation and analysis methods used in this study. Since this researcher was still engaged at the organization under study during the time of this research, this chapter therefore also presents the reflexivity statement which is essential in an auto-ethnographic study. The research is a case study of *The Herald's* social semiotic engagement with #This Flag social movement on the newspaper's online platform which was managed by a team of digital journalists including this researcher during the study. The research also explores the appropriation of the Zimbabwe flag during the #This Flag protests and the interpretation of this strategy by *The Herald Online*. The study also analyses the role of *The Herald's* online audiences in the engagement process of the newspaper and #This Flag from the perspective of Hall's (1973) decoding and encoding theory which helps unpack the meaning-making process in any communication process involving media and audiences.

3.1 Qualitative Research

This study is a research of media texts of *The Herald* online and their latent meaning in the newspaper's engagement with #This Flag. Therefore the study undertook the qualitative research methodology in appreciation of the need to critically frame theoretical paradigms which place importance on interpretation of phenomena rather than numerical measurement (Gunter, 2000:23). Findings to this research required analysis rather than quantification thereby making critical the employment of the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research methodology is an approach that requires calculated planning and execution in order to make sense of data obtained through ethnographic methods. Looking at a process without observation and critical analysis is no research. Creswell (1998:15-16 cited in Luton, 2010:04) explains qualitative research as an approach achieved through protracted fieldwork which involves collection of data such as pictures, words and an inductive analysis of these and presenting them in convincing language in order to make notable contribution to the relevant body of knowledge.

Qualitative approach is also concerned not with large volumes of quantifiable data but rather it is concerned with asking critical, normative and ontological questions in order to obtain latent

meaning rather than just scratching the surface of a phenomenon (Lowery and Evans, 2004 in Luton, 2010). It is within this context that this study employed the qualitative approach in its attempt to obtain meaning embedded in cartoons, words and pictures used to depict #This Flag in *The Herald online* and why the newspaper opted for that kind of a social semiotic engagement.

Qualitative methodology also helped in this study to understanding the phenomenon further than just the portrayal of #This Flag but rather the whole contextual meaning making process as involving audiences to which *The Herald* online texts were intended. Qualitative research methodology thus does not just analyze for the sake of establishing surface meaning but places research into context in order to obtain idiographic and emic knowledge, which is a kind of inquiry that explores into the nitty-gritty elements of language and culture and the ensuing discourses (Luton, 2010; Patton, 2015). Thus qualitative research approach helped dig into the meaning of, not why *The Herald online* was established but rather, what, how and why it used the language it adopted in its interaction with #This Flag and the extent to which this interpretation was received and re-interpreted by the various audiences who interacted with the texts.

3.2 Case Study

This researcher used a case study in exploring the social-semiotic representation of #This Flag in *The Herald online* mainly because this is a research design that allows answers from broad questions presented in an intensive manner through observation and interviews. A case study is a process of inquiry of a particular case, and is also interested in the outcome of that inquiry (Stake, 2008). A Case study makes it possible much easier to obtain more variables from a single case. It also allows a researcher to express own ideas through deductive analysis of media texts and querying the motive of the media texts, say from a political economy perspective (Swanborn, 2010; George and Bennett, 2004). It is this context that Orum et al (1991) premise the definition of a case study as a multifaceted in-depth investigation that uses qualitative research design in obtaining data from several sources yet focusing on a single social phenomenon. Thus this study used the case study research design in order to explore the single phenomenon of #This Flag social movement in an in-depth manner that allowed a detailed conduction of the research process. In this argument, the researcher appreciates that indeed some case studies may make use of quantitative research approaches as argued in Orum et al (1991).

Case studies are holistic and usually make use of such data obtained through non-experimental methods such as ethnography, historical observations or field researches. Case studies also investigate dimensions of a single observation (Gerring, 2007; Morgan, 2014:290; Rohlfing, 2012), in this case #This Flag protest organized by The Flag Movement led by Evan Mawarire, and its subsequent interaction with *The Herald Online* newspaper. Case study in this research was appropriate in that this kind of a research design allows for the investigation of the wholesomeness of a phenomena based on a broad topic (Morgan, 2014; Orum et al, 2007), which is the scenario with the topic under study which touches broadly on social movements, online newspapers, use of the national flag in global protests and political environs in which these social movements engage with media thereby creating the wholesomeness of a single case, #This Flag and its engagement in *The Herald Online*.

The researcher also appreciates the existence of a number of types of case studies and their nature which is distinguishable by size of unit cases and the purpose of the case analysis. In the first instance, size would be determined by whether the case focuses on an individual, various individuals, a group or a broad phenomenon. In the second instance variations that define the purpose or intent of a case include the “single case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study” (Creswell, 2007:74). The intrinsic case study is primarily interested in the particular case under study whilst the general phenomenon being researched is also essential but of secondary interest (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2008; Grandy, 2010). It is in this context that this study adopted the intrinsic case study, whose character involves selection of a phenomenon, in this instance the opposition social movements with particular interest on #This Flag protest and its broad treatment in *The Herald Online* newspaper as the locus of enunciation.

The phenomenon of opposition social movements is and has been widely over-trodden with regards its historical founding, its evolution over time, role in determining the political order as well as its use in defeating colonialism outside Europe. Opposition social movements have latterly become active in challenging entrenched despotic governments they helped to the throne, like in Latin America, Middle East and Africa mainly (Dobbin, 2012, Marks and McAdams,1996; Martin, 2015; Mawere and Marongwe, 2016; Nyamnjoh, 2016; Ramluckan, 2017; Mutsvairo, 2017; Mpofu, 2017; Masawi, 2017). Further work has been done with regards the social semiotic engagement of political establishments with online media in Zimbabwe

(Mapuwei, 2014) and it is within this context that this researcher locates this study in the case of #This Flag in *The Herald Online* as a state-controlled newspaper which has also extended accommodation of its audiences on the internet.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethics are of paramount importance in media research and should be highly regarded mainly due to the complex influence media possess in how society understands and shape the future. Media influence society's beliefs and values in many aspects. Public scrutiny has also become interested more and more in media practice and operations with distrust around media content on the increase (Kieran, 1998; Plaisance, 2014). Concern around ethics continue to grow latterly buoyed by the internet-based technological developments taking shape around the globe, yet media largely remain a preferred source of news and information as well as a point of reference (Lando, 2017; Mhiripiri and Chari, 2017). Ethics are premised on rational justification in order to protect others from harm as a result of misbehavior in media operations and research. Ethical decisions should therefore justifiably be defensible from evidence-based rationality and not necessarily on a moral basis alone (Plaisance, 2014). Ethics are premised on honest. In academic institutions, prior approval may not be a requisite yet in some private and public organizations obtaining written consent from authorities or members who might be entailed is necessary (Chang et al, 2013). This researcher as such being an employee of Zimpapers, the publishers of *The Herald Online* and also being involved in the digital team manning the publication, had to advise the principals of this study as entirely and strictly academic and not bent on the intent to harm the organization.

In the same context, the issue of objectivity becomes crucial in view of personal or work relationships with those that might be implicated in the study, like fellow employees who form part of the population in charge of areas of interest like content management on *The Herald Online*. The researched from *The Herald Online* should not feel compromised or threatened (Takhar-Lail and Ghorban, 2015) and therefore informed consent was obtained in this regard. Objectivity is achieved by way of reflexivity, which is a process involving critical self-assessment in an honest manner in order to achieve 'empathic neutrality' by way of not getting over involved or becoming too distant resulting in impaired judgment. Thus autoethnography, researching an organization the researcher is part of requires both involvement and detachment

and yet the process has to be managed in a way that does not compromise the process and the findings through involvement of emotions (Davies, 1999; Patton, 2002; Finlay, 2003). It is within this context that the researcher presents a statement of reflexivity below.

3.4. Reflexivity

In an attempt to achieve total objectivity, I hereby declare that I have been engaged with *The Herald Online* since the establishment of digital operations at Zimpapers in 2011. Zimpapers Digital is a unit under the Publishing and Digital Division of the holding media company, Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd. My position is online editor, and my responsibility include:

- Managing editorial content online on behalf of title editors
- Oversee policy enforcement on digital platforms
- Oversee moderation of readers' comments on the group's digital platforms
- Handle breaking news on websites
- Syndication of print news on digital platforms
- Oversee production of mobile telephone news
- Social media management for selected digital platforms, *The Herald Online* included

I am convinced that this research will be treated and understood purely in academic terms by my principals as an essential study that can also be useful to the organization as research is an ongoing process for any business operation. Thus this research I believe will also be useful to *The Herald's* engagement with its various audiences and contribute towards increased engagement of the newspaper with its readers and sources. I also declare that I acted cautiously as best as I could to guard against personal interests as an employee of Zimpapers, the publishers of the newspaper under research, and as such it is my firm belief that the results of this study remain valid and relevant as an academic contribution.

3.5 Unit of analysis

Unit of analysis is what or who is under research. The researched could be the media texts, audiences or the media organization (Babbie, 2008). Unit of analysis when studying media texts could be an individual page, articles or even paragraphs of an article focusing on the phenomenon being investigated. Unit of analysis could also constitute a whole issue of a

newspaper, magazine or such an element (Morris, 2006; Altheide and Schneider, 2013). Priest (2010) argues that unit of analysis forms the smallest element of texts analysis but remains the most important. Unit of analysis forms the window of engagement in a research and establishes the level at which the coding or discovery of meaning is conducted (Anderson, 2012). In this study my unit of analysis was a selection of cartoons, articles, pictures, videos and audience comments selected from *The Herald* online channel.

3.6 Sampling techniques

Sampling entails the selection of a representative number from respondents among the population being used in a research. The population forms the respondents or participants and these constitute those who are likely to give the most comprehensive data on the research focus (Morris, 2006). Sampling should also guarantee that every subject from the population has equal prospects of being selected. Thus sampling in research refers basically to the definition of the population from which a sample is to be drawn from as well as that each member of the population has an equal chance of inclusion which is greater than zero and measurable (Hansen and Machin, 2013; Emmel, 2013). The sampling methods below were used for this study:

3.6.1 Convenience sampling

Hansen and Machin (2013) opine that convenience sampling is premised on the convenience of the availability and willingness of respondents to participate in the study. Also known as accidental sampling, convenience sampling targets those respondents who are easy to get and willing to participate in the study. This method is rather considered weak in some cases (Gravetter and Forzano, 2012), but the researcher opted for convenience sampling by drawing respondents from within the organization under research owing to the existing relationship and the excitement of research in a department still considered relatively new where members are keen to tap into new knowledge. Convenience sampling was also settled for since it is easy to manage with regards time and proximity in the engagement of respondents. While Ary et al (2010) argue that convenience sampling may be adopted on the basis of being the only one available to a researcher, this researcher also used purposive sampling.

3.6.2 Purposive Sampling

Also known as judgment sampling, purposive sampling is a qualitative sampling method where respondents are chosen according to criteria that may include consideration of aspects the researcher may be aware of about the sample (Jensen, 2002; Babbie, 2008; Ary et al, 2010). Thus this study purposively picked on reader comments that were posted in reaction to stories on #This Flag on *The Herald online* website in order to establish what meaning they attempted to create of the opposition social movement as a result of the newspaper's dominant meaning of #This Flag. These comments of course were of a diversified nature and slant.

3.7 Data gathering methods

There are several data collection methods in qualitative research and these usually fall under three categories which are questionnaires, observation and interviews. Data collection methods are techniques of systematic collection of information about objects of study which include the population and the phenomenon being researched. Data has to be collected in a systematic manner in order to achieve conclusively answer the research questions (Powell, 2004; Hox and Boeije, 2005; Daneil and Sam, 2011). This research used qualitative research approach as it sought to research media texts and as such used autoethnography and digital archival research for data collection.

3.7.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research data collection technique in which the author is both researcher and the researched. Autoethnography is premised on researching oneself, with the author exploring personal experiences within a cultural, social or political context (McIlveen, 2008). Chang (2008, in Kelly 2014) opines that autoethnography helps with insight into research questions about a situation lived or understood by others and as such the researcher being both researcher and subject of study, plays the role to tell the narrative from a personal experience. It is a self-narrative that queries one's situation with others within a social context (Spry, 2001). Data is primarily collected through personal experience. This technique also helps researchers understand better the communities or backgrounds they come from whilst they simultaneously contribute to existing research works for the benefit of others. Therefore being an employee of

The Herald online newspaper presented the author as an autoethnographer and this served as a perpetual reminder to pursue a neutral root without getting over-involved or too detached to the detriment of the study.

LeCompte (1999) posits that an autoethnographer has the ethical burden of undergoing through self-reflection not only during the study but before, during and after the research in order to guard findings against personal influence through emotional opinion. Thus the researcher in an autoethnography has a responsibility to manage the research process against self-serving interests, opinions, conclusions and expectations through a process of disciplined subjectivity (Erikson, 1985 cited in LeCompte, 1999:66). Thus in this study the researcher had to take cognizance of his involvement in the news production process of *The Herald Online* on #This Flag, but with full knowledge that editorial decisions resided with the newspaper's title editor. This helped guard against an abstract approach to the study.

Being an employee of *The Herald Online*, it also meant the researcher enjoyed resources of the unit under study to accomplish the research, such resources as office space, internet as well as time in-between working hours and mostly after hours. Outside Zimpapers this could have meant costs with regards internet access as well as possible suspicion on the motive of the study had the researcher been more of an alien. Internet connectivity was a major benefit as the research itself also has archival data collection as one of the techniques used to obtain data on the reportage of #This Flag in *The Herald* newspaper online as discussed in Section 3.7.2.

While academically autoethnography has its own challenges such as overemphasis of the narrative, exclusive personal reliance for data source or negligence of ethics (Foster, 2008), this study had its own fair share of challenges as it coincided with the restructuring of Zimpapers, a process that started around June 2017 resulting in the birth of three divisions namely Commercial Printing, Broadcasting, and Publishing and Digital as the company moved to consolidate its operations as a fully integrated media house. Unfortunately the digital unit which is in charge of the production of *The Herald Online* was the last to be restructured starting August 2017 into September, a twilight period before submission of this thesis. It was a period characterized by uncertainty as reassignments were also taking place with some journalists being posted to some remote towns like Mutare, Chinhoi and Masvingo, a move which could have jeopardized this research had the researcher been targeted for reassignment.

3.7.2 Digital archival research

Digital archives are computerized data storage archives which at the click or few clicks of a button avail data dating back in time for immediate access on internet (Kaleva, 2015). Owing to the development of internet based information communication technologies, loads of data are therefore available on internet and can be accessed via the World Wide Web (WWW) through digital means (Malcolm, 2004). Dutton (2009) and Newman et al (2012 in Procter et al, 2015) contend that the advent of new media has given birth to what they term the “fifth estate” in reference the social media community which is argued to be both an audience as well as producer of information as audiences can post own content through blogs and other internet based social media platforms. Thus, this research for data collection also made use of digital archives to access cartoons, articles, pictures, videos and user-generated content from *The Herald* online archives. User-generated comments were also accessed through digital archival search as people debated the engagement of #This Flag on *The Herald* online thereby broadening the ultimate meaning created out of the newspaper’s texts.

Digital archival research has unique ethical problems which include the challenges to identity participants especially those who come through as anonymous bloggers or social media participants yet their views on a particular news item matter. In that regard King (1996 in Procter et al, 2015) suggests the dropping of usernames, names and computer signatures as a way of protecting the identity of respondents. Herring (1996 also cited in Procter et al, 2015) agrees that when dealing with online based respondent, it is important not to use their real names as an ethic of respecting their privacy. Lotz and Ross (2004) opine that social media users often develop a sense that their discussions online are private as they sit in the comfort of their homes or offices typing from laptops, computers or mobile devices, yet this is not the case. King (1996 in Lotz and Ross, 2004) describes this false sense of privacy as “perceived privacy.” Waskul and Douglass (1996 in Lotz and Ross) argue that internet platforms, by virtue of the WWW being public when its users have a sense of privacy when participating on the platform, give rise to the notions of “privately public” and “publicly private” participation thereby creating a blur between the two as the internet embraces both. It is in this context that Lotz and Ross (2004) argue that researchers are expected to conduct themselves ethically and self-reflect and appreciate that social media participants treat such social media platforms as private and protect their identities.

This researcher therefore in accessing user-generated content, had to employ Lotz and Ross' (2004) advice and only used audiences' comments without their names, user-names or pseudonyms although these are available on *The Herald* online archives as part of debate generated from the newspapers online engagement with #This Flag.

3.7.3 Visual anthropology

Visual anthropology entails use of visual research methods encompassing video, photography as well as new digital multimedia technologies including hypermedia. Visual anthropology also involves the use of tools to create cultural records and to analyze society using ethnographic methods of description and comparison (Guindi, 2007; Pink, 2001 cited in Pink, 2007). *The Herald online* uses multimedia methods of news gathering (at least up to the period of this study) and as such this study used visual anthropology in the collection and analysis of multimedia content from the newspaper's web extension tools such as Youtube which feed into *The Herald* online based on content published. In this regard videos published on *The Herald* website were accessed and analyzed in their description of #This Flag.

3.7.4 Unstructured face-to-face interviews

Hansen and Machin (2013) posit that interviews are one of the most effective ways of obtaining data from people. Interviews allow discussion and further understanding interrogation of issues owing to the ensuing conversation with opportunities to ask follow up questions. Interviews can take place through the telephone, email or face-to-face. Thus in this regard the researcher opted for an unstructured face-to-face interview involving Innocent Mpofo, the cartoonist of *The Herald* newspaper whose cartoons were used online in order to understand what inspired his work. However it is important to note that interviews were largely not the main data gathering method in this research as this had to be blended with autoethnography and digital archival research.

3.8 Data analysis methods

Data analysis involves summarizing words in their masses, description of pictorial data, cartoons, multimedia data and much more generated through observation and interviews (Lacey and Luff, 2001). The process of data analysis in qualitative research also entails the identification and summarization of key patterns, trends and threads of data collected. Thus data analysis methods are ways in which data is reduced for research purposes for it to be more meaningful than just presenting loads of words, phrases, pictures and videos with no coherence (Hesse-Biber, 2010). This study therefore used social semiotics theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA) in its exploration for meaning in terms of language use, signs, cartoons and multimedia visuals.

3.8.1 Social semiotics theory

Social semiotics is a branch of the field of semiotics which investigates human signifying practices in specific social and cultural circumstances, and helps to explain meaning-making as a social practice. Semiotics, is originally defined by Ferdinand de Saussure as “the science of the life of signs in society”. Social semiotics expands on Saussure’s founding insights by exploring the implications of the fact that the “codes” of language and communication are formed by social processes and at best shared from one generation to another. Social semiotics is therefore important in this research as it offers the basis within which people interact, convey and relay meaning on social media platforms and internet, with reference to the engagement of *The Herald Online* with #This Flag movement.

The world has become a much more integrated community. Modern media which include the internet based platforms such as websites and social network sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Youtube and many more have changed the global communication order. Nothing demonstrates this more than how people communicate news, how opinions are wielded by instant debates, how technology captures, documents and archive events, how people disclose information about their achievements, complains, anger, loss, disappointments and so on in the age of social media.

Mano (2002) asserts that social semiotics is thus the study of the social dimensions of meaning, and of the power of human processes of signification and interpretation (known as semiosis) in shaping individuals and societies. Mano (2002) posits that internet has enabled people in general

and media companies to bypass some regulatory provisions as authorities have not been able to immediately control it in an abstract manner as compared to traditional print media. It is within this context that this study used social semiotics to investigate *The Herald's* online representation of Evan Mawarire's #This Flag through various meaning making processes that subsist on typical digital platforms whether visual, verbal, graphical or aural in nature (Thibault, 1991). These different meaning-making systems, or possible "channels" for example speech, writing or images are known as semiotic modes. Semiotic modes can include visual, verbal, written, gestural and musical resources for communication. They also include various "multimodal" ensembles of any of these modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) and these form the scope of this study in exploring *The Herald's* engagement with #This Flag.

Social semiotics also include researching how society design and make sense of meanings, the study of texts and how these semiotic systems are shaped by social ideologies and interests as well as how they are adapted as society evolves (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Language is abstractly structured and exists independent of specific instances and any communicative exchange is situated in a social context that constrains the linguistic forms participants use (Hall, 1997). Hall (1997) further contends that how these participants define the social situation, their perceptions of what others know, think and believe, and the claims they make about their own and others' identities affect the form and content of their acts of speaking and meaning-making.

Structuralist semiotics focuses primarily on theorising semiotic systems or structures (termed 'langue' by de Saussure, which changes over time). In contrast, social semiotics tries to account for the variability of semiotic practices termed 'parole' by Saussure. This altered focus shows how individual creativity, changing historical circumstances, and new social identities and projects can all change patterns of usage and design (Hodge and Kress, 1988). From a social semiotic perspective, rather than being fixed into unchanging "codes", signs are considered to be resources which people use and adapt or "design" to make meaning. Thus language influences representation in that it is the form within which meaning is formulated and exchanged.

3.8.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discourse is a set of relations of communication between people who intercommunicate through talking or writing including conversing through newspaper articles or any other such set of communication. Discourse brings meaning and meaning-making into the complexes of social relations which comprise objects that include politics, linguistics and sociology among many. Thus meaning of texts should therefore be understood as representations and interactions within the complex social relations that CDA aspires to unpack (Fairclough, 1995:04; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997 in Wodak and Meyer, 2009:05; van Leeuwen, 2008).

The researcher therefore also used CDA in analyzing the stories and videos of *The Herald online* in its engagement with #This Flag in the context of the divergent political ideologies of the newspaper as a government controlled publication and the social movement as an opposition force. Stories were analyzed from a binary position, first looking at the dominant meaning as generally read through text and secondly from a critical perspective with regards careful selection of words meant to foster a certain influence on audiences.

CDA also has a three-part analytic scheme which includes textual, interpretation of communicative events and social practices (Rogers, 2004). CDA therefore was also used to analyze the interpretation of *The Herald online* texts by audiences in their interaction amongst themselves as well as in their reaction to the newspaper itself and #This Flag in a show of contesting ideologies. Audiences are not passive (Hall, 1973). As such the researcher found it critical to expand the investigation into user-generated content and apply CDA in its analysis since the UGC was grounded in texts originally initiated by The Herald. The researcher therefore argues that the UGC could not be separated from *The Herald* texts in their online engagement with #This Flag.

3.8.3 Methods of data presentation

Presentation of qualitative data is grounded in textured analysis of findings usually laid out in a narrative expression. This method is ideal for all qualitative data that may have been gathered through ethnography, interviews of data obtained from archives (Silverman and Patterson, 2015). This researcher presented the data in a narrative format which is supported by excerpts of cartoons and UGC screenshots to demonstrate the debate ensuing from The Herald's online content which could only be more visible online. Data obtained through autoethnographic

observation was also narratively presented in a way that complements data interpreted through the two methods of data analysis that the researcher employed.

3.8.4 Conclusion

Chapter 3 presented the research methodology that this study employed and also laid out the techniques used in obtaining data, the methods of its analysis and presentation which feeds into Chapter 5 as the study presents the findings. Autoethnography entails self-research where the author is both the researcher and the subject. Autoethnography therefore calls for a great deal of ethical considerations (Erikson, 1985; LeCompte, 1999; McIlveen, 2008) and therefore Chapter 3 also presented the reflexivity statement through which the researcher had to declare and reflect as an ethical buffer to guard against influencing the research findings through personal interests.

Chapter 4 Organizational analysis: History of *The Herald* and #This Flag

4.0 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the *The Herald* and #This Flag, the two entities under study with specific interest on their political economy and how this influences their ideological positions and content. The chapter also analyses the history of *The Herald* newspaper and its involvement with the government of the day during the colonial era and in post-independent Zimbabwe. The chapter also narrows down to the Zimpapers Digital department, a unit mandated with the management of the newspaper's online version which is under study with regards its engagement with #This Flag. Also under focus is #This Flag, what it is, who initiated it, how and with what motive.

4.1. History of *The Herald* newspaper

The history of *The Herald*, published by Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) is strongly rooted in the colonial era from the days Cecil John Rhodes' Pioneer Column settled in the land north across the Limpopo, before "excellent agent" William Ernest Fairbridge was sent to the new colonial settlement to represent the newspaper's holding company, the Argus Printing and Publishing Company. The Argus Printing and Publishing Company had just been formed by Francis Joseph Dormer, a friend of Rhodes in November 1886 after the former war correspondent for the *Cape Argus* in South Africa had seized the opportunity to acquire the publication from its retiring owner, Saul Solomon. Rhodes became the co-shareholder after injecting £6000 (six thousand pounds) for Dormer to acquire their first publication from Solomon. **Quotes >>>>to follow>>>>**

4.1.1 *The Herald* in the colonial era

At inception as the colonial settlers took root in the land to be Christened Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe), Fairbridge rolled out the first issue of *The Herald*, then born as *The Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times* on June 27, 1891. Exactly a year later, on September 8 1892, Fairbridge ceased producing the publication through a cyclostyle, an ancient device for reproducing print work after Dormer sent through a modern printing machine to enable the production of *The Mashonaland Herald and Zambesian Times* on a weekly basis. Immediately, Dormer revised the title of the newspaper to *Rhodesia Herald* although by then the name

Rhodesia had not yet been agreed upon to be the name of the new settlement. The newspaper stayed off the dusty streets of the new capital, Salisbury pending the setting up and testing of the new printing press. The publication reappeared beginning on October 29, 1892 as a four-page published every Saturday. The first editorial policy of the newspaper was:

“The aims they (of the publishers) will keep steadily in view will be to advance to the fullest of their powers the mining and agricultural interests, to discuss and criticize moderately, but without fear or favour, the topics of the day or hour, and to promote fellowship and unity amongst all classes and sections of the white community” (Gale, 1962:19).

Of interest to the colonial and post history of *The Herald* is the editorial policy as well as the fact that the publication was regarded a real forum of public opinion, and public opinion was forthright in its criticism and condemnation of various policies by the BSAC. Some of the policies criticized by the new settlers through *Rhodesia Herald* were regulations on gold mining which entitled only Rhodes’ British South Africa Company to be the sole investor until the policies were repealed in 1907 owing to pressure from the settlers who felt they had also taken the risk in setting up the new settlement.

While some might feel that *The Herald* (in post-independence Zimbabwe) is biased, this is not the position. The newspaper has vastly improved in accommodating diverse views if you are to consider the space accorded to audiences online where people respond to news articles we carry. Participation is open to all, unlike in the colonial era when *The Herald* was a whites-only publication. More-so, readers’ comments are used as potential leads for follow-up stories. – Caesar Zvayi, Editor-in-Chief

However, as is discussed later in this background, the conflict around political economy issues of *The Herald* is traceable right a few months after the first issue when Rhodes had to travel all the way from Cape Town to the new settlement to address issues around demands on land acquisition by the new settlers which *The Herald* had given prominence to. Rhodes did not mince his words as he threatened Fairbridge with immediate deportation for giving too much attention to these demands by the new settlers

After the establishment of the colonial administration in 1923, *The Rhodesia Herald’s* role was clearly stated as to serve the best interests of Rhodesia. Thus, Rhodes’ warning against Fairbridge in the beginning marks the beginning of the role *The Herald* was to play up to the period of this study. *The Herald’s* dance with politics and the status quo was more pronounced in

1962 after the Rhodesian Front (RF), a colonial party led by Ian Douglas Smith assumed power and immediately took a grip of the media. The decision to have tight control of the media was to preserve Christian values and morals of the new colonial settlement as well as deal with the black liberation fighters. Despite the colonial position of *The Herald* from the days of Rhodes through the establishment of the Responsible Government, still Smith felt the publication was too liberal, hence the idea to have it under the government's armipit.

4.1.2 Discussion

The colonial past of *The Herald* shows a newspaper which was evidently set up as a propaganda mouthpiece with arguably no room at all for different opinion as shown by Rhodes' threat to deport Fairbridge if he continued giving a voice to the settlers demands against the BSAC. Also clear was the policy to serve the interests of Rhodesia, as posited in Gale (1962). Saunders (1999) and Mukasa (2003:172) concur with Gale (1962) that the culture of the newspaper was to advance European settler interests while issues around Africans "were largely, if not exclusively, negative and demeaning." Latterly during Ian Smith's rule, the government in its endeavor to pursue the Rhodesian agenda also had chief propagandist Ivor Benson issuing the infamous statement: "the press must be free-no one denies that-but it must be OUR press, promoting OUR values and OUR interests. Only such a press has any claim to the freedom to govern itself in OUR society" (Saunders, 1999:06). It is within this context that this study explores the social semiotic engagement of the newspaper's online version in post-independence Zimbabwe with one of the dissenting voices, an oppositional social movement called #This Flag, considering its role as a government mouthpiece. What kind of movement has the newspaper attempted to portray out of #ThisFlag?

4.2 *The Herald* in post-independent Zimbabwe

At the attainment of independence in 1980, the new Zanu-PF government under President Robert Mugabe established the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) whose mandate was to transform and run Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) after its acquisition from Argus. Zimpapers therefore temporarily operates as a listed company with government having 51 per cent shareholding through the ZMMT which is supposed to be a buffer between the company's operations and government. Zimpapers therefore has other shareholders with Old Mutual being

the second largest shareholder through a 10.24 per cent shareholding. The rest of the shares are held differently by eighteen minority shareholders (See Appendix 1 for the comprehensive Zimpapers Shareholding structure).

Zimpapers at the time of this study had become a more integrated media company with three distinct units namely the Publishing and Digital division, the Broadcasting Division and the Commercial Printing Division. The Publishing and Digital division is in charge of news production, newspaper printing and publishing as well as digital publishing whilst the company's radio stations Star FM and Diamond FM fall under the Broadcasting Division. At the time of study Zimpapers had already laid the foundation for a new television station, Zimpapers Television Network (ZTN) (See Appendix 2 for the Zimpapers group business structure) to present the group as an integrated media company whose objective is to comprehensively produce news content to be consumed on various platforms as asserted by its CEO during the 2017 annual general meeting:

Being a content factory our objective is to ensure that our content can be shared on as many diverse platforms as possible. Our goal is to reach all our readers on their platform of choice. Digital provides us with a different platform where our readers are consulting our content so it behooves us to have a presence on those platforms, hence the inception of digital at Zimpapers. –
Pikirai Deketeke, Zimpapers Group CEO.

Zimpapers has a charter of editorial independence to which the group's Board of Directors affirm its commitment. Under this Charter, the Board of Directors and its appointed management retain the right to appoint or dismiss editors, and the latter are also directly responsible to the appointed management. The editors are expected to take into account as they exercise their judgment, issues to do with national interest, public benefit, that the group's publications are family publications and respect for the country's various social values (See Appendix 3 for the group's editorial charter)

4.2.1 Discussion

Although *The Herald* newspaper has the ZMMT as a buffer, the publication is recognized as one that serves the interests of the government of the day (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999). This has

resulted in government taking interest in the operations of the newspaper with policies which scholars argue are tantamount to interference resulting in dismissals of editors or journalists (Rusike, 1990, Saunders, 1999; Chiumbu, 2009; Ronning and Kupe, 2000). In the same context Mabweazara (2011:150) notes then Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo in 2004 declaring that *The Herald* was expected to, “protect, preserve and project . . . regime values.” However the idea of ZMMT as a buffer is in line with global trends which opine that media establishments are run better through trusts in order to achieve editorial autonomy (Balctiene et al, 2015). It is within this context that President Mugabe and Zimbabwe’s first Information Minister, Nathan Shamuyarira declared that the new Zanu-PF government soon after independence was “for the freedom of the press” and that they expected open media criticism (*Financial Gazette*, 19.09.90 in Chuma, 2004:125; Windrich, 1981 in Chuma, 2004; Esipisu and Khaguli, 2009). However this is contested elsewhere citing at some point at the turn of the millennium, the placement of the parent information ministry led by Jonathan Moyo in the President’s Office, a feat which was largely perceived as a repeat of the UDI-era media policies when Ian Smith had had the information department directly under his office as prime minister of Rhodesia (Chikuhwa, 2004; Chiumbu, 2009; Ronning and Kupe, 2000; Chuma, 2004).

4.3 Organizational structure of *The Herald*

The Herald operates as a unit among a number of other publications that have their own newsroom structures under Zimpapers. However, the Digital Department which is mandated with the online management of *The Herald* up to the period of this study remained a stand-alone unit under the newly established Publishing and Digital Division of Zimpapers. The department was also undergoing structural changes which saw it largely remain more of a service department in charge of reformatting newspaper content for digital audiences including multimedia production and blending. The Digital Department was created in 2010 and established *The Herald Online* in 2011 as its second project after having pioneered an amalgamated group news site, *Zimpaperonline* as a way of marking the arrival online of the rest of the groups’ newspapers on internet.

The Herald, as the flagship would appear to be more visible online than other Zimpapers publications. However, all publications are equally represented because it is the Digital Department’s mandate to manage those publications on internet. It should however be noted that

The Herald has one hierarchy in terms of editorial policy with the Editor-in-Chief being in charge of the publication. So, the Digital Department in their generation of online content and its management are guided by the overall editorial policy as dictated by the shareholder. (Caeser Zvayi, Editor-in-Chief).

The Herald website up to the period of this study was the biggest revenue earner for the Digital Department through internally solicited as well as advertising-network solicited adverts. The Herald, owing to the ongoing restructuring at the time of this study had seen the appointment of Caesar Zvayi as its Editor-in-Chief as the newspaper moved to broaden national coverage through the establishment of regional editions to cover all the country's provinces through daily dedicated pages. The online version was tweaked to accommodate the print changes. (See **Annexure 4 for the organograms of *The Herald* newspaper and the Zimpapers Digital Department**).

4.3.1 Discussion

Bratton and Chantamore (2007) assert organizational structure as the division of labour or assignment of tasks to coordinate various activities that constitute organizational work in a firm. This description is premised on Marx and Webber's work on how industrial work was structured during the nineteenth century. In this context organizations are thus structured through components that include their size, goals, culture, professionalism, identity and their performance (Maguire, 2003:10). It is within this context that *The Herald* is organized as defined by the various units under it, including the Zimpapers Digital Department which is mandated with the production, maintenance and management of *The Herald Online*.

4.4 Composition of Digital Department

The Zimpapers Digital Department, mandated with the online management of *The Herald* generates own content over and above managing content produced for the print newspaper through the Editor-in-Chief's conventional newsroom. Such online content includes live updates on events agreed upon by the Online Editor and the Editor-in-Chief and the team members discussed below are responsible for the content generation and in some cases working with journalists from the print newsroom.

4.4.1 Online Editor

I the author, at the time of this study was employed as the Online Editor and was mandated with overall editorial management of the group's digital platforms including all newspaper websites in terms of breaking news updates, content reformatting, mobile news content reproduction as well as live updates of selected events. I also oversee moderation of user-generated comments in accordance with the group's Terms and Conditions of website use (**See Appendix 5 for the Terms and Conditions of website use**).

Owing to the structural changes taking place at the time of this study, the incumbent had under his portfolio social media duties, which had been initially separated from the mainstream digital operations. Also vacant at the time of the study was the position of Head-Digital Services, a position that had been created the previous year to replace the one for Group Digital Editor as the group re-strategized to find firm footing. Therefore, as the Online Editor I literally have all the newspapers' title Editors as my immediate bosses as the publications have stand-alone sites managed from the Digital Department.

4.4.2 Online News Editor

The Online News Editor is the immediate coordinator of content from the central news desk known as the "super desk" in *The Herald* newsroom although the duties cut across the group in consultation with the Online Desk of the Southern Region which takes care of Zimpapers Bulawayo Branch's titles namely *Chronicle*, *Sunday News*, *B-Metro* and *Umthunywa*.

I work with reporters on a daily basis to provide fresh content for the website. This starts at diary presentation from each reporter at the Convergence Desk that includes my Print and Radio colleagues. I pick stories appropriate for online updates, stories that can generate exciting debate, stories that touch on people's social issues. I am mandated with promoting the Digital First strategy. The strategy is aimed at ensuring that any news item is first published online followed by radio and later to print. – Costa Mano, Online News Editor

The Online News editor thus supervises reporters on the main news diary from a digital perspective under the 'digital first' policy whose objective is to break stories immediately on digital platforms and reserving more details for print analysis under the concept of 'day 2 journalism.'

4.4.3 Social Media Writer

Another position under suspension at the time of the study is that of Social Media Editor. It was not clear whether this would be resuscitated during the restructuring process. However the duties were being primarily taken care of by the Social Media Writer in consultation with the Online Editor and the Online News Editor.

Social Media promotes active participation of readers instead of passive consumption of news articles. Through Facebook and Twitter, our readers have been able to collaboratively discuss their views both with other readers and with the newspapers themselves. Comments are also a barometer through which newsrooms measure organic conversation pertaining stories. – Simiso Mlevu, Social Media Writer

Under normal circumstances the social media writer manages social media platforms which include *FaceBook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram* for all Zimpapers' publications by way of promoting all editorial content on these platforms in order to promote traffic to the Zimpapers' websites, *The Herald Online* chief among them. Live coverage of events is also simultaneously carried out on both these platforms and the websites as they are conjoined.

Audiences use social media to express their opinions, interrogate authorities whom they do not have access to, point out mistakes on published news articles. The comments are funny, hilarious, enlightening, thoughtful sometimes, but also crude. Readers need little and most times no interference at all when interacting among themselves. The challenge with social media comments is that audiences often fire a broadside at reporters, editors, the newspaper and the authorities. Some of the comments are utterly unpleasant and some slanderous yet there is no mechanism as yet to bring readers to account. – Simiso Mlevu, Social Media Writer

Social media audiences often engage in vibrant conversation and as a result, other readers who would have not read the news articles often trek to the website just for comments conversation thereby contributing to an increase in online traffic.

4.4.4 Online sub-editors

The Digital Department has two sub-editors who are responsible for the uploading of stories, picture editing and uploading, UGC moderation on a 24- hour shift as well as reformatting of content for mobile platforms. Owing to cost-cutting strategies, the sub-editors are complemented

by two interns at any given time to be able to complete a sound 24-hour shift every day of the week. The online sub-editors are the interface of *The Herald Online* with audiences.

Interacting with readers has taken a new twist in this era of technology where opinions of our audiences are bound to be taken into consideration. Ignoring their opinion is risky as we could lose ears and eyeballs as some of our stories actually come from readers through our interactive platforms. Various restrictions on the platforms may tend to drive away audiences, hence we have to be liberal when it comes to reader opinion so that the whole engagement becomes more of an exchange of ideas through conversation. Of course we still have to guard The Herald Online platform since it is more of a descent platform and having vulgar or sexually obscene language would not be in the best interests of all. (Shingirai Huni-Online Sub-editor)

Being the moderators of audiences' comments, the online sub-editors also engage in real time conversation with readers on various issues raised basing on the mainstream content on the website.

4.4.5 Graphic designer

The digital department has a sit-in graphic designer who is responsible for multimedia editing as well as newsletter production for other publications. The graphic designer is the chief producer and editor of videos which are managed through the Zimpapers Youtube account. Videos analyzed in this research are produced and hosted on this account.

Working for *The Herald Online* is an opportunity to contribute to something bigger. It is also a learning curve mainly through feedback (from audiences). It a job about creativity in order to enhance our interaction with the outside world. (Joseph Murisi, Graphic Designer/Visuals Producer)

4.4.6 Discussion

Critical political economy (CPE) explains that various ways in which communication is organized have implications on the nature and scope of media content production and the ways in which audiences engage with that content (McChesney, 2003 in Hardy, 2014). CPE therefore goes beyond ownership, funding and control in its analysis of media production and performance as journalists and production personnel might have their input and influence on the final content. It is in this context that the creativity of the graphic designers can spice up the intended meaning

of *The Herald Online's* final texts. In the same realm, the real time perspective within which *The Herald Online* team members work also make them active participants as they engage an active audience.

4.5 *The Herald's* links with other organizations

The Herald through the holding company, Zimpapers has business relationships and strategic partnerships with various key internal and external stakeholders. For the purposes of this research, the study focused on external publics only for feasibility purposes.

4.5.1 Government Institutions

The Government of Zimbabwe through the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) has majority shares through a 51 per cent stake. The ZMMT was created to act as a buffer between direct government control and the operations of the publishing company. It is however argued that this has not been entirely the case following politically motivated editorial appointments and or dismissals over time (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999; Ronning and Kupe, 2000; Chuma, 2004; Chikuhwa, 2009). Like any other media house in the country, *The Herald* has sound relationships with the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), a statutory board that licenses the newspaper's journalists annually as well as the holding company.

4.5.2. Academic Institutions

Zimpapers and particularly *The Herald* is largely viewed as a key partner in the training of journalists in Zimbabwe and to a notable extent the newspaper engages a number of media interns, some of who are seconded to the Digital Department to experience online reporting, multimedia editing as well as graphic designing. These students are drawn largely from the country's main media training universities and other colleges such as the Midlands State University (MSU), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), the Christian College of Southern Africa (CCOSA) and the Harare Polytechnic. These relationships with academic institutions have seen *The Herald's* relationship particularly with MSU growing in leaps and bounds with several senior journalists having enrolled with the university to higher educational qualifications to match changing global media trends.

We engage several students from various tertiary institutions annually and it is one of our community development policies. Being a media company the majority of these media students. The MSU is among the most popular universities because of its flexible media programmes which have seen most of our workers enrolling to further their studies on block release. We have been supportive of the workers as well because that is one of the ways how Zimpapers can grow – Victoria Ruzvidzo, Managing Editor – The Herald.

4.5.3 Business partners and special service providers

The Herald Online has specific links with its website host, Webdev which fully manages the technical element of the newspaper in terms of site development, technological upgrades and security management against cyber-attacks. The newspaper also has links with three mobile telecommunications companies namely Econet, NetOne and Telecel with whom the publication runs the Mobile News Service, a service mainly targeted at areas not accessed by the company's vehicle distribution network. The mobile news service relationship is a tripartite one with each telecommunications company recommending a technical partner to manage the infrastructure like computer hardware and software used to produce and disseminate the news on mobile phones.

The Herald online also has strategic partnerships with *Disqus*, a social media company that provides a comment platform from where the newspaper's audiences interact with the publication as well as converse among themselves. Such is the arrangement with global internet technology company *Google* from which *The Herald online* enjoys advertising revenue through adverts sourced through the United States-based company. This is a standard arrangement though across many websites, but it remains key in revenue earnings.

4.5.4 Discussion

The Herald's relationship with external stakeholders such as service providers and strategic partners might mean some concessions on media coverage. From a political economy (PE) perspective, partners of *The Herald Online* such as internet service providers (ISP) and webhosts may have influence on the final content to an extent through one of Herman and Chomsky's (1988) five filters of information, advertising which is argued to be a latter day licensing authority as the newspaper also requires a financial lifeline. However it is not given that the

advertising filter would always thrive as from a CPE perspective it can still be argued that a newspaper may forego certain business norms in its pursuit for social justice and democracy (Wasko et al, 2011).

4.6 Who is Evan Mawarire?

Evan Mawarire, according to his official *Facebook* and *LinkedIn* pages, social media platforms on which he holds accounts, describes himself as an author, motivational speaker and leader of This Flag Movement. Mawarire also says he is a senior pastor at His Generation Church, and is also listed as CEO of a company called Brand360. He also manages a *Facebook* page titled *ThisFlag/IfulegiLeyi/MurezaUyu* which acts as the social media platform for This Flag Movement and also runs a *Twitter* account under *Twitter* handle @PastorEvanLive with a strapline #ThisFlag E Mawarire. He also served as Child President between 1993 and 1994 (Twitter, 2017; Facebook, 2017; LinkedIn, 2017, Pindula, 2017 all available online). At least at the time of this study, these social media accounts were active and with regular updates under the code banner #ThisFlag. The updates were characterized by opinion pieces on various political and socio-economic issues ranging from the country's subdued economic performances, views on national days such as the Independence, Heroes' and Zimbabwe Defence Forces holidays. Mawarire's moto is:

Our generation has to realize very quickly that we cannot subcontract our struggle to the previous generation, neither can we mortgage our future to their selfish desires.

Mawarire came to the stage through a self-made video posted on his Facebook account on April 16, 2016 in which he was bemoaning the state of Zimbabwe's economy and general social welfare:

This Flag, this, this beautiful flag . . . They tell me that the green, the green is for the vegetation and for the crops. I don't see any crops in my country. Hanzi the yellow is for all the minerals . . . goridhe (gold), diamonds, platinum, chrome. I don't know how much of it is left, I don't know who they sold it to, and how much they got for it. The red, the red, the red, the red they say that it is the blood . . . the blood that was shed to secure freedom for me and I am so thankful for that. I just don't know that if they were here, they that shed their blood, and saw the way that the country is, that they wouldn't demand that their blood be brought back?

This flag, they tell me that the black is for the majority, people like me, and yet for some reason I don't feel like I am a part of it. I look at it sometimes and I wonder . . . Is this a story of my future, Or is just a reminder of a sad past? Wherever I go and I put on the colours of Zimbabwe, they look at me and as if they want to laugh they ask, 'Are you from Zimbabwe?' Vachiseka (they ask mockingly). And sometimes when I look at the flag, it's not a reminder of my pride and inspiration. It feels as if I just want to belong to another country. **(See Appendix 6 for #This Flag, A Lament for Zimbabwe (available on Youtube and a complete digital video disc (DVD)).**

Mwarire had later on mobilized for a mass job stay away which coincided with a national job strike by the civil service on July 6 2016. Later on in August 2016 he left for South Africa enroute to the US claiming his life was in danger and stayed in exile for six months before returning on February 1, 2017 and was immediately arrested on landing at the Harare International Airport. Mwarire would be charged with subverting a constitutionally elected government as well as contravening the Flag of Zimbabwe Act (Chapter 10:10) through its regulations namely Flag of Zimbabwe (Use and Application of Flag) Regulations (1987) and Statutory Instrument 194 of 1987. Under this Act, it is a criminal offence for any person to burn, mutilate, or otherwise insult the national flag or any reproduction thereof, in circumstances, which are calculated or likely to show disrespect for the national flag or to bring it into disrepute. Anyone convicted of breaching the Act would be liable for \$200 fine or a prison term not exceeding one year, or both. It is also worth noting that on return Mwarire did not command the kind of support and sympathy he had garnered in 2016 as only a handful of people gathered at the courts to witness his appearance whilst no one turned up to volunteer for him as before (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 1980; *The Herald* 3 February, *VOA*, 3 February, 2017; *NewZimbabwe.com*, February 1, 2017; *The Guardian*, 1 February, 2017, all available online). At the time of writing, Mwarire was out on bail.

4.7 Overall Discussion

#ThisFlag (pronounced as Hashtag This Flag) came to the fore on 19 April 2016 following the one-man four-minute long video protest that Mwarire recorded and posted on *Facebook*, accusing government of failing to provide a descent life for its citizens. Mwarire's video, titled '*#ThisFlag – A Lament of Zimbabwe*' immediately went viral attracting widespread media

attention, and that saw the birth of #ThisFlag movement. The video was shared more than 2000 times 24 hours after release (Pindula, 2016; Mutanana, 2016:76; Goredema 2016). In the days to follow, Mawarire created and published another video titled “Hatichada&Hatichatya-#This Flag” (We are fed up and we are not afraid anymore-#This Flag) in which he had a straightforward message to government, “enough is enough” and this production again found its way onto to other various social media platforms including *YouTube* and *WhatsApp* (*Zambezi Press*, 2016; *ZimEye*, 2016). The video mobilized for a mass job-stay away and immediately got support from a similar movement, #Tajamuka led by Promise Mkwanzani, leader of Tajamuka/Sesijkile movement (Pindula, 2017 available online). The calls for a mass job-stay away coincided with threats of a job strike by civil servants in Zimbabwe who were protesting against delayed salaries and bonuses. Whether the civil servants strike, slated for July 6, 2016 was the cause of people opting to stay away, or the stay-away was caused by both actions remains a contested issue. However it is a fact that indeed on July 6 2016 the majority opted to stay away from their jobs. Mawarire’s stay-away campaign ran under the code name ‘#ShutDown Zimbabwe.’

Following these videos, Mawarire then was a guest on *ZiFM* radio station on the programme The Platform hosted by broadcaster Ruvheneko Parirenyatwa to discuss #This Flag campaign with co-guest Tafadzwa Musarara. Immediately after the programme, Mawarire had a bust up in the studio corridors with Supa Mandiwanzira, the founder of *ZiFM* who then was a Zanu-PF legislator and cabinet minister in President Mugabe’s government (Chikuhwa, 2013:168, Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2016). A video recording of the quarrel immediately went viral too on social media after having been initially posted on *Twitter* with Mandiwanzira accusing Mawarire of “lying” against government yet he had access to various ministers in the cabinet (*Newsday*, 18 May, 2016). Apart from the *ZiFM* bust up, other privately owned media described #ThisFlag campaign as an overdue cause, with others declaring it was time even for churches to stand up against government and that it was time for real owners of Zimbabwe to claim their stake of the country (Gomo, 2016; Musewe, 2016; *Newsday*, 2 August 2016, available online).

The Herald Online however had its issues with Mawarire and it is within this context that this study explores the social semiotic representation of the online newspaper with Mawarire’s #ThisFlag movement. This is from the perspective that *The Herald Online* as state controlled

media would seek to serve the interests of the government of the day (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999). Mawarire was however subsequently arrested a week after the July 6 2016 later for “organizing” the mass job-stay away although his case was dismissed by the magistrate citing violation of the constitution (*The Financial Gazette*, July 7, 2016; *The Herald*, July 7 2016; *The Guardian*, July 6, 2017; *News Day* 6 July 2016, *NewsDay*, 13 July 2016, all available online). During his appearance in court, Mawarire wrote his own piece of history by attracting thousands of supporters who participated in a vigil and also attracted about 200 lawyers who volunteered to defend his case.

4.8 Conclusion

This Chapter laid out the organizational analysis of *The Herald* newspaper and the Zimpapers Digital department, a unit mandated with the management of the newspaper’s website, *The Herald Online*. The Chapter explored the history of The Herald from its establishment soon after Rhodes’ Pioneer Column set foot on the land north across the Limpopo, present day Zimbabwe and also looked at its operations during the colonial era before and after Ian Smith’s regime as well as in post-independence Zimbabwe. The Chapter also looked at the little known history and ownership of #ThisFlag. Chapter 5 hence presents research findings and data analysis to answer the research questions raised in Chapter 1.

Chapter 5: Data presentation and analysis

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 is a presentation and an analysis of the findings to this study which sought to establish the social-semiotic engagement of #This Flag with online newspapers, *The Herald Online* in particular. The study also sought to identify the various social and political discourses *The Herald Online* produced around #This Flag through an analysis of cartoons published in the newspaper. The study also explored through the meaning-making role of *The Herald's* online audiences in the newspaper's engagement with #This Flag. The researcher sought as well, to explore the appropriation of the national flag by opposition social movements, in particular #This Flag and the government's subsequent reaction to that development. The research is informed by Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Robert Merton's social strain theory and Vannevar Bush's hypermedia theory.

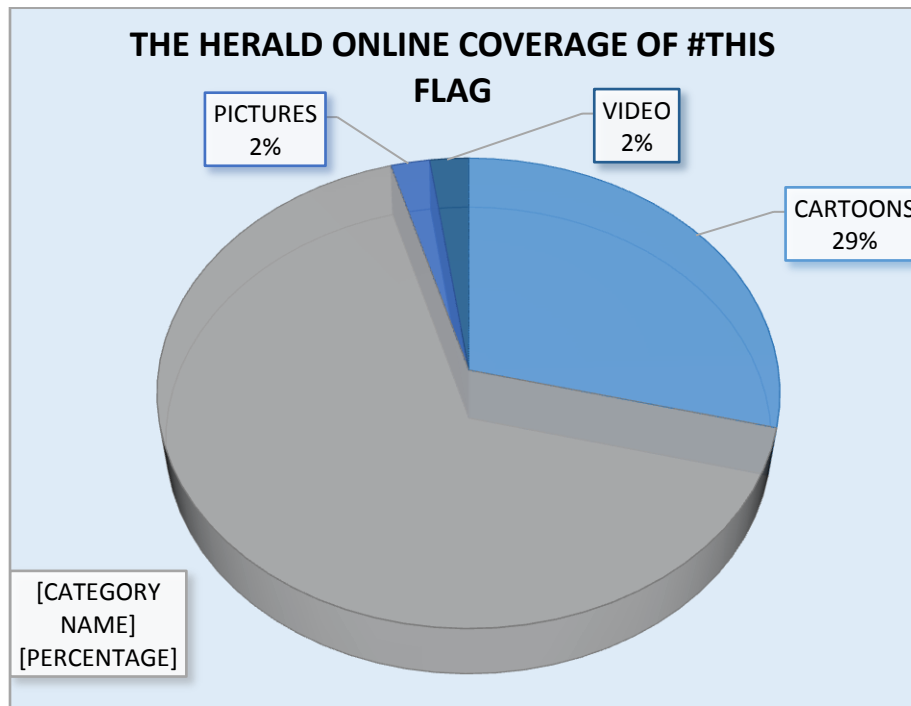


Figure 1. A pie-chart illustrating the distribution of media texts used by The Herald online in its engagement with #This Flag.

The study discovered that *The Herald Online* in its engagement with #This Flag social movement sought a gradual approach to condemn the oppositional force through editorial

cartoons that at first deliberately did not want to recognize Evan Mawarire or his Flag Movement by name. During this period, it is also discovered that through opinion pieces *The Herald Online* gradually primed audiences towards a debate around a social movement the newspaper already labeled a terrorist and shadowy organization fronted by malcontents. The cartoons later moved into a full-fledged confrontation, condemning Mawarire and the #This Flag as a creation of imperialist forces, chief among them the US and the French ambassadors. It is at this juncture that the audiences complete the equation by giving their critical opinion against or in support of *The Herald Online* in a way that produces certain discourses around #This Flag social movement. The research concludes that at least up to the end of the study, *The Herald Online* had crippled #This Flag enough for the social movement to be viewed as one of those fly by night toothless dogs that always barked on the status quo with no effect.

5.1.1 Evan Mawarire, a faceless shadowy malcontent

This research established that *The Herald Online* used a series of editorial cartoons supported by several news reports and opinion pieces to prime its audiences towards an agenda of labeling and representing #This Flag movement and its leader Evan Mawarire primarily as faceless and shadowy, before representing it as a foreign project meant to destabilize a constitutionally elected government.

In the above context, the first cartoon in *The Herald* related to #This Flag was published on July 6, 2016 about three months after Mawarire had launched his protest on Facebook on April 16, 2016. The cartoon, represented in **Figure 2** portrays a citizenry couple reading a newspaper headline on a newsstand which reads, “MDC-T admits backing violence” with the female character insinuating that the “D” in the acronym “MDC-T” stands for “destructive . . .”

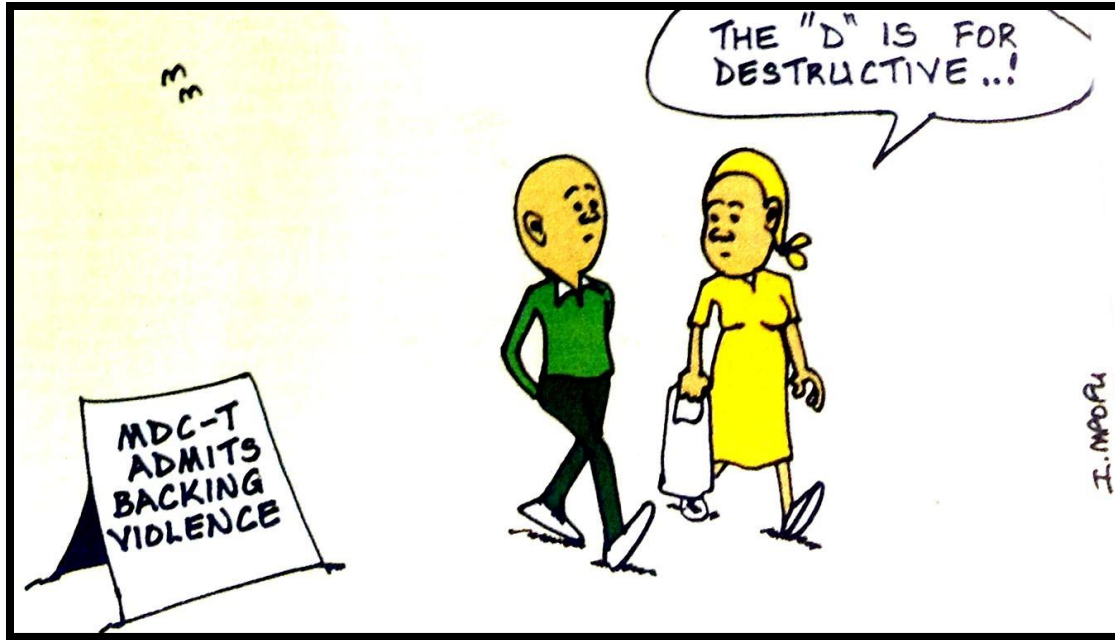


Figure 2. This first cartoon did not make reference to #This Flag by name but chose to associate its protest with the main opposition party, MDCT.

This cartoon was published as a follow up to news reports of the opposition party MDC-T backing the violent demonstrations by #This Flag and dubbed #ShutdownZim as well as an earlier violent protest that had occurred in Beitbridge on 1 July, 2016 against the enactment of Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 (SI64) by the government, which sought to regulate the importation of basic commodities into Zimbabwe (*The Herald*, July 1 2016, available online). Mainly affected by the statute were cross border traders plying their trade between South Africa and Zimbabwe, hence the choice of Beitbridge as the venue of the initial demonstrations. However in reacting to the demonstrations, government tended to group #Tajamuka and #This Flag together describing the movements as “shadowy” and having the support of “political vultures,” who latched onto a civil servants strike in order to gain political mileage, as reported by *The Herald* political editor, Tichaona Zindoga (*The Herald*, July 7 2016, available online).

However Mawarire had been clear on his Facebook platform posting a video in which he called for a total closure of national business on July 6 2016. Mawarire declared:

If you are working for an employer who is forcing you to come to work, listen to me, let them know that on Wednesday (July 6, 2016) you will not be able to come to work. And I am telling you this again, even if you decided to go, the public transportation is being shut down. We are

asking banks . . .you know what? The banks actually need to be the first to close down . . .let me tell you why the banks should be the first to shut down. The banks need to shut down because they are the ones whom we gave our money, and when the government took our money from the Reserve Banks, banks should have gone there to fight for us because we entrusted them with our money, but they didn't go there to fight for us. So we are saying to the banks we know you are afraid that your licenses will get taken, but unite as banks. If all of you shut down will they take all your licenses? No, they wont do that!

The events in Beitbridge had on July 1, 2016 left a trail of destruction with several bonded motor vehicles belonging to private individuals and waiting for import duty clearance by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) being set ablaze and reduced to shells at the border town. The demonstrators also looted shops, vandalized government property and set on fire a ZIMRA warehouse destroying property valued at several thousands of dollars (*The Herald*, July 6, 2017, available online).

Figure 3 is a cartoon that *The Herald* carried the following day, July 7 2016 depicting a puzzled duo who question why the Beitbridge demonstrators were failing to understand the general expectation that “locals will demand they are protected from foreign business interests” (*The Herald*, 7 July 2017) as the demos sought to challenge government on its enactment of SI 64.



Figure 3. The second cartoon never mentioned #This Flag by name too, but focused on the violent protests the social movement had organized.

The cartoon is a follow up on the Beitbridge events, and appears to buttress the alleged retrogression of the demonstrators, whose leaders *The Herald* largely framed as shadowy and faceless despite the fact that these had identified themselves as #This Flag through the official Facebook page of Mawarire and were already calling for a paralyzing mass job-stay away on July 6, 2016 which went on to coincide with a civil servants strike mainly led by nurses and teachers. Whether the civil service strike indeed coincided with #This Flag's call to #ShutDownZim (shut down Zimbabwe) or it was planned remain contestable. However this research argues that as much as *The Herald* online claim that the strike and the #ShutDownZim demonstration coincided, the publication was cognizant of the influence and threats The Flag Movement demos wielded as demonstrated by the texts under study. As such *The Herald* online engaged in a three-phased campaign to discredit the movement by way of priming the audiences into a mood to discuss the construction around it, initially of a shadowy and faceless opposition meant to destabilize a constitutionally elected government.

Meanwhile the cartoons got complementary support from a series of articles on *The Herald Online* which attacked the #This Flag protests but not acknowledging the movement by name, opting to describe them as shadowy and faceless. One of such articles was a report of President Mugabe's warning against the so-called shadowy dissident groupings.

Foreign embassies should stop meddling in local politics by sponsoring dissident groupings to subvert a constitutionally-elected Government, President Mugabe has said. He also cautioned churches against dabbling in politics, saying the ruling ZANU-PF party would not tolerate "any nonsense" perpetrated in the name of religion – *The Herald*, 28 July 2016, available online.



Figure 4.

The article was a hint on the accusations against foreign embassies, largely fingered as the source funding for the oppositional social movement. The story also gave a hint on the role of the churches, probably linking churches with Mawarire since the latter had indicated he was a pastor with His Generation Church.

Another article by columnist Nathaniel Manheru (*The Herald*, 30 July 2017 available online) mockingly makes reference to Evan Mawarire as someone seeking political relevance yet not man enough to stay on the land.

Typically, as ZANU-PF chases after new voters, it makes sure old ones are satisfied. There again in the rural areas, the voter register is being consolidated. And look at our politicians on the other side, on the nether of national politics: they hope to extend the hashtag campaign to rural areas! Look at the lot that carps in newspapers, on YouTube, that mounts telegenic demonstrations in London, Melbourne, New York, Johannesburg, etc, etc, etc. Who cares about them? They don't vote.

Like Mawarire, they not only run away, but criticise ZANU-PF to make themselves eligible for donor funding, after which they fade away, into happy oblivion, well provided for. Just imagine a Mawarire who calls for an uprising from the safety of some South African university, from an ivory tower! Who takes him seriously? Yes, they run away, vote with their feet. It is not the lion

that bellows three villages away that worries a stranded villager clinging up a big tree; it is the little, quiet deadly puff adder next to the bow he rests on. – The Herald, 30 July 2016

The third cartoon on #This Flag was published on July 9, 2016 and it asserted the position that the civil service strike on July 6 and 7, 2016 was a genuine cause, however hijacked by “malcontents” led by Mawarire who saw an opportunity to sail on the plight of government employees. The cartoon (Figure 4) argues to reveal that they were some malcontents who had lurchered onto a genuine strike by the civil service and depicts a caricature of a “malcontent” with a mobile phone

and a petrol bomb in his hands at the same time exclaiming at the headline which reads “Salary payments: teachers, nurses call off job action.” The subject in the cartoon shouts, “What?! Taking the wind out of our sails!”, to consolidate *The Herald’s* claims that the so-called shadowy social movements were behind the violence that characterized the civil servants strike on July 6. The cartoon is premised on the report about government reaching a payment deal with civil servants thereby immediately ending the job action, much to the chagrin of #This Flag, according to *The Herald* cartoon (*The Herald*, July 9 2016, available online).

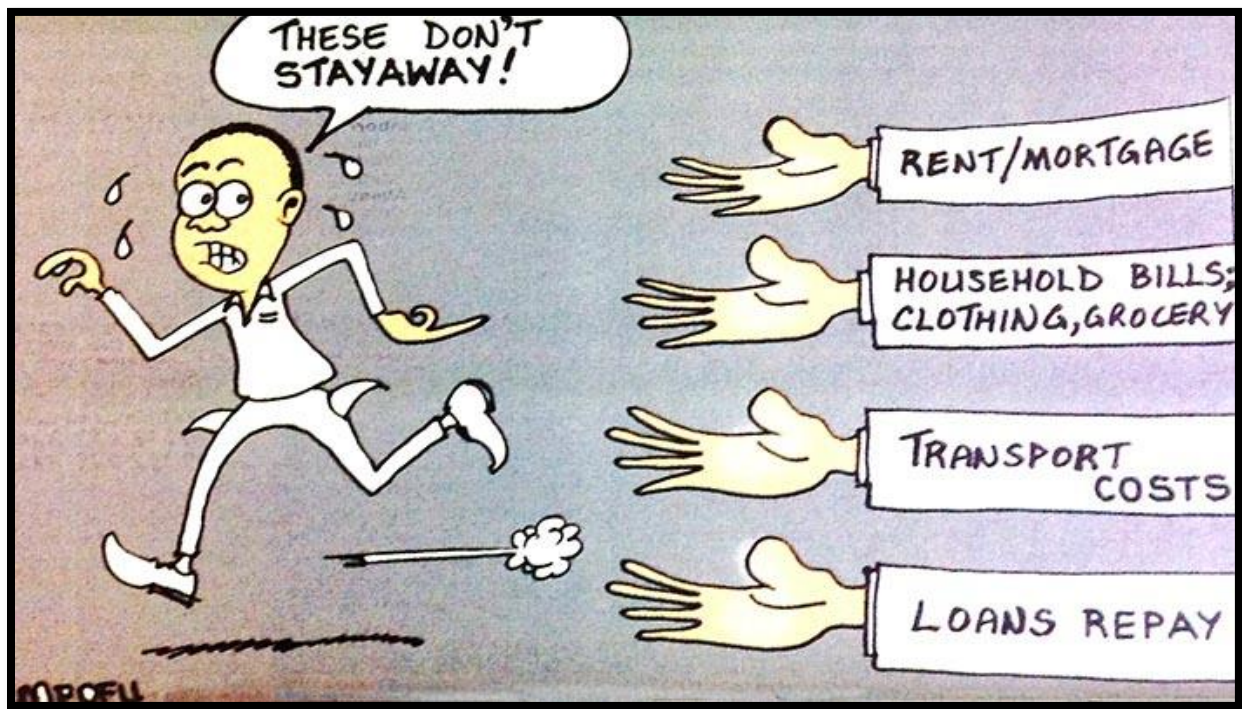


Figure 5

Nyamanhindi (2008:121) argues that cartoons in Zimbabwean newspapers vary according to political economy of the newspapers that carry them, with a clear distinction of publicly owned newspaper cartoons lacking complexity and critique in their support of the government. This assertion could explain the approach with which *The Herald* treated the arrival of #This Flag protest onto the social movement scene, choosing not to legitimate the movement by way of not addressing it by name nor recognizing its leader, Evan Mawarire. This is notable in that since April, 16 2016, the day #This Flag movement came onto the scene, *The Herald* chose not to talk about Mawarire and through its cartoons preferred to describe the organizer as a faceless and shadowy character, a malcontent bent on subverting a legally elected government and destabilizing an otherwise peace-loving society. This confirms the position of the newspaper as representing the interests of the government of the day, choosing to be less complex in its engagement with #This Flag, yet toughly condemning the movement and its protest (Gale, 1963, Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999; Hill, 2003). Nyamanhindi (2008) also posit that cartoons possess several functions in the meaning-making process as well as their ideological reflection on media and their gatekeepers. This assertion confirms *The Herald's* treatment of #This Flag movement with an ideological reflection that openly supports the government's condemnation of the protest but failing to admit that the civil service plight would easily qualify as one of the issues #This Flag protested against.

The fourth cartoon (Figure 4), a less complex caricature adds to the priming of the audience with the character of a civilian being haunted by such social demands as debts, household bills, mortgage repayments and transport costs after having opted to heed the calls by #This Flag movement to stay away from work. This cartoon latently presents #This Flag as a plague that no sane citizen ought to listen to as everyday life problems would still come back to hound the ordinary after participating in demonstrations which appear less organized, typical of a social movement demo which kind of self-drive. The cartoon (Figure 4), although looking moderate, is pregnant with latent social semiotics that would lead into exciting debates among audiences of *The Herald Online* with consequences to #This Flag which could be attributed to its representation through the online newspaper.

5.1.3 Discussion

Cartoons are argued to be a more decipherable form of visual political communication as they are simply expressed through humorous caricature and simple words (Anderson, 1978). Nyamanhindi (2008) contends that cartoons in general simplify ideas that may be too difficult to interpret and describes political cartoons as symbolic or representational of a situation in a satirical, humorous or witty way. *The Herald Online* in its social semiotic engagement with #This Flag made use of cartoons to represent the latter as a faceless and shadowy group of malcontents hiding behind religion yet being used by imperialist powers to subvert a constitutionally elected government.

5.2 #This Flag, a agent of imperialism

Social semiotics seek to unravel the latent structure of ideas on which media texts are built by placing emphasis on social construction of reality (Morris, 1995). In this context, this study established that *The Herald* cartoons went into a second phase of social construction of #This Flag, revealing the opposition social movement forces that had been hogging the lime light all along as imperialism works of France and the US. To support this establishment, *The Herald* cartoon (Figure, 6) of July 13, 2016 depicts Laurent Delahousse, the French Ambassador to Zimbabwe setting fire underneath the map of Zimbabwe caricatured as a kettle. Ironically the map of Zimbabwe arguably looks like a kettle or tea-pot. The cartoon is based on an editorial comment (*The Herald*, 12 July 2016, available online) which accuses the French ambassador of meddling in Zimbabwe's internal affairs by involving himself in the activities of the shadowy groups. This follows reports of Delahousse having been seen hobnobbing with some opposition political figures as well as leaders of #Tajamuka, another hashtag-based movement in Zimbabwe which had participated in the Beitbridge protests (*The Herald*, 12 July 2017 available online).

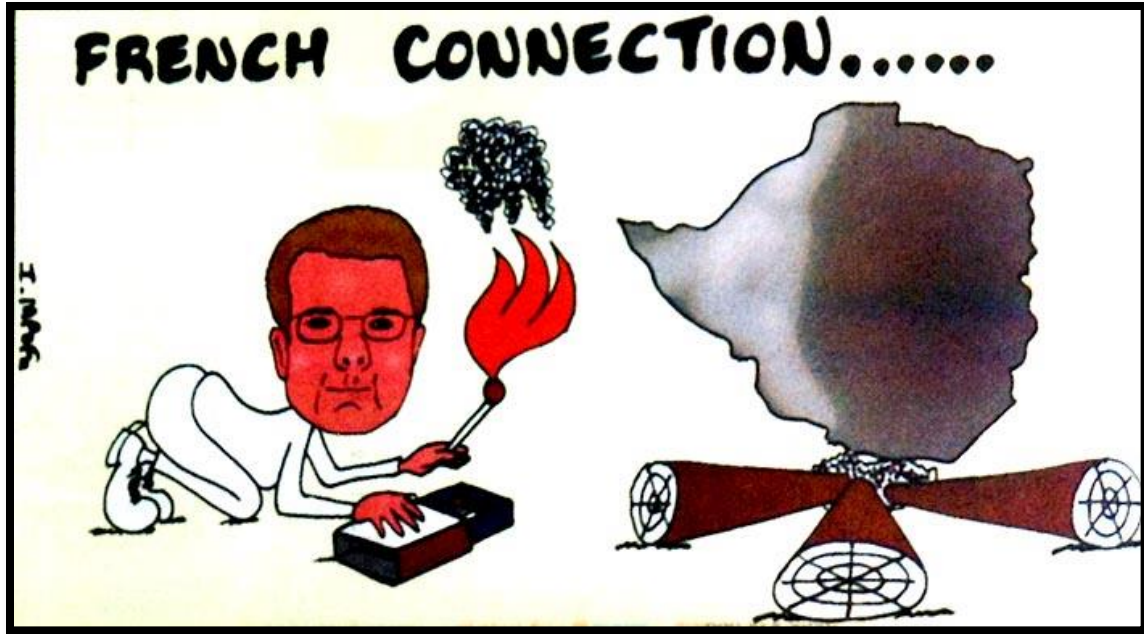


Figure 6. Ambassador Delhousse depicted stocking fire on Zimbabwe

The cartoon script continues to strike a balance in a way that can be argued to be a strong emphasis on the social consequences of engaging in “shadowy” demonstrations as represented in the July 14, 2016 cartoon (Figure 7) which portrays a normal working environment with bona-fide citizens going about their daily work errands. Of interest is the comment by one character in the cartoon, that the situation resembles “A stayaway from the stayaway” in support of *The Herald’s* (July 14, 2016, available online) report that the second call for a two-day work boycott on the 13th and 14th of July 2016 had largely been ignored. Earlier on, *The Herald* (July 7, 2016 available online) had acknowledged that indeed the civil service strike had been largely heeded but was adamant that calls for a national shutdown by #This Flag movement had largely been ignored.

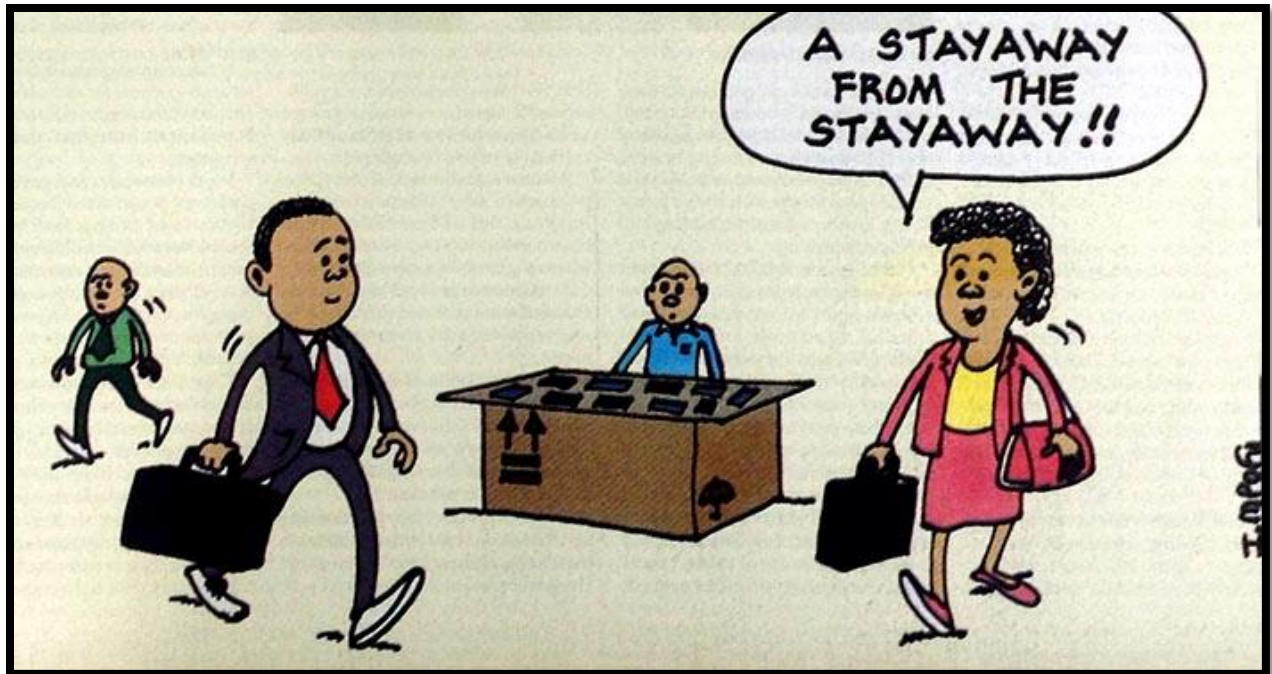


Figure 7. Patriotic nationals depicted reporting for work against #This Flag’s call for a shutdown.

However it is also notable that for the first time *The Herald* (July 14, 2016 available online) refers to #This Flag by the name of its organizer, Evan Mwarire describing him as “one Evan Mwarire, a man known more for reciting the bands on the National Flag than ministering the Word of God.” The report also equates Mwarire to the Biblical donkey on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem amid adulation, which naively thought that the cheers were directed at it and foolishly chose to return to the city alone before being pelted away by an unamused congregation. This emanates from the fact that the planned “second” shutdown on July 13, 2016 was largely a flop with people opting to go about their business. However another social-semiotic meaning in the July 14, 2016 cartoon (Figure 7) probably unbeknown to the cartoonist is a street vendor with what appears like smartphones and related accessories, a depiction which could be interpreted to confirm #This Flag’s goals as justified, that the government needed to self-asses and address economic challenges facing its citizens which had resulted in a sizeable majority turning to street vending. Thus the social semiotic engagement of *The Herald* with #This Flag was not a rosy journey.

The Herald Online concludes the phase by ‘exposing’ Mawarire in a cartoon (Figure 8) where the activist is depicted with the Zimbabwe national flag around his neck whilst putting on a bottom made out of the US national flag, to argue that the activist has double standards and truly there as a US backed imperialist agent.

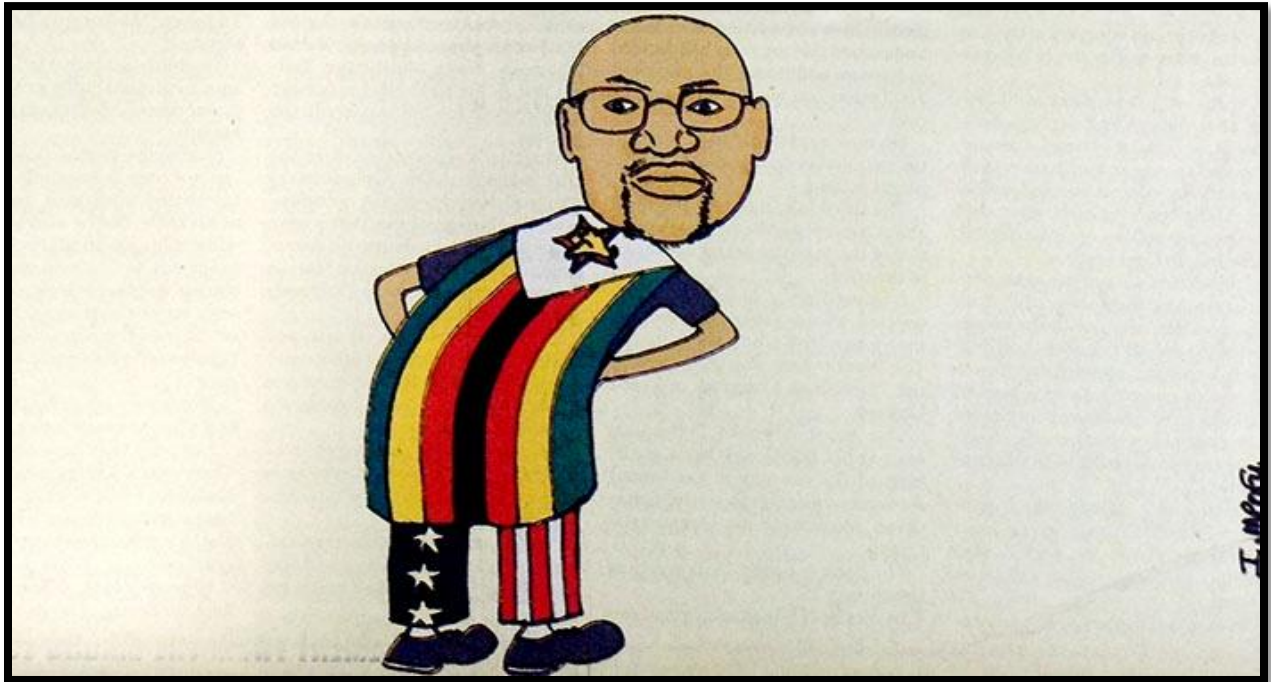


Figure 8. Evan Mawarire is depicted draped in the Zimbabwean flag with pants designed in US colours.

5.1 Discussion

Although Nyamanhindi (2008) argues in the case of Zimbabwe in his work on Operation Murambatsvina, that public media cartoons often lack complexity and critique, Mpofu’s work in Figure 8 attempts to fulfil Morris’ (1995) theory on the use of unexpected metaphors and stereotypes by zombifying Mawarire as a US puppet and a French string-controlled marionette. The meaning-making process around #This Flag is gradual with a sustained and systematic social-semiotic representation of Mawarire and #This Flag as purely a foreign representation. On the other side, Mawarire fires salvos from other digital platforms as there is an apparent blackout of his protest on *The Herald Online*, which chooses not to recognize the causes of the protests from Mawarire’s claims of a melt-down of the social order in the country.

5.1.1. The digital battle for the national flag

The study also established a sustained attempt by *The Herald Online* to wrestle away from #This Flag the appropriation of the national flag as an expression of patriotism as the newspaper caricatures the national emblem as a tattered rag (Figure 9), probably torn due to abuse through violence and demonstrations. It would appear however that *The Herald* sought to manipulate the use of the national flag in pushing its quo agenda, probably realizing the power of the emblem in national politics. This study also established that in the battle of the flag, *The Herald Online* sought to engage with #This Flag protest on the same digital turf on which the latter thrive, whilst pushing the discourse of the protest as the work of imperialists through puppetry embedded in the Zimbabwean flag in order to deceive the populace. This is unlike in the Arab spring where the use of the national flags arguably fortified the protesters' position.



Figure 9 shows a tattered Zimbabwe national flag to depict its alleged abuse by #This Flag movement.

Mwarire is further depicted in the cartoon published on 22 July 2016 (Figure 10) showing the #This Flag leader as a pastor with no followers. Mwarire is represented calling fellow pastors, prophets and church elders borrowing congregations in futile for his intended second demonstration to attempt a national shutdown of all government operations. The intended second demo flopped.



Figure 10. Mawarire depicted as a Pastor with no followers.

The battle for the national flag moves into a phase where *The Herald Online* depicts a uniformed security character dressed in national army colours holding the national flag in an ordained manner with the word “consecrated” inscribed therein against a dejected-looking Mawarire with the national emblem draped around his neck (Figure 11). The cartoon comes at a time Zimbabwe had just celebrated the Heroes and Zimbabwe Defence Forces holidays on August 8 and 9 2016 respectively. However for Mawarire, the flag read another meaning:

This flag, and so I must look at it again with courage, and try to remind myself that it is my country. I look at the Green and think to myself, it is not just vegetation. But the green represents the power of being able to push through soil, to push past limitations and flourish and grow. That's me. My flag.

The Yellow yes is about the minerals, but not just the minerals that are in the ground. But the minerals above it. You and me are the minerals. We are the value of this land. The Red, yes, it's blood. But not just blood, it's passionate blood. It is the will to survive. It is the resolve to carry on. It is the want to push through to see the dreams come to pass. – Evan Mawarire, in the video *This Flag, a Lament for Zimbabwe* (available online)

The national flag is widely argued to reflect a spirit of national belonging among citizens including those who may be in the diaspora who on the basis of discrimination on foreign land

end up displaying a high level spirit of patriotism (Fisher, 2010; Ruzivo, 2017). Ruzivo (2017) also posit that in Zimbabwe as early as 1980 the government had introduced the national pledge in schools in salutation of the national flag, but this had been dropped along the way owing to some people selling the flag as well as using it for interior household décor. This therefore explains the symbolic



Figure 10. The battle for the national emblem

stature of the national flag in the #This Flag protests. Figure 10 therefore depicts a battle of the minds as well as competing political discourses premised on the scramble for the national flag with the newspaper presenting #This Flag as a puppet movement that should not identify with the national flag or claim to be patriotic. The tussle for the national flag in the online engagement of *The Herald* and #This Flag, also followed the launch by the government of Zimbabwe of the national pledge in schools which school children had to recite. The national pledge also have a stanza on the salutation of the national flag. The national pledge was driven through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education under cabinet minister Lazarus Dokora, depicted in Figure 11 reminding schools that government is the authority and not social media, confirming the significance of the internet as a battle ground of political ideas.

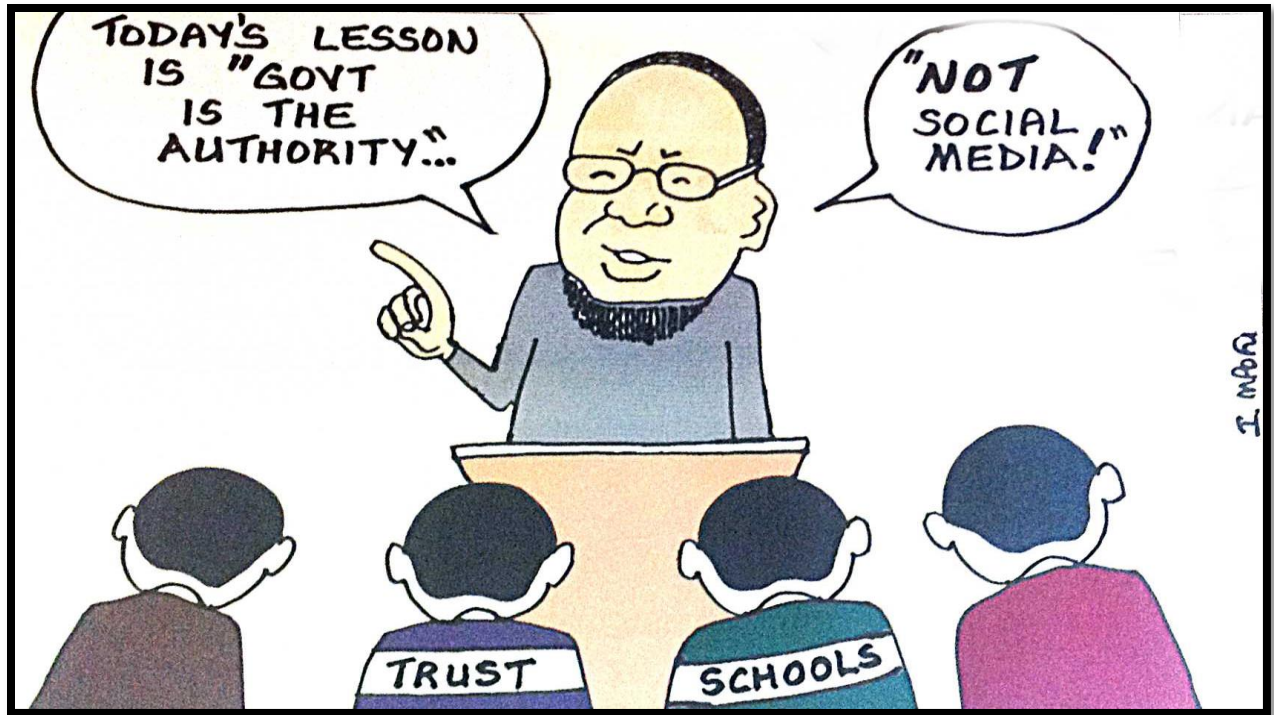


Figure 11. Minister Lazarus Dokora depicted herein warn schools and trusts against social movement calls on social media for people to resist the national pledge.

Although *The Herald* depicts Mwarire and #This Flag as unpatriotic and undeserving to claim use of the national flag, the battle is not an easy one as demonstrated through the participation of the newspaper's online audiences who are actively involved in probably the ultimate meaning-making process in the engagement of the two entities under research. However *The Herald* is quite cognizant of this as acknowledged through the cartoon published 6 September 2016 (Figure 12) which depicts a battle on the use of social media, with a hand on one side using social media for networking, e-learning and ecommerce across such platforms as Facebook, Linked-In and Youtube whilst the other hand shows what the cartoonist describes as 'anti-social media' with the user urging for the barricading of roads and mobilizing for stones, to represent the use of social media to promote violent demonstrations against government.



Figure 12. Internet, the new battle-ground of ideas.

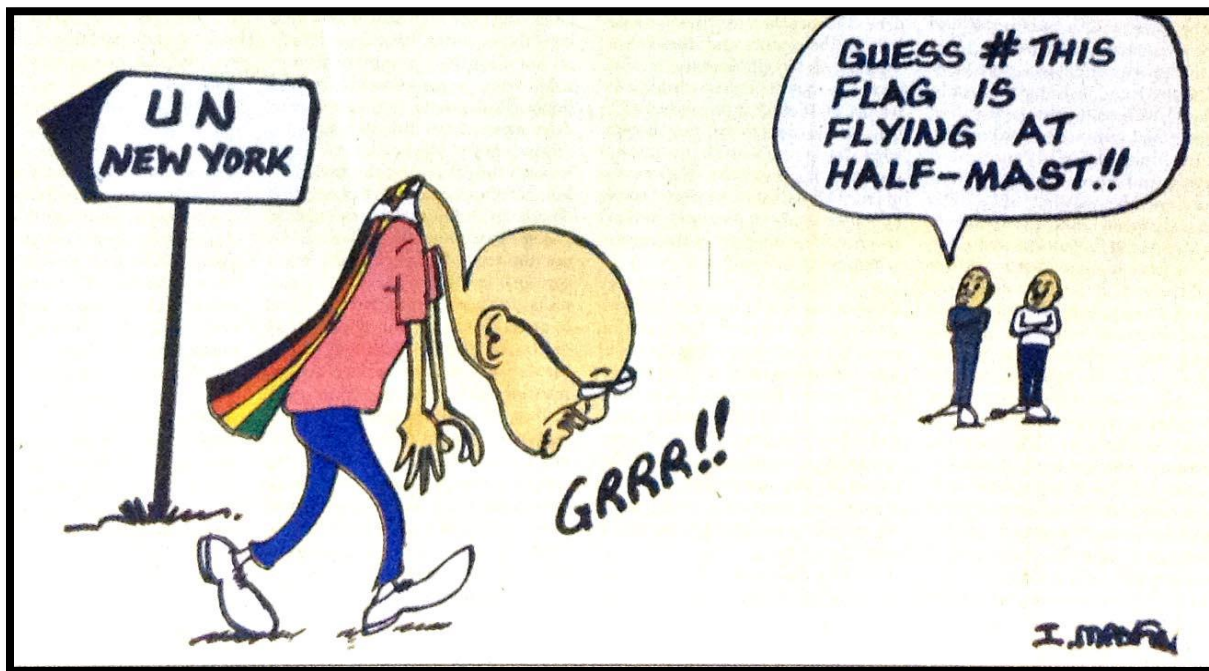


Figure 13. Defeated in the battle for the national flag . . . Mwarire caricatured leaving the UN headquarters.

The Herald Online claims victory on the discourse around the use of the national flag by #This Flag as it represents the latter in the final cartoon (Figure 13) through the caricature of Evan Mawarire leaving the United Nations (UN) with his head down and the national flag draped around his neck after leading a flopped demo on 15 September 2016, which was largely countered by supporters of ZANU-PF in New York mainly African-American citizens who also argued that Mawarire was misinformed to come and seek plight from the US, itself a master of imperialism.

5.1.2 Discussion

Political cartoons seek to win a view point in their engagement process with audiences whilst they also act as agenda-setting agents and they are also capable of influencing minds through propositions, creating meaning metaphorically in their caricaturing of “familiar images, allusions, and symbolic commonplaces . . .” (Edwards, 1997:09). In this context, the national emblem in social protests is argued to resemble protesters as defenders of the national cause (Gerbuado (2017). Ferri and Connor (2007) contend that meaning is not fixed. Meaning is created, and the same concept is applied to the encoding and decoding of cartoons. Hall (1997) however asserts that those who wish to rule seek to structure, shape and manipulate meaning and this explains the socio-semiotic engagement of the *The Herald Online* and #This Flag as the two entities tussle for the meaning of the national flag in order to claim power. The importance to Zimbabweans of the national flag is first recorded during the independence celebrations in 1980 with the hoisting of the new flag to replace Britain’s Union Jack having been greeted with euphoric celebrations by ZANU-PF and the nation at large (Chiwome and Mguni, 2012).

5.2 Mawarire, a new face of US-EU imperialism against Zimbabwe

This research also established that *The Herald Online* through its news stories in its condemnation of Evan Mawarire and his #This Flag protest, largely achieved the reproduction of the activist as an unpatriotic sellout who fell for the bait of freebies of agents of imperialism bent on attaining neo-liberal control of a sovereign African country. A set of 30 news articles published by *The Herald* online had their social-semiotic construction of Mawarire critically analyzed and as discussed in this section, the study established that the newspaper to a large extent successfully discredited Mawarire and #This Flag as a foreign project controlled from the

US and EU arguing that his escape into exile in Washington was not warranted as his life was never under threat. Through its US-based correspondent, Obi Egbuna, *The Herald online* (August 16, 2016 available online) described Mawarire as a new item on the EU-US shopping list as a new face after failed several make-over attempts of Zimbabwe's arguably face of opposition politics, Morgan Tsvangirai. Egbuna wrote:

The reality is that after all failed attempts to give former Zimbabwe Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC countless political makeovers that conjure up the image of Fankenstein's monster and the Africans who spend millions of dollars to bleach their beautiful black skin, along with civil society groups who despite funding and backing from the likes of George Soros, Carl Gershman and Madeline Albright have failed to bring home the bacon, US-EU imperialism went shopping for a new face and voice with the same message. What is ironic is at the height of the US-EU backed Arab Spring movement in North Africa, Mr Tsvangirai is on record calling for a similar movement to be started in Zimbabwe.

The writer goes on to dispute Mawarire's purported influence over the civil service strike of 6 and 7 July 2016 arguing that his church did not even command more than 50 congregants to listen to his Biblical sermons and therefore he could not claim to have mobilized a whole public service and the general populace to shut down their country. The writer mockingly acknowledges Mawarire's social media creativity, albeit creative enough to desecrate his own flag in order to please masters of imperialism. Egbuna suggests that the best response from the government would have been to print as many US and British flags as possible for donation to Mawarire. *The Herald* political editor Tichaona Zindoga weighs in describing Mawarire and the #This Flag as a fad, and that fads do not make revolutions. In an interview with the researcher, Zindoga argues:

There is a misconception by both local and international watchers that the so-called "shutdown" was caused by Mawarire and the associated Tajamukas. We had known in prior weeks that there would be a civil service strike on that day – and *The Herald* and other newspapers had even reported it – but Mawarire jumped in and ended up appropriating its success. We know that the civil service strike was a genuine labour issue between government and its works especially around the delay of payment in and around the month of July. The strike also had the blessing of the main opposition (the MDCT party). The Flag's role was at best complementary and at worst incidental and opportunistic.

Zindoga's argument concurs with Egbuna's proposition of Mawarire at least having foreign backing considering his reception in Washington where he immediately had a presentation organized by Atlantic Council, a US think-tank which advocates for constructive leadership in the world. However, it is notable that Mawarire after the 6 July strike got overwhelming support and sympathy drawing up to 100 lawyers who offered to represent him after he was arrested and charged with subverting a constitutionally elected government. *The Herald* (July 14, 2016

available online) acknowledged the presence of a crowd of supporters, but played down the support. The newspaper however framed the story through politically social-semiotic lenses by publishing a picture of three white men present at the courts in support of Mawarire, who included former commercial white farmer Ben Freeth with the national flag draped around his neck (Figure 14). Freeth is a known critic of Zimbabwe’s land reform programme in which he lost his farm which was acquired, subdivided and allocated to several formerly landless blacks at the height of the land redistribution programme. While *The Herald* vilified Mawarire, socially constructing him as a sellout and an agent of imperialism, online audiences of the newspaper largely saw a hero in the leader of #This Flag. Several comments on *The Herald* online stories about Mawarire tended to sympathize with him with many ridiculing the government for trying to stifle a voice of reason.

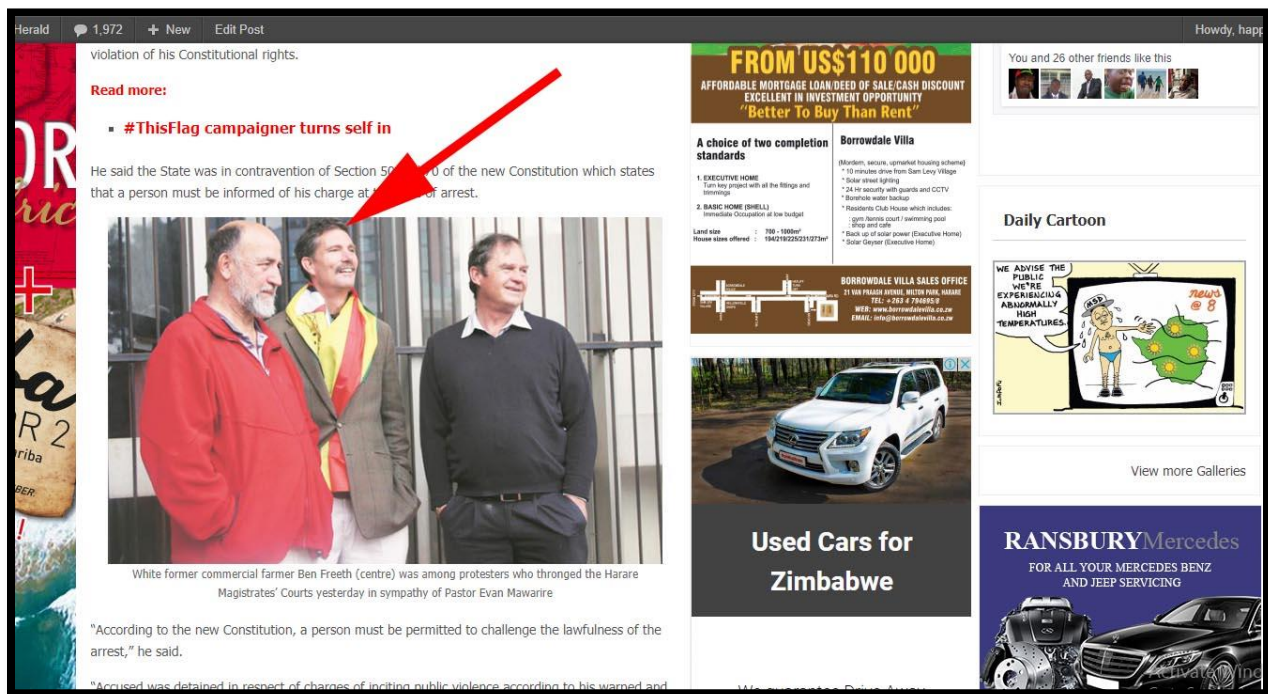


Figure 14. Zimbabwean white former commercial farmer Ben Freeth (center) with two companions at the Harare magistrate’s court in support of Evan Mawarire who was appearing to answer charges of subverting a constitutionally elected government (available online).

The offline support Mwarire attracted at the courts in Harare reflected the online support he enjoyed on *The Herald Online* comments platform. Thus, the social-semiotic engagement of *The Herald Online* and #This Flag largely had a third voice of freedom, the audiences’ opinion and

judgment which sought to question the newspaper’s social construction of Mwarire and #This Flag. Reacting to Isdore Guvamombe’s story in *The Herald Online* titled “Letter to Pastor Evan Mwarire: Stupidity is like a silent fart, it soon announces itself through smell,” (*The Herald*, 5 August 2016, available online) one user by the pseudonym Brich comments:

If Mwarire wasn’t a real threat he wouldn’t have been making headlines like the way he is doing nowadays on the Zanu-PF paper, so regardless of the type of propaganda you might try to use we already know who the real enemy is. We kindly ask you to spare us the nonsense and start preparing for your downfall.

Another follower of *The Herald Online*, Dark Child writing on the same story commented: “Herald is no longer writing for the masses, they are now writing to please just 1 reader: RGM (Robert Gabriel Mugabe).” (See more comments on Annexure 9)

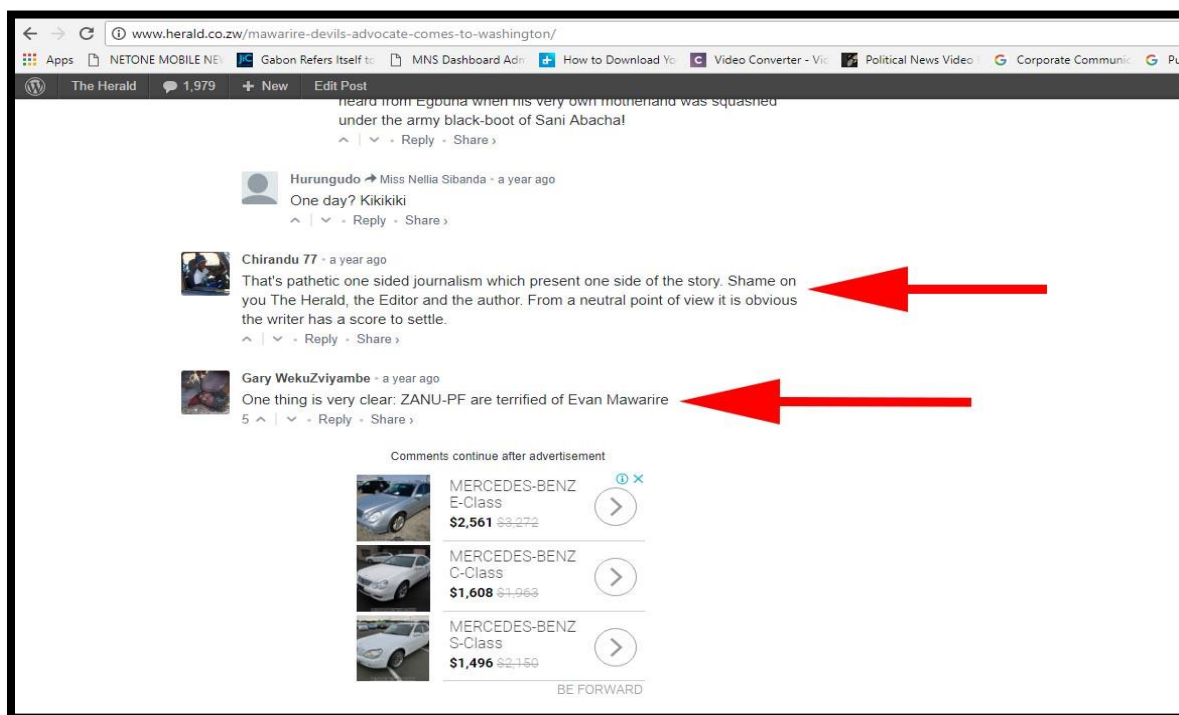


Figure 15. A screenshot of a sample of comments in support of Mwarire (available online).

The Herald’s claim could be fulfilled by Mwarire’s escape into exile immediately after being freed on bail. *The Herald* continued to build around Mwarire the discourse of imperialism even in his absence. Guvamombe’s opinion piece, largely written along *The Herald Online’s* editorial policy in support of the government of the day likens Mwarire to a lizard that jumps from a tree

and lands with a thud to impress onlookers but certainly feeling the pain when alone at night. The article argues that Mawarire, being a puppet would soon have reality setting in on him after all the hullabaloo was gone.

In an earlier editorial instalment titled “Mawarire, same script different cast,” *The Herald* (July 14, 2016 available online) consolidates the claims that Mawarire is the new face of Western imperialism:

History tells us that before any major regional, continental or international gathering, opposition groups in Zimbabwe always angle to get the spotlight on Zimbabwe to support their claims of alleged closure of democratic space and human rights abuses.

However another user by the pseudonym, Mpeno counters *The Herald's* claims by arguing that, “He (Mawarire) is very right that it’s “...the same script different cast”. It is always “The Oppressor” vs “The Oppressed”, “The People” vs “The Establishment”, “Propaganda” vs “Truth”, “The Masses” vs “The Few,” in a comment that confirms the audiences’ third angle in the online semiotic engagement of #This Flag and the online newspaper.

Lawson Mabheha, the Assistant News Editor of *The Herald*, in the article titled, “Stay-away a flop – Statistics,” argues that the July 6 2016 stay-away that coincided with the civil servants strike was a flop judging by the number of shops that were open as well as the number of civil servants that reported for work. However this simply invites more vitriol from the majority of readers who choose to make their own meaning with one Judas Iscariot claiming:

I can't believe an assistant editor wrote this piece of garbage. You're showing a picture of the normally very crowded business district, with 15 people and 3 cars, and you call it business as usual? By your own gov't statics, only 8% of teachers in Harare showed up for work, 86% of shops were closed and you call it a flop? In Bulawayo only 3 percent of public transporters were on the road and you say the stay away was a flop. For me Harare and Bulawayo are the first and second in terms of the market. So the stay away was a huge success. – (*The Herald*, July 11 2016 available online).

Reader comments (**See more on Annexure 10**) thus confirm the research’s establishment that audiences played the trump card in the socio-semiotic engagement of #This Flag and *The Herald Online* as further discussed in the next section which is a second phase on Mawarire’s #This Flag following his return from exile.

5.2.1 Discussion

The Herald Online was largely consistency in its argument that Evan Mawarire's #This Flag was a foreign project. This was argued through the second phase of cartoons showing Mawarire in pants sewn out of the US flag yet above he draped himself in the national flag of Zimbabwe. *The Herald Online* also capitalized on the presence of some commercial white farmers at the courts in support of Mawarire and this fell in line with claims that the presence of white former commercial farmers during Zimbabwe's opposition gatherings largely empowers ZANU-PF to argue that local opposition forces are surrogates of British imperialism (Dashwood, 2004; Mugoti, 2009; Chung, 2006; Madzokere and Machingura, 2016; Rutherford 2001).

5.3 The audience trump card and *The Herald's* exposé

The study also established that *The Herald*, through consistent social-semiotic online engagement with #This Flag stunningly succeeded in setting an agenda for its audiences and the nation at large to think about Evan Mawarire and his movement as a project of imperialism. This is observed in the subsequent positions the majority of the newspaper's online readers and the nation at large took following the #This Flag leader's return on February 1, 2017 from exile. After immediately getting arrested at the Harare International Airport, Mawarire would appear in court on February 3 2017 facing charges of subverting a constitutionally elected government. Observable is a notable shift in comments by *The Herald Online's* audiences against Evan Mawarire, describing #This Flag as a money-making scheme, and some agreeing with the newspaper that the pastor was indeed a project of imperialism not worth listening to whilst others argued he is a ZANU-PF implant (**See Annexure 11 for more comments against Mawarire**).

The fact that the audiences start to argue online around issues as suggested by *The Herald* with regards the authenticity of #This Flag shows the influence of the newspaper on setting the agenda of the day despite being largely labelled a government propaganda mouthpiece. The researcher opines that it is not only the comments shift that defines #This Flag after its engagement with *The Herald Online*, but the subsequent absence from the magistrates court of the majority who had earlier on engaged in an all-night vigil the previous year in support of Mawarire is pregnant with meaning which can largely be attributed to the newspaper's engagement with the social movement online. Also absent from the courts were the 100 lawyers

who had the previous year offered to represent Mawarire's. On February 3, 2017 The Flag Movement leader only his lawyer Harrison Nkomo and another advocate Fadzai Mahere. It is in this context once again that *The Herald Online* equates Mawarire to the Biblical donkey that mistook Jesus' popularity for its own when he rode on it into Jerusalem, and the boofhead got pelted when it chose to return to the city alone.

The Herald Online also made use of a single video of then Minister of Media, Information and Broadcasting Christopher Mushohwe issuing a threat against those he termed 'social media abusers' following #This Flag-related protests in the country as discussed in this study. In the video Minister Mushohwe hints of the introduction in Parliament of the Cyber Crime and Cyber Security bill in order to foster a new law that would regulate the use of social media in Zimbabwe (*The Herald*, June 20 2017 available Online) (**Also see Annexure 11 for the video**). The video, although it generated a single comment on the Zimpapers Youtube channel where *The Herald* videos are hosted, the comment by a participant by the pseudonym L. LL was however vitriolic enough to express the feelings of the majority also expressed who expressed themselves against government on *The Herald Online* comments platforms:

What kind of fuckery is that? nxa Ayehwa kani nha nhai. People have genuine grievances why not address those grievances? If people hold protests they get killed or you send police to beat them up. How else are we supposed to be heard? All you do is intimidate people, that's all. . . .What kind of government which doesn't want to be criticized yet you are getting everything wrong? – L.LL (*Zimpapers Youtube*, June 20 2017)

The shift in audience approach against #This Flag is a direct opposite of the above although it does not translate into direct support of the government.

While *The Herald Online* arguably succeeded in setting as the topic for debate the authenticity of #This Flag, audiences emerge the trump card in the final judgment of Mawarire and his movement. The lack of support for Mawarire on *The Herald's Online* comments platform after the activist's return from exile equally represents the absence of physical support at the magistrate's court. Mawarire had largely enjoyed support from the majority of *The Herald Online's* audiences but most of those followers appear to have sided with the newspaper after the activist's return from exile in February 2017 arguing the pastor was fake and was trying to hog the limelight for self-enrichment purposes through donations from Western sympathizers. Others argued he was a ZANU-PF project employed to cause confusion with some accusing him of being a terrorist who deserved to be locked up in jail. Loyalists still viewed him as a hero. *The*

Herald Online News Editor Costa Mano who also assists with the supervision of comments moderators, in an interview with the researcher observes that:

Readers played a far more prominent role . . . When he (Mawarire) was arrested, his supporters thronged the magistrates' Court in scenes never seen before because they believed he was being persecuted. However, soon after his release he fled the country and that left many of his supporters dumbfounded in that he had managed to rally the nation in ways unforeseen and still to be seen yet fled when most thought the battle had begun. His supporters came up with all sorts of theories like he was paid by ZANU-PF and is actually part of the party machinery (Costa Mano)

The Herald Online has largely built a community of loyal audiences who do not necessarily side with its editorial thinking. It is in this context that this research established that audiences freely expressed themselves against *The Herald Online* and the government after the initial arrest of Mawarire in 2016 and then tended to either side with *The Herald* or simply condemned the #This Flag pastor but with all conversation emanating from *The Herald's* engagement with the social movement online. One such loyal commentator with a pseudonym Cde Muzvinavhu (Prof) sets Mawarire among the opposition pigeons commenting on an opinion piece (*The Herald*, 8 February 2017 available online) arguing that:

The big picture is loss of support from those who thronged the courtroom and ground during his last year trial. As he broods in a remand prison cell, he is wondering whether donors will finance him in the absence of significant and sustainable support from the civil society and political opposition lot. It would appear even some activists became jealousy of his sudden "rise" as he seemed to overshadow the in the quest to impress and attract Western donor funding. Other political opposition leaders felt challenged by the publicity he was getting. This explains the sudden decline of his short-lived support at the court hearing. If he succeeds in getting a bail out, the conditions may not give him ability to continue his social media "preaching." Wither Evans Mawarire? Is his political model viable? The future will tell! (Cde Muzvinavhu (Prof)).

Another participant by the name Rudeologist simply ridicules the #This Flag leader saying,

"Don't give this broke pastor too much attention. You only make him look important when he is a criminal element inciting people to sabotage the economy. They should lock him up or release him to us citizens on the streets where we can deliver our own justice." Rudeologist.

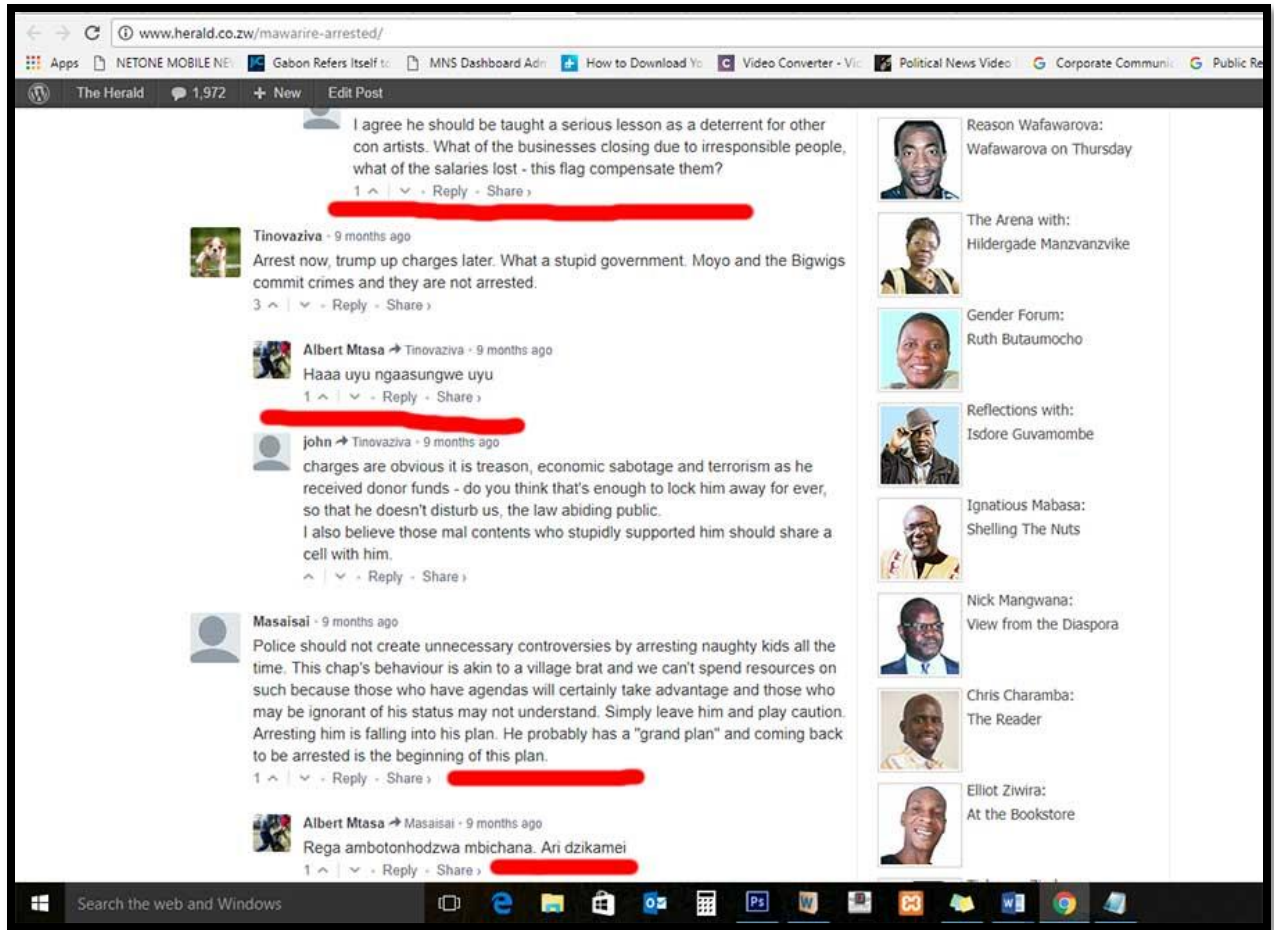


Figure 16. A screenshot of comments on the story of Mawarire’s February 1 2017 (*The Herald*, 2 February 2017 available online). See Annexure 4 for more comments on the story.

While *The Herald Online* (February 3, 2017 available online) chose not to focus on the absence of Mawarire’s supporters at the magistrate’s court on February 2 2017, choosing to carry a passing comment in the court story on the protest leader that read, “He (Mawarire) seems to have been deserted by his supporters, who were conspicuous by their absence yesterday (February 2 2017, at the court),” elsewhere other media platforms blew it out with *Newzimbabwe.com* making a pictorial comparison of the crowd support in 2016 versus an empty courtyard in 2017. Mawarire however did not pitch up at the courts on the particular day as police sought to pile an extra charge against him. He was to appear at the court the following day, February 3 2017 and the scenario remained the same with no-one in his support as before. This research therefore establishes that this pictorial representation is premised on the results of the social-semiotic

engagement of #This Flag and *The Herald Online* with the latter opting to continue with a low-level coverage of the former in order not to legitimate the hashtag-based protest but with a connotative representation to continue to build around the movement the discourse of imperialistic agency. In all the 30 stories on #This Flag movement, during the period under review, *The Herald Online* did not engage in live updates as has been the norm on some similar events where audiences usually expect real-time updates nor did the online platform engage in multimedia story-telling, to make use of several pictures, videos and graphics to show the kind of support the social protests attracted. The newspaper's coverage of The Flag Movement and its leader can be concluded to have been akin to setting the cat among the pigeons, letting the newspaper's audiences do the talking and pass the final judgment on defining #This Flag based on an agenda set by *The Herald Online*. Thus *The Herald's* stories and the subsequent UGC on The Flag Movement's coverage resulted in the protest largely being viewed as a terrorist organization, a money-spinning scheme with the leader being labelled a fake pastor who deserved to be locked up. (See more anti-#This Flag comments on Annexure 13).

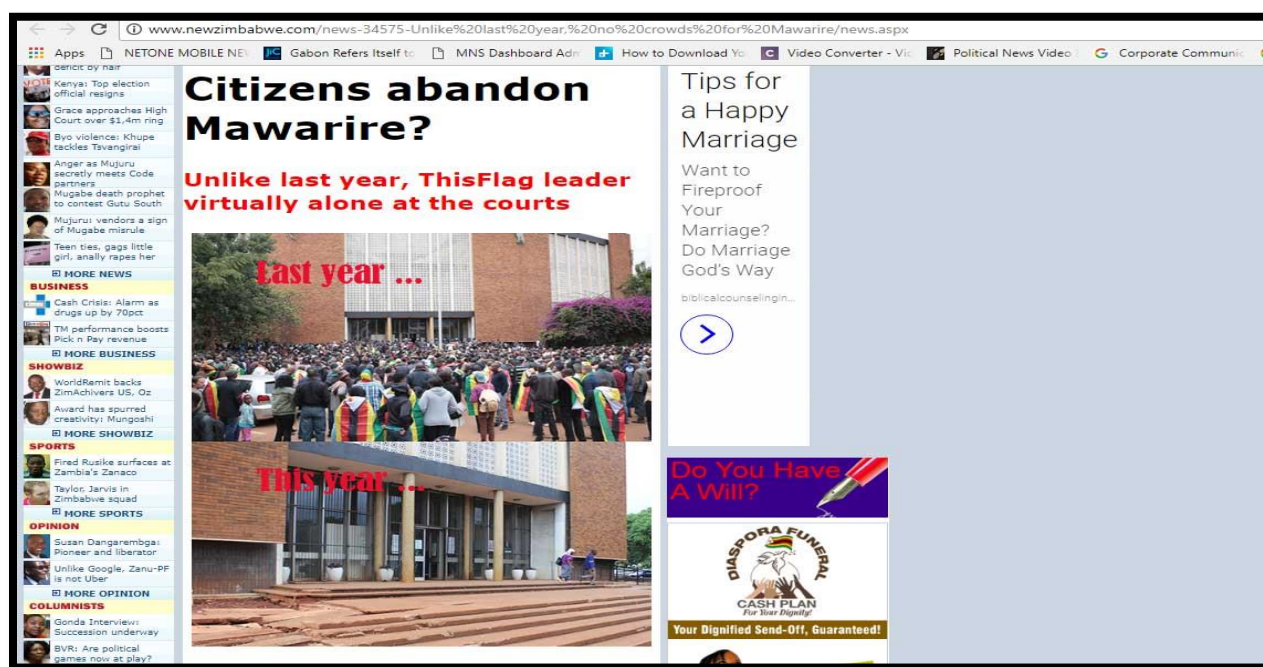


Figure 17. A screenshot of *Newzimbabwe.com*'s coverage of Evan Mawarire's court appearance on February 2, 2017 juxtaposes the 2016 support and the virtual insignificance the activist commanded a year later (*Newzimbabwe.com*, 5 February 2017, available online)

5.3.1 Discussion

The Herald Online in its socio-semiotic engagement with #This Flag thus largely achieved to set the agenda of Mawarire as a foreign-backed project as shown by the sway in the audience discussion around the oppositional social movement. As Cohen (1964 in Martin 2004 and Carroll, 2016) puts it, the media may not always succeed in telling audiences what to think, but is spectacularly successful in telling them what to think about. However the majority of the audiences who opted to engage in the discussion on #This Flag on *The Herald Online* platform preferred to be anonymous and this could be due to a sense of security and privacy that comes with anonymous participation as audiences tend to freely express themselves more (Heatherly et al (2014).

5.4 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that *The Herald* through its online version generally have an established pro-status quo stance owing to its ownership structure in which government through the ZMMT has 51 per cent ownership (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999). Opposition social movements in Zimbabwe have also been generally anti-government thereby resulting in a hostile relationship with *The Herald* newspaper which however goes beyond mere antagonism as the two parties engage in an ideological social-semiotic engagement characterized by framing, representation and construction of meaning meant to win the minds of the audiences at every level (Wood, 1994). It is in this context that this research establishes that *The Herald* in its online engagement with #This Flag strategically sought to prime the audiences towards a lengthy discussion of #This Flag and its leader Evan Mawarire, setting an agenda that the opposition social movement is an imperialist project which is foreign funded and controlled.

The Herald Online sought to use cartoons that deliberately did not recognize #This Flag by name or its leader, opting to describe it as a shadowy terrorist movement in its attempt to prop government's hegemonic grip over the masses. Over and above the objective of achieving dominance, hegemony also seeks to propagate the ideas of the status quo as the general interests of society and winning the hearts of the subalterns in the process (Storey, 2009). The social semiotic engagement of #This Flag and *The Herald Online* therefore leaves room for audiences participation in order to create false inclusion mainly because the influence to set the agenda

remains with the newspaper. Hegemony also involves coercion where necessary through the engagement of state institutions like the police, army and prisons also known as the repressive state apparatuses (Storey, 2006; Jones, 2006; Althusser, 2004). The Herald Online in this study becomes the terrain of engagement with #This Flag as the newspaper reproduces #This Flag as a string-controlled marionette trying to hide behind nationalism through the use of the national flag. However the newspaper in its defence of the status quo does not seem to seriously consider Merton's social strain theory which explains the pressures around which social activism originates, choosing in its engagement with #This Flag not to probe the issues raised by the social movement.

The Herald Online engages with #This Flag in a phased approach escalating the meaning-making in its cartoons by “discovering” and “exposing” the problem of the social strife bedeviling Zimbabwe as caused by #This Flag and one Evan Mawarire whom the newspaper presents as a fake pastor with no followers at all at his congregation, an agent of imperialism being used by the US the French ambassadors. Mawarire is cartooned with Zimbabwean flag draped around his neck whilst he is also putting on pants made out of the US flag to show someone with double standards and hiding behind patriotism. Welch (2000) opines that the flag is imbued with qualities of patriotism and as such its preservation invokes moral obligation on the part of governments. The study establishes that on that basis *The Herald Online* moves into a phase where it engages #This Flag in the battle for the national flag, arguing through cartoons and news stories that the social movement and its leader do not qualify to lay claim on the national flag on the basis of patriotism when they are a foreign project meant to prop imperialism in Zimbabwe.

The research also establishes that in line with Bush's (1945) hypermedia theory *The Herald Online* creates a space of debate on its platforms in a sense that empowers “the dancers on the floor” through access to the disc jockey's turntable (Lupton, 1996). The status of #This Flag and Mawarire is discussed on *The Herald Online's* comments platform however under an agenda set out by the newspaper. The researcher however argues that in the context of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, that sense of inclusion of the audiences through the comments platform is false as the newspaper still retains the right to publish or delete comments in line with its own editorial policies. However, what is key in the study's findings is the recognition of the influence and

power of the audiences in the meaning-making process by *The Herald Online* and the extent to which the newspaper goes in attempting to direct the audiences' conversation as well as putting the final ink in the branding of Mwarire and #This Flag in the online engagement of the social movement and the newspaper. The study therefore concludes that *The Herald Online* emerges the winner in the sense that at last Mwarire and #This Flag are left with diminished support a development which the researcher attributes to the social-semiotic construction of the social movement as a project of imperialism.

5.4.1 Conclusion

Chapter 5 demonstrated the findings from the auto-ethnographic activities conducted by the researcher as well as interviews and analyses of the cartoons, news articles and audience comments from *The Herald Online* on stories about #This Flag. Stories and cartoons were obtained from the *The Herald's* online archives whilst interviews were conducted with the newspaper's Online News Editor and the Political Editor. The Herald's cartoonist Innocent Mporu was slippery in trying to set an appointment with him and also gave excuses about personal tight schedules on why he could not respond to questions sent to him via e-mail.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 is a summation of the study's findings whose topic interrogates the socio-semiotic engagement of opposition social movements and online media in Zimbabwe with specific focus on the case of #This Flag and *The Herald Online*. Chapter 6 also sums up the research evaluation and recommendations on areas for further studies. The recommendations are applicable to the Zimpapers Digital Department as managers and producers of *The Herald Online* newspaper in respect of their online engagement with dissenting voices, opposition social movements included.

6.2. Evaluation and conclusions reached

The study sought to probe the socio-semiotic engagement of opposition social movements with online newspapers with focus on *The Herald Online* and #This Flag, an internet driven social protest lead by Evan Mawarire, who also leads His Generation Church. The study used cartoons, textual stories, audiences-generated comments, a photograph and a video used in the coverage of #This Flag social movement from April 19 2016 when it came to the stage.

Theoretically, the study combined Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Vannevar Bush's hypermedia theory in analyzing cartoons and stories from *The Herald Online* and how these sought to help consolidate ZANU-PF's hegemonic dominance against dissenting voices. Bush's hypermedia theory helped explore the agency of *The Herald Online* audience as they participated in the meaning-making process through the enabling user-generated comments features of the newspaper under study as an online platform. The study also employed Robert Merton's structural-strain theory in exploring the general causes of social activism and the motive of #This Flag movement led by Evan Mawarire.

The Herald Online visibly started paying serious attention to #This Flag around July 2016, almost three months after the social movement came to the fore through a four-minute video in

which its leader Mawarire lamented the national emblem on the basis that government had failed to fulfil its wishes represented through its colours. Priming and framing are theories developed to comprehend audiences' participation in their acceptance or rejection of certain media influences (Bennet, 2010). Cohen (1964 in Martin, 2004) also posit that media can set the agenda for audiences by telling them what to think about. Thus *The Herald Online*'s strategy of turning a blind eye on #This Flag helped the newspaper prime the audiences through a gradual agenda-setting process during which the social movement became the subject of discussion as it was presented as a shadowy project of imperialism.

The ensuing engagement of *The Herald Online* with #This Flag presented the latter as an act of criminality which the general populace ought not to recognize or engage with. The engagement was fulfilled with the use of cartoons that described the ensuing protests organized under #This Flag as the criminal works of shadowy groups abusing social media with the objective to subvert a constitutionally elected government. The engagement moved into a phase during which the shadowy groups were "identified" and their objective "exposed" and textual opinion pieces and news reports followed to give flesh to these claims.

Socio-semiotic analysis of the cartoons used by *The Herald Online* in the second phase of its online engagement with #This Flag show a sustained and deliberate process to identify the US and the French embassies as the brains behind the hashtag-based protests taking place across the country. Entmen et al (1993 in Moy et al, 2016) posit that news frames possess the potential to influence public opinion in a substantial way. Frames can also influence political behaviour (Moy, 2016). It is the establishment of this research that stories about diplomats from the US and French embassies seen hobnobbing with some members of the hashtag-based protests and #This Flag in particular brought to the fore the debate that #This Flag was indeed a project of imperialism organized through the US and the French Ambassador, Mr Delahousse.

The framing of #This Flag as an imperialist project was firmly premised on the gradual priming foundation provided through the cartoons in the first phase of engagement that did not refer to #This Flag protests by name. Naming and attributing the protests at this juncture to imperialism presented #This Flag as the discovery of a long term political programme which had just been discovered thereby successfully building around the protest the desired oppositional political discourse.

The study also established that *The Herald Online*'s phased approach to its engagement with The Flag Movement finished with the role of audiences whose participation in the engagement completed the matrix from Hall's (1973) encoding and decoding theory which recognizes the activeness of audiences in the media communication process. In their participation, Heatherly et al (2014) argue that on digital platforms audiences tend to prefer anonymity due to a sense of security and privacy as individuals participate from the comfort and privacy of their homes. This sense of security and privacy could be however false owing to various factors like poor judgment in weighing risk of sharing information online and the inequality between internet service providers and audiences as online consumers. Thus the whole business of participation may just be based on trust as trust reduces any perceived risks on the part of audiences (Metzger, 2004 and Schneier, 2010 in Lee, 2013).

However, this study through an analysis of audience-generated comments on news stories about #This Flag on *The Herald Online* established that loyal followers of the newspaper expressed themselves both for and against Mwarire's social movement. The trend showed a serious attack on *The Herald Online* and the government for their portrayal of the movement as an agent of imperialism, a sell-out organization out to cause anarchy on behalf of erstwhile Africa's colonial masters. The exciting trend was the shift in the taste of the comments which arguably can be concluded to be what *The Herald Online* envied for as a sizeable number tended to label Mwarire in exactly or more vitriol language than that of the government controlled newspaper.

The Herald Online having opened the floodgates for audience participation since gaining internal management of its digital platforms in 2011 (Mabweazara, 2014) means it had opened up to dissent, but there is still room for improvement in that regard for the newspaper. *The Herald Online* has no reason not to go a step further to accommodate different views in its mainstream reportage than allow dissent only through user-generated comments. In its engagement with #This Flag, *The Herald* did not accommodate the voice of Evan Mwarire or those who supported The Flag Movement's cause. As much as the newspaper serves the interests of the government of the day (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999), it still stands a chance to grow online conversations around its own content by allowing different voices and opinion yet still maintain its pro-government stance in order to support the national agenda from a pan-African perspective. As it stands, *The Herald Online* is breaking news and producing important content

for analysis and discussion on competitor platforms thereby losing audiences and revenue, and in some cases losing the authenticity of the debate. It must take ownership of the discussion topics it creates around social issues.

The Zimbabwe government and its critics have traditionally battled their ideological wars on television, radio and the print media, but the battleground has of late extended to the ubiquitous digital media (Moyo, 2009). Arnold et al (2008) posits that President Mugabe's government manipulates both local and foreign public opinion through outright lies and a sustained effort to incite locals to believe that erstwhile colonial powers are sabotaging them. *The Herald Online*, argued to be a government mouthpiece (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1999) therefore has a role to come to the party by authenticating and justifying its pro-government position by way of adopting trending digital story-telling strategies such as live online discussions where the nation's concerns are argued out from both an academic and political perspective. This is in view of the justification of President Mugabe's policies such as the land redistribution programme which are elsewhere argued as crucial in the decolonization process (Mamdani, 2009). Live online interviews are trendy on other global digital platforms such as *Aljazeera*, *BBC*, *CNN* and others and *The Herald Online* should justifiably up the game in terms of running with Zimbabwe's, if not Africa's story on decolonization. Supporting the government of the day does not necessarily imply being against the general populace especially where the government's policies are viewed as benefiting the poor as is the case with President Mugabe's land reform policy.

This study also encountered the origins and the subsequent appropriation of the national flag as a medium of political communication in ancient Europe and America, and latterly in Africa during the Arab Spring (Hamilton, 1852; Curtis, 1993; Marshal, 2016; Cumberland, 2017; Gerbuado, 2017). However, the origin of the national flag in Africa or Zimbabwe and the meaning of its use as a medium of political communication in protests on the continent was not broadly explored save for the Arab Spring, which is a different setting from the focus of this study. A gap for further research in the origins of the flag in Zimbabwe and its role in local politics would help further understand power embedded in this emblem in a country where imported public clothing can come embedded in foreign flag colours such as the US, British or South African colours.

Further research would also probably help explore power relations between publicly and privately owned media in their coverage of the national pledge in Zimbabwe in 2016. The national pledge makes it mandatory for schools to recite the salutation of the national flag and therefore the resistance experienced in Zimbabwean privately owned schools as well as reservations by parents and teachers in some government schools would be interesting to explore in the context of the notion of national patriotism. The role of civic society and their ownership and funding would spice up the interest for further research in this area.

6.3 Conclusion

The Herald Online, being the digital version of Zimbabwe's mainstream publicly owned traditional print media is important in understanding the political direction of the country. Therefore, its digital engagement with various news elements is important to track in view of the emancipatory nature of online media. The findings of this research are therefore important to the development of the media academic body of knowledge as well as to *The Herald Online* as a mainstream media outlet.

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