

# The Voice of Silence: Youth Identity and the “I Am Kenyan” Movement

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## **Abstract**

This research seeks to examine the “I am Kenyan” youth-led cross ethnic organization and its impact on the lived experiences of political and national subjectivities of the youth in Kenya. This organization uses social media as a forum to promote non-violent inter-ethnic relations and youth awareness within the political sphere in order to facilitate the development of a unified sense of national identity. I propose to apply the term “silent” movement based on the use of social media as a platform and the body as a tool of self-expression whereby actors silently share their views online while adorning their bodies with communicative bracelets that are associated with the organization. I further seek to examine the impact of ethnic violence on new political modes of representation and identity and whether this particularized violence supports or precludes an identity-based form of slacktivism or/ “armchair” activism. My research seeks to examine how this new kind of social activism acts as a new tactic and response to state repression and political exploitation.

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## **Dedications**

I dedicate my thesis work to my family and friends. To my parents Rose and Charles who have encouraged me through this journey, to my twin brother Albert who never let me waver, to my older sister Gachoki who was always a source of strength. To my friends who stood by me while I struggled. To Kimberley who provided strength through her feedback and support. I will always appreciate all that has been done.

# Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedications .....	iv
List of Figures .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Research Methodology .....	4
Chapter 2: Historical Background .....	7
2.1 Politics in Kenya .....	7
2.2 Colonial Legacy.....	7
2.3 Post-Independence .....	9
2.4 Ethnic Relations in Kenya .....	10
2.5 New media in Kenya .....	16
2.6 Conceptual Framework.....	17
2.6.1 Youth in Waiting.....	17
2.6.2 Social Media.....	19
2.6.3 Research Significance.....	22
2.7 Theoretical Framework .....	22
2.7.1 Social Movements.....	22
2.7.2 Social Movements and Social Media.....	29
2.7.3 Waithood and Resistance.....	32
2.7.4 Youth and Social Media Activism.....	38
2.7.5 The Silent Movement.....	40
2.7.6 Resistance and the Silent Movement.....	43
Chapter 3: Research Methodology .....	45
3.1 Research Site.....	45
3.2 Sampling and Analysis.....	45
3.2.1 The Four Stages of Social Movements.....	46
3.3 Ethical Considerations (informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality, potential risks) .....	50
3.3.1 Research Instruments.....	50
3.4 Participants .....	51
3.5 Consent .....	51
3.7 Risks and Benefits .....	52

Chapter 4: Data Analysis .....	53
4.1 The four stages of social Movements .....	53
4.1.1 Emergence. ....	54
4.1.2 Coalescence and Beauractization. ....	56
4.1.3 Decline. ....	63
Chapter 5: Analysis and Conclusion .....	65
5.1 References .....	70

## List of Figures

Figure 1: (2013) "I Am Kenyan" Project, Photo Competition Winner .....	1
Figure 2:Image of my wristband .....	15
Figure 3: #Occupy Wall Street: .....	29
Figure 4: Photo by "I Am Kenyan" Project, posted on March 2013.....	40
Figure 5: "I Am Kenyan" Facebook homepage: <a href="https://www.Facebook.com/IAMKenyanProject/">https://www.Facebook.com/IAMKenyanProject/</a> .....	57
Figure 6: Pawa 254 Facebook Homepage: <a href="https://www.Facebook.com/PAWA254/">https://www.Facebook.com/PAWA254/</a> .....	58
Figure 7: Pawa 254 Homepage: <a href="http://pawa254.org/">http://pawa254.org/</a> .....	60
Figure 8: Images of the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence from Pawa 254 Facebook page: accessed 28/10/2017 .....	61
Figure 9: Google Search results of the "I Am Kenyan" Movement.....	62
Figure 10: Google Search Results of the Pawa 254 Organization .....	63
Figure 11: The "I Am Kenyan" webpage <a href="http://www.iamkenyan.or.ke">http://www.iamkenyan.or.ke</a> accessed from the "I Am Kenyan" Facebook homepage.....	64

## Chapter 1: Introduction



Figure 1 (2013) "I Am Kenyan" Project, Photo Competition Winner

<https://www.Facebook.com/IAmKenyanProject/photos/a.306031262804133.68956.306030892804170/488278284579429/?type=3&theater>

This research explores media activism through youth-led organizations. Its focus is on the "I Am Kenyan" youth-led cross ethnic organization and to a lesser extent Pawa 254, both of which use social media as a platform. During the Kenyan post-election period of 2007-2008, there was a rise in ethnic violence which many young Kenyans participated in, resulting in the deaths of over 1,500 people and the internal displacement of 500,000 people. The violence during this period was because of political unrest due to ethnic discord. The massacre involved individuals being attacked in their homes, and ousted from large tracts of land that were perceived to belong to another ethnic

community. The history of ethnic violence is elaborated in the background of this research, illustrating the nature of land displacement of a few indigenous communities to certain parts of Kenya. Some research suggests that youth involvement in the massacre was due to the high levels of unemployment, which was exploited by the 2007-2008 election party candidates to gain their vote (Kanyinga & Nykuri, 1997; Roberts, 2009). With an unstable economy and the effects of rural-urban migration, youth unemployment is continuously growing. Increased education opportunities in urban centres provide a landscape of highly qualified job seekers in a market that cannot accommodate their skills (Roberts, 2009). The political sphere of Kenya is always affected by ethnic tensions among the major community leaders of the *Kalenjin*, *Luo*, and *Kikuyu* ethnic groups in their struggle for power (Hickman, 2011). Political leaders have used the dissension among communities to fuel their political agendas, and this has resulted in the subsequent ethnic tensions (Njogu, 2009; Roberts, 2009). This ethnic-nationalism has been a key factor in instigating political violence. The struggle for power is mainly between the *Kikuyu*, *Luo* and the *Kalenjin*.

In response to this 2007-2008 post-election discord and animosity, the currently active “I am Kenyan” youth-led cross-ethnic organization uses social media as a forum to promote non-violent inter-ethnic relations and youth awareness within the political sphere in order to facilitate the development of a unified sense of national identity. Awareness of the impact ethnic violence has on the masses is created by using stickers and bracelets, as well as pictures with the slogan “I Am Kenyan” in the colors of the Kenyan Flag, posted on Facebook and “hashtagged” on Twitter and similar websites. The colors of the Kenyan flag symbolize the concept of Kenyan national unity. The primary colors are red, green, black and white. Red symbolizes the blood shed during the struggle for independence (Kanyinga & Nykuri, 1997). White symbolizes peace and unity, black represents the pride of our skin color and the African race as a whole culture and heritage,



and green represents working hand in hand to build a better nation (Kanyinga & Nykuri, 1997). Similarly, the Pawa 254 began to take shape after the post-election violence. The individuals who would form this organization began their activities with the prospect of providing a collective voice with which to comment on the upcoming election in 2012-2013. These youth-led collectivized endeavours sought to promote unity in diversity, by building a national political culture where there is respect for ethnic differences and equitable relations between ethnic communities; promoting peace and a oneness where the good of the nation is the aim for all.

I propose to apply the term “silent” movement based on the use of social media as a platform and the body as a tool of self-expression by whereby actors silently type their views while adorning their bodies with communicative bracelets that are associated with the organization. I further seek to examine the impact of ethnic violence on new political modes of representation and identity and whether this particularized violence supports or precludes an identity-based form of slacktivism, or “armchair” activism. The discourse surrounding social media has always been contentious. Some scholars question its effectiveness as a medium for movement building. In these cases, it may be viewed as slacktivism, which may be defined as “actions in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement” (Franklin, 2014), or “armchair” activism, which is similarly defined as a form of second hand participation. This implies that those involved are not as invested due to their limited participation within the digital framework. The risks posed to ‘virtual protestors’ as opposed to those protesting on streets are imaged to be fewer and less serious. The physical disconnection that is afforded by digital media use is imaged to create a sense of detachment from both the means and the goals of the movements, especially due to the ease of entry and exit to and from digital platforms. Moreover, there are no perceived

repercussions from virtual dissension and participants may participate as little as possible (Naghibi, 2011).

As a counterpoint to these presumptions, this research project focuses on how so-called “virtual” social media discourses which feature representations of embodied expression reconfigure the lived political experiences of Kenyan youth. My research seeks to examine how this new kind of social activism acts as a novel tactical response to state repression and political exploitation. While attempting to explore the rationale for the development of this type of activism and illustrate what impact it has on youth social and political subjectivities within the sphere of social media representation, I will look at the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between ethnic violence and youth political expression in Kenya?
- How do social media interactions reflect and/or influence individual and subcultural subjectivities among Kenyan youth and supra-ethnic interactions between Kenyan youth and others?
- Does “I am Kenyan” represent a silent social movement or a form of slacktivism or “armchair activism”?
- How are the Pawa 254 and the “I Am Kenyan” organizations comparable?

## **1.1 Research Methodology**

My research methodology is comprised by a photographic inquiry that features content analysis of virtual and visual materials. I had originally intended to pursue an indirect photo inquiry, using photos as instruments for eliciting comments from participants in the form of semi-structured interviews. Owing to time constraints and other issues, however, rather late in the process, I shifted my methodology to one of ‘direct photographic inquiry’ (cf Collier). Direct photographic inquiry involves examining photos as “field texts” by taking a series of

methodological steps. This methodology has been adapted from David Fetterman's work, which is paraphrased in what follows (Fetterman, 1989). In the first stage of my research, I examined the corpus of pictures as a whole while making note of my initial impressions and feelings. The idea is that this would allow the cultural circumstances to speak in their own terms. Next, I took an inventory of all the images by making use of categories that reflect the focus of the study. I followed this step with a structured content analysis. This allowed me to sift through the photos in response to specific questions and to fine-tune my initial descriptions and discoveries. Finally, I engaged in a search for meaning using elements from the context that define the photos' significance. This thematic form of inquiry and categorizing is informed by my own positioning in this research as a Kenyan woman with experience in youth-led movements. The research is partially ethnographic because the meanings of any one image, or set of images, can be made at three sites: technological, compositional, and social. Throughout my research I have attended to theoretical debates about how to interpret images, many of which can be understood as debates over which of these sites and modalities is most important for understanding an image (Fetterman, 1989). For the purposes of this project, I find the last modality – the social – to have the greatest bearing on my interpretations.

The results of this research will provide a perspective on the nature of the movement, especially since most of its activism is within social media scopes. Both visual and virtual ethnography will better highlight what impacts social media has had on youth subjectivities within the political framework. The use of direct photo inquiry will illustrate the some of the intangible features of this movement.

Kenyan youth-led organizations frequently incorporate imagery into their representations. Comparing Facebook photos from Pawa 254 and the "I Am Kenyan" sites will enable me to

construct a narrative using the resources youth select to tell their stories. As Pink (2001) has illustrated, the use of pictures in our daily lives is becoming more common and prominent. Similarly, the use of social media landscapes as a means of documenting one's lifestyle, and sharing opinions and beliefs among the youth is becoming more commonplace. The increasing use of social media globally is evinced by numerous examples such as the #occupy, the #blacklivesmatter and many more. The use of social media as a means to spread global awareness and to rally for causes is becoming more prevalent.

The nature of the "I Am Kenyan" movement incorporates narrative modes of representation as well as visual representation. The history of state repression with no reprieve and little to no change has had an impact on youth subjectivities within the sphere of social action. Cases such as the #occupy movement and the global justice movements brought together individuals who endured similar forms of political and social unrest from all over the world. In the Kenyan context, the movement seeks to promote unity within diversity, and in using social media as a forum, I postulate that the narrative and visual representations act affectively – they work at the level of felt experiences and emotional engagement to viscerally remind audiences of what it feels like to be united. At the same time, social media provides a free space for anonymity and ethnic diversification. This is fostered through the technology of social media itself, which affords anonymity by allowing users to take on varied aliases and to use increasingly untraceable servers. Anonymity permits open dialogue without the fear of having to face reprisals should one's location or ethnic background become known. This is relevant socially because peoples' names, physical features, spoken dialects and other identifying features align them with ethnic groups whose politics they may or may not espouse. Without necessarily adopting political views, their bodies become billboards for political messaging and targets for those who hold opposing views to those

messages. Using social media, allows people to assert some control over how their bodies carry messages, and to control others' access to their embodied selves.

## **Chapter 2: Historical Background**

### **2.1 Politics in Kenya**

The ethnic discord in Kenya stems from a variety of factors, such as colonialism, economic class differences and various social constructs. The combination of these elements over the years has resulted in a tension-filled political structure that seems on the brink of boiling over, and this is what happened in the 2007-2008 post-election violence. The various instances of violence such as the attempted coup in 1982 and the land clashes in 1992 contributed to the culmination of the violence. The following historical overview illustrates the creation and the maintenance of ethnic divisions (Widner, 1992).

### **2.2 Colonial Legacy**

The colonial legacy of the British government (from 1888 with the development of the British East African Company to Kenyan independence in 1963) had a great impact on ethnic relations. This brief overview illustrates the animosity that was facilitated and perpetuated by the British regime. The British implemented a “Divide and Rule” system of governance (Sua, 2013). The British government used this political strategy to promote dissension between ethnic communities by actively sharing and redistributing land among those who supported their regime (Sua, 2013; Robertson, 2008). The British rule also led to the displacement of many communities within the nation. The process of manipulation and pitting of ethnic communities against each

other ensured that there was limited resistance from the masses (Kanyinga & Nykuri, 1997; Sua, 2013).

The claiming of the white highlands (fertile parts of Kenya mainly within the Central Province and parts of the Rift Valley) was an act that displaced several of the agriculturally based communities onto land reserves that were far less fertile and forced them into becoming farm hands and squatters. The farm hands and squatters would work the fertile land, and were given certain tracts to live on by the white settlers. Similarly, the pastoral communities such as the *Maasai*, *Samburu*, *Nandi*, and *Pokot* were pushed onto reserves that were not conducive to agricultural development and which had limited grazing land for their cattle (Kanyinga & Nykuri, 1997).

Each of the land units was reserved for the use of a particular ethnic group. These native reserves laid a firm framework for solidifying the ethnicization of the Kenyan society. The administration placed solid socio-political boundaries between the various units of the native reserves and by so doing obstructed ‘political’ interactions among the different ethnic communities, and thus prevented inter-ethnic political relationships (Kanyinga, 2009:5).

These instances of ethnic segregation were a common tactic used by the British colonists. For instance, during the Apartheid regime in South Africa, ethnic groups were sequestered and segregated via the Bantustan reserve system, which created marginalization and fed ethnic divisiveness which ultimately prevented allied resistance. This divide and rule tactic is also illustrated in the case of the Rwandan genocide, where the two ethnic groups (Hutu and the Tutsi) were pitted against each other by the British colonialists. This created competition over scarce resources and unnecessary animosity and tension, which eventually reached its pinnacle in the Rwandan Genocide.

Coercing ethnic groups into a situation where they had to compete for minimal resources to achieve independence caused inter-ethnic hostilities to grow. Many political parties arose at the time. The Kikuyu Central Association (KCA-1928), which later became Kenya African Union (KAU-1944) addressed issues of concern to the Kikuyu, specifically land grievances. The Ukambani Members Association (UMA-1930s) represented the needs of the Kamba community. The Luhya formed the Luhya Union (LU-1930s), the Luo formed the Young Kavirondo Association (YKA-1921) and many other smaller parties were also formed (Kanyinga, 2009; Mutua, 2008).

### **2.3 Post-Independence**

After independence was attained in 1963, the land redistribution “Million Acre Scheme” became a major issue in the development of ethnic contention. Instead of free distribution of large tracts of land held by the British government to the communities as was initially anticipated, the British government facilitated the signing of an agreement treaty that led to the Kenyan government having to buy the land from the white settlers (Nykuri, 1997).

The agreement resulted in the formation of GEMA (*Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association*), a collective of the ethnic communities closest to the Kikuyu, in a bid to re-acquire land through co-operation (Kanyinga, 2009; Rono, 2002). Through this integration, the *Kikuyu* formed cooperatives and managed to buy large tracts of the white highlands. President at the time, Jomo Kenyatta (*Kikuyu* descent) is alleged to have facilitated this process. The acquisition of the funds necessary to buy such large tracts of land was highly questionable. At the time, some of the banks had high standing members of the *Kikuyu* community serving as employees and board members. It is therefore possible that the National Bank of Kenya, Kenya Commercial Bank, and a few others influenced the land redistribution process. The individuals involved, who were affiliated with the

banks, facilitated the acquisition of large tracts of land by providing funds through loans and other forms of monetary aid to members affiliated with the GEMA association (Nykuri, 1997; Kanyinga, 2009). As a result, the *Kikuyu* managed to re-acquire their land from the white settlers in the Central province as well as to gain new tracts of land from the Rift Valley and parts of the coastal region (Nykuri & Roberts, 1997). The exceedingly unfair distribution of wealth became an issue of contention between the *Kikuyu* and *Kalenjin* who were the original landowners within the Rift Valley, and contributed to the rise of ethnic-based animosity. Even after Kenya attained its independence, it continued to experience periods of ethnic tension which culminated in the 2007-2008 post-election violence (Kanyinga, 2009; Hickman, 2011).

## **2.4 Ethnic Relations in Kenya**

Kenya is a country that has over 70 different ethnic groups that fall under the umbrella of three main categories namely: The *Cushites*, *Nilotes*, and the *Bantus*. Within these three core categories, five major ethnic groups are represented, namely the *Kikuyu* (22%), *Luhya* (14%), *Luo* (13%), *Kalenjin* (12%), and *Kamba* (11%). The *Kalenjin* people are an aggregation of smaller tribes, namely: the *Kipsigis*, *Marakwet*, *Nandi*, *Pokot*, *Endorois*, *Sabaot*, *Terik*, *Elgeyo* and *Turgen* (Roberts, 2007). The political sphere of Kenya has been influenced by ethnic tensions among the major communities (during and after colonization), namely *Kalenjin*, *Luo* and *Kikuyu*. This has resulted in animosity between ethnic communities as well as corruption, exploitation and various forms of social manipulations throughout the years. Land grievances that were present since independence, political manipulation of ethnic differences, unemployment and poverty helped maintain ethnic tensions. According to Hickman, during the 2007-2008 post-election violence:

The *Kalenjin* and *Massai* targeted the *Kikuyu* in the Rift Valley. Ethnic gangs in the informal settlements around Nairobi targeted members of other ethnic groups. For



example, the sect/organized crime group of *Kikuyu* called the *Mungiki* targeted the *Luo* as a form of retaliation (Hickman, 2011:29).

Kenya has experienced a different period of political rule since the nation attained its independence in 1963. Four presidents have governed the nation thus far; *Jomo Kenyatta*, *Daniel Arap Moi*, *Mwai Kibaki*, and *Uhuru Kenyatta* (currently the President) the son of *Jomo Kenyatta*. Of these four leaders, *Daniel Arap Moi* is the only one who is a member of the *Kalenjin* ethnic group. The others belong to the *Kikuyu* ethnic community (Widner, 1992).

*Jomo Kenyatta* ruled from the period of 1963 to 1978; upon his death, *Daniel Arap Moi* who was the Vice President at the time took over and ruled the nation until 2002. During his time in government, the country was under a single party rule, and the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) was the representative political party (Widner, 1992). President *Moi*'s rule included strict control of the government. Resistance was met with political assassinations, imprisonment and death threats. Corruption and police brutality were the norm. This resulted in an attempted coup by the military in 1982. This also led to the implementation of a multi-party system in 1992 (Nykuri & Roberts, 1997; Widner, 1992).

Eventually, the KANU regime ended because of the rise of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) (Roberts, 2009). This political party was an amalgamation of the major ethnic groups. The presidential candidate was *Mwai Kibaki*, and he won by a landslide. The regime change aimed to facilitate the formation of a coalesced government, the eradication of corruption, and changes within the constitution (Mutua, 2008; Calas, 2008). Despite this, most of the promises made by the president were not fulfilled, and the new party experienced severe conflict internally and externally. Nonetheless, Kenya voted in President *Kibaki* for a second term. Unmet promises and unresolved conflicts led to the post-election violence of the 2007-2008 elections (Roberts, 2009).

Bouts of ethnic violence have created instability in Kenya. Ethnic collectives have resorted to the use of violence to achieve key aims, including regime change. The attempted coup on *Moi's* political system by the military in 1982 (Widner, 1992), for instance, facilitated the move to the multi-party elections that took place in 1992 (Roberts, 2009). Similarly, the ethnic-based land clashes of 1992 also led to land allocations in favour of particular ethnic groups. Ethnic violence predates the independence era. Current political regimes, however, use these already existing tensions, in which people are deeply emotionally invested, to manipulate citizens to support their preferred political causes.

Kenya has historically been plagued by ethnic conflict and it is often expressed in the political sphere. Ethnic leaders over the years have coveted the opportunity to rule and this has led to a constant state of ethnic political unrest. For instance, during *Jomo Kenyatta's* regime *Oginga Odinga* of the *Luo* was a key figure in the political sphere. His actions suggest that he wanted to be the President before *Daniel Moi*. After *Daniel Moi's* 24-year dictatorship, his son *Raila Odinga* made a play for power and lost. This struggle continued with *Raila Odinga* attempting to gain the presidential seat at every turn. The re-election of President *Mwai Kibaki* sparked such unrest that a new position for Prime Minister was created to placate *Raila Odinga* because he persisted in inciting ethnic violence.

This background illustrates the ethnic diversity in Kenya. It sets the stage to show the nature of the ethnic discord and elucidates the struggle for unification. This collective action, which is facilitated by the youth for the youth, seeks to create a group affiliation among tremendously diverse parties. I seek to examine how the form of the "I Am Kenyan" organization has been influenced by state retaliatory violence and whether these factors have facilitated the development of a "silent" social movement, or propagated slacktivism/ "armchair" activism. While

social movements in Kenya have a long history of presence during periods of tension and conflict, their protests have been met with the use of forced removal of protestors in city streets by the government through the police. Kiai (1992) states that:

Kenya's human rights record has been dismal. Political assassinations, deaths in police custody, detentions without trial and police brutality have been prevalent in Kenya ever since the reign of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta... [and when Daniel Moi assumed the presidency in 1978], government critics were harassed and intimidated through brief arrests and interrogations. By 1980, however, the regime had severely circumscribed freedom of expression and a culture of silence and fear began to permeate society (1992:14-15).

For instance, there have been cases such as Wangari Maathai who is the founder of the green belt movement. An environmental activist who faced police brutality and government crackdowns at every turn, she has been jailed, beaten unconscious and has received death threats throughout her activist lifestyle (Muthuki, 2006). Youth collective action in universities has been met with similar violence over the years. The impacts of state repression, government crackdowns on protests and even unlawful detention are growing factors in the development of various forms of collective action and their methods of execution. The organizers of the "I Am Kenyan" movement seem to have observed this history and chosen a form of engagement that protects members from bodily harm and arrest, while allowing them to express and assert their views to local and international audiences.

Mindful of the repercussions of open and outspoken political dissent, Kenyan youth self-expression in turn takes on a coded form for communicating views, which does not draw unwanted attention from the state or militant members of ethnic groups. This is evinced in the rise in

prominence of the “I Am Kenyan” wristbands, bracelets, and other physical adornments with the colours of the Kenyan flag. I have observed these articles on a variety of individuals, myself included. The Kenyan flag is an innocuous symbol of national membership that illustrates an imagined nationality at an abstract level above local geographic and ethnic differences. It is easy to see how this might be easier to accomplish among members of the Kenyan diaspora who are removed from the daily strife that ethnic tensions that are pervasive in their home country. However, the wristbands would appear to be just as popular within Kenya as they are in the diaspora. I suspect that youth who have absented themselves from the local political fray by retreating to online gatherings instead, are also able to divest in the ethnic conflict and imagine themselves as belonging to a national collective, in a way that those from previous generations, who remain emotionally invested in the ethnic battles are unable to do. Because these wristbands moreover, are worn on the body, they serve as a tactile reminder that this membership is not simply “imagined,” that is it is not simply “virtual,” it is real and it is embodied and lived.



*Figure 2:Image of my wristband*

How is youth political expression shaped and formed by such experiences? The impact of ethnic violence and the history behind it play a significant role in self-identification among youth groups. Youth who have retreated from the sorts of ethnic violence that are occurring on the streets, have taken to online formats to find communities of interest and others who are similarly tired of the violence. These communities of interest are comprised by youth from a variety of ethnic groups. The sharing of information in these instances is having an impact on the rigidity of some of the traditions associated with particular ethnicities. This is especially true in cities such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and others which have communication infrastructures that permit better exchange and social interaction. The rural communities, on the other hand, continue to

experience greater isolation from information and communication which has a conservative effect on ethnic traditions.

Simply moving to the city does not necessarily promote nationalist sensibilities however. Youth who migrate to the city centres for school or employment, may experience a state of protracted “waithood,” which is defined as a liminal space in which the young are unable to break into the realm of adulthood because of their exclusion from the labour market (Honwana, 2012). This has resulted in growing rates of unemployment and overpopulation in urban areas, and the intensification of supra-ethnic interactions among youth. In my research, I will ask to what extent the “I Am Kenyan” actions and its social media influences have an impact on supra-ethnic interactions among youth and on their subcultural subjectivities.

## **2.5 New media in Kenya**

New media is an emergent aspect of social movements and social activism in general. In Kenya, new media has significantly contributed to the spread and growth of the “I Am Kenyan” actions. It has also provided a space for interaction that stretches beyond the realms of physical boundaries thus presumably resulting in a higher outreach (Kanyinga & Nykuri, 1997). Today, members of the diaspora who live abroad, for instance, have the opportunity to observe events, acquire news and interact with people, in Kenya in a way that was not possible before. As a result, members of the diaspora feel themselves to be *participants* in local affairs such as electoral processes, and family affairs in an unprecedented manner.

In addition to expanding the Kenyan national polity to include expatriates and members of the diaspora, social media is used by the Kenyan youth at home and abroad in processes of identity construction and self-promotion, as I will discuss in later sections. Further, social media is employed as a platform for economic outreach and as a meeting place for an emerging “activist”

art society, as will be illustrated in my discussion of the Pawa 254 organization in chapter four. The artists who submit work to Pawa 254 are commenting on social injustice and lived experience of Kenyan youth. The promotion of art and musical events through social media, including the selling of merchandise such as bracelets as practiced by “I Am Kenyan” and Pawa 254 promotes non-intrusive forms of social activism and creates awareness on a wider scale.

I will examine the social media culture examining its influence on individual and subcultural subjectivities and its linkages with media activism. A comparative analysis of the “I Am Kenyan” movement and the Pawa 254 organization will help illustrate the nature and impact of media activism. I will explore how social media coupled with the use of English and *Swahili* as a lingua franca across Kenya are promoting supra-ethnic interactions both among the youth and in the broader society. I also seek to examine the influence and impact of new media as a forum for the development of national and political identity. I am interested in the impact that new media is having on emerging movements and other media-based political groups and organizations. This will help me to ascertain what form Kenyan youth activism is taking, and whether it corresponds with slacktivism or “armchair” activism.

## **2.6 Conceptual Framework**

### **2.6.1 Youth in Waiting.**

Youth in “waithood” (Appadurai, 1996; Honwana, 2012; 2013) is an emerging discourse that illustrates that many young people are in a liminal state. The construct of waithood views youth endeavours and cultures temporally in a transitional state of waithood between childhood and adulthood (Durham, 2008). “Waithood” can be described as a liminal space in which youth are stuck and unable to move forward into adulthood due to lack of financial autonomy which is influenced by unemployment and the lack of an independent and stable home (Honwana, 2012).

The increasing number of young people and students within the Kenyan context attending universities and moving to the city seeking a better lifestyle has resulted in a situation where many educated individuals are unemployed (Munga & Onsomu, 2014; Roberts, 2009). The employment rate has shrunk over time due to an unstable economy (Masquelier, 2013). Job-seekers are forced to take low-paying jobs and part-time work that do not reflect their skills or sustain them (Masquelier, 2013). Based on the 2009 Census, the rate of youth unemployment was 15.8% for ages 15-19 and 13.1% for ages 20-24, while the total unemployment rate was 8.6% (Munga & Onsomu, 2014). These rates are on par with G20 countries and are demonstrably low for an African country. They are considerably lower than places such as South Africa, for instance, where the youth unemployment rate is approximately 50%. Since the actual rates are low, it seems clear that perception rather than empirical fact is in play. The government plays on the perception of high youth employment to foment unrest.

Youth who perceived employment to be a competition with other ethnic groups for minimal resources engaged in ethnic violence when the promise of better job opportunities and more stable support during the post-election period of 2007-2008 never materialized (Roberts, 2009). The political elite's exploitation of the youth illustrates the position the young adults hold as both a symbol of the future and as a threat to those in power (Fournier, 2015). Ethnic nationalism, like nationalism itself, creates certain subject positions for men and women, the elderly youth and so on. These positions are often internally contradictory. Kenyan ethnic nationalism creates an oppositional position for youth. Youth are perceived as a threat to the authority of the elites. This subject position sets out roles for them as passive, ineffectual and apathetic subjects who have little value to the economy, political life or social affairs of the state. Youth, however are refusing to accept this role as passive victims of this seemingly hegemonic



nationalizing discourse - rather, to varying degrees, they negotiate their subject positions. They are coming up with new innovative ideas, for instance, such as marketing themselves on social media, and developing online entrepreneurial endeavours which reduce the need for high capital investments. The Pawa 254 organization is an example of this phenomenon with its emphasis on art and digital media such as filmography and photography as a means to promote youth art endeavours. These activities are promoted on social media sites and are tied in with musical events such as concerts as a means to promote awareness and to empower youth in a new and growing market. They have workshops on various art forms, and the organization holds a few art exhibits to promote the works of local artists.

Online forums such as Pawa 254 provide a means for youth to support and create employment opportunities for themselves. These creative forms of self-representation provide a sense of camaraderie and facilitate the creation of new subject positions and a sub-culture that are organized according to youth's values (Honwana, 2012). Building communities of interest and marketing products for them using social media results in a growing hub of youth-led sustainable businesses.

### **2.6.2 Social Media.**

Social and digital media and its growing influence on new forms of social movements is an expanding field within the anthropological framework. Castells (1996) postulates that digital media and the digital age are creating a new reality, and this reality is “fundamentally altering the way we are born, live, sleep, produce, consume, dream, fight, or die” (Castells, 1996:31). Digital media has facilitated the development of new forms of communication and self-identification (Coleman, 2010), such as the *#Occupy Wall Street*. Using social media platforms in the Occupy Wall Street campaign had a wider impact and incorporated a wider diversity of actors than would

have been possible through street organizing alone. The diversity in participation facilitated widespread “occupation” which led to a global day of action that included protests in 82 countries (Juris, 2012). Similarly, the Global Justice Mobilizations against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Prague in 2000, and protests in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization (WTO) used list-serves as a mode of communicating and sharing information. This method brought together individuals on an unprecedented scale. Hutchby illustrated that “using list-serves as a means of communication and coordination helped give rise to a model of networked organizations based on decentralized coordination among diverse, autonomous collective actors...” (Hutchby, 2001; Juris, 2012). Computer mediated communication is indeed changing the pace and the scale of human organization, as was anticipated by media theorist Marshall McLuhan in his famous work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

Social media activism within the Kenyan context occurs via Facebook, photography and body adornments, including photos taken with the caption “I Am Kenyan” in the colors of the Kenyan flag which “trend” on various social media sites. Pawa 254 activism is comprised by the use of social media sites to promote workshops, art exhibits, film courses, and political messages. New media is a sphere of social, cultural and economic interactions with increasing importance. In everyday life, it has an impact on the development of social and cultural identities. It is also affecting economic and political relations, expanding the sphere of these interactions into a global network that is not limited by geographic or ethnic borders (Coleman, 2010). Social media marketing is gaining importance for political, business and ideological campaigns, especially those targeting youth. Blogging has become an entrepreneurial endeavour for youth, and promotes youth capital accumulation and political empowerment through a medium that has high outreach.

On a political level, social media has a double-edged nature. It can promote inter-ethnic relations through posts, tags, and self-expression both from individuals within the country and those in the diaspora. It may also be employed, however, to exacerbate ethnic discord and animosity as illustrated by various cases of hate speech on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This includes comments posted on Facebook and Twitter such as “*Washenzi warudi makwao!!! We must meet n take this to Parliament! If ur not blood raised, utahama Nchi yetu! Mafi ya kuku wasio na akili!!! Nkst!*” (Benesch, 2014) meaning “Those lazy people (that have occupied land) need to go back to where they are from!! We must meet and take this to Parliament! If you are not blood raised, you will move from this country that is ours! Chicken shit that has no brains.” Another example is “I urge all my tribesmen to fight, annihilate, assassinate and execute when the opportunity will present itself, all those who benefited in these squabbles. REVENGE!!REVENGE!!REVENGE!!” (Benesch, 2014). These examples of hate speech are geared towards the *Kikuyu* community residing in the Rift Valley. The use of hate speech within the Kenyan context is a common phenomenon especially when it comes to dealing with land grievances (Benesch, 2014).

New media in the above context bolsters national identity within and beyond the country. In the framework of the Kenyan case study, I will examine the role of hate speech in perpetuating ethnic tensions and the freedom of autonomy social media brings to these participants. This research will illustrate the nature of Kenyan social media culture and its influence on youth social and political interactions. Similarly, this research will illustrate the fluidity and sustenance of youth led-organizations within this digital field site.

These diverse aspects of social media use will also illustrate the nature of youth interaction and the development of subcultures within the framework of media activism. The use of *Swahili*

in this context becomes a national language of self-expression by which people from diverse backgrounds can share their thoughts. The use of social media as a tool for social interaction provides a forum for free and open dialogue without the fear of physical persecution on an ethnic identity basis. The potential for psychological abuse remains, however, as spaces for anonymous posting also permit people to utter hate speech without fear of reprisal. Social media communication provides an online meeting ground without the need for physical contact. It creates a space for self-expression and identification while providing a platform for collective representation and allows for diverse opinions and ideologies to be expressed.

### **2.6.3 Research Significance.**

This study will illustrate the impact of social media as a platform for the development of new and varied forms of social movements, and the factors influencing the development of new social formations such as: state repression, colonialism and competition over scarce resources. While the growth of media activism is a new phenomenon within the anthropological framework, it is often to be found accompanied by peaceful on-the-street protests in towns and cities as will be illustrated by examples such as #Occupy Wall Street. In such movements, both new media and peaceful demonstrations are used in tandem and together have global impact (Juris, 2012). An on-the-street ethnography is beyond the scope of this thesis, which illustrates instead the significance of media activism as a stand-alone form of social movement representation.

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.7.1 Social Movements.**

Social movements can be defined as the collective coming together of individuals and groups to change a certain way of life or way of being governed, based on perceived grievances and discord. This collective action leads to the formation of social and political alliances that seek

to change the status quo. Actors collectively mobilize and act on their grievances through various ways such as protest marches, strikes and boycotts (Klandermans & Roggeband, 2010).

My research on the “I Am Kenyan” movement seeks to take this definition of the social movement further by illustrating the fluidity of the goals and actions of a movement. The nature of the relational factors that influence the coming together of different actors and the nature of the movement itself represent a fluid system of symbolic representation that advocates for gradual attitude shifts within the structural framework of the society. It also illustrates the nature of the different social interaction units that represent the whole group collective. This ranges from those who are actively involved in the organizational framework of the movement to those whose participation is limited to sporting a wristband as a sign of support. This in turn falls in line with the “New” Social Movement theory illustrated by Habermas (1981):

. . . The new conflicts arise in areas of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization. They are manifested in the sub-institutional, extra-parliamentary forms of protest. The underlying deficits reflect a reification of communicative spheres of action; the media of money and power are not sufficient to circumvent this reification. The question is not one of compensations that the welfare state can provide. Rather, the question is how to defend or reinstate endangered lifestyles, or how to put reformed lifestyles into practice. In short, the new conflicts are not sparked by problems of distribution, but concern the grammar of forms of life (as cited in Edwards, 2004:117).

In this context, the exploration of new avenues that contribute to the formation of social movements moves away from the more essentialist perspectives that have permeated the discourse over the years. The questions of ethnic culture and ethnic contexts come into play. Similarly, the development of national identity and national political culture become questions that require

addressing in the context of the new social movement theory. The scope of understanding the nature of social movements widens further and incorporates a variety of previously unaddressed social cultural dimensions. In this case, this theory opens up a space in which they can address the accountability of the already established structural social system:

According to Tarrow (1994), the development of social movements is:

...activated by the changes in political opportunities that give rise to new waves of movements and shape their unfolding. Although actors interact regularly with opponents in stable cleavage structures, the rise and fall of social movements is too irregular to be explained by such stable cleavages. Political opportunities are both seized and expanded by social movements, turned into collective action and sustained by mobilizing structures and cultural frames (Tarrow, 1994:8).

From the above, the “I am Kenyan” movement can be viewed as a form of collective action that arose due to the increasingly contentious politics during the period of the 2007-2008 post-election violence. The unaddressed ethnic tensions over the years had built up to a boiling point. The reaction was almost immediate with youth mobilization being at the forefront. The collective disgruntlement with the status quo systems of government and a need for change acted as the key components to the development of the mobilization of collective action and identity in the Kenyan context.

The very nature of social movements hinges on the demand for change at a rapid pace. For instance, in the case of the “March on Washington” in April 1993, the convergence of individuals at the Lincoln Memorial was an action taken to draw the attention of the political elite and the government to the rights and privileges of the Gay and Lesbian community being restricted. The “othering” of this community is what facilitated the need for change. The community wanted to

share rights equal rights to those of other citizens (Tarrow, 1994). This movement is similar to the Civil Rights Movement in that the nature and form of action undertaken responded to the pattern of oppression to which the community was subjected for being perceived as different or as “other” (Tarrow, 1994).

Similarly, the “orange revolution” of 2004 in the Ukraine involved youth mobilization and focused on political re-structuring due to unpopular leadership (Fournier, 2015). Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter which rose to prominence worldwide during the Ferguson protests and after, reflected the social injustices faced by people of colour. By creating a strong social media following, the movement has had a strong impact on discourse on racial discrimination, inequality and police injustice. Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa (2015) illustrate how the use of social media has affected social representation on new media outlets especially regarding racialization of people of color (Haeggeurd, 2016). In their discussion, they focus on “hashtag activism” which is expansive in form, influencing more than one organization and branching into media subsets such as the music industry, news outlets and beyond (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). According to Tarrow, the nature of contentious politics is described as:

...episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when:

(a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims, and

The claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants or objects of claims—roughly translated, the definition refers to collective political struggle.

Contentious politics, in the sense of this entry, includes social movements, but it also includes less sustained forms of contention—like riots and strike waves—and more extensive ones—like civil wars, revolutions, and episodes of democratization—and it

intersects with routine political processes—like elections and interest group politics” (Tarrow, 2013:20).

This illustrates that in relation to social movements, political contention is just a foreground for collective action. This is because the sphere of the political has a larger influence on the societal structure. The need for accountability and transparency in this respect is what is key in the role that social movements play (Tarrow, 2013). As such, they provide a forum for discourse on the social structures of the society. Tarrow postulates that the more obscure actors such as ethnicity, race, gender, and culture have always been a part of collective action and that there is a move away from the consideration of the ‘old’ politics of labour and union as key components of political contention. In this case, ‘old’ politics meaning factors such as economic discontent, including labour issues, wage distribution, working conditions, among others (Edwards, 2004; 2009).

These distinctions of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ politics of social movements (Edwards, 2004) in my opinion are not productive. Instead, it seems more plausible that the labour politic and the new social movement politic are two sides of the same coin, and together influence the formation of the collective structure of a movement. These themes work in tandem with each other to create a more defined social movement platform and this facilitates the creation of the open space of accountability. This new space is a place where actors may work to legitimize the questions and actions which would give form to the movement. The questions and actions are both shaped by and derived from broader social structures and they seek to transform them.

Movements such as the *Mau Mau* movement (1940-1952 when it was banned), the December Twelve movement (1974-1985) and the *Mwakenya* movement (1987-2001), while immensely understated, played a major role in the struggle for independence as well as the subsequent struggle for political inclusion and freedom during the *Kenyatta* and *Moi* regimes



(1963-2001). Although the *Mau Mau Movement* is a guerrilla organization, the struggle for freedom they advocated and the subsequent impact of state repression they experienced has some common features with social movements. This entailed the single party regime of *Daniel Moi* that sparked the 1982 attempted coup and the subsequent shift to multi-party politics in 1992. These movements, while demonstrating a strong will for social change, were met with the repressive forces of the political elite. During these periods, the detainment of political prisoners was highly prevalent. Many assassinations were also conducted such as the killing of *Dedan Kimathi Waciuri*, a key figure in the *Mau Mau* movement who was hanged by the British in 1957; and *Karimi wa Nduthu*, a figure in the *Mwakenya* movement met his end in 1996 during the *Moi* regime (Kinyatti, 2008). Political leaders such as *Tom Mboya* whose death in 1969 is considered an assassination and the obscure death of the Foreign Minister *Robert Ouko* in 1990 are indicators of the perceived threat to the ruling regimes of the times these movements posed. *Tom Mboya* played a major role in the struggle for independence both within the Pan-Africanist movement which he helped to found, as well as within the *Mau Mau* movement.

Other examples include the previously mentioned Green Belt Movement led by *Wangari Maathai*, which uses peaceful demonstration to promote environmental and social justice. During her staged sit-down in *Karura* Forest she was forcibly removed by the authorities. Even though the demonstrators did not act in any way violently, they were met with force and brutality. Other cases of police brutality include instances where she was beaten unconscious, was imprisoned and was also subjected to death threats (Muthuki, 2006). In the mayhem that followed, she lost some of her hair as it was pulled out and some of her supporters were injured.

The strikes of the University of Nairobi students provide another example. The University of Nairobi students have undertaken many strikes over the years. However, the peaceful protests

were often met with violent state repression. The police disperse the crowds using tear gas and force, but the citizens usually fight back. They threw stones and various other harmful objects which in turn led to more forceful reactions from the police. It was in this context that the post-election violence of 2007-2008 resulted in the destruction of property, the physical and verbal abuse between groups of people from ethnic communities in conflict. The brute violence of the authorities in subduing the masses represents the volatile nature of the society as well as their relationship with the authorities. The culture of government crackdowns on protests and the current retaliation by the protestors is one of the key factors that led to intense violence in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 elections.

These movements illustrate historic cases of retaliatory violence by the government in power. For this reason, the present form of social movement is a strategy that departs from the more confrontational forms of protestation and leans toward a more unobtrusive form of self-representation. In the present-day Kenya, two social movements take on these diverse spheres of social collective action. The main case study is the “I Am Kenyan” movement, which I consider a “silent” movement. Another analogous movement is known as Pawa 254 and is one that uses film, art, music, and theatre as a medium for promoting social change while at the same time empowering youth through promoting their work in the budding artistic field of the country.

## 2.7.2 Social Movements and Social Media.



Figure 3: #Occupy Wall Street:

<http://business.financialpost.com/business-insider/rolling-jubilee-how-occupy-wall-street-aims-to-bail-out-the-99>

Social media has facilitated the growth and expansion of the fields within which social movements and organizations operate. This emerging platform has provided a space whereby actors within social movements are not limited to and by, physical geography. It has provided a landscape where interaction cuts across borders, diminishes hierarchy, and creates a forum with a sense of equality (Juris, 2012). Social media is facilitating a shift from the more blatant and visible forms of protest-organization to forms that are more flexible and sustainable and in some contexts, much more strategic (Juris, 2012). Social media enables the mobilization of individuals into action. Using social media, target audiences can expand and contract depending on the desired effect of the movement. This in turn facilitates higher levels of collective identity and leads to widespread collective action. It is a new avenue in which the possibilities have expanded exponentially. For

instance, in the case of the “*#Occupy*” movement, the level of interaction on social media was widespread and this in turn facilitated a domino effect in which, “*#Occupy Wall Street*” moved into broader territory in that it impacted other locales all over the world aside from Wall Street. This resulted in protests in more than 80 countries (Juris, 2012).

Social media has facilitated the evolution of social movements, shifting terrains from a logic of networks to a logic of aggregation. The movement is from a landscape that brings communication, interaction, and the coordination of collective actors, to one that includes individuals from diverse backgrounds within a physical and global space:

“...These individuals may subsequently forge a collective subjectivity through the process of struggle, but it is a subjectivity that is under the constant pressure of disaggregation into its individual components -- hence the importance of interaction and community building within physical spaces” -- the logic of aggregation (Fox, 2009 as cited in Juris, 2012:266).

The logic of aggregation that Fox describes is one that illustrates the subjective nature of social media based interaction; while collective action continues to be pursued as a goal, the participants may not be completely invested. Thus, the process of social interaction both within a physical space as well as online, provides the optimum form of collective action. These frameworks vary in terms of the cultural logic and influences that come into play. Movements within the sphere of the logic of aggregation, such as that of *#Occupy Wall Street*, have a wider reach and gather participants from a broad geographic expanse. While the experiences of these actors may be diverse, they gather according to a shared interest so it is likely that the nature of opinion held within such groups is more homogenous than within any community that shares only geography. The like-mindedness of people within a community of interest creates a platform for

communicating with a clear and collective voice, which provides a new paradigm of public debate, where numbers matter.

There are key components that reflect the influence of new media in protest such as the use, by participants, of the Guy Fawkes mask, which is a symbol of resistance from the film and graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (Coleman, 2012). This mask played a major role in resistance, due to its association with the Anonymous movement and the values that became loaded into its visible symbols. The Occupy protests spanned a few weeks and the constant sharing on both social and mainstream media carried the messages of the movement to all corners of the globe. The news reports and social media messaging prompted other demonstrations under the banner of “occupation” and eventually led to a global day of action that included on-the-street protests in 82 countries (Juris, 2012).

The Global Justice Mobilizations against the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in Prague in 2000, and in Seattle in 1999 against the WTO (World Trade Organization) used list-serves as a mode of communicating and sharing information. This mode brought together individuals with shared ideologies, and “...through this communication and coordination thus helped give rise to a model of networked organizations based on decentralized coordination among diverse, autonomous collective actors” (Hutchby, 2001 as cited in Juris, 2012:266). The referral of the movement as a “Movement of Movements” or a “Network of Networks” became commonplace (Mertes, 2004).

The *#Occupy Wall Street* movement and the Global Justice Movements are different from that of the “I Am Kenyan” movement yet share certain similarities, such as the mobilization of individuals using social media. Social media acted as a platform for interaction and the sharing of information without the express need for physical contact between members. This has facilitated

less harm in the process of protesting and mobilization. Similarly, the use of symbolic representation provides a stronger impact in the “message” being perpetuated by the protestors. The use of the Guy Fawkes mask, as well as the “I am Kenyan” bracelets acts in a similar manner, as a form of reminder to those adorning them as well as to those who see them.

The impact of culture, history, and social norms has also led to a variety of differences within the context of protest. Yet the underlying current between all these varied forms of movements and their interactions with new media have brought about attention, visibility, and accountability to the repressive aspects of society and social culture (Bonilla, 2015).

Raymond (1999) postulates “organizations which design systems are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations” (Raymond, 1999:224). The culture of media activism in this context is revealed through its reflection of social culture, technological advancement and the diversification of society. These constructs have facilitated the growth of socio-cultural interactions, which have in turn influenced the culture of networking and the culture of technological advancements in communication. The impact of global justice movements over time has led to the development of social media constructs that create a forum for communication and self-representation autonomous from the structures of politics and governance; a democratic space of new and evolving global cultural scopes.

### **2.7.3 Waithood and Resistance.**

Youth in “waithood” (Appadurai, 1996) (Honwana, 2012; 2013) play a major role in the violence that was observed during the post-election violence of 2007-2008. The ever-increasing number of youth and students attending universities, and moving to the city seeking a better lifestyle, has resulted in many educated individuals who are having difficulty getting into the labour market which has shrunk over time due to an unstable economy. In most cases these

individuals are forced to take low-paying jobs and part-time employment that do not reflect their skills and are not stable enough to fully sustain them (Masquelier, 2013). According to the Kenya Youth Policy of 2006, the category “youth” refers to individuals aged 15 to 30. Despite that this marking is purely physiological, outside of administrative definitions, youth is determined according to physical, psychological, cultural, social and political criteria. When the National Youth Service was established in 1964, the government began to take into account youth demography when framing policy. In Kenya, youth in “waithood” refers to youth who have not moved out of home and have not yet started their own families. As illustrated earlier, the 2009 Census shows the rate of youth unemployment to be 15.8% for ages 15-19 and 13.1% for ages 20-24, while the total unemployment rate was 8.6% (Munga & Onsomu, 2014). As such, they have been used as tools by political leaders-through their interactions during rallies-to propagate ethnic tension and animosity. This resulted in the exploitation of youth through the promise of better job opportunities and more stable support during the post-election period of 2007-2008.

Youth in Kenya and throughout the world live in liminality while awaiting adulthood. The spatial and temporal scape (Appadurai, 1996) they represent is informed by social, cultural and economic marginality (Maira and Soep, 2005). According to Honwana (2012) the youth “showed strong awareness of the broader socio-economic and political environments that affect their lives. They are acutely conscious of their marginal structural position, and they despise and rebel against the abuse and corruption that they observe as the elites in power get richer and they become poorer” (Honwana, 2012:35-36). Subsequently, youth interaction with the political elite and their exploitation illustrate the subject position into which youth have been inserted, both as symbol of the future (who cannot act in the present) and as passive pawns to be used by those in power. They represent a threat to power in the sense that while it may seem that youth in this temporal state are

incapable of moving forward, they are instead coming up with new and innovative ideas that provide novel means within the socio-economic framework for achieving their ends. These creative forms of self-representation provide a sense of camaraderie and facilitate the creation of a sub-culture unique to the youth (Honwana, 2012).

One of Honwana's (2012) major arguments is that youth are moving away from the concept of party politics and are more in tune with social movements, in particular those that seek to make right wrongs such as corruption, bad governance, and unfulfilled political promises that are causing social unrest (Ntarangwi, 2014). This is reflected through the rising forums of youth led organizations that strive to bring awareness to both the youth and the citizens of the country. This has culminated in a variety of movements throughout the world such as the riots in Maputo, Mozambique in 2010, and the *Y'en Marre!* (Enough is Enough!) movement in Senegal which was protesting the third term of President *Abdoulaye Wade's* through an attempted change in the constitution. Similarly, the uprising in Tunisia that was sparked by the death of a young man named *Mohamed Bouazizi* in 2011, incited a few revolutions in North Africa such as in Egypt (Honwana, 2012; 2013).

While on a few occasions waithood has facilitated the rise of social movements, it has also led to the development of strong youth interactions and youth sub-cultures. For instance, in the case of the *Fada* in Niger, young men meet and talk to each other, providing support and giving advice related to their situations (Masquelier, 2013). As finances, ideas, technologies become increasingly globalized, new geographical scopes are opening. With greater access to information that used to be held by elders in the community, youth are increasingly able to actively facilitate their own representations and reconfigure their own identities and create their own cultural practices. "Youthful subcultures resisted and contested class oppression by creatively re-



representing cultural codes embodied in specific commodities and styles” (Hall and Jefferson, 1991, as cited in Honwana, 2013:2). For instance, in the Kenyan context, youth mobilization seems to be a combination of both the development of a sense of togetherness and the discontent that comes from inequality. The “I Am Kenyan” movement is one that seeks to bring both aspects together. Similarly, the social media context provides an added landscape that transcends geographical barriers. This creates a social media sub-culture rooted within the youth culture and context.

Youth endeavours and cultures are usually illustrated in a state of liminality, or waitthood (Durham, 2008). However, taking in the concept of “youth at risk”, the development of new forms of social interactions and economic knowledge accrued through youth risk-taking is one that steers the society into a new sphere of interaction and development, especially in a globally shifting environment (Jackson and Scott, 1999). These aspects of risk, temporality and hope as embodied by youth as the future (Carpanzano, 2003) (Farquhar, 2002) are quite relevant in the Kenyan context whereby the continuous development of the country and its exposure to western technologies and media, have provided a platform for the development of new youth ideas and cultures. It has also created a safe space for youth interaction away from the prying eyes of the “adults” especially through social media. This in turn has resulted in a new subculture of economic, communal interactions on a platform far removed from the expected, and one considered risky and faulty at best (Jackson and Scott, 1999).

The use of social media in the Kenyan context has created an avenue for economic and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth endeavours, both in the arts and the realm of the capitalist society. This is so much so, that new innovative endeavours in the economic sphere through social media sites and blogs are targeting youth as a market. Similarly, the “I Am Kenyan” community

as well as the Pawa 254 organization use this platform to facilitate both the agenda of the movement, as well as serve as a platform to promote youth self-development and empowerment. This was observed through my preliminary research as well as through my own experiences dabbling in youth entrepreneurial endeavours. This will be illustrated in Chapter four whereby I will give a brief overview of the various forms of social media entrepreneurial outlooks.

Youth agency plays a major role in this context as young people shape a new framework of social and cultural norms that suit their unique position in a liminal, transitional state. The process of navigating this scape is a challenge, and the companionship that comes from peer-to-peer relations facilitates the development of new cultural norms. Notions of rebellion, youth creativity and resistance are reflecting a stance against the already present cultural hegemonies within society. There is therefore visible marginalization of youth in society and this serves to illustrate the liminal state as described by Turner (1974). This state of liminality or waihood is described by Honwana (2012) as “youth perpetually waiting to enter into adulthood... neither dependent children nor autonomous adults” (Honwana, 2012:29). She goes on to describe waihood as a liminal space in which the young are unable to break into the realm of adulthood because of the exclusion from the labour market. This affects their financial autonomy and their capacity to create stable and independent homes. In turn, she illustrates how the process of waihood is in fact both creative and transformative (Honwana, 2012).

This representation illustrates the adaptive and innovative nature of the youth seeking alternative avenues for expression and fulfillment. The “I Am Kenyan” movement provides both a forum and framework that steers youth away from the traditional as well as socio-culturally accepted perceptions of the youth. This plays into political participation as well. Kenyan youth are perceived by adults as politically apathetic. Social media however provide opportunities for youth

to develop subcultures of interest and question the status quo in subtle ways (Cole and Durham, 2008). The nature of the “I Am Kenyan” movement, is to challenge the status quo in a subtle and unobtrusive way. In so doing, it limits generational interference and creates a sense of togetherness among youth who would otherwise be alienated.

The form of the movement, including the use of bracelets and other forms of jewellery and bodily representations and the use of social media to transmit messages and images both reflects and helps to create a culture of self-representation and self-identification. Youth bodies in this movement become the medium of self-expression and identification, without explicit speech acts. The lack of on-the-street protesting and the quelling of vociferous rebellious attitudes stems in part from already existing ethnic norms. My preliminary findings have revealed that increased ethnic awareness that has come about through increased contact between ethnic groups has had an impact on the marriage practices of the young which has resulted in amalgamations of different ethnic practices. It has also had an impact on generational structures. While tradition is a key component of everyday life, ideas about marriage are evolving especially concerning marriageability among different communities. The use of English and *Swahili* as lingua franca especially within the social media context, are facilitating communication across ethnicities. Greater capacities for and instances of communication are reflected in social media representations and new youth forms of identification which I will illustrate in detail in Chapter four.

Over the course of my interactions with the founder of the “I Am Kenyan” movement I discovered that the goal of the movement was to influence and empower youth socially, politically and economically. Pawa 254 has similar goals which I will address in the analysis section of the thesis. Pawa 254 actively promotes change by marketing art forms such as film, photography and

music. It organizes workshops that promote the training of youth in various art forms that can be sold online.

Kenyan youth do act as agents of social and cultural change but at the same time, this does not wholly describe youth agency. Empowerment is not limited to liberation from traditions but also includes youths' ability to shape and influence cultures and build on relationalities (Durham, 2002). "I Am Kenyan" and Pawa 254 both offer spaces for interaction and a forum for empowerment.

#### **2.7.4 Youth and Social Media Activism.**

Media as a platform that contributes to social change is a new and growing field in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. "Millennials" are actively involved in a virtual scape that complements their interactions in the social, economic and political spheres of society.

Facebook and Twitter are all-pervasive and are able to facilitate a sharing of information cross culturally. They are attractive because they appear to be safe spaces in which young people may come together from all walks of life to share their thoughts and feelings as well as interact with others of like minds without the necessity of travel.

According to Castells (1996) digital media and the digital age are creating a new reality, and this reality is "fundamentally altering the way we are born, we live, we sleep, we produce, we consume, we dream, we fight, or we die (Castells, 1996:31). Digital media has facilitated the development of new forms of communication and self-identification (Coleman, 2010) and therefore groups with imagined collective identities can in fact dwell in the sphere of digital media. Representation and identity in this context do not lose meaning even if they are situated within the realm of digital media. Media may act as a new scape of interaction and identification (Ingold, 2000). The core nature of the "I Am Kenyan" movement falls under this purview whereby the

digital landscape is one of the key components of collective interaction. The digital space in the Kenyan context transcends the physical boundaries of land and nation and extends to an international scale wherein individuals in the diaspora participate as if they were physically present.

The issue of “armchair resistance” whereby the participants are alleged to be passive is a common charge in debates about the efficacy of digital media action. Digital media environments can be impersonal and superficial. The ease of entry and exit from digital spaces without detection, the facility with which an online petition may be signed, and other means of online protesting can stand in for action in the real world and result in apathetic participants at one extreme. At the other end of the spectrum are narcissists who reduce all action to self-promotion and invest only in causes that which will yield self-interested gains. Positioned between these poles on the continuum, there are individuals who are doubly removed, in the sense of being online and away from “on-the street” action, and out of the country and unlikely to directly experience the day to day ramifications of protests in their home countries. This adds a layer of complexity to the analysis as the dynamic among members of the diaspora may be to romanticize the home country, or to hold it up to some impossible ideals fuelled by the “invented traditions” impulses described at length by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Bernal (2005) illustrates that the relationship between the diaspora and information technologies are homologous in that “in both cyberspace and the spaces of diaspora.... location is ambiguous, and to be made socially meaningful, it must be actively constructed” (Bernal, 2005:661). How it is that these spaces are construed cannot be implied and must be interrogated through an investigation of how actors confer meaning upon these processes.

Awareness of the individual and group activity based on regularity and frequency is necessary in understanding cultural ways in which information is disseminated via social media sites. In addition to collective practices, individual experiences and practices play an important role in online interactions and in the development of cyber communities and networks (Postill & Pink, 2012:124). Individual and collective expressions and action exist online in a dialogical relationship, which creates a sense of direct participation that cuts across space and time (Bonilla, 2015).

### **2.7.5 The Silent Movement.**



*Figure 4: Photo by "I Am Kenyan" Project, posted on March 2013*

<https://www.Facebook.com/IAmKenyanProject/photos/a.306040149469911.68960.306030892804170/451982291542362/?type=3&theater>

The “I Am Kenyan” Movement is a dynamic youth led organization that advocates for the empowerment of youth within the Kenyan society as well as for the eradication of ethnic conflicts and divisions. The organization originally formed in the wake of the backlash of the 2007-2008 post-election violence. The massacre that occurred during that period affected both the nation and the international community. Subsequently, a young Kenyan outside the confines of their home country, struck by the brutality of the occurrence, began using social media. The movement began

to take shape through the support of family and friends, within and outside the nation. The selected medium of representation was social media and symbolic forms of representation such as physical adornments like wristbands and in some cases articles of clothing and even car stickers were featured. The organization's Facebook page describes its mandate as follows: it seeks to bring Kenyans together and to promote the Kenyan identity using photography. Another goal was to promote peaceful interactions for the 2013 general elections so as to avoid a recurrence of the violence that occurred in 2007-2008 ("I Am Kenyan "project, 2012).

Despite starting with images and photographs on the Facebook page, the organization has moved on to other visual forms of representation in the offline world. Participants have taken to wearing the wristbands and placing stickers on vehicle that were popularized on the site taking these online messages into offline public, semi-public and private spaces as a means of promoting awareness.

This study seeks to illustrate the nature of the "silent" movement as an emerging form of social resistance with a far-reaching impact, wherein collective action can take the form of seemingly insignificant embodied acts of adornment. The shift from media to embodied acts marks a particular form of collective consciousness in the making. The wristbands, for instance, have become a visual reference for national identity. I will observe these subtle communications as a form of 'body culture' to examine whether they are creating a sense of shared identity and creating awareness among those wearing them. The 'body culture,' which involves adorning oneself in the combined colours of the Kenyan flag, I will argue, represents an innovative way of mediating national identity. Wristbands in the colours of the Kenyan flag are evocative of an emphasis on national identity and this form of representation is not limited to the Kenyan context. Other African countries do share this form of embodied representation countries such as Tanzania, Zimbabwe

and other African nations. I have seen it more so in the diaspora, but it might also be prevalent in the home countries. The visible representations using the Kenyan flag holds a variety of meanings depending on who is wearing it and those who see it. Its innocuous nature makes it a safe tool for self representation, this is to say, while seeming like a simple bracelet to the mass population of those who see it, it might also hold a stronger and deeper meaning for the wearer. In this context, it is a safe tool in the sense that it does not draw unwanted government attention or facilitate ethnic tension. The presence of these types of bracelets in the African landscape illustrates the nature of African political oppression.

Malcolm Gladwell (2010) illustrates that social media creates ties that are less enduring but more expansive than those created through physical interaction or presence. He illustrates the lack of a hierarchy in social media, arguing that social media creates a sense of space for all voices to be heard equally (Gladwell, 2010:43) which democratizes space and time. Because people are geographically dispersed, however, their energies are spent connecting, rather than doing. Social media, therefore, creates connection and awareness, but there is less participation through action. The “I Am Kenyan” movement which specifically seeks to build awareness (rather than engage in protests) and which seeks gradual change fits this niche. While it does not require participation through action on the street, the act of donning the wristband provides its wearer with a mnemonic device that binds one, through remembrance, to the nation in the same way that wearing fabrics with particular colours or designs binds one to a particular ethnic community. This tactile mnemonic facilitates a focus in perspective that is subtle but influential – it is like wearing a team uniform that others readily recognize. By examining how media practices influence social interactions, I will be able to better illustrate the contextual nature of the movement. This research



will examine social media interactions or media practice as a vital form of sub-cultural formation (Couldry, 2004).

Mass media representation of the “I Am Kenyan” movement marks the beginning of the movement’s decline. The “I Am Kenyan” organization’s growth and decline are highlighted in its social media trail. This is further expounded upon in Chapter four, but it is important to note that the movement does in fact meet a period of decline in its activity due to various factors that are highlighted in my analysis section. The factors that contribute to the social movement’s decline are its assimilation into the mainstream, diminishing online activity on the movement social media sites and the aging of youth out of the liminal state of waithood.

The decline is illustrated in the widespread use of Kenyan Flag bracelets which now lack the “I Am Kenyan” signature logo. The changing bracelets convey how national identity has grown despite the decline of the movement. Youth may be contributing less to online forums as they age out of waithood. The former movement members are moving on to opportunities in employment and self-development. This differs from the Pawa 254 organization which began, and still operates, with a business model. Pawa 254 provides opportunities for youth empowerment and development through the arts and scholarship and learning opportunities which help youth exit liminality.

#### **2.7.6 Resistance and the Silent Movement.**

People use social media as a form of resistance in Kenya because they are marginalized. Social media provides a good alternative for those who have experienced police brutality or media misrepresentation at their on-the-street protests. Youth who were disparaged and/or misrepresented have been drawn to the “I Am Kenyan” movement. According to Bonilla (2015) these youth “...seek to document, contest and ultimately transform their quotidian experiences by simultaneously asserting the fundamental value and the particularity of their embodiment both on

and off line” (Bonilla, 2015:9). The “I Am Kenyan” site provides a safe space in which youth interaction can occur, knowledge can be shared, and information disseminated.

The term “safe” is used in this context to illustrate that while social media does not provide complete anonymity, there has been no government backlash in relation to these organizations. The online spaces in this context are safe. The wearing of the bracelets in the public sphere has also not been a cause for concern in terms of governmental retaliation. The bracelets hold a double meaning in the context of representation. Participants in these organizations may wear the bracelets to portray a specific meaning or to express a meaning to themselves but this can be perceived differently within the public sphere. And for this reason, the double meaning behind these bracelets in its own way provides a form of paradoxical protection. This evolving form of representation is not limited to youth participants but includes other members of the society as well. Political leaders have no influence on these forums and social media spaces. Political participation and campaigns are not usually geared toward social media sites. This is currently changing with the rise of youth political leaders who are campaigning both online and offline while maintaining transparency and accountability.

The impact and influence of social media and digital media representation has led to the growth of political awareness. This in turn has facilitated the growth of resistance whereby the youth are currently developing new ways of illustrating social injustices that are not limited to social media sites. The impact these organizations have had over the years have facilitated a growth in youth political participation. For instance, the founder of the Pawa 254 organization, who had adamantly refused to participate in politics in 2012/2013, is now actively involved in politics in the 2017 elections. This is elaborated more in chapter four and highlights the growing impact and influences of social resistance through media activism.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Site**

The “I Am Kenyan” collectivized work is a dynamic youth-led organization that advocates for the empowerment of young people within the Kenyan society as well as the eradication of ethnic conflicts and divisions. It seeks to bring Kenyans together and to promote the Kenyan identity and peace. It represented a stand for peaceful interactions for the 2013 general elections. The organization formed out of the backlash from the 2007-2008 post-election violence and was established in 2012. Its leadership is based on the administrators of the page, and the participants are the people who subscribe to this page. There are those more active than others, who post numerous photos and attend events and there are ‘lurkers’ who are passively involved in the movement but retain their subscription. Individuals can participate in various activities and competitions posted on the page. Similarly, posts related to the organization are uploaded on the “timeline” of the social media page to promote an event or share that story through photos taken, or articles read online and shared. It could also include ‘memes’ that are relevant to peace and reflect the struggle against inter-ethnic conflict.

The research focuses on visual and virtual ethnographic analysis from both the “I Am Kenyan” organization and the Pawa 254 social media sites. I will argue that Kenyan youth use digital media politically as a tool to spread awareness. I will provide the cultural and historical context for these actions.

### **3.2 Sampling and Analysis**

I conducted the research on an online platform using the four stages of social movements as a tool for analysis (which will be described later). The field site for this research includes the

online platforms frequented by members of each organization. As a member of both organizations, I have had the opportunity to observe and familiarize myself with the social media platforms used. Positioning myself as a subcultural insider, I recorded the insights and observations I made as an online observer and occasional participant.

The use of visual ethnography will also be relevant to this study (Pink, 2001). The use of pictures on Facebook is a fundamental component of this research. To achieve ethical access requires that I seek permission from the founder of each organization as well as from the page administrators of the various social media sites to acquire consent and access to the photos that are archived therein.

In addition to these online settings, I am intimately familiar with Kenyan culture, into which I was born. While this provides me with better access regarding the use of language and certain cultural practices, it may make it slightly more difficult for me to objectify my perceptions and look upon Kenyan culture as an anthropologist might. This is true for any anthropologist who studies their own culture. The fact that I am a member of the diaspora creates both geographic and ideological distance from these movements, however, and more importantly, the methodological tools I have apprehended that permit me to suspend bias through rigorous reflexivity have prepared me to embark upon this study wherein I am seeking to disprove my hypotheses, rather than trolling for information to support my already held presuppositions.

### **3.2.1 The Four Stages of Social Movements.**

The four stages of social movement development will play a primary role in my data analysis. The rise and fall of social movements is predicated upon the four stages of social movement which are described as social ferment, popular excitement, formalization and

institutionalization (De La Porta and Diani, 2006:150). These four stages are also known today as emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization and decline.

The stage of emergence corresponds with the rise in public awareness about a social issue and the emergence of a recognized need for action. This stage is usually preliminary and involves various catalysts that would eventually lead to collective action. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, the supreme court ruling regarding segregation in public schools in 1954 and the arrest of Rosa Parks resulted in a spike of public malcontent. Similarly, in the case of the #Blacklivesmatter, the wrongful deaths in Ferguson and the killing of other young men of colour acted as catalysts for collective action. In the Kenyan case, the catalyst would be the post-election violence that ensued after the 2007-2008 elections.

The second stage is coalescence, whereby the organization/movement takes on the form of collective action. This stage is characterized by individuals actively coming together in an organized collective manner to tackle the social issues that are deemed to be salient and shared. Coalescence usually involves mobilization, and this facilitates the development of a structured movement. Rex D. Hopper submits that in this stage:

...unrest is no longer covert, endemic, and esoteric; it becomes overt, epidemic and exoteric.

Discontent is no longer uncoordinated and individual; it tends to become focalized and collective” (Hopper, 1950:273).

In the Kenyan context, the flurry of online activity after the 2008 elections was a clear indication of this stage. Similarly, the few meetings and events held offline are also an indication of high levels of collective action stemming from social media communication. Movements such as #Occupy Wall Street and the Global Justice Mobilizations as illustrated in Chapter two have reached this stage through their online platforms. The #Occupy Wall Street through its influence

on social media arrived at the coalescence stage quickly, and likewise the Global Justice Mobilizations through its use of list-serves and other platforms began to quickly generate a following.

The third stage is bureaucratization. This stage entails a move from simple collective action to a “formalization” of the movement (De la Porta & Diani, 2006:151). In this stage, the movement is proving successful in raising awareness for its causes. At the same time, the movement is becoming more organized and has access to resources that will help aid the cause. In the development of the “I Am Kenyan” organization, this stage does not follow all the steps, mainly due to collective action occurring on social media sites. The majority of the prerequisites of this stage are met through increased activity on social media, active branding of the message through symbolic representation (wrist bands and car stickers), and growing exposure and representation of the movement through increased visibility on other forms of digital media such as television networks, radio interviews, podcasts and YouTube videos. This includes the creation of a website specifically geared to meet the demands of the organization and overall continued support from the youth and those involved in the movement.

Movements such as the #Blacklivesmatter, #Occupy and the Global Justice Mobilizations all share a similar fate with the “I Am Kenyan” Movement at this stage. Their growth occurred within the framework of social media only. The #Blacklivesmatter, #Occupy, for example, demonstrated growth through the spread of the hashtag across countries and nationalities within the social media framework. Digital media activity was not limited to the movements’ locations of origin and spread to regions and individuals who could identify with the struggle. The nature and context of these movements also plays a role in the extent to which individuals become willing to serve the cause. Successful social movements are informed by social constructs that intersect

major social and cultural divides which can be identified as structural rather than individual (Miller, 1999). #Blacklivesmatter was focused on race and discrimination and resulted in smaller movement sub-cultures that arose on a situational basis. The #Occupy movement was informed by a sense of socio-economic justice and structured by moral outrage over class inequities. The strong themes began to coalesce once the information was spread via social and digital media exposure. This would later lead to widespread global collective action.

The fourth stage is the decline. This stage could occur for a variety of reasons such as repression, co-optation, success, failure or appropriation by the establishment and assimilation into the mainstream (Miller, 1999:305) The “I Am Kenyan” movement declined as a result of its appropriation by the establishment and assimilation into the mainstream. This form of decline entails that the goals of the movement become part of the status quo, they become associated with the establishment and they are absorbed into the mainstream, making it unnecessary for the movement to remain active in its present state (Macionis, 2001). Over the course of its lifespan, the “I Am Kenyan” organization met a variety of its goals, namely raising awareness about ethnic discord and supporting youth representation in the political sphere. After the 2012-2013 elections, it was clear that youth representation within the political sphere was changing. This was reinforced with the appointment of Uhuru Kenyatta -- the youngest Kenyan -- President with and the recognition of youth discourse in state level political debates. Similarly, the increased participation of youth, after the devolution of the country into counties, has led to increased participation within the political framework. Once youth achieved a place from which to speak in official places, the movement had met its goal and the online forum was no longer a necessity. This precipitated the movement’s abrupt end. The growth in youth awareness and participation, the assimilation of the forms of representation into the mainstream, and the use of digital and social media forums in

official capacities – for instance to campaign - by new youth political leaders are key contributors to the decline of the organization. The impact of youth participation is clear in the media representation of these elections wherein youth are not merely given a place to speak (in news programming for example), but are also themselves often the journalists posing the questions, writing and filming the stories, and offering political commentary from fifth estate establishment positionings. For instance, in 2017, photo journalist and the founder of the Pawa 254 organization chose to run in the 2017 general elections. Having adamantly refused to run for office in the 2012-2013 elections, he was actively involved in highlighting the violence that took place after the post-election violence of 2007-2008. As a photojournalist, his work reflected the need for unity as a nation (Dahir, 2017:3).

Movements such as the #Occupy and Global Justice Mobilizations declined after achieving their goals through mass mobilization. Juris (2012) illustrates that the #Occupy mobilized in 82 countries. The Global Justice Mobilization appeared in a variety of cities within the span of one year i.e. Seattle in (1999) and Prague in (2000) (Juris, 2012). The success of these movements paved way for social media action in other settings.

The stages of social movement development provide an analytic framework for observing the two Kenyan social movement case studies. I will employ these stages to determine to what extent they fall under the category of social movement or “armchair activism/slacktivism”.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations (informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality, potential risks)**

#### **3.3.1 Research Instruments.**

- The use of visual content analysis will greatly reduce the risks of exposure that would otherwise be present when dealing with participants and participant observation.



- My access is determined by the presence of the images on social media sites, which will be obtained through the approval of the site managers as well as the founders of the organizations.
- The photos derived from social media sites are already within the public eye. Their use in this research illustrates a grey area in the context of ethics and privacy. To alleviate this, permission will be sought from social media sites administrators who govern the pages.
- The majority of the data collected on the online platforms stems from my own social media pages. This will limit any use of personal information from other users of the media sites.

### **3.4 Participants**

- There will be no participants in this research. The observations will be conducted in the form of content analysis using the photos and text on my own social media pages as well as my personal activity in the study of the movements. I will not be engaged in ethnographic research mainly due to the nature of the field being comprised by anonymous social media sites and owing to time constraints. Interacting with data in this manner will illustrate the need for further study and for virtual ethnography as a tool for social media research (which this study does not represent).

### **3.5 Consent**

Consent is a very critical aspect of this research. I will seek consent from the page managers to use some of the photos from their sites. While the majority of these images will be gathered from feeds to my own social media pages, consent will still be required in the case of visual data use that infringes on the privacy of the other members of the organizations.

### 3.7 Risks and Benefits

The research was to be conducted a few years after the post-election violence of 2008 but amidst a new election in Kenya (2017). While Kenyan elections are tumultuous, the identities of individuals in the photos I use are indecipherable and therefore they are not exposed to any election-related violence by virtue of this study.

- In the case of anonymity and privacy, data will be held solely by the researcher in question, as well as stored privately by the said researcher. Access may be given to the investigator's supervisor in the case of an emergency but that aside, the data will not be shared or released to anyone. The names of the individuals participating in the research will be kept confidential for them not to be identified.
- The faces and other identifying features of individuals in photos will be altered so that they cannot be recognized.
- Any confidential data will be destroyed immediately after the data analysis has been conducted, to ensure that the report has been completed and no information could have been overlooked during this time frame. All forms of material that are linked to the confidentiality and anonymity of the study will be destroyed.
- The risks of photographic content analysis using photos that are already found in the public domain are negligible.
- The benefits of this study include contributions to knowledge about Kenyan youth movements.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

### **4.1 The four stages of social Movements**

The four stages of social movement development will serve as a research guideline in the analysis of the photos collected for this study.

These stages will allow me to paint a picture of a social movement using direct photographic inquiry. Direct photographic inquiry involves examining the corpus of pictures I collected as a whole while making note of my initial impressions and feelings. Next, I took an inventory of all the images by making use of categories that reflected the four stages of social movements. I followed this step with a structured content analysis. Finally, I engaged in a search for meaning using the four stages of social movements that define the photos' significance. To find photos I searched Facebook and websites affiliated with "I Am Kenyan" and Pawa 254, and monitored my own Facebook page for updates that were associated with these organizations.

A comparative analysis of the Pawa 254 organization and the "I Am Kenyan" movement, will help illustrate the nature media activism may take without mobilizing people on-the-street. Miller asserts that culture shapes social media and social media interactions, not the other way around (Miller, 2011:76). I argue that ethnicity and age are the two central categories culturally mediating Kenyan social media use in these movements. Class, however, is another important factor in social media use in Kenya. Youth participants in both the "I Am Kenyan" organization and the Pawa 254 movement are mainly members of working, middle and upper classes. The poor, the very young, and the elderly are not taking active roles within these organizations.

#### **4.1.1 Emergence.**

Both “I Am Kenyan” and the Pawa 254 came into being after the 2007-2008 post election violence. Their inception arose due to the socio-economic injustices that were observed during the post-election violence of 2007-2008. These two organizations share a wide range of similarities as well as differences.

The context of emergence in the case of The “I Am Kenyan” movement was initiated with a social media issued call to share images with the slogan “I Am Kenyan” as a means to show solidarity and support before the next general elections. The idea was that images shared on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and the organization’s webpage would evoke a sense of national identity that would encourage people to set aside their ethnic and other differences.

Various socio-cultural events were structured around “I Am Kenyan.” These events included food drives and youth led-development projects in places such as Kibera (the largest slum area in Nairobi). Other projects included youth forums and activities in universities. There were platforms for sharing art and music. Organizations such as AIESEC (International Association of Students in Economic and Commercial Sciences) and other university based youth-led social programs were affiliated and facilitated organizations such as the “I Am Kenyan” project as a means to promote social awareness of the ethnic divisivity within the country and the lack of political accountability. It was also a means to promote and encourage youth participation in a fair election. I managed to attend two events. One was held at my university, though it wasn’t quite an event as such but more a rally. The members of this organization had a booth outside the AIESEC offices, and were selling wrist bands and t-shirts with the slogan “I Am Kenyan” on them. I found this to be incredibly intrgiuing because the wrist bands, t-shirts and even car bumper stickers were all in

the colours of the Kenyan flag. The wrist bands were in four major colors; red, green, black and white.

My second encounter with the movement was in an art and music event that my brother told me about, that was being held at the University of Nairobi. One of my friends from high school was also a performer at this event and I was excited to see what the art scene would be like. In my own experience, art, music, poetry and writing were not common avenues for aspiring young adults to take and therefore I was incredibly proud and impressed by the people involved in this gathering. It was an art exhibition with various artists displaying different forms of art such as drawings, paintings, and photographs. The themes of the pieces varied, but the majority of the work centred around youth empowerment and the issues revolving around ethnic tensions. This exhibit was supplemented by a period of beautiful music and a brief seminar on youth awareness and political participation. Coincidentally, we found a large booth outside the venue distributing wrist bands and t-shirts related to the “I Am Kenyan” movement. After this second encounter, I found their Facebook page and began to follow the organization. My discovery of “I Am Kenyan” was by chance, and was determined by virtue of my connection to someone who knew of it. What I subsequently learned about it came from my own research on Facebook.

I stumbled onto Pawa 254 differently. I found out about this organization when I was finishing my university courses. The term Pawa isa colloquial term for “power” and the numbers 254 represents the country code. What fascinated me about this movement was not the symbolic representation of Kenyan identity on wristbands, but rather the use of digital media and film as means to promote a message of peace. Members of this movement used art and poetry and film to express their discontent with socio-economic injustices. At the time, I didn’t quite realise they were a movement due to the fact that they operated more as a for-profit business. Also, Pawa 254

occupied offices they also rented spaces for events and seminars that they held. The organizers of Pawa 254 were also involved with a variety of projects related to film production and major art exhibits within the country. They held forums and seminars on the various ways individuals can improve their art, and they provided different opportunities for aspiring artists and writers to build their craft and become “artists.”

On Twitter and Facebook Pawa 254 posted different events and opportunities to learn about and discuss art such as filmography and photography. Opportunities for scholarships with various organizations and art exhibits were linked regularly on their Facebook page and on Twitter. They held screenings of movies that sought to empower and promote national identity, and raise awareness of social injustices such as slave labour, child abuse, and even gender bias. The postings and events covered a wide range of topics and provided a forum for discussion and communication among members. These films were local films and while some had garnered international acclaim, they were selected for showings because of their common focus on social injustices. Some of these films included *Nairobi Half Life* (Tykwer et al and Gitonga, 2012) and *He Named Me Malala* (Dill et al, and Guggenheim, 2015).

My initial impression of these movements led me to view one as a social movement (“I Am Kenyan”) and the Pawa 254 organization as more of a business endeavour, though one informed by an awareness of social justice issues.

#### **4.1.2 Coalescence and Beauractization.**

While at the time my interest was solely personal, I kept tabs on the Facebook pages of the two movements. When it finally came down to my research for my Master’s thesis, I realized this would be very interesting, mainly because my initial undergraduate research was based on youth

political awareness. I actively began to follow the pages more closely.

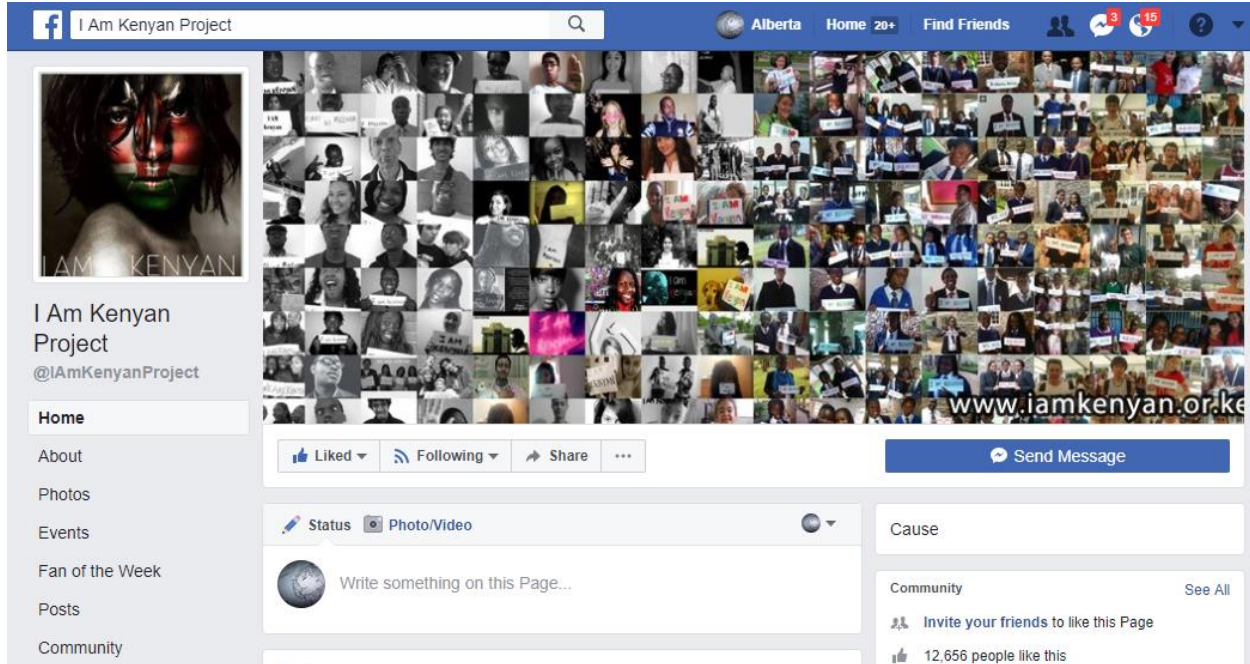


Figure 5: "I Am Kenyan" Facebook homepage: <https://www.Facebook.com/IAmKenyanProject/>

My initial instinct was to follow the developments of the “I Am Kenyan” organization and this came to be the main focus of my research. Above is the image of their Facebook homepage. The cover photo as illustrated above illustrates the use of photography as a bid for peaceful representation. In April 2012 when the organization was forming, a bid for photos with the slogan “I Am Kenyan” was posted. This was mainly as a means to advocate for peace in the upcoming general elections of 2013. The images became popular among the online Kenyan community. With the growth and recognition that the movement began to gather, it took on a new momentum and that is when the bracelets and the car stickers began to become more prominent.

Being affiliated with their homepage on Facebook meant I got a variety of notifications regarding various activities that would appear on my timeline. At this point I began to notice how dispersed the organization was in terms of the people involved. There were posts from Kenyans

from different parts of the world advocating for peaceful representation in the 2013 general elections.

The Pawa 254 Facebook homepage, on the other hand, while embracing a similar message, was focused more on art, film and photography as a form of income generation. The organization is not a stand alone social movement. It seems to have started out as a business that sought to promote art, film and photography in a conscientious way. The films and the images used by this organization are geared to promoting awareness of the present social injustices in the country.

The name Pawa 254 is derived from the English word “Power” which is turned to “Pawa” in the Kenyan slang. The numbers 254 are the country code. It is common to use the numbers to reference the country. As illustrated in the logo, the name also bears the colours of the Kenyan flag. The Facebook page as illustrated below has multiple hyperlinks to other social media sites such as Twitter and the organization’s webpage.

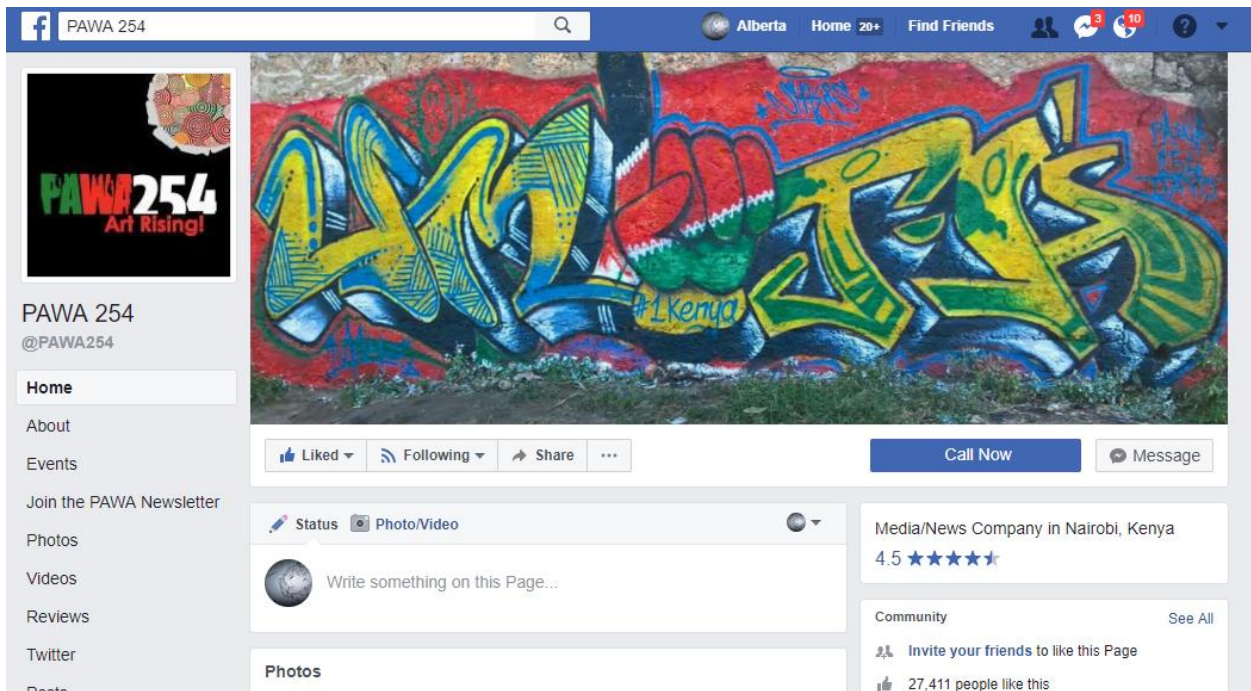


Figure 6: Pawa 254 Facebook Homepage: <https://www.Facebook.com/PAWA254/>



My interest in Pawa 254 began when it was mentioned as being somewhat affiliated with the “I Am Kenyan” organization. Pawa 254 first appeared on the “I Am Kenyan” Facebook page as a link to a blogging site in May of 2013. Over time it grew in prominence in its own right and became a forum for communication and discussion for those who follow the page. The organization posts seminars, online discussions, blogs and articles related to issues regarding social injustices. They also frequently post forums related to the promotion and development of various art forms such as film and photography. The two movements had pages linked on the regular to other sites and forums that provided a platform for discussion. These sites varied depending on the choices made by the administrators and the topics that they wanted to discuss. For instance, on April 14<sup>th</sup> 2012, the first post of the “I Am Kenyan” organization went online. It was uploaded with the phrasing “take action now!!! Send us a photo of you on a plain background with the words “I AM KENYAN” on a piece of paper, making a funny, happy or silly expression.” On May 28<sup>th</sup> of 2012 the “I Am Kenyan” organization posted a call for videos submitted to the Youtube page affiliated with the organization. Similarly on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2012 a few weeks after the “I Am Kenyan” organization first went online on Facebook, they posted again on their timeline a call to upload images with the slogan “I Am Kenyan” for anyone interested in participating.

The Pawa 254 organization had similar postings on their timeline, but these were interspersed with social events such as film viewings, seminars and calls for discussions online. Links to various articles related to social injustices would be posted and a call to discussion would be posted in tandem with the articles. Links to radio podcasts, concerts, and art exhibits as well came up frequently on the page. Opportunities for scholarships and participation in film or art were also be posted. On June 16<sup>th</sup> 2017, for instance, with the upcoming elections later in the year, there was a posting regarding the National Cohesion and Integration Commission of Kenya. This was a

platform to discuss ethnic relations and interactions. Similarly, on July 11<sup>th</sup> of 2017 Pawa 254 posted a link to an article by Bonnie Chiu concerning political activism. The Pawa 254 webpage provided greater accessibility to tools related to their goals and their target audience as illustrated below:

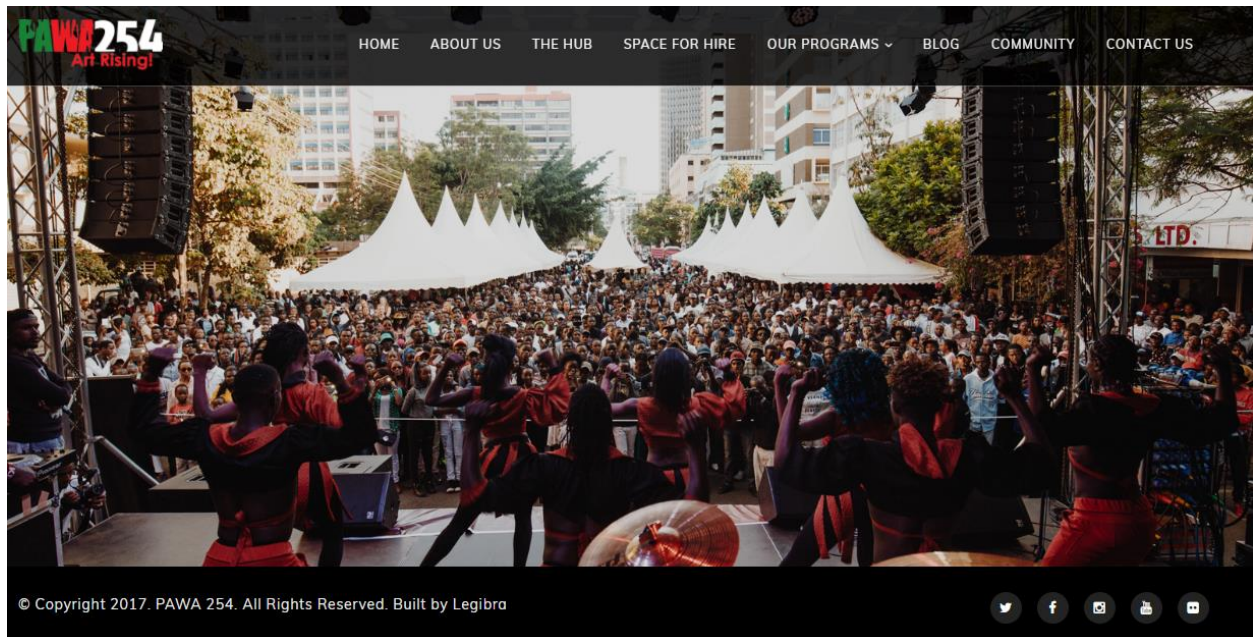


Figure 7: Pawa 254 Homepage: <http://pawa254.org/>

The Pawa 254 homepage hosts a variety of tabs that provide access to engagement with the organization and its events. At the bottom of the page, there are a variety of links affiliated to their social media sites. They also have a communication forum, whereby those who have questions or queries could submit a detailed email and expect to receive a response within an hour.

Both organizations have supported the increased interest among youth in participating online in discussions regarding political awareness and social justice. Both organizations issued calls to ethnic tolerance and peaceful youth participation in upcoming elections.



*Figure 8: Images of the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence from Pawa 254 Facebook page: accessed 28/10/2017*

This images above appeared on the Pawa 254 Facebook page and served as a reminder of the post election violence that was experieined in 2007-2008.

The 2012-2013 general elections were accompanied by an increased rate of online activity. The “I Am Kenyan” organization drew attention to this interest in online communicating and themselves drew a significant amount of news media attention. Radio journalists conducted interviews at the events organized by this growing organization. While the orgnization was in its emergence stage, much of its activity was limited to social media sites. From my observations as both a “lurker” and a participant on social media sites, I learned that many members of “I Am Kenyan” were not located in the Kenya and quite a few were also in university.

One of the challenges in doing online content analysis is the vast array and availability of resources. Digital media is constantly changing. Social movements that use list-serves and emails, moreover, are structurally different than movements which use platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, which while being more interactive, have an internally contradictory quality in that they can be both more personal and simultaneously more impersonal. Without physical presence and contact, these organizations seem to be less interactive in certain social aspects (Gladwell, 2010).

The ease of access to information on the social media pages of these two key movements would lead to a variety of links, articles and events that I found interesting but I had no idea would be affiliated with social media activism. The Google Search results also yielded a variety of results and links that led to various forums affiliated with the organizations. A comparison of the two Google searches also shows the level of activity of the two organizations. It can be observed that there is a visible decline in the “I Am Kenyan” organization while the Pawa 254 organization shows continued growth and activity.

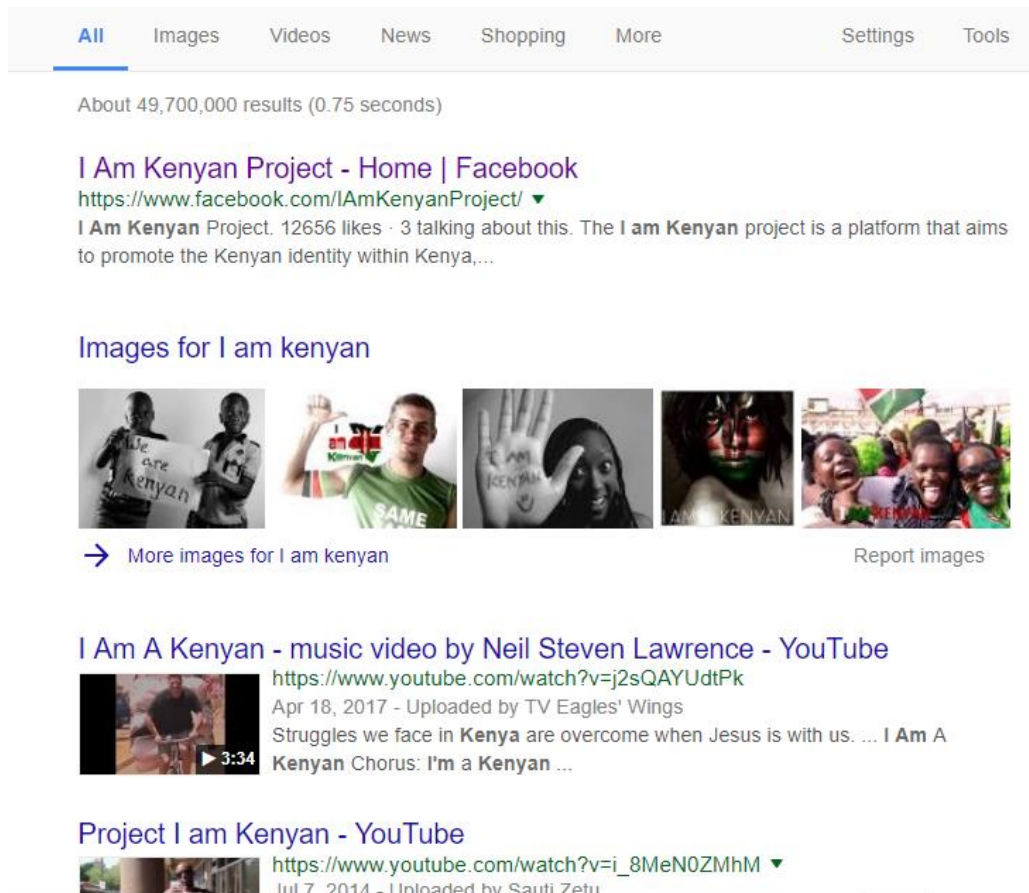


Figure 9: Google Search results of the "I Am Kenyan" Movement

[https://www.google.ca/search?q=I+am+Kenyan&rlz=1CIGGRV\\_enCA751CA752&oq=i+am+&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j69i60l3j69i57j0.1691j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.ca/search?q=I+am+Kenyan&rlz=1CIGGRV_enCA751CA752&oq=i+am+&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j69i60l3j69i57j0.1691j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

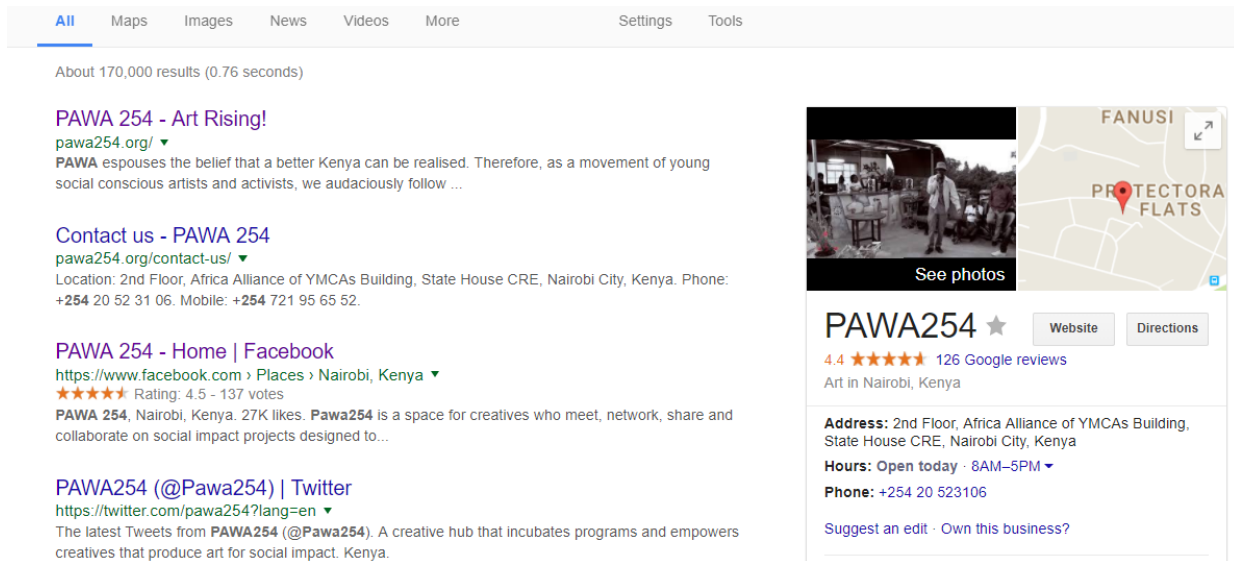


Figure 10: Google Search Results of the Pawa 254 Organization

[https://www.google.ca/search?rlz=1C1GGRV\\_enCA751CA752&ei=QhcKWv\\_qLsvQjwSQrYjYDw&q=pawa+254&oq=pawa&gs\\_l=psy-ab.1.0.35i39k1j0i67k1l3j0l6.75663.76585.0.78232.4.4.0.0.0.549.1039.0j1j0j1j0j1.3.0....0...1.1.64.psy-ab..1.3.1038...0i46i67k1j46i67k1j0i131k1.0.HSFXhJZU5kg](https://www.google.ca/search?rlz=1C1GGRV_enCA751CA752&ei=QhcKWv_qLsvQjwSQrYjYDw&q=pawa+254&oq=pawa&gs_l=psy-ab.1.0.35i39k1j0i67k1l3j0l6.75663.76585.0.78232.4.4.0.0.0.549.1039.0j1j0j1j0j1.3.0....0...1.1.64.psy-ab..1.3.1038...0i46i67k1j46i67k1j0i131k1.0.HSFXhJZU5kg)

#### 4.1.3 Decline.

Over the past few years, I have observed a decline in the activity of the “I Am Kenyan” movement. After the peaceful 2012-2013 general elections, it became increasingly clear that the level of social awareness regarding ethnic tension and discord has increased. Granted this did not necessarily mean that tensions were completely eradicated, but it was a testament to the post election violence of 2007-2008 that there were strong levels of social awareness. Many Kenyans were keen on avoiding a similar state of unrest or violence.

During this period I began to notice that the posts on the “I Am Kenyan” Facebook homepage were becoming less frequent. At first I thought it was due to the increased political awareness within the country, but even with the elections upcoming elections in 2017, the movement had a low level of activity. I then noticed that even the movement webpage had been taken down as illustrated below:

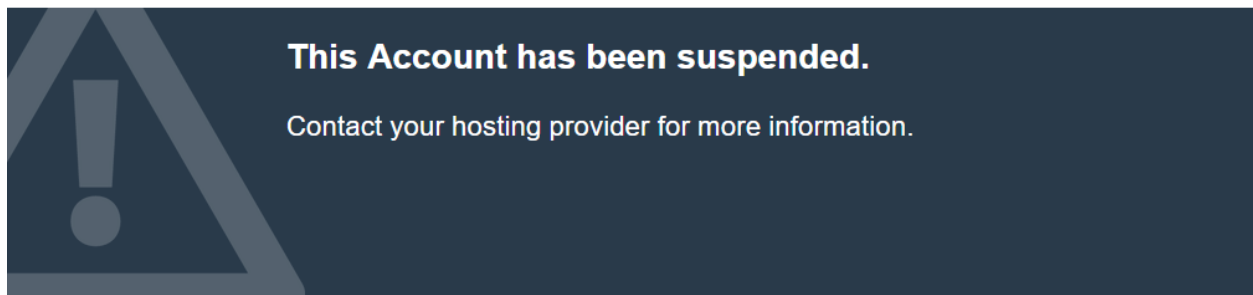


Figure 11: The "I Am Kenyan" webpage <http://www.iamkenyan.or.ke> accessed from the "I Am Kenyan" Facebook homepage.

The absence of activity on social media sites has not led to the complete eradication of the movement, however. Its members still feature prominently on the Facebook page and on Twitter and other social media sites. While the postings are infrequent, they are still relevant to the social issues that Kenyan youth are encountering in their daily lives.

The Pawa 254 movement, on the other hand, remains as active as it was in the beginning. The frequency of postings on the site tend to rise during periods of tension such as the months building up to the election period of 2016-2017. The posts were concerned ethnic tolerance, accountability and visibility in the electoral process, youth participation in the political sphere and peaceful elections across the board. Pawa 254 also continues to maintain postings regarding art exhibits and filming opportunities for those interested in the visual arts.



## **Chapter 5: Analysis and Conclusion**

I would assert that the “I Am Kenyan” youth-led organization is a silent movement. Because its activity was limited to social media sites, and non-discursive signification through the wearing of wrist bands and the placement of car stickers, it corresponds with the definition of a “silent” movement. It is more than a mere form of slacktivism because the activity it supports in terms of speech events has made a great impact in the development of a Kenyan identity among the youth.

I would argue that the Pawa 254 organization is also a silent movement. Its emphasis is on art as a forum for creating social awareness and promoting social change, and it uses social media and other art forms as a means of promoting change. These activities are responses to the historical impact of violence and state repression. While the use of social media is an emerging platform in social movement development, the Kenyan organizations illustrate the situational influences that have led to these unique forms of mobilization. These movements have also facilitated collective action and mobilization outside the sphere of social media interaction. While not all participants are as actively involved as others, the same could be said of all social movements. The forms of mobilization Pawa 254 supported did not involve peaceful protests in public spaces, but were charity events organized by the members of the movements to create awareness and promote unity. These events had an impact insofar as they gathering individuals together through shared symbolic representations, into places where they were able to exchange key messages of peace, political integrity and Kenyan unity.

The terms “armchair activism/slacktivism” do not completely apply in either of these contexts. Participant involvement was a key practice in promoting peace. Both online and offline participant activity was frequent and represented a wide range of individuals. Youth participated

frequently in public events held by both organizations, and in the social media framework. In instances of collective action using social media, the level of participation varies depending on each individual and on events that are occurring. It is difficult to characterize group participation as “armchair activism/slacktivism” if individuals are acting independently. Because the organization has no hierarchy, leaders may emerge and recede, take on particular roles or delegate, and participation may occur in other online platforms that are not necessarily linked to the movement, despite that the goals may be aligned. The nature of online group activity is definitely an area requiring future research.

The two organizations utilize symbolic representation as their *modus operandi*. The use of bracelets, car stickers and the slogan “I Am Kenyan” play a key role in identifying the issues of ethnic conflict within the country. The Pawa 254 organization uses digital media and other art forms as the means of promoting their symbolic representation of the discord within the country. Art exhibits are staged to promote social awareness. Films and podcasts provide a means of sharing these themes broadly.

Youth involvement and participation in these movements is therefore not entirely influenced by their liminal status within Kenyan society. From the data collected, a comparison of the two movements indicates that youth involvement includes individuals who are past the point of liminality. It is probable that the individuals originally involved in the “I Am Kenyan” organization were liminal youth. The reason for the decline of this organization is likely due to the ageing out of “youth in waiting,” who moved from the liminal stage to positions of adulthood in the established order. This, coupled with its assimilation into the mainstream, where other bracelets lacking the “I Am Kenyan” slogan with the colours and the symbols of the flag are becoming more common. The increase in awareness about ethnic divisions, the growth of youth participation in political



spheres, and the birth of a Pan-Kenyan identity signalled the decline in the need for a social movement. While the movement declined it did not cease to exist entirely. Rather, online activity simply diminished. The “I Am Kenyan” Facebook page is still relatively active. Its activity increased with the 2017 elections.

On the other hand, the Pawa 254 organization illustrates youth involvement and participation not being strongly influenced by “youth in waiting”. The organization operates under a business model, and successfully engages in activities that bolster business interactions and promote youth empowerment. It therefore acted as a buffer for those within the liminal stage, creating a safe space of youth self-empowerment through art.

The decline of the “I Am Kenyan” organization occurred for a variety of reasons. Aside from the participants ageing out, the goal of promoting ethnic awareness and Kenyan unity was met. It is possible to consider that this shift in the form of the “I Am Kenyan” organization is not entirely a decline in the full sense of the word. This organization in its own way has caused a change in the status quo creating an emerging symbol of national identity that can be considered Pan-Kenyan. This unifying symbol acts as an illustration of the form the organization has taken in its assimilation into the mainstream.

In contrast, the Pawa 254 organization is still actively involved in youth political participation and social awareness. It continues to act as a business platform while maintaining its stance on art as a consciousness raising opportunity. It is very likely that the demography of the participants in the Pawa 254 organization is not limited to youth. It is also possible, that it continues to exist because the economic disparities have not been resolved and its goals have therefore not been accomplished. Pawa 254 is thus still “becoming” while “I Am Kenyan” had been realized.

Political awareness that has arisen due to these organizations has led to an increased demand for fair and democratic elections as illustrated in the 2017/2018 general elections. It has also led to youth activity within the broader framework of political participation. This in turn has revolutionized political participation by providing a framework for political representation on social media sites.

The main impact of these organizations has been to influence youth participation in political spaces. This has increased over the years, and ever more so after the 2012/2013 elections. The collective wearing of the bracelets has contributed to a shift in understanding of the concept of national identity. The dynamic of social media discourse has also changed and evolved over time. Both during and after the 2012/2013 general elections, media interactions have emphasised the need for ethnic unity and political accountability and transparency. This has been illustrated in the 2017 elections, where there was increased scrutiny of the electoral process and a demand for transparency.

My observations of the “I Am Kenyan” organization have led me to suggest that its decline may be attributed to increased awareness overtime. The 2012/2013 elections were an eye-opening experience in terms of the number of young people who participated and voted. The embracing of the organization by the mainstream is evinced both in the use of the bracelets and the informed discussions that began to take place among youth and the wider community regarding the devastating impact of ethnic tensions. The concepts of ethnic discord and of a Pan-Kenyan identity have become a routine component of daily discourse, especially during election periods as is illustrated in the years after the post-election violence of 2007/2008.

Youth both voted and ran for office in the 2012/2013 elections and continued to do so in the 2017 general elections. The “I Am Kenyan” movement provided a training ground for youth

to develop various skills of social resistance. They were able to take these skills and put them to use in official political fields. Youth began to run for office and to exercise their civic right to vote. That the movement declined denotes its success not its failure. Youth who ceased to be active on “I Am Kenyan” social media sites did not simply retreat into the background and become apathetic. Instead, they used their new skills and the new networks they developed on these sites and at the events they promoted to promote peace, to advocate for youth interests and to usher in a new era of politics characterized by fair elections, a well-informed electorate and equal representation for all.

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