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Ooko, Gloria Anyango

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UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

EXPLORING POWER STRUGGLES IN ONLINE SPACES: A STUDY OF SELECTED POLITICAL WHATSAPP COMMUNITIES IN KENYA.

Gloria Anyango Ooko

Supervisor: Prof Dina Ligaga

Thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies

School of Language, Literature and Media Studies,

Faculty of Humanities,

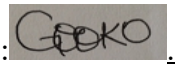
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

December 2021

DECLARATION

I, Gloria Anyango Ooko, student number 1769821, declare that this thesis titled; Exploring power struggles in online spaces: a study of selected political WhatsApp communities in Kenya, is my own work that is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Except where reference is made in the text of this dissertation, this dissertation contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis or any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of this thesis and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signature: .

Date: 02/12/2021

Ethics clearance number: H17/10/19

DEDICATION

To “Connie,” my dearest mom. Your love still abounds despite your long absence. Continue dancing with angels.

To “Wuon Nyamuok,” my dearest dad. Thank you for your immense love and support. You are more that I could ever imagine a father to be. *Nyasaye omedi ndalo babana.*

To my dear sisters; Dortellah, Nancy and Iddah, for their unwavering support.

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To my dad, dear sisters and the rest of my family, thank you for the emotional and psychological support. May God reward you all.

I am grateful to the University of the Witwatersrand for funding my tuition through the Post Graduate Merit Award and to SLLM for financial support.

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Finally yet importantly, I would like to thank a dear friend, Dr. Westen Shilaho Kwatemba. The effort you put into reading and editing my work and your constant encouragement went a long way into making this journey worthwhile. May the Almighty grant the desires of your heart.

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Figure 1: An analytical model of the political approach to media participation

ABBREVIATIONS

ADMIN	Administrator
AIP	Access Interaction Participation
CA	Communication Authority of Kenya
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCK	Communication Commission of Kenya
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
COK	Constitution of Kenya
COK	Constitution of Kenya
DMA	Discursive Material Analysis
DT	Discourse Theory
DT	Discourse Theory
E2EE	End-to-End Encryption
EADF	East Asembo Development Forum
EADF	East Asembo Development Forum
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoK	Government of Kenya
HCI	Human Computer Interaction
HSS	Hegemony Socialist Strategy
ICT	Information Communication Interaction
IMEI	International Mobile Equipment Identity
IT	Information Technology
KF	Kabula Forward
KF	Kabula Forward
KTN	Kenya Television Network
MCA	Member of County Assembly
MIM	Mobile Instant Messaging
MP	Member of Parliament
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

NTV	Nation Television
QR	Quick Response
RCD	Remote Control Device
SMS	Short Message Service
SNS	Social Networking Sites
TV	Television
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
VCR	Video Cassette Recorder
VHF	Very High Frequency
WELL	Whole Earth Electronic Link

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ABSTRACT

A free and accessible media is indispensable to citizen participation in democracy and development. In post-colonial Kenya, free media is elusive. However, the advent of social media technologies is disrupting this hegemony. The citizenry can participate in content creation and dissemination and exercise political power. Specific to this study is how WhatsApp, a smart phone instant messaging application, has popularized mass messaging by citizens through its group formation affordance, a model that has the potential to reinvigorate participatory democracy in Africa. This study conceptualizes WhatsApp groups as WhatsApp communities and considers two such communities in Kenya; Kabula Forward and East Asembo Development Forum. The study uses discourse-material analysis to explain how affordances availed by WhatsApp influence users' online community membership (right to participation, identity negotiation and sense of belonging) in political discourses in Kenya. Theoretically, the study holds that in any social interaction lies power struggles. This study analyses how WhatsApp discursively provides both free spaces and technologies of control. This netnographic study employs qualitative interviews (both online and offline), background listening and focus group discussions to collect multi-modal data in the human-technology WhatsApp community assemblage. Findings show that "new media," as social media and other digital media are often referred to, are a remediation of old media, not only in terms of the modes of communication they avail but also the power hierarchies they create in the media ecology and the society. For instance, while participants construct WhatsApp as a free space, certain affordances, and conventions such as the administrator convention, create modes of structural and discursive exclusion in WhatsApp communities. Through the share-ability affordances, hegemonic political discourses previously sedimented in the old media are remediated into the so-called free spaces, threatening emerging modes of participation, identification, and construction of sense of belonging to a community. In the process, dislocations which could potentially provide new ways of meaning making and re-politicization of sedimented discourses are hindered. As such, WhatsApp through what I term as a techno-trope (a neologism of technology and rhetorical tropes) process, acts like an "open- label" placebo would, where participants metaphorically construct WhatsApp communities as free spaces despite experiencing the control and exclusions the technology affords. In other words, the very affordances of WhatsApp which enable discourses of freedom, also constrain them.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

The spread of internet, especially social media applications, has made it possible for people to form communities in which proximity is not the key determinant of membership. These communities have adapted internet technologies to become more virtual, adopted new features made available by internet technologies to reshape conventional communities, while simultaneously retaining many features evident in conventional communities. Social media applications are spontaneous in their creation, yet these accidental innovations are changing the way people participate in politics. For instance, when Mark Zuckerberg developed Facebook, he was not in it for the money, nor did he wish to create a platform for participation in politics, he simply wanted to facilitate communication with his friends (Alef, 2010, p. i). The story is similar for WhatsApp, an application developed by former employees of Yahoo who were "rejected by Facebook," and had their start-up later acquired by Facebook Inc. (Olsen, 2014*).* These two are among other successful social media applications which came into being through "chance and reasoning" (Merton & Barber, 2004).

Despite their serendipity, these social media applications have become a popular media for political participation, especially when they act as tools that enable common people to create communities. Although Armstrong and Hagell (1996, p. 86) had noted years earlier that the idea of community was a point of focus since the inception of the internet, social media applications have made it easier for people to actualize what the authors imagined. Indeed, it is Web 2.0 that should be credited with the ability to create fluid communities, what Jones (1998) described as cyber society, Rheingold (2000) refers to as virtual communities while others call online communities.

Rheingold (2000, p. 5) describes virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace." In some studies, the term "digital

community is used instead of virtual communities. Avance (2016, p. 3) defines digital community as "disembodied cyberspace…which is ephemeral, united around a shared interest or identity rather than a particular virtual location". Virtual communities on the other hand, refers to "a quasi-geographical location (ibid, p. 65). Following the inconclusive debates on the difference between virtual[1] and digital communities, (For a more expansive discussion, see Avance, 2016) I follow Avance's (2016) recommendation that one uses the term online community instead as an "imprecise but useful stand-in" (p. 66). Other than following this recommendation, Feenberg's and Barney's (2004) definition of online communities as long-term and significantly stable groups mediated by the internet effectively describe the nature of EADF and KF WhatsApp communities. Moreover, Preece's (2000) argument that the nature of an online community is determined by the social interaction of community members as well as the design of the software (media) which mediates the interaction, also supports the choice of using "online community" in this study. Nevertheless, these terms are used interchangeably in literature. Of importance is that these boundary-less online communities enable membership.

In this study, I define community membership as not only the right to join but also participation, identity construction and sense of belonging by participants globally who may have certain ties with the local agenda or place that the online community has been imagined around; the phenomenon of the translocal (Appadurai, 1995; Carpentier, 2007; Chiumbu, 2014). The concept of membership, as defined in this study, brings with it the notion of power. Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali (2013) argue that understanding the distribution of power among actors is crucial in the discursive analysis of participation in all contexts. In Anderson's imagined communities, the notions of power and politics of inclusion and exclusion are clear. Communities considered themselves cosmically central through a "sacred language, which linked them to a super terrestrial order of power" (2006, p.13). Knowledge of Arabic, for example, admitted one to the Islamic Ummah (community) while that of Latin qualified one to be admitted to Christendom, as these communities had confidence in the uniqueness (translations were not permitted) of these sacred languages. The internet-based media like WhatsApp is for virtual translocal communities, what

[1] There will be references to virtual and digital communities in this thesis if that is how scholars I cite refer to them, in such cases, virtual or digital communities will mean the same as online communities.

the spoken language was for sacral imagined communities, and print revolution was for imagined nations.

This study is premised on the understanding that power struggles (occasioned by objective discourses attempting to sediment hegemony and antagonisms) are inherent in any social set up (Carpentier, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Foucault, 1982; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). It, therefore, seeks to explore power struggles in a translocal context, among members of two online WhatsApp communities in Kenya namely East Asembo Development Forum (EADF) and Kabula Forward (KF). The two WhatsApp community cases were purposively selected for their instrumental value, given that their goal is to hold their political leaders accountable, denoting a relationship of power. Moreover, since the said political leaders are members of the WhatsApp communities alongside with the ordinary citizens (non-political elite), demarcating the boundary of *us* vs *them* and rendering the communities political ones, this situates them within the realm of the political which drives the theoretical lens of this study. The study also considers the influence of the material (WhatsApp application) and government action on these power struggles as parts of the community assemblage.

1.1Background of the Study.

1.1.1 Defining WhatsApp.

WhatsApp is defined as a cross platform Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) service for smart phones accessed through the internet (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Ndedi & Kingsely, 2017; O'Hara et al., 2014). Owing to their important networking function, WhatsApp, Facebook, Viber, WeChat, IMessage and other social media are also referred to as Social Networking Sites (SNS) (Williams et al., 2009; Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). WhatsApp, pun on the phrase, "What's Up" was founded in 2009 by two engineers, Jan Koum and Brian Acton who previously worked for Yahoo (Kingsely, 2017). WhatsApp was later acquired by Facebook. Over time since its inception WhatsApp has become extremely popular worldwide gaining millions of users, overtaking other instant messaging services like Viber and Yahoo Messenger (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014) except for China and South Korea where WeChat and Kakao Tal provided by local MIM service companies are dominant.

WhatsApp started as an alternative to the relatively costly SMS sent from mobile phones (Makinnen et al., 2014). As opposed to the traditional SMS, WhatsApp messages are "[…] multimedia messages transmitted over the Internet, non-stop to the telephone operator" (Barhoumi, 2015, p. 222). On its inception, users would subscribe for free in the first year and pay a fee of 99cents$ in the subsequent years (Wani et al., 2013). In 2016, however, downloading WhatsApp technology became free, what may be charged is data bundles by the mobile company which the user has subscribed to. WhatsApp is relatively cheap compared to SMS especially when communicating with people abroad (Barhoumi, 2015). Some scholars have argued that "mobile phones are almost always the cheapest and quickest way to communicate" (Etzo & Collender, 2010, p. 659). This also explains findings that show high rates of mobile phone ownership in Africa (Wasserman, 2011) and their use to access other media forms like the radio, internet, and television (Chiumbu, 2014; Mitulla et al., 2015; Nassanga et al., 2013; Willems, 2013).

The phenomenon of increased mobile phones for Africans, particularly Kenyans, contributes to this study, since majority of WhatsApp users access WhatsApp on mobile phones as opposed to desktops (Ekine, 2010; Etzo & Collender, 2010; Hahn & Kibora, 2008; Wasserman, 2011). Even the use of WhatsApp on desktop requires synchronizing the desktop to the WhatsApp account of the user's mobile phone using a QR[2] code. The desktop therefore simply becomes an extension of the smart phone. In fact, studies on the role of social media networks like Facebook and Twitter in agitating for democracy in Africa usually acknowledge mobile phones as the main enabling factor (Mare, 2015). Elsewhere in the UK, O'Hara et al. (2014, p.1) have noted that "the elevated levels of smartphone adoption have been particularly noticeable, since they provide perhaps one of the most powerful platforms for accessing combinations of communication modalities."

Smartphones also allow for media convergence. At the inception of WhatsApp, one could only send texts but currently users can exchange images, voice and video calls, location, documents in

[2] A QR (Quick Response) code is "a two-dimensional barcode that is readable by smart phones" (Kieseberg et al., 2010, p.79). The code enables a smartphone to display and compose text, open a URL, and save contacts (Kieseberg et al., 2010).

various formats, among others via the app. Moreover, an end-to-end encryption (E2EE)[3] security on the WhatsApp platform ensures that no one apart from the intended parties can read or listen to the information transacted. This is a crucial factor to consider in the case of Kenya, and other African countries characterized by government surveillance (Moyo, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003; Tendi, 2016). In Kenya, the E2EE on WhatsApp messages therefore provides a "safe haven" for people to communicate freely compared to other media forms. For example, the government through the Communication Authority of Kenya (CA), formerly Communication Commission Kenya (CCK), carries out surveillance to monitor private emails (Privacy International, 2017) to check what they claim is an increase in cybercrime. Mobile phone users are monitored through the IMEI[4] codes as it is a requirement that they must register their mobile numbers against their national IDs, failure to which their SIM cards are blocked.

CA wrote to mobile service providers in Kenya and informed them of their intention to install monitoring equipment in their companies to capture text, voice and other personal identity details and transmit it to monitoring equipment at CA offices. The government claimed that by doing so they would be able to impound counterfeit mobile devices. In July 2017, before Kenya's general election, the then Chairman of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) announced that they were investigating hate speech on 21 WhatsApp groups and threatened to arrest administrators of groups accused of hate speech (NTV-Kenya, 2017). And indeed, some WhatsApp administrators have been arrested in relation to the discussions and activities of members of the WhatsApp groups they administrate (Nairobi News, 2017). This could mean that certain features of WhatsApp which contributes to its privacy like the end-to-end encryption may not be fool proof as WhatsApp/Facebook claims.

WhatsApp has certain affordances which determine how it is used. WhatsApp may contribute to power struggles in the two virtual communities. This means that WhatsApp does not only play a

[3]End-to-end encryption (E2EE) is a "data exchanged between two communicating parties is encrypted in a way that only the sender and the intended recipient can decrypt it, so, e.g., eavesdroppers and service providers cannot read or modify messages" (Onwuzurike & Cristofaro 2016, p. 2)

[4]The International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI is a unique number used to show the genuineness of 3GPP, iDEN mobile phones and some satellite phones (Jha & Krasner 2008).

"neutral" role of providing a virtual space for community engagement but also has agency of its own which manifest as affordances. The concept of affordances was first put forward by perceptual psychologist Gibson (1979) who argued that an affordance is the possible actions an environment offers (whether good or bad) to an actor, but its existence is independent from the actors. Whether and how an affordance is perceived is however dependent on the capabilities of the actor (Chemero, 2003). This means the actor must have the ability (agency) to perceive the affordances if they are to be useful to him/her. Since then, the concept of affordance has been used to explain various notions, especially how communication technology is used in social sciences. Studies show that unlike how the internet and other information communication technologies (ICTs) were initially perceived, they are no longer separate social technical systems (McLuhan, 1964; Wellman et al., 2003) but are part of the social process itself (DiMaggio et al., 2001; Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Howard, 2002; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Norman (1988) introduced the use of affordance to the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and design field (Pellegrino, 2018). To Gibson's (1979) conceptualization of affordance as action possibility, Norman (1990) adds how that action is conveyed to users, what he termed as "perceptible" affordance (p. 12). In other words, the nature or materiality of an object determines its use. Consequently, objects exercise agency in their use alongside the user's agency of choosing and implementing an action. For technology, the user manuals provided by designers also make it easy for users to identify the perceptible affordances. For instance, the most obvious function of WhatsApp perceived by users is communicating through texting because of the keyboard that appears immediately you tap into a WhatsApp page. This makes texting, the most perceptible affordance of WhatsApp. Another example of a perceptible affordance is the *emoji* which is also known as emoticon or smiley (Sanchez-Moya & Cruz-Moya, 2015). Emojis are a variety of images (now include other objects not only human faces) which depicts emotions of WhatsApp users. To a certain extent, emojis address the discourse that SMSs and MIMs are not as effective as face-to-face communication because they are handicapped when it comes to expressing emotions and non-verbal cues.

However, perceptible affordances are not the only affordances. Gaver (1991, p. 80), like Norman (1988, 1990) who also considered the materiality of an object as suggesting its use, identified "hidden" affordances and "false" affordances in addition to perceptible affordances. Hidden affordances are capabilities an object or technology has which even its designers did not realize existed. As a result, the designer does not provide information about them either through nature of designs or user manuals. This makes the affordance to remain hidden and can only be inferred from other evidence. For instance, the ability of using a mobile phone to transfer money (the *Mpesa*[5] innovation in Kenya) remained hidden until a user discovered it in the process of interacting with the mobile phone. False affordances on the other hand are created when information makes people to perceive non-existent affordances. Norman (2013) further argued that other than providing affordances technology also has constraints which prevent certain use. However recent studies on affordances go beyond Norman's binary of affordance/constraints and consider affordances in terms of variability (Evans et al., 2017) and as "resources-enabler-informational entities activated through people's agency" (Pellegrino, 2018, p.77). These arguments are in line with reconceptualisation of affordances as "constraining affordances" (Durante, 2011) which recognizes the dual action possibility of affordances (Floridi, 2007, 2011; Pellegrino, 2018). In the case of this study, WhatsApp affordances possibly contributes to the construction of these communities as free spaces while at the same time constrain this very freedom, constructing a discourse of control.

Of significance to this study is the group forming affordance of WhatsApp that enables users to create online or virtual communities where members can discuss, share information, and strengthen relationships. Communities are formed by an "administrator" who then adds members and is the only one who can remove members from the group. The "administrator" can make other members administrators with powers to significant extent like those of the founding administrator. A WhatsApp group has a maximum of 256 members. How these communities are formed informs power relations and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. These aspects are discussed further in the review of literature.

[5] The M stands for Mobile while Pesa is the Kiwahili word for money.

1.1.2 Overview of the Kenyan digital context and how it speaks to power struggles.

Kenya's history of censorship and surveillance of the media and citizens is long (Ogola, 2004). Kenyan citizens have always found alternative means of countering mainstream media narratives and hegemony through popular culture, music, football, public minibuses and so on (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1987; Ligaga, 2012, Mukhongo, 2014; Ogola, 2004). It is understandable therefore that Kenyans, especially youth, have embraced new media initially theorised as democratic and free. Social networking sites like Facebook are favourite sites for activists and the general citizenry to lampoon, castigate and hold the government accountable which is difficult to do through mainstream media. WhatsApp has also increasingly become popular since most Kenyans consider it a "safe site" impenetrable to all controlling government. It is a false affordance since the internet which enables WhatsApp is not immune to surveillance and capitalism dictates (cf. Fuchs et al., 2011).

Further, the rapid development in the ICT sector has also contributed to the increased use of technology in Kenya. Nairobi, Kenya' capital city, is dubbed the "Silicon Savannah." It hosts iHub which is one of the most successful technology hubs in five African countries; South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, and Morocco (Telegraph, 2016). The Communication Authority of Kenya (CA) sector report for the period June-September 2019, released in April 2020, showed an increase in internet subscriptions by 4.1 per cent to 52 million people up from 49.9 million the previous quarter. Of these, 99.3 percent were mobile data subscriptions. This is a large number of subscriptions considering the latest United Nations estimates which puts the current population of Kenya at 53,771,296 (Worldometers, 2020). Reports from CA over the years have continuously shown that Kenyans access internet through mobile subscriptions attributed to increasingly affordable smartphones and data bundles provided by various service providers (CA, 2017). Other sources of internet access include terrestrial wireless, fixed cable modem or fixed fibre optic. This is significant data given that in Kenya, like other parts of Africa, social media sites like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter are accessed mainly through the mobile phone and the mobile phone is associated with internet connection in Africa (Ekine, 2010; Etzo & Collender, 2010; Hahn & Kibora, 2008; Wasserman, 2011). Mobile phone service providers, Safaricom and Airtel, have also contributed toward providing easy and affordable access to internet through mobile phones and wireless data which are an impetus to growth in internet subscriptions and penetration (CA, 2017).

Kenya's policies, particularly the 2006 ICT policy, created an environment for digital advancement including the national ICT infrastructure frameworks like the undersea fibre optic cables, development of Technology Park and Innovation Centre, Konza (ongoing), and the government, in collaboration with the private sector, is working to develop Konza smart city, software and hardware incubation centres among others (Mitulla et al., 2016) further increasing the number of Kenyans on the internet and internet based MIMs like WhatsApp.

The statistics on the current number of WhatsApp users in Kenya is unknown. However, it is estimated that more than half of mobile phone users in Kenya use WhatsApp (Henry et al., 2016). Moreover, internet access and mobile phone subscriptions show exponential growth every year (CA, 2019, 2021), this has a direct impact on WhatsApp use as it is accessed through mobile phones. Majority of studies on WhatsApp in Kenya have concentrated on how people use WhatsApp without looking at politics or agency of the platform. For example, a study on use of WhatsApp by Community Health Workers (CHWs) in collaboration with their supervisors in Kibera and Makueni in Kenya, demonstrates the ease in using WhatsApp for "virtual one-to-one, group, and peer-to-peer" forms of supervision and support with" minimal training" (Henry et al., 2016, p. 311). In another study investigating whether Pharmacy students at Kenyatta University in Kenya get the time to engage with social media, Ogaji et al. (2017) found that WhatsApp was the most used app to reach friends and family by the students followed by Facebook.

The nature of research on WhatsApp is however, changing and moving towards political deliberation. Omanga (2019) finds that WhatsApp has provided a platform for participation in political discourse not just in the virtual space; but that online organization sets the stage for offline action. This study seeks to contribute to the thin literature on the materiality of social media technology in Africa, specifically how this technology mediates and influences the nature of the power struggles in WhatsApp communities.

1.1.3 The elusive free space of political participation in Kenya.

Works on the impact of internet and social media in the expansion of the democratic space in Kenya, usually trace the beginning of the realization of this impact to the proliferation of mobile phones which resulted in mobile applications such as *Mpesa* which revolutionised banking for ordinary citizens (Ndemo & Weiss, 2017) and access to internet and consequently information. During unprecedented violence following disputed elections in 2007 digital platforms like *Ushahidi* (Swahili for witness) were critical in this regard (Ndemo & Weiss, 2017; Nyabola, 2018). Moreover, developments in the telecommunications sector exemplified by laying of fibre optic cable, in operation since 2009, and favourable policies have also contributed to access to digital media. However, I argue that developments in ICT or the advent of the internet, in and of itself, does not account for the adaption of internet/social media use in Kenya. Digital media and its use are a present-absent phenomenon fuelled by the lack of and need thereof of an alternative free media space through which ordinary Kenyan citizens could get information and articulate their political demands. The development of the *Ushahidi*, "a ground-breaking information-gathering, visualization, and interactive mapping tool" (Ndemo & Weiss, 2017, p.3) for instance, is a case in point. Its developers, Erik Hersman, Ory Okolloh, Juliana Rotich, and David Kobia designed the app to document eyewitness account of the 2007/2008 post-election violence at a time when government had blacked out local media and outlawed its reporting of gross human rights violations.

Indeed, previous studies have established that Kenya's media ecology is strongly intertwined with its political history (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1987; Mbeke, 2008; Ogola, 2011). Digital media is a part of a larger media ecology and thus cannot be analysed in isolation. Couldry and Hepp (2018, p. 40) in their mediatization theory underscore this argument by stating that each wave of mediatization whether mechanization, electrification or digitalisation "captures a distinctive way in which the constellation of media generally available at a particular time and place operate as an environment-not only through upcoming 'new media' but also through continuing 'old media'." The critical- political- economy approach, for instance, calls for a comprehensive analysis of media which not only focuses on media ownership, control, and technical efficiency but also historical analysis and "moral questions of justice, equity, and the public good" (Golding & Murdock, 1996, p.14).

Previous accounts of media development and democracy in Kenya have analysed these aspects. They focused on the institutional politics, and foregrounded historical state surveillance of traditional media and citizens. They have also discussed how ownership concentration and restrictive legislation have infringed on democracy by inhibiting participation (e.g., Frederiksen, 2011; Golding & Murdock, 1996; Makali, 2003; Mbeke, 2008; Ochillo, 1993; Ogola, 2011). However, the technological materiality aspect has been largely neglected even though they add to the historicities of an elusive free space in Kenya consequently, contributing to the need for and adoption of social media apps like WhatsApp for political purposes. This is not to say that analysis of media should take either a symbolic or material trajectory, but both. After all, media technology is both an artefact (material) and symbolic (Silverstone, 1994). Materiality includes the physical aspects of technology and factors such as space/place where they are positioned in the country, the politics of technology in other words.

Broadcast media, especially the television, has historically not been appropriated by ordinary citizens for political participation in Kenya. This can be explained in part from a political-economic lens and through a techno-cultural lens, in particular what Silverstone (1994) refers to as a double articulation. Explaining this concept through a "moral economy of the household," Silverstone (1994, p. 82-83) argues that,

> Television is doubly articulated into a household because its significance as a technology depends on its appropriation by the household both as an object (the machine itself) and as a medium. As an object, it is bought and incorporated into the culture of the household for its aesthetic and functional characteristics, and it is displayed (or hidden) in the public or private spaces of the household, and collectively or individually used. As an object the television becomes both an element in national and international communication network and the symbol of its domestic appropriation. As a medium, through the structure and content of its programming as well as through the mediation of public and private spheres more broadly, it draws the members of the household into a world of public and shared meanings as well as providing some of the raw material for the forging of their own private, domestic culture. In this sense through its double articulation, the medium does become the message, though that message is not pre-given by the technology. It is worked and reworked within the social circumstances under which it is both produced and received.

Following McLuhan (1964), Silverstone (2004) reiterates that the medium is the message. Therefore, how people interact with and perceive the television, influences what they appropriate it for. As an object, the television in Kenya was and is still a prized household possession both by those who can and cannot afford it. This is mainly attributed to its high price compared to the radio. Television is valued as much for its information as for aesthetic value. Before the liberalisation of waves in the 90's when Kenya had only one television broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC, formerly Voice of Kenya, VOK) (See Mbeke, 2008; Mc'Ochieng, 2000) it was common to strategically place TV sets centrally in living rooms and cover them with decorative clothing, only to be uncovered in the evening for news and entertainment programming, as that is the time when programmes were aired. Additionally, it is viewed less as a medium through which ordinary citizens can articulate their political demands and more as a source of information, a one-way communication process. This can be attributed both to its technological limitation as how TV is structured, and functions render it less interactive and the resulting "traditional monologue broadcaster –to-viewer relationship" (Ambala, 2017, p. 120).

Moreover, what goes into the production process in broadcast media can also act as an inhibiting factor to freedom and participation. Williams (1974/2003, p.86) argues that the static and planned programming flow in radio and television is the "defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form." It means that broadcast media is not positioned to be instantly accommodative of changing audience interests as is the case on social media where participants can change the direction of a conversation instantly. Programming in broadcasting rarely changes, save for interjections to accommodate say "breaking news," which too focuses on the broadcaster's interest to be the first to relay a "scoop" as opposed to audience's interest. To further reiterate the uninterrupted flow which characterises television programming, Williams argues that concept of "interruption" is no longer applicable in describing the intervals between one programme and another, usually filled in by music or advertisements, which are considered part of the planned flow. Still, many users consider these fillers interruptive (Williams, 1974/2003). One can therefore argue that lengthy advertisements slotted in between prime time news items, given the high viewership, interrupts the flow of information. This could result in loss of interest among viewers whereas political participation requires sustained flow of information.

Although Williams' idea of television flow was conceptualised within a particular context at a time when television used Very High Frequency (VHF) and Ultra High Frequency (UHF) transmissions, with no cable, video cassette recorder (VCR) or a Remote-Control Device (RCD) (Uricchio, 2005), the concept can apply to the current Kenyan context. More so if we think about it in the sense of flow of hegemonic political and cultural ideologies. Ambala (2017), having studied various television programmes of different formats including news, from four television stations in Kenya namely Citizen TV, KTN, NTV and KBC argued that the programmes neither fully "invite the ordinary people" to participate in their production nor include them in the "narration of the everyday" meant to build up a banal Kenyan nationalism. Instead, ordinary people are invited to participate only in minimalist ways (see Carpentier, 2011) while much focus and airtime is given to elites (political, media, celebrities) who fit into the traditional "newsmaker" role. He therefore concluded that the broadcasting discourse in Kenya remains as "exclusionary, hegemonic and elitist" just as it was in its inception during the colonial era (Ambala, 2017, p. 140). Kenya might have moved away from the days when KBC was the only broadcaster but, not much has changed regarding inclusion of plurality of voices. Forms of participation remain within the minimalist realm just as it was with KBC whose only semblance of audience participation was "greeting programmes" where audiences exchanged greetings by use of cards.

Radio, however, has an advantage over television as a source of political information that enhances its democratic and social development potential. This is attributed mostly to its wider reach amplified by communal consumption and low cost of production (Al-hassan et al., 2011; Meyers, 2008/2009). It therefore appeals more to citizens as a medium through which they can articulate their demands aided by mobile phone technology. The presence of several community radio and vernacular radio stations in Kenya is also important in terms of focusing on local political and developmental issues and use of language that most people can understand and resonate with. Though it does not have the visual element, the element of sound gives it an edge over print media which requires literacy for consumption even though the latter was more appropriated for political activism in pre-independent Kenya. Community radio has however over-taken the print media in this regard given their more inclusive nature as ownership and production in this case is in the hands of ordinary people. An example of this is Pamoja FM located in Kibera, Nairobi, which was

pivotal in promoting peaceful co-existence among the different ethnic groups inhabiting the area post 2007/2008 post-election violence (Okinyi, 2018). But radio like television also has technological components which play into hegemonic relationships pushing other users to the periphery. Some studies show that the use and control of RCD for instance, further perpetuate stereotypical gender constructs (see Copeland & Schweitzer, 1993; Konig et al, 2008; Walker, 1996).

The print media in Kenya has been vibrant in the attempt to create an informed citizenry and speak truth to successive oppressive political regimes since the colonial period. During the colonial period, collaborative effort from like-minded Indian and Africans gave birth to several alternative papers which urged communities to resist the efforts of the colonial masters to subdue them (Frederiksen, 2011). The clarion call was not to passively accept information from colonial masters as the "truth" but instead to cultivate a culture of actively engaging with texts, seeking alternative truths which the oppositional texts were offering. Examples of these texts include the first newspaper in vernacular, in Kikuyu, *Muigwithania*[6], edited by Jomo Kenyatta, who later became the first president of Kenya; the *African Standard*, owned by a prominent Kenyan businessman of Indian ancestry, A. M. Jeevanjee; the *Indian Voice* (1911-14), the *East African-Chronicle* (1921-22) among others which supported the works of Kenyan struggle leaders. At the center of these collaborative efforts to produce "resistance" print was most importantly the investment of time, creativity, innovation, and money by individuals and not merely the being of print technology (Barber, 2009; Frederiksen, 2011). However, the existence of another technology, that of transport and communication infrastructure in the colony, meant that the Indians brought by colonialists (and not ordinary Kenyans) who worked in the production and service lines of this sector and later engaged in print, gained valuable skills, technical ability, to exploit the print technology (Frederiksen, 2011).

Despite these texts providing alternative narratives to those perpetuated by colonialists, they are still embedded in a non-participatory top-down model. Both the Indian and African politicians and

[6] The Reconciler

publicists behind these texts came from a smaller group of educated and more influential "sub-elites" or "neo-masses who relied on skills as opposed to patronage to influence the rest of the community (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1979, p.223-4 cited in Frederiksen, 2011, p.159). What this means is that these texts unintentionally ended up being exclusionary to the illiterate (who were in the majority during this period) or those who did not understand a particular vernacular some of the texts were published in. In post-colonial Kenya, activist texts are associated with civil society organizations, lawyers, dissidents; notable examples being *Nairobi Law Monthly* then edited by Gitobu Imanyara and the now defunct, *Society* edited by Pius Nyamora. These were among prominent anti-establishment publications during one party dictatorship under Daniel Moi. However civil society in Kenya is no longer as robust. It is embedded in ethnicity and patronage which militate against their ability to hold the state to account and act as a prop for democracy (Bodewes, 2010; Mueller, 2008; Odhiambo, 2004). As noted by Odhiambo (2004, p. 41), "civil society in Kenya is a conduit for individual primitive accumulation without accountability to the civic community on whose behalf it purports to speak." It is no wonder that most robust civil society leaders and members during the Moi regime were absorbed into the ruling elite upon Moi exit. Their commitment to democracy, equity, social justice, inclusivity, and the rule of law that they purportedly professed before, fell off exposing them as regime apologists, opportunists, and accomplices in state excesses.

Moving towards a more material aspect, another inhibiting factor against the "freedom" of legacy media is their physical positioning in relation to access by majority of ordinary citizens. From the colonial period to the beginning of the 21st century, Kenya's mainstream media had been located centrally in Nairobi, the capital city. Currently these media houses have branched out but only in major towns, but their reach has expanded to cover almost all areas in the country (see for instance, BBC Media Action, 2018). Poor infrastructure then in terms of communication and road networks, meant rural areas, the populous, were cut off from media access. Here access is used broadly not just as getting media content and interpretations but participating in content production and media institutions (Carpentier, 2012; 2016).

The location of these media houses in Nairobi was not accidental. It was strategic. Nairobi is metaphoric of political and economic power. To be cut off from Nairobi is to be cut off from the central arena where all sectors of society play out. It is to be othered, disenfranchised and ostracized. Consequently, Nairobi is emblematic of the systemic exclusion of 'othered' citizens in Kenya and is at the same time the repository of information, political and economic affluence. It explains rural-urban migration and the emergent power imbalance in favour of the urban. Other centres of influence have emerged in the form of counties which came into being through devolution (decentralization) of power, resources and decision making following the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution. They however have not succeeded in dimming the centrality of Nairobi which retains enormous political power and resources.

The exclusion of ordinary citizens from the media by virtue of being physically distant from where the legacy media are based, follows a familiar pattern of political exclusion in Kenya exemplified by the zoning of the country between the opposition strongholds and government ones. Moreover, the administrative partitioning of Kenya maintains the colonial design, since political and tribal boundaries are coterminous. Successive authoritarian regimes have retained this colonial legacy. Some administrative units are identified by the inhabiting tribe. Political participation including voting in Kenya is akin to an ethnic census and regime supporters and opponents are identified, not based on ideological politics, but tribe (see Human Rights Watch, 2008; Khamisi, 2018; Republic of Kenya, 2008a). Although national resources are allocated unevenly in favour of government supporting areas, the reality is that president appropriates state resources together with a cross-ethnic coterie of clients (Shilaho, 2018). I use the word "tribe" as opposed to the less evocative "ethnic group" because Kenyans use "tribe" in explaining the obstacles and opportunities they encounter daily. Its primeval element upstages issue-based class politics.

Just like the political elite have appropriated places for exclusion, political activists in Kenya have also appropriated places as spaces of safety, free expression and mobilization by citizens to counter oppression. The appropriators of these places rely primarily on face-to-face communication with the messages benefiting from the multiplier effect when media reports on their activities. *Jeevanjee*

Gardens[7], *Kamukunji grounds*[8]and *Freedom Corner*[9] in Nairobi, are such places turned into incubating spaces for political activism with their main advantage being informal, participatory and inclusive public spheres. These places have for long been appropriated for political activism by civil society, filling in the gap left by mainstream media who have failed in their watchdog role, owing to political and economic co-option and control. However, these "alternative spaces" have since been infiltrated by the government with spies who thwart and compromise mobilization efforts. For instance, *Bunge la Mwananchi or* 'People's Parliament,' an organic social movement in Kenya, headquartered in Jeevanjee Gardens and spread out to other towns was hailed by Kimari and Rasmussen (2010) for its resistance to institutionalization and dominance by political actors unlike other social movements that are registered by Non–governmental organizations and susceptible to ideological meddling by donors (Willem, 2015). *Bunge la Mwananchi,* however, could be joining the 'compromised' civil society (organizations) in Kenya. For instance, what Kimari and Rasmussen (2010) described as the "choosing of a ceremonial leader" by Bunge la Mwananchi Members, has turned into full-fledged elections complete with campaigns, creating room for politicians to influence the results and consequently the agenda by funding the campaigns.

The association of the offline "safe" spaces with compromised civil society organizations and politicians has therefore rendered them ineffective, leaving the vacuum and desire for a "free" space for counter-hegemonic discourses unfilled. This, coupled with the inability of legacy media to offer audiences uncontrolled participatory spaces, is what has led audiences in Africa and indeed Kenya, to move to digital media (Willems & Mano, 2017). One such space in Kenya which is the focus of this study, is the WhatsApp community enabled by the group formation feature of the technology. WhatsApp, like other social media including Facebook and Twitter, has the advantage

[7] See Patel (2002) on the bibliography of the Kenyan political activist and philanthropist of Asian origin, Alibhai Jeevanjee, whom the garden is named after. Bunge la Mwananchi, one of the grassroots social movement in Kenya hold its meetings at Jeevanjee Gardens.

[8] See Makokha (2020) article which puts Kamukunji grounds at the centre of citizen power versus government control.

[9] Tibett (1994) gives a historical account of how "Freedom Corner" was conceived as a symbol for political agitation, and the role of women in the struggle for democracy in Kenya.

of the fusion of space and medium therefore comes in as the perceived panacea to the long quest not just for free media but free space for political agitation.

Just as is the case with the legacy media, other internet-based media including other social media forms like Facebook and Twitter which preceded WhatsApp have also contributed to the view of WhatsApp providing a free space. According to Mukhongo (2020), the blog facilitated one of the earliest forms of collective interaction on the internet in Kenya. She cites the Kenya Bloggers Webring (KBW) launched in 2003 by Daudi Were and Mashada.com as pioneer blogs which provided both local and international information to Kenyans (ibid). The personal blog, "Kenyan Pundit" by Ory Okolloh, one of the founders of *Ushahidi,* offers commentary, particularly political commentary which invites her audience to critically consider political deficiencies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Soetan, 2012).

As aforementioned, Ushahidi (testimony), an open-source software application which allows for data crowdsourcing and analysis, in its advent during the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, provided a counter-public sphere through which citizens could send messages which helped in mapping the areas affected by violence. It provided the necessary safe space for ordinary citizens to be heard and warned of potential danger as the government had banned mainstream media live coverage under the guise of it fueling violence, at a time when the watchdog and surveillance roles of the media was most crucial. The founder of Mashada.com, David Kobia, on the other hand, temporarily shut down the Website in January 2008, over what he termed as the inability to moderate hate speech on the platform instigated by the disputed election (Zuckerman, 2009).

Another such platform, *Uchaguzi*, Kiswahili for decision, followed in 2010 just prior to the referendum that led to the promulgation of the current Kenyan Constitution. Founded by Ushahidi in partnership with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Knight Foundation, it uses the mobile phone platform through which citizens can report electoral malpractices and other experiences (Aarvik, 2015).

There are various studies on social media which not only demonstrate the isea of free space but also show how communities online can be organised intentionally or inadvertently along antagonistic lines of *Us* vs *Them.* These communities also provide alternative spaces to mainstream media for collective action. Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) is a prominent example of these communities with Mutahi and Kimari (2017) observing that the hashtag #KOT is often used to mobilize Kenyans on Twitter around social action and political accountability. KOT *comprises* of regular Kenyan users of Twitter who use the hashtag #KOT to engage in the everyday happenings in the country. Part of that everyday touches on political matters and on such occasions the hashtag #KOT serves as a collective call through which Kenyans are mobilised on social media to participate in political activism.

Katiambo (2017) for instance writes of how the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN was used by KOT to launch an uncivil protest against CNN in the wake of Obama's visit to Kenya. As is the dominant representation of Africa on international media, CNN had termed Kenya as a "hotbed of terror". KOT responded via the #SomeoneTellCNN offering alternative narratives of Kenya. For instance, #SomeoneTellCNN that Kenya is a #hotbedofchampions, referring to Kenya's prowess in Athletics in the World. CNN eventually apologised to Kenyans. Additionally, Okoth (2020) shows how KOT frequently use visuals including memes, newspaper and google screenshots to poke fun and ridicule their leaders in the bid of holding them accountable.

Diepeveen (2019) using a Facebook group named "Mombasa Youth Senate", explores the political nature of discussions in this group and finds that Facebook structures and users' experience does not encourage new imaginaries on citizen-state relations. Regardless, Diepeveen acknowledges the open space despite for interaction that Facebook provides its users.

In a WhatsApp study, Katiambo and Ochoti (2021), explain how seemingly meaningless talk on predatory publishing with the boundaries being between "fake and peer reviewed" journals on a WhatsApp group of lecturers in Kenya, "reveal struggles at the unconscious level in the era of corporatized universities and alternative facts" (p. 39). In another WhatsApp study, Omanga

(2019) discusses how discourses on WhatsApp do not only mobilize participants towards collective political action online, but also leads to offline activism.

1.2 Statement of the problem and rationale.

Although WhatsApp groups form online communities, it cannot be assumed that communication within these communities is free since it is within such free spaces that the people are, to use Foucault's words, made to govern themselves. Proliferation of mobile phones and affordable internet connectivity especially due to the installing of fiber optics has enabled more Kenyans to join virtual communities created through social media applications like WhatsApp (CA, 2017). Specifically, for Kenya which has a history of citizen surveillance and media censorship, mass adoption of internet has enabled Kenyans of different socio-cultural and political affiliations to move their power struggles to virtual communities which they feel are "freer," with the most popular application being WhatsApp (cf. Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Church & Oliveira, 2013; O'Hara et al., 2014). WhatsApp communities transcend local boundaries, extending membership to not only various parts of the nation but even regions outside the nation-state. Just like it has been happening with advancement in communication technology since invention of the moving press, social media applications were received with great hope of providing participatory and democratic spaces for sociopolitical development (see Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren, 2001; Dralega, 2008; Levin, 2002; Moyo, 2012; Papacharissi, 2002; Willems, 2013) economic (Sawe, 2015) and learning opportunities (Church & Oliveira, 2013; Rambe & Bere, 2013; Yeboah & Ewur, 2014).

What characterizes these notions is the view that virtual spaces allow for individual autonomy and agency on one hand (Matei, 2005; Shapiro, 1999) and communal harmony on the other which can be traced as far back as the development of the telegraph and telephone (see Standage, 1998). Moreover "new media" can strengthen communal ties and make social relationships stronger due to reduced hierarchies (Boorstin, 1978; Carey, 1988). Strengthening both the individual and communal perspectives beg the questions; how are these spaces democratic? And given that WhatsApp communities initiators become the 'administrators' of the spaces with power to control

other members, the question is: How does human interaction with WhatsApp technology contribute to 'hegemony'? Similarly, in such a context, how are individuals struggling to maintain 'self-governing' agency?

These questions coupled with calls from African community media scholars for a change in focus from the 'celebratory' nature of virtual spaces to other aspects. For instance, the convergence of community radio with online media and the challenges this brings (Chiumbu, 2014) and how traces of personal data left online by users can be used by corporations for economic gain (Willems, 2014) motivates the focus of this study. Moreover, the WhatsApp software design could be contributing to power struggles by dictating dominant use of the technology. For instance, the limited number of group members (256) though a platform and server restriction, inadvertently limits inclusion of members after the limit is reached. I therefore sought to explore the subtle power forms instigating hegemonic discourses and how they are countered in virtual communities as afforded by WhatsApp in Kenya.

Methodologically, this work is a netnographic study which combines discursive analysis of both human and material action through WhatsApp affordances in a Discursive Material Analysis (DMA), cognisant that technology cannot operate independently but also that in analysis of social media use, the analysis of materiality of technology is often left out. The focus is not so much on what is said, as is the case in many digital studies but how it is constructed (political action) with the aim of exposing the hegemonic or counter hegemonic discourses which may have influenced the way something was said.

1.3 Overall research question.

How do hegemonic discourses of membership – understood as participation, sense of belonging and identity negotiation–become sedimented and countered in political WhatsApp communities?

1.3.1 Sub research questions

1) To what extent can one determine that power struggles affect sense of belonging in an online community on the WhatsApp platform?

2) To what extent do such power struggles surround participation in WhatsApp communities?

3) How do such power struggles potentially contribute to identity negotiations among participating members?

4) To what extent do socio-technical affordances of WhatsApp influence power struggle discourses in these communities?

1.4 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction.

This chapter gives an overview of the thesis with the focus being outlining the major concepts that the study engages with.

Chapter 2: Literature review.

This chapter reviews relevant literature in the field of digital political participation, socio-technological affordances and agency, digital subjectivities, and participation. It will provide a foundation for the theoretical and analytical concepts used in the study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework.

This chapter engages with the various theoretical concepts largely drawn from Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory. It aims to provide a reflection of the study in relation to the concepts applied to contextualize it with the study and draw out analytical/theoretical concepts from the exercise which can be applied in building up methodology including an analysis framework for the study.

Chapter 4: Methodology.

This chapter build up from the theoretical chapter to describe the research and analytical methods employed in the study. It will explain the research process in detail.

Chapter 5: In pursuit of an online community: WhatsApp as a metaphor of freedom.

This chapter begins by mapping the various actors involved in the formation of the WhatsApp communities under study. It gives a general outline of who they are, how they become part of the

virtual community and the offline/online; local/diaspora interplay. The chapter aims to redefine what is meant by a "community" while drawing out the unique features of the WhatsApp community influenced by the WhatsApp technological affordances. The main argument of this chapter is that admission to the community which accords one the opportunity to have their voices heard is not necessarily informed by the traditional forms of community ties like being born in that physical place, ability to speak the native language, family ties among others. Instead, it is an interplay of technology affordance-constraints (do you own a smart phone, know how to use WhatsApp, have internet access?) and new forms of hegemony; where the previously marginalised individuals now have the power to decide not only who joins the virtual community or leaves but also determine the nature of communicative interaction and participation. Consequently, community is redefined in other ways other than through the geographical structural lens; a cultural-technological lens.

Chapter 6: Of super and Chief administrators: exploring emerging forms of authority in WhatsApp communities.

This chapter argues that much as the goal of the WhatsApp communities is to counter hegemony, findings show that the role of WhatsApp group administrators point to an emergence of new forms of authority and logics of inclusion and exclusion, which could pose a threat to the newly founded 'safe space' for political participation. Moreover, since through WhatsApp, even the diaspora and urbanites can virtually participate with the locals on matters affecting a place they are not physically present in, the logics of exclusion and inclusion are further complicated. The chapter will tease out the discursive power inequalities among actors that may exist, and how technology affordances contribute to these new hegemons.

Chapter 7: Of benevolence and maleficence: conceptualizing participation as an identity construct.

This chapter explores ways in which identity construction is entangled with the right to participate. It questions whether maximalist participation can be achieved in WhatsApp communities given the multiplicity of identities. For instance, does the inclusion of the previously marginalized subject positions translate to their 'right to participate'? If so, how does their newly found right relate to the rights of the previously privileged subject positions? The aim will be to bring out ways

in which the materiality of WhatsApp technology allows for unconventional forms of identity construction and negotiation. For instance, rather than a participant belonging because they were born in the places around which the virtual communities are imagined, they belong because of their monetary contribution to a cause being pushed for in the WhatsApp group that may have nothing to do with the original goal of the group. The virtual communities are in some ways both embodied and disembodied from the offline community allowing while constraining at the same time the negotiation of new modes of identification. Those whose identities are viewed as acceptable by others therefore have more liberty to participate than those whose identities are questioned for one reason to another. Eventually these identities are simply reduced to 'those who can participate' and 'those who cannot.'

Chapter 8: New media, old tricks; the politics and poli(tricks) of WhatsApp communities.

This chapter aims to tie up both new findings and findings in the previous chapters by focusing on the primacy of politics in the social. It explores whether the WhatsApp communities under study have succeeded in being counter-hegemonic projects or they are extension of pre-existing hegemonic blocs. That is, it explores the forms of governmentalities that strive to make these communities apolitical, ways in which they are countered if any, and what then this means in the general theorization of digital practices as contributing to democratization.

Chapter 9: Conclusion.

This chapter synthesises the discussions arising from the analytical chapters. It presents the main thesis of study while providing recommendations for future research.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter set the stage for understanding what this study is about, while placing it within the media study field. The background of the study by highlighted historical accounts of the media, most especially the digital media environment in Kenya and WhatsApp, the social medium this study is based on. Additionally, it brought forth some of the theoretical grounding this study follows. The aim and specific research questions were outlined to clearly show the trajectory of the study.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW: A THEORETICAL EXPOSITION

2.0 Introduction.

This chapter situates the study in the scholarly discourses of how human's everyday lives have become intertwined with technology both in mundane and complicated ways. In particular, the major questions of this study, namely: how socio-technological affordances influence the dynamics of the concept of community, sense of belonging, participation, and identity construction as they relate to the political in digital culture. The major aim of this chapter is to expose the theoretical discourses which have emerged over time in this field as a starting point and rationale for the theoretical choices made in the next chapter. Though this study does not fit neatly into digital humanities as my focus is not to apply computational tools and methods in my analysis but to analyse WhatsApp technology through a discursive lens. References to some text in this field however have been made in the empirical chapters in lieu of their relevance with the findings.

2.1 Genealogy of Community in relation of power struggles.

The concept of community is a floating signifier which has been theorised using multiple dimensions since it caught the interest of scholars. Fernback (1997) says that much as it is easy for the public to define community, in academic discourse however, the term is amorphous and has "descriptive, normative, and ideological connotations…encompassing both material and symbolic connotation" (p. 39). This means that fixing the meaning of community can be termed as a hegemonic struggle. Additionally, Levinson and Christensen (2003 p. xxxvii) note:

> [....] today community has both an abstract and a concrete meaning: in the abstract, a sense of commonality and, in the concrete, actual, specific groups of people who have certain circumstances or interests in common.

I use Foucault's genealogy to trace changes on the concept of community along certain historical developments such as urbanization, communication technology developments and theorizations of place over the years. As Giddens (1990) put it, the social history of time-space distantiation goes hand in hand with communication history. Genealogy in Foucault's thinking means "a specific type of history which seek to deconstruct what was previously regarded as unified while also

attempting to identify an underlying continuity which is the product of "discontinuous systematicities" (Sembou, 2011, p. 2).

Starting from sociology, which is the origin of community discourse and finally situating it in the media and communication field (particularly community media), I trace the paths of technological development along the major debates which see these developments on one hand as weakening community ties and on the other providing opportunities for people to maintain close communal ties despite distance across space and time. Critical to community discourse is the notion of place or locality (Carpentier, 2007; Carpentier et al., 2003; Harvey, 1993; Jones, 1998). I will therefore also look at how theorizations of place have impacted how people view community.

The origin of community theory can be traced back to Ferdinand Tonnies' book, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) translated as *Community and Society* (1957). Tonnies created a dichotomy of differentiating community from society using social structure as a point of analysis. His *Gemeinschaft* (community) favours a particular type of place, a pre-industrial rural setting, a village, neighbourhood where people are united by close ties of family and kinship and work together to achieve a common goal or consensus (Carpentier, 2007; Morris & Morton, 1998; White & Guest, 2003). On the other hand, because of urbanization and industrialization, the *Gesellschaft* (society) is associated with a large city characterised by disunited people more inclined to individualism though they live in harmony like in the community (Lyon & Driskell, 2012). This dichotomy sets up the stage for "community lost" discourse (White & Guest, 2003).

Though following the "community lost" discourse (White & Guest, 2003) and like Tonnies, acknowledging the importance of community relations for human interdependence and upholding moral values in his conceptualization of community, Emille Durkheim focused less on social and physical structure and more on "a set of variable properties of human interaction that could be found not only among tradition-bound peasants of small villages but also among the most sophisticated denizens of modern cities" (Brint, 2001, p.3). Consequently, he argued that urbanization and industrialization would lead to more complex division of labour and

specialization in the *Gesellschaft* resulting to a weakening of social ties and moral degradation as individuals will no longer be able to bond socially with others (White & Guest, 2003).

From the above cases, it is apparent that the notion of place was important for these classical scholars in the conceptualization of community. Changes in the size of place (from village to city) because of urbanization; a move from "work as a natural function" (Tonnies, 1957, p. 1195) to large scale production and work for compensation occasioned by urbanization and industrialization weakened social ties in the former (*Gemeinschaft*) leading to a more fragmented *Gesellschaft.* Engels (1845/1999, p. 93, cited in Carpentier, 2007, p. 2) illustrates this thus:

> There is something distasteful about the very bustle of the streets, something that is abhorrent to human nature itself. Hundreds of thousands of people of all classes and ranks of society jostle past one another; are they not all human beings with the same characteristics and potentialities, equally interested in the pursuit of happiness? […] yet they rush past one another as if they had nothing in common or where in no way associated with one another.

Informed by the work of the classical sociologists, scholars in the Chicago school of sociology (CSS) further entrenched the concept of community in modern urban sociology studies. Just like the classical scholars, the preoccupation with structure continued to be key in the conceptualization of community. This time, the city gained more respect as a locality for community (Carpentier, 2007; Harvey, 1993) despite the fear of fragmentation of social ties with the increase of urbanization and technology (Calhoun, 1998; Fischer, 1992; Weber, 1963; Wellman, 1979). For instance, Wellman (1988) proposed that other than leading to the 'loss of community' technological developments for instance cars, telephones, and airplanes instead 'liberated community' as they enabled people to communicate and maintain social ties despite the spatial and time distance created by urbanization.

In his major article 'Human ecology' Park (1936), a member of CSS uses the biological Darwin theory to explain the concept of community. He argues that like in plants and animals, human relationships at the substructure level of a community (city) are symbiotic; "a biotic social order

which comes into existence and maintained by competition" (ibid p. 1). Even in their struggle for existence individual roles remain interdependent resulting to what he calls the "the principle of cooperative competition" (ibid p. 3). The superstructure of a community (city) is held together by communication and consensus as an adaptive response to the biotic substructure. He gives the definition of community as embodying the following characteristics:

> Population territorially organized, more or less completely rooted in the soil it occupies, its individual units living in a relationship of mutual interdependence in the sense in which that term applies to human beings (Park, 1936, p. 4)

Scholars both in CSS and elsewhere took a shift from structural-geographical approach while still complementing it, to recognize other factors as contributing to the sense of a community. For instance, Marx Weber, a member of the CSS, conceptualised the community differently away from the ecological approach of his colleagues. Following Karl Marx's view "of society as the scene of constant strife" (Neuwirth, 1969, p. 148), Weber argued that the emergence of a community is due to hegemonic struggle be it of an economic, social, or political nature among members. The city is therefore a direct product of unequal distribution of power (Gottdiener & Feagin, 1988; Walton, 1982). Further social relationships are also maintained based on this power. Those in power manipulate others using means of production to ensure the status quo remains (Zukin, 1980; 1993). It takes antagonism and conflict through interaction and communication for members to overthrow the status quo (Foucault, 1997; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Neuwirth, 1969).

The competition and struggle for existence in the community described by Park, Weber, Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe further stamps the premise from which this study begins, that power struggles or antagonisms are inherent in any social set up including virtual communities enabled by WhatsApp and other "new" media technologies. However, in the online communities, survival is not of a biological nature but a struggle to stamp their membership, to ensure their voices are heard while at the same time collaborating with other members through the 'repertoire of communication' (Mattoni, 2012).

While focusing on culture as the basis for community, Robert Lynd and his wife Hellen Lynd carried out a holistic study around the same time CSS carried the ecological studies. In their book *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* published in 1929, they gave a thick description of the Muncie community which unlike the small cities (communities) in the Chicago studies, was a relatively large city with a large number of people (Lyon & Driskell, 2011).Though they had set out to study the religious component of the community they soon realized that other interrelated social factors including economic and cultural beliefs merged together with religion to determine the activities of and define the Muncie community. In a follow up study, the Lynds found that a certain family had monopolized the economy of Muncie amid the Great Depression (Lyon & Driskell, 2011) leading to unequal distribution of power and suffering of the rest of the members of Muncie community.

Studies of community are not a preserve of sociology, scholars in other fields particularly communication and media began to recognise the importance of community in their field. According to Carpentier (2007) the concepts of community and locality played a significant role from the onset of community media theory. Janowitz (1967) through his seminal paper titled *community press in an urban setting*, is credited with situating community in the field of communication, specifically community media with his discussions of the major functions of a community newspaper. He says this of communities:

> [...] like any social system, encompasses a process of communications and a system of values. It implies sentiments and attachments to a geographical area, no matter how transitory or complex. The boundaries of human communities in our industrialised society are not only diffuse but are multiple. They stubbornly defy simple cartographic representations, but they create the life space in which men and their families [sic] pursue the search for status and self-respect (Janowitz, 1967, p. vii-viii)

Just like in sociology, the concept of community has also been reconceptualised in community media discourse. According to Carpentier (2007) the reconceptualization has taken two paths; one supplementing the geographic with non-geographic while the other supplementing the structural or material with culture. Moreover, ICT especially the internet and internet-based media like

WhatsApp have played a significant role in the fluidity of community thus the reconceptualization (Castells, 2009; Chiumbu, 2014; Willems, 2015).

The cultural path constitutes socially constructed conceptualization of communities of meaning. For instance, “symbolic communities” (Hunter, 1974); and “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983/2006). These communities are held together by language and culture modes which are shared through media like was the case of Anderson’s imagined nations which were made possible by the print revolution.

Taking the non-geographic path and enabled by new media especially internet based like MIMs are ‘Community of interest’ which bring together people who interact around particular conditions (Clark, 1973, cited in Fuller, 2016; Lewis, 1993) ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 2000) which constitutes informal spaces for professional or sometimes family networks and ‘virtual community’ (Rheingold, 1993) which are boundary less communities formed online. Communities of interest and practice can be formed both online and offline and are “defined by the direct and frequent contact between members and the feeling of belonging and sharing” (Carpentier, 2007, p. 3). This study’s main interest is WhatsApp based online communities already defined in the introduction.

With the move from the structural geographic to cultural and non-geographic, does it mean place/locality has completely been removed from community, especially the online communities? Some scholars agree with this. For instance, Casey (2013) argues that indeed the notion of place has been eroded and instead assimilated into space. This debate is also linked to the authenticity of virtual communities. Could they be termed as ‘real communities’ compared to the geographical communities? To tackle the issue of authenticity, scholars in the field of CMC, following Anderson (1983, p. 6) have instead suggested that we look at the “style in which these communities are imagined.” Consequently, Baym (1998, p. 38) argues that:

> On-line community's "style" is shaped by a range of pre-existing structures, including external contexts, temporal structure, system infrastructure, group purposes, and

> participant characteristics. In ongoing communicative interaction, participants strategically appropriate and exploit the resources and rules those structures offer. The result is a dynamic set of systematic social meanings that enables participants to imagine themselves as a community.

By referring to pre-existing structures including external contexts (Baym, 1998) supports her notion that place is not totally removed from community but simply decentred in a highly deterritorialised world (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

Further, the debate on globalization also helps to deal with the question of place (Carpentier, 2007). Much as Appadurai (1995) acknowledges the role of globalization in deterritorialization of places as also indicated with McLuhan's (1964, 2003) 'global village', he argues that locality is not totally lost. This view is also shared by Robertson (1995) who uses the concept of glocalization to describe how local socio-cultural and political aspects compete with the global version such that you cannot have a completely homogeneous view. However, since the concept of glocalization is seen as favouring the global to the local, community media scholars for instance Carpentier (2007) and Chiumbu (2014) propose the use of Appadurai's (1995 translocal to capture the operations of media in an increasingly globalised world. The local produces contexts both within and without the nation state and thus translocal transcends the boundaries of a nation state to include the transnational and diasporic contexts. It is this view that this study adopts, that place is not completely lost in boundary less WhatsApp communities. The two cases I will look at are spatially dispersed around certain localities and include the rural, urban (within the nation state) and diasporic contexts.

Online communities differ to a significant extent from previous conceptions which gave precedence to place in terms of agency to belong. That is, one belonged because of predetermined primordial factors like birth, parental heritage. Avance (2016, p. 66) however, argues that online communities are not exempt from these predeterminations as factors such as data availability and a platform's affordances mean that "online community formation relies on this user centered software architecture that predates the community itself, so that communities evolve and adapt not

in spite of but because of the affordances of their technological platform." Regardless, Avance (2016) acknowledges that online communities are to a considerable extent self-agential as one can choose whether to join them or not.

Since much of the debates surrounding online communities are linked to notions such as sense of belonging to a community, inclusion/exclusion, identity construction and negotiation and participation, more about online communities will be discussed in the next sections of literature review.

2.2 Distinguishing politics from the political.

Since this study is concerned with what I term as "political WhatsApp communities," there is need to operationalize what such communities would engage in. Trends in contemporary political discourse rarely engage with anti-political narratives even among those that focus on political action in terms of activism and protest. This makes the question, "what is politics?" even more pertinent.

The term politics is not fixed even though its etymology is in the Greek word *polis*, which means a city-state. This informs the narrow state-centric definition of politics as the art of government as provided by law within a defined territory (Appadorai, 1968/2001**)**. This means that other people and other institutions not considered as part of what is termed government are outside politics and therefore non-political. In this formulation, democracy is representative, in which leaders are elected to act on behalf of the electorate in resource allocation, punishment and rewards, or exercise what Easton (1981, p.352) called "authoritative allocation of values." A much narrower view, however, is to confine politics into an engagement of political parties and politicians. This seems to be the case in Kenya where politics is confined in the realm of political parties' and politicians' activities especially during elections (see Shilaho, 2018). There are other views which give a much broader perspective to politics. These include viewing politics as public affairs. It places politics within an extended view of the public sphere which includes politics, civil society, culture, commerce and so on. In this formulation too, other domains deemed private (like family or even civil society in some views of the public/private dichotomy) are of-course rendered non-

political. The main argument of the public sphere thought, associated with John Stuart Mill and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is that politics is a public good that does not belong only to the state (Lake & Baum, 2001; Wang, 2013). Aristotle (1948, p.1253) in *Politics*, declares that "man is by nature a political animal" that can enjoy a good life only within a political community where politics is practised ethically. Arendt (1958) similarly places politics within the public sphere declaring it the most important activity amongst free and equal citizens.

But a just society based on equity and upholding of ethical virtues especially by rulers is almost utopian. Societies are ridden by conflict and mistrust among individuals particularly with regards to decision making. The two conceptualizations of politics discussed above therefore attract anti-political sentimentalities; from politics being a nuisance, as something that simply needs to be tolerated or totally done away with to Machiavellian views in which politics is inherently deceptive. This leads to other views of politics whose main aim is to provide consensus or compromise, *as a strategy to resolve* conflict and reach a decision embraced by majority through negotiations as opposed to force. The thesis of this account is that though conflict is inevitable in society, it is however reconcilable through strategies like elections, party politics, debates where interests and power of diverse groups can be conciliated (Crick, 1993; 2004). This formulation means that the minority opinion is never considered. The decisions are, however, legitimized through agreed upon procedures of the negotiation process.

A broader and radical conceptualization of politics centres power. Informed by Foucault's (1998, p.63) theorization that "power is everywhere", politics therefore becomes part of the everyday and penetrates all social spheres whether public or private**.** Consequently, power becomes the tool for influencing desirable decisions and acquiring scarce resources. Those with power therefore subjugate and oppress those without as is articulated in Marx's (1848) account of how the dominant class (bourgeoisies) through economic power, exploit the lower-class, the proletariat and the ensuing class struggle to either maintain the status quo or counter it. Rendering everything political however, is criticised for ridding politics of its particularity (the political) and restricting it to state activity *(*Rancière, 1998).

The focus of the particularity of politics ushers in the post-foundational political thought in which politics is differentiated from the political (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2000**;** Ranciere, 1998; Zizek, 2000)**.** Thus, the political, the inherent conflict within the social is presented as the heart of politics, its ontological condition. Mouffe (2000, p. 101) articulates the difference between the political and politics thus:

> By 'the political,' I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. 'Politics' on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political.'

The idea of the political can be traced back to Schmitt's (1927) theorizations in *The Concept of the Political* where he defines the political as an existential friend-enemy relationship. According to Schmitt, the political relationship is a distinct category just like other categories such as economy, morality, aesthetics, and culture, because it is constitutive. This means that there has to be a particular and unique criterion to understand the political as the ultimate distinction is that the political cannot be constituted as evil or good as is the case of morality, beautiful or ugly as in aesthetics or even profitable as is the case in economics. Accordingly, the ultimate distinction within the political is that of a friend/enemy, mutually independent realms, as "the distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation" (ibid, p. 26).

This is not to say, however, that political distinctions are completely autonomous of other distinctive categories; more often than not categories such as, of the affective, morality or culture are used to describe the political. In Kenya, for instance, political distinctions are hinged on tribe, language, culture, region, and religion. Raila Odinga, a prominent political figure, and of Luo descent, has been delegitimized by his Kikuyu political competitors as a *kihii* (young boy, a derogatory reference to an uncircumcised male regardless of age). His father, a first-generation Kenyan politician, was derided in a similar fashion. As such, the two were unfit to lead the country

according to this bigotry since culturally Luos do not practice circumcision (Auchter, 2017; wa Wamwere, 2008).

Additionally, the political plays within the public sphere and not the private sphere because the enemy is not a private "foe" for one to hate or annihilate but as Schmitt (1996, p. 28) argues, the enemy "exists only when, at least potentially, one who is fighting the collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity." In Schmitt's formulation, there exists a real possibility of annihilation of the enemy if the antagonisms result to war, as the "utmost degree of association and dissociation is the willingness to die for one's in-group or kill the Other respectively" (ibid, p. 32-3). Even though according to him, war is not political despite resulting from a political decision, but rather a continuation of politics by other means (ibid).

Ironically, Schmitt's work suffered the same fallacy, that of using an autonomous category in defining another. His work has been openly shurnned by scholars of democratic theory due to his association with National Socialism (Beckstein, 2011). Mouffe (2005, p.5) however, argues that this need not be the case citing that scholarship need to be judged by their "intellectual force" and "not the moral qualities." Mouffe's work on the political draws from Schmitt's works in three ways; the political as the inherent conflict in the social, insisting on the validity of the left-right coalitions in politics and revising the friend/enemy distinction to that of adversaries; the ontological condition of the political and the collectivities of political subjects[10] (ibid). Like Schmitt, Mouffe's (2005) work is a critique of deliberative democracy which thrive for rational consensus with the belief that deliberations can completely do away with antagonisms, a condition of post politics, also conceptualized as depoliticization.

[10] See the theoretical framework chapter for an elaborate account on political ontology and collective subjectivities.

Political philosophers have indeed demonstrated how the "post-political zeitgeist[11]" closes the possibility of alternatives to the established socio-political structure and discourses by doing away with conflict and contestation and favouring consensus and conciliation instead (Maeseele & Raeijmaekers, 2017, p. 3) ushering the "end of politics." Stocker (2006) highlight these ideas in what he calls 'anti-politics;' "a condition in which institutions, policies and discourses associated with neoliberal ideas of self-interested individualism and market efficiency foreclose or discourage participation in politics and the public sphere" (Wood, 2016, P.521). This emptying of the political of its inherent antagonisms (Mouffe, 2005) by fronting a discourse of "no alternative" is what depoliticisation sets out to do (see Maeseele & Raeijmaekers, 2017).

Like many other concepts including democracy and participation, the signification of depoliticisation is highly contested. While initial approaches to depoliticisation defined the concept in pithier terms fixing its meaning to neoliberal government strategies or governmentalities; later approaches embrace more fluid definitions (see Wood, 2016 for these debates) in which depoliticisation becomes an empty signifier. An empty signifier is "a signifier without the signified" (Laclau, 1996, p. 36) in which anything can fit into but with "limits of signification" (ibid, p.39). The limits help in the fixation of concepts, even temporarily, which is important otherwise it becomes "the discourse of the psychotic" (Laclau, 1990, p.90).

For Beveridge (2017), this fixation of meaning is possible by thinking of depoliticisation through the ontology of politics, that is, what politics is understood to be. Hay (2013: 4) defines ontology of politics as that which relates to "what is politically, to what exists politically, and to the units that comprise political reality." Consequently, Beveridge (2017) argues that, how depoliticization is defined in scholarship depends on the different conceptualizations of politics; "politics as the institutions of government, politics as choice and contingency and politics as the apparatus of order and consensus versus 'political' moments of antagonism" (Beveridge, 2017, p.590). The

[11] Also referred to as post-political condition, is "a one size fits all label to describe (rather than explain) the currently dominant political forms and practices associated with global capitalism and the neoliberal order" (Puymbroeck & Oosterlynck, 2014, p.2).

subsequent discussion on the different conceptualizations of depoliticization, proves Beveridge's (2017) point.

According to Burnham (2001, p.128) depoliticisation as "the process of placing at one remove the character of decision making." Flinders and Buller (2006, p.295) expand Burnham's definition to define depoliticisation as:

> the range of tools, mechanisms and institutions through which politicians can attempt to move an indirect governing relationship and/or seek to persuade the demos that they can no longer be reasonably held responsible for a certain issue, policy field or specific decision

These definitions and by other various scholars including Foster et al (2014) lie in the first political lens approach to depoliticisation. This approach to depoliticization first became popular in political science following debates on alleged 'end of politics' due to the fall of communism and the rise of neoliberalism (Wood, 2016). Scholars using the second political lens including and Hay (2007), Jenkins (2011) and Wood and Flinders (2014) have criticized the state-centric focus as a narrow conceptualization of 'the political' and instead emphasized the fluidity of the depoliticisation concept. For instance, Jenkins (2011, p. 160) argues that "a strategy of depoliticisation entails forming necessities, permanence, immobility, closure and fatalism and concealing/negating or removing contingency." Further Strange (2014) point out the contingency of the concept by pointing out the discursive struggles between politicisation and depoliticisation. The third political lens is more radical. It is associated with post foundationalist theorists like Mouffe (2000, 2005) and Rancière (1998) who distinguish politics from the political.

The value of the expansive definitions is that they add to the initial governmental strategy of depoliticisation the societal and discursive strategies. Governmental depoliticisation as already seen from the 'first generation' definitions of depoliticisation point to how states/political actors shift their decision-making responsibilities to arm's-length bodies like judicial institutions, state corporations and para-statals to avoid any direct backlash from citizens over those decisions (Etherington & Jones, 2018). Additionally, they decenter analysis from the narrow focus on

'cutting off the king's head' to deconstructing the multiple power relations and inequalities which exist in all realms of society (Wood, 2016). The scope of the three forms of depoliticisation can be found in Wood and Flinders (2014, p. 157):

1. Governmental depoliticisation: speaks to the delegation of direct control of functions by elected politicians who hive them off to arm's-length agencies, boards and commissions in order to avoid blame in case of inefficiency. That is, moving responsibility from the government to the public sphere.
2. Societal depoliticisation: is the privatisation of an issue or function from the (collective) public sphere to the (individualised) private sphere where an important political issue for instance is displaced from the media news-cycle.
3. Discursive depoliticisation: occurs when elected officials deny their capacity for control through 'speech acts.' For instance, they could blame their own dysfunction on fate.

In line with the post-structuralist take on discourse that everything is discursive, Wood and Flinders (2014, p. 165) suggestion that the governmental (state), societal and discursive strategies are layered and interdependent as opposed to being self-standing provides a road map in which the expansive definitions of depoliticisation can be fixed provide important insight for this study. At the same time, it allows the discursive analysis of all the three strategies as part of an assemblage of one phenomenon rather than separately. For instance, the material government decisions are usually legitimised using discursive strategies which act to frame certain desired meta-narratives of public discourse on contentious decisions by manipulating what is to be considered political or not.

Mouffe (1999) offers a solution to post-politics and (or) depoliticization which she attributes to shortcomings of liberal democracy, particularly the Habermasian deliberative democracy. She does this through her model of agonistic pluralism whose basis was set in *Hegemony and Social Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Though Habermas argues the shortcomings of his argument of rational consensus through a communicative deliberation are only of empirical nature, Mouffe (1999) contends that the major weakness of deliberative and other forms of liberal democracy is ontological. That is, the denial of the ineradicable character of power and antagonisms in the social.

She argues that by thriving for a rational consensus achieved through reason and rational argumentation, proponents of liberal democracy simply move from an economic model of democracy to a moral one (p. 746) and in the process, deny the ontological position of the political. In this sense, legitimacy is granted to decisions in the democratic public sphere when they are arrived at in the interest of the common good through "processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals" (Benhabib, 1996, p.69). However, there can never be a consensus, which is nothing but a temporary stabilization of power (hegemony) without exclusion (several other possible decisions have to be set aside for the one perceived to be of common good) as no deliberation can ever be free of constraints (Mouffe, 1999).

Expectedly therefore, agonistic pluralism's mission is to mobilize conflict or passions as Mouffe (1999), refers to them, into achieving democratic gains instead of suppressing them or pushing them into the private sphere. In a pluralist democracy, differences should not only be recognized but they should be allowed to play out since such a democracy can only survive when collective identities are formed around difference as opposed to consensus. Although Mouffe (1999, p. 756) acknowledges that some form of consensus in a pluralist democracy will always be necessary, it will however be a "conflictual consensus" because of embracing difference. Mouffe's account is similar with Schmitt's account on the political to the extent of its ineradicable nature but is at variance with the latter's presentation of violence as a possible strategy through which an enemy can be destroyed. Accordingly, Mouffe transforms the friend/enemy relation in which an enemy is viewed as an entity to be destroyed into one between democratic adversaries who differ in their views but at the same time respect the right of the Other to defend their position (ibid). In this way, antagonism is not destroyed but transformed into agonism.

Even though Mouffe (1999) is critiqued for her failure to "robustly" explain how an enemy is converted into an adversary (Jones, 2014; Kapoor, 2002), Jones (2014) still contends however, that agonistic democracy's focus on hegemony and political contestation further expands the democratic space as it is more participatory and inclusive. Noteworthy, Mouffe, in an interview with Carpentier and Cammaerts (2006) expresses skepticism over new media and especially the internet's ability to nurture an agonistic public space, arguing that new media, like the old, makes

it possible for people to consume only content that reinforces their beliefs. However, studies are coming up which demonstrate the relevance of agonistic pluralism to internet use. One such study is by Katiambo (2019) who illustrates how incivility on social media in Kenya is questioning several objective discourses including the concept of "hate speech" which the government is using to securitize the internet and curtail free speech.

As such the question to be answered in this study is whether, given that these WhatsApp communities are political ones, are they freer (in the sense of embracing and identifying around difference), participatory and inclusive?

2. 3 Sense of belonging and politics of inclusion and exclusion in online communities.

Since the advent of the internet, scholars have been divided on the impact this technology has on community. Most critics of online communities (Doheny-Farina, 1996; Healy, 1997; Lockard, 1997; Prodnik, 2012) use the characteristics of Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* as a bar with which to measure what entails a 'real' community and what does not. On this, Haythornwaite (2009, p. 131) reckons, "One reason we continue to find stark contrasts in views of online community is an adherence to simplistic dichotomies: *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*, offline versus online, face-to-face versus mediated, strong ties versus weak ties." Other than the obvious structural-geographic factor, sense of community, sense of belonging to a community and interaction frequency are also commonly used aspects. Gusfield (1975, cited in Chavis & Wandersman, 1990) emphasized the relational component of community over the territorial one. He argued that shared territory alone cannot constitute a community, the nature and quality of relationships in communities even those without boundaries is what informs a sense of community.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) posit that a sense of community is brought about by members' feeling of belonging, that they are important to one another and the community and that through that community, their needs will be met. They go further to identify membership as one of the major components of a sense of community. They describe "feelings of membership" as arising from

"community boundaries, emotional safety, members' sense of belonging to, and identification with the group, personal investment of time into group, and a common symbol system" (ibid, p. 22). I interpret the last two elements as participation which is discussed in the next section and discuss the first three elements under the current subtopic.

Myriad studies have since established sense of belonging as a crucial factor in online communities (Hagerty et al., 1996; Kim & Kaplan, 2004; Roberts, 1998; Udenze & Ugoala, 2020). Sense of belonging is a psychological experience which helps in understanding community involvement (Hagerty et al., 1996) and an essential element in cultivating member's loyalty (Kim & Kaplan, 2004) and commitment in virtual communities (Roberts, 1998). To begin with how recruitment is done in WhatsApp communities influences sense of belonging. Sardar (1995) posits that virtual or online communities are self-selecting. Individuals are invited by the "administrators" who start the group or other members. Links to a group can also be advertised on other media platforms like Facebook, so that all an interested person has to do, is click on the link and join the WhatsApp community. A person may be motivated to join an online community for several reasons including affiliation to others who are already members, need for information and so on (Abhijit, 2011). Having conducted a systematic review of WhatsApp studies published from 2009 to 2019, Pang and Woo (2020, n.p) identified the following key motivations for WhatsApp groups formed for political mobilization; "news gathering and sharing for reciprocity, connecting for solidarity and building collective identity, coordinating actions; and state surveillance and evasion." They, however, noted that much has not yet been done to conclusively determine the nature of WhatsApp groups, users, and the motivations of their use and how WhatsApp affordances impacts their use (ibid).

Online communities build ground rules for operations which new members are "initiated" to by the "older" members (Haythornwaite, 2009) helping the newcomers to feel they belong. However, this initiation process could open ground for a show of power, leaving a new member feeling excluded and that they do not belong in the online community despite joining it. For instance, Seabrook (1997, cited in Matei, 2005) because of his unpleasant hazing experience in Whole Earth Electronic Link (WELL), one of the first virtual communities to be studied, concludes that virtual

communities can be elitist spaces where the community spirit is killed by self-absorbed competition from older members. He reiterates that older members feel they have more knowledge and entitlement to the community than the newcomers thus wield their power through harsh initiation rituals consequently excluding them (ibid). Power hierarchies can, however, be traced from the inception of an online community, when technically everyone is new, as members begin to form insider circles which are used to negotiate power.

WhatsApp communities are mostly exclusive by nature making it hard to know which ones exist unless you are invited or 'added' into one. Exclusive virtual communities like their 'open' or public counterparts are also discussed in 'safe places' discourses which considers virtual communities as either "separative" or "inclusive" (Rosenfeld & Noterman, 2014) with the former being seen as groups of homogenous individuals who close themselves off from the general public while the latter are more egalitarian spaces (ibid). Safe spaces on the other hand are those where "one can speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance" (Kenney, 2001, p. 24) without fear of harassment or violence (Van Heijningen & Van Clief, 2017). Studies have, however, shown that virtual communities can sometimes be unsafe places where some members are bullied, blackmailed, ignored, or even scandalised (Katzer, Fetchenhauer & Belschak, 2009; Pearce & Vital, 2015) thus eventually excluding the victims of the abuse (Katzer et al., 2009) who are silenced and rendered powerless to defend themselves.

A sense of belonging into a virtual community is therefore largely dependent on inclusion and exclusion of members in the community. From the literature reviewed above however, in most virtual communities, inclusion is marred by power struggles with some individuals trying to control others by asserting their space as the 'more entitled members' who belong more to the community than others.

2.3 Placing participation within the political realm.

The concept of participation is embedded right at the centre of community media discourse (Carpentier et al., 2013) and membership in communities. Wenger (1998, p. 55) defines participation "as the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises." Additionally, participation is a political process in which power struggles are inherently embedded (Carpentier, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Matikainen et al., 2014). According to Carpentier (2009) debates on participation analyse distribution of power at macro and micro levels of society. Various definitions of participation, further demonstrate the relationship between power and participation. For instance, Carpentier et al (2003) following Pateman (1972) define participation as "a process where individual members of a community have a certain degree of power to influence or determine the outcome of that process" (p. 55). Further, Carpentier (2014) asserts that participation refers to a "situation where the actors involved in (formal or informal) decision making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to some extent) egalitarian" (p. 1002). Participation therefore implies a situation in which power imbalance naturally exists and individual through the same process of participation try to equalize it (Carpentier et al., 2014).

The entanglement of participation and power as it relates to decision making, situates it right into democracy discourse and the political realm. Carpentier et al. (2003; 2013) following the theoretical underpinning of minimalist vs maximalist democracy, argues that mediated participation takes a dichotomy of participation *through* (minimalist) and *in* the media (maximalist). In the former, the media simply acts as a platform for citizens to air their views and interact with others while the latter goes beyond simple access and interaction to provide an opportunity for ordinary citizens to contribute to both generation of media content and decision making (ibid). The latter is associated with a more democratic media which is the ideal that community media should thrive to achieve (Carpentier et al., 2003; Carpentier, 2012; Carpentier et al., 2013; Downing, 2000; Rodriguez, 2001). From these definitions we draw out pertinent concerns of participation discourse, that is, access to information, power hierarchies, inclusion/exclusion, decision making and representation. These are also some of the concerns addressed in democratic theory.

It is these concerns that the internet at its advent was deemed capable of addressing due to its perceived participatory nature which fosters open communication and participation (Rheingold, 1993; Shapiro, 2000; Tsagarousianou, 1998; Wellman et al., 2001). van Dijk (2012) provides an excellent summary of the different views of digital democracy. He defines the concept as "the pursuit and the practice of democracy in whatever view using digital media in online and offline political communication" (ibid, p. 51). He identifies four utopian waves of digital democracy which he argues began with the *teledemocracy* perspective (e.g., Arteton, 1987, Becker, 1981) which came forward in the 1980s. The idea in this perspective is that ICTs will remove space barriers therefore allowing direct participation of citizens in politics, doing away with the need for representatives. The second wave emerging in the 1990s was that of virtual community (Rheingold, 1993) based on the expectation that UseNet groups and other online communities would address the "community lost" narrative.

Third, is the "new democracy" wave associated by scholars such as Shapiro (2000) who saw the internet as providing a possibility for mass participation in politics and eventually influencing government policy making. The final utopian wave, the "Web 2.0" perspective is premised on the perceived interactivity of the internet which is seen to enable more participatory use by citizens, with the most important being co-creation of content, where users become prosumers, citizen journalists and so on (Frisssen, 2008; Papacharissi, 2009). At the centre of these arguments is the thought that the internet is inherently democratic given its structure. That is the internet is interactive, active, and creative, direct, platform that is egalitarian and a network which enables both individual and collective creation of content (van Dijk, 2013). As such, digital democracy is argued to increase access to information, its retrieval and exchange among different stakeholders including government and citizens, encourage debate, deliberation and construction of communities and increase citizen participation in politics including decision making (Tsagarousianou, 1999). The danger with these utopian views is that by declaring the internet to be inherently democratic in its structure, they fail to acknowledge the power hierarchies which exist in the digital platforms. Consequently, they end up pushing forward an anti-politics narrative even though their aim is to present these spaces as increasingly supportive of participation in politics.

In contrast are dystopian views in which the democratic potential of the internet or its affordance for political engagement is questioned or even denied. The main argument being that the internet is no different from the real world and will only push people further from political and civic engagement (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Wilhelm, 2000). Syntopian views on the other hand acknowledge the merits of the internet and social media for political participation but also put forward factors among social demographics under the mantra of the "digital divide" (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2011; van Dijk, 2006), "participation divide" (Correa, 2010; Schradie, 2011) or even a "democratic divide" (Norris, 2001**)** as resulting from social demographic inequalities and difference among users; including whether they are already interested in politics or not as determining participation on the same.

Scholarship on online political participation, even those that lay claim to the inherent democratic potential of the internet, show that participation on digital platforms take different forms. There are those that take a representative democracy approach, where the internet is seen as tool for governments to share and collect information to citizens for better service delivery, the phenomenon of e-governance (e.g., Layne & Lee, 2001; Reddick, 2005). In this formulation, citizens are treated as passive users of the internet, barely recognizing their engagements online and as such do not serve the interest of this study which is embedded in a maximalist view of participation. The concept of e-participation, though more inclusive in terms of supporting a bottom-up approach, articulates participation as a process whose end point is inclusivity of citizens in policy formulation with government openness as a starting point. This means that citizen participation in policy, is dependent on government's goodwill. A good example in this category is Macintosh's (2004, p. 2) levels of participation with the first being information; where government provides information to citizens, secondly, consultation; a process where citizens give feedback to government which in turn responds to the queries and thirdly, active participation in which the two parties actively and equally engage in policy formulation.

Then there are those forms that are more citizen-centric informed by the tenets of deliberative democracy and associated with the Web 2.0. In these formulations, the emphasis is on the internet

as a locus for political participation. In studies of organization of activism on the internet for instance on social media, Bruns, Wilson & Saunders (2008) and Shirky (2009) posit that the internet allows for more equal distribution of power among members of a community through deeper participation. Further, Shirky (2011, p. 3) argues that much as social media affords freedom not only to access and share information its major strength lies in them being "long term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere." Similarly, Rasmussen (2014) argues that the internet and social media like Twitter and Facebook improves the conceptualization of the Habermas public sphere by doing away with the social chasm between speakers and listeners. The result is that there is a chance for everyone to participate meaningfully in public debates.

Castells (2007), Dahlberg (2001) and Papacharissi (2002) also make a case for a digital sphere enabled by internet and social media for political information sharing and deliberation even though such a public space is "an increasingly contested terrain, as it expresses the new historical stage in which a new form of society is being given birth […]" (Castells, 2007, p. 258). Dahlberg (2001) however still maintains the original conceptualization of the public sphere by positing the digital sphere as a place for rational debate. Arguably, the digital sphere conceptualization speaks to political participation as the ability of ordinary persons to have a voice and speak in public matters. This view is supported by various social media scholars who argue that these platforms increase access to public issues by reducing obstructions for public expressions more by ordinary citizens (e.g., Pasek et al., 2009; Towner & Dulio, 2011).

The counter-publics perspective associated with radical democracy in which agonistic pluralism fits, further offers builds on the debate of political participation. Fraser (1992) proposed to solve the shortcomings of the public sphere particularly its exclusivity by introducing the concept of the subaltern counter-publics. The counter-publics are smaller spheres of civic interaction which develop alongside the public sphere, where the previously marginalised groups like women, can get an opportunity to engage freely. Within this perspective, the digital media therefore provides an opportunity for participation for excluded groups (Dahlberg, 2005) as the "counter-publics locate public activity outside the public sphere" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 40). The counter-publics

are not just spaces of deliberation but also spaces for invention of new discourses, counter-discourses, and identity negotiation (Fraser, 1992) thus expanding opportunities shaping and initiating change in the political realm.

This study takes a syntopian view in which the internet and social media platforms are seen as both affording opportunities for participation and inhibiting them, as technology does not operate independently but within the social appropriations of its users (e.g., Castells, 1996, 1997; Hardt & Negri, 2009). Such a view is supported by previous theorisations of the political nature of social. For instance, Svensson (2012) following Elias (1970/1998) and Foucault (1979/1994) argue that since participation is a process that takes place among people it is unlikely that participation hierarchies and power relationships can be done away with. Through power sideshows including hostile hazing rituals, individuals in virtual communities alienate some members such that they are not able to participate fully in the activities of the communities. This is explained by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p.125) in their antagonism thesis, "the presence of the 'other' prevents me from being totally myself [….] I cannot be a full presence for myself."

In a study of online activism on Facebook and Twitter of a middle-class activist community in Southern Stockholm, Svensson (2012) found that instead of the egalitarian discourses of internet participation which posit that there are no hierarchies in participation and power inequalities; members took two positions, the core, and the periphery. The core characterised the leaders of the movement, who passed information to the rest of community and were considered more powerful as they had more understanding of the issue at hand. On the other end were periphery members who consumed information and analysis of issues from the core and rarely participated in the discussion.

Another example is the WELL, one of the first virtual communities which started with a vision of open and unhindered freedom of being facilitating intense participation and emotional openness. However, this did not last as deep-rooted conflict, power struggles, accusations and counter accusations among other things led to the breakdown of the community (Hafner, 1997) with some

members leaving to form another virtual community and eventually what remained of the WELL was sold to a profit-making organization (Matei, 2005).

Moreover, the materiality of technology further rearticulates the nature of participation in virtual spaces. For instance, the presence of 'administrators' (individuals who form WhatsApp groups and can admit or remove members) in WhatsApp and other virtual communities imply moderation of member's behaviour. Moderation can be positive on one hand for instance in curbing hostility thus creating a conducive environment for open communication and maximalist participation. On the other hand, if overdone, can subdue voices and hinder individuals from participating in the community fully (van Heijningen & van Clief, 2017; Wright, 2006). Further, ownership control, algorithms, surveillance, and lack of full proof data protection, exposes digital subjectivities to capitalistic exploitation especially by social networking platforms (Berardi, 2009; Fisher, 2009; Fuchs, 2011; Grosser, 2014) while creating the illusion of encouraging political agency (Dean, 2009, 2010, 2012) and participation (Andrejevic, 2013).

The literature reviewed in this section gives an overview of the different theorizations and dynamics involved in online participation. Consequently, it will be interesting to find out the nature of participation and the motivation behind them in the two cases of WhatsApp communities.

2.4 Identification, Power and Technology.

Matters of power and hegemony are matters of exclusion/ inclusion. Since these groups are conceptualized in the study as communities, the question of identity construction and negotiation could not be avoided. In literature following the digital culture line, discussions of how identity is constructed in offline spaces, the condition of embodiment/disembodiment of the corporeal body of the actor in relation to their environment and others is important regardless of how that identity is constituted. In psychological accounts which draw inspiration from scholars such Freud, identity is constituted in three ways; personal, relational, and social. Personal identity is constituted as self-identity, one's self-determined concept of themselves in terms of autonomy, values, beliefs, and

goals which sets them apart from others (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Rodriguez, et al, 2010; Schwartz et al, 2011).

Relational identity is related to the roles individuals take in an interpersonal relationship, for example that of a manager-subordinate (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) while social identity speaks to how individuals negotiate and manage their relational identity roles within social groups one shares values, beliefs, and goals with (Bornman, 2010) with the aim of belonging (Phinney, 2003). Sociological accounts of identity especially the functionalist, see identity as emerging from influences within one's social context. In other words, one is what one's parents, social class or grouping is. As such, actors in this identification process are rendered passive (Buckingham, 2008).

In social theory, identity is conceptualized as multiple roles people play in society, and whatever role is dominant in a particular context, constitutes one's identity at the time (Stets & Burke, 2014; Stryker et al., 2000). The important contribution of social theory to theorising identity which is also embraced in social constructionist/Postmodernist/ Poststructuralist approaches is the recognition of multiplicity of identity. Another important contribution from social theory is Bauman's (2004) conceptualization of identity as fluid and constantly negotiable. Bauman (2004) also points out that identity becomes even more prominent when it is threatened or contested. It is from these assertions that Buckingham (2008) leans on to conceptualise identity politics, which is of interest to this study, in relation to power.

The term "identity politics" "refers primarily to activist social movements that have explicitly sought to challenge this process: they have struggled to resist oppressive accounts of their identities constructed by others who hold power over them, and claimed the right to self-determination" (Buckingham, 2008, p. 7). It is an approach to identity which focuses on previously othered or marginalised with the aim of recognizing and bringing to the fore power inequalities and how to possibly address them. As such, this implies that identity construction is a result of difference be it for instance, of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, political and consequently operates at group

level (Buckingham, 2008). Moreover, unlike in social theory, identity politics place identity within the locus of political struggle (Calhoun, 1994). Identity politics also speak to a collective identity construction which acknowledges that though humans strive to be different, they are at the same time attracted to elements of commonality with sameness in their difference (Arendt, 1958; Calhoun, 1994; Taylor & Whittier, 1992) which forms a formidable force to resistance. As such, identity politics is often criticised for essentialism including that of generalizing members of a group into a singular fixed identity. Bernstein (2005) group various orientation of identity politics as Neo-Marxist; new social movement; Social constructionist, Postmodernist and Poststructuralist; and later proposes an integrative approach. In this study I follow the Social constructionist/Postmodernist/Poststructuralist approach to identity politics.

The social constructionist/Postmodernist/ Poststructuralist approach to identity politics moves away from the essentialism of a collective identity seen in the other approaches and instead embrace plurality (Bernstein, 2005). In this approach, power is constructed differently and there is a push for new forms of organizing which embraces difference by bringing together different marginalized people as one force as opposed to essential categories (Gamson, 1995; Warner, 2000). Butler (1988), a poststructuralist, for instance, critiques the predetermined gender binary system. She argues that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 19). By theorising "gender as a performative act," she argues that identity is what we do as opposed to what we are, and thus envisions the possibility of the construction of other gender forms other than the stipulated gender binary categories (ibid). The idea of fluidity or contingency of identification in Butler's work is also seen in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) who argue that identities are not pre-constituted but are constructed through the logic of antagonism (difference) which also prevents the full constitution of identities. As such collective identity, or coalition building to use Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) parlance, is not because of some essential form but a discursive process; what Melucci (1985) describes as:

> [. . .] a shared definition of the field of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action: "shared" means constructed and negotiated through a repeated process of "activation" of social relationships connecting the actors (p. 793).

In other words, identity begins at a condition of "emptiness" to be filled discursively with whichever identification manages to be hegemonic. As such, the identification process is characterised by exclusion and power dynamics. It is this formulation of collective identity that this study follows to understand how social affordances of technology and human action contribute to collective identity negotiation in the WhatsApp communities.

In online spaces, the issue of identity is rendered even more prominent especially in discourses of the marginalised that see such spaces as an opportunity to speak, to be heard, seen or exist in their own terms, an opportunity previously denied. Castells (1996, p.3) argues that "in a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning." He therefore theorizes identity as source of meaning and experience. He acknowledges tensions in networks as a relation of power through which "societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self" (ibid, p. 3). It is these tensions which account for changes in how identification occurs. Among the resulting identities is the identity of resistance which creates a collective community through which collective action against opposition is taken.

Perhaps the profoundness of questions of "who we are" in online social media spaces is a result of the "newness" of these spaces and therefore the need to understand ourselves and how to navigate relationships with "different" others (known or unknown). Additionally, the affordances technology accords us as navigation tools while at the same time having an agency of its own, quite different from offline spaces is a promise of new possibilities, new identity constructions of our own making. I therefore argue that technologies of resistance in online spaces are a combination of human action and technology affordance which enable individuals to construct and perform their identities without fear of victimization. In other words, overcome the subjugation they face in offline spaces. This fluidity in identification in some accounts is mainly attributed to the early argument that bodies are disembodied in digital communication as the subject is seen to only exist through the words they articulate, given the promises anonymity and pseudonymity that online spaces were seen to afford (Bargh et al., 2002; McKenna et al., 2002; Rheingold, 1993;

Turkle, 1995; Zhao, 2006). In line with this thought of disembodiment are ideas of post humanism in which human embodiment is totally transcended by technology as is the argument that man is an imperfect, irrational being who can only function well by moving towards being a machine than being human. Moravec (1990) for instance, envisages a possibility that human consciousness can be downloaded into a computer and still remain unchanged, thus obtaining immortality through technology.

However current research in accounts of post-humanism differs from the former conceptualization of posthumanism "in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself [……]" (Wolfe, 2010, p. xv). Yet other accounts of post humanism go for a hybridity resulting from interaction of human/animal and technology, the extension of man in McLuhan's (1964) parlance, in the rejection of boundaries between "human" and animal and "human and "machine." A notable example of this is Donna Haraway's (1991) "Cyborg Manifesto" in which the cyborg is a material-semiotic metaphor which unites different political coalitions through affinity rather than identity. Haraway (1991) rejects traditional notions of feminist identity politics as essential.

In most recent research on digital communication, especially that deals with sensitive issues, some scholars follow the disembodiment trajectory with anonymity lauded for enabling participation in such contexts. For instance, van Heijningen and van Clief (2017) found that anonymity allows women in Kenya to open up about their sexuality on the internet, something most would otherwise not engage in offline. Jardine (2016) argues that online anonymity helps citizens to avoid government surveillance in both repressive and more libertarian environments. However, with further technological developments, some scholars have argued for the need to nuance thinking about anonymity in online spaces, consequently bridging the gap between embodiment and disembodiment. Zhao et. al (2008), give an example of how users on Facebook reveal their identities through profile pictures rather than 'telling them', rendering such sites "nonymous".

Sarda et al (2019) instead argue that anonymity exists in different degrees depending on the range of tools used and functions of different internet browsers and as such technical and social dimensions affect how identity is constructed and privacy is performed online. Accordingly, different technologies may afford diverse levels of protection of one's privacy. WhatsApp (2016) for instance uses an end-to –end encryption technology to automatically ensure privacy and protect users from surveillance. Facebook on the other hand, largely depends on how users appropriate the technology; with options provided for whether they want their timelines public or only available to friends. As such, degree of privacy is dependent both on how much one is willing to disclose and the privacy settings of the technology which stills functions through the user's agency. In contrast, Asenbaum (2019) avers that digital spaces are more embodied than earlier thought. Writing on digital democracy which he argues is "not only defined by what we do (voting, debating, protesting) but also in a more fundamental way by who we are," he points out the use of "stereotypical African- American avatars to occupy digital space during protests on racism" as a testament to embodiment in online engagements (ibid, p.2).

In an out rightly affordance-oriented study, Khazraee and Novak (2018) identify two affordances for discourse and performance as key to collective identity construction in digital protest. They argue that affordances which exist in form of visual and textual practices enabled by Facebook firstly affords discourse by helping actors to collectively frame grievances and negotiate meaning. In this case, constructing the mandatory hijab for women as oppressive. Secondly, by enabling women to deliberately share photo biographies of themselves not wearing the hijab, Facebook contribute to their performance of protest as these acts mobilize wider audiences to join the movement (ibid). In a netnographic study to determine what motivates Nigerian diaspora in USA to use the WhatsApp platform for community and identity construction, Udenze and Ugoala (2020), found that WhatsApp is a major source of information about home for these users. The sharing of information and interaction in the platform among users in return help to create national identities and strong bonds of companionship. Issues of privacy and trust which usually come up in discussions of affordances of social media as it relates to surveillance, also play a role in identification in online spaces. These issues often invoke discourses of embodiment and disembodiment (see for example, Durante, 2011).

2.5 Conclusion.

In this literature review, I have thematically discussed the various theoretical paths which literature on the questions of sense of belonging to a community, participation, identification, and their entanglement with digital media technology is anchored. The discussion followed a genealogical strategy in which a historical account of the theoretical paths which have emerged over time within the specific and broader field of this study was traced. How these themes interact with the meta-discourse of power was also explored. Most importantly I have also set the basis for the specific theoretical choices I made to guide this study, discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Applying Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to modern day governmentality

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter elucidated the existing theoretical trajectories of previous scholarship in terms of the concerns of this thesis, that is, community and its attendant functionalities of sense of belonging, participation and identity negotiation in relation to digital technology and power. Consequently, the theoretical exposition paved way for the theoretical choices in this chapter. Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory often capitalised and abbreviated as DT to differentiate it from other strands of discourse theory, forms the major theoretical framework to which this study leans on. First introduced in their 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)*, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, hereafter DT, specifically their ontological conceptualization of the discursive and their political identity theory provide important insights to this study.

The contingent nature of the discursive structure for instance, provides a framework through which one can understand the polysemy WhatsApp as a floating signifier, whose meaning different elements (and discourses) seek to fix. Consequently, two competing discourses of freedom and control prove more dominant by othering all other possible discourses which could determine the signification of WhatsApp. The first section (and subsections) of this chapter therefore discusses DT and its major tenets. In keeping with the advantages of theoretical eclecticism as Serres' (1995) argues that no "single theoretical pass key can open all doors", I draw on Foucault's (1979, 1980; 1982) theorisation of power and Carpentier's (2011; 2012; 2016; 2017 among others) conceptualisation of participation, covered in conversation with each other in the subsequent section of the chapter. Additionally, the works of the two are also brought into conversation with DT, so that it is not just eclecticism for the sake of it, but a demonstration of how these different works integrate to contribute to the analysis of this study. Foucault's argument of the non-possessive nature of power, its ubiquity, and problematisation of government as governmentality, speaks to the equal opportunity every element in the WhatsApp discourse has to fix meanings and identities. It is at this point of fixation that Laclau and Mouffe (1985) concept of hegemony comes in to define the power inequalities among elements in discourse. Carpentier's work is important to

the study since the concept of participation is not directly theorized in DT and because Carpentier follows various arguments in DT in his analytical model of participation. Lastly, I bring in the concept of mobility which is in tandem with DT's emphasis on the contingency of the social to weave in the technological theorizations into the discursive, DT's non distinction between the discursive and non-discursive notwithstanding.

3.1 A brief genealogy of discourse theory.

The concept 'discourse' is in itself a floating signifier. There are many ways in which people think of discourse; some with a precise signification and others almost in meaningless ways. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) for instance, propose a preliminary of discourse as a "*particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)*" (emphasis in the original). In a positivist formulation discourse is seen as a frame through which we view the world while in Marxist tradition, discourse is synonymous with ideology. Discourse has its origin in the study of language of public speech and its literature can be traced to the past two millennia (van Dijk, 1985). Language philosophers like J.L. Austin and John Searle, for instance, contributed to this thought. Their speech-act theory argues that speech is credited with adding action and therefore context to discourse study, that is, "linguistic communication essentially involves acts" (Searle, 1969, p. 2). What this means is that unlike previously conceived, it is not words that are the primary unit of communication but how they are produced. In other words, meaning is given by context and not necessarily language.

The "new" discourse studies can be categorized under structuralism and post-structuralism thought. In other words, language is action. Structuralism is majorly based on Saussurian scientific model of linguistics brought forward in Saussure's 1916 publication: *The Course in General Linguistics* (Young, 1983). Saussure (1983) argues that it is '*langue*'-the system of any language-which is responsible for signification in communication and '*parole*'-the performative part of the system. For structuralism theorists therefore**:**

> Meaning is made possible by the existence of underlying systems of conventions which enable elements to function individually as signs. Structuralism analysis addresses itself to

> the system of rules and relations underlying each signifying practice: its activity more often than not consists in producing a model of this system (Young, 1983, p. 3).

Post structuralism discourse studies, which this study follows, builds on the ideas of structuralism that signs gain their meaning by placing them in particular relations with other signs in discourse. However, they are opposed to structuralism's notion of language "as a stable, unchangeable and totalizing structure and dissolve the sharp distinction between *langue* and *parole*" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 10). This means that meaning can never be completely fixed as through negotiations and conflicts, signs can take up new meanings or challenged. Foucault's (1971/1972) work on discourse especially his understanding that discourses shape and are shaped by social relations and institutions as opposed to being determined by the objective world, provide inspiration for post structuralist discourse analysis under the umbrella of social constructionism. Works on discourse insipired by Foucault include Laclau and Mouffe's DT, the various strands of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Wodak, Fairclough and van Dijk (See Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002 for a discussion on this). However, the strands of CDA focus on the ontic while Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) DT take an ontological analysis. Foucault's ideas on double subjectivation in discourse also play a significant role on how identity is conceptualized in discourse.

3.2 Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory and its Key Concepts.

DT is an eclectic endeavour which results from continuities and discontinuities of certain theoretical concepts in Marxist tradition, Derrida's deconstruction, Gramsci's hegemony and Lacan's *point de capiton* and *lack***.** As a post- Marxist project, DT ontologically deconstructs the central categories of the Marxist theory which presents the economy and class as super structures through which the society is ordered. On the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) privilege the political "not as a superstructure but as having the status of ontology of the social" (xiv). What this means is that unlike the Marxist positioning of the proletariat as the universal class whose interventions would lead to "human reconciliation, disintegration of the state and the end of politics" (ibid, xiii); Laclau and Mouffe (1985) present the political as the universal and this is where the hegemonic link comes in, as the central analytical tool. In their own words, hegemony is "constitutively political" (xiii) and thus the social field, constituted as "discursive space" can

never be neutral, meaning social actors can never completely agree, the "impossibility of society" according to Laclau (1983).

Laclau & Mouffe (1985) conceptualize discourse as fully constitutive of the world and consequently do away with the binary of discursive and non-discursive, as is the case in other strands of discourse theory. Instead, "practices are viewed as exclusively discursive" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 19). What this means is that though everything whether material or symbolic cannot be reduced to language, they are organised in the same principle as language. In other words, objects in themselves are meaningless but gain meaning ascribed to them within the context of discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Consider Laclau & Mouffe's example of a stone which attains the meaning of a building block in construction discourse but can also be perceived as a weapon when used as a projectile in a different context. As such, apart from conversations in the WhatsApp community, actions by government/institutions like the Acts guiding social media use, and the WhatsApp technology itself is included in my analysis of determining how the emerging discourses in the two WhatsApp communities are constructed.

That signification does not precede discourse, points to a competition of the elements in discourse to determine for others the meaning of concepts and practices articulated in discourse. This further reiterates the premise on which this study is anchored, that antagonisms (conflict) are inherent in any social set-up including the WhatsApp communities and that everything is discursive including the material technology, WhatsApp. Reality and meaning are therefore viewed as unfixed, fluid and contingent. DT has three interrelated levels to it; their ontology, their political identity theory, and their democratic theory of radical pluralism (Carpentier et al., 2019; Smith, 1999). These three, however, interact to bring out the overall idea of contingency in discourse theory that "social phenomena are never finished or total" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 2). That is, the impossibility of achieving fixation of meaning. This theoretical framework will however draw on the first two levels. The third level, which speaks to a post-Marxist formulation of radical democratic politics and further building into populism as a left-wing strategy (Laclau, 2005) and agonistic democracy (Mouffe, 1999; 2005; 2013) has been discussed in part according to its relevance to this study in

the literature review chapter. In the next sections, I discuss the first two levels of DT while drawing out the significant conceptualizations key to this thesis.

3.2.1 The ontology of discourse theory

The ontology of DT is discussed in two sections. The first focuses on the understanding of the ontology itself. The second expands on how DT's ontology subsequently impacts the process of construction of meaning (and identities), which is what the practice of discourse entails.

3.2.1.1 The discursive nature of the social

According to Howarth (2000) Laclau and Mouffe ontology in DT lies in the way they theorise the discursive as constituting social reality. This means that Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasize the role of the discursive structure in generating meaning in the social while at the same time recognizing the significance of the material. Carpentier et al (2019, p. 5) term this as the "careful positioning between materialism and idealism." Consequently, discourse provides the structure through which meaning is constructed. The excerpt below drawn from Laclau and Mouffe (1985) not only defines discourse in their theory but also brings out some key concepts:

> [We] will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated (p.85).

From this excerpt it can be deduced that at the beginning of formation of a discourse, signs are polysemic and could take up any meaning. The positioning of elements (signs and subjects) in relation to one another, and their consequent modification in a discursive process (including modification of discourse itself), is what constitutes an articulation process. This means that prior to their articulations, these elements exist as floating signifiers. A floating signifier refers to a signifier "overflowed with meaning" (Torfing, 1999, p. 301). This means that there are multiple possible meanings to a floating signifier and the different political groups in discourse compete to assign their desired meaning to it, excluding others. In chapter 5, I discuss how the term "Wanjiku", a feminine name among Kikuyu took up the politicised signification of ordinary Kenyan citizens

(Shitemi & Kamaaara, 2014). The acquired referent has further birthed competing connotations of empowered (politically conscious and actively agitating for their rights) and disempowered (constructed as citizen's dependent on second parties such as CSOs to agitate for change on their behalf) ordinary Kenyan citizens. "Wanjiku" is therefore a floating signifier. Though Wanjiku still has a cultural signification among the Kikuyu, this cultural aspect is displaced in the everyday political discourse in Kenya.

The floating of elements in discourse points to the contingency of the discursive structure which according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985) results from the dialectic interplay of the inherent conflicts (antagonisms) in the social, rendering society impossible. Antagonisms can also be understood as occurring when different discourses "make contrasting demands in relation to the same actions within a common terrain, and inevitably one blocks the other" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.47). That the suture of society is impossible is not to be understood literally; what it means is that due to the contingent nature of the processes of the social, for instance, the identification and meaning making processes can never achieve full fixation; only a partial and temporary fixation, if any, is possible (Hansen, 2014). This is a critique of the essentialist formulation of "society" as a sutured and self-defined totality (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.111). The unfixity (contingency) further means that the floating signs and concepts in discourse can take up several meanings depending on how they are articulated in a particular discourse. As such, discourse is the "incomplete attempts to fix meanings within a particular structure of relations" (Carpentier et al., 2019, p.5). To further strengthen their ideas on contingency of the discursive structure, Laclau (1996, p.36) developed the idea of an empty signifier which he defines as "a signifier without the signified" in which anything can fit into but with "limits of signification" (Laclau, 1996, p.39). The limits help in the fixation of concepts.

When the floating elements are articulated in discourse, they transform into moments. Thus, moments are meanings or identities which have succeeded in becoming hegemonic over all other possible meanings. This is an indication that articulated elements are always positioned in difference or antagonistic relationship with one another. Howarth (2010, p. 309) summarizes these thoughts with his description of discourse as an articulatory practice which involves the drawing

of political frontiers by social actors as each try to position their meanings or interpretation as the universal. But this universalism is not as in Habermasian conceptualisation where rational thought and ideas arrived at through the dialogic process have universal application; but rather a particular that has become hegemonic. After all, "the universal is no more than a particular that at some moment has become dominant…" (Laclau, 2007, p. 26**)**. This in itself is an act of power, a hegemonic practice, since for one meaning to take precedence; other meanings have to be excluded within the field of discursivity. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refer to this process as overdetermination; "the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifier by the signified" (Ibid, p.11).

Further discourse goes beyond "representations and systems of meaning" (Dryzek, 1997, p. 8). Though discourse stabilizes the social structure by stopping the floating meanings in articulations, this suture is never permanent due to the contingency of the social. Discourse therefore remains a "[…] structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed" (Laclau, 1988**,** p. 254). A temporary suture is, however, important if any signification is to be achieved albeit partially as "a discourse in which meaning cannot be possibly fixed is nothing but discourse of the psychotic" (Laclau, 1990, p. 90)**.**

3.2.1.2 How discourses gain (partial) stability.

Given the discussion on the discursive so far, one might therefore ask, if all social forms are contingent including articulation of meaning and identities, how then is any social formation or stability of discourse possible? The answer to this comes in the form of a *nodal point*. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) use the concept of nodal point adapted from Lacan's *point de capiton* to refer to the moment of meaning fixation. Nodal points are "privileged signifiers or reference points in a discourse that bind together a particular system of meaning or 'chain of signification'" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p.12). Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) use an example from Zizek in which several pre-existing signifiers in discourses such as democracy and freedom are transformed into internal moments of communist discourse after being articulated around the nodal point, communism. It is the nodal points that when sedimented become hegemonic and makes a discourse stable. However, contingency means that discourses are always threatened with instability as the

field of discursivity has elements both connected and not connected to a particular discourse. It is the unconnected elements which cause instability within discourse when they become articulated and even displace the connected elements, consequently changing the signification of that discourse (Carpentier et al., 2019, p. 6). This means that discourses can therefore be disarticulated, re-articulated or even disintegrated.

According to Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000, p. 13), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) further tackle the question of the emergence and composition of partial fixations by affirming the primacy of politics in their social ontology. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that discourses and their articulations are as a result of antagonism and the exercise of power. They aver that antagonism "as the negation of a given order is, quite simply, the limit of that order, and not the moment of a broader totality in relation to which the two poles of antagonism would constitute differential – i.e., objective partial instances" (ibid, p. 126)**.** Whenever identities are unable to have closures then antagonisms lack any discursive presence. Social antagonisms therefore occur as the presence of the Other inhibits social actors from fully being themselves (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This reiterates that discourse is established by exclusion of all other possible meanings and identification which form the field of discursivity (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The presence of a purely negative identity that accounts for antagonistic relations and consequently the construction of social antagonisms, threaten discursive systems (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). To explain how a purely negative identity is possible, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) invoke the logic of equivalence. The logic of equivalence simplifies the political space whereby articulating similarities, different elements or different subject positions are brought together in a chain reducing the possible number of positions that can exist (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p. 130). Thus, the logic of equivalence on the other hand, creates a political frontier which demarcates the lines of exclusion and inclusion (Howarth, 2009). Whereas the logic of equivalence divides the political space (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000), the logic of difference brings to the fore the differences among subject positions in a bid to "loosen-up or disarticulate the equivalential chains of demands and identities" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007. p. 321) thus expanding the political space (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

3.2.2 Political Identity theory

To understand what is seen as a development of an identity theory in Laclau and Mouffe's DT, I discuss it in two sub-sections. The first looks at the major premise in which the political identity theory is anchored and the second focuses on how identities are subsequently constructed given that premise.

3.2.2.1 The primacy of politics and hegemony

One distinct premise of DT is the ontology in which Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) work is premised. Their social ontology is in asserting discourse as political since its formation is an act of power. They arrived at this ontology through a self-imposed question in HSS: "how […] does a relation between entities have to be, for a hegemonic relation to become possible?" The answer to this can be summarized as the open-endedness or unfixity of the society which they arrive at by privileging the moment of political articulation (primacy of politics) in their view, and the concept of hegemony as central in this formulation (ibid, p. x).

Having noted the contingency of the social and the primacy of politics in the social demonstrated by antagonisms which makes it impossible for society to completely suture, how then do certain discourses become naturalised in society that other possible meanings become forgotten? This according to Laclau & Mouffe (1985) is made possible through hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) deconstruct and radicalize Gramsci's hegemony to explain the instances in which certain discourses become socially dominant (Carpentier 2017). Gramsci' (1999, p. 261) argues that "the 'normal' exercise of hegemony is characterized by the combination of force and consent variously balancing one another, without force exceeding consent too much". Gramsci moves from the previous conceptualizations of hegemony, for instance in Leninism, the vanguard party is presented as holding the historically determined role of mobilizing different elements towards a revolution struggle. Instead, he presents hegemony as the articulation of several forces by the proletariat where they represent and agitate for the universal rights of a people instead of their usual corporate interests in what he terms as "intellectual, cultural and moral leadership" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 22). He further reiterates the importance of consent in the formation of

dominant alliances as opposed to "the (exclusive) domination of the other, without, however, excluding a certain form of pressure and repression" (Carpentier, 2017, p.21)

In discourse theory, hegemony is conceptualized in terms of practices and formations (rule or governance). Laclau and Mouffe deconstructs the remaining essentialist elements in Gramsci's conceptualizations including favouring a "fundamental social class" as initiator of social change, presenting the economy as a superstructure which structures a society as a "self-enclosed totality" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). As already discussed, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) DT is anchored on the contingency and the political nature of the social. In this vein, the existence of antagonistic forces and instability of political frontiers formed are the precursors for hegemonic practices to occur. Hegemony has two sides to it. As a political practice, it "[…] captures the making and breaking of political projects and discourse coalitions. But on the other hand, it is also a form of rule or governance that speaks to the maintenance of the policies, practices and regimes that are formed by such force" (Howarth, 2010, p. 310). These two components employ the political logics of equivalence and difference respectively through which antagonistic struggles are discursively articulated. Hegemony is therefore inherently political as antagonistic struggles of inclusion and exclusion are acts of power.

Hegemony as a practice involves building consensus, getting people to support a social actor(s) through various forms of political articulations to produce and maintain a social order. This happens through the logic of equivalence whereas many disparate identities and subjectivities (existing as floating signifiers) are articulated for them to support a common a project. The articulated elements and identities are consequently transformed as the result of the articulation (Carpentier, 2017; Howarth, 2010; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). Griggs and Howarth (2004) give an example of how this occurs:

> demands of local campaigns to oppose a particular airport expansion can be linked together with demands arising from other campaigns in different parts of the country, to construct a broader coalition. Demands to halt airport expansion more generally can also be linked to wider social demands – such as demands for better public transport or greater social justice – by finding points of equivalence amongst these different struggles. In this case, the very identities and demands of local struggles will be modified to reflect their more universal character, whilst the content of the new demand will be given by a more general opposition

> to a government's overall national policy of airport expansion, and/or to its environmental consequences (cited in Howarth, 2010).

Hegemonic projects therefore aim to "construct and stabilize nodal points that are the basis of a social order, the main aim being to become a social imaginary, or the horizon" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 21). Consequently, social orders become hegemonic by not only excluding all other regimes through the building of political frontiers, as in the workings of a nodal point but also dissolving antagonisms. Only in the case of hegemony, the point of fixation is known as a myth (I will return to the concepts of myth and social imaginary shortly). When hegemonic projects succeed, then what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refer to as sedimentation, occurs. Sedimentation refers to how the nature of hegemonic acts is concealed and naturalized, ridding it of its political nature (depoliticization). This they distinguish from its opposite, "reactivation" which makes the concealed political acts visible again (ibid, p. viii) as hegemonic discourses just like other elements of discourse can be dislocated.

On the other hand, hegemony as a form of rule or governance point to the types of hegemonic formations or historical bloc in Laclau and Mouffe's terms that arise from the hegemonic practices of consensus building. It accounts for how identities consent to a rule or social order they had previously resisted (Howarth, 2010). It happens through the logic of difference where elements in the equivalential chains are disarticulated by power holders by bringing forth their difference**.** In this way, power holders can manage oppositions through strategies and tactics that prevent any major changes or upsetting the status quo. The logic of difference works in the same way as what Foucault (1991) terms as governmentality, the conceptualization of government as "an art of doing politics, an activity of governing issues and subjectivities, which concerns the 'how' and 'what' of public interventions" (Howarth, 2010, p.321); "the conduct of conduct" (Foucault, 1982, pp. 220-221).

At any given moment discourses can either succeed or fail to achieve hegemony. This is where we return to the concepts of myth and social imaginary (horizon). Both according to Laclau (1990)

emerge as a result of structural dislocation. Myths therefore construct novel places of representation which attempt to suture a dislocated space by providing a surface in which several demands and dislocations can be accommodated (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). For instance, technology can be considered as a dislocation in the Kenyan society that has disrupted several hegemonic blocs in terms of what, for example, we understand as a community or spaces of political articulation. A WhatsApp space and governmentality strategies that attempt to redefine and reconcile these dislocations can therefore be considered as myth as both employ hegemony as practice and governance, respectively. Consequently, the actions of myths are hegemonic as they seek to form "a new objectivity by means of the re-articulation of the dislocated elements" (Laclau, 1990, p.64). A myth becomes a social imaginary when it succeeds in its objective.

A social imaginary, also known as 'horizon,' is defined by Laclau (1990, p.64) as an "an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility." That is, all other imaginaries have been completely subdued and there exist only one dominant discourse. Laclau gave the examples of Enlightenment and Christian Millennialism. In the current era, Neoliberalism poses as a good example of a social imaginary which infiltrates all aspects of the social in most parts of the world determining how meanings and especially government decisions are constructed. In psychoanalytic discourse, social imaginaries are fantasies which help subjects overcome the lack resulting from the contingency of the social and the resultant impossibility of attaining reality, or what Lacan refers to as the Real. Thus, following Lacan, fantasmatic logics (Glynos and Howarth, 2007) in addition to the political logics of equivalence and difference are conceived to account for how discourses are naturalised or become hegemonic as the authorities play on either the beatific side which has a stabilizing function or the horrific side which destabilizes discourses (Žižek, 1989, p. 192).

Fantasmatic logics also conceal the radical contingency of discourse contributing to depoliticized/anti-political discourses. These ideas espouse the affective nature of the political that goes beyond emotions which numerous studies have already demonstrated are part of politics (Marcus, 1991; Marcus et al., 2000; Demertzis, 2014). It is an affect that is more inclined towards Berlant (2011) description of sentimentality. She problematizes sentimentality as an attachment towards and identification with objects (including politics) which we know may disappoint us but

at the same time, hold on to the hope that they make our lives better, a cruel optimism. And such is the precarious relationship that we have with technology that this study espouses; one of WhatsApp possibly bringing change even though it has been associated with maintaining the status quo in certain instances, a relationship that is possibly of freedom even though it could also possibly control us with the result being the emergence of social imaginaries which repair dislocations in society to maintain an objective order rather than counter it.

3.2.2.2 Identification as subject positions and political subjectivity.

In a post-structuralist view, identity is constructed discursively. Just like meaning is constructed and negotiated, identities are determined by discourses and therefore never completely fixed. Moreover, both individual and collective identities are "organized according to the same principles in the same discursive processes." (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 40) This view rejects the essentialist Marxist (and structuralist) position that collective identities are determined by pre-existing structures such as class and economy. In this conception therefore, identities are not primordial but rather "precarious constructions that are constituted by political practices of inclusion and exclusion [...] an act of power" (Howarth, 2010, p. 314). As already established in other areas of DT, construction of social identities and political identities are also predicated on the idea of lack and contingency (undecidability) of the discursive structure. It follows therefore that "social and political identities are vulnerable and incomplete entities, which emerge and are constituted through processes of identification and investment" (Howarth 2010, p. 314). Moreover, the theorization of identity in DT takes the sociocultural strand as opposed to the psychoanalytic strand (Carpentier, 2014).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) builds on Althusser's theorization of the subject as 'interpellated' or 'hailed', that is, constructed by discourses in lieu of ideological practices as argued by Althusser. However, like Althusser, Laclau and Mouffe reject the phenomenological, empiricist and rational ideas that confer on the subject the ability to originate its own ideas or values and rationality (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2002, p. 18). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) further differentiate between subject positions and political subjectivity. The former refers to how subjects are positioned

against the Other within a discursive structure while the latter refers to how subjects act within discourse, that is, their agency.

The 'subject position' formulation is inspired by Lacanian theorization of subject as lack (Zizek, 1990) in which the subject before the constructive subjectivation process is devoid of any identification. It is through subjectivation that "the subject integrates what is given to him/her into the universe of meaning-this integration always ultimately fails, there is a certain leftover which cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe" (Zizek, 1990, p. 254). Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 11) in their discourse theory conceptualize subject position as follows:

> Whenever we use the category of 'subject' in this text, we will do so in the sense of 'subject position' within a discursive structure. Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations-not even in limited sense of being endowed with powers that render an experience possible-as all 'experience' depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility.

This definition speaks to an 'overdetermination[12]' in the Freudian sense, which points out an interpellation. However, it is not as in Althusser's structuralism conceptualization where subjects are ideologically interpellated robbing them of the agency to resist, rather they are interpellated by discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) as eventually what we are interpellated by is determined by our positioning (Zizek, 1990). An ideological interpellation is opposed by Laclau and Mouffe for its deterministic nature as "ideological practices are regarded as a 'relatively autonomous' region of a social" meaning a subject constituted ideologically are determined by "pre-existing social structures" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 19); a notion counter to DT's premise that discourse include all social practices.

Just like the discourses that interpellated them, subject positions are fluid and keep changing in various contexts of the social. Subject position is therefore not only a floating signifier whose signification is contingent but is also fragmented. Fragmented identities imply multiplicity of

[12] Accounts for the contingency of the social and multiplicity of identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985)

identities of social actors in discourse, dependent subjects as opposed to autonomous subjects, as no one discourse of a particular identity can ever be permanently fixed. The fixation is only partial (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Carpentier (2017, p. 97) also points to the contingency of subject positions as follows:

> In all cases it is important to note that the subject positions are structuring but not determining forces that invite subjects to identify with them-interpellating them-without being able to force subjects into acceptance. In addition, the workings of agency also make these identifications -if they occur-always particular, as they become integrated within the subject, who is characterised by her/his many identificatory alignments.

Due to the over-determined nature of subjects, subject positions are always in conflict or antagonisms. Each subject has needs that need to be met, when they meet others with similar needs then they come together in the chain of equivalence. However, for there to be a chain of equivalence, there must be an outside, an Other coalesced in a chain of difference. These subject positions are thus always engaged in an antagonistic relationship as the presence of the Other is important to the existence of the self. The fluidity of discourses also means that subject positions in the chains of equivalence and difference also keep changing depending on the nature of discourse at play. Subject positions that do not engage in visible antagonisms with others are hegemonic as discourses about them have been sedimented and any other possibility locked out (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 47–9). Hegemonic discourses can however be dislocated.

As a response to the critique of the Foucauldian 'subject position' presented in HSS, Laclau (1990) moves to the idea of political subjectivity to differentiate between the two (See Hansen, 2014). A political subject is one with agency, one that acts, that decides. Still sticking to the idea of lack (negativity) Laclau (1990, p.30) in his essay, *New* r*eflections on the revolutions of our time*, argues that the "subject is nothing but this distance between the undecidable structure and the decision**."** This turn in the conceptualization of the subject presupposes the notion of dislocation inspired by Derrida's concept of deconstruction**.**

How then does dislocation and by extension deconstruction constitute a political subjectivity? Dislocation is a disruption, a decentering in the discursive structure which happens through social processes (See; Carpentier, 2017; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000; Laclau, 1990) resulting to the shattering of "already existing identities and literally induces an identity crisis for the subject" (Howarth & Stavrakakis; 2000, p.20) meaning and discourses. The identity crisis for the subjects forces the subjects to discursively construct new identities, an action which requires action, decision and thus political subjectivity is born. Agency is therefore important in conceiving political subjectivity and their stabilization. Stabilized political subjectivities become "those subject positions which 'produce' individuals with certain characteristics and attributes" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p.21)

The contingency, undecidability of the structure and antagonisms is important to this study as they speak to the power struggles in WhatsApp as different subject positions try to assert their agency to belong, participate and identify with a particular WhatsApp community. It also points to the 'counter conduct' strategies of the Other.

3.3 Theorizing power and participation.

One of the objectives of this research is to explore how power struggles in WhatsApp communities affect participation of members. Participation is a concept that is very much related to power regardless of the lens with which you look at it. It may also be regarded as a floating signifier as there are multiple ways in which its signification is articulated (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013).

Carpentier (2016) presents two main approaches to participation: the sociological and political studies approach. The sociological approach to participation represents a broader view of participation that captures ideas such as consumer culture where actor participate in certain buying behavior and cultural participation. For instance, having access to cultural forms like museums and ritual participation (Carey, 2009) as in how individuals engage when sharing a medium like radio (Carpentier, 2016). Though the sociological approach also has an element of power, it only

plays a secondary role as opposed to the political studies approach which is premised on the concept of power particularly on the issue of power relations among actors and decision making. The political approach on the other hand, has a specific focus on redressing power inequalities among social actors in a decision-making process. For instance, Pateman (1972, p. 70) linking participation to democratic theory, describes partial participation in which though parties involved influence each other, only one party has the power to make decisions. This she distinguishes from full participation in which the decision-making process is egalitarian, that is all parties involved have equal power to decide (ibid). The political approach, in line with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) ontological assumptions of the same, is what Carpentier (2011a; 2011b, 2012; 2016; 2017) follows in his analysis of participation.

Carpentier (2016) privileges the Foucauldian strategic model of power -which analyses power as a ubiquitous element in the social-analytics to build his 'beyond the ladder' political approach to participation. Though Carpentier work is firmly grounded in DT, the Foucauldian approach is adapted as Laclau and Mouffe do not engage much with the concept of power. Moreover, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) themselves admit that their understanding of the concept of power is closest to Foucault's understanding of the same. They describe power as the authority to define, thereby excluding all other possible definitions and discourses, exerting a particular signification as the only signification. Additionally, Howarth (2010) also argues that DT follows the Foucauldian strategic model of power; what Laclau and Mouffe add to it is the "is the role of hegemony as a political *practice,* and as a way of conceptualizing different *forms* of rule and their maintenance" (p. 324. Emphasis in the original). It is therefore prudent to first unpack the concept of power, albeit briefly, before engaging with the 'beyond the ladder' participation approach.

Power is similarly a broad concept which could signify many things. In rationalist formulations of Luke, Herbamas and others, for instance, power is seen as a possession of the sovereign, an explicit force or domination that are "external to rational processes of discursive communication" (Howarth, 2000, p. 323).

Foucault's conceptualization of power develops in three phases using the historical methods of archaeology and genealogy in an attempt to address the essentialist traditional conceptualizations of power. His first two models of power, however, had elements of structuralism. It his third analytics of discourse and power, developed in "his writings on sexuality, governmentality, and subjectivity" (Howarth, 2010 p. 316), Foucault conceptualizes power as a strategy and the 'problem of government', as governmentality (See Gordon et al., 1991). The strategic approach to power is a move from previous sites in which power operates to produce subjectivities: madness (the clinic), sexuality (biopower) and delinquency (the prison). As opposed to the traditional juridical model where power was embodied in the sovereign **(**see Schmitt, 1927), Foucault argues instead that the sovereign Subject does not exist, only "strategies without subjects" (Foucault, 1982, p. 220–221). As such:

> Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere . . . Power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1979, p. 93).

It is always already present in all social practices; all relationships be they virtual or face to face at both micro and macro levels. No one exists outside power (Foucault, 1980, p. 141). It is relative, context-specific and dispersed among a wide range of actors (Cornea et al., 2017). We are constantly subjecting it and being objects of it. Power is not always negative but can also be productive (Gaventa, 2003). Moreover, by problematizing government as governmentality, Foucault offers an approach to power which is neither centered on consensus nor violence (Lemke, 2001), but on the process rather than the end product in which "relatively free social agents are engaged in struggle to impose their wills and objectives on each other" (Howarth, 2010, p. 323). In fact, for Foucault, though cognizant of the imbalance in power relations, the "place" of power is non-existent altogether, what exists are the practices of knowledge, power, discourses and truth regimes (Rose, 2000) which produce instances of domination while remaining in "their everyday forms as actions upon the actions of others" (Foucault 1982, p. 211). This he also refers to as "the conduct of conduct" (ibid).

Going back to the notion of participation within the political approach where it is mainly anchored in democratic discourses, participation is seen as an object of struggle as different democratic discourses strive to articulate participation and its intensities in particular ways (Carpentier, 2016). As such, participation is a floating signifier. Participation is also formulated as an empty signifier. Carpentier (2012, 2016, 2017) firmly grounds participation in democratic theory to demonstrate the element of power in participation, while at the same time emphasizing the ability of this approach to transcend the realm of institutional politics to other fields including communication and media. Specifically, Carpentier's work on participation is anchored around community media which fits within the larger discourse of alternative media in which I place my study on WhatsApp in.

Participation is a key articulation in democratic discourse. Whether democracy is considered as an ideal (Dahl, 1989 p. 98; Hyland, 1995, p. 67) in which participation among members in decision making is egalitarian (Somerville, 2011) or as a project (Sartori, 1987, p.16) where there is a power imbalance in participation in decision making (Somerville 2011). Cognisant of the concept of democracy being an empty signifier, Carpentier (2012, 2016, 2017) narrows the field of meaning by following articulation of democracy as either maximalist or minimalist. Minimalist democracy associated by scholars such as Schumpeter, Popper, Riker, and Przeworski who view democracy as a competitive process such as election, in which leaders are chosen. Power to decide is delegated since it is impossible for individual electors to make rational political decision due to their value-based differences and the complexity political decision (Schumpeter, 1976). Democratic value is hence found in government turn over occasioned by free and fair elections (Przeworski, 1999**)** in which "the societal decision-making remains centralised and participation remains limited (in space and time)" (Carpentier, 2012, p. 166).

In more democratic models like radical democracy or participatory democracy, which fall under the maximalist participation continuum, participation involves much more than the "mere election of representatives." (Carpentier, 2012, p. 166). In these models, participation is characterised by continuity and decision-making is decentralised (ibid). Carpentier (2012, 2016, 2017) applies the

minimalist/maximalist democracy to participation, not as a dichotomy but as a continuum in which various participatory intensities are positioned. To put it discursively, what falls in between the minimalist and maximalist participation dimensions are all the possibilities of participatory intensities that exist within a particular discourse. It follows therefore that maximalist participation becomes the utopian horizon which is not only difficult to achieve but to sustain (Carpentier, 2014).

In media and communication discourse, minimalist participation depicts a situation "where media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, and maximalist forms, where the power relations between the different actors that are part of the decision-making process, including (semi-)professionals and non-privileged groups, are balanced" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 91). Community media or "citizen's media" (Rodríguez, 2001) as an alternative media form for instance, due to its ownership (belonging to a community) occupy the maximalist participation end of the spectrum as compared to mainstream media. Other attributes of community media which contributes to its more participatory nature includes, it is not for profit functions and its egalitarian nature in which subject positions to a great extent equally contribute to decision making like programming and management (Carpentier, 2011a; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). Unlike the elitist mainstream media, it is a voice for the previously marginalised (Couldry, 2015) and thus moves towards maximalist participation.

The internet and social media are also often theorized under the alternative media paradigm especially for their role in social movements (Castells, 2015) though also criticized in equal measure for aiding the capitalism social order in lieu of providing an alternative to it (see for instance Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs & Sandoval, 2015). Additionally, the advent of the internet and social media has renewed interest on the concept of participation bringing with it further difficulties in theorising participation (Carpentier, 2016). He identifies these challenges as: "how to deal with the theoretisation and conceptualisation of participation; how to support the research with analytical models; and how the evaluate the research outcomes" (ibid, p. 70). To address the first challenge, Carpentier (2011b) in an article titled *"The concept of participation. If they have access and interact, do they really participate?"* came up with an Access, Interaction and Participation

(AIP) model in which he differentiates participation from concepts that though are not synonyms are often substituted for it. That is, access and interaction.

In the AIP model, access is defined as presence in technology, content, people and organizations. Access to technology in digital inequality discourse for instance, would mean achieving presence to or coming to contact to ICTs which facilitate access to media content (Carpentier, 2011b, p.173). Interaction on the other hand "emphasizes the socio-communicative relationship that is established with other humans or objectives" (ibid, p. 175). Carpentier (2011b) uses this negative relationist strategy in which participation is juxtaposed against access and interaction to "clarify participation's contemporary discursive limits" (p. 175). In another words, he attempts to fix meaning of a contingent concept by articulating what participation is not and how it relates to discourse.

The other two challenges he addresses by developing the 'beyond the ladder' model of participation (Carpentier, 2016). Though acknowledging the importance of previous models, especially Arnstein's (1969) 'A ladder of participation' model in bringing out the necessity of power in conceptualizing participation and how the critical and political approaches relate. Carpentier (2016) presents his model to address the inadequacies of the ladder model. In Arnstein's model, three main categories of citizen power, tokenism and non-participation and eight levels spread out in each of the categories are presented. For instance, the levels in the citizen power category moves it towards maximalist participation while levels in tokenism denotes minimalist participation.

To address the criticisms of ladder models of participation including Arnstein's, with the most notable criticisms being that they do not capture the multi-layeredness and complexities of participation processes presenting them as stable. This means eschewing the struggle (antagonistic nature of participation) over participatory intensities within them and consequently "black boxing" the notion of power (Carpentier, 2016, p. 75). Carpentier proposes an "analytical model of choosing the hard way-beyond the ladder model." (ibid). His analytics of participation which

consists of four levels and twelve steps, is based on the dialectics between power and participation in the political approach. He writes,

> If participation is still taken to refer to the equalisation of power relations between privileged and non-privileged actors, in formal or informal decision-making processes, within a particular context, then this choice requires these processes (and sub-processes or micro-processes), contexts, actors, decisions and power relations to be theorised and defined, and then to be analysed (ibid, p.77).

Another important aspect of this model which is useful for this study is the recognition of the material component in participation contexts. As such the model analytics is a 'discursive-material' knot that acknowledges the "material and discursive struggles that are intrinsically part of the dynamics of power" (ibid, p. 77).

The first level of this analytical model is the "process and its field" (Carpentier, 2016, p.78). Carpentier argues that participation is situated in various media processes (for instance, production, and distribution) and contexts. The particular media process to be analysed and the context in which it is situated has to be identified to avoid ambiguities and overambitious research claims. This is the first step of the analysis. The notion of process points to a sequence of activities aimed at achieving certain goal(s). Following Bourdieu's field theory, Carpentier (2016, p.78) presents the field as "domains or spaces that have relative autonomy, fed by particular knowledges and interests of its actors."

It is important to note, however, that participation is a complex notion that is not restricted to just one societal field. At the same time participation can transcend contexts. Carpentier captures these complexities of trans-field participation in terms of "transgressive" and "transferred forms" of participation (ibid, p. 78). The two formulations follow Wasko and Mosco's (1992, p. 7) conceptualization of democratization *in* and *through* the media to differentiate between participation *in* and *through* a field. Participation *in* the media (transgressive) occurs when a participatory process moves beyond the boundary of one field to be situated in several other fields. Participation through the media (transferred) on the other hand occurs when a non-participatory

process in one field triggers participation in another. He gives the example of how a newspaper often (with a few exceptions) does not offer its readers an opportunity to directly participate through it but the contents of the newspaper can create a more conscious and active polity who participate in the political field. Analysis will therefore require a consideration of all the fields affected. Step two after mapping, involves analysing the general characteristics of the field that is, how it is constructed and structured while analysing how the relationship between the participatory process and the field is organized is the third step.

The second level focuses on "the Actors." In view of the discursive-material lens, actors include both individuals (human) and non- human actors within the sociological notion of social actors. For instance, in Actor-Network Theory associated with French scholars Latour (1996, 1999, 2005) Law and Callon (1988), humans do not act alone but in conjunction with other non-human actants (including technology, organizations) in their environment or network as put in the theory. Both human and non-human actors are therefore accorded agency which means that "social actors have decision-making and action-inducing structures, which allow them to function as particular delineated entities in the social" (ibid, p.79). Consequently, Carpentier (2016) cites and follows Hindess' (1986, p. 115) definition of an actor "as a locus of decision and action" in which the decision informs the action.

Step four therefore involves identifying all social actors in the participatory process and mapping their relationships to each other. After mapping, an analysis of the material positioning, identities and roles of all the actors in the participatory process is done since the three structure the participatory process (step five). Here identities are defined in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) terms as discursively constructed subject positions. Contingency of identification and the participation process is re-emphasized. Roles are regarded as the actual nor expected action/behavior of these identities. The material actor includes many environmental elements; for instance, in the case of this study, the material WhatsApp technology is part of the discursive-material knot as among other things it determines access to the participatory process and is intertwined with the structures which assign meanings to identities. This brings us to step six where we analyze the actor's position in the field to determine whether they are privileged (hegemonic) or not. The positions

are not just confined to the participatory process under study but to general societal subject positions. The rationale of this step is based on the idea that "participation is always and necessarily corrective: a participatory process corrects a more general societal power imbalance, where actors that have different power positions in society into a process where this power imbalance is (partially) addressed and equalized" (ibid, p. 80). It is important to note that neither the elites nor non-elites are a homogeneous block.

The third level of the model is 'the decisions' which maps all the "decision-making moments within the participatory process and their significance in relation towards the goals of the participatory process" (step 7) (ibid, p.81). Step eight would be to find out the actions of different actors in the decision-making moments and how they relate to their material positions, identities and roles. Carpentier follows Laclau & Mouffe (1985) formulation of decision as a moment of fixation. He also follows Deleuze and Guattari's (1984, p. 36) materialist metaphor of the machine described as "a system of interruptions or breaks" which interrupts "a material flow that it cuts into." This interruption in the context of participation requires decision making to maintain stability of the process. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p.112), "every discourse is an attempt to arrest the flow of difference." Consequently, decision-making is the moment in which this flow is arrested; either halting the flow of the discourse or changing its structuring; which points to whether power is exercised or not, thus making it a political moment (hegemonic) (See also Weber, 1947; Dahl, 1957; Mouffe, 2000). Since decision-making moments may be numerous in terms of numbers and their nature, as they are micro-processes of the participatory process, Carpentier suggest that areas of analysis of decision –making be generated by the analysis itself.

The fourth and last level analyses power relations. As already discussed, Carpentier follows Foucault's (1978) strategic model of power and thus Foucault's major premises that power is not a possession even though power relations are always unbalanced, apply. To further operationalize Foucault's power, Carpentier applies Giddens (1979, p. 91) "dialectics of control" in which he pits the transformative aspect of power against its dominating aspect. The transformative capacity treats power "in terms of the conduct of agents, exercising their free will" while domination treats

power "as a structural quality" (Carpentier, 2016, p.82). What this means is that since the social is contingent, no actor no matter how privileged can fully exercise control over other subject positions. Such a position will always generate resistance; in this sense, power is always restrictive. The resistance component intervenes between the generative and restrictive components making it the third component of power (ibid, p.82).

Step nine therefore would be to inventorise the decision-making moments in terms of the three components of power: generative, restrictive and resistance. At this level, the focus is on micro processes of participation including potential participation. What is analyzed is covered by the following questions:

> …what can each actor generate and what is generated for them, what is restricted for each actor and what is restricted by them, and which actions (of which actor) are resisted by which other actor? The structuring question behind this set of questions is who decides on what? (ibid, p.82).

After the inventory is done (of decision-making moments and power positions), a comparison of power positions of privileged and non-privileged actors is done (step 10) for the micro-processes and eventually for the whole participation process (step 11). At this point the guiding question is "how equal the power relations are in the entire participatory process […] which can result, for instance, in the identification of a general power imbalance, or the identification of particular areas of power-sharing" (ibid, p. 83). In the last step (12) the analyst can now evaluate all instances of power balances or imbalances of the participatory process in question to determine the overall effect of power; that is, the nature of participation being produced in the said participatory process. The diagram below summarizes Carpentier's (2016) model.

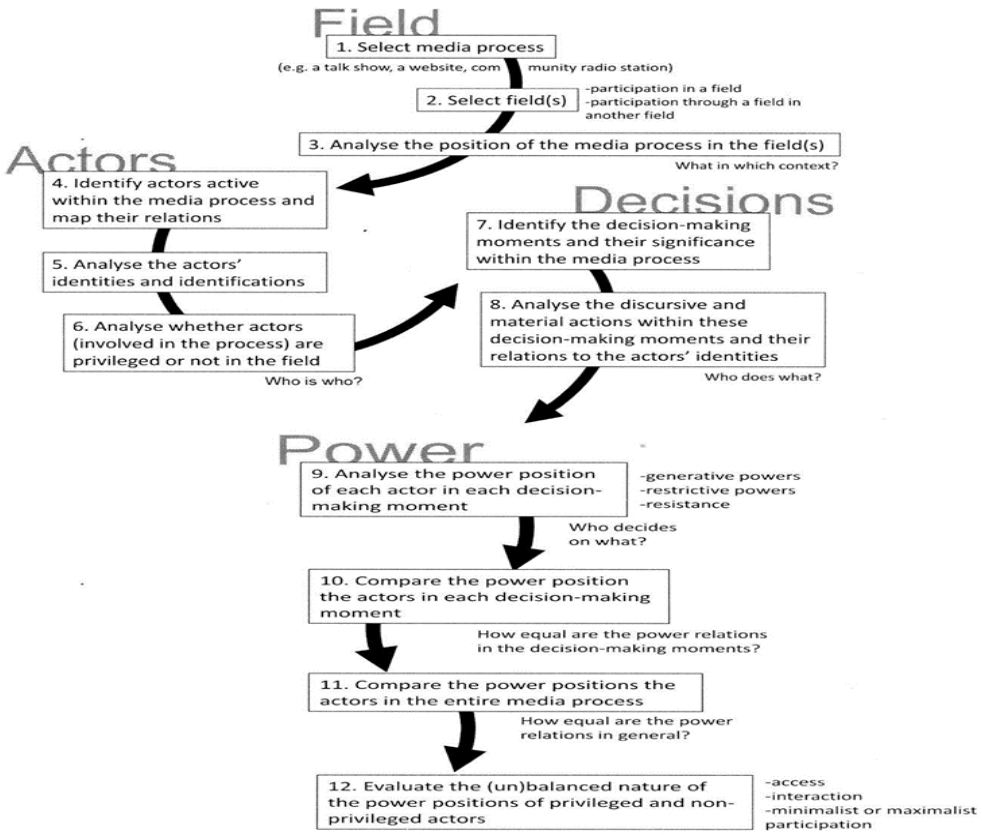


Figure 1: an analytical model for the study of media participatory processes in the political approach (adopted from Carpentier, 2016, p. 83).

3.4 Theorizing digital communities and subjectivities.

After theorizing the primacy of the political in the social, the next task is to explore how these earlier conceptualizations links or not to the repertoire of digital media because even the differences matter in understanding the trajectories of the so called "new media." Since the material component, that is WhatsApp technology is also part of this study, it is important to consider the following questions; how do we theorize virtual communities enabled by digital media like WhatsApp, and how differently or similarly are digital subjectivities constructed? The internet (and social media) is an area of communication which has been debated a lot since its inception. It follows therefore that its theorization had also taken several paths. For some, it is a media of liberation and democracy, for others it is the new haven for capitalism, surveillance and crime. But that it has changed the way we theorize the social is indisputable. Because of the numerous

positions on what the effect of a technological dislocation of the social especially on notions such as 'community' (see e.g., White & Guest, 2003 on 'community lost' discourse), this study invokes the concept *mobility* as the nodal point that captures the technological affordances which make these redefinitions possible.

The traditional use of mobility follows two paths: spatial mobility and social mobility. Spatial mobility refers to geographical displacements across physical places like borders, boundaries. Social mobility is vertical movement along social stratification. The main thesis of these forms of mobility is positive change. In the traditional approach to social mobility, "changing social positions across hierarchies is a characteristic of modern societies" (Faist, 2013, p. 1638). The positive change brought about by movement include removing economic inequalities across the globe through open borders (Rodrick, 1997) and a 'global ecumene' in which peripheral cultures may be strengthened through interaction and creolization despite unequal flows between peripheral cultures and those at the centre (Hannerz, 1992; Hannerz & Hannerz, 1996). This would mean traditional societies previously characterized as immobile were viewed as depicting a lack of development, disadvantage, little sense of agency and deterioration of social life (See for instance Coulter et al., 2013; Faist, 2013; Schewel, 2019) even though myriad studies have since critiqued this notion (see for instance Fischer et al., 1997; Salazar, 2010; Schewel, 2019). Modern societies are, for instance, characterized by mobilities: global flows and networks (Urry, 2000).

This notion is demonstrated in the mobility turn/ new mobility paradigm (Urry, 2000) which considers an expanded variety of movement of not just of people but ideas, goods and others as a result of contemporary capitalism and globalization (Salazar, 2018). For instance, Sheller and Urry (2006) move away from the foundationalism assumption that the social is constituted by individuals who relate intensively in a close physical propinquity. They argue instead that new ICTs have enabled intermittent connections despite the distance and that it is these distant connections that hold social life together. Similarly, Castells (2000) argues that fluidity in the social is no longer driven by the industrial age but an information age in which proliferation of ICTs enables the formation of networks, which constitute the new morphology of society that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. A networked society is therefore "a society whose

social structure is made up of networks powered by micro-electronics-based information and communications technologies" (Castells 2004, p. 3). For Kakihara and Sorensen (2002), symbolic travel on the internet enables the formations of cyber or virtual communities. Whether traditional or "new mobility turn/paradigm" the crucial factor is that mobility captures the contingency of the social and the idea that the social is constituted of inequalities and power relations among various actors occasioned by the logics of inclusion and exclusion into a society (See Castells, 2004). Used metaphorically, the concept of mobility captures the nuanced debates which argue that technology can be both empowering and disempowering.

The mobility I refer to here is more in tandem with 'a new paradigm' of mobility. A symbolic and virtual mobility defined by it practices captures a form of imaginary and symbolic translocal movement through technology enabling the formation of a mythical (In Laclau's sense) imagined community. In this sense, a community resulting from technological mobility starts out as an empty signifier, an entity rendered unstable by the fluidities of hegemonic and counter hegemonic practices, fluid identities in which subject positions shift (deterritorialised identities); privileged actors can be confronted, and their subject positions dislocated; a fluidity in which no structure is permanent. A fluidity co-enabled by the practices of a socio-technical assemblage which constitute an in-betwixt' world that is both present and absent, in some ways embodied and in others disembodied from the offline physical places around which it is imagined. A mobility accorded by the figure of a 'voyeur' or 'pedestrian' enables the thinking of a community not as a bounded place but as practices of the 'walker'; the everyday footsteps the walker makes that do not stick to the predestined straight paths of the city planner instead like rhizomes, are meandering, 'corner cutting' negotiations which do not only stamp their authority and announce their existence in this 'new' world but also escape the panopticism of their 'old' world (See de Certeau, 1984). In the same breadth, the technology that affords this virtual movement and fluidity cannot be thought of only as perceptual but also as hidden and false. In other words, how technology is used and appropriated can take various readings including the preferred reading, oppositional, negotiated and even aberrant reading (Hall, 1972/1980). These rhizomatic manoeuvers of networking and connections speak to the changing criteria of exclusion and inclusion consequently adding complexities to digital subjectivities and participation**.**

Consequently, this conceptualization of mobility (as a meta-affordance) therefore moves us from the dialectic of technological determinism and social reductionism, instead ushering a horizontal discursive-material analysis framework in which neither technology nor the human actor is given privilege. Instead, they are considered as part of a community assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari's parlance in which members (human actors and technology) actors are embedded.

3.5 Conclusion.

In this chapter, I discussed the major theory, Discourse Theory (DT) as formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) which provides the framework through which this study has been conceptualised and analysed. It fleshed out the major components of DT which are instrumental to this study including, discourse and how the primacy of politics influence its conceptualization in DT, antagonism and hegemony. Further I explored how these concepts interact with other theorizations, for instance Foucault's conceptualisation of power and Carpentier's dichotomy of minimalist and maximalist participation. Most importantly, DT's understanding and operationalisation of materiality as discursive was discussed; this informed the discussion on technology agency under the mobility nodal point and its intertwinement with human agency in line with the points of inquiry in this study; sense of community, identification and participation. The discussions in this chapter informed the research methodology discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY: BUILDING A DISCURSIVE-MATERIAL ANALYTICAL TOOL

4.0 Introduction

This chapter further elucidates how Discourse Theory (DT) discussed in the previous chapter charts the trajectory of the ontology and methodological choices made in this study. It is a narrative of creativity, fluidity informed by scholarly work that details the journey of conceiving a discursive-material analytical tool that ties the WhatsApp technology, members of the communities on WhatsApp and government policies and directives related to WhatsApp into an assemblage of a WhatsApp community.

4. 1 Philosophical Foundation.

This study follows the post-foundational approach based on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) Discourse Theory (DT) to conceptualise power struggles in the political WhatsApp communities as part of the Real which escapes the symbolic. Much as joining the WhatsApp communities is voluntary, and members work towards a common counter-hegemonic goal of holding their political leaders accountable, they cannot escape the political, the inherent antagonisms that characterize social set ups. Although all discourse analysis studies are constructivist and concerned with the ontic, for example CDA, conversation analysis or even semiotics, DT is concerned with the ontological (the spirit in layman's language).

This study therefore follows DT's ontology which lies in the primacy of politics in the social that is, the political nature of social interactions. It is imperative to reiterate that the political is distinguishable from politics. The former, which is what this study is interested in, being the inherent antagonisms in human relations and the latter, which the study also exposes as part of objective discourses aiming to rid the social of its contingency. Since the political operates at the ontological level, it cannot be accessed directly but can only be symbolised (ontically). This means that though the linguistic/material texts in this study are ontical, they can be used to explain the ontological, the underlying causes of power struggles in the political WhatsApp communities. As such the relationship between the ontic and ontological is a contingent one, it moves back and forth

though the ontic is concerned with open existence of matter that can be observed, while the ontological is concerned with underlying deep structure that create the ontic (Heidegger 1962, p.44).

Moreover, a post foundationalist approach means that this study assumes that politics does not have essence. In other words, there is no universal way of settling differences. What is constant is differences/antagonism though the nature of differences keeps changing. As such there will always be a political frontier among people engaged in politics, for instance in this case ordinary citizens on one side trying to hold their political leaders accountable and those leaders on the other. However, actors can move towards agonism, which is, creating an environment where disagreements are allowed and seen as advancing democracy (Mouffe, 2005). The idea of agonism is a move from Habermas' (1962/1991) thoughts which places import on rationality and consensus in deliberations or even Wiredu's (1995) consensual democracy.

DT does not only provide ontology, but it also provides the language for epistemology. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue against a chasm between the discursive and non-discursive. Instead, they posit that everything is discursive. This means that material, for example WhatsApp technology can be interpreted in an analogous way as linguistic texts, since meaning is attributed to material discursively.

Furthermore, meaning is constructed, constantly negotiated (contingent) and struggled over hegemonically as people try to make sense of their social and material world in an equally contingent discursive field. Subject positions and subjectivities, political frontiers are therefore formed as a result of subjects trying to sediment their articulations or stabilize their position. For instance, in the literature review, the concept of community has been discussed as a floating signifier whose meaning keep on changing depending on temporal and spatial contexts. The concept of contingency is especially important considering the online nature of this research site which has been found to afford mobility causing networked publics to oscillate between enclaved publics and counter-publics (Florini, 2019). Similarly, membership into these virtual WhatsApp

communities like any other social set up provide an inherent back and forth hegemonic-counter-hegemonic discursive struggle over identification, the right to participate and sense of belonging to a community. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p.112) aver; "any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre."

Consequently, this study takes a macro-textual discourse concept and non-hierarchical consideration of text in a discursive material analysis of data. The text includes both the linguistic texts and the material WhatsApp technology's affordances-constraints. The communities under study cannot exist in a digital context without the WhatsApp technology and thus cannot be studied in isolation. They exist in an assemblage, a discursive-material knot which structures both large scale assemblages like states and everyday micro processes (Carpentier, 2017) like online community interaction. Any change or disruption (dislocation) in one component of the assemblage affects all components of the system. For instance, if WhatsApp changes its interface limiting group membership to 256 to allow more members to join a group; this could lead to new articulations, re-articulations and hegemonic struggles over discourses of participation, sense of belonging and formation of new identities or new political frontiers. Government policies may also influence conduct in WhatsApp communities.

Based on this philosophical background, the next section attempts to build a discursive-material analysis tool.

4.2 Setting ground for a Discursive Material Analytical (DMA) tool: sensitizing concepts.

One of the criticisms of DT is that it failed to provide a clear methodology which can be followed in empirical research. In their defence, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that the lack of methodology in their work is not an accident but a deliberate move to embrace the spirit of non-essentialism which they robustly advocate for. The theorists also mention materialism (of objects) but do not robustly engage in it. While these may be considered weaknesses of DT, to me it is a blessing in disguise as it allows me to embrace DT's gospel of contingency and be creative in the

methodological choices that I make within the context in which I conducted this research. Of course, my methodological creativity is backed by work of scholars such as Laclau, Mouffe, Carpentier, Howarth, Griggs and others whose ideas embrace fluidity of method, a refusal to be confined to something that is fixed.

To build the DMA tool, I first had to consider the sensitizing concepts with which to identify instances of hegemony in which objective discourses are sedimented and moments of dislocations in which the hegemony is countered. Blumer (1954, p. 7) developed sensitizing concepts to be used as "general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances." The sensitizing concepts used have either already been discussed in the previous chapters or discussed herein. Hegemony, the first sensitizing concept has been discussed in detail in the theoretical chapter. However, it is important to reiterate that in DT hegemony results from the dialectic of political practices and formations. Political practice refers to the antagonistic forces which engage in the construction and dislocation of political projects and discourse coalitions. In contrast, formations are the consented to rules which maintain the projects formed from the antagonistic forces (See Howarth, 2010; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000).

Carpentier's (2017) non- hierarchical theoretical reflection on DT, what he calls the discursive-material knot provides the second sensitizing concept. Carpentier (2017), following Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) macro-textual approach to discourse, expands DT by demonstrating the interconnectedness of the material and the discursive in a bid to build an empirical method. Carpentier (2017) while acknowledging old materialism, adapt new materialism (see; Butler, 2011; Delanda, 2006; Latour, 2005) to build up the knot carefully striking a balance between the role of the discursive in meaning production and the agential role of the material. Bennet's (2004, p.348) articulation that technological materialism not only aids social practices but also shape how people experience the social also speaks to the entanglement of the material and the discursive. Carpentier's (2017) ideas therefore informs my analysis strategy which considers WhatsApp technology, members of the political WhatsApp communities and government policies and

directives on WhatsApp as an assemblage that collectively contribute to the power struggles in the WhatsApp communities in attempt to either maintain hegemony or counter it.

So how then can one begin to tie the knot? This I argue, following Carpentier (2017) is achievable by simultaneously analysing the agency of both the material and human actors. A simultaneous analysis looked like an impossible task at first, because no matter how hard I tried to picture it, the actions of the WhatsApp technology and the human actors kept coming to me as separate bits even though they act collectively in the knot I had envisioned. This is how the idea of mobility as the third sensitizing concept, was born as the glue that analytically tied the two together. Mobility in this work is used metaphorically to capture the ideas of contingency of the social as stipulated in DT, the contingency that informs how the chain of equivalence and difference are articulated and disarticulated (already discussed in the theoretical chapter), and the fluidity of the WhatsApp technology affordances which enables it entanglement with other parts of the assemblage in line with the logics of equivalence and difference.

Studies on social media technology affordances have brought to the fore various affordances including persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability (boyd, 2011) and visibility (Evans et al., 2017). Moreover, what constitutes an affordance or not is not always agreed upon (See Evans et al., 2017). However, in this study I chose to highlight the four affordances of modality, agency, interactivity and navigability because I argue they cover both broadly and specifically what I consider WhatsApp technology affords. In the broader sense, for instance, searchability could be contained under navigability, as the ability to search and find past postings assist in manoeuvering through large chunk of data. It is for this reason that I tied technological affordances under the metaphoric umbrella of mobility. In this sense, mobility acts as a "meta-affordance" as I argue that no matter what an affordance is; ultimately, they make the technological environment and their use fluid, including constraining use. This argument is to great extent in line with to Norman (2013, p. 141) who argues that other than providing affordances, technology also exercises constraints which "force the desired behaviour" on use through forcing functions (forces a user to behave in certain ways); interlocks (determine the sequence of actions of the user); lock-ins (which ensures continuous use of technology); and lock-outs (prevents "dangerous" use of technology). In this

study however, Norman's (2013) argument is extended in that the line between an affordance and constraint is in some instances blurred. In other words, an affordance can be at the same time a constraint as is seen in current studies of technology affordances (Durante, 2011; Floridi, 2007, 2011; Pellegrino, 2018). For instance, the very affordances that inform a perception of freedom on WhatsApp also avail the technologies of control.

4.2.1 Modality.

All media communicate through either text, audio or visual. These modalities can be used to analyze effect of technology on hegemonic struggles (cf. McLuhan, 1964; Sundar, 2008). Like the traditional media, WhatsApp technology interface has modalities which facilitates communication for users, even though the latter is limited to one or two modalities at most. WhatsApp like other digital media comes with multiple modes which in the case of this study contribute to either sedimentation of hegemonic discourses or antagonisms to counter the latter. McLuhan's (1964) thoughts on how the media extends human action are especially important when thinking of what the multiple modes of WhatsApp avails to users. WhatsApp offers text, videos, audio, pictures, and an animation mode known as the Graphics Interchange Format (GIF). The focus of analysis using the multimodal nature of WhatsApp is therefore how the different modalities extend users participation in articulation of discourses, identity negotiations and sense of belonging. Techno-politics in the form articulations of government policies directed at controlling usage of various modalities of WhatsApp was alsoz analysed. It is through these modalities that chains of equivalence and difference which counter or sediment hegemony respectively, are mobilised.

4.2.2 Agency.

The agency concept as a unit of analysis in this study is twofold. It refers to the agency of the material, that is, what WhatsApp software can do independent of human action, in relation to hegemonic struggles and how it affects users' agency. Bennet (2004, p.351) who refers to material agency as the "thing power" defines it as "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle." (See also Deleuze & Guatarri, 2004; Latour, 2005). According to Carpentier (2017), agency of a material structure prevents its closure, contributing to the contingency of the material and consequently, the discursive field. Things or objects have a

life of their own. They cannot entirely be pinned down by the symbolic or human contexts even though the symbolic attribute meaning to them in the interplay of human-nonhuman assemblage (Bennet, 2004; Carpentier, 2017). For analysis of agency of WhatsApp, I adapt Sundar's (2008) approach on identifying technology agency. Features of the WhatsApp interface which communicate individual identities (e.g., names and phone numbers) and facilitate identity negotiations were identified and their agency analysed. Second, I analyzed auto generated features which influence participation of members in the WhatsApp communities. Third, I analyzed social presence features which give WhatsApp affective human like qualities.

Fourth, I analyzed interface features which produce a bandwagon effect. This is signified by any popularity cues for WhatsApp communities. Just like in traditional persuasion, users are likely to believe that groups with many people or people they know are better and they should join too, influencing sense of belonging to a WhatsApp community. Additionally, the 'security' agency affordance of WhatsApp was also important in analyzing government policies and directives on WhatsApp use. Government actions were analyzed by identifying how the state encourages specific "conduct" in WhatsApp use, meant to shape, guide, or affect the conduct of people (cf. Foucault, 1977). Here conduct is not through government coercions but is achieved through shaping "conduct of oneself" that creates a sense of self-governance as a guiding force in WhatsApp communities. In other words, I looked at how the state has designed systems for self-ordering and control. Power becomes non-confrontational when it is exercised through informing people about the possibilities of conduct.

4.2.3 Interactivity.

Interactivity is a neologism which implies both interaction and activity (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Carpentier, 2017). Interaction refers to the social encounter of two or more actors including contact between humans and things (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). It has both the social and communicative dimensions where the social dimension invokes elements such as contact, social regulations, and reciprocity while the communicative dimension implies response and meaning sharing (Carpentier, 2017). Activity on the other hand implies practice. In this study the notion of embodied interaction that captures interaction of both material practices and signifying practices

have been used (ibid, p. 52). I analyzed features of the WhatsApp interface which allow for social interaction within and through the medium. Social interaction has implications on identity negotiation, participation and sense of belonging affecting how users articulate (signifying practices) their identities, the extent to which they participate and feel that they belong. Specifically, I looked for WhatsApp affordances (including its features and conventions) which enable or constrain reciprocity, social regulation, meaning sharing and the influence they have on articulations of hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses on identity, sense of belonging and participation and eventually, the goals of the communities.

4.2.4 Navigability.

The navigability affordance of WhatsApp is an appropriation of physical movement within geographical places to online spaces. It therefore refers to the ability of WhatsApp to allow users to move "through the medium" (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 516). This movement in my study will be conceptualized the same way people navigate physical spaces (de Certeau, 2010) which do not always happen in straight lines. This includes the ways though which they avoid 'conduct of conduct,' interactivity, spaces they do not want to be in, maintain their 'personal space' among other members of the WhatsApp communities they are in and limitations of the technology application which constrains navigation. I therefore analysed navigational aids supporting both linear and non-linear texts on WhatsApp, scaffold affordances which make WhatsApp seems easy to use and therefore attracting users. Navigational aids points to ease of access of activities on WhatsApp. The access component enables users to overcome spatial and temporal limitations of physical spaces. For instance, WhatsApp bridges distance to the center which is one factor that silenced the Subaltern in physical spaces (see Spivak, 1988) as it allows virtual translocal movements. By so doing, it allows for multiple identities or subject positions. This could affect user's willingness to participate in discourses in WhatsApp and thus become user excluding constrains, which according to Norman (1988) refers to the limitation of technology which makes navigation of technology difficult for users. Access also speaks to the politics of the technology including issues of digital inequalities. Finally, I looked at "defence" WhatsApp affordances which enable users to creatively counter hegemonic discourses.

Once the knot was tied it automatically led to the method of analysis. The knot was tied using a rhetoric trope, that is, the metaphor mobility, which paved way for a rhetoric analysis. To explicitly cater for the technological element in this analysis, I coined the neologism techno-tropes and therefore in the next section I discuss how a techno-trope analysis works.

4.3 Techno-trope analysis.

The concept "techno-trope" is developed following the discussion in the introductory chapters on what WhatsApp is, how it operates (including technology agency) the politics it abounds, and the nature of the discursive which according to Discourse Theory (DT) is inherently political. The "techno" part refers to technology while the "trope" part refers to rhetorical tropes. The idea that the naming of technological affordances and features, though may be read as literal, also carry with them figurative functions that are used politically in modes of inclusion and exclusion in WhatsApp communities. Rhetoric tropes refer to symbolic use of words to invoke meanings, different from the literal meaning of those words. They include for instance, metonyms, metaphors and catachresis. When used in relation to DT, rhetoric goes beyond the use of figurative language as opposed to literal meaning, to take a political meaning. This is because DT as already reiterated operates at the ontological level "that specifies the interweaving of words and actions into practices, the contingency of all identity, the primacy of politics, and so forth" (Howarth & Griggs, 2006, p. 29). The focus of analysis in this study was on how metaphors act to sediment hegemonic practices and the possibilities of their countering.

Wittgenstein's ideas on philosophy of language especially his concept of language-games is important in understanding how metaphors are conceptualized. It goes beyond the traditional criterion of similarity in the composition and decoding of metaphors (de Franca Gurgel, 2016) or even John Searle's improved ideas on metaphors with his "distinction between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning" (ibid, 2016, p.160). Wittgenstein in his later works argues that a sign gains its signification only through conventional language-games in which it is used. That is, it has to follow the rules that users have learnt over time such that it becomes their linguistic behaviour (Blair, 2006). It is not about what is said but the context, the "how" in which it said. A metaphor if analysed discursively, "begins in one language-game and ends in another (or at another level of

the same language-game)" (de Franca Gurgel 2016, p. 160). This statement provides an entry point of considering metaphors ontologically. For example, the term mobile phone refers to the portable communication device that replaced the static telephone. In *M-pesa* however, the mobility metaphor is moved from telecommunications to the realm of banking and would require an understanding of how banking works and issues of access to banking services in Kenya, to be comprehended.

The *M-pesa* example demonstrates that technology including communication ones already integrate the use of metaphors in their design albeit at an ontic level. Hurtienne and Blessing (2007) trace the use of 'metaphor' in user interface design to early eighties with the advent of Graphical User Interfaces (GUI). They give the example of how the office metaphor was employed through incorporating graphics of familiar objects like trash can, folders, and calculators on computers (ibid). This aided user interaction with computers as these are objects office workers have previously experienced and therefore could easily guess their use on the computer. This utilization of metaphor in interface design means that a metaphor is not just a figure of speech but also a cognitive mechanism, what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) term as a conceptual metaphor whose operation is "mostly unconscious, automatic, and is used with no noticeable effort, just like our linguistic system and the rest of our conceptual system" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 245). As such, a tropological analysis of WhatsApp technology at both ontic and ontological level is therefore possible as is with the case with the other aspects of the WhatsApp community assemblage.

Tropological analysis can be used at both ontological level of discourse theory, and at ontical level of discourse analysis of texts as linguistic practices (see Howarth & Griggs, 2006, p. 29). At ontical level, metonyms and metaphors can be used in rhetorical analysis of linguistic texts– for example analysis of what people write in WhatsApp communities. At the ontological level, metaphorical analysis, just like its linguistic equivalent, can be used to describe how hegemonic order creates "new meaningful totalities via the disarticulation and replacement of previously existing formations" (ibid, also see Howarth, 2005). Thus, empty signifiers acquire stable meanings through metaphorical substitutions. If such metaphorisation succeeds, the substitution makes it a *catachresis* as it becomes a figural term without a literal one (Laclau, 2005, p. 71). For instance,

the meaning of the polysemy WhatsApp is removed when it is equated to freedom (if we are to go by technology celebratory discourses), blocking us from ever knowing oppressive possibilities.

In his later works, Laclau, introduces rhetorical tropes such as the metaphor, and metonymy and catachresis to further understand how the logics of equivalence and difference work to create hegemony implying that "no politics can be purely rational" (Thomassen, 2016, p. 167). According to Kaplan (2010, p.258),

> For Laclau "rhetoric" refers to contingent, discursive and fundamentally tropological process that brings objective reality into existence by imposing on an array of heterogeneous elements the semblance of a structure within which they acquire identity/meaning.

The objective reality in Laclau's statement above speaks to hegemonic discourses. Hegemony has two sides to it. The first as a political practice in which political projects and discourse coalitions and the other, "...a form of rule or governance that speaks to the maintenance of the policies, practices and regimes that are formed by such force" (Howarth, 2010, p. 310). These two components employ the political logics of equivalence and difference respectively through which antagonistic struggles are discursively articulated. Hegemony is therefore inherently political as antagonistic struggles of inclusion and exclusion are acts of power.

How antagonism is defined in DT is important in the understanding of how rhetoric is used in this context. Laclau (1988, p. 256) argues that antagonism is not an objective relation but represents the limits of any objectivity by collapsing differences in elements thus creating a chain of equivalence. In such an operation therefore, "antagonism is something that is showable and not sayable [….] it locates itself in the limits of language and can only exist as a disruption of language, that is, a metaphor."

Thus, how a metaphor is formed in Laclau's term begins from a demand, a political act. He argues that a symbolic representation of the literal begins when there is unity of different demands, that

is, the formation of a chain of equivalence (Laclau, 1988). Demands begin as requests of certain groups/individuals to authority for service delivery; say a request for clean water. Demands mutate into claim through the formation of a chain of equivalence, when diverse groups requesting different things, say one asking for clean water, another equipped hospital, another environmental conservation and so on, see themselves as one, a disenfranchised, frustrated lot whose rights are neither recognised nor met. At this point the individual demands are still identifiable. But if the differences are collapsed further, and the different demands and identities of claimants are constructed in a more universal character, say the subaltern against a common adversary, say imperialists and claims to institutions become claims against institutional order, then we have a hegemonic struggle (see Laclau, 2006, p. 654-55). If the environmental group, not seen as a natural embodiment of democratic fills the gap of leadership and champions the democratic demands of the other groups as opposed to their usual own, and with time, democratic struggles is increasingly associated with the environment rights group, then the operation becomes a metonym.

A metonym is association of one thing to another which it is closely related to. If this association becomes sedimented, such that the individual demands are no longer identifiable but seen as a democratic struggle embodied by the environmental group and therefore addressing the demands of the environmental group equals enhancing struggle, then the metonym has been transformed into a metaphor. Hegemony is therefore "… the movement from metonymy to metaphor, from contingent articulation to essential belonging" (Laclau, 2008, p.69), after all, "the universal is no more than a particular that at some moment has become dominant" (Laclau, 1996, p.26). This explains the power struggle between elements to attain a hegemonic position.

Indeed, metaphors work through arbitrary substitution of one thing with another (e.g., Lara is an angel). This substitution gives chance for misunderstanding (ideology/hegemony) - for example people can think "Lara is a real angel" when she is not. Such misunderstanding is what Laclau (2005, p.71) calls catachresis- a figural term without a literal. Catachresis represents how modern-day ideology is perpetuated- how elites make people understand one thing as another and how those new articulations are hegemonic. This study therefore focused on the ontological dimension

to analyze how WhatsApp is an empty signifier that is metaphorically creating new meaningful totalities and replacing previously existing formations.

4.4 Research methods to support discursive material analysis.

Having established a discursive material analysis method derived from discourse theory, this section is on qualitative methods aligned to the ontology of DT which have been employed together with Discursive Material Analysis to support this research.

4.4.1 The cases.

Two instrumental cases, that is, East Asembo Development Forum (EADF) and Kabula Forward (KF) WhatsApp communities were purposefully selected as they fit within the criteria of being formed for political interest, that of holding political leaders accountable and agitating for development. Purposive sampling is the selection of a sample based on particular purpose (Marshall, 1996) and information expectations on the content the researcher is interested in (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Moreover, they are imagined spatially around places constituted politically. East Asembo is a ward in Siaya County in Western Kenya and Kabula is a Ward also in Western Kenya predominantly occupied by the Luo and Bukusu people respectively. Wards are the smallest forms of administration for county governments. These communities are similar in that they are political online communities formed to tackle a fundamentally similar issue of interest. In both groups, membership comprise individuals residing in both rural and urban areas (including the diaspora). At the time of analysis, KF had 230 members while EADF had 182 members, though numbers keep changing from time to time as people leave, are removed or added into the groups. The maximum number a WhatsApp group can hold is 256 members. The predominant language used in the two communities is a mix of English and Kiswahili and mother tongue. The Luo speak *Dholuo* while Bukusu speak *Lubukusu*. Since, I understand *Dholuo* I did not encounter problems with data from EADF, but I had to get assistance with translations for the KF community.

Against the criticisms of the case study approach including, it being time consuming, costly, prone to bias and what is considered its major weakness; a minimal basis for scientific generalisation given the small number of participants/cases researched, the study employed instrumental case

studies which are seen to overcome these disadvantages (Stake, 1995). For instance, while Mintzberg et al (2005, p.10) argues that "If there is no generalizing beyond the data, no theory. No theory, no insight. And if no insight, why do research?" instrumental case studies overcome the need for generalisation as the cases are a means of understanding something more than just the particular cases. Consequently, EADF and KF play a supportive role in the achievement of the aim of this study, that is, understanding the power struggles in WhatsApp communities. As Stake (1995) argues, the focus of case studies is not statistical generalisation but rather in making sense of a particular, the problematics of power in WhatsApp communities. The EADF and KF cases are however looked at in depth and their ordinary activities detailed in terms of their typicality to other cases or their uniqueness because doing so helps in pursuing the goal of the study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

4.4.2 Netnography.

This study employed the netnography method. Put forward by Kozinets (2007) netnography is a form of ethnography where like in the traditional ethnography, the major principle employed is emersion into the community of study. Netnography which follows the same conceptualization as 'Virtual ethnography' (Hine, 2000), 'digital ethnography' (Murphy 2008), 'social media ethnography' (Postill & Pink, 2012) is not so different from traditional ethnography (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002) although the dynamics of virtual spaces apply. It also applies a multi-sited field work with intermittent employment of online participant observations and offline interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Mare (2017) who used social media ethnography to explain political action of Youth on Facebook in Zimbabwe and South Africa, and Omanga (2019) who employed digital ethnography to explore how WhatsApp consist of "digital publics" in Kenya illustrate the robustness of these methods. Moreover, Udenze and Ugoala (2020) reiterate the appropriateness of the netnography method in studying WhatsApp as information a researcher would need is automatically archived in the app itself. Like physical spaces, virtual spaces have a particular language, style of engagement determined by technological affordances which also requires the researcher to spend time in the community to understand what goes on there (Mare, 2017).

I am a member of the WhatsApp communities I studied, that is, Kabula Forward (KF) and East Asembo Development Forum (EADF). I joined these groups in 2016 through WhatsApp links posted on some Facebook groups I was following. I have therefore been immersed in these spaces for a period of three years, observing interactions and participating while keeping in mind my positionality as a researcher.

4.4.3. Sampling methods.

In line with Foucault's view that power is hidden in multiple modes**,** multimodality sampling was used to obtain samples for this study. The first sample mode was the purposive and random sampling of linguistic text (statements of members of the WhatsApp communities and mentions of government policies and directives) and the second mode was the technology text, that is, the affordances-constraints of WhatsApp. Government policies and directives were selected purposively with the criteria being those that directly speak to social media use in Kenya. For the policies, two fit the criteria; the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) Act No.12 of 2008 (Republic of Kenya, 2008) on hate speech which is defined as "threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviours, written material, performances, visual images, programmes that can stir up ethnic hatred."

The second government document selected was the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018 (Republic of Kenya, 2018), which controls and criminalizes online hate speech and "False publications." From an online search of verbal directives given by relevant bodies online, the verbal directive that came up was the 2017 warning by the then NCIC chairperson Francis ole Kaparo just before the general elections to WhatsApp administrators that they would be held liable for any misinformation and hate speech spread in the groups they oversaw (CGTN Africa, 2017). The purpose of the government Acts and policies was not so much for the analysis of their content, but to see if there was any reference to them in the WhatsApp communities whether overtly or covertly, and if so, how they affected discourse in the communities.

WhatsApp texts (posted online between August 2017 and December, 2018) were first mined using one of the App's features which allows one to export the data directly from WhatsApp onto various avenues including e-mail, blue-tooth and Facebook. I transferred the data from WhatsApp to my G-mail and downloaded the attachment which comes in the format of the generic text editor, notepad. The data comes already organized in columns of date, time, speaker and what was said; this made it possible for me to transfer it to an excel sheet for easy processing. In the first phase I purposively selected the data set that fell within discursive moments. A discursive moment refers to a critical juncture in discourse which disrupts the "normal" trajectory of discourse in a social set up (Bislev & Salskov, 2001; Reed, 2005). In this study, these junctures were identified as moments where a tangible action like decision making, committing to a meeting online or offline, directly addressing the MCAs/MPs was required of members in the WhatsApp communities.

Relevant data within the pre-selected data set was then mined using a data mining application known as Group Wize by entering certain key words into it. The key words were conceptualised along the themes of sense of belonging, identity, participation, power and affordances but were further simplified into words and phrases that were more likely to be used in the context of the WhatsApp communities under study. The words included home, belong, kinship, tribe, clan, attachment, born, recognition, same, who are you? (Depicts both power and identity), East Asembo, Kabula, what have you done? (participation), act/action, engage, involve, interest, active, dormant, administrator, leader, MCA (member of county assembly), MP (member of parliament), county government, platform, use, advantages, disadvantages, left, remove. The same were translated into Dholuo, Lubukusu and Kiswahili and the search conducted once more.

For interviews I purposively selected 2 main administrators from the communities, that is, those who started the respective online communities, 6 most active and 6 least active members (frequency determined by the app; the first 3 members in both categories who were listed by the Group Wize app were included in the sample), 4 diaspora members; (determined by their phone numbers) and 3 individuals who left the communities between August, 2017 and December, 2018 (there were 9 members in total who left the two communities between the stipulated time, but only

four could be traced and agreed to participate. The rest had possibly changed their phone numbers). Six members each for the two focus group discussions were recruited on voluntary basis and with the consideration that a FGD should be comprised of between 6 to 8 members.

4.4.4 Data collection methods.

4.4.4.1 Background Listening.

User engagement and communication sharing in virtual communities call for creative online methods of data collection (Rahm-Skageby, 2011, p.410). I employed background listening (metaphoric for voice) (Crawford 2009) which is a proactive and more participatory method that overcomes the shortcoming and stigma surrounding lurking (Crawford, 2009; Mare, 2017). In both communities I made my presence and purpose known first to the administrators and through posts on both spaces. The method allowed me to familiarize myself with the on goings in the communities and also to gather observational data. I read discussions in the forum weekly, taking notes of my thoughts on the general going-ons and the discursive moments. I also exported the chat logs from the WhatsApp communities to my email address for further analysis. The data from background listening is presented as observations.

4.4.4.2 Interviews.

Interviews were mostly conducted offline, but I had to use WhatsApp calls for the diaspora participants. The online interviews were a bit challenging because of network issues and time differences but I managed to complete them by conducting them in bits. The interviews were meant to probe and seek clarifications on the observations I had made and from interesting issues arising from the FGDs. It particularly gave me an understanding of individual perspectives that could be compared to my initial thoughts of the dynamics affecting all aspects of the study. That is, participation, power, sense of belonging, identity negotiations and affordances-constraints. For instance, I had initially made assumptions from my observations that sense of belonging was determined by primordial factors, specifically, being born in the places around which the online communities were imagined, but from the interviews and FGDs it was clear that though that was a factor it was not as important as being perceived as an individual who assists the community in

one way or another regardless of birth origins or tribe. Individual interviews were also paramount in getting thoughts on government policies and directives, that is, if they influenced what individuals post and how they engage in discussions in the virtual communities. The interviews also helped to get information on participants' interaction with the WhatsApp technology. The multimodal nature of online interviews helps in understanding the interviewee better even before you interview them. For instance, one can browse through (observe) their communication thread in the WhatsApp platform and face to face interaction through video calling via WhatsApp.

4.4.4.3 Focus Group Discussions.

From the two FGDs with KF and EADF respectively, my interest was on the power dynamics of social interactions especially in a different environment from the social space. Inasmuch as recruitment was voluntary, the FGDs had membership that captured all demographics, from administrators to members who rarely participate in the online communities to some leaders. We discussed issues cutting across all the research questions but with a special focus on identity and power negotiation. It was interesting to note the power laden terms other participants used to refer to the administrators, for instance, "chief," "super admin" and "*telo," Dholuo* for leader. The FGDs were also important in gathering data on participants' interaction with the technology contributing to the affordance-constraint aspect of the study. Moreover, the FGDs provided an opportunity to triangulate data from the observations which were more aligned to the researcher's perceptions and interviews which gives an individual participant's view as opposed to a community view.

4.4.5 Data analysis

Data from interviews and FGDs was first transcribed, collated, edited, coded in a manner that makes it sensible and accessible for purposes of interpretation and discussion. The data including that from observations and technology materiality was then organized and analysed thematically according to the techno-tropes they exhibited and subjected to a discursive-material analysis discussed in 4.2 and 4.3 above. Techno-tropes addressing similar issues were categorized into relevant chosen themes and sub themes generated to tell the story through thick descriptions within the major theme of power as freedom and/or control.

4.5 Ethical considerations.

Conducting online research comes with unique ethical and even legal challenges in some cases. Grinyer (2007) for instance argues that application of traditional ethical guidelines on online research is very problematic. Ackland (2013, p. 43) on the other hand calls online researchers "to rethink established ethical principles of informed consent, privacy and anonymity." Kozinets (2002) however is of the view that "netnography can be done ethically as long as one is "flexible" and "unobtrusive" (p.70). Kozinets (2002) netnography ethical guidelines are summarized by Langer and Beckman (2005, p.193) as:

> (1) the researcher should fully disclose his/her presence, affiliations and intentions to online community during any research, (2) the researchers should ensure confidentiality and anonymity to informants, and (3) the researcher should seek and incorporate feedback from members of the online community being researched and an additional fourth unique to online medium, (4) Taking a cautious position on the private versus-public medium issue.

Kozinets (2010) changed his position on disclosure, suggesting that in public spaces which he defines as those where one does not need registration to participate in, a researcher could operate covertly. Langer and Beckman (2005) argue that since netnography is not so different from content analysis of traditional forms like TV where information is in the public domain anyway, the same should apply to online spaces and therefore Kozinets (2002) guideline is superfluous. Tuikka et al. (2017) having analysed 52 articles which use netnography solely or partly agree that Kozinets' (2002) ethical guidelines substantively apply in qualitative research of online communities despite pointing out that rules 1, 2 and 4 may be unnecessary in open fora. They also reached the conclusion that netnographic research can be conducted in many different ethically justified ways provided the researcher considers the following questions:

a. Do you need to ask the informed consent of the members of the online community in question?
b. Do you need to protect the anonymity of the members of the online community in question?
c. How important is the accountability of your research? (Tuikka et al., 2017, p.9)

In this study, the answers to all the above questions were in the positive. To begin with, to use WhatsApp, a user needs to register on to the platform with their phone number to create an account. To join a WhatsApp community, they need to be added by an administrator or join using a provided group link. Since the WhatsApp communities under study are restricted to those who come from a particular place, access to these communities is dependent on this fact and the rules and purpose of the communities, holding their leaders accountable and pushing for development abound. Since I was joining them for the purpose of research, I needed to obtain informed consent from members. Given the nature of these communities, the precarious laws guiding usage of social media in Kenya, and arrest of some WhatsApp administrators of other communities, there was need to maintain anonymity. The members of these communities laid down their expectations during an open session I had with them which touched on confidentiality and privacy, I am therefore accountable for my decisions as the researcher. As such all the guidelines put forward by Kozinets (2002) are useful in this study.

I applied the first guideline by letting members know starting from the Administrators that I was part of the communities with my aim being to carry out research on the nature of power struggles in the online communiques. This was done through a post in the communities, stating who I was my purpose of being there and seeking consent from members to observe what was going on in the communities. As is the critique of Kozinets' (2002) full researcher disclosure ethical component which Posey et al. (2010) term as restrictive, I got opposition from some members and communities. Kozinets (2015) and Xun and Reynolds (2010) also recognize the risk disclosure may pose to research as not all participants may consent to being “watched” by a researcher. Roy et al. (2015) advice that a researcher can minimize the risk of losing data especially for private groups as is the case of WhatsApp communities, by contacting as many groups as ten until they find one that would allow researcher participation.

I started out with four communities and ended up losing two that were not comfortable in participating in the research. For the two EADF and KF that gave informed consent, I had an open session with them within the communities where I allowed them to ask questions and suggest

ground rules on researcher's conduct. The session proved productive as members informed me of what they expected for instance, "no screenshots," "anonymity," though in some cases members told me directly that they did not mind being named. Announcing my presence early enough allowed me and the communities to go through the motions from suspicion to trust and to cover instances of membership changes given the fluidity of online communities (King, 1996; Sugiura et al., 2017). Early disclosure (in 2016) also meant that I could fall into the background where participants "forgot" about my existence and interacted without my presence affecting them. Despite falling in the background, I was however aware at all times of the power my positionality as a researcher in the two WhatsApp communities accorded me. It is for this reason that I only included a much later data set of postings between August 2017 and December 2018 to minimize chances that I could have influenced interaction in any way. Moreover, by allowing a discussion on what the community members' expectations of how I should conduct myself during the research process also helped me to a certain extent to give back power to the research participants.

To minimize breach of confidentiality and intrusion of privacy caused by traceability, I removed personal identifiers from the chat log and used pseudonyms instead. I also avoided taking screenshots of postings in the WhatsApp communities. Feedback was obtained especially during individual interviews where I would show interviewees their conversations on the WhatsApp community platform and ask them to clarify what they meant and whether they still feel the same way. The fourth component needed creativity to navigate especially since the line between private and public in online spaces keep blurring. The same could be argued for WhatsApp which though considered private as one would not know of a community's existence unless they are added to it or invited via a link and is also equipped with the end-to-end encryption privacy feature, the challenge to this privacy is possible through what the technology itself allows.

For instance, not only can screenshots of conversations in a WhatsApp community be taken and shared across other WhatsApp accounts, communities and other public domains but chat logs could also be exported via e-mail and the information shared to others outside the WhatsApp community. In the case of this study, participants insisted that I should not use screenshots of their

online postings and that request was upheld; even though some participants opined that their activities on WhatsApp do not define who they are or affect their offline personalities. Additionally, the chat logs data exported to my email was solely used for research and not shared with anyone else. Screenshots could be likened to direct quotes which Skageby (2009) argues that should not be used in the research report as it compromises anonymity especially if that information could possibly be harmful to the participants (Tuikka et al., 2017).

During the KF FGD, when we were discussing hindrances of participation, participants gave the example of a member who was evicted or 'removed' (in WhatsApp language) from the community upon request by members as he was hostile to almost everyone during discussions. I only realized his brother was part of the FGD when one of the participants pointed to him saying, "Ask him, he is his brother. He will tell you how problematic the guy is" (Waswa, FGD, KF, 2018). I had to stop the discussion for a moment to ask him how he felt about us discussing his brother. He said he did not mind but I asked the participants to be sensitive moving forward and simply offer descriptions of what happened without using the negative adjectives they were using to describe him. The name Pat is a pseudonym as are all the other names used in this report. Given my positionality as both researcher and member of these WhatsApp communities, I had to avoid participating other than through observations during discursive moments to avoid including my obvious biases in the data collected. I also abided by the ethical standards of the University of the Witwatersrand, School of Literature, Language and Media Studies.

4.6 Conclusion.

In this chapter, I have explained the overall research process, methods and procedures given the ontological stance taken in this study while at the same time reflecting carefully on the methodological choices that I made. The next chapter will discuss empirical findings on how the online communities were constructed, by mapping the various actors involved in the formation of the WhatsApp communities under study while teasing out the emergent discourses on the nature of the communities.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN PURSUIT OF AN ONLINE COMMUNITY: WHATSAPP AS A METAPHOR OF FREEDOM

5.0 Introduction.

> We decided to have EADF on WhatsApp because unlike other social media like Facebook and Twitter, a WhatsApp group is private. It is hard to tell it exists which reduces the likelihood that the government will spy on you. We are free and safe to discuss political issues without fear (Pat, interview, EADF, 2018).

The paradox in the above epigraph sets the tone of this chapter: it aims at explaining how participants fix the meaning of the floating signifier WhatsApp, and particularly how its group formation affordance works through metaphoric substitution to create a free online community for political participation by backgrounding the government. Although Pat claims that WhatsApp users are free, it is such freedom that acts as subtle means for controlling people. Unlike the disciplinarian state power, governmentality is attained through the willing participation of the governed (Foucault, 1991). It is on account of this paradox of '*control'* looking like '*freedom'* that this chapter deconstructs the rhetorical nature of WhatsApp discourse to reveal how it has been constructed by its developers and users to be what it is not. Users may believe the space is free from elite control, yet this may not the reality. In other words, the chapter describes how the construction of WhatsApp as safe space is metaphorical. To use the words of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 124), "most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature" even though they are constructed as literal by obscuring their metaphoricity.

To view WhatsApp as a metaphor is to see this new internet application as part of governmentality, meaning the application is working as part of the language games that stabilises hegemony. Following the linguistic turn, language games are not limited to rules guiding linguistic expressions, but also grammar that can be used to read hegemony, considering that domination works like language. That is to say, WhatsApp affordances-constraints are a sign system which can be read using "the principles of *linguistic form analysis"* (Torfing 2005, 153). Thus, the working mechanism of metaphors will be used as 'grammar' for reading the hegemony concealed

in the WhatsApp technology. Therefore, this chapter utilises the working mechanism of linguistics grammar to create a grammar for interpreting the hegemonic function of WhatsApp as non-linguistic text. The chapter advances Laclau's rules of tropes, the use of the working mechanism of metaphor—the naming of one thing as another—to conceal governmentality/hegemony in WhatsApp communities by using techno-tropes to include the action of the technology. For example, by mistakenly believing that WhatsApp spaces are free from government control, users allow the ruling elite to use this new community mobilising technology for hegemonic purposes. Concisely, WhatsApp is working as a metaphor that is substituting the concept of freedom with what it is not.

These WhatsApp communities fit themselves within the metaphor of freedom by co-opting the meaning of "ordinary citizens" as presented in democratic discourse, to create a metaphoric binary between we (us) and them (they), where them (they) refers to the unseen/unreachable political elite vs "we" the ordinary citizen. By embracing this position, they can occupy subject positions of agency that enable the WhatsApp group to self-define as "free political sites of resistance." However, my entire thesis is based on questioning what I see as an artificiality of this positioning. This artificiality is constructed by technology and human factors operating as an assemblage. As part of that questioning, this chapter focuses on how the frontiers are constructed in the process of negotiating a coalition of resistance.

5.1 Demarcating political frontiers: the political myth of "ordinary citizens."

Inherently humans are social beings, and this pushes them towards collaboration and association, especially with those with whom they have common interests - a community. In the pre-internet era conceptualization of community, commonality was determined by close geographical bonds, kinship ties, and the myth of a shared origin, as was the case of Tonnies' (1957) *gemeinschaft* (community). However, with the advent of communication technology, commonality has metamorphosed into cultural meanings as seen in symbolic communities (Hunter, 1974) and imagined communities (Anderson, 2006); professionalism, that is, communities of practice (Wenger, 2000) and mode of mediation, that is, virtual (Rheingold, 2000) and online communities.

Some of these communities overlap. These commonalities point to the entanglement of identity and community.

However, commonality does not mean the absence of conflict among community members. If anything, its very emergence is a result of hegemonic struggle be it of an economic, social or political nature among members, in line with Marx position on society "as the scene of constant strife" (Neuwirth 1969, p. 148). As such, for there to be a chain of equivalence which brings different elements together to form a coalition by focusing on a constructed common demand, there must be a constitutive outside. This is how political communities are constructed, by mobilising around a hegemonic particular despite their differences, which set them apart from the Other. This is what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) term as social antagonism, the impossibility of the society which defines the political.

It was clear from the beginning that Kabula Forward (KF) and East Asembo Development Forum (EADF) emerged from an antagonistic relationship between two opposite sides. One, pitting the political leaders against the political construct of "ordinary citizens" subject position on the other side of the political frontier. When asked why the online community was formed or why members joined the communities, all participants agreed that the communities emerged to hold their political leaders accountable as explained by Joe and Kilian, the founding administrators of KF sv and EADF respectively:

> I formed KF on the WhatsApp platform because I saw the need to bring us "common wananchi[13]" together to ensure that our leaders do the work they were elected to do and to find ways through which our community can develop (Super Administrator, interview, KF, 2018).
>
> EADF was formed because we did not have a space as common members of East Asembo ward to freely discuss development issues affecting us. Our leaders like the Member of County Assembly[14], the Member of Parliament – MP and even the chief are here. We can therefore approach them directly with our issues and demand they act accordingly because

[13] *Wananchi* is the Swahili word for citizens; its singular form is *mwananchi*; the use of common mwananchi in Kenya to refer to ordinary citizen is commonplace.
[14] the elected ward representative at the county government, abbreviated as MCA.

> we elected them to serve us. They cannot hide away from us as they used to before we had this platform (Kilian, interview, EADF, 2018).

Another member of EADF said he joined the community upon recommendation by a friend who is aware of his political activism and therefore thought he would offer meaningful contribution, given the goal of the community is to hold their leaders accountable and push a development agenda in East Asembo. From the narratives, the discourse of "*us*" verses "*them*," which forms the first nodal point on membership and purpose of the communities is apparent. The narratives, especially the sentiments of the super administrator, unveil the antagonistic relationship between common *wananchi* (ordinary citizens) -a discursively constructed collective political subjectivity, and their political leaders. Without *them* there can be no *us* or *we* and therefore no community. *Our* coming together as *we*/*us* is only possible through the construction of the imagined collective of common *wananchi* under the horizon of ordinariness. This then leaves the political leaders as the constitutive outside by virtue that *they* hold power and therefore cannot be perceived as ordinary. The political leaders' subject position is informed by *them* being identified as the enemies of *our* existence, of *our* development; it is only by this identification that *we* can defeat *them.* The co-existence between the friends (ordinary citizens) and enemy (political leaders) in the same WhatsApp communities implies that defeating is not annihilation of the enemy, but holding *them* accountable to ensure *our* development, pointing to an adversarial relationship.

The general term ordinary citizen is however a fluid one when considered in particular contexts including gender, class and geopolitics. Further, given its pivotal role in the demarcation of the political frontiers, a theme that runs through out this study, it is therefore important to flesh out the diverse conceptualisations of this term in relevant literature while at the same time highlighting ways in which it is invoked by the participants' narratives above. Literature on social movements, democracy and political change are replete with import of the collective subject position of the ordinary citizen in the agitation for social change (see for example, Inch, 2015; Welzel & Inglehart, 2008). In some conceptualizations, the ordinary citizen is a representation of the marginalized and the socio-economic and politically excluded. While in others, the ordinary citizen, though insubordinate, has the potential to be or is an empowered Other who has gained a voice to speak

back to oppression. Even though the various terms used are not exactly "ordinary citizen" but the articulations appeal to a similar concept.

Consider, for instance, Marxist thoughts on capitalism. He argues that for the sustainability of this economic system, there must be a working class, in this case, the proletariat. It is the same proletariat, a marginalized and exploited group, that he accords the agency to initiate a revolution into communism against the bourgeois (Bottomer, 1983). In the article, "can the subaltern speak," Spivak (1988) explores the possibility of the subaltern-long muted by colonialism and beyond- to speak back to knowledge creation when in fact research on the post-colonial takes the West intellectual tradition. The answer to her self-posed question is no, the subaltern cannot speak especially given how existing research depicts the double colonized, "black or brown poor rural women" as voiceless (p. 90). On the other hand, Fraser (1990) used the concept of subaltern counter-publics to represent alternative discursive spaces "where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (p.67).

The phrase, "ordinary citizen," is a collapsing of two subject positions, that of "ordinary person" and "citizen." The citizen and ordinary person subject positions are among five subject positions including the expert, the owner and the leader pointed out by Carpentier (2017, p. 97) as more connected to participation in the media. Developments in the conceptualization of citizenship have occurred alongside shifts in development thought, especially more emancipatory and participatory ones through which individuals championed for good governance (Jones & Gaventa, 2002). Unlike in traditional Western political thought where citizenship is determined by civic and political rights, as is in the Libertarian, Communitarian and Civic Republican views (Oldfield, 1990; Rawls, 1993; Jones & Gaventa, 2002), the invocation of citizenship by participants in Kabula and EADF WhatsApp communities closely follows Miller's (2011, p.57) broader cultural approach to citizenship which he sums up as the "the right to know and to speak." The cultural view does not only relate to institutionalised politics but broadly to the social including identity formation and the ability of citizens to participate in decision making. Cultural citizenship entails recognition of

oneself as a citizen first then empowerment and participation in a democracy follow (Dahlgren, 2000, 2006; Gaventa, 2004; Carpentier, 2017).

The "ordinary person" like citizenship is central to a democratic process. Though related to the citizen subject position, it takes a relationist and hierarchical dimension (Carpentier, 2017). There are two main approaches: ordinary person as mass and underclass and as non-elite (Carpentier, 2017). In the first instance, the ordinary person signifies any other person, homogenous group that is not distinctive (Thumim, 2006) but who "could potentially instigate social change struggle" (Carpentier, 2017, p. 99) as in Marxist proletariat. The inverse is that the ordinary persons can also turn into a mass mob who invokes violent revolts against the social order (ibid). One of the limitations of this perspective stems from classism determination as it becomes unclear what class to include in this category; whether 'low' or 'middle' class, for instance. The second formulation transcends the essentialist classism to present an "elite-the people relationship; thus, the ordinary person becomes a non-elite" (Carpentier, 2017, p.101).

Laclau (1977) juxtaposition of the 'people/power' in social formation bloc also aids in understanding the ordinary person as non-political elite, the dominated. The power bloc also consists of social elites (Hall, 1981). Moreover, the ordinary is distinct from the masses and have a right to engage in democratic processes. The ordinary person as non-elite and "…its discursive relationship towards societal elites, encapsulates basic societal differences which might become (and often are) translated into societal hierarchy that incorporates structural power imbalances" (Carpentier, 2009, p.187). The super administrator's juxtaposition of ordinary citizens against political leaders/political elite (interview, KF, 2018) follows the latter conceptualization of ordinary persons as non-elite.

Even though the ordinary person in both approaches can be conceptualized either as marginalised, excluded from the participatory process or as empowered and located within the citizenship subject position (Carpentier, 2017) in most writings including those on the internet, citizenship comes with a given agency to participate in policy formulations and other political matters (e.g., Barber, 1998;

OECD, 2001) even though decision making may still be left to political leaders. On the other hand, the default representation of an ordinary person is that of subjugation. It is important to emphasize that the ordinary persons also construct themselves as Other, a self-referential action that is not only capable of rendering the ordinary person submissive to power, but also awakening a consciousness to that subjugation and resistance. de Certeau (2011) re-signification of the ordinary man supports this. He juxtaposes a "user" (ordinary man) as a consumer of culture produced by a "producer" who subjugates the user through the dominant economic order and coercive disciplinary techniques. However, the user according to de Certeau is not passive but through everyday actions which culminate to a "network of antidiscipline" (ibid, p. xiv-xv) resists the dominant groups.

The ordinary citizen re-articulation in these WhatsApp communities could therefore be understood as an empowered ordinary person who can participate in a democratic process including demanding for accountable political leadership and good governance. Following de Certeau (2011), "ordinariness" is maintained to foreground the banal; the everyday-ness of these individuals. Indeed, a dearth of studies on use political activism whether online or offline in Kenya and elsewhere, emphasize the role ordinary citizens in enhancing democracy through participation (Bang, 2005; Chatora, 2012; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2021; Nyabola, 2018; Shirky, 2011). In a study of a WhatsApp group named *Nakuru Analysts* (NA), Omanga (2019, p. 184) noted that members of the group "imagined their participation in WhatsApp debates as a form of productive citizenship" in addition to taking active offline roles of checking the excesses of their county government. In another WhatsApp study, Gil de Zuniga et al. (2021) argue that ordinary citizens are increasingly using WhatsApp for political activism in Spain, USA, and New Zealand owing to the app's intimate and controlled environment.

However, a closer look at the ordinary citizen construct suggests that this identification is more fluid than it is fixed. For starters, in most African states, not all citizens are equal not just without borders but within the borders of a Nation-State. The Western universal understanding of citizenship which assumes pre-given rights, including civic rights, by virtue of belonging to a

particular nation-state is nothing but a particular that with time has become hegemonic. In Kenya, the terminology "ordinary citizen" and its monikers "ordinary Kenyan," "common *mwananchi*" and "*Wanjiku*;" does not always mean an empowered everyday citizen. Instead, it has a double of articulation of empowerment and subjugation which often play out simultaneously in political discourse. The subjugation articulation points to a weaker citizen with little if any potential to speak back to power. The "citizenship" in the term does not automatically confer rights to political participation by means of belonging to a nation state; its meaning is more like the conceptualization of an ordinary person as undefined, often unruly mass. This is often true if the term is used by the political elite who have weaponised it for their own selfish ends; to project a weak, uninformed and powerless member of society who needs saving while positioning themselves as the "saviour." The saviour (top-down representation) narrative is seen in the continuous quest of the political elite to have politics exclusively defined as an art of government, who consequently appoint "appropriate" individuals or institutions to speak on behalf of the ordinary citizen. The resistance to this position has historically been taken up by the legacy media, activists, opposition political parties, NGOs and CSOs, who similarly also purport to be speaking and acting on "behalf of *common mwananchi*" consequently subjugating the ordinary citizen.

In one of his "roadside speeches" in the late 90's, former president Moi introduced "Wanjiku" into Kenya's political discourse. At the time, civil society was agitating for an inclusive constitutional reform process where every citizen would participate. In response, Moi retorted wondering what "Wanjiku" knew about the constitution. His depiction of "Wanjiku" was understood as representing the ordinary citizen who in his view was ignorant, declaring the sphere of constitution making as exclusively that of experts; lawyers and politicians (Shitemi, 2014). In a testament to the power of media in sedimenting or countering discourse, cartoonist Godfrey Mwampembwa commonly known as Gado, speaks to Shitemi (2014) in an interview. Gado narrates how he immediately offered an ideological counter-discourse to Moi's account by graphically presenting "Wanjiku" as an un-gendered (important, since Wanjiku is a female name from the Kikuyu tribe) identifiable human who questions power (Shitemi, 2014) in seemingly "foolish" but at the same time meaningful manner. Gado's revolutionised "Wanjiku" which first appeared on print and

subsequently on social media platforms like Twitter, propelling its everyday-ness, does not need saving by experts or politicians as Moi's Wanjiku does.

The fluid nature of the ordinary citizen construct runs through the different articles published in (Shitemi & Kamaara, 2014) as the authors embark in a multi-disciplinary endeavour to define, understand and even unmask the identity of Wanjiku. In the accounts, Wanjiku is both powerless and powerful politically, she/he is un-gendered, an ordinary Kenyan man as well as a woman; Wanjiku is socio economically empowered and disempowered, Wanjiku is both conscious and ignorant of his/her exploitation and public affairs, Wanjiku is subdued and vocal at the same time, Wanjiku's voice is only heard through representatives like civil society at the same time participates directly in politics, Wanjiku is an absent fellow whose presence is only felt during elections in the form of voting, Wanjiku is the ever present figure in all spheres, Wanjiku is in need of rescue and a rescuer, Wanjiku is ordinary as well as elite; Wanjiku is in despair and hopeful for a better future; Wanjiku is EVERYONE! is the conclusion reached in this volume.

What this conclusion by Shitemi and Kamaara (2014) emphasizes, as I argue is the case in these WhatsApp communities that the ordinary citizen is not an essential identity and therefore it does not organize around definitive binaries of ethnicity or economic class even though in some accounts, it refers to only those within the middle class and below (Ojiambo, 2019). Ojiambo (2019) however aptly states that political elites are not included within this collective; an identity is constructed out of difference as is one the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Consequently, ordinary citizen is instead a collective political subjectivity discursively imagined out of recognition of one's or collective marginalization (political elites are not marginalised) and the desire for change. The exclusion of the political elite from the construct of ordinary citizen plays out on political discourse in both legacy and social media in the cynically imagined *mwenye-nchi* (owner of the country; merchants of impunity who act as if the state is their private property and exercise power at their own behest) in contrast to *mwananchi*. "Who owns Kenya," a segment of the Sunday Live News pogramme which used to air on Citizen TV (one of Kenya's mainstream media) exemplifies if not amplifies this difference. "Who owns Kenya" successively detailed major shareholders in leading corporations, which usually comprised of a small clique of Kenya's

political and economic elites. Used satirically, *mwenye-nchi* subtly questions power but also betrays a fatalistic resignation to the ordinary citizens' fate. Again, an articulation of the powerlessness of the ordinary citizen.

The fragmented nature of the ordinary citizen construct is akin to Haraway's (1991) fluid cyborg imagery which rejects dualisms of gender, human and machine, among others. Through the cyborg imagery, she critiques traditional feminists' accounts which universalizes the experiences and positionality of women against men. To Haraway, the cyborg "is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality…or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (ibid, p. 292). In other words, the cyborg collective results from affinity rather than the essential determinants of what a female is, as traditional feminists purport. Noteworthy, is the importance of science and technology which enables the formulation of the cyborg as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism" (p. 291) and its existence within both our social reality and fiction. Similarly, WhatsApp community formation affordance has not only allowed members to imagine themselves through the collective of ordinary citizen but also to chart and advance their course directly without the need of an intermediary. Previously, before the advent of social media in Kenya and at a period of heavy government censorship in Kenya, Atieno-Odhiambo (1987) presented rumour mongering as a powerful communication network which provided an alternative discursive site for ordinary citizens to get information and exercise political consciousness. Moreover, he argued that rumours flatten to a substantive extent the power hierarchy which exist between the ordinary citizen and the political elite (ibid).

In a study on how social media are heteroglossic discursive space, Ogola (2015, p. 75-76) uses the term "ordinary citizen" as a hierarchical and power difference juxtaposition against the political and economic elite. He writes of Twitter,

> as an important discursive space where the majesty of power is easily punctured also occurred when then Cabinet Secretary for Land, Charity Ngilu, named a group of businessmen – all with the surname 'Singh' – as the legal owners of the controversial hotel. These businessmen were quickly 'unmasked' as 'fronts' for the deputy president, who was

> then also sarcastically depicted as a 'Sikh.' Addressed as a 'Sikh,' the deputy president was accordingly stripped of the majesty of power that comes with his stature. He became an ordinary citizen, open to criticism like any other.

What is important with the ordinary citizen articulation in the WhatsApp communities, illuminated further by Ogola's description is that it provides the language games through which previously marginalized ordinary citizens can define themselves in juxtaposition with the elites, and through technology congregate as a community with similar historicities and needs. It therefore provides a basis for the construction of *we/us* vs *they/them*-those like the political leaders who have marginalized *us* as is the case for these two communities. The collective identity of empowered citizens also creates a sense of one-ness, belonging and builds trust, important ingredients for the construction of free spaces.

For the Kabula Forward and East Asembo Development Forum, the WhatsApp technology constraints like the 256 members per group limit, participate in refining what an ordinary citizen is. It is this entanglement of the linguistic and the non-linguistic that lends credit to the idea of the techno-trope. So, members adding (administrators) or suggesting other members to be added have to consider if the new members fit the bill of being either from Kabula Ward or East Asembo Ward, are not part of the political leaders (who have already been added to be held accountable) and have interest in holding political leaders accountable towards achieving the development goal. It is those who fit this description that take up the precious limited space available. It is important to note that the collective subject position does not always remain hegemonic but is subject to re-articulations and dislocations through the logic of difference as is discussed in the next chapters.

5.2 Mobilizing diverse groups for the collective articulation: the interplay of affordances and constraints.

From the onset, the metaphor of freedom which enables a construction of the ordinary citizen political subjectivity is set out by the description of its purpose by its developers: to replace Short Messaging Service (SMS) with a 'free of charge' and ad-free space for transmitting text, images, audio files, video files, and web links to individuals or groups. This makes it attractive for people

to subscribe to WhatsApp enabling their mobilization into the online communities even though data charges may still apply depending on how one accesses internet.

Laclau & Mouffe (2001) emphasize how social movements can become a formidable force of political actors if different democratic struggles coalesce their claims into a major demand through coalition building. In the case of EADF and KF WhatsApp communities, defining and bringing *us/we* together in a chain of equivalence regardless of what individual's particular demands is brought out in the excerpts below:

> I joined EADF because even though I live in the UK, East Asembo is my home, I was born there, my family lives there. And therefore, as a citizen of that place, I need to contribute to its development and that means following closely what the elected leaders do, especially our Member of the County Assembly (MCA). It is not proper to leave such matters to only those who are based at home (refers to rural dwellers locally based in their respective ward) (Phoebe, interview, EADF, 2018).
>
> I stay in Nairobi, but just to work. Mostly I care about my home. I am glad the country got devolved, that means we can have development at home. Mostly I am concerned about poor health care system, we do not have good hospitals and therefore our relatives at home suffer. I would like to see this change through the local leadership. KF enable us to come together to let our leaders know the problems we have, and what we want done (Waswa, FGD, KF, 2018).

These narrations bring out a diasporic discourse of liminal existence common to online communities because of the mobility affordance of new media which erases physical distance. Emergent studies on WhatsApp groups like those which dealt with aspects of media convergence and mobilities resulting from developments in ICTs including the internet, mobile phones and other social media forms, point to the use of WhatsApp by the diasporas to connect to "home" (e.g., Frouws et al, 2016; Ugoala & Udenze, 2020). Udenze and Ugoala's (2020) study for instance, found that Nigeria diaspora in the US prefer to use WhatsApp to get and share information about home (Nigeria) which encourages community building among members.

At this point, the focus is how the two excerpts attest to the concurrent existence of different identities which constitute members' offline identities including "diasporas," "urbanites" and "locals" whose demands are not exactly the same but are bound together by the affinity of the logic of equivalence which defines them as the "*we"* of ordinary citizens. The affinity is to hold their political leaders accountable and push for development; even though that development is understood in some cases broadly as is the case of "diasporan" Phoebe or in specific terms as demonstrated by "urbanite" Waswa. It is this affinity which also demarcates the boundary between we/us and them; the *other*, political leaders in this case.

In concurrence with this study, Trere (2015) following Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasizes that the formation of a collective identity is tied to an oppositional *other*. In a study to examine digital frontstage and backstage activism through instant messaging platforms specifically Facebook and WhatsApp. Trere (2015, p.906) elaborates how Mexican students (*we)* channelled their resistance through the collective identity banner of #YoSoy132 movement against their clearly demarcated enemy; the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and a controlled media. The movement mobilised after an incident at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico in which students demanded answers from the PRI party candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, over a previous incident of police repression under his watch as governor. Instead of engaging the students, a furious Nieto walked away and resorted to maligning the students and even stripping them of their student identity by claiming instead through the media that they were "thugs, violent, fascist, and intolerant" being used by the left to discredit him (ibid, p. 906). To counter the manipulative discourse in mainstream media and reclaim their identity, 131 of the students at the said university published a video on You Tube in which they displayed their student credentials and read out their names. The video went viral and other students in solidarity with the 131 by stating, "I'm 132", and thus the #YoSoy132 movement was born on Twitter. Subsequently, members of this movement formed Facebook chats and WhatsApp groups through which they shared information and continued to strengthen their coalition (ibid).

Though he does not explicitly write of boundaries between a collective against an oppressive Other, Omanga (2019, p. 176) on the composition of Nakuru Analysts (NA) WhatsApp group,

lists different subject positions including "citizens of the city of Nakuru, county government officials, including the governor and his cabinet/senior county officials, elected Members of the county assembly, the county speaker, local opinion leaders [….]." He also notes that some citizen perceived the platform as an opportunity to speak to power while on the other hand county officials viewed it as a bother (ibid). Like Trere (2015) he mentions that material affordances of WhatsApp impacts on deliberation on the platform, even though he does not focus on them in detail. This leads to the argument in this study that WhatsApp affordances combined with human agency is imperative in the imagining of a community and coalition building. The double nature of technology affordances which could also act as constraints is explored to provide an entry into questioning the metaphor of WhatsApp freedom as it relates to the possibility of a community.

The possibility of an *us* is for instance, viable through the ontic level group-formation orientational metaphoric icon depicting a group of people close to each other even though there are spaces in between them, with the "caricature" of the person in front being bigger and on a different level than the other two caricatures. An orientational metaphor organizes concepts through spatial orientation (Lakoff and Johnson, 1993). In technology design, orientational metaphors are applied through allocation of spaces in between objects to depict distance and levels between an object(s) in relation to another. This means that the group formation icon relies on image schema (Johnson, 1992) to metaphorically urge users perceive a device which transcends spatiality and time by affording mobility. Prior knowledge of the objects in the image, in this case people, is required if one is to intuitively decipher what the metaphoric icon invites them to do (Hurtienne & Blessings, 2007). At this stage, the metaphor is simply a perceptual affordance or convention serving the purpose of availing possibilities of what can be done by the group formation affordance. That is, bringing people together regardless of spatial and time differences, whether locally (rural), urban or diaspora based as exemplified by the conversation below obtained from observation in EADF in 2017:

> **Ronnie**: (Reacts to a comment)
> **Onyango**: Hey Ronnie. How are you doing there in Obama Land (USA)?
> **Ronnie**: I am good my friend. How are people at home (Asembo) doing?
> **Onyango**: We are fine at home. God is watching over us, I am grateful.
> **Nyaduka**: Hey my brothers, greetings from Nairobi. Glad you are all okay
> **Onyango**: Greetings received, thanks my sister. Any news from Nairobi

Nyaduka: Nothing much, just the usual struggles to make ends meet.
Onyango: Ah, good. We all have to struggle to make end meets. May God watch over you.
Nyaduka: You too.
Onyango: Thanks sister, good day.

However, it becomes hegemonic by the constraints provided within this affordance to limit possibilities to those desired by the designer of technology. Once one clicks on the icon to form a group, the constraints fly in action. For instance, only the "administrator" (a function designated by WhatsApp) can add members who must have smart phones, download WhatsApp and register their account with it using their mobile phone numbers. These forcing constraints which include the membership limit put at 256 members, invite certain human action to discursively fix the meaning of *us* and *them*. For instance, how does the administrator determine *who* to add? The EADF and KF administrators elucidate this:

> When I formed the group, I added people I knew who I thought will contribute meaningfully towards the goal of the group. It is hard to add somebody you do not know because you do not have their mobile phone numbers. Those added also usually suggest people to be added by forwarding their numbers to me. The people we admit apart from our political leaders, are generally ordinary sons and daughters of East Asembo who want to see our Ward progress. (Chief admin, Interview, EADF, 2018).

> When I formed the group, I at first added those people I knew are passionate about politics and development of our ward. I added the Member of County Assembly representing Kabula, the Member of Parliament of our constituency and other leaders in the County government because they need to know our grievances. I then made some of the members I had already "added" admins, so they too could add more like-minded people. I had published the WhatsApp invite link on other platforms like Facebook, but I realized even those who do not come from Kabula were joining, and the group had gotten to the limit of 256. So I deactivated it (Super admin, interview, KF, 2018).

The narratives submit that the metaphor for group/community formation acts hegemonically at the ontological level to determine who is to be included and excluded from the WhatsApp community; only those who come from East Asembo or Kabula or from Nakuru County as is the case in Nakuru Analysts (Omanga, 2019). The WhatsApp architectural limit of 256 also means that once that limit is reached, any other individual, despite their interest, cannot join the communities even though one can argue that the limit is reasonable to enable easy following of discussions. The narratives

also define the constitutive outside, the enemy or adversary (the politicians) who has to be present for an "us," "common *mwananchi*" to exist. Various discourses support the "oppressed" ordinary citizen and "self-interested" political leaders in African political articulation. As such, the political frontier established in these WhatsApp communities is not misplaced especially in Africa where the dominant discourse adopting the political economy lens ties underdevelopment to poor governance (e.g., Mills, 2011). Africanists like Jean-François Bayart (1993) and Jean-Pascal Daloz (2003), accent what they regard as inherent deficiencies in postcolonial A-frican States; some cultural, others idiosyncratic, others colonial legacies that stymie good governance and the emergence of the Weberian state (see Ganahl, 2014 for some of these debates). It is for the same reasons that the political economy of the media discourse submit that media freedom is contingent upon the extant politics. A dictatorial state begets a highly controlled and censored media. Consequently, the populace is denied alternative views and are controlled through government ideologies perpetuated through pro-establishment media (see Atieno-Odhiambo, 1987; Mbeke, 2008; Ogola, 2011 for these discussions on the legacy of the Kenyan media) and thus ordinary citizens have turned to alternative spaces like WhatsApp which they deem free despite constraints. These spaces bring them in direct contact in with the enemy so that they can exercise collective action.

5.3 How the enemy (them) acts to deny (us) free space: constructing a discourse of oppression.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that once there is a collective identity construct in which demands can be articulated, social movements need to articulate their demands as oppression while linking it to available broader discourses like democracy. In this section, I discuss how meaning of what is considered harmful which *them* do to deny *us* a safe (free) space for political agitation is fixed. I reiterate the working definition of free spaces in this work, as spaces devoid of government (governmentality) control and surveillance, thereby fostering political participation. The enemy is constructed by this definition as those who aim to curtail the freedom of the ordinary citizen impeding their political participation and undermining democracy. To reiterate Pat's narrative on the privacy of WhatsApp and the advantages that affords we can clearly deduce some of the ills associated with the enemy.

The epigraph, Pat's (2018) excerpt, invokes surveillance by the government on its citizens and media apparatus, what the respondent refers to as spying. For users like Pat who engage in politics on WhatsApp, maintaining privacy and resisting surveillance is significant since Kenya, like other post-colonial African countries, places its citizens under surveillance (Moyo, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). Media surveillance has been studied extensively with the advent of the internet. In fact, social media platforms have become the main sources from which governments mine data from citizens posing a real threat to online participation (Fernback, 2007; Kadivar, 2015). The involvement of Cambridge Analytica in manipulating public sentiment in favour of Uhuru Kenyatta during disputed presidential elections in Kenya in 2017 (Nyabola, 2018), demonstrates that even corporates illicitly mine data to advance partisan political agendas. It is noteworthy that WhatsApp is owned by Facebook, although according to the company, WhatsApp has an end-to end encryption, Facebook does not. The government's counter position is that they place citizens under surveillance for public security (Fuchs, 2012; Lyon, 2001) but they also breach citizens' right to privacy to maintain power (Andrejevic, 2013; Lyon, 2001, 2007). Indeed, technology by allowing data mining, provide the structure through which governments articulate their position.

The comment by Lincy (2018) below during the FGD with KF brings to the fore another ill related to surveillance, that of infringing on freedom of speech. Like Pat, she reiterates the importance of conventions like the "administrator" who is the only person who can "add" members into the community and by so doing, controlling inclusion, exclusion, and privacy while contributing to a sense of safety:

> When I am in this group (KF) I feel very safe. Most of the people here are my former schoolmates and friends. I am sure I can say whatever I want to say no matter how controversial it may be. Nobody can report me to the authority.

While Lincy's narrative point to the existence of co-surveillance (discussed in detail in chapter 7), it foremost positions the metaphor of freedom of WhatsApp in the sense of free speech within discourses of trust and cohesion which results from sense of community of "ordinariness" and friendship. Pang and Wo (2020) argues that relationship building and social cohesion on WhatsApp is possible on WhatsApp communities because of the casual, banal conversations that

go on frequently among members. Trere (2015, p. 911) attributes this freedom, what he refers to as a "digital comfort zone" to the digital backstage WhatsApp provides. This constitutes WhatsApp communities as "safe places where activists could express themselves far from official lights of Facebook wall and pages" (Trere, 2015, p. 911 citing a respondent, Ernesto).

Secondly, Lincy's narrative by mention of authority also points to online democratic discourses. Free speech is the crux for expanding democratic spaces in which dominant political ideologies can be countered and political leaders held accountable without censorship or restraint of any kind. However, "not all technology has a democratizing potential other than those who afford expressive capabilities like television, radio and the internet" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 3). While online platforms have been hailed for expanding opportunities for freedom of expression and democracy through increased access to information and participation (Jenkins, 2006; Rheingold, 2000), they have also been critiqued for restraining it owing to various challenges that these technologies come with. Despite these arguments, the narratives by Pat and Lincy insist on participants on WhatsApp spaces being able "to say what they want to say without fear of authority." These narratives of the democratic potential of social media technology can also be seen in studies of other social media platforms in Kenya. According to Omanga (2015), a chief transformed the traditional *baraza* (local term for public meetings) which was less inclusive as certain groups in society like the youth rarely participated, into a more effective online *baraza*. Twitter is credited for this success. Ogola (2015) found out that key bloggers/activists and citizen journalists on Twitter had created a more horizontal participatory environment on wider national narratives amidst the platform's own hierarchies.

On the other hand, Papacharissi (2009, p.234) argues that "while the internet and surrounding digital technologies provide a public space, they do not necessarily provide a public sphere." He adds that access to information alone made possible by online media does not necessarily lead to "political participation, or greater civic engagement, or trust in political process" (ibid, p.234). The issue of access speaks to digital divide which is a challenge more prominent in the global South. While WhatsApp started as an alternative to the relatively costly SMS sent directly from

mobile phones (Makinnen et al., 2014), the application depends on the internet for its operation and therefore the politics of data costs, owning a smart phone, technical skills to operate it applies.

Flichy (2010, cited in Mahlouly, 2013) observes that the digital public sphere is inclusive and diverse in terms of nature of participants especially when juxtaposed with the Habermasian Public sphere. In the same breadth however, he casts a shadow on the quality of online participation citing the inferior quality of political debate that results from this plurality. He also notes the unsustainability of online political engagements, arguing that they are mostly ad hoc depending on individual interests (ibid). However, from observation of the political WhatsApp communities in question, there is some semblance of stability as they have been in operation for over three years. Gibson (2019) adds his voice to the free speech and safe space debate by noting that online spaces are prone to Noelle-Neumann's (1974) spiral of silence phenomenon, where participants who perceive their opinion to be in the minority choose to keep quiet and conform to the dominant narratives. However, myriad scholars have critiqued this citing the changing political environment and dynamics of online communication (see for example, Castells, 2010; Ceron et al., 2013, Ho & McLeod, 2008).

In the context of the KF and EADF WhatsApp communities, opinion is shaped mostly by the avant-garde who do not necessarily fall into the 'elite' formulation of Noelle-Neumann's but get their influence from being locally based and therefore more informed about the happenings in their respective wards. Moreover, the context in WhatsApp is different from the original spiral of silence, whereas in the original formulation of the theory, public opinion is shaped by mass media, for WhatsApp the context is more private and individuals who would have easily fallen within the silent majority category are now the vocal ones as Otoyo opines:

> We welcome the presence of our political leaders; we do not fear them at all nor do they influence what we say in the platform. In fact, we talk about their shortcomings and lack of focus on development because we know they are in the group and will get to know how we feel about them (Otoyo, FGD, EADF, 2018).

When I asked an elected Member of the County Assembly (MCA) of East Asembo how she felt about being in the WhatsApp community, she responded thus:

> When I heard about EADF, I told myself, I must be part of it. You know when you are a leader, you are always looking for an opportunity to hear first-hand what the people you represent are saying about it. I use what is said about my leadership in EADF to improve. Even though sometimes people say very hurtful things and you are tempted to quit, but I stay put. I have since decided to keep quiet and not argue with everyone on the platform, I only speak when asked directly to address an issue (MCA, interview, EADF, 2018).

The response by the MCA is a testament to how freely ordinary citizens are speaking in the WhatsApp communities, compelling political leaders to listen to them even if they do not respond (or act) every time, but the information is passed. It is also important to note that the MCA is compelled to respond, if directly addressed because of the proximity to the ordinary citizen to them. This was not possible with legacy media. This means that to an extent, given the proximity of ordinary citizens to their leaders enabled by WhatsApp, the hegemonic order of political power is questioned and countered even if momentarily. The silence from the political leader is also noteworthy. Consequently, the question of how WhatsApp is perceived as a metaphor of freedom and safety still looms. This brings us to the next nodal point on how safety on WhatsApp is negotiated.

5.4 Negotiating freedom: "What happens in WhatsApp remains in WhatsApp?"

Given the discussion on how antagonisms instigate the emergence of communities and the detailing of how technology and government collaborate to control ordinary citizens, what strategies do participants employ to fix the meaning of WhatsApp as a "free and safe" space as Pat, the respondent, did in the epigraph, or even claim that "what happens in WhatsApp, remains in WhatsApp?" As evident in the excerpt below from Waswa, a member of KF:

> I understand that director of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission issued warning that administrators will be arrested if members of a WhatsApp group engage in hate speech, but so far, no administrator has been arrested. I have heard that some people who insulted the president on FB (Facebook) were arrested and jailed, but so far, no arrest on WhatsApp users. Don't you think if the government 'knew' what was happening in WhatsApp, they would have already arrested some people? Sometimes we quarrel on

> WhatsApp and say wrong things, but the admin always cautions us on these matters, other members can also caution you. One time, I met a member, Okuta, who had insulted me on WhatsApp, when I asked him about it, he said that that was just WhatsApp, out here we are friends, "What happens in WhatsApp remains in WhatsApp" (Waswa, FGD, KF, 2018).

Despite Waswa's unawareness that two WhatsApp administrators had been arrested at the time, this excerpt still portrays the entanglement of technological affordances with the politics of technology while still providing the language enabling the discursive game of the substitution of WhatsApp as a free space. More interestingly, even though participants are aware of the techno-politics within which WhatsApp operates, they still feel safe within this space. I argue that this substitution is a possible articulation given the fluidity of what a safe space constitutes. After all, the idea of safe space is not only desirable but often contested (Stengel & Weems, 2010). Moreover, the negotiation of meaning of WhatsApp as a safe space point to the oppositional reading of technology, where users completely reject dominant meanings and use of technology. Appropriating the group formation affordance of WhatsApp for politics is one such example of oppositional reading.

The statement "What happens in WhatsApp remains in WhatsApp" which is interesting in the way it draws parallels with the adage "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." It also invokes and fits in the debate on disembodiment/embodiment of cyber spaces and consequently whether the space can be considered safe. According to Okuta, WhatsApp technology affords the total separation of the online and the offline realms. The construction of these two spaces, the offline and the online, is the first strategy through which participants perceive WhatsApp as a safe space.

Starting from Merleau-Ponty's (1964/2002) radical argument that humans are body-subjects where our perceptions and consciousness are embodied, a conceptualization that moved beyond the mind-body dualism of Western thought (Killmeier, 2009). Most studies on human interaction with media technology grapple with the phenomena of disembodiment and embodiment. Earlier studies on the virtual experience by scholars such as Barlow (2000) advanced the disembodiment discourse. Barlow (2000) describes how his body was "left behind" when he first experienced Virtual Reality

(VR). He says of his body, "[…] all that remains of the aging shambles which usually constitutes my corporeal self is a glowing, golden hand floating before me like Macbeth's dagger" (n.p). Disembodiment discourses follow the Cartesian dualism of body and mind and consider the cyberspace as the "meetings of minds" free from bodily constraints like race, gender and so on (Clark, 1997; Kupfer, 2007; Levine, 2000). Conversationally, these disembodied spaces considered so because of factors such as anonymity can therefore be considered safe as is the case with Poster's (1995) idea of digital subjectivity and other proponents of cyber democracy like Rheingold (1993) and Turtle (1995).

Building on Merleau-Ponty's ideas, Ihde (1983) for instance argues that our lives are already embodied with artefacts or material technologies that we interact with, what he calls embodiment relations. This is in line with McLuhan's (1964) famous argument, that new media forms are nothing but "technological extensions" of man. The book is "an extension of the eye…. Electric circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system" (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, pg. 39-41). As such, technology enhances human function rather than replacing it completely (Cleland, 2010) as argued by opponents of "community lost" and technology embodiment discourses (e.g., Asenbaum, 2017)**.** Some current studies particularly those in the emergent field of digital humanities also study technological creativity aspects such as embodied technological experiences (e.g., Smithies, 2017).

Discursively, one would argue disembodiment proponents present online identities as total disarticulation enabled by technology, that exist outside the language games that govern our corporeal bodies. As a result, it is not just the naming that is different from what the corporeal body is named, but also the characteristics of the "new" entity. Kramer (2008, p. 36), argues that pseudonyms depersonalize, present "personas" and not "persons". In a study to understand how teenagers conceive themselves when interacting with the disembodied and anonymous (this is achieved through pseudonyms or aliases), Zhao (2005, p. 395) uses the term "digital self" which he treats in his analysis as a separate entity, even though he acknowledges that "in practice it would be impossible to separate the digital self from other aspects of a person's self-repository." Further,

he finds that pseudonyms help build both fun inconsequential relationships on one hand and on the other intimacy and trust, making people to feel safe to open up.

However, there is a contradictory discourse in line with my analysis as demonstrated by Waswa's offline questioning of Okuta on what the latter said on WhatsApp. Waswa's questioning speaks to arguments which consider online identities (and spaces) as a re-articulation of offline corporeal bodies, where rules in the language game which define offline identities though altered and manipulated, can still be identified. This finding confers with Ajana's (2005, p. 29) "pseudo embodiment," where bodily perceptions are essential in the construction of self-identity and subjectivity in the cyberspace. In other words, technology and the corporeal body are synthesized within an assemblage. I therefore argue that in the WhatsApp communities under study, the online experience may not have the same effect of disembodiment as in other studies conducted in different social media spaces (e.g., Zhao et al., 2008 study on Facebook where the platform is seen as affording anonymity). For one, inclusion of members is done through referrals by friends or people known to them. This means that, from the beginning, even though online, one enters a familiar territory abound with offline friendship ties and interactions, negating the discourse of disembodiment.

Closely related to the issue of disembodiment, being cut from the outside world, are the ideas of resistance to surveillance and protection of one's privacy. Regarding privacy, participants' narratives have so far depicted the belief that WhatsApp is private compared to other social media. However, the same narratives also point to breach of privacy given the technology's affordances and conventions. Let us consider Jeff's narrative:

> I know there are members here in KF who take screenshots of conversations of certain issues, especially controversial issues which attract heated debates and share them on other WhatsApp forums and even Facebook. However, I am not worried because these are usually people who are quiet here and do not have influence. Even if they post those screenshots on Facebook, it does not really matter because they do not have many followers anyway. I will still say what I want to say in KF without fear (Jeff, FGD, KF, 2018).

To understand how screen shots, ontic metaphors of vision are also metaphoric at the ontological level and dislocate WhatsApp metaphors of security, we need to first know how a screenshot is taken on WhatsApp. A screenshot also called a screen capture, or a screen grab is a digital image of contents appearing on the screen of computers or mobile devices. The screenshot function is not actually a WhatsApp function but an inbuilt function of the mobile phone. Depending on the type of phone and the system that runs it, one can take a screen shot by first selecting and displaying what they want screen-shot on WhatsApp and press simultaneously on the "Power + "Home" or "Power" + "Volume Down" buttons. Using certain apps for example one can mirror the "display" they want to screen shot on a computer screen and use the camera icon on WhatsApp to take the screenshot. A screen shot is an image, a photograph which like other documents are "authoritative mediums that preserve selected representations of reality, contribute to collective memory (and amnesia) and have the power to direct our understanding of the world" (Stylianou-Lambert & Stylianou, 2014, p.118).

Since the shareability affordance in WhatsApp, means that individuals can take screen shots of messages and spread them to other WhatsApp users and even across other social media platforms, what the viewers in the other platforms see is the gaze of the sharer. The sharer therefore holds the power of determining what is represented and how it is represented. For instance, he/she could blur the identity of the interlocutors or expose them, share the screenshot as is, or add their own comments on it. They could also erase parts of the conversations captured by the screenshot. Moreover, since the size of how much one can screenshot is dependent on the size of their mobile phone screen, the screenshot is just a part of a whole conversation yet becomes representative of the whole through which what was said is viewed and understood by the spectators or followers in social media terms, of the sharer. In this sense, the screenshot becomes a synecdoche. This is in line with Foucault's (1973, p. 114) argument that the gaze is a medium of domination as it becomes the "speaking eye" through which meaning is described and consequently knowledge/power as it is the only source of clarity for the spectator. In his essay, *Las Meninas,* Foucault posit the gaze is unstable and therefore the observer and the observed continuously exchange roles (Richardson, 2019). As such, even those who have been watched, that is, those captured in the screenshots are

also seeing the observer (the screen shot) taker. That is, they identify who the observer is as they are part of the network of the observer, again negating discourses of online disembodiment.

It is through this argument that the second strategy of resistance to surveillance and privacy breach is unveiled; choosing to ignore and downplay the effect of the surveillance by stating as Jeff did "Even if they post those screenshots on Facebook, it does not really matter because they do not have many followers anyway," thus the WhatsApp space is still safe after all. This strategy can be explained by hooks (1992) theory of "oppositional gaze" in which she describes how women are not necessarily objectified by the male gaze in films as they can exercise their agency by refusing to watch the film for instance, refusing to identify with what is attributed to the woman by the film or even laughing at or criticizing the representation of black women by the film (p.121).

Further the shareability affordance of WhatsApp technology within and across platforms demonstrates the ambivalence of the WhatsApp technology and consequently the instability of the hegemonic "safe" WhatsApp space discourse. It explains how the shareability affordance blurs the public/private dichotomy. Papacharissi (2010) argues that the private and the public spheres are a matter of choreography, they are fluid and results from individual's negotiation and through sociability affordance of technology fraternize from their own privacy into a form of networked privacy. Further it can be argued that technology allows for reorganization, a convergence of virtual spaces in different platforms beyond just media convergence. As such the private domain on WhatsApp is still extended on Facebook and other public social media spaces like Twitter as the 'sharer's network is to a substantial extent limited to their networks in WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Thus, it is important to further interrogate the idea of "followers" invoked by Jeff, which I argue is metaphoric for influence and consequently authority whose meaning can be fixed at either being influential or not. Jeff's narrative suggests that influence is determined by the number of "followers" one has.

How influential one is on a social networking site is determined by the frequency one's activities within the network, how these activities are perceived by and affect others significantly (Holmes,

2006; Trusov et al., 2010) (the theme of influence-frequency of activity-also speaks to participation which is discussed in a later chapter). The idea that the "sharer" has few followers and therefore less influence and impact on the privacy afforded by WhatsApp can be explained by Granovetter's (1973) sociological theory known as "The Strength of Weak Ties." He argues that in social networks, weaker ties between individuals, that is those outside's one's immediate network, are more effective in the widespread of information than stronger ties. Additionally, in a study to investigate the conversational aspects of the retweeting convention on Twitter, boyd et al. (2010) note that retweeting becomes a political act when it is done to get one's voice and to get the attention of the person whose message, they are retweeting. This not only shows the influence of the person they are retweeting but also further strengthens that influence, especially if the person gets retweeted by those who are not their direct followers.

Still on influence, Papacharissi (2010) argues that most civic activities are formulated in private sphere as individuals feel more powerful and in control here given the intimacy of the space. It is from the private sphere that individuals learn and gain courage to face the public sphere they feel they have no control or influence over (Dahlgren, 2009). The connotation of these arguments is two-fold. One, is the idea of intimacy of private spaces which lead to sense of community and consequently safety thus granting individuals the freedom "to say what they want to say… without fear of being reported to the authority" as stated succinctly by Lincy (2018). Sense of community is therefore the third strategy through which individuals negotiate safety. In the WhatsApp communities, the intimacy afforded by the technology's "add" convention, which is controlled by an administrator, points to a familiarity of individuals with other members of the networks as the nature of enrolment means that most individuals already have established offline relationships which are further strengthened online as new relationships are also forged during members' interactions. It also includes the knowledge and ease of operating the WhatsApp technology. Indeed, studies have shown that intimacy resulting from online friendships builds trust and sense of community among users contributing to feelings of safety (Johnson et al., 2011; van Heijningen & van Clief, 2017). van Heijningen and van Clief (2017) in a study on how Facebook enables safe spaces on love matters in Kenya argue that sense of community is important for safe spaces and that it is hard to achieve a sense of community if members are completely anonymous.

This sense of community is so important to members of EADF and KF as it controls sense of inclusion and exclusion which determines safety and consequently freedom. For instance, there are public officials like chiefs, police officers and other security administrators but they held that they have never reported any of the ongoing in the WhatsApp group (even though governmentality is evident) since as one of them explained:

> When we are here, we are here as sons and daughters of Kabula. What affects Kabula also affects us and therefore it is important that we are one with the rest of the members. Sometimes when I feel a member is going overboard and saying things that could land them in trouble, I simply caution them (Policeman, interview, KF, 2018).

A chief (2018) in the EADF WhatsApp community, however, indicated during an interview that he takes it upon himself to inform group members of new government policies and directives. He also cautions members to refrain from spreading propaganda in the group or interacting with others in a manner that could lead to violence.

The fourth strategy of negotiating safety and freedom lies in the formation of rules and regulations which is also tied to a sense of community. Both EADF and KF do not have written rules as indicated by Lori:

> KF does not have any written rules. We also did not discuss any rules of engagement, but naturally when you interact with people, there are certain things that are obvious. For instance, you have to respect your elders, you do not talk back or argue unnecessarily, it is our culture. You also need to give people a chance to say what they want to say, you do not insult them unless you are joking with your friends and age mates (Lori, interview, KF, 2018).

This sentiment is also shared by members of EADF as demonstrated by Onyango (interview, 2018):

> Since I joined this group, we have never discussed any rules, but some things are obvious when people come together. We are not supposed to take screen shots for instance or share conversations here elsewhere. Respect is important. Our culture informs how we engage.

What happens when one is deemed not to adhere to the agreed rules is what contributes to the construction of a safe space. WhatsApp technology allows the administrator to remove any member of the group if they want to:

> If you are cautioned to stop engaging in things that go against the agreed rules and you do not stop, then the admin can remove you from the group. Sometimes, members demand that you be removed. If this happens, you will miss what is happening in Kabula Forward. So many things are discussed on this forum. You really feel bad if you are not here (Shifefwe, FGD, KF, 2018).

The "missing out" here is particularly important because it points to an exclusion, a silencing of voices of the one excluded which no one wants to happen to them and therefore they conform to the agreed rules which include safety measures. The importance of having a voice in private spaces can be explained by the second connotation of the arguments by Dahlgren (2009) and Papacharissi (2010). They argue that in the public sphere ordinary citizens do not have a voice when pitted against the powerful voices of political and social elites who are more powerful than them. An example of this is the Habermasian (1962) public sphere where voices of women for instance were excluded from public deliberation or even the Greek Agora in which it was the ideas of the best performers through speech-acts that carried the day. As such, I argue that people who are "quiet" in more private space like WhatsApp can therefore not have influence or a voice in public spaces and therefore their expulsion from these WhatsApp communities do not jeopardise their safety in any way. Instead, it enhances it, especially if those expelled were sharing private conversations outside the community. I put "quiet" in quotation mark as I acknowledge the problematics of silence in power discourses further discussed in the next chapters.

5.5 Conclusion.

Given the discussions, the 'ordinary citizen' subject position can be understood as metaphor that thrives to be transformed into a synecdoche (a totalizing hegemonic term that stands for the whole) capable of representing all marginalised people who do not have access to power and information. This generalized political identity enabled the unconscious doing away of different demands or needs among urban dwellers, rural dwellers and the diaspora bringing them together in a chain of equivalence; even though the chain is not stable and can be disarticulated, as we will see later.

Additionally, in this chapter, which marks the beginning of discussing the empirical findings, we have set the pace in discussing emerging issues of power play, exclusion/inclusion, identity negotiation and how technological metaphors together with the human action including techno politics, come together to form the techno-tropes through which the meanings of those themes are fixed. In the next chapter the metaphoric naming and functioning of the WhatsApp administrator is interrogated as part of questioning the metaphor of WhatsApp as freedom, a discourse initiated by the participants' sentiments in chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: OF SUPER AND CHIEF ADMINISTRATORS: EXPLORING EMERGENT FORMS OF AUTHORITY IN WHATSAPP COMMUNITIES.

6.0 Introduction.

The administrative function of WhatsApp even though it was not designed to be, is potentially hegemonic. It is a polysemy which could be turned into a sign with the regime's preferred meaning. It can also be seen as an interlock and forcing constraint. On one hand, its functions determine the sequence of WhatsApp group formation and on the other, force desired behaviour. Without an administrator, the one who initiates a WhatsApp group, and "adds" other members, there cannot be WhatsApp communities. Further without an administrator to form a WhatsApp community, users cannot enjoy the interactivity affordance which is the hall mark of the WhatsApp group affordance. Much as these examples contribute to the reading of the administrator as an enabling function of inclusion and interaction, they also point to the position of an administrator as a powerful one, as the same actions cannot happen without this function. This chapter argues that the "administrator" function is metaphoric as it obscures its hegemonic character by substituting through naming it what it is not. The administrator is therefore a previous empty signifier whose meaning has been fixed as a moderator/facilitator by pushing out other possible meanings. However, since meaning cannot be permanently fixed, as the constitutive antagonistic outside always attempts to dislocate the hegemonic meanings; combined actions of the human (including elected leaders exercising their power through the administrator) and technological actors (techno-tropes) bring to the fore other possible significations which are always in conflict with the hegemonic signification of moderator/ facilitator. Since very few members of these WhatsApp communities recognize or even counter the administrator's exercise of power, the hidden power-laden significations of the administrator remain largely obscured.

The administrator function therefore weakens the chain of equivalence responsible for the ordinary citizen collective and further questions the metaphor of freedom attributed to WhatsApp by community members. Technology's action combined with human actors' attachment to the term

administrator, the lexicals “super” and “chief,” further sediments its hegemony. In this sense, these strategies are techno-trop(ic). This means that the technological function or inbuilt design is not enough to give it its metaphoricity and hegemony, but human action including language and culture also play a significant role. Moreover, technology is also programmed by humans giving it an inherent bias which often but not always is discriminatory. As such the power of the administrators is co-produced by the different actors that constitute the EADF and KF WhatsApp community assemblages.

In the previous chapter some of the conventions of WhatsApp group formation affordance were mentioned for instance “adding,” “removing,” but the discussion will further deepen. Three nodal points guide the discussion in this chapter: Constructing ‘super’ and ‘chief’ administrators on WhatsApp, maintaining the “chieftaincy” and “superness” through remediation and resisting the hegemonic administrators.

6.1 Constructing “super” and “chief” administrators on WhatsApp.

In Shakespeare’s (1974) classic play Romeo and Juliet, the character Juliet asked, “what is in a name, that which we call a rose by any other would smell as sweet” (Act 2, Scene 2). He may have been right in the context of matters of the heart as the idiom love is blind suggests. However, when it comes to the political, naming is not to be taken for granted as it may either reactivate the particularities of objective discourses or obscure hegemony. A name is not what an individual or action is called as in nominalist view or what it is, as in realism, but how it is articulated and rearticulated changing the rule of grammar/language game with each instance of articulation “despite its family resemblance” (Laclau, 2014, p. 209 in his appropriation of Wittgenstein’s language games). What this means is that the use of or even terming of administrator in the WhatsApp communities, is not an abstract one as is the preferred reading projected by the app’s developers or even the administrators themselves, but rather, it is a particular which has become hegemonic by obscuring other possible meanings of superiority, leadership, editors/gatekeepers, and disciplinarian/dictator. The ontic administrator metaphor operates at the ontological level to obscure hegemony.

The term administrator as used in WhatsApp referred to founders of WhatsApp Groups. With improvement of the WhatsApp software, the original administrator, the "super" and "chief" administrators in the context KF and EADF communities, can now "make" other members they select as administrators. The other administrators can perform similar functions with the original administrators such as adding and removing members, create and revoke group invite links, and restrict editing group information for instance by setting it up so that only the administrators can name a group and change its icon, or even limiting sending of messages to only the administrators. However, the original administrator is the one who initially can "give" administrative powers (once made administrators can also give others administrative powers) and also revoke them. However, the original administrator's status cannot be revoked. It only ends if he or she exits the group.

To begin with, I argue that the administrator function is an antagonistic attempt to repair the dislocation which created the chain of equivalence of the imaginary of "ordinary citizens" and WhatsApp as a "free" space. I reiterate, "free" space in this study means devoid of hierarchies and exclusions and which encourages maximalist participation, sense of belonging and freedom in identification. In fact, the WhatsApp administrator subject position attempts to hide its hegemony by fixing its meaning as synonymous with the otherwise default function of moderator/facilitator as asserted by participants:

> This platform, Kabula Forward, was formed by the super admin "Bokelo." Basically, he guides our discussions and ensures members conduct themselves in the agreed upon manner. Since he wanted to include members from all corners of Kabula, he made five other people, including me, who come from the different areas (formerly sub locations) admins, so we could help in adding people from our locations (Shinyalu, FGD, KF, 2018).
>
> We have two admins in EADF, the chief admin, the one who started the group and the other one, made admin by the chief admin so he can help him moderate the group's discussions and add people (Otieno, interview, EADF, 2018).

The superlative "super" on the KF's original administrator's title can be compared to concepts such as super-power states used metaphorically in reference to a powerful nation like the USA. A super administrator is therefore figurative of the power this entity holds. Ironically, in these

narratives, despite members of the two communities conferring "greatness," which imply a power hierarchy, by allocating the lexicals "super" and "chief" on the original administrators (founders of the communities), they nevertheless perceive them as facilitators of inclusion of members and moderators of discussions in the WhatsApp communities. In two studies on WhatsApp which mention administrators, this trend is also seen. Trere (2015) even though he does not use the term administrators, mentioned that the key informants he conducted interviews with included those who formed and managed the digital platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp. By including WhatsApp administrators as part of the key informants, he inadvertently acknowledges their importance in WhatsApp communities. Omanga (2019) also mentions that he interviewed WhatsApp administrators in charge of moderating discussions and adding members into the groups he studied. Even though he does not explicitly mention the power surrounding this role, he explains how Kinyanjui, one of the administrators of the county level *Nakuru Analysts* (*NA)* WhatsApp group, played a pivotal role in replicating similar groups at the sub-county levels and helping these grassroots groups acquire significance at the county level by sharing them on *the NA* group.

The mobilization affordance of WhatsApp through the "add" to group convention enables the administrator to bring members of both frontiers together, dislocating the previous distance existed between leaders and the led, consequently stamping its construction as a moderator/facilitator by members. This reading is in line with app's programmers' presentation of the administrator convention, as a facilitating convention that enables the realization of the group formation affordance. What this perception means is that the chain of equivalence of ordinary citizens pitted against the enemy, the political elite, is still intact as the administrator is still considered part of the collective of the ordinary citizen imaginary. Some of the narrations from the interviews when members were asked of what they thought of the administrators and their role further sediments this notion explicate this notion:

> We have utmost respect for our super admin. He is a much-respected member of the community. He contributes very generously to various matters affecting our community. For example, whenever there is a harambee (fundraiser) to pay for the education of needy but excellent students, he is always on the fore front. In fact, he has been the guest of honour to many such events (Selina, interview, KF, 2018).

> He is just the super admin because he started the forum, so he justly holds that position. Otherwise, I do not think being an administrator makes him any different from us. He is very much one of us. Like …he has already said, our super admin actively participates in our community. Many of us who grew up in this community consider him a big brother. For instance, he owns a big pharmacy in town, but he is humble…whenever our fathers and mothers come from the district hospital, he gives them drugs on credit and buy them soda (soft drink) because he considers them his parents too (Shinyalu, interview, KF, 2018).
>
> I think the administrator role is a necessary one. You know all groups formed on social media have to have administrators who forms (sic) them, right? On Facebook for example all the groups I am in have administrators who started them. Of course, a group can have one or more administrators but there is that very first one, that Chief Administrator like ours here, who first formed it and has the power to make others admins. (Pat, Interview, EADF, 2018).

If participants think that the administrator role is simply that of moderation/facilitation, what then makes the "super" or "chief" administrator a hegemon, a metaphor? From the FGDs narrations, we can begin to understand how it possible to construct a "super" and "chief" administrator, where both terms denote power while at the same time maintain their articulated positions as part of the nodal point of just ordinary citizens, a "one of us" in the fight against the oppressive political elite and holding them accountable. I argue that this articulation is maintained by sedimented discourses or practices, which gain their objectivity as the only possible truth mostly through founding myths. Afterall, myths are "no more than a foil which represents the missing fullness and –hence- the dislocated character of a society" (Nabers, 2017, p. 423). They are what make new (mis)representations possible in the attempt by alternative discourses to suture a dislocated space (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). They can take different forms including metaphors and find legitimacy in different fantasies including the transcendence or affective attachment manifested as "strange temporalities of projection into an enabling object that is also disabling" as in cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011, p. 95).

In the case of Kabula Forward community, the power laden articulation "super" admin is obscured mostly by myths which speak to sentimentalities, affective attachment, especially the idea of benevolence and its intersection with sense of belonging in a community in the African context.

The "super" admin is a giver, he is kind especially to the most vulnerable of the society; children and the elderly, a gesture not lost on the rest of the members, especially in a country where benevolence (through fundraisers) and politics are intertwined[15]. He is therefore "super" not only because a WhatsApp programmer conferred powers on him by virtue of being a group initiator (after all, he has no control over that), but also because he acts within the societal norms of who belongs, who is a respectable person in society, and so he is definitely "one of us", he is an "ordinary" citizen. To think about him in any other way is to create an affective dissonance which must be quickly repaired by the fantasmatic logics of invoking the sentimentalities of giving.

Moreover, the idea of a lack of control, not having a choice in the construction of a "chieftaincy" or "superness" put forward in EADF and also mentioned in KF, echoes a fantasmatic logic informed by ideas of fate and transcendence, though in this case, technology is the almighty. This is an acknowledgement of technology agency, its ability to do, make us do and collaborate with human actors in doing (Carpentier, 2017; Latour, 2005; McLuhan, 1994). Further, Pat emphasizes this when he draws reference from another social media network, that is Facebook which also happen to own WhatsApp. By so doing, he unwittingly relies upon an already sedimented discourse; "that is how online groups work" to legitimize his premise that the chief administrator is one by virtue of being the initiator of an online group. Any other initiator would have been the administrator and therefore the current administrator is not in a privileged position.

Indeed, the administrator function is not new to WhatsApp. It was so with Web 1.0 online forums like bulletin boards and is still the case with online forums on Web 2.0 which afford group formations like Facebook and Myspace. In one of the long-standing online communities, the WELL (Whole Earth Electronic Link), the administrator function equivalent exist in what is called a "conference host" with the community forums referred to as conferences. In WELL, the conference host is viewed as a technical and social moderator in line with its written policy guidelines whose function is to "encourage participation, guide the discussions, and are sometimes deferred to in conflicts" (Smith, 1992, p. 10). Smith asserts that consequently, despite having to

[15] This aspect is discussed in detail in the subsequent empirical chapters.

act within certain informal social controls, a conference host possess more power than non-host participants (ibid). A significant difference in how the administrator function is presented in WELL and WhatsApp is instrumental in defining WhatsApp as an ontologically hegemonic function which attempts to hide its hegemony. While for WELL the powers of the host are overtly inscribed within the WELL's guidebook (Smith, 1992), the powers of a WhatsApp administrators are not defined. Instead, it is presented simply as a technical role through a structural metaphor, leaving out its social implications. A structural metaphor operating at an ontic level, relies on the familiarity of an object existing in real life to communicate how a computer/technology convention functions (See Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). It is expected that users have experience with what an administrator, particularly a systems administrator does in real life and can transfer that understanding to what a WhatsApp administrator is and should do.

What this means is that while most technology have in built programmes and affordances to ensure their smooth running, there is still need for collaboration of the human. For organizational use of technology, this collaboration usually exists in the form of external (human) system administrators whose work include but is not limited to installation, monitoring, troubleshooting, and maintenance, sets them aside from everyday technology users (Velasquez & Weisband, 2008). However, most software is increasingly being designed with the ordinary user in mind as is observed in research on User Interface/User Experience (UI/XI). The interface is a tool that enables the user through affordances and conventions to manoeuvre through the device under use. On the other hand, user experience speaks to the interaction between human and technology, the back-and-forth dialogue between them **(**Norman, 1988; Roth, 2017; Sundar et al., 2014; Velasquez & Weisband, 2008). Of importance to the interaction that user experience brings is contingency in use of technology (enabling many possible outcomes depending on what the user feeds the technology, and the feedback technology gives) and the agency technology afford the user (Sundar et al., 2014).

The idea of an administrator inbuilt in the design of group formation affordance in WhatsApp could therefore be read in the preferred signification as a computer remediation of a system

administrator, adapted by the designers from the experience of the essential functions system administrators perform to maintain the system. Indeed, Roth (2017) argues designers are increasingly going for the inverse that is, starting from user experience to user interface (UX/UI) in a bid to create more user friendly and effective technological devices. Remediation here is used in a more media related manner, particularly, its intersectionality with affect. In a study drawing the nexus between media, affect and the face, Angel and Gibbs (2006) argue that media communication goes beyond the semiotic and cognitive to appropriate human ability for affect in the process of bio mediation. They conceptualize remediation as the "manner in which media repurpose the human" (ibid, p. 27). It is this understanding of remediation that I work with.

However, the lexicals "super" and "chief" point to oppositional readings even though the participants do not acknowledge it. They further articulate a logic of difference, which sets apart the administrator from other members in the equivalential chain of "ordinary citizens" by conferring to them powers that the rest do not have. Not only does this render the administrator position hegemonic but forecloses other possibilities of overt remediation which could re-active the particularities that make the administrator a hegemon and facilitate counter discourses by members. It is this foreclosure which enables the construction of the administrator as "super admin" and "chief admin" while at the same time sedimenting the myth that administrators function as moderators/facilitators in simply technical terms. After all, all online communities have the administrator function which operates in a similar manner. In the next sections, I expose other power –laden remediations which I argue are part of the administrator function, though obscured by the propensity of members to defer to the dominant reading of what an administrator is, in the bid to further demonstrate why a WhatsApp administrator is hegemonic and further question the metaphor of WhatsApp as a free space as held by participants of the two communities. Further I argue that the obscuring of the re-articulations of leadership, editor and disciplinarian (in the governmentality sense) is possible since they follow the same family of rules as the dominant reading preferred by the app developers.

6.2 Administrator as remediated leader.

In the case of KF and EADF, various re-articulation of the administrator as a leader were manifest during conversations in the communities and also from interviews and focus group discussions. The notion of leadership is a re-articulation in two ways. First it is a re-articulation in the sense that members and the administrators themselves confer to this function more power than those already bestowed upon them by technology. Secondly, the convention of an administrator is a re-mediation of the leadership subject position found in the organization of traditional social movements/activism. Asked how discussions in the platform are run, the "chief" administrator of EADF responded:

> When there is a motion to be discussed, sometimes proposed by members or me, as the chief administrator must ensure that members agree on the time because people are not online all the time. When that time comes, I call the house to order and see to it that we have a fruitful discussion (Chief administrator, interview, EADF, 2018).

This conversation followed in KF community also illuminates the same phenomenon (Observations, KF, 2018):

> **Gordon**: it is time as Kabula Forward to discuss who will be our next MCA. We need to support one of our own in this group. Let us check the popularity of aspirants among us, then we rally behind whoever is more popular.
> **Lusweti**: How do you suggest we do it?
> **Super admin**: simple. I Just make a list of all aspirants' names including our current MCA then one ticks against their preferred candidates. I will begin:
> 1. Candidate A
> 2. Candidate B
> 3. Candidate C
> 4. Candidate D✅
>
> **Elkana**: Candidate D already has one vote.
> **Lusweti**: Candidate B✅
> **Wekesa**: Guys, there is still time for this, we will do this in 2022. In fact, this list has left so many aspirants out.
> **Gordon**: Wekesa, what am suggesting is happening everywhere.
> **Super admin**: Ok then. I suggest we arrange for a special day and time that shall be well communicated.
> **Nelly**: As an admin it is important you allow members decide as you moderate
> **Super admin**: Ok, let me discuss with other admins "inbox."
> **Wekesa**: 👍🏽👍🏽

While these narratives illuminate the preferred reading of the role of the WhatsApp administrator, that is, moderators/facilitators, they also point to a different articulation, that of a leader. And consequently, conjuring up the imagery of the "led." It is therefore imperative to analyse the power hierarchical nature of relationship between the leader and the led. To begin with, the leader articulation is made possible by the interplay between WhatsApp technology's affordances and constraints. While the group affordance enables a mobilization, bringing people together in space despite their physical location, time may still become a constraint. Although WhatsApp like other social media enables synchronous communication (Abualrob & Nazzal, 2020; Ujakpa et al., 2018), the reality of its usage is different in that communication can, and is usually the case, take place asynchronously because factors like internet access and one's other commitments may affect this.

The technological constraint which requires access to internet to use WhatsApp, a forcing function, makes members to give the administrators the power to fix and communicate time and moderate discussions. Especially since if one comes online later and is bombarded by myriad messages it may be hard to navigate through the discussion. Even though WhatsApp affords navigability through the "search" conventions, one has to figure out which key word(s) to input and even then, it is difficult for the search to bring up a whole conversation systematically. Besides their responses or contributions to the debate may already be passed by time. This finding is in tandem with Gerbaudo's (2012, p. 135) like Benkler (2006) and Shirky (2010) use of the economic concept of "power law distribution" through which he explains how "soft leadership" emerges in digital activism. Gerbaudo (2012) argues that contrary to claims to 'end of organisation' in contemporary social movements proposed by proponents of digital democracy like Castells (2012, 2015), social media leads to forms of "liquid organizing" (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.145). This kind of organizing collapses differences between organization and communication such that "the 'communicators' of a movement become also automatically its organisers and leaders" (ibid, p.135). In this sense, WhatsApp administrators like the Facebook administrators Waehl Ghonim and Fabio Gandara and Pablo Gallego whose mobilization on Facebook helped spark revolutions in Egypt and Spain respectively, are "choreographed" leaders (Gerbaudo, p. 135). Accordingly, the pecking order begins from the original administrators (super and chief) "choreographed" jointly by the WhatsApp technology and members of the communities, other administrators "choreographed" by

original administrators through a WhatsApp convention that facilitates this, then the rest of the members (both ordinary citizens and political leaders).

The assertions (and actions) by the "chief" and "super" administrators presented so far show that apart from members of these communities conferring power to the administrators, the administrators themselves also embrace that power by considering themselves leaders. This is contrary to Gerbaudo's (2012, p.139) finding that the Facebook administrators mentioned above were "reluctant" leaders. That is, they were hesitant to admit that the pivotal roles they played in helping spark and keeping the revolutions going were acts of leadership, despite evidence showing so. Instead, they claimed that the social media platforms they used allowed everyone access and equal participation, akin to Castells' (2015) argument of horizontalism of social media and subsequent dislocation of the notion of leadership. Rendering what he called networked social movements like the Occupy wall street and the Arab spring, "leaderless."

The "We" and "I" in the chief administrator's narrative points to the back-and-forth antagonism between the collective and individual identity, with the logic of difference always threatening to dislocate the element of the administrator from the collective of the ordinary citizen. This attests to the ephemerality of identities and the social. Though one part of the decision is made by the whole ultimately the one who makes the final decision, who directs how the conversation goes is the administrator. Though it is a collaboration but one in which the members themselves attribute power to the administrators. Considering the role of antagonisms in the construction of meaning with each side of the divide trying to compete with the other to fix meaning, WhatsApp administrators legitimize their position as leaders by being the decision makers, both in times of certainty and uncertainty.

Even though the idea of leader in the WhatsApp communities is understood as the domain of the politically elected or appointed as shown by who members listed as their leaders when I posed the question; MCA, MP, Governor, Ward administrator […]; there is also the notion of remediation of the political leader through the administrator. Both the super/chief administrators for the two

communities are politically affiliated to the ruling regime, at least at the county government level. The KF administrator is an appointed County Executive Committee Member (CECM) (equivalent to a cabinet secretary or minister at the county level) in Bungoma County Government. While the EADF administrator is not an appointee of either the county or ward administration, he was the chief campaigner for the Member of County Assembly (MCA) of East Asembo Ward. Since recruiting of members largely depends on the network of the already recruited members, other would-be members with a different political inclination may by default be excluded either during recruitment (even though other members also recommend new members for recruitment) or participation within the communities.

When this aspect was put to KF during the interviews and FGDs, they seem to think that this affiliation does not affect recruitment, but some asserted that it definitely affected participation (participation is discussed in the next chapter). This could also be attributed to the fact that there are 5 more administrators in the KF community, conferred that power by the super administrators to "add" members from the different geographical demographics of Kabula they represent. As such, the super administrator's influence on inclusion of members is possibly significantly reduced. For EADF however, there is only one more administrator, a close friend to the chief administrator, who like the chief administrator, was in the campaign camp for the MCA. In a rare moment of reactivation, a member of EADF expressed this fear during the interviews:

> The admins themselves (referring to the chief admin and the other admin appointed by the former) are politicians, they campaigned very actively for the MCA. This affects how people are recruited into this platform. Remember we have people who would have wished to be here……. to join this forum but cannot. Since they are well known to have different personal and political opinion, in fact the admin would not admit them. They themselves would not want to be here (Felix, interview, EADF, 2018).

However, the chief administrator passionately denied this accusation. He stated that he recruits those interested regardless of their political affiliation as long as there is space, that is, the limit of 256 has not been exceeded. The only condition is that they must come from East Asembo. Despite denial by the "chief" administrator, Felix's assertion points to a governmentality enabled in part by exclusion powers conferred to the administrator by technology who then decides who to admit

and who not to. Even though members may suggest who is to be added, it is the administrator who has power to do so. This technical protocol is even more problematic in the case of these WhatsApp communities given the affiliation of the administrators with the political elite whom the collective "ordinary citizen" (where the administrators are also included) is meant to hold accountable. In McLuhan (1964) sense, the administrator becomes the extension of the political leader; begging the question, in whose behalf does the administrator act? So much as the political leaders rarely participate in these communities, their power is exercised by the admistrator's performative acts. This phenomenon is however not unique to these WhatsApp communities as Omanga (2019) found that Nakuru Analyst WhatsApp group he studied was formed by members of an earlier group which they abandoned as the administrators became the mouth pieces of the county government. Moreover, this finding can be interpreted as a remediation of the challenges of traditional social movements and CSOs especially in Africa which end up being co-opted or infiltrated by states, marking an end to their claim of acting on behalf of ordinary citizens (Bodewes, 2010; Mueller, 2008; Odhiambo, 2004; Pointer et al., 2016).

As such, the "add members" convention which affords mobility, by being a convention exclusive to the administrator, also diabolically constraints inclusion and sense of belonging. Moreover, from observations, it is not just the administrators who are the extension of the political elites but there are other members alongside the administrators serving the interests of politicians instead of that of the ordinary citizen they are supposed to be a part of. While Felix (interview, 2018) criticized the chief administrator's affiliation to East Asembo Ward's MCA, in the same breadth, the interviewee introduced a different logic of exclusion betraying the inability to totally do away with the hierarchies which exist in online spaces. He opines:

> The Admin should also the check the calibre of people they are admitting in the group, not just every Tom, Dick and Harry. Some of them just take pictures and post here without giving the real context of the images. Others just post utter nonsense. Admins have left out some important stakeholders and opinion leaders in the communities who would have given more meaningful contributions (Felix, interview, EADF, 2018).

The excerpt further imbues a hierarchy even in the concept of ordinary citizen, that others qualify more than others to belong in that online community while also conferring power on the

super/chief administrator as the only person who can ensure this desired quality. It shows how elitism works as a logic of difference to further weaken the chain of equivalence of ordinary citizen impacting on their achieving their goal of holding the political elite accountable. Questions of who has a right to belong and consequently to speak, negates Pat's (interview, 2018) assertion in the epigraph in the previous chapter, that in "WhatsApp, one can say whatever they want to say." Evidently, Felix would prefer opinion leaders, people who speak on behalf of others, an appeal to representative democracy against the more inclusive agonistic democracy which Mouffe (1999) advocates. This explicates the precariousness of the universal of the ordinary citizen identity and further questions the metaphor of WhatsApp as a free space. Notions of inequality and hierarchy speak directly to participation, an aspect addressed in detailed in the next chapter.

6.3 Administrator as a remediated gate keeper.

Indeed, from observations of ongoing discussions it was clear that the chief/super administrators did not only take charge of reminding members when discussions are to take place but also ensured that members stick to the topic of a particular day and generally the stipulated agenda of the communities. Recall the communities have a stipulated goal; that is to hold their local government leaders accountable and push for development. Much as the communities' goals are collectively curated by all members, whenever a member veers off, by for instance posting a forwarded message that has nothing to do with the discussion at hand, the administrators are quick to admonish them. It is not that other members do not complain or tell them off, but members mostly defer to the administrators to admonish or act against the "distractors." The conversation below from observations of EADF (2017) explicates this:

> **Joram**: Lol (laugh out loud). Boda boda guys can be very arrogant at times. I went to visit my uncle, only to find him busy bathing his children. I thought the wife had just stepped out for a while, but come lunch time, my uncle got busy in the Kitchen. Imagine a man his age, squatting, blowing into the fireplace to start a fire. I had to ask him where his wife was. Poor guy, the wife left him for a young boda boda rider. These boda boda riders are luring people wives away because they have money, they will be the end of us poor people.
>
> **Caleb**: *Hehehe* (laughing), I can only imagine. What did you do my friend, did you help him fan the fire? Women like quick money, if you are struggling like us, women will make you suffer. Love does not count nowadays.

Caren: Correct! I do not see what wrong the woman has done, if your uncle is not hardworking, the wife has every right to move on. You cannot feed on love.

Susana: What is this Admin, where are you? How is this conversation relevant to us? I though we agreed that in the next three days we continue discussing where in East Asembo the Teachers' Training College should be located. When it is serious matters, some of you do not participate, but when it is irrelevant issues, you don't stop bombarding us with nonsense.

Caleb: Aah, Susana. It does not have to be serious all the time. Can we not laugh a bit?

Chief Admin: Joram, you know the rules and should adhere to them. Delete your post. Consider yourself warned.

The Kabula Forward community members are especially hostile to information related to the National government, so comments such as *"hizo siasa za Nairobi hatutaki kuskia,* let us concentrate on Kabula and Bungoma County. In fact, some of these videos you post here are just a waste of our data bundles as we have already accessed them elsewhere in other platforms*"* (Administrator, observations, KF, 2018) are not uncommon. The first part of the quote translates to "we do not want to hear political matters related to Nairobi", Nairobi here being symbolic of the National government as it is its headquarters. The rejection of narratives at the national level can be interpreted as a rejection of powers that previously marginalised them and the perception that decentralised local governments gives power to ordinary citizens for self-determination. But at the same time, like the excerpt from EADF, it shows how the administrator function also carries with it a gatekeeping action; both in terms filtering what members can engage in or not, a remediation of agenda setting role of legacy media.

Agenda setting plays out in these communities not so much in McCombs and Shaw (1977) issue salience manner but more in line with Weaver's (2007) focus on relative salience of an issue and its attributes. Weaver's (2007) account moves from simply focusing on amount of coverage to how content is represented and shaped. This means that agenda setting research is intertwined with research on framing and priming (Matei, 2010; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) which all speak to gatekeeping. Granted, new media environment has led to increase in information sources, co-production blurring the producer/consumer dichotomy and fragmentation of audiences

undermining the traditional modes of gatekeeping as we knew it. Hence the declaration by Williams and Carpini (2000, p.61) "if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers." Most studies on gate keeping in the digital environment have focused on the two-step flow of news from legacy media to being shared online via blogs and social media like Facebook and WhatsApp (See e.g., Chavers, 2016; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018). Largely neglected is gatekeeping within these online forums or communities themselves as is the case in this study.

All the same these studies have demonstrated the waning influence of traditional media to shape people's thinking of information in the realm of social media; with some arguing for reconceptualization of the concept of gatekeeping as originally conceived by Lewin (1947), while others have called for a total overhaul of the concept. Bruns (2005) argues that the participatory nature of social media allows for content curation by audiences and making it impossible for influential individuals to keep gates, instead they watch already existing gates. Others like Heinderyckx (2015) and Shoemaker and Vos (2009) however posit that gatekeeping as a theoretical tradition is still useful in the advent of the digital albeit with some transformations. Thorson and Wells (2015) on the other hand argue that the increasingly participatory nature of gatekeeping where both news producers and audiences are involved can be captured under the concepts of secondary gatekeeping and curation of flows, respectively.

However, it is the metaphor of network incorporated into gatekeeping theory that better provides an analytical lens with which to think through these findings as it takes care of the interconnectedness of social media. The incorporation of social network theory into gatekeeping can be traced back to the work of Bavelas (1948) on network centrality to the two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazersfeld, 1955) and to van Dijck's (2012) network society. Summarily the idea of a networked gatekeeping process recognizes the emergence of other influential gate keeping hubs within a network other than the traditional central hubs. In the sense of internet and social media therefore, the most connected actors within a network can be referred to as gate keepers (van Dijck, 2012). As such, hierarchies in the digital can never be completely done away with and therefore the concept of gatekeeping remains relevant even in digital contexts.

Any form of gatekeeping within these WhatsApp communities therefore do not begin within the WhatsApp communities given that information shared in these platforms have already gone through some previous prior gate keeping process. Whether it is information shared from other news sites, blogs, social media, or individuals' own compositions with particular frames, as is the case with Joram's (observations, EADF, 2017) narration above. A participatory curation process can also be seen with members commenting or sharing their own opinions about what they think of the information shared, questioning its relevance in relation to the communities' goals like Susana (observations, EADF, 2017) or issue priming as is the case with the administrator (observations, KF, 2017). However, given the powers conferred to the administrators by technology and how most of the community members defer to them to keep members in check, they therefore become central in the WhatsApp community networks and therefore this network's central gatekeepers.

Studies demonstrate the importance of analysing gatekeeping at multiple levels, not just at individual journalist level but also institutional and societal (Sara Enli, 2007; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Moreover, Lewin (1947) also argued that gatekeepers do not act independently of their environment but the two are "one constellation of interdependent factors" (p.338). The online space gatekeeping invites a multi-layered analysis to gatekeeping including the political, cultural, technological, economical; aspects this study continues to explore. As a result, the WhatsApp communities also demonstrate aspects of gate watching as the predetermined agendas and the political goals of these communities, the economic aspect in terms of whether one has data bundles to share or download videos shared for instance, are already existing gates through which information is filtered. What remains is to watch these gates, where again the administrator subject position is crucial.

In another incident where some members of the EADF were demanding answers on why some development projects in the Ward had stalled, the discourse turned sexist when some of them claimed, that the MCA who is a woman and a widow did not care about the plight of East Asembo as she was in a love affair with a man who comes from another ward in a different sub-county. One of the members wrote:

> I told you it was wrong to vote for a woman; a woman does not have a permanent abode. This one (the MCA, who is a member of East Asembo by marriage) has already found a home elsewhere when she was widowed barely a year ago. What a shame! (Ken, observations, EADF, 2018).

Yet another one asserted:

> She should go and represent the people of Ugenya (this is where the alleged lover hails from). She is not one of us anymore. In fact, she never sleeps in her house here anymore (Anele, observations, EADF, 2018).

The chief administrator warned the advancers of these narratives to stop or get "removed" (WhatsApp parlance) from the WhatsApp community. They did not, and he removed one of them from the community, while one left on his own accord. But most importantly he gave a warning that that particular topic should not be discussed and anyone who tried to continue with that discourse will be removed from the community without hesitation. While this was happening, the chief administrator also removed the MCA from the WhatsApp community; according to him, to protect her from the harassment. Most of the members supported the administrator's action. Only few made their disagreement known.

While both Anele and Ken's narrations which imply that the MCA is promiscuous, could possibly speak to discourses which question whether online spaces are safe especially for women, consequently impacting on their participation, at this point, I choose to focus on the Administrator's action to remove the MCA from the WhatsApp community, in order to "protect" the MCA from what he termed as sexual harassment while dictating what cannot be said about her, re-articulates the position of the WhatsApp administrator as an editor. Additionally, the "chief" administrator removed the MCA from the community without consulting her in the bid to shelter her from what he considered an embarrassing situation for her. When I asked the MCA how she felt about the incident, she explained:

> I was following the discussion for some time, paused to attend to another matter, as you know as an MCA I have so many duties to attend to serve my ward. When I got a chance to get into WhatsApp, I noticed there were no new message notifications from the EADF group. I thought that was odd, given how heated that debate was. I clicked into the group and this message "+254… removed you". I was surprised that the chief administrator

> removed me. I called him and he began explaining how the discussion was not good for me…I told him to add me back at once (MCA, interview, EADF, 2018).

It is ironical that a political leader would need protection from an ordinary citizen but also a testament to how gatekeeping role can change in digital spaces. While traditional gatekeeping exposed how powerful and influential societal elites among them being the political elite influence the gatekeeping process, this situation is reversed in the WhatsApp communities. Instead, gatekeeping in this situation was done to protect a political leader, the MCA, from the content framing of ordinary citizens. A reversed gate keeping action is also seen in the administrator's declaration that the topic could not be discussed any longer. As such focus moved from issue salience to directing audiences on what not to focus on. This further reiterates the gatekeeping power a WhatsApp administrator holds.

6.4 Administrator as remediated disciplinarian (conducting conduct).

Upon probing the chief administrator on the above incident, particularly on his decision to remove the 'truants' from the community, he asserted that:

> Much as we do not have any written rules, there is mutual understanding among members about what is permissible or not. We are here to engage our leaders, yes, but it should be on development matters and done with decorum. Discipline has to be maintained; we do not allow insults here. Remember, I warned them, and only removed them (from the community) when they did not listen (Chief admin, interview, EADF, 2018).

Moreover, from comments of other participants garnered from observations of the communities' activities, and particularly this incident, the concept of discipline kept coming up:

> You know it is very wrong when people insult others on WhatsApp. Even the government has said that those who engage in hate speech should be arrested. So yes, when that happened, I was among those who asked the admin to remove the manner less members (Leslie, FGD, EADF, 2018).

Yet another member asserted,

> As a woman and a mother, I am extremely disappointed with the insults hurled at the MCA. There are those of us who are very careless with what they say, no decorum at all. They

> seem to forget we are mixed up. There are people I call my mothers and fathers here, there are those I call my sons and daughters, my in-laws and so on. Such is the case for everyone else. These relationships must be respected and maintained, we do not want *chira* and embarrassment here" (Nyotido, observations, EADF, 2018).

It is interesting however how the "truants" hit back to almost what was a mob justice since most of the other members called on the administrator to remove them from the community owing to what they termed as indiscipline. Below is part of the conversation following the posts by Ken and Anele about the MCA in the subsection above:

> **Nyotido**: [….] Ken and Anele have constantly shown disrespect in this forum, but this time round, they have gone too far. These are insults not only to the MCA but to all our mothers whether in EADF or not. Admin, you must act.
>
> **Chief admin**: Ken and Anele, I have warned you severally, but it seems you do not care about the rules of EADF. We do not allow indiscipline here.
>
> **Ken**: What rules are you talking about? Rules by who and for whom? Ever since I joined EADF, I do not recall when we ever discussed rules. I thought this is a political forum, what I have said about the MCA is true and touches on political matters of our ward. That she does not live in our ward, affects how she represents us. How will she know the problems we are facing if she is not here, how will *wananchi* access her?
>
> **Anele**: My brother Ken, you are wasting time. These people only come up with rules when you touch their gods, otherwise you will never hear of rules any other time.
>
> **Leslie**: Instead of apologizing, you are arguing with us.
>
> **Ken**: What apologies?
>
> **Chief Admin**: I am removing the two of you.
>
> **Ken**: Do not bother, I know where the "exit" button is
>
> +254 (..) left.

The ambiguity brought about by a lack (in the Lacanian sense) of clear rules of engagement, not so much because they are not written as claimed by the "truants" but because they are not forth rightly discussed as one joins the group. This creates a discursive illusion of "no rules" feeding into the social imaginary of WhatsApp as a free space. Derrida's (1976, p.158) pronouncement that there is "nothing outside the text", understood as everything is text, not only deconstructed

the idea that speech is superior to the written but also that representational absence is actually a form of presence. Accordingly, the lack of written rules or clearly pronounced regulations of engagement in the WhatsApp communities studied does not mean rules and consequently "discipline" cannot be invoked as the "truants" seem to suggest, rather, they are an absent present.

What this ambiguity does instead is to render the signifier discipline a floating one which can take whatever competing signification that manages to fill the void, even though partially. Similarly, Hajer (2003, p.175) in an article on how policy making is changing in the context of "transnational, polycentric networks of governance in which power is dispersed", argues that this causes an "institutional void" where "there are no generally accepted rules and norms according to which policy making and politics is to be conducted." Consequently, "both policy and polity are dependent on the outcome of discursive interactions" (ibid p.176).

The invocation of "hate speech" in similar situations in KF as is the case in EADF shows that the reading of discipline in line with law discourses used by the state to control social media use is one way in which this ambiguity void is discursively filled. Although the ordinary citizen loathes government control of media thus the turn to WhatsApp which they believe to a great extent keeps them safe, they still desire a form of control articulated as "discipline" or sub discourses such as "decorum," "respect" if they are to have meaningful co-existence. This desire helps them overcome any dissonance that may be created by leaning on the discourse of the Other, that is, categorising dissent as hate speech. Just like the state punishes those who are found in a court of law as being guilty of the hate speech crime either through jail terms or fines, so do the members of these communities call for punishment of those they consider truant; that is, expulsion from the communities.

Granted, the comments by the disenchanted members about the MCA were sexist and in bad taste, but the reaction of members and super administrator was to focus on the insults and not the merits of their complaints as part of holding elected leaders accountable. Besides, the nature of the "insults" (one can argue that by mentioning who one is engaged in coitus with if true is not an

insult but just stating facts) constitutes a moral issue and not necessarily hate speech. They failed to interrogate the gist of the dissent; that is, if the Member of County Assembly is based in another ward far away from the one she was elected to represent, then what happens to the promise of devolution (decentralisation) to make leaders accessible?

The articulation of *chira* which refers to the consequences of committing a taboo in the Luo community, positions culture as another nodal point in fixing the meaning of discipline. The taboo breached here is that young people discussed the sex life of a woman much older than them and among people that could be considered their mothers and fathers, by virtue of belonging to their parents' age group. In the Luo culture as is the case in many African cultures, a father, mother, grandparents, sisters or brothers are not necessarily those one is biologically related to but are linked to through a clan or age-group.

This finding is concurrent with studies that have found that technology does not act in isolation of cultural context in which it is used (Du Gay et al., 2013; Florini, 2015). Lindtner et al. (2012, p. 9) explains this notion by defining technologies as sites of transnational imaginations through which certain values like those of open sharing of information are specifically imagined and generally taken up "as cultural reorientation across different sites and in relation to global processes." They give an example of how discourses on open–source policies and IT (Information Technology) politics in China are understood in relation to national policy as well as translocal practices of information exchange and collaboration. A return to culture to describe how members should behave in the WhatsApp communities speaks to how enclaved these spaces are even as they operate within a global public of WhatsApp users. Florini (2015) explores how black podcasters who refer to themselves as "Chitlin' Circuit" as a recreation of the historical venues which allowed black artists to perform during the period of segregation, appropriate various logics of black culture. They do this through use of informal conversation (vernacular) and cultural informal spaces transforming them into enclaved black spaces (ibid). Further by listeners consuming these podcasts through headphones, "they may to some degree be cocooning themselves in the sounds of Black sociality as they navigate a hegemony that constitutes white culture as normative" (ibid,

p. 210). While in Florini's work, culture is evoked as a counter hegemonic strategy against white monopoly of radio and podcasts, the context in which culture is appropriated in these communities speak to how governmentality plays out in online spaces. In concurrence with this study, Florini's work demonstrates how technology contributes to the construction of fluid publics.

By bringing the autonomous categories of cultural and the legal (hate speech) into the realm of the political to define (in)discipline they are able to undermine the merits of the complaints and silence dissent. Moreover, it can be argued that sinc*e chira* exists in the realm of the supernatural making it hard to overturn its consequences, consequently, *chira* acts as a fanstamatic logic that spells doom if discipline as defined in the WhatsApp communities is not observed. It therefore provides the justification for administrators' punitive action as it does away with the dissonance that may have been experienced as punishment goes against the perception of WhatsApp as a free space.

Expelling members from the WhatsApp communities is not the only punishment meted against those seen to have contravened the communities' norms. Other forms of punishments are explained below in an interview excerpt with KF's super administrator:

> [….] it is not always that I remove undisciplined members. It depends on what they have done. If one commits a grave mistake like posting pornographic materials in KF, then I completely remove them. However, if it is something minor, I could just warn them or ask them to delete what they have posted because the person could be engaging us while intoxicated, so we bear with them. Sometimes I remove someone for a while, put them in suspension until they learn their lesson. Of course, some understand the importance of my action; to ensure harmony among members while others are angered. If they come to my inbox (referring to directly messaging the administrator on WhatsApp instead of posting a message in the community) and apologize, I add them back in. In some instances, other members could also ask on their behalf that I add them back (Super administrator, interview, KF, 2018).

Again the "necessary" discourse comes through in this excerpt as has been the case throughout most of the narratives on administrators' action so far. Like was the narrative in Smith's (1992) analysis of the role of conference hosts in WELL communities, so is a study by Ujakpa et al (2018)

on how WhatsApp supports communication and learning in a small university in Namibia. While they concluded that WhatsApp enhances interaction in learning and intimacy among interlocutors, they found posting of course unrelated material into the learning WhatsApp group problematic. In a bid to address this problem, they recommend that WhatsApp should improve its app to allow the administrator to restrict viewing of unnecessary posts. In other words, the administrators should not block posting, but block viewing once posts they consider unnecessary are posted.

Additionally, the excerpt above confirms that it is not always that the administrator gets the support of the rest of the members to administer punishment. Sometimes members will urge the administrator to bring back an expelled or suspended member or even not to mete out punishment to begin with. This finding acts as the starting point into exploring the technologies of self, members employ to navigate through administrators' punitive actions. They could apologise to the group before action is taken or message the administrator directly because, once you are removed from the community you cannot post into the community or view any new messages posted. An interview with one of the former members of EADF (he left the community) summarises the technologies of self-employed:

> You see, I do not believe that we East Asembo Ward elected the right MCA. So of course, I always clashed with her sycophants in the forum, especially with her number one supporter, the chief admin. Before the incident (referring to the MCA incident above), I had found ways to survive. I would post on how ineffective the MCA was, then immediately they begin complaining that I have used harsh words, I would delete the post (if the time allowed by app to delete for everyone is still applicable). If not, I would simply apologize. After all, the message would have been passed. Sometimes I would not target anyone specific but forward a post or write generally on the dangers of not allowing variety of views. When the incident happened, my friends and I were already fed up, we were ready for anything. We made our thoughts known without care for anything. I knew the admin would remove me as he had already previously suspended me before adding me back. This time, I did not give him the pleasure. I simply left. My friends and I have formed another WhatsApp group called "East Asembo Youth for Change," we are steadily recruiting members (Ken, interview, EADF, 2018).

What is interesting in this narrative is how the same WhatsApp technology that renders the administrator hegemonic given the "add" and "remove" functions, also allows for counter-

hegemonic practices. By clicking the "exit group" button for instance, an individual takes away the power from the administrator to exercise any control over them; to warn, suspend or even expel them. The same group formation affordance that allowed the administrators of EADF and KF to form these communities is the same that enables protestors to form a counter community. Omanga's (2019) study also found out that the Nakuru Analysts WhatsApp groups in Kenya was formed in protest by one Elijah Kinyanjui when the administrators of the *Chamgamka na Kinuthia* ('Cheer up with Kinuthia') WhatsApp group he previously belonged to, became uncomfortable with questions demanding accountability from the Nakuru county government.

6.5 Conclusion.

This chapter questions WhatsApp as a metaphor of freedom constructed by the collective of ordinary citizens in the previous chapter. It shows how the logic of difference which puts a WhatsApp administrator subject position in these WhatsApp communities at the top of the hierarchy of the ordinary citizen collective, and more in line with the constitutive outside- the political leader. This renders the narratives of freedom, safety, egalitarianism, and unity for common purpose seen in the previous chapter problematic. Also illuminated is the double sidedness of technology, where an affordance can also be a constraint. That is, its ability to afford both hope and despair, freedom and control, as while the co-produced administrator power point to control, the agency afforded by the app to an "aggrieved" person(s) to "left" a community for instance, as is the WhatsApp parlance, and even start a counter WhatsApp community points to freedom.

CHAPTER 7: OF BENEVOLENCE AND MALEFICENCE: CONCEPTUALIZING PARTICIPATION AS AN IDENTITY CONSTRUCT.

7.0 Introduction

This chapter reflects on ways in which identification is entangled with the right to participate, questioning the metaphor of WhatsApp as a free space where maximalist participation can take place. It questions whether maximalist participation as put forward by Carpentier (2011, 2012, 2016, 2017) can be achieved in WhatsApp communities given the possibility of the multiple identities previously set aside for the common political subjectivity of ordinary citizens emerging through the logic of differences. For instance, does the inclusion of the previously marginalized subject positions automatically translate to their "right to participate?" If so, how does their newly found right relate to the rights of the previously privileged subject positions and the collective political subjectivity of ordinary citizens in the media field? The chapter brings out ways in which the materiality of WhatsApp technology possibly allows for unconventional forms of identity construction and negotiation which moves away from primordial modes of identification. The online communities constitute embodied disembodied spaces given their link with the offline, allowing while constraining at the same time the negotiation of new identities. Additionally, the chapter explores how the new modes of identification afforded by the fluidity of WhatsApp technology, influence the meaning of participation in the sense of "cutting into the flow" of participation discourse and changing its discursive structure, so much so that participation is metaphorically substituted by identification. For instance, those whose subject positions are viewed as acceptable by others in the logic of equivalence therefore have more liberty to participate than those whose identities are questioned. They therefore become the actors who have the power to make decisions. Eventually other possible subject positions are supressed, and the emergent political subjectivities of "those who can participate" and "those who cannot" become dominant, stabilizing the disrupted discourses of identification and participation.

7.1 "I can be whoever I want to be!" Questioning WhatsApp metaphor of "freedom" to be present.

Part of the reason the lexicon WhatsApp has successfully been metaphorically substituted with the metaphor of free space, is that it affords the freedom or agency for one to define themselves however they want or even be anonymous, at least at a glance. Despite and as a result of this affordance given the mobility of the technology and fluidity of the interaction of members among themselves and with the technology, various tensions arise which question the agency to define oneself as preferred. These tensions or antagonisms collectively question the ideas that informed the construction of the collective of ordinary citizens given the consideration of fluidity of identification.

Consider the "profile" metaphor of identity on WhatsApp. It affords the freedom to be whoever one wants to be, online by allowing one to "customize" their profile. The "profile" acts as an empty signifier which can be filled with an avatar, a video or photograph. The default status on one's profile which usually reads, "Hey there, I am Using WhatsApp" can also be changed into a personalized message. This freedom to identify in whatever way one chooses seems to sediment the metaphor of WhatsApp as a free space, a myth needed by participants to speak up freely without fear of the defined enemy, the political leader, as the excerpt below shows:

> The good thing with WhatsApp is that you can choose how you want to be known to others you are interacting with. For instance, what you see on my profile as my name (Wizzyboy) is my nickname, and the picture is a cartoon. You see politicians and their supporters are prone to victimizing people if you tell them the truth. So, this way, they cannot tell who I am. I used to go by the same nickname on Facebook too until they changed the system. Now Facebook insists you have to put a real name (Wizzyboy, 2018, interview, EADF).

> I am very well known to many people here in Kabula because I was born here, schooled here and I work just here in Bungoma town, so I have settled in my village. I know in WhatsApp you can create whatever profile you want or even use nicknames, but in my case it is useless. I do not see the need to use pseudonyms on WhatsApp or even remain anonymous like others do, that is for cowards or people who are hiding something. After all, we are residents of Kabula and are on KF to participate together for the good of Kabula, so why hide? How will our leaders know we mean business if we do not face them directly? As for a profile picture, you can upload anything. My profile picture is my house (Waswa, interview, KF, 2018).

Wizzyboy's sentiments invokes discourses of anonymity and pseudonymity as they relate to surveillance, specifically modes of resisting surveillance from authority. By use of a pseudonym and an avatar as his profile picture, Wizzyboy asserts that he can engage political leaders, say whatever he wants to say without fear of consequences and therefore participate maximally. These sentiments are similar to Turkle's (1995, p. 216) who argues in support of online anonymity since "donning a mask, adopting a persona, is a step toward reaching a deep fakeer truth about the real." On the other hand, Waswa views anonymity and pseudonymity as cowardly acts against the collective identity and course of the WhatsApp community. His views cohere with studies which associate anonymity with deception (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006), bullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013), and fake news (Wang et al., 2018) which could be potentially fatal as was the case of WhatsApp groups in India. There was a wave of mob violence in India in 2018 of hate killings on account of disinformation spread through WhatsApp texts and videos, with some people being lynched under the guise that they were child kidnappers (Arun, 2019, Farooq, 2018)**.** It must be emphasised though that deep seated fissures within the Indian society coupled with governance failures found expression through technology as Vasudeva & Barkdull (2020) argue. Hence WhatsApp in and of itself was not responsible for the mob violence, vigilantism, and collapse of the rule of law.

These competing narratives form the first instance of antagonisms responsible for entangling identity with participation. They are a testament to how fluid surveillance has become in the digital era where apart from the gaze transforming into a multi-directional one, the watched may welcome the watching after all (Baumann & Lyon, 2012) as is Waswa's sentiment. Wizzyboy's thoughts are reminiscent of the disembodiment narratives exemplified in the epigraph on chapter 5 by Pat (interview, EADF, 2018) who asserted that WhatsApp is devoid of surveillance and therefore safe for participation owing to its privacy affordance and the declaration by Okuta, a KF member that "what happens in WhatsApp, remains in WhatsApp." Waswa, on the other hand, offers a counter narrative. In as much as these issues were discussed in detail in chapter 5 in relation to community belonging, they will be discussed here again within a different locus, that is, how they affect identification and in turn participation.

The empty WhatsApp profile icon, metaphoric for fluid identification coheres with Laclau's (2001) argument that political subjectivity only occurs from a discursive construction. As such Wizzyboy can identify as a pseudonym instead of using a real identity marker. It is also possible not to fill in the profile and remain anonymous. In such a case, an individual appears in a WhatsApp community as just a phone number without even a picture. Scholarship in line with the disembodied discourse of online spaces are also in support of anonymity as the opposite of identity. The argument is that the absence of identity markers which are often used as modes of exclusion, fosters better participation in politics (e.g., Beyer, 2014; Gekker, 2012; Poster, 1997; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1995). Anonymity and pseudonymity are also hailed as enabling the escape of surveillance from the state, another factor conducive for political participation. Such is the case with Wizzy's explanation of his use of a pseudonym as a performative identity to participate without fear. A lot of literature which developed Anonymous as a moniker for collective identity can be found in studies of the image board 4Chan and /b/, a sub-board of 4Chan (Asenbaum, 2018).

A techno-determinist argument associated with 4Chan is that anonymity is built in this technology's infrastructure (Beyer, 2014; McDonald, 2015) as it does not have social status identity markers therefore facilitating inclusiveness (McDonald, 2015) and avoiding surveillance (Cambre, 2014). However, Asenbaum (2018, p.1546) following the new materialism approach which acknowledges the integration of human and machine, argues that this integration led to several other reconfigurations of previous binaries including privacy/public and identity/anonymity. The product of the identity/anonymity electronic configuration is a "digital persona as a meso level medium [….] used by the individual cyborg (micro-level) to communicate to others (macro-level)." He proceeds to give examples of digital personas as including nicknames and avatars which he avers are "multiple, incoherent, contingent and ephemeral" (ibid, p.1546). In this formulation, the binary of individual/collectivism is bridged, watering down Waswa's (interview, KF, 2018) concerns that anonymity/pseudonymity undermines the collective of ordinary citizens.

The duality of the WhatsApp infrastructure, that is, the interplay of affordance/constraint which questions the narrative of anonymity and pseudonymity also seems to be in line with Asenbaum's (2018) argument of an emergent digital persona which fuses elements of both anonymity and identity in contrast to the binary narrative of the same. While the empty WhatsApp "profile" signifies one can be anonymous thus affording robust interactivity and navigability, it is actually a false affordance especially since one can only do this after going through other sequences of signing up with WhatsApp, with the most notable action being adding your mobile phone number into the app without which you cannot sign up. This type of constraint is what Norman (2013) calls interlocks, "safety" constrains which prevents users from using a technology "inappropriately" by determining the sequence of use. Consequently, the metaphoric "profile" renders the signifier of freedom of identification empty. This is because it can take up any meaning including control which is what happens by being forced to sign up to WhatsApp through their phone number without which one cannot access WhatsApp and benefit from the interactivity it affords by connecting people to others; all which are precursors to participation.

There are also technological apps external to WhatsApp for example, True caller, which one can use to check the "identity" behind a mobile phone number. However, one may not obtain the exact identity as it only shows how that number has been archived by others. However, pseudonyms or at worst, stolen identities can still pass. It is at this juncture that techno-trope attributes of this feature are apparent. It provides a possibility for the state and other parties including profit-making corporations to intrude into these otherwise private conversations and also unveil the identity of "anonymous" individuals. Additionally, ordinary technology users themselves also engage in self-surveillance and surveillance of those in authority, a phenomenon Mann (2004) refers to as sousveillance. Since inclusion into the communities is via phone numbers which existing members suggest, the possibility that they have saved into their phone contacts the real names of the newcomers. Once one saves the mobile phone number with the "real" name of the anonymous, then the pseudonym ceases to appear for the user even if the initially anonymous maintains the pseudonym in their WhatsApp profile settings.

Findings from observations of the EADF and KF communities show that even if some members may be using pseudonyms, during interactions, the others constantly ask the anonymous to identify themselves, given the nature of the communities and their purpose. Moreover, in the context of social media, where anonymous communication is quickly becoming outdated, the dynamic shifts. Facebook in particular has been successful in linking online profiles to real-world identities (boyd, 2012). This argument again demonstrates the emptiness and instability of the profile metaphor of identity on WhatsApp causing its back-and-forth signification between freedom and control. It is an example of ways in which technology has made surveillance fluid (Bauman & Lyon, 2012), dislocating existing hegemonic power relations while at the same time creating new ones and simultaneously using and being used by technology. Given that we are in a post-panopticon era; the gaze does not come from only the top but from multiple directions. The footprints we leave online therefore - our names, mobile phone numbers, addresses and so on-deconstruct the self-identification affordance of WhatsApp.

Further, Waswa (interview, KF, 2018) seems to welcome surveillance as a strategy to demarcate the frontier between those who belong to the "we" of ordinary citizens and the "them" of political leaders. He welcomes the being seen by "them" as an act of resistance to power, a show of bravery that lets the adversary know that the ordinary citizen is aware of their actions and will hold them to account without fear. Thus, the need, he insists to present one's real self as proof of the existence and solidarity of the collective political subjectivity of the ordinary citizen, making the nature of participation more collective and robust. The need to be watched is in tandem with arguments made by Bauman and Lyon (2012) on liquid surveillance as a concept that is useful to understand how surveillance works in a contemporary post-panopticon world. Of interest is Lyon's insistence on probing for occasions of hope in his and Bauman's critique of modern surveillance deeply entrenched in the corporate and public affairs realms (ibid). Lyon (1994) had previously captured this dual working of surveillance as connoting both care and control. On one hand is *care* as in media surveillance to gather information on behalf of citizens or governments in an attempt to protect citizens from danger and on the other, *control* which suggests breach of privacy, gathering information for selfish ends as is the practice of most states (Bauman & Lyon, 2012; Lyon, 1994) though this practice is not exclusive to the state. It is in the same spirit that WhatsApp users

especially in political groups encourage use of real identity markers as opposed to anonymity as KF's administrator suggests:

> We do not have many anonymous people in KF. Even the few that are there, we somehow get to know who they are, because of their phone numbers, or those who know who they are refer to them by their names as they are responding to their posts, or one could simply ask them to identify themselves. Anonymous people tend to be offensive, hindering others from participating and are more likely to spread hate speech, which is extremely dangerous especially for us administrators. The government says it is us who will be arrested if the WhatsApp groups we administrate are found to spread hate speech (Super administrator, interview, KF 2018).

The KF administrator's sentiments are an example of how states re-package security discourses of control as those of care, to initiate self-governance among ordinary citizens affecting how they negotiate their identities online. States usually exploit the threat of terrorism, cybercrime, and external infiltration of borders to justify surveillance while it is about control as was the case with the former US President, Donald Trump's administration. Social media further emboldens the state which passes surveillance under the metaphors of "security" and "protection." For instance, they argue that the ubiquity of social media renders citizens vulnerable to "criminals" while at the same time using the same affordances and characteristics of social media to gather information to advance objectives at variance with the national interests such as retaining power through fraudulent elections and state violence. This points to the intertwinement of technological action with human action, that is how technology shapes and is shaped by human action.

One such law in Kenya presented by the state as "protection of citizens" is the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018, which aims at controlling "fake news." The Act criminalises false publications defined as "misleading or fictitious data that is made to look authentic, and false information that is likely to constitute hate speech and advocate hatred, ethnic incitement and vilification of others" (Republic of Kenya, 2018). The Kenyan parliament pushed for adoption of the Kenya Information and Communication (Amendment) Bill 2019 which aims to place even more burden on WhatsApp administrators. Apart from demanding that they monitor content posted in their groups and discipline those deemed as errant, the bill requires that they apply for a licence

from the Communication Authority of Kenya (CA) and register their physical address with the communication body. Furthermore, they are also required to keep a record of all group members' addresses. Failure to abide by these regulations attracts a fine of up to KSH 200, 000 in fines or a maximum of one-year imprisonment (Republic of Kenya, 2019). This bill spectacularly takes modern day governmentality to dizzying levels and has the potential to spell a death knell to WhatsApp groups given that no administrator would like to bear such responsibilities.

For the state to successfully prosecute offenders, it means they need access to information posted in a WhatsApp community, rendering the technology's security and privacy affordances redundant. For instance, end to end encryption (E2EE) security affordance on WhatsApp is supposed to ensure that "data exchanged between two communicating parties is encrypted in a way that only the sender and the intended recipient can decrypt it, so, e.g., eavesdroppers and service providers cannot read or modify messages" (Onwuzurike & Cristofaro, 2016, p. 2). Although E2EE on WhatsApp and other platforms like email seems to provide a 'safe haven' for people to communicate freely compared to other media forms; its biggest shortcoming is that users do know not how to encrypt messages (Demjaha et al., 2018), and therefore it is almost functionless. Moreover, the government through the CA has been using technology to monitor private emails (CCK, 2012) to put in check what they argue is an increase in cybercrime. The anonymity/privacy of WhatsApp group is also countered as mobile phone users are monitored through the IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) codes as it is a requirement that they have to register their mobile numbers using their national IDs, failure to which their SIM cards are blocked. Recall the "profile" identity metaphor works together with an interlock constraint that requires one to key in their mobile phone numbers used in WhatsApp.

Apart from government surveillance, there is also co-surveillance which further deconstructs the idea of self-identification on WhatsApp. During FGDs with both communities, members indicated that they do not bother with pseudonyms as they are not afraid to speak their minds. Besides,

> even those with pseudonyms eventually get known to us. For instance, if someone posts using a pseudonym, most people will ask who they are, either directly on the platform or

> inbox those who have responded to them. Usually those who know them personally would tell the rest who they are (Pat, FGD, EADF, 2018).

The demand to identify who one is communicating with and what they are up to as articulated by the super administrator (interview, KF 2018) and Pat (FGD, EADF, 2018) point to the existence of co-surveillance in the WhatsApp communities. It also points to members desire to communicate with people familiar to them negating the discourses which consider anonymity as increasing trust and safety in online spaces (e.g., van Heijningen & van Clief, 2017; Matei, 2005). To the contrary, this finding suggests that trust online is built through connections and familiarity. The finding further deconstructs the idea of freedom to choose who one wants to be on WhatsApp. Not only that, but the co-surveillance further negates "WhatsApp as a free space."

In contrast to the findings of this study, the few studies on WhatsApp and political activism which raise the issue of resistance from surveillance link it only to the privacy the WhatsApp affords through end-to end encryption and not to the fluidity of identity negotiations it affords or constraints as this study does. Johns and Cheong (2019) presents one such study in which they explore how Malaysian social media users navigate censorship through what they term as "networked-affect." They found that to escape surveillance, participants moved from "public" social media like Facebook and Twitter (which they deemed made them vulnerable to state surveillance and the resultant seditious laws) to WhatsApp, Telegram and Messenger which employ end to end encryption. However, participants did not feel entirely safe on WhatsApp as they argued that one could do livestream and share it with the authorities. Dencik et al. (2016) and Khazraee and Losey (2016) also present the end-to-end encryption feature of WhatsApp as a technological solution to government intrusion and surveillance.

Since findings so far show that WhatsApp technology combined with state action not only affords fluidity in identification but also constrains it, the next sections explore other possibilities of identification in the WhatsApp communities.

7.2 Deconstructing primordialism in identity construction.

Findings in this study show that though at the inception of the Kabula and EADF WhatsApp communities and earlier interactions among members, political identities of members were to a large extent determined by primordialism, they with time evolved to socially constructed political subjectivities. Earlier studies argue that modes of exclusion and inclusion related to identity and politics in Kenya are mostly defined by primordial factors (c.f Atieno-Odhiambo; Shilaho, 2018). According to Shilaho (2018), essentialist social identity components like ethnicity and tribalism and even clannism in some instance, are the factors around which politics and political identities are constructed in Kenya. For instance, Luos are inclined to support a political party led by a co-ethnic. Kikuyus are drawn to political ideologies and personalities from their tribe as well and so are almost the rest of the ethnic groups in Kenya (institutionalised truths) (See Shilaho, 2018). Consequently, ethnic identities have been politicised, in what is commonly referred to as political tribalism.

Despite being in a rural area, Kabula ward, is situated close to Bungoma, a town, and also the headquarters of Bungoma county. As such, its composition is somewhat cosmopolitan. Bukusu is, however, the predominant ethnic group in Bungoma County. On the other hand, East Asembo Ward is in a rural area far from a town centre and generally inhabited by just one ethnic group, the Luos. The two cases highlighted below show how clannism and ethnicity played a role in determining identity and belonging in the two WhatsApp communities:

Case one:

There was an intense argument in EADF regarding where in East Asembo a proposed Teachers Training College had to be constructed. Each clan within East Asembo insisted that it to be built within their clan. As such, everyone was putting their case forward why their clan (the land occupied by their clan) would be the ideal host for the upcoming project, highlighting positive self-identification and negative attributes for others. A member, while responding to another,

insisted that the TTC should be hosted in K'Onyango[16] (one of the clans in East Asembo) and held that "Ja'Kamalumbe" (which loosely translates to son of Kamalumbe) (the member he was responding to, like others of the Kamalumbe clan, was self-centered and always wanted to push for all projects to be implemented in his area. At this point, another member interjected, telling the Ja'Konyango that the one he is referring to as Ja'Kamalumbe[17] is a true son of K'onyango while he was a "*jadak*[18]" He told him where he originated from upon which the third member responded, "You are Ja' Alego Kogelo and you know it. Your great grandfather was a Ja' Kogelo who migrated from his ancestral land to settle in East Asembo. You should just shut up because you have no stake in this. This is an East Asembo matter!" The member, who had identified himself as a Ja'Konyango, was so distraught that he left the online community (Observations, EADF, 2018).

Case two:

In a bid to discourage members of KF to vote for a certain aspirant for the parliamentary sit of Bumula constituency where Kabula ward is situated, a participant, Patrick (observations, KF, 2017) listed reasons he claimed even Bukusu elders would not allow the said candidate to be elected. The major reasons included that the said candidate was posing as a resident of Kabula when he was an immigrant from Tongaren, another constituency in Bungoma County. Patrick also claimed they (the Bukusu) gave the candidate land and a wife, but he mistreated, divorced her, and remarried a Ugandan. Evidence that the candidate had no respect for Bumula.

In case one, members highlight the patrilineal nature of identity and belonging which supports the essentialist notion of ethnic, racial or biological identity as stable entities (Oostendorp & Jones, 2015). In this structure, women belong either by birth or marriage. Moreover, the right to participate in the discussion of construction of the TTC, was directly predicated on primordial sense of belonging and identity, that is clanism. Additionally, members predominantly

[16]K' or Ka denotes place and therefore K'Onyango translates directly as Onyango's place. Onyango is a male name. this further shows that identity is patrilineal.
[17]Ja' is gender specific referent whose signification is 'son of.' Ja'Kamalumbe is therefore son of the place, Kamalumbe. The female version would be Nya'Kamalumbe.
[18] Immigrant.

communicate in *Dholuo*, a language spoken by Luos, which could be viewed as the logic of excluding anybody else who does not speak the language. But this factor is not significant in the EADF case as all its membership is Luo. English or a mix of English and *Dholuo* is also used. In Kabula Forward on the other hand, belonging from the word go hangs precariously on the tribe and "birthplace" or autochthony components. Comments signalling claims on identity and belonging based on the two components such as "I was born here, so you cannot claim I do not know anything about Kabula" (Weta, observations, KF, 2018) or someone being praised as "a true Bukusu" (Tetu, observations, KF, 2017) for their approved actions are few nor do members dwell so much on them when they arise. Interestingly, however, this online community has membership from outside the predominant tribe, Bukusu. There are Luos, Kalenjins, Tesos and so on. In fact, the super administrator is originally Teso. His father was a Teso who settled in Kabula, Bukusu land and assimilated into the Bukusu tribe through language and culture, specifically naming. The super admin therefore has both Bukusu and Teso names (FGD notes, KF, 2018). This is a testament of the social constructionist view of identification through acculturation (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2017; Ward, 2008).

Case two represents one of the rare occasions in which the issue of belonging by virtue of tribe came up. Not necessarily to belonging to and participation in KF WhatsApp community but touching on the choice of leadership KF members should make. The allusion is that the said political candidate is not Bukusu, since he was allegedly given "land and a wife" and nor does he come from Bumula, the constituency in which he has declared his candidature and therefore should be excluded at the vote. The allusion to Tongaren as the origin of the candidate is also significant. Historically, Tongaren is within "White highlands" used to refer to areas that were occupied by White settlers during colonial times because of their agricultural productivity. After Kenya's independence, plots were subdivided and sold to indigenous people (see Kanyinga, 2009). Thus, Tongaren is multiethnic much as the Bukusu are the majority. Consequently, Patrick's allusion by alleging that the candidate hails from Tongaren, is that he might as well be from any of the minority tribes. However, all the members who commented on this post dismissed it as mere propaganda.

The tribal identity marker used by Patrick (observations, KF, 2017) represents part of the existential logics of difference which constantly threatens the collective political subjectivity of ordinary citizens and consequently the right to participate in these communities. This is akin to the exclusion of immigrants (in the international context) from political participation through the invocation of one of the traditional modes of exclusion; that of citizenship. In this arrangement, citizenship becomes the measure of immigrant integration into political life (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2013). This argument is rooted in the Enlightenment ideas associated with Hobbes and Locke which uses positive qualifications to place the citizen as the liberal subject (see for example, Shaw, 2003) unlike political subjectivity constructed through negative qualifications, that is, conflict. There is a plethora of literature which demonstrate how ethnicity or tribal identity loses its cultural essentialism and becomes politicised in Kenya. This politicisation of ethnicity makes it difficult for Kenyans to collectively mobilize around other identity constructions, essential or not, such as class or even nation (see Atieno-Odhiambo, 1987, 2002; Haugerud, 1993, Shilaho, 2018). Shilaho (2018), for instance, argues that post-colonial Kenya's ethnic politics is not pre-determined but is an inheritance of the British colonialists' administrative organization of different regions of Kenya in terms of tribe homogeinity as a "stratagem of divide and rule" (p. 1).

Tribalism (negative ethnicity) is so rife in Kenya that the idea of nationhood is fragmented. Kenyans imagine themselves in terms of tribe and hardly by nationhood. Haugerud (1993) cites how Nomadic communities from Northern Kenya speak of travelling to "Kenya" when going to Nairobi, meaning that they cannot envision themselves as part of the imagined community of Kenya. The ethnic dimension is also a factor in political participation in social media. In a study to explore whether young adults in Nairobi use social media simply for entertainment purposes or whether the technology could lead to societal changes, Jäntti (2015) found that even though social media contributed to diversity in discussions, these discussions easily turned into hate speech and violence because of tribalism. Accordingly, hate speech and violence were some of the tactics used to exclude individuals from political participation on the online platforms.

Even though tribal identity marker is a real threat to the collective political subjectivity of ordinary citizens, findings also show that these WhatsApp communities constantly strive to overcome the threat and rearticulate the collective political subjectivity. The following excerpts exemplify this point:

> Basically, belonging to Kabula Forward is determined by being born in Kabula or hailing from Kabula. Because we have those born in towns, but they belong to Kabula because their fathers are sons of Kabula. However, we have those who do not hail from Kabula but they live and work among us. They also belong to this community because they are our friends, neighbours, what affects us also affect them, so they can contribute their views freely. I am an example of this (Zari, interview, KF, 2018).

> Aaah [….] here, everybody who is on KF belongs. We even have Luos here, Kalenjins…but some of them grew up here with us. So they are our brothers and sisters. They participate actively in issues affecting our communities even more than some of us born here. They are the first to raise the alarm whenever something goes wrong. Some were added to this platform because they are government officials dealing with security, agricultural issues so they rightly belong here. We can seek advice, inform them when something goes wrong and even get information from them very easily (Waswa, FGD, KF, 2018).

The excerpts above provoke a recurring narrative; that of identification in terms of a collective identity held together by logic of equivalence, that of holding their defined enemy, the political leaders accountable and push for development. They also are a testament of the existential instability of the social myth of the ordinary citizens perpetuated by the always existing threat in the logics of difference. Additionally, declarations such as that of Teacher (EADF, FGD, 2018) that even though he was not born in East Asembo, he lives and works there as a teacher, his children go to school there, his family is equally affected by the poor development in the area, consequently he too has a right to voice his opinions and be heard on matters affecting East Asembo, are therefore important in repairing dislocations caused by differences such as that of "birth right" or tribal identity markers. Teacher's declarations just as Zari's and Waswa's not only deconstruct the notion of essentialism in identity construction but begin to tease out other possibilities, including rare ones, of substituting identification with participation in these WhatsApp communities in the bid to preserve the logic of equivalence which stabilizes the collective political subjectivity even though temporarily.

This substitution is possible given the floating nature of the concept of participation and Laclau's (2005) argument that identity construction is based on radical difference and therefore does not conform to logic as is premised in Hegelian dialectics. This is not an entirely unique finding to this study, as some studies have also questioned the linkage of political identity with primordial factors (e.g., Shilaho, 2018). However, a total metaphoric substitution enabled by a human-technology assemblage of another phenomenon with identity has not been explored, to the best of my knowledge. It is how techno-tropes work to systematically effect this substitution that I focus on in the next sections.

7.3 Participation as the right to "voice views" and be heard?

The first stable nodal point attempting to fix meaning of participation in other ways other than the hegemonic primordial factors like tribe, place of birth and clan, is to "speak and be heard (understood)." From the excerpts above by Zari, Waswa and Teacher, this signification comes forth strongly dislocating the primordial modes of identification. Though the participants articulate the "speaking" and being "heard" differently, the implication of these articulations, that is to substitute identity with participation, is the same. Waswa (FGD, KF, 2018) for instance, speaks of "raising alarm" and "information exchange" among members, while Zari (FGD, KF, 2018) speaks of "contributing views." The Teacher (FGD, EADF, 2018) on the other hand directly equates participation to "voicing his opinion" and "being heard." Therefore, one can argue that to belong to these WhatsApp communities is equivalent to "voicing," "speaking" and being "heard (understood)" which in turn are equivalent to participation, making participation an identity construct.

There is a groundswell of studies which analyse voice as a valuable tool through which ordinary citizens especially marginalised groups can engage in public affairs (e.g., Coleman, 2002; Schlozman et al., 2012; Shumow, 2015; Verba et al., 1995). In contrast there are scholars like Carpentier (2012) and Crawford (2009) who are sceptical of the simplistic use of voice in the analysis of participation. Crawford (2009, p. 526) for instance, critiques the fact that internet studies has focused more on the aspect of voice and posting in public forums with the neglect of semi-private spaces like "behind-the-scenes direct messaging in social media environments" in

which WhatsApp fits. Despite criticisms, I argue that voice is still an important analytical tool in participation, especially if considered metaphorically, in teasing out the mostly subtle power structures which make up the cyberspace (Mitra & Watts, 2002).

Moreover, other scholars have placed voice right in the analysis of participation by reconceptualising it as a "right to be understood" and not merely the "right to speak" (Couldry, 2009, 2010; Husband, 2009). Couldry (2010) definition of voice for instance is a critique to neoliberalism which favours voices of power as opposed to that of ordinary citizens. He insists that voice matters, it is not just about having a voice, but the voice should be of value. He says of voice as value:

> [….] the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organising human life and resources that themselves value voice (as a process) [….] Valuing voice then involves particular attention to the conditions under which voice as a process is effective … "voice" as used here, is a value about values or what philosophers sometimes call a second-order value (p.2).

As such, I argue that voice should not be perceived as just to "speak" out an opinion or simply equated to access and interaction; factors considered as precursors to participation as is Carpentier et al (2013, 2014) argument, but a consideration of the quality, and authenticity/validity of voice illuminate the nature of participation (whether maximalist or minimalist) on online platforms. Consequently, it is not enough for social media technology like WhatsApp to afford plurality and amplify voices of ordinary citizens, those voices have to matter. Considering that modes of participation in offline spaces have be found to be prone to power inequalities, it is therefore important to consider the materiality of technology used, its interaction with voice and the resultant effect on participation. For instance, to use WhatsApp, to be an active participating member of a WhatsApp community, one needs to have internet connectivity which cost money as the excerpt below exemplifies,

> Where is John, he is too quiet today. Could it be he does not have data bundles (inserts laughing emoticons) (Pat, observation, EADF, 2017).

Such statements are a common feature in the two WhatsApp communities. While the statement was made in jest or mockery, for John, one of the most active members in this community not having a "clever and quick comeback," it invokes digital inequality and broader narrative of capitalism, given the reason presumed to be muting John's voice and consequently his participation. Studies show despite proliferation of smart phone usage, Africa is still lagging when it comes to internet access (Mare, 2017; Wasserman, 2011). Studies on WhatsApp show that political activism, especially its mobilization element from offline spaces to WhatsApp, is concurrently meant to escape surveillance and low costs of operating the app (Johns & Cheong, 2019; Trere, 2015).

In this instance, digital inequality affects the ability of one to navigate or use WhatsApp or even enjoy its interactivity affordance since having internet connectivity is what Norman (2013) refers to as a forcing function which both enables and constraints use depending on whether one is connected or not. Interactivity and navigability affordances of WhatsApp are therefore determiners of participation and not just factors that set precedence to participation.

To regurgitate, maximalist participation requires a participatory context in which power among the participating parties is to a considerable extent egalitarian (Carpentier, 2012, 2014). Observations of the EADF and KF WhatsApp communities show that there are certain members whose opinion in virtual communities is valued and always elicits robust participation while others only get a few people to engage with or are ignored and thus excluded. There is also existence of cliques mostly formed by people who already have offline ties, for example, they went to the same school. Such members tend to have similar political opinions, and/or have a sense of superiority propagated by a prestigious Alma mater, sought after jobs and so on. In as much as they are part of the community; they have an inside group within the larger community and engage civilly only among themselves while responding harshly to others or totally ignoring them. If the "ignore" behaviour is constant, the humiliated members retreat into silence to avoid further pain. However, there are some who choose to be silent on their own volition. While self-imposed silence shields them from conversations, they deem uncomfortable, they are still excluded in shaping the communities' discourses. In extreme instances, a member may even exit the community if they

feel their voice is not valued. For instance, one of the participants who exited the WhatsApp community stated that:

> I left that WhatsApp group because I felt I was treated unfairly. There are people in the group who feel they are more knowledgeable and therefore better than others. If you try to comment on what they have posted, they quickly shut you down. Their supporters who are mostly people who interact a lot with them will also join in shutting you up. And when you post something on the forum, they all ignore you. So, if you are not wanted in the group, why stay? (Leslie, interview, KF, 2018)

Authenticity of voice on the other hand is how trustworthy and valid the voice is towards pushing the perceived agenda of the community, that is, to hold political leaders accountable and push for development. From observations of discussions in both communities, there are participants who get castigated often for being mouthpieces of their "sponsors" (referring to politicians) who give them handouts including data. In fact, most of the members dismiss these members beholden to politicians and anything they say or promise since they are seen as an extension of the politicians. It is, therefore, not easy to tell when they are themselves and when they are echoing the politician, the "defined enemy" as the conversation below exemplifies:

> **Don**: Since the current MCA and MP took over, we are *seeing* development in our ward and constituency. One project after another! We are really doing well.
>
> **Ben**: Are you serious? What projects are you talking about? Unless those projects are being implemented at your homestead!
>
> **Don**: I knew you had to say something negative about my comment, I know you are still in mourning. The candidate you supported failed. It is time for you to shut up and watch how development is done.
>
> **Ben**: Who does not know you are on the payroll of your beloved leaders. The internet bundles they buy you are the ones you use to shout their praises here daily. Without them you cannot even afford to be online. No wonder you do not want anyone to criticize them. I understand you perfectly, you have to earn your keep (observations, EADF, 2018).

While this exchange points to the socio-economic realities which contribute to digital inequality, most importantly it points to a mediated governmentality, where political leaders still exercise their power even in a space like WhatsApp further questioning the "free WhatsApp" discourse narrative. How can ordinary citizens in these WhatsApp communities hold political leaders accountable

when socio-economic factors ensure that power remains weighted in favour of the political leaders albeit subtly through proxies. Don (EADF, 2018) is part of ordinary citizens' collective, but his voice betrays a corruption of authenticity. What the corruption of voices mean is that the logic of difference, occasioned by the source of one's internet data, is dislocating elements within the equivalential chain of ordinary citizens, while strengthening the constitutive outside (political leaders). This further fragment the collective "ordinary citizen" identity and the rights/agency they should otherwise enjoy given this subject positionality.

From the last two sections discussed, we can already begin to see the role of the materiality be it cultural or economic in constructing identities which in turn informs the signification of participation. The next section sediments this notion.

7.4 So near, yet so far: The "Diasporan," the "Nairobian," the "Local" and participation.

From observations, findings show that even though WhatsApp represents a space, physical places still define participation. However, the definition is not in the sense of one's ability to participate physically in an event or conversation but their performativity in relation to what the places they are physically located metaphorically represent. The mobility affordance of WhatsApp means that even those who are not physically in the local places, either Kabula or East Asembo can still connect with their locally based counterparts. The figure of the diasporan is particularly focal when it comes to participation, given how participation is constructed in these WhatsApp communities. However, it not a clear-cut figure as the term diaspora seems to have a conflictual meaning in these WhatsApp communities as even those within the nation-state but have migrated from the local lay claim to this identity. In migration studies, the diaspora is predominantly defined as individuals who have migrated beyond the borders of the nation state. However, in these WhatsApp communities, those who reside in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, quintessential of rural-urban migration, also identify themselves as the Diaspora (FGDs, EADF & KF, 2018). This they did against the antagonistic way in which the locally based construct them. This was also confirmed during interviews as the excerpt below shows:

> Though I reside in Nairobi, and come home mostly during December Holidays, I consider myself as part of the Diaspora members. Those outside the country are not at home, just like I am not at home. Just like them, I connect with people at home on WhatsApp So they cannot expect me to be physically present at all activities (Sheba, FGD, EADF, 2018).

But identity is not only self-referential but relational. Moreover, in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) formulation, identification is a function of hegemony where individuals in an antagonistic relationship are both a hindrance and necessity for the "Other's" existence. For instance, in formulating the identity of community media, Carpentier (2015) argues that much as it is a fluid concept, the identity of community media can be fixed by a negative relativity, explaining what it is not. Upon probing the locally based members of the WhatsApp communities, the antagonism between them and "Nairobians" was evident during the interviews and FGDs, some of the locally based respondents noted:

> Nairobi is not diaspora, where have these people gone? They are just here, yet they do not participate. They do not attend fundraisers, they do not come to funerals, they do not want to be part of us, when they do not live far from home (Doe, FGD, KF, 2018).
>
> People of Nairobi think they know so much, but they know nothing. They are just hustlers. We are the people on the ground, we talk, they listen! (Angela, FGD, EADF, 2018).

Both Doe's and Angela's comments illuminate the antagonistic relationship between those based in the capital city, Nairobi and the locally based. They point out the power inequalities among the different subject positions in the equivalential chain of ordinary citizens, in favour of the "disporan" as opposed to the urbanite, and the local as opposed to the urbanite. A logic of difference informed by broader nation-level discourses are arguably responsible for this antagonism, further fragmenting the collective identity of ordinary citizen. Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya and the seat of the national government, is metaphoric of power, not only political but also social and economic. From the colonial period to the beginning of the 21st century, mainstream media had been located centrally in Nairobi. Given the poor infrastructure then in terms of communication and transport networks, it meant that rural areas, the most populous, were cut off from media access. They therefore depended on their kin in urban areas, including Nairobi, to give them information especially on state operations or confirm information they had heard

either over the radio or from hearsay. Political information therefore flowed vertically to the disadvantage of the rural inhabitants.

These coupled with economic affluence whether real or imagined, set the stage for rural-urban migration and the emergent power imbalance in favour of the urbanite. To be cut off from Nairobi therefore was to be cut off from the central arena where all sectors of society play out, it was to be othered. However, with decentralization, what Kenyans popularly call "devolution," power has somewhat shifted to the periphery, namely counties, the second-tier government, making them the focus of most citizens in the hope that they will deliver what successive national governments have failed to do. Some Nairobians now have to look downwards (and backwards) to the counties they left behind, which majorly comprise rural areas, for information and for economic opportunities which the centre no longer monopolises. WhatsApp technology has also contributed to this dislocation. It has brought Nairobians and rural residents in close discourse, made visible their daily struggles, as a result, the mystic effect surrounding Nairobians is now being demystified as a respondent illuminate:

> [….]in fact, Nairobi people should just come back home. We have realized they do not even live better lives than us. They constantly haggle with us for the 'small' county jobs posted in EADF (Pat, FGD, EADF, 2018).

Pat's comments like the others above, reference to home and the physical distance between home and Nairobi, suggests another form of dislocation, a return to boundary in what should otherwise be boundaryless online spaces. This shows the back-and-forth relationship between offline and online spaces, supported for instance, by literature that online spaces are spaces of mobilization while real participation action occurs offline as seen in the case of contemporary revolutions like the Arab spring, occupy movement and so on (see e.g., Bauman & Lyon, 2012, Steinert-Threlkeld, 2015, Akpojivi, 2018). On the other hand, Appadurai's (1996) concept of translocality means one can argue that invoking home is not necessarily a return to boundary but going back to the point of where an analysis should begin. And it is this starting from the local before moving to the global that fixes the signification of participation, its metaphoric substitution with material in these communities:

> We understand diaspora people, they are not home physically but they participate actively, they send us a lot of money when we have harambees[19]. Their parents represent them at functions. They are always with us" (Tito, FGD, KF, 2018).
>
> We do not see you when you are just nearby, you do not attend important happenings in the village like funerals; you do not participate. You do not contribute to fundraisers; you do not participate, and we do not think you belong. In fact, as an admin, I removed a very senior person, a brigadier in the army. He may be of our tribe and a "Kabulan," but members asked that I remove him. They do not want him. All these years he has held a prominent position in the army, but he has never given any son or daughter of Kabula a job! (Admin 2 (not the original admin), interview, KF, 2018).

What is interesting about these excerpts is the absence/presence dialectic which renders the diaspora present even in their absence and Nairobians absent even in their presence. That the "presence" of the diaspora is celebrated in these WhatsApp communities in relation to their "capacity to give" is not new as seen in numerous studies of diaspora and their connection to home (see Nyamnjoh, 2017; Rowe, 2018). What is interesting in this finding is how this celebration of "giving" is a testament of sedimented discourses in the Kenyan society, perpetuated by politicians who use harambees (fundraisers) as a façade of being development conscious. Of interest also is how "giving" facilitates the metaphoric substitution of participation with the material and its effect on identification. This substitution of "giving" with participation and its consequence on determination of identity constructs in the WhatsApp communities is similar to how Somali refugees in Nairobi "constructed a global diasporic identity tied to free flows of capital […] by using money as a substitute for identity documents" (Balakian, 2016, p. 87). Participation has therefore been objectified in an assembly of certain material objects defined in relation to a constitutive outside who in this case is not the political leader but the "non-giver" elements in the equivalential chain of the collective identity of ordinary citizen, weakening the alliance.

[19]Harambee means pulling together. A term popularised by the first president of Kenya who called for Kenyans just after independence to pull together resources to build the nation. Subsequently it has been used to mean a fundraiser.

7.5 Conclusion.

To participate therefore is to give in kind, your time, your money. See where the emphasis is, it is not so much where one is, after all the mobility affordance has already rendered place redundant to a great extent. Your presence is important but that could be substituted with your money. Nor do labels one self-identifies matter. What counts is that you give and eventually the identities which prevail are: those who participate or those who do not participate as defined by one's "giving behaviour."

CHAPTER 8: NEW MEDIA, OLD TRICKS; THE POLITICS AND POLI(TRICKS) OF WHATSAPP COMMUNITIES

8.0 Introduction.

The scene unfolds in the Kenyan statehouse where an "accountability summit" is being held and broadcasted live to the nation. Senior officials from various government bodies charged with the task of fighting corruption and critics are in attendance. Speaker after speaker blames the failure of the fight against corruption on something, someone or some other organization other than themselves. The president who has been watching the proceedings on TV from another room within the state house, suddenly barges into the summit room, demands the microphone, and embarks on a 19 minutes and 15 seconds onslaught on the officers including the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Auditor General, the Judiciary, and the Directorate of Criminal investigation who he accuses of failing in their duties despite providing them with the requisite resources (NTV Kenya, 2016). At some point he poses this question to them, "*Mnataka nifanye nini jameni* (what do you want me to do?) that I have not done?" (ibid).

This spectacle which sparked anger among Kenyans who took to Twitter under the #CryBabyPresident hashtag to express their frustrations, adequately demonstrates the phenomenon of depoliticisation. Other than the irony of an "accountability" summit turned "ping-pong" summit was the bigger irony of a president, the ultimate accounting officer in the land, and a symbol of power claiming he has no power to do anything about corruption and deflecting responsibility to his appointees and the institutions they head. This chapter discusses a meta-discourse that can be traced from all the previous chapters, that of depoliticisation. By focusing on the political vs. politics, it discusses how sedimented discourses perpetuated over history through the legacy media have infiltrated social media like WhatsApp, further questioning the metaphor of freedom that this medium presents to members of the WhatsApp communities under study. These discourses, coupled with technology agency provide the techno-tropes which remove the political from politics, crushing contingency in construction of its meaning and metaphorically substituting it with something that should be denounced if development is to be achieved, effectively introducing a chasm between politics and development. Consequently, institutional politics through governmentality becomes a hindrance to technologies of resistance to power.

8.1 No politics here, only development!

"When we are discussing politics, members are very active, but when it touches on development, people go mute!" stated a frustrated super administrator of the KF community during one of my observation sessions. Such statements including those chastising some members for "bringing politics" into the online communities instead of focusing on "development" are common in both communities. This begs the question, if the communities clearly state as their goal, "to ensure political accountability and push for development in their physical communities," why then does the phenomenon of politics invoke such negative reactions? It was therefore curious to explore how these communities understand and interact with politics:

> You know politicking all the time is not very useful. It takes away the time that people should use to engage in development projects. Politicians can afford to engage in politics all the time, after all that is what they know how to do. They never bother with development. We cannot be like them. Besides elections are over, leaders have already been elected, so what is the point of politics in this forum? (Bob, FGD, EADF, 2018).

> When we talk about not wanting to entertain politics in this platform, we mean we are not interested with information about what one politician or the other said, are doing [….] or which party is doing what […] or who is vying for what seat. Those things do not help us now and is what is making Kenya lag behind. What we want to hear are things like…we have a water problem in this area, what can we do to sort out this problem. Now that is development, not politics (Waswa, FGD, KF, 2018).

The above excerpts clearly show the somewhat schizophrenic relationship members of these communities have with politics. While they think of themselves as political communities, they at the same time see themselves as removed from politics. In their words, it is something they simply do not engage in. Two different themes emerge from these narratives, that of the domain of politics and anti-political sentiments. These themes speak to depoliticisation. The confinement of politics as an activity exclusive to politicians (and that happens only during elections), and consequently presenting this definition of politics as the only signification, is in tandem with the narrow conceptualizations of politics as the art of government. In this formulation, ordinary citizen's participation is confined to voting. This view denotes the Machiavellian construction of politics as a futile, amoral and so perverse an exercise devoid of scruples reserved for politicians, the constitutive outside, that *we* ordinary citizens, should not embrace. As such, in Kenya, ordinary citizens who engage in "politics" are most often branded anti-development, despite raising

pertinent issues of representation and accountability. So is the case in these WhatsApp communities as exemplified by the narratives above. This shows a remediation of ideologies previously perpetuated in legacy media to social media platforms.

The myth that politics and development are mutually exclusive is however not new to these WhatsApp communities. It is preponderant in Kenya's postcolonial period and stems from systemic depoliticisation over the years. It is reinforced by a co-opted and/or controlled legacy media environment, imperviousness to accountability and freedom of expression and disregard for the bill of rights by Kenya's successive regimes. In fact, it has transformed into a social imaginary locking out all other alternative views of politics, a political act in itself. When Kenya attained independence in 1963, it was largely seen as a new dawn that would herald transformation. However, this was not to be. Following in the footsteps of colonialists, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, suppressed media freedom, freedom of expression and eliminated political competition which culminated in the fallout with his vice president, Jaramogi Odinga (see Atieno-Odhiambo, 1987; Mbeke, 2008).

The strategy used to displace politics from development evident in the Bob and Waswa's aformentined sentiments, is similar to the manner in which Kenyatta (Kenya's first president) displaced the political from the media by diminishing the media's capacity as a political space of resistance and plurality of views (cf. Beveridge & Koch, 2017). Kenyatta deployed what Atieno-Odhiambo (1987) called the ideology of order under the guise that Kenya, a country with a fledgling sense of nationhood, needed it. Colonialists had exploited divide and rule stratagem to marginalise and impoverish indigenous people, and therefore Kenyatta punted national unity and development as requirements to overcome the balkanising colonial legacy. And development was conceived crassly in a brick-and-mortar framework that entailed transport and communication networks, skyscrapers, street lighting, access to electricity, construction of schools, hospitals, stadia among such amenities. Absent was the soul of the nation – social cohesion, justice, rule of law, environmental conservation, human rights and freedoms, accountability and probity in public office and social discipline (See Sen, 2001 for an expanded view of development as freedom). In

this thesis, the mention of "development" by participants, is therefore used in reference to physical amenities that successive Kenyans governments accorded precedence over the peoples' wellbeing owing to the rents that they illegally extract from them. Under this perverse conceptualisation of development, a railway line, for instance, trumps human dignity and life. Critics, including journalists, can always be violently suppressed for standing in the way of "development" and a fraction of the citizenry will agree that the government is justified to violate basic human rights as long as they deliver on "development."

Ordinary citizens then, as is the case now, were initiated into participating in the sedimentation of this social imaginary using various discursive tactics. One such tactic is his call for "harambee" loosely translated to mean pulling resources together, with a focus on "development" instead of politics. He accused his critics of politicking instead of pulling together with the rest of the citizens to build the nation; an accusation that media amplified through music, news articles, children educative programmes over the radio, newspapers and the only television station at the time, Voice of Kenya now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) (See Khamisi, 2018). It is worth to note that KBC, a public media, funded by the public revenue and therefore expected to serve public interest, has operated as a state propaganda mouthpiece since inception (Mbeke, 2008). Kenyatta's populist slogan - *Uhuru na Kazi* "freedom and work" replaced *Uhuru na Mashamba* "freedom and land," the rallying call during the struggle against colonialism was meant to lull Kenyans into acquiescence and stigmatize critics opposed to his excesses such as land grabs, political assassinations, grand corruption, constitutional infractions. These critics were characterized as lazy, defiant and unable to get out of the anticolonial mind-set (See Bennet, 1967; Kithuku, 2015 for a discussion of the *uhuru na kazi* ideology). Politics was therefore strategically removed from the public sphere and constructed as a nuisance propagated by opposition politicians and their supporters which identified them as enemies of the state and people. After elections, successive Kenyan governments held that, "development" takes precedence over "politics." Consequently, to a considerable section of Kenyans, politics lost its contingency of meaning, an act of depoliticization.

The art of compartmentalizing issues by the political elite, for instance placing certain issues in the domain of politics, others in the domain of development and disconnecting societal problems from bad governance, in effect, poor politics, has been internalized by ordinary citizens in Kenya. Consequently, although bedeviled by crosscutting socioeconomic and political challenges, they do not make their demands on the government as a collective as they fail to see the connection between demands. The shareability affordance of WhatsApp means information can be forwarded and received across platforms such that the discourses perpetuated, for instance, on Twitter and Facebook, where the political elite and their bots[20] are increasingly active, are the same ones being propagated on WhatsApp. This does not only happen in Kenya but also across the world as demonstrated by the former US president, Donald Trump on Twitter. However, the repetitive messages could also elicit an opposite effect, that of apathy. A KF member, for instance, noted that he does not focus on what he termed as "political material" on the online community since they are just forwards that he had already come across on other social media groups and WhatsApp groups that he was a member of (Cephas, interview, KF, 2018). Although there may be pluralism of media, there is little if any diverse content leaving little chance for the reactivation or (re) politicization of sedimented discourses.

Moreover, there seemed to be a consensus of sorts in these WhatsApp communities over the inadmissibility of satirical or humorous content shared in form of memes, videos or short narratives. Regardless of whether they are of political content or not, they are often dismissed as nuisance which takes focus away from the important development project. The conversation below observed from the EADF (2018) community demonstrates this:

> **Milkah**: Posts a video of the governor of Homabay County dancing, his oversized coat almost falling off (This governor is infamous for his oversized suits which are thought to be even more ridiculous because he is overweight. He has been the subject of some funny memes in Kenya). Inserts laughing emojis in the comments.
>
> **Ben:** Hey you, what is the caption for this video, what is it about?
>
> **Nyaduk**a: I have just wasted 3 minutes of my life that I will never get back. How does this video of Akuba (the governor's nickname) help us here? Admin, these are the things we

[20] A software application that runs automated simple and routine tasks over internet much faster than humans.

keep warning people about, but they keep posting. And when there are serious issues for discussion, they do not even contribute. This kind of people should be removed.

Junior: I do not understand what the hullabaloo is about, take it easy people. This video is funny. Have you all lost your sense of humour? It does not always have to be that serious. Admin, aren't we allowed to have a good laugh?

Milka: But can't you see that Akuba (the governor's nickname) is only good at dancing when Homabay County is among the lowest performing county in terms of development?

Chief Admin: Milkah, be warned. We do not appreciate such things here. Read the group description again.

Milkah: Eh, c'mon admin, you do not have to take everything this seriously. Anyway, I have noted your warning.

In agreement with Ben and Nyaduka's protests are arguments that not all forms of irony and humour are necessarily empowering but instead could depict a stance of "cynical distance" against the "underlying belief in the liberating, anti-totalitarian force of laughter, of ironic distance" (Zizek, 1989, p. 24). The internet is accused of oversaturating the public sphere with political satire creating a conducive environment for political cynicism especially among the youth who are already apathetic to traditional politics (Crittenden et al., 2011) or even end up producing an opposite effect of the one desired. Nussbaum (2017, para. 17) in her analysis of the 2016 US presidential elections, posits that "we memed a president into existence." Her statement is in reference to how despite the circulation on social media of satirical memes caricaturing Donald Trump and questioning his ability to hold the top office in the US, he still got elected. In other words, "the name-calling was so destabilizing, flipping between serious and silly, that it warped the boundaries of discourse" (ibid, para.17). However, in some instances, "cynical distance" is conceptualised as "a first step towards greater participation in the public sphere, rather than an increased withdrawal from it" (Brock, 2018, p. 291; also see; Bustillos, 2012; Roudakova, 2013).

On the other hand, some studies on social media including WhatsApp have found that even though the purpose of and conversations in WhatsApp communities may not be directly linked to politics, they inadvertently contribute to it. For instance, the sense of safety in WhatsApp resulting from its more private setting, contributes to more sharing of information and interaction among users,

cultivating a sense of community (Goh, *et al.*, 2019; Swart, *et al.*, 2019; Udenze & Ugoala, 2020). This means that members of WhatsApp groups are more likely to collectively participate in political activism and advocacy when the need arises given the solidarity among them. A study by Lee and Ting (2015) exemplifies this phenomenon. They found that although WhatsApp was used by young activists to share information and mobilize collective actions during the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong, these groups were initially engaged in information sharing that was generally casual and not geared towards activism (ibid). Additionally, from the systematic review of literature to determine what motivates people to use WhatsApp, Pang and Woo (2020) observe that conversations and interactions in WhatsApp groups including but not limited to satirical memes, emojis, sarcasm often viewed as banal or even depoliticized, may also speak to power. For instance, Ncube (2014) used a neo-Gramscian approach in which popular culture is constructed as a site of political struggle, to show how Zimbabweans (both politicians and their fans) successfully utilized football metaphors circulated through Facebook and WhatsApp to "score" points during the 2013 elections. Of course, there is a plethora of studies connecting all forms of legacy media and the internet to the interlinkage of the everyday, popular culture and power (e.g., Ligaga, 2012; Makombe & Agbede, 2016; Ogola, 2019). I highlight Ncube's study as it focuses directly on WhatsApp. Therefore, to dictate in narrow terms in EADF and KF WhatsApp communities what fits into their goal and what does not, especially given their understanding of politics; is to foreclose alternative views and meanings which might just help in the reactivation of the political.

8.2 State excesses, hate speech and depoliticization.

Other salient factors fueling the fantasmatic logic which informs members of the WhatsApp communities view that their communities and by extension the country's underdevelopment is blanketly due to politics (the politics that causes this is rarely qualified or simply referred to as bad politics) and therefore "politicking" could come at a personal cost, due to state repression. For instance, Kenyan politics is, by and large, based on politicized tribal identity as opposed to programmatic ideology, and self-serving politicians exploit this fault line to drum up support while othering. This coupled with the lack of political will to oversee credible elections has meant that elections are highly polarizing, disputed and regularly degenerate into violence with the most egregious violence witnessed after disputed presidential elections in 2007. Kenya's politics is

typified by violence – state sponsored and as well as intercommunal - loss of life, lifelong injuries, damage to property, mass displacement and related humanitarian crises. The media is complicit in some instances in fuelling this violence. Legacy media has been accused of stoking the violence through incitement, appeal to tribal chauvinism and stereotypes and partisan reporting as was the accusation levelled against a journalist who worked for Kass FM, a vernacular radio station, on the role he played in the 2007/2008 post-election violence (ICC, 2010). New media like WhatsApp has been hailed for quelling it to a certain extent (Nyabola, 2018) but is also a platform for incendiary ethnic profiling, bigotry, falsehoods bullying and othering (Ahad & Lim, 2014; Aizenkot & Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2019). It is a site of incandescent tribal politics too. However, pro-establishment Kenyans do not hold the state operatives including the president accountable for state violence. Instead, they blame victims (protesting ordinary citizens) on bizarre grounds such as they deserved it because "their protest over stolen elections is detrimental to the economy." Critics of normative looting associated with vain mega infrastructural projects are cavalierly dismissed as antidevelopment. Apologists of state repression exhibit ridiculous depoliticised reasoning.

In the digital era, one of the state excesses meant to curtail freedom of speech is evident in the way hate speech is framed by the state in the constitution, which follows the same logic of anti-political substitution of the meaning of politics with something which is evil or a nuisance. To reiterate, hate speech is defined as "threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, written material, performances, visual images, programmes that can stir up ethnic hatred" (Republic of Kenya, 2018). The broad definition of hate speech in the Kenyan law includes insults and abuse, items that could easily fall under what is broadly understood as incivility. In this formulation, incivility is equal to hate speech and potentially treasonous to overzealous regime apologists when the president is lampooned or insulted. So, in the real sense, the state conflates incivility with hate-speech and criminalises both. This is an anti-political act, since by favouring the universalized "civil speech" over incivility, the state "marks boundaries for acceptable speech, with what is outside the boundaries categorised as part of the crime of hate speech and thus displaced from politics" (Katiambo, 2019, p. 5).

Further, how hate speech is defined in the Kenyan law, produces a double effect, both which works to destroy antagonisms instead of embracing them. First, by confining hate-speech and the accompanying incivility components (a political act) to the legal, the state seeks to provide a consensus to the meaning of hate-speech and its consequences; thereby attempting to stifle conflict and its constitutive nature of power in social (Mouffe, 2000). On the other hand, the broad definition of hate speech which includes other broader categories such as incivility, which has a "family resemblance" with it, render hate speech a floating signifier whose signification consequently becomes difficult to pin. This difficulty in defining hate speech is attributed in part to the "multiple overlapping discourses that operate on the concept" (Pohjonen, 2019, p. 3090). However, the focus here is not on the "correct" definition of hate speech, but how it is used in discourse. Brown's (2017) conceptualization of hate speech is therefore useful in this analysis. He conceptualises hate speech in terms of Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblance" where a concept cannot have a universal meaning, instead meaning is derived from the context in which it is used:

> What I am claiming, in other words, is not simply that a variety of different things can count as hate speech [. . .] I am claiming that the term "hate speech" has more than one meaning […] Instead, what I am claiming is that the term "hate speech" is systematically ambiguous; which is to say, it carries a multiplicity of different meanings (Brown, 2017, p. 564).

This ambiguity is seen in the way the concept of hate speech keeps oscillating from one societal domain to another in this thesis. At one point it is a security discourse (seen in chapter 5 and 7) at another, it is a moral discourse (chapter 6) besides the legal discourse (state formulation). In the excerpt below, a different discourse emerges in which hate speech is seen as an "anti-development" sentiment, a domain of "bad politics" which strips it of its political qualities:

> **Wamwe**: Posts several photos of the events. MCA hoyee! Hoyee! The honourable MCA today visited 3 primary schools and made note of the challenges these schools are facing. He promised to push the county government to allocate a budget to address these challenges in this fiscal year.
>
> **Naliaka**: This is great news. Our MCA is working. His focus is on development and more development, nothing else!

> **Orion**: Is this what you call working for development of our ward! Visiting schools is development? Who does not know the problems affecting the public schools in our Ward? This is just a waste of public funds. The MCA should replace his stupid advisors. Stupidity and misuse of taxpayer's fund cannot be termed as development.
>
> **Wamwe**: Who are you calling stupid? That is hate speech. Admin, I hope you are noting this kind of people who want to interfere with our peace because they are jealous of our development!
>
> **Naliaka:** Lol (laugh out loud). Wamwe, jealousy will kill some people here. *Siasa mbaya maisha mbaya!* (bad politics equals bad life, a quote the Kenya's former president, Daniel Moi, popularized) (Observation, KF, 2018).

The excerpts demonstrate how the phrase hate-speech is so cavalierly used that even banal remarks such as insults are termed hate-speech. Like in its previous invocation, the view that hate –speech is evil with no redeeming qualities is further sedimented, foreclosing other ways of imagining this concept in the social. This is in congruence with arguments which support prohibition of hate speech on consequential grounds of the harms it produces and its lack of value (e.g., O'Connor, 2002, Waldron, 2012). An approach against arguments proposing legal protection of hate speech as that would provide social trust through which individuals who overtly portray their prejudice are excluded from positions of authority and assist those who seek tolerance to identify and dissuade the prejudiced from holding the intolerant views (Schulzke, 2016). Additionally, labeling any form of dissent as hate speech in these WhatsApp communities, forecloses debate and interferes with achieving the goals of the communities in the same way the state employs hate-speech to stifle counter-hegemonic views; an exemplification of how governmentalities operate in social media.

A testament to the state weaponisation of hate-speech for its selfish ends is seen in the category of those arrested and charged with hate-speech in Kenya. To date those arrested and charged with hate speech mostly fall in the category of "common *mwananchi*" including some WhatsApp administrators, bloggers and citizen journalists. Some political leaders have also been arrested, but the trend shows that only politicians opposed to the Kenyatta regime have had charges proffered against them, while those who are pro-establishment are summoned, questioned by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), but no further action is taken. The charges

range from insulting the president to posting messages on WhatsApp and other social media platforms which purportedly incited hate and/or threatened national security. These arrests have sparked complaints of double standards and infringement on right to free speech, especially since politicians are treated leniently as compared to ordinary citizens (Khamadi, 2015).

The time and context in which the Act against hate speech was enacted also contributes to the state wielding it to their advantage. The Act was enacted in the wake of the 2007/2008 post-election violence for which vernacular radio stations and mobile phones were identified as purveyors of messages that heightened ethnic hatred and violence (See Mitulla et al., 2015). Since political activism has moved to the online space, social media has become the new arena perceived as the incubator and instigator of ethnic hate and violence, with the state shifting its gaze away from the traditional media. Given the long history Kenya has had with tribalism and its connection to inequities related to resource distribution, poverty, inequalities, access to justice and electoral violence, the state easily invokes discourses of citizen protection, state security and stability around hate-speech. In reality, hate speech in Kenya is a metaphor for anti-establishment stances with most citizens oblivious of its state centric undertones, since the invocation of tribalism and violence act as the fantasmatic logic enabling its blanket acceptance of its criminalization (including incivility) as something inherently good for the ordinary citizens.

8.2 Who is responsible for development? shifting responsibility from public sphere to private sphere.

Findings from observations show that the understanding of development in these WhatsApp communities is consistent with the parochial state propagation of the same. Again the "*harambee* call" by Jomo Kenyatta is arguably the initiator of the prevailing discourse of development in Kenya. Granted, participatory democratic models advocate for horizontal approaches of governance where citizens are included in policy making and hold the government accountable. However, given the non-excludable nature of public goods, it is the government that is expected to provide them as the collector of tax and other revenues. In some cases, especially in developing countries, private and non-governmental organizations also provide public goods to augment the government's delivery (Green & Matthias, 2006; Werker & Ahmed, 2008). The government is

therefore expected to provide potable water, universal education, healthcare and even food by all means including fundraisers, a practice which has been entrenched into the Kenyan political culture. This is a culture of dependency, personality cultism and messianism. Granted, a responsive government is one that provides public goods in concert with the social contract, but the meaning of development in Kenya is metaphorically substituted with tokenism. And not only that, the responsibility and accountability towards development has over the years discursively shifted from the government to individual citizens. For instance, when the EADF's chief administrator decried the lack of participation among members, it was during an online fundraiser for a house for a widowed woman and school fees for her eldest child, one of three. The chief administrator was so frustrated by the lack of participation, constructed as "giving towards development" that he declared:

> I have suspended all other activities in this forum for two weeks. We will only deal with contributions or discussion geared towards achieving this noble cause. Anybody who posts or forwards any other different issue will be suspended and temporarily removed from the forum. I will not tolerate anti-development members (Chief administrator, observations, EADF, 2017).

True to his word, he went ahead to remove members who dared to defy his pronouncement despite protests as some members accused him of dictatorship and treating the group as if it were beholden to him, curtailing members' agency in the process negating the construction of WhatsApp as a free space. Some members even left the community in protest. What is interesting was the nature of their complaints:

> You need to remember that not all of us have money like others. We are also struggling to make ends meet. In fact, I wish that members would fundraise for me too (Jane, observations, EADF, 2017).
>
> Give us time, we are working hard to get some money to fundraise. You do not need to pressure us like that as if we are children who do not understand what needs to be done (Frank, observations, EADF, 2017).

None of the members pointed out that fundraising was neither linked to the goals of the communities, nor did they link the need to fundraise to bail out community members in need to

governance and leadership failure. It is this failure by the state that has forced citizens to exit the state and resort to self-help measures to cushion themselves against the vagaries of unbearable economic conditions. It was lost on them that if the government delivered public services consistent with the social contract, instead of abetting grand corruption that hollowed out state institutions, no child would miss school for lack of fees, and widows and other vulnerable people would be economically empowered to provide for themselves and their dependants. The member of parliament representing the constituency in which EADF is found, was praised for exemplary conduct when he contributed approximately 100USD. The member of county assembly was castigated for donating 10USD. She then increased it to 50USD. This betrayed lack of civic consciousness among the members of the WhatsApp communities and the politicians whose understanding of development was not about empowerment but tokenism and handouts. Successive Kenyan governments had encouraged this behavior for political mileage.

The fundraising incident illuminates the sedimented discourses regarding "good" leadership in Kenya. Mbeya (2010, p. 46) likens a constituency to a "big household with the MP acting as the head of the household." Due to prevalent poverty levels, the member of parliament is expected to extract from the center and provide for their constituents. In a study to investigate voters' understanding of the role of parliamentary representatives, Kivuva et al. (2011) found that the legislator was seen as a constituency provider. However, voting choice is more influenced by the traditional role of the legislator of enacting laws favourable to citizens' interests and holding the executive to account. The provider role is more important to individuals who directly benefit from grants usually handed down by the legislator privately –patronage politics embedded in corruption. Lack of development is usually blamed on the member of parliament's failure "to bring money for development" when their role is to enact laws meant to enhance collective wellbeing - an act of depoliticization. Instead, it is the task of the executive to coordinate and implement policies into development programmes.

With the advent of social media which affords mobility and formation of online communities, the responsibility has shifted further to individual ordinary citizens. Development in the mobile

telephony sector has also made it easier to hold individuals responsible through inventions like *M-Pesa*, a mobile banking service that enables people to send and receive money through mobile phones even in areas where banks are not available. WhatsApp copy and paste convention enables generation of a list. Every time one contributes the list is copied, their names added and then reposted. Due to the visibility, and the fact that the list is archived and retrievable on WhatsApp through the "search convention, this puts pressure on members of the online communities to contribute to fundraisers so that they are not branded anti-development.

Nyabola (2018) presents the case of Jadudi, a young Kenyan man who had cancer and needed money to get treatment from India. An influential blogger used his story telling ability to mobilize the nation to fundraise for Jadudi's treatment. Within a short period, money was raised to fly Jadudi, accompanied by his mother, to India. Unfortunately, Jadudi died. Nyabola (2018) derives from this case the mobilization affordance of social media and its ability to crosscut tribes and unite Kenyans for a cause. On the other hand, the case further demonstrates how deeply the functions of the state have been depoliticized with its responsibilities falling on individual ordinary citizens. Moreover, these narratives speak to Kenya's deep-rooted culture of dependency popularly known in local parlance as handouts. In this formulation, grants are acceptable and seen as development as long as they come from within and not the traditional international donor which is constructed as an impediment to development (Moyo, 2009). Recipients of politicians' handouts fail to recognize that these funds are derived from their taxes that should be utilized through well thought out policies. Instead funds are doled out by individual politicians as tokens and favours in exchange for political support which reifies patronage, trumps accountability and celebrates mediocrity.

The deliberately engineered narrative by government to make citizens accountable for the dereliction of its responsibilities, such as calling citizens to pull together in form of a *harambee* yet the government collects taxes, is deeply entrenched in the Kenyan society. For instance, in the wake of the West Gate Mall terrorism attack in September 2013, the Kenyatta government launched a campaign dubbed "Operation Sanitization of Eastleigh" in 2014 which was later

changed to “Operation Usalama Watch”. The language used to describe this exercise was disturbingly dependent on the metaphor of cleanliness and tiding up in reference to getting rid of Al-Shabaab elements from Eastleigh. Global discourses curate a terrorist as a Muslim oriental and in Kenya, this political securitization is extended to people of Somali ethninicity (See e.g., Campbell, 2006). Eastleigh, inhabited mostly by people of Somali ethnicity, has been securitized over the years and constitute the social imaginary of a terrorist hub. Kenya’s demographics includes Somalis. However, the government often assumes that all Somalis in Kenya are immigrants from Somalia which has meant the systemic exclusion and othering of the North-Eastern region of Kenya which borders Somalia, since independence. Of major interest is the Kenyatta self-absolving claim “*ulinzi unaanza na mimi, ulinzi unaanza na wewe*” loosely translated as “security begins with me, security begins with you” (Kenyatta, 2014, 1:30-36). Although Kenyatta seemed to point a finger to himself, it was his “citizen of Kenya” self, likening himself to ordinary citizens, and minimizing his consequential powers as head of state. Moreover, the campaign enabled Kenyatta to justify the installations of closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance in public spaces all over the country which have never been instrumental in resolving rampant crime within the city. Effectively, he deflated responsibility from his failure as head of state to guarantee security to citizens, and turned it into a public service, and the responsibility of ordinary citizens.

The government-initiated community policy programme dubbed “*Nyumba kumi (ten houses)*[6]” initiative which according to Mwangangi et al (2020) is meant to build collaboration between ordinary citizens and security services to improve security and ultimately reduce crime rates. However, this initiative turned out to be yet another surveillance gimmick about citizen control whose enforcers wield untrammeled powers harking back to the one-party autocracy. Additionally, the proposed changes to the constitution under a two-person pact (President Kenyatta and opposition leader turned government apologist, Raila Odinga) known as the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) further burdens ordinary citizens through a clause that spells out responsibilities of citizens (See Republic of Kenya, 2020). This hints at authoritarianism for a regime that routinely violates the bill of rights and disobeys court orders. These examples show how the Kenyan government has consistently, over the years, discursively found strategies to shirk responsibility

and hold ordinary citizens responsible for their fate yet they are taxed. It is what Beveridge and Koch (2017) term as societal depoliticization. The shareability affordance of social media like WhatsApp means information circulating in the mainstream media find their way into these online places, thus sedimenting these ideologies as they lose their political inspirations and are normalized. The same phenomenon is seen in the way complaints are read in the WhatsApp communities. The excerpt below from the KF WhatsApp community drawn from a discussion on whether their MCA was delivering on his promises for development, demonstrates this:

> **Wamwe**: (Lists feeder roads which connect several areas of Kabula Ward to each other and some to the main road leading to Bungoma town which he claims, have been repaired by the current MCA administration).
>
> **Orion**: If what you have posted here is true, then this is a very good start for the MCA.
>
> **Wamwe**: What do you mean, if true, aren't you a resident of Kabula? You only need to walk around the ward to see these things for yourself.
>
> **Danny**: Are these the same roads that are currently impassable due to the heavy rains? All that was done was to grade and pave them. They were not tarmacked. The murram that was poured on these roads have been washed away. So no, the MCA is yet to deliver on his promise.
>
> **Wamwe**: I really think some of us do not know why this noble group was formed…Kabula belongs to all of us, in case anyone has an idea and ways that can make us a better Kabula, they should feel free to share ideas and see how we can move forward as "Kabulans." But criticizing without offering solutions is as good as nothing.
>
> **Danny**: I have suggested that the roads should be tarmacked for their durability. Is that not a solution?
>
> **Wamwe**: Will those roads tarmac themselves? I am sure you know money is needed for that and that the national government has not disbursed money to counties. All county governments have no money; in fact, the Kenyan government is broke (does not have money)! One of those roads pass right by your homestead, have you ever even once put just stones on it to make it better? What have you done to make Kabula better, mention even just one thing! All you know how to do is to make noise, complain then complain some more. When the MCA, who you did not even vote for tries to help, you cannot even appreciate it.
>
> **Orion**: What do you mean he did not vote for the MCA? Does it mean our leaders should only work for those who voted for them? (Observations, KF, 2018).

From this example, complaints are constructed as a nuisance, "noise making" with no value at all regarding the rubric of development. It is also expected that ordinary citizens should provide solutions instead of merely complaining. A complainant is often challenged to "mention what they have done" to remedy the problem while they neither have the capacity nor responsibility to provide public goods and services. It is meant to silence them and stifle dissent and consequently impeding any conflictual understanding of development. Ironically while Wamwe (KF, 2018) dubs Danny (KF, 2018) a habitual complainant, his actions can also be conceived as "complaining about those who complain," especially if those complaints are directed against the political leader he is allied to. Besides Wamwe ironically takes it upon himself to defend a powerful government instead of holding it accountable.

Kowaleski (2019) notes that while recognized elsewhere in the psychological and economic fields, the political potential of complaining often dismissed as "grumbling" is yet to be recognized (p. 453). He however notes that not all forms of complaining are politically viable and distinguishes between "inactive complaining and complaining aimed at making a change which may be reinforced or reduced" (p. 456). Summarily, he constructs inactive complaining as that which does not provide an alternative to the existing authority, does not allow for repair of politics, a "quite" nagging which does not go beyond the context of personal relationships and habitual complaining which speaks to the complainant's personality (malcontents). In other words, complaining as an end in and of itself and not a means to an end. On the other hand, complaints meant to instigate change have an "institutional object" regardless of its context; whether it happens at "(1) private (interpersonal: person-to-person), (2) individual-institutional (person-to-institution), and (3) collective (institution-to institution)" (ibid, p. 456-457). In other words, for a complaint to move from mere dissatisfaction to political legitimacy, it is not so much about its content but how it is framed in relation to social policy and its public articulation. A public articulation can be made through the media with the internet and new media technologies such as social media being hailed for providing an environment which is likely to normalize complaints and criticisms (Lovink, 2013).

Moreover, actors have to reinforce these claims by "going beyond particularisms and pointing at a potential character of claims" (Kowaleski, 2019, p.457) As Castells (2015) says of protest movements such as Occupy, that they articulated more complains than did political claims. In lieu of Kowaleski (2019) conceptualization of inactive and instrumental complaining, I argue that Danny's (KF, 2018) complaints are actually instrumental as not only does he direct his dissatisfaction to the right institution (represented by the MCA) charged with the responsibility of providing the service demanded, he is not dissatisfied with the service provided per se (paving of roads) but with the quality of that service (roads not tarred) (cf. Thøgersen et al., 2009). An improvement of the nature of the rods (from murram to tar) is of benefit for all members of Kabula Community and not just to Danny alone. On the other hand, Wamwe (KF, 2018) who is a proxy and therefore acts on behalf of the political leader (MCA) response is fatalistic as it points out the impossibility of achieving Danny's demand, after all counties are experiencing the same plight (Zizek, 1994) in a bid to depoliticize Danny's claims and thus block them from taking precedence in the discussions of successes/failure of the MCA. Ronny's (KF, 2018) response constitutes the few occasions in the WhatsApp communities where actors thrive to expose the political in the depoliticized hegemonic narratives.

8.3 Assessing the perception of the success of online communities.

Given how discourses of control kept trying to dislocate the discourses of freedom to gain hegemony, and considering the goals of these communities, can the communities be termed as successful in their endeavor? During FGDs with the online communities, Kabula Forward members largely expressed their satisfaction with their online community. Most participants consider their online community a success as (Lusweti, FGD, KF, 2018) illuminates:

> I am so happy to be a member of this forum. I feel that this community is successful because whenever we call for meetings, organize functions like fundraisers, members turn up in large numbers. This year alone, we have managed to fundraise for three children who did not have fees for joining secondary school. If it were not for this forum, these children would not have enrolled in Form one. We have also fundraised for a sick member.

On the other hand, most members of EADF felt that the community has not been able to achieve its goals since:

> they have had to call off two meeting as either only few members indicated they would attend or failed to completely turn up. When we discuss development issues, especially when people are needed to fundraise, they go mute. Only the usual few contribute, I do not understand why. We need to rethink the purpose of this group and use it for politics, that is what most people are interested in discussing (Lenny, FGD, EADF, 2018).

These excerpts invoke common narratives on how WhatsApp and social media platforms are assessed in terms of whether they can be said to achieve tangible political activism ends, especially with scholarship which express misgivings with constructing internet spaces as having potential for political participation and activism. Morozov (2009) accuses internet activists of slacktivism, where their online activities only serve to boost their egos but cannot impact real life politics. Bimber (2001) and Scheufele and Nisbet (2002) note the inability of the internet to mobilise actors to activism. Other derogatory terms associated with internet activism include "clicktivism," "keyboard activism" and armchair activism, among others.

The major argument that informs the evaluation of online spaces for political participation is the online/offline dichotomy, where presence of tangible and "seeable" political activities is favoured over the subtle and unseen efforts online. As such, social media spaces are seen as playing a secondary and supportive role, majorly mobilization, to the primary offline political activism. Unlike these dystopian views, most studies on WhatsApp and political activism acknowledge the pivotal role the app plays in this type of participation. However, the dichotomy of the online/offline comparison is evident even though not always explicitly. Omanga (2019) for instance argues that the WhatsApp groups he studied were effective in instigating political change. He attributes this success to the emergence from the WhatsApp groups of "political personhoods" who went on to vie in elections, contributed to policy making by actively engaging the county authorities among other offline activities (ibid, p. 175). Trere (2015; 2018) recognizes the role WhatsApp plays as a digital backstage in providing a safe haven for activists to come back to and emotionally support each other after engaging in political activism on the not so friendly front-stage social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Granted, success is a social construct defined according to particular individual's and communities' contexts, Thus the perception of most Kabula Forward members that they had succeeded in their endeavor and on the other hand, failure for East Asembo Development Forum. However, the success of these communities can be assessed in their own terms according to how they define their goals, holding their political leaders accountable and spurring development, and using the framework of analysis in this study. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) stipulate that for social movements to be successful in influencing change, they must have a discourse that brings multiple groups together to collectively articulate their demands and to propagate their own hegemonic discourse, linking it to an already existing broader narrative of subordination. This would in turn enable them to define power inequality as oppression, leading to reactivation of the existing sedimented discourses. Moreover, as seen with Carpentier et al. (2003; 2013) minimalist/maximalist conceptualization, participation occurs within a spectrum. Accordingly, the success or failure of these WhatsApp communities is not a standard "yes" or "no" answer but an evaluation of various aspects within the spectrum of the goals the communities set to achieve against the stipulations of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) of successful social movements.

Assessing the success of these communities by putting their goals side by side with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) stipulations enables one to explain when, why and how these communities are successful or not. Beginning from the first step, did the communities succeed in constructing a discourse that would bring multiple groups to collectively articulate their demands? To this effect, I argue that the communities were successful in the beginning. They constructed a discourse that clearly defined the constitutive outside, defined ways in which they felt oppressed by the constitutive outside, that is the political leaders, and mobilized diverse groups - "Nairobians," the "Diasporans" and the Locals- to channel their demands into one: to hold their political leaders accountable and to instigate development. However, with time, other discourses which re-articulated their goals in problematic ways gained traction. For instance, the discourse of giving/fundraisers which redefined participation and belonging to these communities, the emergence of new hegemons like the WhatsApp administrators and the extension of political leaders' power through proxies; a testament of how online spaces can perpetuate governmentality.

On whether they were able to propagate a hegemonic discourse that described their plight as oppression and linked their demand to broader existing discourses of oppression, I argue that they failed in this regard. They instead allowed existing hegemonic institutions to instigate antagonisms, fragment the chain of equivalence that constructed the collective identity of ordinary citizens meant to propagate their collective demand. They failed to turn their antagonisms into agonism making it hard to define their plight as oppression as they excluded certain alternative discourses while embracing remediated hegemonic ideologies from mainstream media. The blocking of alternative discourses was seen in the way narratives from individuals they felt did not belong or issues that did not touch on them directly, were rejected, and with it, their political potential. They also did not connect their discourse of oppression to broader existing discourses like the universality of human rights, reading their problems as local ones by refusing to engage with national discourses, when these very discourses informed their thoughts and actions interfering with the achievement of their goals. Consequently, existing hegemonic discourses were to a great extent, sedimented as opposed to their reactivation to expose their political nature.

8.4 Conclusion

The narrow understanding politics as that which the state engages in centres the political elite while ignoring other subtle power structures. Given what this understanding of politics is associated with, the discussion in this chapter helps us understand why the WhatsApp communities' members and indeed most Kenyans, as evidenced by discourses in other social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, claim to be apolitical, since contestation of ideas is considered anti-development. But nothing is more political than purporting to be apolitical since to elect not to engage in politics is in itself political.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

9.0 Introduction.

The main objective of this study was to explore the nature of power struggles in political WhatsApp communities in Kenya using two such communities namely, East Asembo Development Forum (EADF) and Kabula Forward (KF) as instrumental case studies. The chapter provides a summary of major findings and an analysis of how these findings link with each other and the questions this research set out to answer. The discussion focusses on the empirical and theoretical contributions to the discipline of media studies particularly political digital culture. The chapter also suggests possible areas for future research and recommendations.

Compared to some previous studies in the field of social media and politics, the focus has largely been on social media that operate in the public domain like Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Mare, 2015; Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012) and rarely on the ones considered to be, to a substantial extent, in the private domain like WhatsApp. Moreover, most studies on WhatsApp have focused on what it is used for, for example educational, political activism, socialization (e.g., Ogaji et al., 2017; Omanga, 2019; Pang & Woo, 2020; Trere, 2020, 2015; Ujakpa et al., 2018) purposes without considering how WhatsApp can in turn "use" us. That is how users' interaction with the WhatsApp technology affordances and the resulting impact on discourses.

This digital ethnographic study therefore represents one of the few studies to explore socio-technological affordances of WhatsApp. The work is also unique in that it treats WhatsApp technology as discursive and is therefore part of an assemblage of WhatsApp community comprising of human and technological actors. What is studied is not so much what is said, but how it is constructed and how these constructions build up to the political in which competing discourses and meanings strive to be hegemonic. Although the WhatsApp communities studied may be centred on politics and development, the analysis is not how these discussions relate to institutional politics per se but how they either contribute to politicization (recognising the inherent conflict/antagonism in the social) or depoliticization (pushing for consensus in meaning) of discourses on politics in Kenya, framed as power struggles. In terms of context, this study adds to

the few studies on WhatsApp in Africa. Most studies on WhatsApp have been done in the Western context, although more studies in the African context are coming up (Pang & Woo, 2020).

Moreover, most studies on WhatsApp use for political activism or engagement focus on particular events such as the Umbrella movement (Lee & Ting, 2015), Occupy movement (Trere, 2020) and #YoSoy132 (Trere, 2015). Even though some of these studies on functionalism/use of WhatsApp, acknowledge its affordances they do neither consider the resultant agency of the affordances nor their possible constraining effect. The incorporation of these aspects I argue leads to a more nuanced understanding and thick description of the interaction of human/technology assemblage with politics. It is for this reason that this study focused more on interactions among members and the technology, seeking to answer the following questions:

> 1) To what extent can one determine that power struggles affect sense of belonging in an online community on the WhatsApp platform?
>
> 2) To what extent do such power struggles surround participation in WhatsApp communities?
>
> 3) How do such power struggles potentially contribute to identity negotiations among participating members?
>
> 4) To what extent do socio-technical affordances of WhatsApp influence power struggle discourses in these communities?

To get empirical answers to the aforementioned research questions, this study followed a post-structuralism approach to qualitative research, specifically, netnography research method. Data was collected through three tools: online participant observation, in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions to triangulate findings on power struggles in WhatsApp communities where community is understood as sense of belonging, participation and identity negotiation. Immersing myself in these WhatsApp communities was important since I was able to directly observe and experience the power struggles, make sense of them and produce a first-hand account of the same instead of solely relying on accounts by participants relayed during interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Moreover, a creative discursive –material analysis was employed adding "techno" to tropes to come up with a techno-trope analysis. Tropes have always been used to analyse social

fields each seen to have its own set of [….] of "grammar or cluster of rules which make some combinations and substitutions possible and exclude others" (Laclau, 2000, p.76). In the same way technology can also be read as having its unique set of grammar which can be analysed by rhetorical tropes.

Just as discourse is contingent and fluid, the discourses which emerged from the research questions did not follow strict lines or patterns, but findings were a back-and-forth meandering, entanglement and overlaps of one question(s) with others. None the less two competing discourses of freedom and control emerged above other sub discourses. The findings are summarised in the next section below.

9.1 Summary of Findings: A journey of freedom and (or) control.

Given that antagonisms conceptualised in this thesis as power struggles are part of the social, especially for the political, it is no wonder that two competing narratives of freedom and control; each struggling to metaphorically define the WhatsApp technology, emerged from the WhatsApp communities studied. This begs the question, can online communities resulting from the assemblage of human and technology provide an inclusive environment where members feel they belong, can collectively identify with a common goal and motivated to participate maximally towards the achievement of this goal. The answer to this question is not clear cut. Indeed, literature on the democratic potential of the internet and social media does not follow one universal narrative.

Although currently a techno-determinist and celebratory narrative about the internet can hardly hold, the argument that the consensus on internet should completely be written off as a platform inherently undemocratic, does not also take cognisant of the contingency of the social and the power of discourse, in which meaning does not exist prior to its construction. Instead, most signifiers are either empty or floating, thus their meanings are fixed, albeit temporarily by whichever hegemonic signification which succeeds in its quest. Consequently, the democratic or undemocratic potential of the internet cannot simply be attributed to its infrastructure, as how people interact with and use technology, defines the grammar for understanding the nature of that technology. It is from this integration of human/technology that the two overarching discourses of

freedom and control emerged as participants thrived to achieve their goal by countering persistent hegemonic discourses which in turn thrived to maintain their hegemony. The disparate meta-discourses are supported throughout the thesis by other equally competing discourses including governmentality, affect/(dis)affect; disembodiment/embodiment, newness/remediation, politicization/depoliticization.

The journey to the creation of a social imaginary of WhatsApp community as a free space devoid of all forms of control including surveillance and all forms of governmentalities; begins with discursively positioning WhatsApp as uniquely different from the "Other" (traditional media characterised by control and co-option by the state) given its group formation and privacy affordances. As such, WhatsApp is perceived as possibly filling the lack in Lacanian terms, that is left by traditional media. That is the desire for a medium of freedom in which maximalist political participation can take place. The privacy affordance is also considered a unique feature to WhatsApp as compared to other social media like Facebook and Twitter, making it ideal for political participation. The group-formation affordance consequently enables the two WhatsApp groups of Kabula Forward and East Asembo Development Forum to transform into communities under the collective political identity of ordinary citizens. It is through this collective political identity, made possible through the logic of equivalence which glues the coalition under the banner "holding political leaders accountable and agitating for development of our communities" that the discourse of freedom is advanced.

This consequently creates a frontier of a "*we*" of ordinary citizens and "*them*" of political leaders; a demarcation which points to negation in identity construction. As such, political leaders are constructed as the second hegemonic Other who participants have to contend with in a bid to take back the power to pave their own path and to achieve their goals. At this juncture, the construction of WhatsApp as a space of freedom is possible through the affective component of elements in the chain of equivalence of ordinary citizens. This includes the desire to belong, to be part of a coalition of people with similar experiences and aspirations and not to be left out from a technology that affords its users the possibility to fulfil their desires through mobility affordance and features

such as “add” a member into a group or “join via link.” It is also made possible by discourses of disembodiment which include anonymity and fearlessness which render WhatsApp space as separate from offline spaces and the challenges thereof to political participation attributed to offline spaces. These aspects which respond fully to research question 1 on sense of belonging to a community and question four on the technology’s role have compellingly been articulated in chapter five. Some aspects of question two on participation and three on identity negotiation also came forth at this juncture.

Since empty and floating signifiers can only be temporarily sutured and a negative identity means that there is always an Other which threatens its existence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), the discourse of freedom in the WhatsApp communities is not stable from the beginning of this journey. Along with the evidence from findings which support a discourse of freedom is the evidence which brings in the counter discourse of control. These include findings that depict the WhatsApp space as having elements of embodiment, brought forth in Cyborg theory as “first, the electronically mediated re-embodiment as digital persona; and second, the actual material body of the activist, which [….] still persists” (Asenbaum, 2018, p.1555-1556). Evidence of control in WhatsApp discussed as previously existing and emergent hegemonic discourses seeking to sediment their position and maintain status quo. This means that they act as an obstacle to the achievement of the goal of the coalition of ordinary citizens. The discourse therefore runs throughout the thesis; seen in the way some forms of subjugation experienced through traditional media are remediated in the online communities through the combined agency of the assemblage of WhatsApp and its affordances/constraints and human action.

For instance, in chapter 6, I discussed an emergent “new” hegemon in the form of WhatsApp community administrators who, by dint of the power conferred to them by both technology and human action, weaken the chain of equivalence of ordinary citizens by introducing difference in status and in what the administrators can do, which other members within the collective political subjectivity cannot. A deeper look into the administrator function revealed that most of the powers conferred on the administrator are not necessarily attributed to the “newness” of WhatsApp technology, but are a remediation of traditional media hegemons, political leaders and challenges

of offline political participation, a testament of governmentality in online spaces. Moments of reactivation of the discourse of freedom is also seen at this point in the journey in the form of members who recognize the hegemonic dispensation of the administrator and counter it through various strategies including those afforded by technology, for instance "lefting" the WhatsApp communities. The discourse of freedom is also maintained by a fantasmatic logics of "normality" and "necessity" which facilitate the reconciliation of the administrator position as essential to the functionality of WhatsApp communities as was and is the case with other platforms like List serves, Myspace and Facebook which afford group formation. The fantasmatic logic of normality therefore helped the rest of participants within the coalition to avoid what I term as an "affective dissonance" that would result from questioning the subject position of the administrator within the chain of equivalence of ordinary citizens. The discussion on "emergent" hegemons captured aspects raised in all the research questions and most importantly initiated the questioning of WhatsApp as a metaphor of freedom.

The discourse of control continues to follow through in the ways in which members of the two WhatsApp communities understand participation and consequently those who have a right to participate in the matters pertaining to Kabula and East Asembo Wards, respectively. Considering that for a political subjectivity to be constructed, it has to be emptied of all other (positive) identifications; a hegemonic struggle also ensued as these other identifications in the form of birth right, tribe, clannism, economic status tried to dislocate the ordinary citizen political subjectivity and to disarticulate the logic of belonging and participation initially responsible for formation of the communities. So, on one hand was the freedom to identify with the collective identity and therefore automatically gain the right to participate and on the other the control of who belongs to the communities through fixed identification and consequently who has a right to participate. In the end a metaphoric substitution of "giving" or benevolence with participation transformed participation into an identity construct of "those who can participate" and "those who cannot participate." This finding which responds to questions 2, 3, and 4 and questions how one belongs to the community raised by question 1, is discussed in chapter seven.

Another struggle between freedom and control is in the competition between fluid ways of understanding politics and development and fixed hegemonic meanings of the same, discussed in chapter 8. A look into this aspect was important because it directly impacts on whether the two WhatsApp communities can transform the various antagonisms threatening the stability of the ordinary citizen political subjectivity into agonism. And in turn, achieve their collective demand of "holding leaders accountable and pushing for development in their wards." By focusing on the primacy of politics in the social, the findings once more put into question the "newness" of "new" technology such as WhatsApp. For instance, while WhatsApp afforded plurality of participants to a certain extent, it does not guarantee diversity or even new views. Instead, we see a remediation not just in terms of technology but also in circulation of ideologies whereby discourses of depoliticization in the understanding of politics, development and the players responsible for development, previously perpetuated by traditional media, also make their way to the online communities. In so doing, undermine the discourse of freedom by doing away with conflict in meaning making in favour of consensus. These anti-political discourses are meant to maintain the status quo, where pre-existing hegemonies especially the defined enemy, political leader still wield immense control over ordinary citizens. Hence the continuities of old media are not just in their materiality of representation and manifestation or functionalities but also in the creation and maintenance of power structures. Consequently, though WhatsApp is considered new media in many ways, engaging with the limits of its newness is important if we have to capture moments of sedimentations and remediation of power hierarchies of traditional media. Rare moments of reactivation also occurred however in an attempt to expose the political nature of these discourses and counter hegemonies. However, they were not remarkably successful, meaning the WhatsApp communities could hardly achieve their goals.

9.2 Theoretical and methodological contributions.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) discourse theory (DT) in collaboration with Foucault's (1979,1980, 1982) theorisations of power and Carpentier (2011, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017) on participation provided a comprehensive analytical framework through which I was able to explain most aspects of this study. Noteworthy is DT's contention that the everyday construction of meaning is a joint endeavour and shared experiences of elements in discourse. This is seen in how participants

curated imagined communities through WhatsApp and the new ways of understanding participation and identification. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) peg the successful articulation of collective demands into the construction of a political identity resulting from antagonisms. The political subjectivity (in this case ordinary citizen) therefore becomes hegemonic by stripping the subjects of all other identities (e.g., ethnic, socioeconomic) and defining an enemy, a constitutive outside, which in this case is the political leader. Moreover, those who identify with the collective political identity have a hegemonic discourse of their own which they articulate while aligning it to broader discourses of oppression. All these aspects are true of the WhatsApp communities studied, why then did they fail to achieve their demand? The same can be said of social movements elsewhere such as the Arab spring which succeeded, to a certain extent, to initiate a revolution, but could not achieve their overall goal.

Of course, the simple answer to this would be provided by DT as the inherent antagonisms and contingency of the discursive structures. This means that the logic of equivalence which holds the collective political subjectivity together is always threatened by elements in the logic of difference seeking to disarticulate it. As seen from the findings, even though the WhatsApp communities succeeded in constructing a collective political identity, the previously emptied positive identities continuously came up, weakening the collective identity by highlighting differences and creating antagonisms among elements in the chain of equivalence. Consequently, making it impossible for the ordinary citizens to successfully achieve their goals.

Mouffe (2000) provides a solution to the problematics of antagonism in her proposition of agonistic democracy in which antagonism is not destroyed but embraced, transforming it into agonism, a form of "conflictual consensus." However, I argue that the very discursive contingency stipulated in DT that would enable that transformation is the same that would turn back the newly found agonism into antagonisms, as was the case in the WhatsApp communities studied. Therefore, I contend that there is need to pay more attention to the stripped positive identities. This does not mean that we do away with the constitutive outside, the defined enemy, but that equal

attention if not more, depending on the context should be paid to the stripped positive identities, especially in Kenya where what would otherwise be essential identities like tribe are politicised.

Additionally, they are more problematic when they are politicised by the very enemy the collective subjectivity is meant to overcome as is the case in Kenya. Ethnicity per se is not a problem as it simply demonstrates the peculiar traits of Kenyans. But since historically, ethnicity has been politicized resulting to what Kenyans refer to as tribalism, with tribalism becoming the currency through which political and resultant socio-economic power is harnessed and negotiated. Consequently, for the Kenyan context, acknowledging antagonisms and recognizing the right for individuals to hold and articulate disparate views is not enough as these differences are politicized, making it more difficult for individuals to drop these identities for a collective one as the stake is higher in terms of loss and gain. As such, they pose an even more danger in my estimation, to achieving a collective demand. I therefore argue that there is need to understand how the positive identities would affect the collective unity and find a way to address and incorporate them into the collective demand from the very beginning, instead of totally emptying them. I put it that it is for a lack of a means to address these politicised differences, especially tribalism that has proven it difficult if not impossible for ordinary citizens in Kenya to instigate socio-political change.

Despite the discourses of control and exclusions interfering with the achievement of the goals of the WhatsApp communities, most participants still constructed WhatsApp communities as free spaces where they could participate without fear; an effect akin to that of an open label placebo, where interventions are applied without concealment. This could be attributed to affective discourses and the moments of reactivation, few as they may be, made possible by few non-conforming participants and the fact that WhatsApp allows for asynchronous communication. For instance, when counter-hegemonic discourses are shared, the gatekeepers might not be online at that instance, other members time to consume that message especially since the “delete for everyone” feature is only operational within an hour. If that time is lapsed, the information can no longer be deleted. Unlike in offline spaces where gatekeepers have several opportunities and strategies especially with legacy media to prevent counter-hegemonic messages from reaching the masses. Gatekeepers have been known to turn off microphones, throw people out of places/deny

access, disperse gatherings using uncouth methods and even raid media houses (See Ogola, 2010) just to prevent communication they are uncomfortable with from reaching the masses. As such, despite the various challenges and constraints pertaining to the technology discussed in this thesis, I argue that WhatsApp is potentially pivotal in the consolidation of democracy.

The thesis contributes to studies of technology which take a discursive approach, by adding material of the technology into the methodological analysis. For instance, by incorporating the "techno" into rhetorical tropes and thus coining the neologism "techno-tropes," this work practically brings out a strategy of analysis of the materiality of objects long recognized in discourse theory as is evident in Laclau and Mouffe (1985), but seldom analysed.

It also contributes to research on how seemingly private online spaces such as WhatsApp can be studied ethically without having to resort to controversial data collection methods like lurking. Moreover, it demonstrates how digital media technologies associated with big data can themselves offer creative solutions through which data can be extracted and organized. For instance, through the data mobility affordance, enabled by the "export" feature in WhatsApp, I was able to transfer the data I needed (already organised in meaningful categories) into to an excel sheet for easy analysis.

9.3 Areas for further research.

Given the discursive biases which emerged from the interaction of humans with WhatsApp technology group setting, there is need for studies which look deeper into how the algorithms which make up WhatsApp infrastructure are encrypted, as that is where the biases that create power inequalities begin.

Most studies on how WhatsApp is used in politics focus more on the mobilization aspect of the app. In other words, WhatsApp is treated as secondary, a tool to manage the communication aspect of a primary activist movement, usually offline ones. There is need for more studies on WhatsApp to consider the potential of WhatsApp in and of itself to instigate political change, as it is only

through this that we will be able to fully understand the democratic potential of WhatsApp (or lack thereof) and make recommendations for improvement from an informed point of view.

Song (2009, p.3) avers that "to study virtual communities is to delve into questions about our cultural beliefs about technology." However, most studies on online WhatsApp communities dwell more on functionalities of WhatsApp and motivations for using WhatsApp (Pang & Woo, 2020) provide a systematic summary of this) and less on the cultural aspect. There is therefore a gap in the holistic view of WhatsApp which needs to be explored through research.

Impending changes on WhatsApp privacy policy has caused discomfort among its users, especially for members of WhatsApp communities including the ones I have studied. Some users are opting to move to telegram or signal and advising others to do the same. The policy which demands that WhatsApp users allow information from the App to be shared with the mother company, Facebook, is however, not new. It was initiated in 2016, the only difference is that then users voluntarily agreed to this but there was an option to opt out. However, this time round users must agree to this policy failure to which they will lose access to the app after May 15, 2021 (Hamilton, 2021). Whether Facebook, WhatsApp owners go on to implement this privacy policy or not, seeds of mistrust of the app have already been planted. This could provide a rich area for exploration for how these changes will affect WhatsApp group dynamics, especially political ones which are constituted on WhatsApp due to its privacy affordance. What would this change, for instance, mean for WhatsApp infrastructure considering features such as end to end encryption?

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Ben. Observation. East Asembo Development Forum, 20/08/2018.
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Chief. Interview, East Asembo Development Forum, 10/12/2018.
Danny. Observation, Kabula Forward, 12/10/2018.
Don. Observation. East Asembo Development Forum, 29/08/2018.
Elkana. Observation, Kabula Forward, 30/11/2018.
Frank. Observations, East Asembo Development Forum, 28/10/2017.
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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE STUDY TITLED: EXPLORING POWER STRUGGLES IN ONLINE SPACES: A STUDY OF SELECTED POLITICAL WHATSAPP COMMUNITIES IN KENYA.

Good day,

My name is Gloria Ooko, a PhD student in Media Studies at University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

My PhD research is entitled: Exploring power struggles in online spaces: a study of selected Political WhatsApp communities in Kenya. This study therefore aims to explore power struggle discourses surrounding membership in WhatsApp communities and how the socio-technological affordances of the platform enable and/or constrain the said struggles in 3 political WhatsApp communities in Kenya.

I am inviting you to be a participant in this research study. Your selection to participate in this research is based on the fact that you are a member of (Kabula Forward/East Asembo Development Forum) WhatsApp group in Kenya which I am working with in this study.

As a participant in this research study, I would request an interview session with you which would be conducted either online or offline at a place of your convenience. With your permission, I ask that this interview be recorded through the use of an audio-recorder. This will allow for accurate results and analysis to be done. This interview session will be approximately one hour in length. However, you can opt out of the recording at any point (whether from the beginning of the interview or midway) for whatever reason.

However, your participation in this research is voluntary and you can pull out from participating at any point. I guarantee that I will maintain your anonymity and confidentiality by ensuring that you cannot be identified by the data I collect. I will also use codes and not your real names or give any of your personal details throughout this research study as well as in the final research dissertation. The information you give me will be used purely for this academic research and I will not divulge any part of it without your permission, to others for a different purpose inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. As a participant, you may refuse to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with and may feel free to withdraw from this study at any time. By being a participant in this research you will not receive payment of any form and the information you disclose will be used only in the research report.

This research will be written into a Doctorate Degree Dissertation that will be available online through the University's website. Should you require a summary of the research, I can make this available to you.

In the event that you seek further clarifications, please, feel free to contact me, my supervisor, Dr. Dina Ligaga or the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics office through the contact details below:

Researcher

Ms. Gloria Ooko
gloria.ooko@students.wits.ac.za
Tel: +27730871836.

Supervisor

Dr Dina Ligaga
dina.ligaga@wits.ac.za
+27826346543

WITS ETHICS OFFICE

1 Jan Smuts Avenue
Braamfontein 2000
Johannesburg, South Africa
10th Floor, Solomon Mahlangu (formerly Senate House), East Campus. See documents below. Please Contact person: Shaun Schoeman,
Shaun.Schoeman@*wits*.ac.za or 0117171408 for queries.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION CHECK LIST.

Online Participant Observation checklist

What kinds of power struggle discourses are circulated on Kabula Forward and East Asembo Development Forum?

- Mention of individuals as “not wanted/needed/should” not be in the community
- Mention of individuals as liked/ welcomed/ belonging/needed in the community.
- Instances where political leaders are addressed directly (check mention of MCA, MP, Chief, Manager, County, government)
- Modes of participation
- Structured vs non structured engagement e.g Rules for interaction? Who enforces them and How…
- Political cartoons/jokes/satire…how do participants respond to them
- Online meetings, what agendas are discussed?
- Intense debates/increased activity
- Any mention of government policies and laws
- Conflicts (sources and how they are dealt with)
- Any other discourses

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

FOR ADMINSTRATORS

1. What were your motivations for initiating the formation of this online community?

- Probe for whether it was an individual initiative or other members participated
- Probe for original reasons for formation
- Probe for changes if any in the motivations for existence of the community

2. Are there any rules or guidelines put in place to determine who joins the community?

3. Are there rules or procedures in place to guide interaction in the community?

5. How were the rules arrived at?

6. Who implements the rules; are they implemented collectively or by an individual?

7. Are there any penalties for breaking the rules?

8. Has there been any incident where a member(s) complained of being stopped from airing their views?

9. How do you address such incidences?

10. Has the community ever experienced interference from the government(authority) or from any other source? How?

11. Comment on your role as an administrator of this WhatsApp community.

12. How has WhatsApp technology aided/challenged you in executing this role?

FOR THE REST OF PARTICIPANTS.

1. How did you join the community?

2. Do you hail from Gem/Kabula?

3. comment on the composition of the WhatsApp community (how do you feel about it?)

4. Do you feel you belong to the WhatsApp community?

5. Have you ever felt (un)welcomed/ (un)wanted in the community? How did you deal with it?

6. Are there rules of engagement in the community?

7. How were the rules arrived at (probe for whether the process was participatory or not?

8. How are the rules of engagement implemented? Are you happy with it?

9. What motivates the extent to which you participate in the community? (Any hindrance to your participation?)

10. Have you experienced any conflict in the community? How do you deal with it?

11. Have you experienced any interference to your participation or feeling of safety in the community?

12. In what ways does WhatsApp challenge/help the way you interact in the community?

13.Do you think the community is successful in achieving its goals?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group.

Introduction: This focus group is meant to understand how we perceive our belonging and participation in the WhatsApp community and interaction with the WhatsApp technology. The focus group discussion will take no more than two hours.

Anonymity: As stipulated in the participant consent form which we have all signed and agreed to, this discussion will be recorded. However, I the researcher assure you of anonymity. If at any given time you feel uncomfortable with the discussion or do not want to be recorded, please feel free to indicate so.

Ground rules

- Only one person speaks at a time
- Respect each person's opinion even if you do not agree, you can express your disagreement when your turn comes
- Express yourself freely
- You can ask questions or seek clarifications

Guiding questions

- What is the goal of the WhatsApp community?
- Does anyone want to share their experience of the WhatsApp community (EADF/KF)?
- What are your thoughts on these experiences (whether negative or positive)?
- Who do you think should be part of the community and Why?
- What are your thoughts on the composition of the community, that is ordinary community members being in the same platform with political leaders and vice versa?
- How does participation (interaction, daily running of the community) occur in the WhatsApp community? (Also list activities you engage in).

-does everybody participate equally in the community?

- In your opinion, do you think the WhatsApp community is an open/safe/free/comfortable space in relation to the goal of community?

- How do you compare the offline experience and the online experience with regard to the community's goal? Do they interact or you experience them separately?
- Do you think the WhatsApp technology has an influence on how you feel about the community? How?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages if any of the WhatsApp community which influence how you interact and negotiate the WhatsApp community? (look for suggestions for improvement)
- What are your thoughts on the success/failure of the WhatsApp community in achieving its goal?)

Concluding question

- Of all the things we've discussed today, what would you say are the most important issues you would like to express/elaborate on?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating. This has been a very successful discussion.

APPENDIX E: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Ooko

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H17/10/19**
PROJECT TITLE	Exploring power struggles in virtual communities: case study of political WhatsApp communities in Kenya
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss G Ooko
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	School of Literature, Language and Media/
DATE CONSIDERED	20 October 2017
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	19 February 2021

DATE 20 February 2018 **CHAIRPERSON** J. Knight

(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr D Ligaga

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

GOKO
Signature

25/02/2018
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

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2%	2%		%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	www.tandfonline.com Internet Source	< %
2	mafiadoc.com Internet Source	< %
3	Tuikka Anne-Marie, Nguyen Chau, K. Kimppa Kai. "Ethical questions related to using netnography as research method", The ORBIT journal, 2017 Publication	< %
4	docplayer.net Internet Source	< %
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