



Connective Action Through Digital Technologies: African Youth (Re)Making Twenty-First-Century Citizenship

Emmanuel Ampomah and Adam Cooper

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Abstract

This chapter traces how young Africans have enacted fluid and morphing forms of citizenship over three linked but distinct periods in the post-colonial era. Across the three periods and in response to deleterious economic and sociopolitical conditions, young Africans have constantly redefined their roles vis-à-vis the state while reimagining political and economic possibilities amidst a prolonged period of dissatisfaction. The chapter focuses on the third stage of post-colonial citizenship and responds to the question; how is youth citizenship being redefined in Africa in the era of social media? It draws on a critical analysis of the *Age of Agitation* series (found on the African Arguments blogsite platform) as well as the #fixthecountry protests in Ghana. The *Age of Agitation* articles clearly illustrates that, across the continent, a self-identified younger generation is constantly and consciously challenging African rulers, with age-based discourses integral to their politics. Their activism needs to be interpreted historically, forged in relation both to anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial rulers, producing potent contestations over permissible forms of citizenship. To this end, the #fixthecountry movement, though limited to Ghana, reflects a continent-wide effort by young Africans to challenge the boundaries of citizenship using social media platforms that create new ways of connecting, communicating, and placing demands on the

E. Ampomah · A. Cooper (✉)
Human Sciences Research Council, Cape Town, South Africa
e-mail: EAmpomah@hsrc.ac.za; ACooper@hsrc.ac.za

state. These collective and connective actions have undoubtedly ushered in a new era of youth citizenship and claim-making on the continent, with great potential for democratic change.

Keywords

Connective action · Citizenship · Youth · #fixthecountry · Africa · Movements

Introduction

As a social process, citizenship is not fixed, but is constantly ‘enacted, contested, revised, and transformed’ in relation to changing social, economic and political conditions (Ndegwa, 1998; Ulrich, 2016). In this chapter, we trace how young Africans have enacted fluid, morphing forms of citizenship over three linked but distinct periods in the post-colonial era, bearing in mind that making assertions for an entire continent will always produce some crude generalisations. Across the three periods, and in response to deleterious economic and sociopolitical conditions, young Africans have constantly redefined their roles vis-à-vis the state and society more broadly, reimagining political and economic possibilities amidst a prolonged period of dissatisfaction. Young people’s role has therefore changed as the post-colonial African state has evolved. Initially content to play the role of follower rather than leader in emerging nation-states, a combination of problems produced by local and global forces have left young Africans both in opposition to the state and searching beyond its boundaries to remake themselves and the places they come from.

The first phase of post-colonial citizenship, roughly corresponding to the 1960s and 1970s was immersed in the initial joys of independence. Excitement was short-lived, as Africa’s first-generation independent leaders generally dealt with economic challenges and ethnic and class tensions through repressing freedoms of speech, expression, association and assembly. Dire economic conditions on the continent between 1970 and 1990 exacerbated strained youth–state relations in Africa, during the second distinct period, as Structural Adjustment Policies initiated by multilateral institutions became widespread. Debt repayment eroded social institutions, as clientelism and repression emerged as key tools of regime preservation (Babb, 2005; Cooper, 2002). Rights-based citizenship claims were therefore relegated to the periphery, as conflicts and economic survival moved centre-stage.

Using this historical backdrop as contextualisation, our chapter focuses on the third stage of post-colonial citizenship, as African youth began to challenge ethno-nationalist regimes through fresh solidarities and new forms of technology. Disillusioned with corruption and authoritarianism, African youth began to challenge ‘tradition’, recreating youth-state relations, roughly from the 1990s to the present (Diouf, 1996; Mbembe, 1985). With extant scholarship devoting significant attention to mass protests and student movements in Africa, we explore the changing meanings and contestations of youth citizenship on the continent, in this third

post-colonial period, responding to the question: how is youth citizenship being redefined in Africa in the era of social media?

Despite a relegation of their needs and aspirations to the periphery, social media has empowered young Africans to reassert their place through a particular brand of citizenship. It has enabled social and political movements to emphasize the need for equal and complete participation in political processes, with the ultimate goal of shaping, claiming and expanding rights and obligations (Adejumobi, 2001; Lieres, 1999; Onyx et al., 2012). Social media has therefore added a layer of complexity to youth claim-making, departing from traditional collective action strategies to connective action approaches. Whereas collective action is based on framing through strong collective identities, group membership and institutional loyalty, the concept of connective action illustrates how social media has made communication and associated forms of action far more personalised and less institutionalised (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Connective action is less hierarchical and significantly co-produced and co-distributed, with participants contributing to the common good through acts of personal expression rather than group solidarity. Connective action uses personally expressive content that is easily shared and recognisable, making participation self-motivating (Benkler, 2006). The result is that the face of the individual citizen is presented as the vanguard of the group, agitating for change or recognition, with a large amount of personal engagement and sharing of content, images and action frames.

We explore new forms of young African connective action and citizenship in more depth through the *Age of Agitation* series on the African Arguments' platform and by looking at one illustrative social movement case study, the #fixthecountry protests, in Ghana. The *Age of Agitation* series amplifies youth citizenship using interviews, articles and podcasts to explore youth activism "in relation to oligarchic multi-party systems" (Honwana et al., 2021), exploring new forms of democratic mobilisation. Analysis of the platform illuminates that age-based discourses are integral to the politics of young Africans. The centrality of the nation-state is not receding in intergenerational politics, even if young people are engaging in forms of citizenship that transcend it. Digital technologies and social media are vital for these movements, tools that enable mass demonstrations that are faster and more efficient than traditional forms of political mobilisation. The #fixthecountry movement in Ghana provides an example of connective action, with a series of young people's grievances shared on social media, generating a simple message contained in three words. The movement, though limited to Ghana, reflects a continent-wide effort by young Africans to challenge the boundaries of citizenship using social media platforms that create new ways of connecting, communicating, and placing demands on the state.

We begin by exploring how young Africans have shaped and transformed the meanings of citizenship over time, followed by a discussion of the age of agitation series, after which we analyse Ghana's #fixthecountry protests.

Post-Colonial African Youth Citizenship: A Three-Part History

Today's understanding of citizenship in Africa has been largely influenced and shaped by the continent's historical experiences of colonialism, Africa's interactions with the international community and the politics of the post-colonial era (Hunter, 2016). The citizenship question has been characterized by several tensions and contestations revolving around issues of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the privileges that ought to characterize citizenship. Although colonial citizenship was mostly the prerogative of white-urban dwellers with the majority black population (across the continent) treated as subjects, the period following the second world war transformed state-citizen relations in Africa. During this period most of the colonies experienced a dramatic increase in citizenship-induced claims, predominantly made by a new generation of educated young Africans. Central to these claims was the quest for a political voice in the administration of the colonies. These demands also had a material element to them, revolving around wages and access to basic services such as education and health, fair prices for farmers, and universal suffrage (Cooper, 2012). These agitations provided an impetus for anti-colonial movements, setting the stage for young Africans to make claims in the post-colonial era.

Three phases of youth-state relations can broadly be identified in post-colonial Africa. The first phase, during the 1960s and 1970s, was characterized by the erosion of political citizenship, undergirded by the desire of first-generation African leaders to consolidate their rule amidst growing ethnic and class tensions. Perhaps, the most poignant attacks on citizenship in this period were the stifling of people's freedoms of speech, expression, association and assembly. These efforts constituted a reproduction of the strategies leveraged by colonial regimes in suppressing the rights of natives, in their bid to distinguish subjects from citizens during the anti-colonial struggles. In Ghana and Kenya for instance, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta viciously stifled political opposition through laws that allowed them to detain dissidents without trial. These and many other policies aimed at muzzling political opposition resulted in passive citizenship in some instances, giving room for military interventions.

Efforts at challenging state authority from young Africans, particularly students, varied across the continent during this period. Many protests involved young citizens protesting autocratic and military regimes. In Egypt, for instance, over 100,000 students protested against Gamal Abdel Nasser's military regime in the 1960s (Zayed et al., 2016). Mobutu Sese Seko's authoritarian rule (1965-1990) in the Congo was equally challenged by educated young Congolese (Becker & Seddon, 2018). Similarly, despite Kwame Nkrumah's attempts at co-opting youth organizations in Ghana after the country's independence in 1957, he was confronted with resistance from the National Union of Ghana Students (Van Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019). At the horn of Africa, student protests in Ethiopia contributed to the country's 1974 Revolution. Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts at making concessions to appease Ethiopian students in 1969 did not curb the periodic demonstrations, sit-ins and non-violent protests staged by disgruntled young citizens (Lemma, 1979). Senegal too had its fair share of youth-led demonstrations, with the 1968 student protests

compelling President Leopold Senghor to flee the capital briefly. In Cote d'Ivoire, student groups with the support of key political figures attempted to overthrow Felix Houphouët-Boigny's government between 1962 and 1964 (Van Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019). Thus, despite the spate of dictatorial tendencies in the years following independence, a generation of educated young Africans challenged the forms of governance they considered inimical to their citizenship. These young Africans contested the hegemony of one-party state systems on the continent, with the hope of promoting a pluralist and democratic society, where citizens shaped politics and governance (Boahen, 1994).

Despite these struggles, significant strides were taken toward social citizenship across the continent. This was evident in the improvement in school systems in the 1960s and 1970s, a decline in infant mortality and a general improvement in social welfare of citizens (Babb, 2005; Ndegwa, 1998). This approach to state-building rendered citizens beneficiaries of socio-economic policies, while simultaneously preventing significant political threats to newly established nation-states. Unfortunately, African governments at this point assumed a role similar to their colonial predecessors, as gatekeeper states that wielded power based on their position to open and close the gate to external and internal groups, rather than mature institutions with deep legitimacy (Cooper, 2002).

The second phase, 1970 to 1990, transformed youth–state relations in Africa. The change was influenced by the dire economic conditions on the continent at the time, emanating from the global oil shock, a reduction in demand for tropical products and the emphasis of international financial institutions on debt repayment (Cooper, 2012). The emphasis on debt repayment particularly eroded the institutions of social citizenship that were dominant in the 1960s (Babb, 2005). The economic conditions of the 1970s exacerbated existing political instability and tensions, relegating citizenship-based claims to the periphery, giving room for clientelism and repression as tools of regime preservation. This increasingly radicalized African youth. Consequently, some young military officers made it their responsibility to topple corrupt regimes, with the aim of resolving the myriad economic and political challenges confronting African states. This was the case with Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and Jerry John Rawlings of Ghana, who became military leaders at the age of 33 and 32, respectively. Between 1960 and 1980, 55% of independent states in sub-Saharan Africa had experienced 52 successful military coup d'états (Mcgowan & Johnson, 1986; Barka & Ncube, 2012).

The radicalization of Africa's youth following years of repression, marginalization, and outright exclusion resulted in widespread conflict. Exhausted by unaddressed deprivation, young people resorted to violence as a means of claiming citizenship rights (Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021: 336–337). As Peters and Richards (1998:187) note, 'militia activity offers young people a chance to make their way in the world'. Young people's grievances leading to frustration and violence continue to remain a popular explanation for the outbreak of conflicts and civil unrest in Africa (Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021).

Of particular significance to youth–state relations in the 1980s was Africa's engagements with multilateral institutions, particularly the World Bank and

International Monetary Fund. The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) proposed by these institutions aggravated existing challenges, leaving African states increasingly reliant on outside institutions and prey to external ideological orientations rather than commitment to local interests. SAPs further set the parameters within which states could expend development resources, culminating in the abrasion of government subsidies, retrenchment of public sector workers, as well as a reduction in wages, among other austerity measures (Auvinen, 1996). During the period, university campuses were scenes of periodic protests as well as sites for the nurturing of activists. Students were particularly interested in protesting austerity measures that adversely impacted their material well-being (Bratton & van de Walle, 1992). Disillusioned with bad governance and dictatorship, youth in Africa began to refute nationalist, ruling class regimes through fresh solidarities and forms of citizenship that challenged 'tradition', creating the third phase of youth–state relations in Africa, which began roughly in the 1990s and has continued to the present (Diouf, 1996; Mbembe, 1985).

The liberalization of Africa's political space, following SAP, has been instrumental in engineering active citizenship among Africa's bulging young population, opening the way for a third period of youth–state relations. With the inability of the African state to deliver on its promises, active forms of citizenship that encourage the participation of the populace in the shaping of rights and obligations have become the norm rather than the exception. Emergent youth movements, normally non-partisan and organically organized, have gradually become a significant factor in political life. These young citizens have often sought to re-demarcate and redefine the boundaries of citizenship in Africa. Through these, young Africans have asserted their rights and re-emphasized the states' primary role of safeguarding entitlements. As such, the role of young people in recreating democratic forms of African citizenship has emerged through their engagements in political, economic, and social processes.

A quintessential example of this transformation is evident in the Arab spring. Starting in Tunisia in December 2010, the Arab Spring culminated in regime changes in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia. Although these protests were not entirely youth-led, young people formed the vanguard of protest. Similarly, youth-led protests against Algeria's strongman, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, have equally resulted in modest political transformation in Algiers. Young people were also at the forefront of the toppling of Omar al-Bashir's 30 years rule in Sudan. Interestingly, unlike most protest movements that are short-lived, young citizens in Khartoum continue to stage protests in their bid to create a democratic and just Sudan, 4 years after al-Bashir was deposed. Regime changes resulting from these and other youth-centred political actions would have been inconceivable in the first three decades of independence without military intervention.

These trends of protest signify a shift in youth–state relations on the continent. Young Africans are gradually taking on active roles in promoting accountability and responsible governance. This has been underpinned by the upsurge in politically oriented social media usage. Accordingly, youth–state relations are being shaped, challenged and transformed by the needs of young Africans, rendering a bottom-up

approach to governance imperative for the sustenance of regimes on the continent. Unlike the first and second phases of youth–state relations, which were mostly predicated on students, social media has afforded young people with access to smartphones and internet connection the opportunity to express and claim their rights and privileges as citizens.

Although these relations may not necessarily result in systemic political and economic transformation, they ultimately enhance public participation in politics, reconstructing the limits on individual rights and freedoms as they ‘challenge the state’s monopoly on political discourse’ (Honwana, 2019). Young Africans’ unwavering refusal to simply accept existing political cultures and establishments evinces the leveraging of citizenship as a tool for redesigning the limitations and boundaries of political imaginations (Honwana, 2019). We explore these new forms of citizenship in more depth through a series of examples from the age of agitation series on the African Arguments’ platform, before looking in-depth at one such movement, the #fixthecountry protests, in Ghana.

The Age of Agitation Series on the African Arguments Platform

Age of Agitation is a series of articles found on the African Arguments blog site (<https://africanarguments.org/category/debating-ideas/age-of-agitation-series/>). *Age of Agitation* uses interviews, articles and podcasts to ‘explore the rich varieties of experiences young activists face in relation to oligarchic multi-party systems...to examine the multiple ways these movements are proposing new and more democratic forms of mobilization, participation, leadership, and decision-making’ (Honwana et al., 2021). The series is edited by Alcinda Honwana, author of the *Time of Youth* and arguably the pre-eminent theorist of African youth studies. As of October 2022, there were 17 articles in the series. *Age of Agitation* frames the questions it seeks to grapple with as:

What is distinctive about this historical moment and how can we understand the diverse trajectories and actions of young people and social movements in Africa? What underlying politics drive young people’s responses to the status quo and how are they mobilizing and thinking about political change? To what extent does examining these processes through the analytical lens of the younger generation allow us to better understand the political dynamics of contemporary social movements in Africa? Finally, what are the possibilities and limitations of these social movements, and will their actions lead to systemic change? And if so, under what conditions? (Honwana et al., 2021)

The *Age of Agitation* articles clearly illustrate that, across the continent, a self-identified younger generation is constantly and consciously challenging African rulers, with age-based discourses integral to their politics. Mass demonstrations have increased seven-fold in the last decade (Honwana et al., 2021). Their activism needs to be interpreted historically, forged in relation both to anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial rulers, producing potent intergenerational contestations over government, types of nation-states and permissible forms of citizenship.

Continent-wide, movements distinctly flavoured by youth are contesting gerontocratic regimes with social media catalysing these movements and reorienting them towards social-justice-related issues rather than party politics.

Examples of intergenerational African conflicts highlighted through the *Age of Agitation* series include Ugandan opposition leader and pop singer Bobi Wine, who claims to advance a ‘generational cause’, saying that he represents the ‘Facebook generation against the facelift generation of the Museveni elite’ (Melchiorre, 2021a). The arrest of Wine in 2021, as he challenged 76-year-old Yoweri Museveni who has been in power since 1986, led to at least 54 people killed by police. Uganda is the second youngest country in Africa and one of the youngest populations in the world. In another example of age-based political contestations highlighted on the platform occurring in Senegal in 2011, Abdoulaye Wade’s attempt to amend the constitution to enable his son to succeed him led to youth demonstrations and movements like Y’en a Marre! (Enough!) and Touche Pas à Ma Constitution! (Don’t Touch My Constitution!) (Drame, 2021). Kenyan youth have challenged the attempted gerontocratic political class pact of the Building Bridges Initiative, which was initially proposed in 2019 and sought to distribute power amongst ethnic groups and political parties, a move that would have further alienated a younger generation (Kimari et al., 2021). Senegalese youth point out how younger politicians with ambitions are discredited on social media. In Southern Africa, Zimbabwean youth bemoan another elderly and undemocratic leader in their ‘second republic’ (Hodgkinson, 2021). Through the rise of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Fees Must Fall movement, South African youth have challenged the ruling African National Congress (ANC) benefitting itself financially and politically in the aftermath of apartheid, without producing a better life for the next generation of South Africans (Braun, 2021; Mpfu-Walsh, 2021). The articles in the series clearly show that it is not an exaggeration to say that African politics is characterized by age-based generational conflicts and tensions.

The second observation from the *Age of Agitation* series is that the relevance of the nation-state is not receding in intergenerational politics, even if young people are engaging in forms of citizenship that transcend it. Young people’s political activities are certainly located at the local level, including their involvement in establishing Bunge la Mwananchi or the People’s Parliament, which started in a park in Jeevanjee Gardens in Nairobi in 1990 (Melchiorre, 2021b). Bunge was a multi-ethnic, cross-class open forum for outdoor debates. It created a platform for young, grassroots political activists to emerge and become leaders in Kenyan social justice movements. The leader of one of Tanzania’s main opposition parties, Zitto Kabwe (45 years old; extremely young in African political terms!), says that his party focused on local government and municipalities because of the difficulties of contesting power at national government level (Melchiorre, 2021c). Another example of local political action, also in Nairobi, is the Muthare Social Justice Centre, which has been documenting cases of extrajudicial killing or the cleansing of young people from Muthare slum, with 157 young people going missing in 2020 alone (Melchiorre, 2021b). This example of state-sanctioned violence producing missing persons shows parallels with missing youth in Latin American military dictatorships. The activities

of the Muthare Social Justice Centre illustrate how young Africans' citizenship practices are simultaneously local and transnational.

Kenyan, Zimbabwean and Nigerian youth have equally drawn parallels with international movements like Black Lives Matter in the USA, contesting police brutality and challenging the role of state-led institutions like the police (Hodgkinson, 2021). Young Nigerians have protested the notorious Special Anti-Armed Robbery Squad that has killed many young people through excessive state violence. There are clear overlaps between the way state-sanctioned police brutality plays out across continents, however, the *Age of Agitation* articles are also quick to point out how class intersects with space and race in Africa, with law enforcement dealing differently with youth in slum areas compared with their middle-class counterparts. African youth also engage with transnational pan-African movements like Afrikki Mwindi, a network that unites social movements of youth on the continent and in the diaspora (Honwana, 2021). Rhodes Must Fall (2015) has reinvigorated the decolonisation debate, which has been taken up by youth in the UK, Europe and North America. Social media platforms have facilitated these new ways young Africans engage with pertinent sociopolitical and citizenship issues on the continent.

International movements, issues, and forms of engagement are certainly cross-pollinating activities, but the relevance of the nation-state has not waned, and it is primarily in relation to this institution that young Africans are challenging 'unfreedoms' in their lives, as the *Age of Agitation* articles clearly shows. It is their own governments and the nation-state that these youth are confronting, rather than, for example multi-national 'globalisation' that youth, predominantly from the global north, have repeatedly challenged at G20 meetings and the World Economic Forum, through the Occupy Movement, or the young climate-change, environmental protesters that arrive at similar meetings.

The third observation involves the role of digital technologies and social media. These tools have certainly enabled mass demonstrations and change in a way that is faster and more efficient than door-to-door organizing can achieve. But digitally inspired forms of connective action that rely on an emotive framing of issues struggle to highlight complexity. This is evident in, for example the Senegalese 'Young Beauty' case, where a young, opposition politician was accused of rape (Drame, 2021). The debate on social media centred around whether the president and his allies were using the issue to discredit a young opposition politician, or if Ousmane Sonko was indeed guilty of rape. Clearly, both of these things can be true at the same time, but the nature of *hashtag* politics does not easily allow for this kind of complexity. There is no doubt that the politics of previous generations was swept up in emotive rhetoric that was not primarily based on democratic deliberation. However, it needs to be acknowledged that social media is not by its nature necessarily inclusive and democratic. Hashtag politics are usually won by those that have the loudest voices, most followers, influence and control over the technology, as research on political systems elsewhere, like the Cambridge Analytica and Russian-influenced scandal of the 2016 American election showed. These examples question how technology and social media can be tempered with forms of

governance that limit hate speech and provocations for violence, channelling them towards robust but peaceful democratic processes that promote understandings of complexity. In the next section, we delve into the #fixthecountry protests to explore how young Ghanaians are reasserting their place in the country's body politic.

#FixTheCountry and the Changing Dynamics of Youth Citizenship in Ghana

The use of social media in advancing young people's interests is gradually gaining traction in Africa. Following the Arab Spring, several youth-led protests have leveraged technology on multiple fronts, in their bid to make claims on the state. One such protest is Ghana's #fixthecountry – online and offline – protests. In May 2021, some Ghanaian youth promulgated the Twitter hashtag #fixthecountry, in efforts to convey the need for social and economic reforms in the West African country. Within hours, thousands of young Ghanaians had joined the online movement. The protest was initiated as a response to rising unemployment – especially among graduates – the rising cost of living, dilapidating state infrastructure, and the government's proposal to impose taxes on electronic financial transactions, popularly known as e-levy (a bill that was passed a year after the protest). The rage and discontentment among young people were also underpinned by the protester's interest in challenging the moral decadence among the political class, evident in the pervasiveness of corruption in the country's body politic (Aljazeera, 2021a, 2021b). Most of these demands are reflective of the inability of successive governments to uphold basic social and economic rights that undergird citizenship. For the most part, the political project in Ghana has prioritized the safeguarding of political and civil liberties of citizens at the expense of the socio-economic well-being of the masses, especially the youth. It is this deficiency in state–society relations that often births collective and connective action among young Ghanaians. The #fixthecountry movement thus mirrors the collective expression of individualistic grievances and aspirations of young Ghanaians.

The movement draws inspiration from Jonathan Michael Teye Dosoo's song, '*Arise Ghana youth for your country*', a song that charges Ghanaian youths to be active and responsible citizens. Responding to this clarion call, the protesters have rallied around the #fixthecountry theme to reassert their responsibilities as citizens while making citizenship-centred claims and demands.

Whereas previous youth-led protests were targeted at incumbent regimes, the #fixthecountry protest appears to be geared towards advocating for a systemic transformation of the country. Perhaps, this reflects the movement's attempts to learn from previous youth-led initiatives that were often limited in scope and demands – and as a result, ended up being short-lived. Unlike other politically motivated youth-led protests in Ghana, #fixthecountry appears to be independent of party politics, making their claims of misgovernance and corruption more relatable to the larger youth population. The protesters' focus on pertinent issues of national interest, instead of identity politics, strengthened their claims while

affirming the potency of connective action in affording young people the opportunity to engage with each other, without being hampered by the demands of formally organized structures.

The campaign has been sustained through the use of social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook. #Fixthecountry's use of social media for protests is a significant deviation from traditional approaches leveraged by political parties and other interest groups in Ghana. The use of social media as an instrument of protests has up to this point been minimal in Ghana, making #fixthecountry a new phenomenon. Social media serves two key purposes for the protesters. First, it provides a platform for the spontaneous and organic expression of grievances. With over 8.8 million Ghanaians having access to social media platforms (Sasu, 2022), these outlets present innovative avenues for claim-making and discourse framing among young Ghanaians. Second, it provides a basis for young people to organize offline actions, including demonstrations. While online protests provide a viable ground for Ghana's youth to contest and debate governmental policies, they are limited in their ability to engender systemic change. Online protest serves as a basis for mobilizing and coordinating occupations and street protests and are therefore leveraged as a means to an end, and not as an end in themselves.

The surge in connective action is partly due to the heavy-handed and often forcible approaches leveraged by state security agencies during youth protests, making social media an attractive alternative. Youth-led protests, though peaceful in most instances, have normally been met with police and military brutality across the continent. Anti-coup protests in Sudan in 2021 for instance, resulted in 40 casualties (Aljazeera, 2021a, 2021b). Similarly, Ethiopia recorded about 239 protester deaths following the killing of Haacaaluu Hundeessa, an Oromo singer (Aljazeera, 2020). These and many other instances across the continent make the use of social media a less risky avenue for protesters. Although police brutality is a rare phenomenon in Ghana, there have been instances where legal technicalities have been leveraged to prevent demonstrations. In this regard, the initial request by the convenors of the #fixthecountry movement to embark on street protests was denied by the Ghana Police Service on grounds of covid-19 restrictions. It is however impossible for such tactics to be applied to online protests, although some African governments have limited access to the internet and banned social media platforms in the quest to silence online protests. A quintessential example of this is the shutdown of social media platforms in South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Senegal during periods of social unrest and mass protests.

The use of online petitions and social media filters and frames has proven efficacious in #fixthecountry's bid to reach a wider audience. Mobilization of supporters for the online and physical protests quickly transcended Ghana's frontiers, inviting similar protests from Ghanaians in the diaspora, particularly in Spain, the USA and Germany (Adu-Bempah Brobbery et al., 2021). The internationalization of protest is however not new in Africa: after the abduction of the Chibok school girls in April 2014 by Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria, for example the Twitter hashtag #BringBackOurGirls gained significant traction globally (Sebeelo, 2021). Although some of the girls continue to remain captives, the hashtag activism was an

instrumental element in holding the Nigerian government accountable for the security of the young girls, while bringing international attention to Nigeria's complicated security challenges.

The greatest achievement of #fixthecountry so far has been the movement's ability to spotlight the economic challenges Ghana is confronted with. In response to this, a counter-protest, #fixyourself, was unsuccessfully promulgated by some politicians in attempts to discredit the concerns of the #fixthecountry campaigners. The use of counter hashtags during 'connective actions' is not uncommon. During the 2016 #ThisFlag protests in Zimbabwe, the minister of education, Professor Jonathan Moyo started a counter-campaign on Twitter in his efforts to discredit the online protest (Sebeelo, 2021). These counter-protests go a long way to emphasize the potential of connective action in ensuring accountability and affording young people the opportunity to challenge systems and governmental practices they deem unacceptable.

The #fixthecountry protest has therefore placed young Ghanaians at the centre of political attention and reemphasized their role in nation-building. Although Ghanaian youth, particularly university students, have vigorously participated in and influenced national politics in times past, their level of participation in politics has waned over time (Asiedu-Acquah, 2019). This is largely due to their co-optation by political parties who leverage their enthusiasm for electoral purposes. In view of this, the role of the Ghanaian youth in national politics has been reduced to participating in electoral processes, either as voters, political party representatives or vigilantes (Van Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019). This phenomenon relegates youth participation in national development and decision-making to the periphery. As such, the movement has highlighted the potency of the Ghanaian youth in challenging socio-economic and political injustices. Despite the potential of #fixthecountry and other youth-led movements to initiate political and economic reforms, these protests are normally dominated by urban and educated youth, who by virtue of their access to technology are able to communicate their grievances.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have contextualized youth citizenship and political engagements in post-colonial Africa, identifying three distinct phases. These phases are connected and can be viewed as representing a continuum and not necessarily a neatly defined trifurcated relationship between the African state and its young constituents.

Across the three phases, Africa's young population has been instrumental in contributing towards liberatory change to the continent, in spite of their marginalization by existing political systems. Since independence, young people have contested authoritarian and quasi-democratic regimes, showing continuity with the colonial era. Across the continent, various strategies and approaches have been leveraged by the youth in their attempts to compel political leaders to respond to their socio-economic and political needs and demands. Regardless of the process, the outcome of young people's political activities differs from country to country. The

degree of impact is however dependent on several contextual factors. To this end, although youth-led campaigns in Burkina Faso, Tunisia and Libya for instance resulted in regime changes, the #fixthecountry protest has barely amounted to any significant structural changes in Ghana's economy. This notwithstanding, it has become increasingly clear, since the Arab spring, that Africa's youth can no longer be taken for granted nor can their demands be ignored without repercussions.

Our analysis of the *Age of Agitation* series further reveals that young Africans are politically engaged at both the national and sub-national levels. This demographic group has challenged the political class, contesting state institutions that continue to undermine their rights and well-being. This has been conspicuous in collective actions in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. The vibrancy of youth citizenship as witnessed in recent times has been undergirded by the ability of Africa's youth to leverage digital technologies and social media to their advantage. This has evidently been the case with the #fixthecountry protests in Ghana. The movement is a quintessential reflection of how young Africans are reasserting their place in politics and further highlights how social media is empowering the continent's youth in their quest to be active citizens. #fixthecountry speaks to a continent-wide effort by young Africans to demand inclusion and consideration in decision-making processes, in their bid to migrate from the fringes of the political architecture to the centre. These collective and connective actions have spatial and temporal boundaries, in many instances, limiting their potential for systemic transformation, but they have undoubtedly ushered in a new era in youth citizenship and claim-making on the continent, with great potential for democratic change.

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