



Inspiring the Citizen to be Bold:
Framing Theory and the Rise and Decline of the
#ThisFlag-Movement in Zimbabwe



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Abstract

This thesis aims to research the #ThisFlag-movement, in the context of the repressive state of Zimbabwe. The movement was founded overnight through a Facebook-video. The unwitting origination left the #ThisFlag's founder Evan Mawarire completely unaware of the impact his actions would have. Despite the lack of a strong strategy for its development, the movement was able to create a new wave of contentious political claim-making in Zimbabwean society. By offering a nonpartisan narrative of low threshold solutions to address injustices, #ThisFlag became a platform that was able to mobilize thousands of citizens to be bold and speak-out against their government. After a peak in movement-momentum around July 2016, the stories surrounding #ThisFlag changed rapidly. Boldness and participation turned into scepticism and withdrawal, causing #ThisFlag to find itself on a path of movement-decline.

This thesis-project studies the emergence and decline of #ThisFlag from a cultural perspective, with the concept of 'meaning-making' taking centre-stage. By using 'collective action frames' as the main analytical framework, the thesis aims to better understand the meaning attached to movement involvement. The particular conceptualization of collective action frames through the sensitizing concepts of 'injustice', 'agency' and 'identity' offers the opportunity to incorporate both the strategic framing efforts of movement-entrepreneurs as well as the less strategic interpretations by movement participants on the receiving end of the frame. Adding the phase of movement-decline to the analysis will allow us to get a more holistic understanding of the construction of meaning attached to social movement involvement and the relationship between different movement-phases.

The findings of this thesis illustrate that two main frames were constructed to inspire and legitimize social movement participation. The particular use of the Zimbabwean flag and #ThisFlag's nonpartisan stance were the main-features around which these sets of beliefs and meanings could be built. Then, the shifting meaning attached to movement involvement, which I call decline, can only be understood in the light of the way in which these two frames were constructed in the phase of movement emergence. The way in which these frames were constructed and later shifted will be of central importance to #ThisFlag's development as a movement towards the future.

List of abbreviations

CANVAS	Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
CNBC	Consumer News and Business Channel
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
HRW	Human Rights Watch
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change (Tsvangirai-fraction)
MDC-N	Movement for Democratic Change (Ncube-fraction)
NAVUZ	National Vendors Union Zimbabwe
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAUS	Occupy Africa Unity Square
RBZ	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
SADC	South African Development Community
SMO	Social Movement Organisation
US, United States	The United States of America
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People’s Union

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Design

1.1 Introduction

“You find your superman. You follow your superman, and all of a sudden, superman decides to be a normal person again. And superman made you believe in impossible things. Flying in the sky; rescuing everybody from their problems. And he is the guy we think of when we are in need. And we need encouragement, and superman just decides: no, I want to be Clark Kent again. So why did you even wear your costume in the first place? I think people just got so disappointed with the person where they found hope. The person who enticed them to start speaking out all of a sudden goes away. Now you have gone ten steps forward to bring people twenty steps back. You have exposed us! I am a normal Zimbabwean, I am not going to speak out, I will be careful of what I say. And the next minute you tell me: ‘you have a right to speak out’, and I am like; YEAH MAN, I’m going to speak out! I go and stand at the freaking court, and people take photos and I will say what I am supposed to say. And next thing, you are out! Get on a plane and go somewhere. Then, who is left with the real nonsense now?! That is me! And you persuaded me to stand in front of a camera, and yet you are running away. That is a double standard. People felt tricked. Maybe he was an opportunist. He took his opportunity and went out of here. Because here is the reality of political life: Either you will be ready to sacrifice your life, or you won’t go at it at all. These are some of the emotions people had. People won’t come out again.”¹

This brief interview-excerpt shows a Zimbabwean citizen who is trying to organize and interpret situations, events, and experiences in a way that makes sense to him. His statement illustrates a more general process of meaning-making, and the core story of this thesis. The #ThisFlag-movement made many Zimbabweans believe in things they would have held to be impossible before. The message of citizen-activism was able to move the “normal Zimbabwean”, to speak out and stand up against the regime that caused Zimbabweans to be so careful about the words they would choose. We can distinguish a newfound hope that turned the passive and calculating Zimbabwean into an active and engaged citizen. But the story quickly turns around, representing feelings of disappointment and anger. Also, these emotions seem to be pointed more towards a person than towards the movement. The leader that embodied the newfound confidence in many Zimbabweans is now causing these same individuals to feel exposed and frightened again. At this moment, according to the interviewee, the movement seems more dead than alive; “People won't come out again.”

On the 19th of April 2016, Pastor Evan Mawarire posted a video on his Facebook.² With this rant, which developed out of a personal frustration for not being able to pay his children's school fees³, Mawarire unwittingly founded a social movement that would soon be known to the world as #ThisFlag. Less than a year after the initial video, I find myself sitting

¹ Author’s interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#7, 4 April 2017),

² Evan Mawarire, “*This Flag - A Lament of Zimbabwe - Evans Mawarire [SpokenWord]*”, Accessed July 2017, online via youtube.com

³ Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 of May 2017)

on a couch somewhere in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, confronted with this incredibly rich and emotional story. How can I better understand what my interviewee is telling me?

In the thirteen months that separated the initial #ThisFlag-video from the end of my field-work period, a completely new movement emerged and later declined. To make sense of this 'world out there' (Snow & Benford 1988: 137), Zimbabwean citizens leading or participating in the movement had to interpret situations, events, experiences and occurrences in a way it was justified for them to zone-in or zone-out, to legitimize movement participation or to make sense of their withdrawal. How can we better understand the meaning these people attached to their involvement in the #ThisFlag-movement?

The birth of #ThisFlag happens online and overnight. The video through which the #ThisFlag-movement originates is recorded behind Evan Mawarire's office desk. Mawarire's message is delivered as a spoken-word poem rather than a political manifesto.⁴ The Pastor moves through the Zimbabwean flag draped around his neck, interpreting the meanings and beliefs that belong to each colour. After this initial #ThisFlag-video goes 'viral', Mawarire heads a social media campaign, urging Zimbabweans to publically wear their flag and speak-up against their government, using the ThisFlag-hashtag. The first 25 days of May, citizens are mobilized to identify and speak out against corruption, injustice and poverty, using the Zimbabwean flag as their identifying-symbol.⁵ On the 6th of July, on the ground protests reach a peak, when #ThisFlag participates in the organization of a nation-wide 'stay-away', which is attended by millions of Zimbabweans and is considered to be the largest contentious action against the Mugabe-regime in the last decade.⁶

This current episode of contention contradicts the history of contemporary protest in Zimbabwe. Mobilization for collective action against the government used to rally around political and social groups that were built through direct engagement with the citizen and projecting the people's agenda at a national level (Chirimambowa & Chimedza 2017). The reconfigured Zimbabwean economy, however, has forced contentious action to be re-thought, re-organised and in some cases re-discovered (Raftopoulos 2014). This research focuses on a brand of contentious action in Zimbabwe in which new methods are able to include and mobilize social groups that have previously been politically inactive and indifferent.

The particular scale of social movement participation is complicated further by the repressive environment it happened in.⁷ At the root of Zimbabwe's crisis is a corrupt political elite that is desperate to cling on to power, using force and repression as their main resources (Coltart 2008). This political elite has a strong influence on the interpretative processes by

⁴See footnote 2

⁵Bridget Mananavire, "*ThisFlag campaign goes gear up*", 29 May 2016, Accessed on 11 July 2017, online via dailynews.co.zw

⁶Al Jazeera, "*Zimbabwe shuts down in protest over economic collapse*", 7 July 2016, Accessed 15 May 2017, online via aljazeera.com - Also see: Reuters, "*From tweets to streets, Zimbabwe social media anger erupts into anti-Mugabe protests*", 7 July 2016, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via reuters.com

⁷See sub-section 2.2 of this thesis

which individuals negotiate the meaning of political events (Tarrow 1998). As most frames support existing versions of reality (Noakes & Johnston 2005), the forces discouraging a feeling of agency are overwhelming (Gamson 1992: 59). In Zimbabwe, the government's frames on what is right or wrong, but especially on the possibilities to alter injustice, are very dominant. More in particular, the #ThisFlag-campaign was met by severe government repression. The arrest of Pastor Evan Mawarire on the 13th of July caused a massive outcry in Zimbabwean society. The movement leader was forced to leave the country, fearing for his life and that of his family. His absence then caused many Zimbabweans to withdraw their personal involvement from the movement, expressing emotions similar to the ones we have seen in the empirical vignette above.

The central complication of this thesis, which follows from this particular set of events and interpretations, is twofold. The initial complication refers to the emergence of the movement; despite the repressive circumstances and the dominant government frame, why did so many people take the risk of making contentious political claims under the specific banner of the #ThisFlag-movement, where most of them remained passive in the past? However, digging deeper into the #ThisFlag-case, a more overarching-complication can be abstracted; how could there be such a huge contradiction between the movement narrative of boldness and active citizenship that mobilized so many in the phase of movement emergence, and the interpretation of events and experiences which caused a shift in the meaning attached to movement involvement illustrated by the empirical vignette?

By using 'collective action frames' as the central sensitizing concept, this research-project adopts an individualist ontological focus on meaning-making. The epistemological stance of this thesis meets its main research goal, in better understanding the construction of meaning by individuals that participated in #ThisFlag, either as movement leaders or movement participants. The meaning of actions can only be understood in context, and therefore needs to be studied "by integrating the self-conscious perspectives of informants themselves" (Demmers 2017: 17). This is consistent with the cultural turn in social movement analysis that "rejects invariant modelling and recognizes the diverse ways in which culture and agency, shape collective action" (Goodwin and Jasper 1999: 27).

What this research will add to the academic debate on social movements is a conceptualization of collective action frames that leaves room for the less strategic forms of meaning-making. This particular application of framing-theory is best suited for a digital age in which movements can emerge overnight, developing in an incremental and organic way.⁸ Then, this research will add a focus on the phase of movement decline, and the way in which the change in meaning attached to movement involvement in that phase can be better understood in the context of the frames used in the phase of movement emergence. By using

⁸ Scholarship addressing the impact of digital technologies on social movements has developed quickly in the last decade. "It no longer makes sense to ask if digital technologies will exercise influence; rather, we can and should be looking at how and, also crucially, through which mechanisms"(Tufekci and Freelon 2013: 843).

framing-theory, this research will look at these movement-phases from the micro-level of analysis, with the individual as the main unit of observation. The following research question will be answered in that regard:

How are collective action frames constructed in a repressive setting, by movement entrepreneurs and movement participants of #ThisFlag, to legitimize and give meaning to their personal involvement in the movement, in phases of movement emergence and movement decline, in Harare, Zimbabwe, between April 2016 and June 2017?

The analytical lens of 'collective action frames' will be operationalized by a reformulation of Gamson's concepts of 'injustice', 'agency' and 'identity', to look at the meaning research participants attached to their personal involvement with the #ThisFlag-movement. In this thesis, two frames will be (re)constructed to better understand the meaning attached to participation in the phase of movement emergence. The first set of beliefs and meanings rally around the use of the Zimbabwean national flag, the second set evolves around the nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement. Subsequently, I will discuss how the meaning attached to involvement in the #ThisFlag-movement shifted over time, causing participants to withdraw or continue their involvement and new frames and strategies to emerge. This has led to the following three sub-questions:

1. *In what ways did the use of the Zimbabwean flag by the #ThisFlag-movement appeal to perceptions of injustice, agency and identity, to construct a set of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized social movement participation?*
2. *In what ways did the nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement appeal to perceptions of injustice, agency and identity, to construct a set of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized social movement participation?*
3. *How did the beliefs and meanings used to inspire and legitimize social movement involvement change over time and in what ways did this influence movement withdrawal, the emergence of new frames, and movement strategies?*

In this thesis, I will argue that both complications outlined above, which build on each other, can be better understood by analysing the sets of beliefs and meanings (frames) that were used to legitimize movement involvement. This thesis will show that two main sets of beliefs and meanings combined strategic movement framing with less strategic interpretations by movement participants on the receiving end of those movement frames. I argue that the organic and unwitting origination of the #ThisFlag-movement left room for this combination of strategic and non-strategic meaning-making to happen in the phase of movement emergence.

This thesis will then show that the disappointment and anger in our empirical vignette cannot be understood independently from the hope and faith it represents. We cannot strive for a better understanding of the way people legitimized their withdrawal from #ThisFlag without understanding the way they managed to render their involvement meaningful in the first place. The particular way in which collective action frames are constructed in the phase of movement emergence has a huge influence on the interpretation of later events and experiences. This can help to explain the phase of declining movement involvement the #ThisFlag-movement is now in and the development of new strategies that comes with it.

Besides better understanding the construction of collective action frames, this thesis also aims to tell a story. Throughout the three months I spent in Zimbabwe, many people shared their stories with me. Without exception, these were inspiring narratives of brave people, who's struggle has largely been ignored by the international media.⁹ Here, I want to honour these people by telling their story, faithful to the narratives they used when they told me theirs.

1.2 Research Design and Methodology

This thesis aims to understand how people construct collective action frames, as a way of studying the meaning behind action. On the one hand, frames are part of the world, passive and structured; on the other, people are actively involved in constructing them (Gamson & Meyer 1996: 276). The construction of meaning can only be studied by integrating the self-conscious perspectives of my research participants, perceiving #ThisFlag-movement entrepreneurs and -participants as actors with agency. Their perspectives have to be placed in a cultural context, being influenced by more structural factors. In that regard, this thesis follows the stance of structuration theory (Giddens 1984). This theory rejects the dichotomy between agency and structure, where structure is seen as limiting agency. Giddens claims that they are a mutually constitutive duality (Giddens 1984: xxi, xxvii). Human agents draw on social structures in their actions, and at the same time these actions serve to produce and reproduce social structure (Jones & Karsten 2008).

In this context, the qualitative research strategy chosen for this research is in line with my interpretative epistemological stance and the ontological focus on meaning-making, but allows for more structural contextual factors to influence this process of understanding the meaning behind action. The beliefs and meanings used to make sense of 'the world out there' were mainly presented to me as stories by my research participants. In this research I aim to faithfully reflect the way in which these people gave meaning to their lives, portraying their subjective experience by staying close to the narratives they used (Ritchie & Lewis 2013: 204).

⁹See Coltart (2008: 9) for a reflection on the reasons for this. In the instances Zimbabwe is covered by international media, the conflict is mainly used as an arena in which the battle over meaning and definition of the crisis on a macro-level takes place, rather than a platform to tell the story of the Zimbabwean struggle at a micro-level. See for example Williams (2005) on the British media reporting on Zimbabwe.

1.2.1 Research Phases and Methodology

My research consisted of roughly three research phases:¹⁰ 1) an initial phase of preliminary research, still based in the Netherlands, 2) a first field-based phase, focussing on ‘mapping the field’ and the ‘contentious episode’, and 3) a second phase of field research, specifically focussing on the #ThisFlag-movement. The primary data collection techniques used during these three phases were: content research of (mainly online) media, books and visual data, document analysis of the online communication by #ThisFlag on its official platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), semi-structured interviews with movement leadership, -participants and other contextual actors¹¹ and participant observation during my fieldwork period in Zimbabwe. These main sources of information were used to triangulate my data in different ways. In this sub-section, the three research phases will be discussed separately, as well as the ways in which the data collection techniques were used during these respective phases and how data was analysed. Finally, a separate paragraph will discuss the sensitivity of my research in relation to the repressive Zimbabwean setting.

The first preliminary phase consisted of mainly desk-based research in the Netherlands. During this period, I monitored the online communication of several social movements in Zimbabwe, with already a slight focus on #ThisFlag. For that movement I was able to conduct a more in-depth document-analysis, which was done through transcribing Pastor Evan Mawarire’s Facebook-video updates, the main way of communicating with his audience. In this phase, I interviewed two individuals about their views on the current episode of political contention.¹² Although a focus on the main narratives used by Zimbabwean activists was there from the beginning, only in the latter period of this research phase did I develop my focus on the meaning attached to action through the concept of collective action frames.

The initial phase of field-based research covered my first five weeks in Zimbabwe. In this phase, my research focussed on ‘mapping the field’ and the ‘contentious episode’, with its main events, actors and characterizing features. In line with the post-positivist epistemological stance of this thesis, my interviewee's were purposefully sampled (Boeije 2010: 35), mainly interviewing core-activists of different social movements which were part of the larger contentious episode, using a snowball-sampling method.¹³ Besides this, I interviewed several ‘context-actors’, who were more indirectly involved in activism, combining perspectives

¹⁰Not including the final phase of thesis writing

¹¹ Such as human rights lawyers, academics, artists, activists and journalists, all of which did not express a direct feeling of involvement with #ThisFlag

¹²Hugo Knoppert is the founder of ZimbabweWatch, an organization that strives to inform a more general public on the developments in the country, transferring the wishes of Zimbabwean civil society to Dutch and European Policymakers. Shaun Matsheza is a former Zimbabwean student-activist who now lives and works in the Netherlands and is still firmly engaged with political contention in his home-country.

¹³In this phase, I interviewed activist connected to #Tajamuka, #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare, #ThisFlag, and #ThisGown

internal and external to the contentious episode.¹⁴ Mainly through semi-structured interviews and more document analysis, I was able to construct a contentious episode time-line, including all the main events and actors in the episode.

After a week of categorizing, coding and analysing my first set of data, I abstracted several salient features and patterns: 1) the nonpartisan stance of the movements in the episode, 2) their nonviolent nature, 3) a discourse of citizenship and patriotism 4) emotions of fear, apathy and frustration, and 5) a shift in movement-momentum. Based on these features I then decided to focus my last field-research phase on the #ThisFlag-movement, since it most expressively represented these features.

In this final phase of field-based research, which covered my last five weeks in Zimbabwe, the data-gathering focussed specifically on the meaning attached to movement involvement. I continued my document analysis, transcribing and documenting all online #ThisFlag-communication. For my semi-structured interviews, again, my interviewee's were purposefully sampled, using a snowball-sampling method (Boeije 2010: 40). I was able to independently interview six out of seven individuals I consider part of the #ThisFlag leadership, interviewing some participants for a second time.¹⁵

As regards movement-participants, I used two ways of purposefully sampling these interviewee's. I reached a first group of research-participants through a key contact within the #ThisFlag-movement leadership, using a snowball sampling method. A second group of movement-participants were sampled through an online selection of very active Facebook- and Twitter-profiles. This sample was in line with the very strong online-character of the way in which the #ThisFlag-movement narratives were communicated.

In the last two phases of the research, my sample was limited by several factors. The research sample's sole focus on the Zimbabwean capital of Harare was determined using the principle of maximization (Morse and Field 1996 in Boeije 2010: 34), choosing the location where the topic of study manifests itself most strongly. Furthermore, the setting was also limited due to restrictions of time and means.¹⁶ Then, the research was conducted without considering the main tribal divide in the country, between the Shona and the Ndebele. Due to the geographical base of my research in Harare, which is situated in Mashonaland where mainly Shona live, this divide was not considered in the sample of this research. Although it has to be considered, I think this restriction has not influenced the quality of my data in a negative way.¹⁷ Finally, the sample used in this research purposefully represents the younger

¹⁴ See footnote 11

¹⁵Two #ThisFlag-movement leaders were already interviewed in the second research phase. However these interviews covered a whole different set of topics and interviewing them for a second time allowed me to go more in-depth and see the progression of the meaning they attached to movement involvement over time.

¹⁶Although the cities of Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare and several others also experienced contentious political action, Harare could be the only logical place to do the research considering the amount of time and means committed to it. Harare is the political heart of the country, holding the residence of the Zimbabwean government. #ThisFlag was started from Harare and has its biggest base of support here.

¹⁷The tensions between Shona and Ndebele have been omnipresent since the 1980s Matabeleland genocide, allegedly committed by a brigade of the Zimbabwean national army under supervision of Robert Mugabe – See:

generation of Zimbabweans, between the age of eighteen and forty, most of which have received some form of higher education. This sample is in line with the demographic target as expressed by #ThisFlag.¹⁸

1.2.2 Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data-collection method during phase two and three of this research. Because these two phases both had a different focus, different topic-guides were used (Boeije 2010: 68-69). Building on the gathered information in the preliminary research-phase, a topic outline was developed, mainly covering two broad themes: 1) the origination and characterizing features of the contentious episode, and 2) the personal role of the interviewee in this episode. In this second phase I have purposefully conducted thirteen interviews.¹⁹

The topic list I used in the third phase was loosely built around the core-components of Gamson's conceptualization of collective action frames; 'injustice', 'agency' and 'identity' (1992: 7). It also covered some additional topics, such as the emotion of fear and the shifting meaning attached to action over time. The topic-list differed slightly for interviewee's categorized as 'movement entrepreneurs', focussing on more strategic ways of appealing to the perceptions of these above mentioned concepts. In the second phase of data gathering, I have conducted sixteen interviews.²⁰ I chose to do single-format interviews and not focus-groups, now the individual as the unit of observation fits my focus on meaning-making. It also was the best choice considering the sensitivity of the topic. All interviews were transcribed, as much as possible within a week after the actual interview. This allowed me to re-live the topics discussed and focus my topic list for next interviews, where necessary.

The reviewed documentation for this research largely consists of public material, mostly provided by the #ThisFlag-movement via their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The bulk of this work consisted of the short video-updates by Evan Mawarire on Facebook, over the last thirteen months. I have transcribed all these short video's to be able to analyse patterns in the narratives used. Furthermore I studied hundreds of news articles from local and international online news platforms to construct a timeline of the contentious episode, which runs from October 2014 until June 2017.

The notes made during participant observation, as well as the content research of (mainly online) media, books and visual data proved helpful in enhancing the quality of the

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "*Nation Building in Zimbabwe and the Challenges of Ndebele Particularism*", 16 September 2008, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via accord.org.za

¹⁸ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement leader (#14, 25th of April 2017), expressing #ThisFlag's strategic focus on the urban population between 18 and 35

¹⁹ These thirteen interviews included a total of sixteen participants. Three of the interviews were done with two interviewee's at the same time. Ten interviews were recorded using a voice-recording device. These particular interviews covered thirteen participants. Three interviews with three interviewee's were not-recorded, but there were notes taken – For more details on these interviews, see Appendix I

²⁰ All these interviews were conducted in a single-format and were all recorded – For more details on these interviews, see Appendix I

data collected with the semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis of the online #ThisFlag communication. These sources were mainly used to examine my research-subject from different angles (Boeije 2010: 176), using media sources to triangulate experiences and events described in interviews, and using more specific interview-questions as a way of triangulating patterns discovered in participant observation and document analysis.

After finishing the data-collection, all transcripts were re-read and notes were attached to particularly interesting or salient paragraphs. These were subsequently coded using 'open codes', linked to the analytical concepts of injustice, agency and identity (Boeije 2010: 94). A 'gut story' was constructed, capturing the essence of the answers to the questions central in this thesis-project. Then, both the interview transcripts as well as the transcripts of the online #ThisFlag-communication were coded in further segmented categories or 'axial codes', through which the gathered data could be analysed more in-depth (Boeije 2010: 108). For this latter part of the process, the online qualitative analysis-software tools of Nvivo were used. Finally, at the end of the writing process, a very complete version of this thesis was sent to several research participants to look for confirmation on my fair assessment of the studied social world by the members of that social world. This form of member-validation adds to the credibility of the results and the acceptability to others (Bryman 2008 in Boeije 2010: 177).

1.2.3 Sensitivity of the Topic

Political contentious action in Zimbabwe is met with force and violence since the independence of the country in 1980. The presence of the ruling party ZANU-PF in all layers of society has made the Zimbabwean citizen very familiar with the emotion of fear (Kagoro 2005: 20). In the most recent contentious episode, several activists were confronted with arbitrary arrest, assault and abductions. Aware of these factors, I tried to take them into account in the meeting-places I arranged, the information I provided about my research and the ways I safely stored my data. By openly communicating about these issues with my research participants, I intended to create a situation in which they could decide, in full knowledge of the risks and benefits of the study, whether and how to participate (Endacott 2004 in Boeije 2010: 45).

With regard to the quality of my analysis, I did deliberately decide to record every interview, despite this 'sensitive context'. I was always able to obtain personal permission to record our conversations and I never had the feeling that my research participants were not freely answering my questions, influencing the quality of my project. However, this cannot be a reason to neglect the influence the sensitivity of the topic might have had on this research.

Finally, my priority in finding the balance between the risks and benefits for my research participants was minimalizing the chances that some "harm, loss or damage may occur" (Sieber 1992). The fact that the topic of this thesis is still very much developing in the present and the #ThisFlag-movement was in a phase of transition during my field-research period, has kept me from involving certain sensitive pieces of information in this final project.

Overall, despite all these consequences the sensitive context had, I am confident that I was able to provide sufficient relevant data to base this thesis on.

1.3 Chapter Outline

As mentioned in the first sub-section, this thesis will answer three sub-questions to unravel the main research-question. The analysis which answers these three questions forms the core of this thesis, in three analytical chapters. Before we turn hereto, Chapter Two will provide the research-context of this thesis. The succinctly outlined empirical features in this chapter inform the reader about the 'world out there', in which my research participants had to render their personal involvement in or withdrawal from the #ThisFlag-movement as meaningful. This chapter will allow the reader to fully grasp the complication within the #ThisFlag-case, covering the Zimbabwean repressive context, the larger contentious episode and several key-moments that research participants used to selectively punctuate and encode objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action.

Chapter Three will provide the theoretical background that is used as a lens through which the empirical case is analysed. It will link the empirical salient features to the analytical lens of collective actions frames. Hereafter, the empirical chapters will follow. Building on the conceptual framework outlined in chapter three, I argue that we can distinguish the construction of two sets of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized social movement participation, allowing for the #ThisFlag-movement to emerge and mobilize many Zimbabweans, including several of my research participants.

Building on Holland, Fox and Daro, I argue that “movements are better seen not as relatively unified actors, but, as multiple sources of cultural discourses competing to inform the everyday actions of movement participants” (2008: 97). To be able to consider both strategic framing efforts by movement entrepreneurs as well as the less strategic construction of meaning of those on the receiving end of framing strategies, I will analyse two main sets of beliefs and meanings as distinct frames. By analysing the features of those frames independently, I argue that we can come to a more in-depth understanding of the constituent parts of a collective action frame and the way different sets of beliefs and meanings are constructed and build on each other. This conceptualization will allow me to consider the dynamic processes associated with the social construction, negotiation, contestation, and transformation of frames, rather than focus on the frame as a 'thing' (Benford 1997: 415).

Chapter Four will discuss how a particular set of beliefs and meanings were constructed around the Zimbabwean flag as the movement symbol. Chapter Five will construct a frame around the nonpartisan stance of #ThisFlag, allowing the movement and its participants to make political claims without moving into the sphere of party politics.

The construction of two action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings in the first two analytical chapters raises the question how the perception of and meaning attached to the

#ThisFlag-movement could change so dramatically in the second half of 2016? To get a more holistic understanding of the frames used to make sense of 'the world out there', Chapter Six will analyse a shift in meaning attached to movement involvement that happened after 13 July 2016, causing new frames to emerge and a re-strategizing to take place.

Chapter Seven, finally, will provide for a conclusion, by assessing the findings of the thesis and discussing its implications for the wider theoretical and empirical context.

Chapter 2: Research Context

2.1 Introduction

The meaning of actions can only be understood in context (Demmers 2017: 17). The self-conscious perspectives of my research participants have to be integrated in the contextual structures that influenced their meaning-making. In this chapter, the research context will be presented in the form of a pyramid. The broad base of the pyramid will consist of Zimbabwe's socio-economic situation, complemented by a background-sketch of the repressive nature of life in Zimbabwe. Then, the chapter will zoom in on the contentious episode in which the subject of this research situates itself, of which the start is situated in October 2014. Finally, at the most narrow point of the context-pyramid, we will look at #ThisFlag itself, covering the key-moments and -phases in the movement's short history. The goal of this chapter is not to give an exhaustive cultural overview of life in Zimbabwe. The provided context will therefore be guided by the narratives used by my research-participants. The events and experiences they referred to while telling me their story were the starting-point for this chapter.

2.2 The Zimbabwean context

Although personal grievances alone have been assumed insufficient to account for collective action since the 1960s (McAdam et al. 1997: 142), it is important to understand that deprivation plays a role in causing emotions of anger and disappointment for my research participants. In 2017, the country that is the context for this research is no longer the relatively prosperous and developed state that Zimbabwe was at its independence in 1980 (Bond and Sharife 2012). Economic decline has been a consistent factor in the country since the late 1990s (Coltart 2008). The hyperinflation of the Zimbabwean currency, which reached a peak in 2008, has bankrupted the government and has largely turned the Zimbabwean economy into an informal one, challenged with high unemployment rates.²¹ The introduction of 'bond-notes' represents the newest economic challenge for the country, as this non-official currency tries to offer a solution for the scarcity of hard currency in Zimbabwe (Amnesty 2017).²²

Political crisis complicates the situation even further. Since the establishment of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as the main opposition political party in 1999, economic deprivation and violence in the political sphere go hand in hand. ZANU-PF, Zimbabwe's ruling party since 1987²³, instigated a period of exacerbated political violence

²¹While the official unemployment figures differ strongly per source and are generally based on unreliable data (See Sintha Chiumia, "*Is Zimbabwe's unemployment rate 4%, 60% or 95%? Why the data is unreliable*", africacheck.org, 1st of October 2014, Accessed on 8 July 2017), we can say that unemployment has affected most Zimbabweans.

²² Also see: The Economist, "*Zimbabwe's new 'bond notes' are falling fast*", 18 February 2017, Accessed 8 July 2017, online via economist.com

²³ZANU-PF emerged after Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) absorbed the 'opposition' Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo

after Robert Mugabe lost the March 2008 presidential-elections. Following this 2008 ‘reign of terror’ (Masunungure 2011:54), a team of South-African mediators mandated by the South African Development Community (SADC) brokered an interim power-sharing agreement between ZANU-PF and the two main opposition formations MDC-T and MDC-N (Aeby 2016). This ‘Global Political Agreement’ (GPA) raised the hopes of many Zimbabweans,²⁴ hoping that it would end ZANU-PF’s abusive practices and lead to a gradual recovery in the country’s economic and social conditions (HRW 2009). However, the balance of power remained heavily skewed in favour of ZANU-PF, and the institutional and political environment could not be decisively altered (Aeby 2016: 704). After the resounding electoral victory of ZANU-PF in the 2013-elections, the economy began to erode once more (Raftopoulos 2013).

2.2.1 *The repressive Zimbabwean context*

The mobilization of many of my research participants has to be understood in contrast to the repressive environment it happened in. In a broad perspective, the Zimbabwean regime heavily leans on a system of patronage, coercion and repression, in which criticism is muted and attempts to weaken the regime’s grip on power are answered with force and violence.²⁵ Mugabe’s post-independence rule has been characterized as “a militarized form of electoral authoritarianism” (Masunungure 2009:82).

The ‘Central Intelligence Organisation’ (CIO) plays an important role in the Zimbabwean state force. The CIO works as a national intelligence agency or secret police and can be characterized as a ‘Mugabe-ally’, openly supporting ZANU-PF (HRW 2013). Besides the actual manifestations of the repressive Zimbabwean state, the largely unknown structure of the security apparatus also causes a mental ‘culture of fear’.²⁶ Within this culture, negative emotions connected to past experiences make people believe that the same horrors can happen at any moment and that they run a constant risk (Aly & Green 2010: 270).

In 2016, according to Human Rights Watch, the Zimbabwean regime was guilty of assaults, arrests and detention without charges, targeted against activist, human rights defenders and journalists specifically.²⁷ More in particular, the #ThisFlag-campaign was met by severe government repression. Pastor Mawarire was arrested several times²⁸, as were several other #ThisFlag-activists. A government-led counter-campaign was started to reclaim

²⁴“Remarkably, within three months, goods had reappeared on supermarket shelves, children had returned to school, transport had improved massively and, in short, the nation saw hope. The next four years under the Unity Government were some of the most blissful that many Zimbabweans remember”. - Edward Chinhanhu, “Are bad times returning to Zimbabwe?”, 25 July 2016, Accessed 8 July 2016, online via insightonconflict.org

²⁵Piers Pigou, “Confrontation in Zimbabwe turns Increasingly Violent”, 6 October 2016, Accessed 12 July 2017, online via crisisgroup.org

²⁶The Zimbabwean culture of fear has been beautifully described by Conflict Studies and Human Rights-alumni Maria Veger in her thesis on human rights defenders and state surveillance (2015)

²⁷Human Rights Watch, “Zimbabwe, events of 2016”, January 2017, Accessed 12 July 2017, online via hrw.org

²⁸Amnesty International, “Zimbabwe: Sham’ arrest of Pastor Mawarire on trumped-up charges”, 31 January 2017, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via amnesty.org,

social media space²⁹ and that same Zimbabwean government made the unauthorized use of the national flag a criminal offence.³⁰ In this way, the government's frame on what is (un)just is very dominant in Zimbabwe, and the possibilities to alter injustice are interpreted as outside of the reach of a Zimbabwean citizen. The fear of the state has created a status-quo in which "dictators can sleep soundly, safe in the knowledge that their subjects are too timid to challenge them" (Masunungure 2011: 51).

2.3 The Contentious Episode

Tilly and Tarrow define a contentious episode as "a bounded sequences of continuous interaction." Episodes are used to chop-up longer streams of contention into segments for the purpose of systematic observation (2015: 39). To tell the story about their personal involvement in the movement, several research participants used events and experiences that were not directly related to #ThisFlag.³¹ The beliefs and meanings attached to their involvement in #ThisFlag therefore must be understood in the context of a larger contentious episode.

The #ThisFlag-movement carried several features in it that are characterizing for a larger period of contention. Several of the methods, strategies and even some faces were already familiar to my research participants before #ThisFlag's emergence. First of all, the movements and campaigns in this episode were not linked to a political party. Several of the actors in the episode used the language of citizenship instead of political party affiliation. Secondly, the protests were creative, opposing the more old-fashioned way of rallying people behind a common goal through political party rallies and marches (Chirimambowa & Chimedza 2017). Finally, non-violence is a value adopted throughout the contentious episode, although several actors do not shun reactive violence against state forces.

On the 14 October 2014, a journalist named Itai Dzamara hand-delivers a petition to the presidential office, in which he demands that President Robert Mugabe dissolves his government and engages all national stakeholders in finding a new solution to the current challenges.³² Dzamara notifies President Mugabe and the police that he will be at the Africa Unity Square in downtown Harare and is not planning to leave until he gets a response. The #OccupyAfricaUnitySquare (OAUS)-movement is born that day. One week after his initial petition, Dzamara wrote:

²⁹Farai Mutsaka, "Zimbabwe's flag center of social media war over frustrations", 11 June 2016, Accessed 9 July 2017, online via bigstory.ap.org

³⁰Munyaradzi Dodo, "How Zimbabwe made Zimbabwe's Flag Illegal", 14 October 2016, Accessed 12 July 2017, online via foreignpolicy.com

³¹ Interview #1, #5, #6, #8, #10, #11, #13, #16, #24

³² Vongai Chikwanda, "One year on, where is Itai Dzamara?", 9 March 2016, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via amnesty.org

"We are continuing to wait for Mugabe's response at Africa Unity Square. I urge every Zimbabwean to refuse to be involved in any plans that may breach peace and national order. We do not need an uprising, but we need to combine our voices in a civil, peaceful and resolute manner, to make our demands heard. Those in Harare, come and join us, in a peaceful, civil and resolute manner. It can be done, because: We are the people! We are the numbers! Let's go!"³³

Dzamara's actions mark the beginning of the contentious episode. Different interviewees interpreted the OAUS-movement as a platform, a starting-point for more creative forms of protest. Dzamara was abducted on the 9th of March 2015 and has not been seen since. His disappearance caused a sense of guilt for certain research-participants and was expressed as a reason to think of new ways to mobilize people that wouldn't bring such a big risk.³⁴

Where OAUS only managed to mobilize a hand full of people, Zimbabwe saw mass-mobilization around new movements in 2016. From the end of May, several protests are staged all over Zimbabwe. There is a second version of #OAUS, which ends with the origination of a new movement, called #Tajamuka/Sesjikile.³⁵ The National Vendors Union Zimbabwe (NAVUZ) stages a protest at a hotel in Harare to remove the Minister of Energy and Power Development Samuel Udenge, who has been living there for over a year, on the tax-payers expenses.³⁶ Unemployed graduates stage a demonstration under the name of #ThisGown, where they play soccer in the streets wearing their graduation-gowns, protesting President Mugabe to honour a 2013 election promise to create 2,2 million jobs.³⁷ Other forms of protest in this contentious episode differ from one-man-protests to sit-ins, and thematic protests, continuing until the end of this research process in July 2017.

The protests, campaigns and social movements that make up the contentious episode build on similar principles, introduced by Dzamara and his #OAUS-movement. They are non-violent and creative, using social media to communicate their message to an audience. They avoid affiliation with opposition political parties, preaching gospel of citizenship and people power.

³³ Itai Dzamara, "I have nothing to hide, fear, nor plot: Itai Dzamara", 23 October 2014, Accessed 12 July 2017, online via nehandaradio.com

³⁴ Interview #1, #5, #8, #11, #16, #24,

³⁵ As an expression, Tajakuma literally means 'outraged', 'angry' with an implicit component of 'action' - #Tajamuka/Sesjikile is a movement made up out of members of the youth wings of all political opposition parties. Although they profile themselves as non-partisan, they are widely seen as connected to party politics, using the structures of those political parties to mobilize youth. Although they explicitly commit to non-violence, they are seen as a more militant or radical group. Their biggest active group can be situated under the youth of high-density urban areas – See: Elsa Buchanan, "We are at the tip of the end of President Mugabe's Zimbabwe's Tajamuka campaign says," 1 August 2016, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via ibtimes.co.uk

³⁶ NAVUZ a very active group that has taken shape as an effect of the Zimbabwean economy turning from a formal into an informal economy – See: Jeffrey Moyo and Norimitsu Onishi, "Protesters Fume as Zimbabwe Vice President Runs Up a Hotel Bill," 27 July 2016, accessed 10 July 2017, online via nytimes.com

³⁷ These protests were organized by a coalition of university graduates called Zimbabwe Coalition for Unemployed Graduates (ZCUG) - See: Dan Hodgkinson, "#ThisGown, #ThisFlag: Why unemployed graduates will ignore Zimbabwe's ban on protests," 7 September 2016, Accessed 10th of July 2017, online via mgafrica.com

#ThisFlag, however, also had its own distinguishing features. The movement's particular use of social media was able to mobilize a mainly young, urban, and educated population, which is a demographic distinctly different from other movements and campaigns. Then, the #ThisFlag-movement uses a narrative of patriotism, expressing the love for Zimbabwe as central to its message. Finally, Pastor Evan Mawarire's unique set of identity-values and interests differentiated him from other actors, inside and outside of the contentious episode, as will be discussed in the analytical chapters of this research. Let us now look at this most narrow part of the contextual-pyramid: the #ThisFlag-movement key moments and – phases.

2.4 #ThisFlag-movement – Key Moments and Phases

In the final sub-section of this chapter, I will discuss the context related specifically to #ThisFlag that research participants used to make sense of their personal movement involvement. While telling their story, they referred to specific moments and phases, which I then restructured into three independent parts.

2.4.1 Movement Origination

A correct understanding of the origination and development of the #ThisFlag-movement is essential in answering the research puzzle that is central to this thesis. The movement originated on 19 April 2016, with a Facebook-video by Evan Mawarire. In his role as a youth-Pastor and relationship-counsellor, Mawarire would regularly upload videos online, on a broad range of topics. The four minute Facebook-video through which the #ThisFlag-movement began opens with Pastor Evan Mawarire stating, “I'm not a politician; I'm not an activist... just a citizen.” He then moves through the colours of the Zimbabwean flag, asking where the values and beliefs each colour represents have gone. He ends the video by stating that “a change must happen” and promises he will stop standing on the side-lines and start fighting for his country.³⁸

Where this particular video was one in a long line of online content and “shouldn't have gone anywhere”³⁹, it would turn out to be the birth of the #ThisFlag-movement. At this moment, however, its founder was not strategically planning to start a social movement. Evan Mawarire was merely venting a personal frustration, looking for the causes of his inability to dispense his “basic duties as a father.”⁴⁰ This non-strategic, almost coincidental origination of the movement would be characterizing for its early development.

³⁸ Evan Mawarire, “*This Flag - A Lament of Zimbabwe - Evans Mawarire [SpokenWord]*”, 19 April 2016, Accessed 3 July 2017, online via youtube.com

³⁹ Authors interview with Kuda Musasiwa (interview #19), one of #ThisFlag-movement leaders that was involved since the early days of the movement

⁴⁰ Mawarire mentioned the inability to pay for his children's school-fees, as the direct cause for this video, authors interview with Evan Mawarire, 16 April 2017

After this initial video went ‘viral’, Mawarire headed an online campaign on social media, urging Zimbabweans to wear the Zimbabwean flag around their necks and speak-up against their government, using the ThisFlag-hashtag. The central #ThisFlag-message is that citizens have the right to express themselves and criticize poor governance freely and easily.⁴¹ The movement is dedicated to empowering and partnering with citizens of Zimbabwe to be engaged and active in the national issues that affect their livelihood. The movement is guided by six core values; (integrity, dignity, boldness, non-violence, citizenship and diversity). It encourages Zimbabweans to be courageous in speaking out and seeking accountability from the government that should serve them.⁴²

The strategic nature of this message in the early movement-phase, however, again is minimal. In this phase, new plans and expressions develop very incrementally, on a day-by-day basis, parallel to the video-updates by Pastor Mawarire. The first 25 days of May are turned into an online campaign, in which citizens are activated to identify and speak out against corruption, injustice and poverty, wearing their flags everywhere they go as a symbol for their message.⁴³ After this campaign, the trichotomy ‘speak, ask, act’ is introduced, slowly paving the way for more offline-action.⁴⁴

2.4.2 Movement Peak

After the initial phase of movement-origination and –development, many research participants describe the month of July 2016 as the peak in movement traction. The preceding month of June witnesses several ‘on the ground’-actions in which #ThisFlag plays a role.^{45&46} In response to the implication of import-bans by the government in May 2016, protests are staged at the Beitbridge border post with South-Africa on the 1st of July 2016.⁴⁷ Three days later, a protest by commuter-omnibus drivers against police harassment is violently put down by the police (Amnesty 2017).⁴⁸ All these protests lead to a mass ‘stay-away’-protest, also referred to as ‘#ShutDownZimbabwe’. On 6 July, the call to stay at home in protest against

⁴¹ See thisflag.co.zw and facebook.com/Thisflag for a brief summary of #ThisFlag’s main message and goals, Accessed 26 of June 2017

⁴² Evan Mawarire, “*Rehearsing the #ThisFlag six core values*”, 22 of July 2016, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via instagram.com/thisflag_zw, 26th of July 2016, also see thisflag1980.com/our-values

⁴³ Bridget Mananavire, “*ThisFlag campaign goes gear up*”, 29 May 2016, Accessed 13 June 2017, online via dailynews.co.zw

⁴⁴ Evan Mawarire, Facebook-update, 27th of May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com

⁴⁵ #ThisFlag participates in a petition to ask for the removal of corrupt Minister of Energy and Power Development Samuel Udenge, under the banner of #UdengeMustGo. The same minister is asked to vacate a hotel he has been staying in on tax-payers costs as mentioned above, led by NAVUZ.

⁴⁶ On the 16th of June, #ThisFlag organizes THE #NoToBondNotes-debate with the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe John Mangudya, to offer a platform to discuss the introduction of this alternative currency in Zimbabwe – See: Richard Chidza, “*Bond notes: #ThisFlag activists grill RBZ boss*,” 19 June 2016, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via thestandard.co.zw

⁴⁷ #Tajamuka/Sesjikile-activists allegedly had a part in organizing these protests, see: Rudzani Tshivhase, “*Operations disrupted by protest at Beitbridge border post*,” 1 July 2016, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via sabc.co.za

⁴⁸ Also see: Gareth Davies, “*Violent clashes between Zimbabwean police and protesters resulted in 30 arrests as a riot broke out in Harare*,” 4 July 2016, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via dailymail.co.uk

the government's economic policies is heeded by millions of Zimbabweans, closing almost all businesses and crippling public transport.⁴⁹ In the aftermath of the protest, hundreds of individuals across the country are assaulted and arrested (HRW 2017).⁵⁰ Although the stay-away is organized in cooperation with many other actors and groups, #ThisFlag has a decisive hand in the success of the protest. Its momentum had grown considerably in the previous two months and the movement was able to mobilize a young urban demographic to participate in the stay-away.

Because of the government's "failure to meet [our] demands", a new shut-down is scheduled for 13 and 14 July.⁵¹ On the first day of this planned action, however, Pastor Evan Mawarire is arrested and charged with 'inciting public violence'.⁵² That same day, thousands of people meet at the Magistrates Court in downtown Harare, where Mawarire was expected to be brought for a court-hearing. The arrest culminates in a gathering of people standing in solidarity with the #ThisFlag-leader, rallying behind #ThisFlag in a peaceful manner. Despite the riot-police at the location, a very diverse group of individuals gathered that day, which ends in Mawarire's release after an alleged technicality. According to most research-participants, no movement or individual actively mobilized people to go to the court.⁵³ This perception of this event as an organic mobilization of people adds to the meaning which is given to it. By almost every research participant, the 13th of July was perceived as a key-moment for #ThisFlag, highlighting the peak in movement traction:

*"The very day he was arrested, pictures started coming in on social media, of his arrest. [...] I was there throughout the whole day until he came out, and there was a sense of victory. One thing that I knew, when we walked out of Rotten Row Magistrates Court, and we saw the crowds that were there, I knew that the whole thing had changed. In that moment I knew that this thing had gone further than we had anticipated."*⁵⁴

2.4.3 Movement Decline.

Where the events of this last month seemed to culminate in that gathering at the court, the expected climax fails to happen. Although the 13 July-events mark the peak in movement traction, Mawarire's arrest represented the start of his personal battle with the Zimbabwean

⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, "Zimbabwe shuts down in protest over economic collapse", 7 July 2016, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via aljazeera.com

⁵⁰ Including 86 people in Bulawayo, 105 people in Harare, and 16 people in Victoria Falls - Human Rights Watch, "Zimbabwe, Events of 2016," World Report 2017, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via hrw.org

⁵¹ The protesters set forth a list of demands that have to be met: "Fire corrupt ministers and deal with police-roadblocks; Pay civil servants on time; We don't want bond-notes; Remove the import bans" – See: Evan Mawarire Facebook-video updates, 6 and 8 July 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire

⁵² Amnesty International, "Zimbabwe: Fear for safety of human rights defender: Evan Mawarire", 22 July 2016, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via amnesty.org

⁵³ In author's interview with a #ThisFlag-movement leader (#18), however, this view was opposed. This person referred to the 13th of July as a "national illusion" of unplanned mobilization, since the momentum was very much strategically built by the movement leadership.

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Marshall Shonhai, #ThisFlag-movement participant (#16, 1 May 2017)

state. Several days after his release, Mawarire decides to leave Zimbabwe for South-Africa, initially for a couple of days until things around his persona would “cool off.”⁵⁵ On the 19th of July, however, President Mugabe decides to publically denounce Mawarire, accusing the pastor of being sponsored by foreign governments, allegedly trying to destabilise his administration.⁵⁶ This event increased the tension in Zimbabwe and forced Mawarire to discard his idea of an early return. The #ThisFlag-leader takes his family out of the country and moves on to the United States in August 2016.

Despite the “sense of victory” as expressed above, the meaning attached to movement involvement starts to move in a downward direction from that point. In the period of Mawarire’s absence, a new leadership-team is formed and in cooperation with their leader abroad, #ThisFlag stays active. Mawarire perseveres in his social media posts, covering his leave as a continuation of his work outside of the country. In this phase, however, we also see the emergence of a more negative meaning attached to #ThisFlag. Disappointment and scepticism are fed by movement leaders publically criticizing each other.⁵⁷ At the same time, a more radical narrative takes over, under the banner of 'Mugabe must Go'.⁵⁸ Several research-participants indicated that for #ThisFlag movement in particular, but especially for the broader playing-field of contentious action, social movements become a space which is only accessible for a particular group of individuals:

“I think after pastor Evan leaving and the more radical wing of the movement taking over, using the ‘Mugabe must Go’-mantra, shifted that narrative and meant that the movement became a space for die-hard, hard-core activists, rather than for ordinary people who want a better live and maybe don’t care too much who is in charge of the country.”⁵⁹

At the time of Mawarire’s return to Zimbabwe on the first of February 2017, the low #ThisFlag-momentum stands in huge contrast with the traction in society halfway 2016. During my field-work period from March until June 2017, #ThisFlag continues its mainly online activities, engaging a selected group of core-activists. On the other hand, the movement tries to re-strategize and rebuild a movement that can regain some of the momentum that was lost over time.

⁵⁵ Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire, (#25, 16 May 2017)

⁵⁶ Al Jazeera, “*Mugabe: Evan Mawarire sponsored by foreign countries*”, 19 July 2016, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via aljazeera.com – Mugabe makes similar statements on the 27th of July – See: News24, “*Mugabe fights back after Zimbabwe protests*”, 27 July 2016, Accessed 12 July 2017, online via news24.com

⁵⁷ One of the faces of #ThisFlag that developed besides Mawarire was Fadzayi Mahere, a human-rights lawyer who supported the movement during several public events. On the 10th of August she wrote an open letter to Evan Mawarire, expressing a strong scepticism towards Mawarire’s motives – See: Fadzayi Mahere, “*Open Letter’ to Evan Mawarire*”, 10th of August 2016, Accessed 2 May 2017, online via [facebook.com/fadzayi.mahere](https://www.facebook.com/fadzayi.mahere)

⁵⁸ Kennedy Nyavaya, “*Celebrities join ‘Mugabe must go’ mantra*,” 31 July 2016, Accessed 11 July 2017, online via thestandard.co.zw

⁵⁹ Author’s interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#28, 26 May 2017)

Chapter 3: Theory

3.1 Introduction

After outlining the empirical context of the case-study, in this chapter it will be discussed what academic tools this research uses to analyse the rise and decline of #ThisFlag. As mentioned heretofore, this framework consists of three core analytical concepts: 'injustice', 'agency' and 'identity'. These concepts are derived from Gamson's conceptualization of collective action frames. Before discussing the three core concepts in more detail, this chapter will briefly describe the academic debate in which this particular research is situated. Finally, the chapter will discuss the particular conceptualization of movement decline.

3.2 Academic Debate

This thesis is situated within the literature on collective action, as it studies coordinated efforts on behalf of a shared interest (Tilly & Tarrow 2015: 8). Forms of collective action, however, go far and wide. The claims that are made by the research-subjects of this thesis are specifically contentious and political, bearing on other actor's interest, with the Zimbabwean government as a target (2015: 7). Many scholars use the term 'social movements' to cover the overlap between contention and collective action (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow 2009: 277). To be more focussed, therefore, this research on the #ThisFlag-movement in Zimbabwe is situated within the literature on social movements and contentious politics.

Most of the work in the field of contention focussed on social movements (McAdam et al 2009: 260). After the 1960s, in which it was often assumed that personal grievances are largely sufficient to account for collective action (McAdam et al. 1997: 142), three main scholarly approaches were developed in the study of social movements. From the 1960's, political-structural and resource mobilization perspectives entered the study of contentious politics.

In political opportunity theory, events or broad social processes can undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996: 3). A shift in political opportunities, then, can facilitate increased political activism (Alimi 2009: 221). Resource-mobilization theory raises the question of when and where repressive political structures become a source for mobilization rather than submission. It conceives social movements as collective and rational decision-makers and studies the capacity for collective action through changing resources and their availability to collective actors (McAdam et al 1996: 3).

However, a political opportunity approach cannot explain how individual Zimbabweans manage to mobilize *in spite of* repressive forces, when there have been no significant changes in Zimbabwean institutional arrangements. Also, how could the utilitarian

emphasis of resource mobilization explain why particular individuals got involved in the #ThisFlag-movement where others did not? (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow 2009: 270).

The most significant academic debate within the literature on contentious politics for this research is that on the ‘cultural turn’. Authors associated with that cultural turn argue that the structural and macro-political orientation of the prevailing social-movement studies approaches minimized the role of human agency in the rise of social movements (Noakes & Johnston 2005: 4), offering a relatively narrow window into the world-views of social movement participants (Kurzman 2008: 8). Structural and rationalist perspectives fail to go beyond the emphasis on determining the mechanisms by which social movements work (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil & Powell 2008: 21). Mobilizing people to action always has a subjective component to it, and this subjective component (the element of perception, interpretation or consciousness) should be conceptualized as a socio-psychological process (Noakes & Johnston 2005: 1). Related thereto, researchers should pay more attention to what were previously considered ‘irrational’ aspects of movements.⁶⁰ Finally, these authors have argued to employ more ethnographic tools and analyses that focus on the meaning-making and cultural practices of collective action (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil & Powell 2008: 22).⁶¹

The concept of ‘meaning-making’ represents the constructivist stance of authors associated with the cultural turn. At its root is the proposition that humans constantly seek to understand the world around them, and that the imposition of meaning on the world is a goal in itself, a spur to action, and a site of contestation. Social movements may be a “particularly conducive site to privilege meaning-making”, because their activities involve resistance to the dominant norms and frames of society (Kurzman 2008: 5-6). Approaches that only focus on structures or rational actors fail to account for all the ‘meaning-work’ involved in social movement processes (Noakes & Johnston, 2005: 3).

This research on the emergence and decline of #ThisFlag adds to the literature on Zimbabwean mobilization for collective action against its government. Research on political contentious action in Zimbabwe used to focus on political and social groups that were built around engagement with citizens on material questions that affected the everyday life of people, such as trade unions (Raftopoulos 2000, Saunders 2007), student movements (Hwami & Kapoor 2012, Zeilig 2008, Hodgkinson 2013), women’s movements (Essof 2013), residents’ association and church-based NGOs or CSOs (Dorman 2002, Aeby 2016). With some exceptions (Hodgkinson, Zeilig), scholars have focused on structural and rational

⁶⁰ Including emotion (Jasper 2011), affect and identity (Polletta & Jasper 2001).

⁶¹ These authors argue that bringing greater attention to culture (Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Polletta 2004; Polletta and Jasper 2001), ideology (Laraña et al. 1994), narratives (Davis et al. 2002) and framing processes (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992) would result in a more complete understanding of social movements.

approaches to study political contention in Zimbabwe. This research will add a cultural perspective to research on Zimbabwean social movements.

More importantly, Zimbabwe's re-configured political-economy means that attempts to activate and involve citizens have to be re-invented and "the old way of doing things must be creatively discarded" (Raftopoulos 2014). In the latest episode of contention, new Zimbabwean movement leaders use different methods of building influence to a very wide audience. The ways in which they are able to include social groups that have previously been politically inactive and indifferent (Chirimambowa & Chimedza 2017), are of central importance to this research. Building on the cultural turn in the study of contentious politics, this thesis will consider meaning-making as the most important facet in analysing the Zimbabwean #ThisFlag-movement and therefore will have to be at the 'centre-stage' of this research (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil & Powell 2008: 24-25).

3.3 Collective Action Frames

The concept of 'collective action frames' will function as the main analytical frame for this research. Within the cultural turn, the work on 'framing' has been most influential (Kurzman 2008:9). For this research we define a frame as "*an interpretative schema that simplifies and condenses 'the world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action* (Benford & Snow 1988: 137), *thus organizing experience and guiding actions by rendering events or occurrences meaningful*" (Snow et al. 1986: 464). The concept has the potential to provide insights into the various forms of meaning-making that are a part of the dynamics of social movements (Noakes & Johnston 2005: 3).

William Gamson and David Snow, usually together with Robert Benford, laid the conceptual groundwork for the study of framing-processes, by developing typologies of core framing concepts. The authors' conceptualization of collective action frames differs at the level of analysis (Noakes & Johnston 2005: 5). Gamson conceptualizes collective action frames on the level of potential movement participants. Collective action frames offer "ways of understanding that imply the need for and desirability of some form of action" (Gamson 1992: 6). Benford and Snow's use of the concept shifts the focus towards the strategic activities of social movement entrepreneurs, who I define as "*people who exhibit strategic initiative in spreading the word about their cause and promoting its message through articulation and amplification*", building on Noakes and Johnston (2005: 8).⁶²

Much of the work of these authors is complementary, and a considerable overlap can be found between the two approaches (Noakes & Johnston, 2005: 6). Benford and Snow's core frame-components of diagnosis and prognosis strongly resemble Gamson's concepts of

⁶² Benford and Snow define collective action frames as "action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns" (2000: 614).

injustice and agency, in offering a morally laden interpretation about an issue as a problem and offering solutions for this problem, respectively. Also, both approaches have a motivational component in them, linking possible solutions to an active agent.

The conceptualization by Benford and Snow, however, has proven more influential in the scholarship on social movements and contentious politics (Noakes & Johnston 2005: 6).⁶³ Their academic dominance, is rather unfortunate, mainly because its focus on strategic framing practices. Building on Goodwin and Jasper, Casas-Cortés, Osterweil & Powell criticize the dominant perspective for treating culture reductively as “mere instrumental tactics” with mobilization as the key goal (2008: 24). Kurzman agrees and argues that within the dominant framing perspective, meaning-making has been turned into a set of independent variables, whereas it should be seen as a dynamic process, underlying all human activity (2008: 10). Desrosiers holds that the initial approach to framing theory was ‘overly concerned with strategy, largely treated as malleable tools in the hands of mobilizers, too linear and static, and neglected the structural and contextual factors affecting the production of frames’ (2012: 16).

Building on these authors, this thesis conceptualizes collective action frames in a way that makes it possible to capture realities at the cross-road between goal-oriented use of framing by movement entrepreneurs and the less strategic, interpretative considerations of movement participants (Desrosiers 2012). As Goffman (1974) suggested, individuals need not be able to articulate a frame or recognize all of its components to apply it as an interpretative schema. The social movement that is the main subject of this research was founded unwittingly, originating overnight. In the analytical chapters of this thesis, we will discover that the incremental and ad-hoc ways in which #ThisFlag developed its strategies left room for exactly these less-strategic interpretations.

By incorporating the interpretations of those research-participants on the receiving end of framing strategies, Gamson’s approach allows to better understand “the broader cultural presence in understanding public affairs” (1992: 8).⁶⁴ I argue that Gamson’s conceptualization of collective action frames has the potential to combine framing-processes from the perspective of both social movement participants and movement entrepreneurs, and emphasizes its ‘negotiated shared meaning’ (Gamson 1992: 111). In this research, therefore, Gamson’s concepts of ‘injustice’, ‘agency’ and ‘identity’ will be the central components on which I build my analysis of the content of the frame (*what*). Corresponding with Gamson’s emphasis on the negotiation of meaning, the proposed research then looks at the ways in which the beliefs and meanings of the movement were negotiated and constructed between movement entrepreneurs and movement participants (*how*). Gamson’s conceptualization of collective action frames through his three components will now be complemented with

⁶³ Possibly through the compliance of their focus on framing tactics with the organizational focus that dominated the field of contentious politics in the 1980’s, as Noakes and Johnston argue.

⁶⁴Which, according to Gamson, is not as easy as finding evidence of all these components by looking at the more strategic “pamphlets and speeches of movement activists” (1992: 8).

developments in literature on its constituent parts, to create the thick concepts that were used while gathering data.

3.3.1 *Injustice*

Gamson formulates his injustice-component as “the moral indignation that combines a cognitive judgement about what is equitable with a psychological emotion about what is wrong or right” (1992: 7). Noakes & Johnston add that the injustice-component must also place the blame for grievances on the individuals and institutions that compose the ‘them’ (2005: 6).⁶⁵ Gamson's conceptualization of the emotional component of the injustice-frame⁶⁶ seems to discard emotions as irrational “heat” added to a rational cognition (1992: 32). Jasper conceptualizes emotions as defined by context and culture in the same way as cognitive meanings are. Building on Jasper, for this thesis, emotions are conceptualized as “learned and controlled through social interaction” (1998: 399). I re-formulate the definition of injustice as one that considers all three core components: problem identification, directed blaming and emotion.

‘A moral indignation that combines a cognitive judgement about what is non-equitable about the problem with a psychological emotion about what is wrong or right, placing the blame for these grievances on particular persons or institutions.’

3.3.2 *Agency*

Gamson defines his agency-component as “the consciousness that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action, a sense of collective efficacy that denies the immutability of the undesirable situation, empowering people by defining them as agents of their own history.” Agency suggests not merely that something can be done, but that ‘we’ can do something’ (1992: 7). Following that conceptualization, the focus for this second component should be on analysing the ‘sense of agency’, rather than presuming or looking for actual agency.

Agency here is strongly associated with the concept of identity. Agency works through the formulation of possible solutions. Therefore, I argue that Benford and Snow’s second framing task of prognostic framing, which they define as “the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem,” should also be included in the definition of agency for this research (2000, 616), but always has to be constructed in combination with the ‘we’ that is framed to be best suited to alter the conditions by using a particular solution. For this thesis, agency will then be defined as:

⁶⁵ Instead of giving it a distinct function, Benford and Snow seem to include identity-construction in the diagnostic framing-component, closely related to the concept of blame, referring to “attributional processes that seek to delineate the boundaries between “good” and “evil” and construct movement protagonists and antagonists”(2000: 616).

⁶⁶Which he refers to as “the righteous anger that puts the fire in the belly and the iron in the soul”

'The consciousness that it is possible to alter the unjust conditions or policies through engaging in particular solutions, in which the agent is part of the sense of collective efficacy (we).'

3.3.3 Identity

Gamson defines his identity-component as “the process of defining this ‘we’ [that has agency], typically in opposition to some ‘they’ who have different interests or values,” emphasizing the importance of its adversarial nature (1992: 7). In this process, the ‘we’ that has agency has to be connected to the identity group of which the potential activist is a part. The collective identity that has to be constructed to bring about collective action is also considered to enlarge the personal identity, by offering fulfilment and realization of the self (Gamson 1992: 56).

Are collective identities imposed on groups or invented by them? And to what extent are collective identities constructed in and through protest rather than preceding it? (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285). In Gamson’s conceptualization, identities are invented by groups and constructed in and through protest. Polletta and Jasper agree on the conceptualization of identity as a process that is done within and through collective action rather than preceding it. By arguing that mobilization does not always require pre-existing collective identities, efforts to strategically frame identities become critical in recruiting participants. They define collective identity from the perspective of the movement participant, as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (2001: 290-291).

Finally, both organizers’ as well as participants’ efforts to frame collective identities should be considered. While movement-entrepreneurs use considerable creativity in constructing identities, “such processes may also occur independently of organizers’ strategic efforts” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 291). Holland, Fox and Daro build on this approach to collective identity, but argue for a ‘decentering’ and dialogic approach, in which movements are seen “as multiple sources of cultural discourses competing to inform the everyday actions of movement participants” (2008: 97). They define collective identity as “participants’ shared sense of the movement as a collective actor – as a dynamic force for change – that they identify with and are inspired to support in their own actions” (2008: 97). Using these three conceptualizations I formulate the following definition of identity:

'The process of defining a shared sense of the movement as a collective ‘we’, that movement participants can identify with and are inspired by to support in their own actions, typically in opposition to some ‘they’ who have different interests or values’.

3.3.4 *Component Interaction*

Finally, it has to be mentioned that the different components of collective action frames do not exist in isolation, but frequently support each other. According to Gamson, the injustice-frame functions as the key component of the collective action frame, facilitating the adoption of the other elements (2011: 467). The injustice-frame makes the injured party a collective, interpreting the injury as shared by some implied in-group (1992: 112). This strong 'we' demands a clear 'they' to sustain the righteous indignation, connecting the injustice-component with that of identity. Then, an injustice-frame implies the possibility of change (1992: 113). By framing the moral indignation in a way in which there is a part in it for the ordinary citizen to alter the undesired, the injustice-component should connect with that of agency. To enlarge the understanding of how meaning attached to action is constructed, this thesis will analyse these elements in their mutual relationship rather than in isolation.

3.4 Movement Decline

Central to the complication this research tries to unravel are not only the frames which legitimized and inspired social movement participation, but also the shift in meaning attached to movement involvement over time. Therefore, finally, the concept of 'decline' is used to deepen the understanding of the meaning attached to involvement in the #ThisFlag-movement. After the 13th of July 2016, my research participants had to process a series of events and experiences which have been described in sub-section 2.4 of this thesis, making sense of the changing 'world out there'. Despite the fact that a small group of mainly movement entrepreneurs remained deeply invested in the movement, this meaning-making caused the popular mass to withdraw their active involvement.

Building on Owens' definition of movement decline as "deterioration, a downward trajectory, or, more terminally, death," (2009: 12) we can say that #ThisFlag found itself on a path of movement decline. Despite the seemingly inevitable nature of this process, there remains a curious silence on the topic in the academic field of social movement studies (Voss 1996: 227). Movement decline is "under-examined and under-theorized" (Kamentisa 1998: 246) and where the works of Kamentisa and Voss seemed to spark a newfound interest in movement decline, Owens claims that a decade later, that spark did not cause for much more research on the subject (2009: 14).

By exclusively focusing on the emergence of movements, researchers divide social movement activism in unrelated blocks, treating mobilization as an end in itself.⁶⁷ Tilly and Tarrow's conceptualization of demobilization as the mere counterpart of mobilization,

⁶⁷Casas-Cortés, Osterweil & Powell use this same line of argumentation to criticize Benford & Snow's dominant perspective on framing theory; treating culture reductively as "mere instrumental tactics" for mobilization as the key goal (2008:24).

illustrates this point. The concept is treated as being a reduction of the aggregation of resources available to the political actor for collective claim-making and representing the end of a contentious episode (Tilly & Tarrow 2015: 120). In this way, the absence of social movement action is used as a baseline. The reasons for decline are simply the inverse of those that explain movement emergence.⁶⁸ Factors of decline simply become a test of the ‘rules of emergence’, without their own dynamics. In this way, decline does not need explanation (Owens 2009: 15)

In this research, however, we look at movement decline through the lens of collective action frames, treating decline as a relative concept that describes a subjective experience (Owens 2009: 13). Where we can try to measure movement decline by the number of likes on a Facebook-post or the amount of on the ground protest taking place, these ‘objective’ measures are left open for interpretation. This interpretation is central to my analysis of movement decline.

The few scholars that dared to touch upon the topic of movement decline have done so using structural (Hipsher 1996, McAdam 1982) or rational (Glassman, Bae-Gyoon Park, and Young-Jin Choi 2008) perspectives, or combining these with a cultural stance through an integrated social movement theory-approach (Voss 1996, Kamentisa 1998). As this research situates itself within the cultural turn in social movement research, I will analyse the decline of #ThisFlag through the lens of framing theory, connecting to Owens’ focus on cultural and contextual factors. Where the concept of movement decline might suggest an analytical focus on the macro-level, decline has to be understood as referring to a subjective experience at the level of the individual, rather than an objective moment at the level of the movement. While the frames used to give meaning to movement involvement can help us to better understand the rise and decline of the movement as a whole, the primary level of analysis of this thesis remains that of the individual.

In line with the relatively under-researched phenomena of movement decline, Voss argued that models and theories of movement development and decline are much less sophisticated than their movement emergence counterparts (1996: 227). The definition of a frame as given above is designed to analyse movement emergence by looking at the meaning attached to *action*.⁶⁹ Movement decline, however, particularly focuses on the *change* in the meaning attached to movement involvement over time, which can result in both continued action as well as withdrawal. Framing theory, when focusing on movement emergence, tends to undervalue this temporal aspect, being cast as static (Benford 1998) and stable (Steinberg

⁶⁸ Owens mentions Doug McAdam’s work on the US Civil Rights Movement as an example. McAdam explains the decline of this movement as “a significant contraction in political opportunities; the decline of organizational strength within the movement; the decline of certain cognitions essential to sustained insurgency; in-creased repression by movement opponents” (1982: 63)

⁶⁹See footnote 62 for this definition

1998, 1999).⁷⁰ This thesis, therefore, will use the term ‘movement-involvement’, when the understanding of the attached meaning requires the frame to develop over time, both in a positive and negative direction.

Since the last analytical chapter of this thesis is about change in beliefs and meanings rather than about a static meaning attached to action, I will adopt Owens’ focus on narratives for my analysis (2008: 244). Narratives here are stories movement-entrepreneurs and participants tell about the movement and about the world around them, explaining that world, as well as forging shared identities, plotting strategies and mobilizing and unifying emotional responses (2009: 19). Her use of sensitizing concepts, strongly overlaps with the use of ‘injustice’, ‘agency’, and ‘identity’ as the theoretical groundwork for this thesis.⁷¹

In chapter six I will (re)construct a change in narrative over time, to then see what influence this change had on the meaning attached to movement-involvement as constructed in chapter four and five. By combining the two, I hope to construct a framework that is able to look at the meaning attached to movement involvement in a more flexible way, incorporating the possibility of change over time. This conceptualization leaves the option to analyse both continued movement involvement and movement withdrawal. In this way, the framework then provides a more holistic understanding meaning, and shows how the perceptions that are constructed in the phase of movement emergence influence those in the phase of movement decline (Owens 2008: 246).

⁷⁰ In Owens 2009: 27

⁷¹ So besides the overarching concept of narratives, Owens uses ‘emotions’, ‘strategies’, and ‘identity’ to analyse movement decline (2009: 19)

Chapter 4: The Flag as a Symbol for Active Citizenship

4.1 Introduction

From the day in April 2016 on which Evan Mawarire posted his first #ThisFlag-video, the Zimbabwean flag became the symbol of a new social movement. Analysing the initial video-updates, one could get the impression that the core-message of #ThisFlag is about pride and patriotism, about looking at the national flag “trying to remind myself that it is my country.”⁷² Although the colours of the flag are linked to a moral indignation, the grievances Zimbabweans go through seem to be interpreted as meaningful in the light of their identity as a resilient people. But is finding strength in re-living national pride really the core-frame used by #ThisFlag to inspire and legitimize movement participation?

In this chapter, I will argue that the understanding of the meaning attached to the flag has to move beyond the love for a shared country of birth. By constructing a set of beliefs and meanings around the Zimbabwean flag, its interpretation was (re)framed as a symbol representing a set of demandable citizens-rights, activating Zimbabweans to oppose the broad spectrum of injustices on which their moral indignation focussed. Using the emotion of fear and a particular form of blame, this injustice frame was then able to provide a set of low threshold solutions that gave movement participants a feeling of agency.

Finally, I will argue that there is a strong relationship between the three components for this particular frame, which can only be explained by a combination of strategic efforts and non-strategic interpretations. Those participants on the receiving end of this frame (re)appropriated the flag as representing a new identity-divide in Zimbabwe, strengthening the idea of a collective 'we' and the feeling of agency. This collective identity was particularly influenced by the values and interest represented Evan Mawarire.

4.2 Injustice

Although the Zimbabwean flag is used and interpreted as a unity symbol that stands for re-living one's identity as a patriotic citizen, the understanding of the meaning attached to the flag has to move beyond unity and the vigorous support for one's country. #ThisFlag appealed to the perception of the Zimbabwean flag as holding several promises for all Zimbabwean citizens. Already in his initial video, Mawarire frames the promises represented by the national flag as something that can and should be demanded by the Zimbabwean citizens from their government, almost like a set of rights.⁷³ The Zimbabwean flag holds a

⁷²Evan Mawarire, “*This Flag - A Lament of Zimbabwe - Evans Mawarire [SpokenWord]*”, 19 April 2016, Accessed 3 July 2017, online via youtube.com

⁷³ Evan Mawarire video update 19 April 2016, via YouTube: “*It is my country, my Zimbabwe, we go through so much. We don't look like much even now but there is promise in it, I will fight for it, I will live for it and I will stand for it.*”

promise, and the #ThisFlag-message appeals to the Zimbabwean citizen to demand that this promise is kept:

“This is the time, that a change must happen. Quit standing on the side-lines and watching this flag fly. And wishing for a future that you are not at all wanting to get involved in. This flag. Every day that it flies it's begging for you to get involved. It's begging for you to say something. It's begging for you to cry out and say; why must we be in the situation that we are in?”⁷⁴

Besides a message of strength through patriotism we can now see an appeal being made to a cognitive judgement about what is non-equitable (Gamson 1992: 7). Evan Mawarire is able to relate the symbolism of the flag to the disenfranchisement of the citizenry and frame this as an injustice. Movement participants can now directly link their personal disenfranchisement to the country not keeping its promise, represented by the flag. The perception of the state their country is in and the disenfranchisement it causes them personally can no longer be accepted by the Zimbabwean citizen, now it is framed as an injustice. Several research participants interpreted this frame as a new meaning attached to the grievances they had experienced in their personal lives long before:

“We have become quite numb. Zimbabweans have this thing about 'making a plan', and we are all so proud to be so resilient and move on with things, but when faced with the reality of what life was and what was promised, and what life is like now... I think it forced people to have a little bit of perspective and say: maybe it is time we have had enough!”⁷⁵

This injustice frame was then made more tangible by using the trichotomy of ‘corruption, injustice, and poverty’.⁷⁶ These very broad moral-indignation categories, combined with the focus on a promise that was not kept, made for a wide spectrum of aggrieved individuals to be able to relate to this frame. The injustice was not linked to a person's absolute suffering, but to the relativity of each individual's deprivation, in the disenfranchisement of the position of any citizen compared to where this person could be if the state would live up to its promise. Through this broad resonance, the “injured party” is interpreted as a collective rather than an individual (Gamson 1992: 112), connecting the injustice-frame with the adversarial identity-frame. In this way the injustice frame attached a new meaning to what it meant to be a patriotic Zimbabwean. It meant that you would actively demand the rights and opportunities, the lack of which keeps you from living up to your full expectations:

⁷⁴ Evan Mawarire, “*This Flag - A Lament of Zimbabwe - Evans Mawarire [SpokenWord]*”, 19 April 2016, Accessed 3 July 2017, online via youtube.com

⁷⁵ Author's interview with Jessica Drury, #ThisFlag-movement participant (#29, 27 May 2017)

⁷⁶ Video- and document-analysis shows that this trichotomy is used throughout all #ThisFlag online communication, as a mantra, from the start of the movement regular social media updates in late April/early May 2016.

“Your pride must be rooted in your belonging. [...] It’s to look at yourself and say: the only place globally where I am allowed all those rights and freedoms to a full extent, is the place in which I was born! So what the hell is it doing for me? What does it mean to be a Zimbabwean when I can’t be a stakeholder in what Zimbabwe can give me? Am I really Zimbabwean or am I just Zimbabwean because I was unfortunate enough to be born here?”⁷⁷

What Tarrow has called “the struggle for cultural supremacy” (1998: 110) refers to the effort to influence the interpretative processes by which individuals negotiate the meaning of political events. In Zimbabwe's repressive context, the government's frames on what is (un)just, but especially on the possibilities to alter injustice, are very dominant. As Noakes & Johnston argue, “most frames support existing versions of reality, reiterating dominant expressions or reinforcing elite interpretations of events, and therefore, discourage collective action by aggrieved populations” (2005: 89). Going against these dominant frames, #ThisFlag encourages and facilitates social movement activity. Where there is “always enough unhappiness to supply the grassroots support for a movement,” #ThisFlag transforms the struggles of daily life into shared grievances (Gamson 1992: 31), by *reframing* a problem in such a way as to highlight or reveal the injustice inherent in the status quo.

4.2.1 *The Emotion of Fear*

To convert this moral indignation in movement participation, now, the moral indignation of what is non-equitable has to be combined with “a psychological emotion about what is wrong or right” (Gamson 1992: 31-32). While the #ThisFlag-movement tapped into emotions of anger and disgruntlement and gave people a platform to express these feelings publically, it also dealt with a particular emotion that used to inhibit people from expressing themselves. One of the key ways in which ZANU-PF has remained in power in Zimbabwe is through fear. “The presence of the party leadership at all levels of society induced silence and fear among the people” (Kagoro 2005: 20). The Zimbabwean citizen has “grown fearful” of any form of confrontation with the state, in the face of surveillance and repression (Masunungure 2011: 51).⁷⁸

Where Gamson only focuses on what Jasper calls 'primary reactive-emotions' (1998: 406), which put “fire in the belly and iron in the soul” (Gamson 1992: 8), in the #ThisFlag-frame these were combined with the rationalization of fear as constructed around a shared social meaning rather than an automatic psychological state. While primary reactive emotions such as anger and frustration were used to build the #ThisFlag-injustice frame, the movement narrative also carefully dismantled the emotion of fear. According to Jasper, “emotion is an action or state of mind that makes sense only in particular circumstances” (1998: 399). By making appeals to peoples' fear as something very rational, #ThisFlag could now incorporate it in their injustice-frame:

⁷⁷ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement leader, (#18, 9 May 2017)

⁷⁸ As we have seen in sub-section 2.2.1

“Carrying our flags, protesting against our government, demanding that they listen and act urgently. We have made a decision as citizens that we are not afraid anymore to speak out. It was our fault, but now we stand and speak and confront.”⁷⁹

In this way, fear moves from something elusive to an emotion that can be objectified and then decisively rejected. Being afraid no longer makes sense when using the #ThisFlag-narrative of pride and active citizenship. Being afraid becomes a choice and the #ThisFlag-narrative decided that it was no longer acceptable to be captured by fear. 'No longer being afraid' then becomes a direct solution to alter the undesired conditions. This frame was adopted by several research-participants in making sense of their own involvement in the movement:

“Why do I think that? So I started to introspect. Why do I think that I shouldn't have the flag? So I stuck a flag in my car, stuck one around my neck! And I just started engaging in the discourse. And then they had the call out for the meeting at the RBZ.⁸⁰ And a part of me was scared! But why am I scared, to go to the Reserve Bank, for a conversation with the governor? Okay, I am going to go! [...] So I was like... daring myself, questioning myself. Why do you feel a certain fear? And I discovered that, all this time this had been there, but I haven't been tapping into it, because I had all these preconceived ideas about what I was allowed to do and what not. And you can't really pin down where it came from, but for years we have whispered about Zimbabwe in bars, but we haven't been saying things out loud. We feel frustrated but we don't complain. So it was this protest of going through things and asking questions, and seeing other young people just feeling it.”⁸¹

4.2.2 Blame

The constructed shared grievances now also need a focussed target (Gamson 1992: 32). The way in which the #ThisFlag-frame was able to reduce fear also stemmed from the particular way in which the blame for these grievances was pointed. Video and document analysis of #ThisFlag-sources shows that the blame for grievances is never placed on individuals, and mainly refers to 'the Zimbabwean government' as the main perpetrator. In this way, #ThisFlag steers away from identifying the independent government positions and - offices with the ruling party. #ThisFlag separates the party and the state, avoiding the obvious blaming of the ruling party and especially the Head of State Robert Mugabe. The blame for the position Zimbabwe is in is put on an office or a function, rather than on a political party or its direct representatives:

⁷⁹Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 18 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via [facebook.com/evanmawarire](https://www.facebook.com/evanmawarire)

⁸⁰ Halfway June 2016, #ThisFlag called on their following to join them for a meeting with the governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), see footnote 46

⁸¹ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement leader, (#18, 9 May 2017)

“If you listen to my videos, from day one, not once did I say: topple them. Not once did I say: let us go and kick them out today. Not once. [...] I was asked point blank about it in South-Africa. One of the students said: we never hear you say 'Mugabe must go', why is that? And I said to them, [...] whilst they should go, what we need to focus more on is the fact that you and I have never been able to speak up before. So we crafted a phrase, which for me has become the backbone of what #ThisFlag stands for, and it says: 'If we cannot cause the politician to change, we must inspire the citizen to be bold.' And I said to people: I don't want to use up my energy saying Mugabe must go, because I think that is an obvious fact. What I want to do is put my energy towards you and me. We are going to be the ones that are here and build a nation for our children going forward.”⁸²

This way of placing blame has to be seen in the context of the repressive Zimbabwean environment. It goes against Gamson's understanding of the concept as optimally functioning when there is “concreteness in the target, even when it is misplaced and directed away from the real causes of hardship” (1992: 33). Furthermore, several research participants blatantly blamed the ruling party and especially the head of state for their grievances, breaking with the way in which #ThisFlag apportioned blame.⁸³ The rather abstract casting of blame by #ThisFlag, therefore, has to be interpreted as having another function besides directing the emotion as evoked by the framed injustice: it creates a safe space for citizens to speak out rather than strengthening the concreteness in the target.

Besides pointing towards government positions, the #ThisFlag-narrative also places blame on its own audience: the Zimbabwean citizen. Already in the initial #ThisFlag-video, Evan Mawarire urges his fellow Zimbabweans to “quit standing on the side-lines [...] wishing for a future that you are not at all wanting to get involved in.”⁸⁴ Part of the position Zimbabwe is in is assessed to be caused by a citizenry that fails to stand up and speak out against their government. In this way, the targets of change are cultural more than political or economic. Raising a new generation of active citizens has its target in those citizens rather than in concrete (government) actors⁸⁵:

“And I think also, I must say that, as I have progressed over the years and looked at why we have gotten to where we are, part of the blame is shouldered by us Zimbabweans. We stopped the culture of holding the government to account. We stopped the culture of asking questions and persisting with these questions until we would get an answer. We stopped the culture of using our constitution.”⁸⁶

⁸² Author's interview with Evan Mawarire, (#25, 16 May 2017)

⁸³ Interview #11, #13, #15, #20, #21, #26, #29

⁸⁴ Evan Mawarire, “*This Flag - A Lament of Zimbabwe - Evans Mawarire [SpokenWord]*”, Accessed July 2017, online via youtube.com

⁸⁵ Interestingly enough, this understanding of blame resonated with several research participants. See: Author's interview with Tafadzwa Mugabe, #ThisFlag-movement supporter (#20, 11 May 2017) - “*Everyone votes and then leaves their elected representatives to fix everything. Nobody is responsible, nobody is even thinking about what they could do to fix things. We are all busy blaming people who we voted into office, we don't take any other responsibility.*”

⁸⁶ Author's interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

This formulation of blame opposes Gamson's understanding of a collective action frame to be essentially adversarial, with a focussed target (1992: 85). However, it has to be understood in relationship with the 'solutions' #ThisFlag then offered. By making the citizenry and their apathy part of the cause of suffering, the movement-frame opened up several specific ways for the citizens to contribute to solving these injustices, which will be discussed in the next sub-section.

4.3 Agency

Constructing an injustice-frame does not explain how movement participants specifically rendered their personal movement participation meaningful. How did the #ThisFlag-frame enable citizens to make the step from endorsing their disenfranchisement as an injustice to developing a consciousness that it is possible to alter these undesired conditions through engaging in particular solutions? After the initial #ThisFlag-video went 'viral', the first seven days of May were declared the '#ThisFlag-challenge'⁸⁷, calling on all Zimbabwean citizens to carry the Zimbabwean flag everywhere they went, as a way of showing their identification with the #ThisFlag-message. Besides this challenge, where the movement moved 'offline' for the first time, there are more subtle 'solutions' we have to identify.

4.3.1 Low Threshold Solutions

In the initial months after the origination of #ThisFlag, there is hardly a strategy for the development of the movement. Evan Mawarire is still without a leadership-team at this point and has no resources available, “walking a road [he] had never walked before.”⁸⁸ In this phase, therefore, the ways in which individuals could get involved in the movement developed in a similar organic way, day by day, literally video by video. The narrative used by Mawarire was one of active citizenship, simply “adding your voice to the fact that we are done with injustice, corruption and poverty.”⁸⁹

#ThisFlag is able to connect its injustice-frame to several low-threshold solutions. The movement builds on the ways it rationalizes fear and places blame, making many Zimbabweans feel that they can be part of the sense of collective efficacy.⁹⁰ While some critical voices claim that the #ThisFlag-movement only articulates problems and lacks solutions⁹¹, Mawarire reverses this accusation and celebrates it as a success, “because we

⁸⁷The 'challenge was later extended to the 25th of May 2016 (Africa-Day)

⁸⁸Author's interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

⁸⁹ idem

⁹⁰ Here, we can clearly see the relationship between between the components of injustice and agency, or the “correspondance between an SMO's diagnostic and prognostic framings” (Benford and Snow 2000: 616).

⁹¹See for example: ZiFM, “#ThisFlag pastor Evan Mawarire, full interview on ZiFM with Ruveneko on The Platform”, 16 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via youtube.com - On the 16th of May 2016, Evan

have never talked before.”⁹² 'Speaking out' in this way becomes as a symbolic opportunity of getting involved in the movement. By linking this particular way of getting involved to the blame that was put on the citizenry for staying quiet in the past, movement-participants can render their relatively small effort of speaking out, online or offline, as meaningful.

As we have seen in sub-section 2.4.3, the 'stay-away' action on 6 July 2016 is interpreted as a key-moment in the #ThisFlag-history. As far as offering solutions, however, it should be seen as a continuation of the way in which the movement developed the consciousness that it is possible to alter the undesired situation. The seemingly passive act of staying at home on that day was framed as another way of “lifting [your] voice and to say to the government enough is enough,” legitimizing 'participation' on that day as altering the undesired.⁹³

A second feature connected the active engagement in the #ThisFlag-movement with the emotion of fear as described above. By framing fear as part of the injustice, any Zimbabwean could alter the undesired conditions through, 'no longer being afraid', almost a symbolic solution. Again, this emphasizes the way in which fear was framed as a very rational emotion, of which one can purposefully decide if it makes sense in a particular context. By infinitely repeating the '*Hatichada & Hatichatya*' –mantra in all online communication⁹⁴, resisting fear defines movement participants “as agents of their own history” (Gamson 1992: 7).

4.3.2 *Using the Flag*

The symbolic use of the national Zimbabwean flag can be said to have had the most impact as a way of actively being a part of the sense of collective efficacy. Sharing a picture or video of yourself with the flag is a first step to add your voice to the debate. Any Zimbabwean with an internet connection can share his voice by a simple act of liking a post or sharing a video, incorporating the symbolic element of the flag, and by doing so showing that they are no longer afraid.

The movement agency-frame also clearly emphasized what it did not see as solutions: “We are not marching, we are not meeting, we have just taken up our flags in a way of saying as citizens; we want to get involved.”⁹⁵ Because of the initial online nature of #ThisFlag, active movement participation could happen in a safe environment.

Finally, the flag gave the movement and its participants an object to bring into the physical space. Because the Facebook-video's went 'viral' throughout Zimbabwe and the

Mawarire was confronted with this accusation in a radio interview, discussing with political analyst and ZANU-PF activist Tafadzwa Musarara. The discussion, hosted by the 'The Program'-radio show on ZiFM, was very influential in the early phase of movement emergence.

⁹²Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 24 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire

⁹³Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 6 July 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire

⁹⁴'Hatichada & Hatichatya' in Shona-language literally translates 'we are fed up and we are no longer afraid'.

⁹⁵Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 12 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire

diaspora, the sole bearing of the flag would express a meaning or a message. The frame 'encoded' the Zimbabwean flag as an object (Benford & Snow 1988: 137), rendering once occurrence with that object meaningful (Snow et al. 1986: 464):

“The flag was really that symbol that transcended throughout, and just using that flag, it was a huge thing. It makes you stand out in a way, and you don’t have to say a lot. All you had to do is hold it, to make a statement. And that was a profound thing. People knew what you were doing, and what you were saying without saying anything at all. Because it was all said by holding that thing. So that was huge. I don’t think there is a period in time that the Zimbabwean flag has been sold so much. Until they had to ban it.”⁹⁶

4.3.3 Government reactions

In the phase of movement emergence, the Zimbabwean government actively tries to suppress mobilization under the banner of #ThisFlag. During the 6th of July stay-away, the first big manifestation on the ground in which #ThisFlag played a role, the Zimbabwean government allegedly tries to block internet access and Whatsapp for several hours, to hinder movement coordination.⁹⁷ After the stay-away action, the government comes down hard on movement participants, assaulting, arbitrarily arresting, and charging with public violence, hundreds of protesters across the country.⁹⁸ Robert Mugabe openly accused the Evan Mawarire of promoting violence and being sponsored by hostile Western governments.⁹⁹ As we have seen above, several movement-leaders were arrested and detained, with the 13th of July-events as the main example.¹⁰⁰ Finally and most significant according to the meaning attached to it by research participants, a 'flag-ban' is imposed by the Zimbabwean government at the end of August. Zimbabwean citizens are warned that they are liable to prosecution and imprisonment if they are found guilty by a court of law when engaging in any action or activity which involves the manufacture, sale or use of the national flag in contravention of the law (CANVAS 2016: 35).¹⁰¹

These repressive reactions of the Zimbabwean state towards the #ThisFlag-actions played a role in the feeling of agency among movement-participants. Several interviewee’s recalled 'personal victories' during the first two months after the movement's origination.¹⁰² Although the actual government strength and their stance on the #ThisFlag-movement was

⁹⁶ Author’s interview with movement participant (#7, 4 April 2017)

⁹⁷ Amnesty International Annual Report – Zimbabwe 2016/2017, online via amnesty.org, Accessed 3 July 2017 - Human Rights Watch Zimbabwe Events of 2016, Accessed 3 July 2017, online via hrw.org - also see Dewa Mavhinga, “Dispatches: Zimbabwe Blocks Internet Amid Police Crackdown”, 6 July 2016, Accessed 12 July 2017, online via hrw.org

⁹⁸ See footnote 50

⁹⁹ See footnote 56

¹⁰⁰ See sub-section 2.2.1 and 2.4.2

¹⁰¹ Also see: New Zimbabwe, “One Year Jail Term for Selling Zimbabwe Flag”, 18 August 2016, Accessed 3 July 2017, online via newzimbabwe.com

¹⁰² Interview #1, #2, #8, #10, #13, #15, #16, #17, #20, #26

always based on speculation, these participants can be said to render the movement actions they participated in more meaningful because of the government's reaction to them:

*"I think there was a moment where we felt like the government was cracking. That it could be reached. I think around that day of Evan's court case, a lot of stories came out really inspiring people. So stories of policeman, coming to Evan, while he was sitting, whispering in his ear; "we are actually with you." You were starting to feel like the system itself was falling apart. And you felt like any piece of straw could have broken the camel's back. You just didn't know which moment was going to be... I mean we literally would have some days where you wouldn't know... I literally wouldn't have been surprised if the president would have jumped on a plane and not come back. People felt like you could touch it."*¹⁰³

Although we cannot ascribe this factor as a strategic #ThisFlag framing tactic, it can help us to better understand the meaning people attached to their personal involvement in altering the undesired conditions. Again, it emphasizes the importance of incorporating the less strategic ways in which action is rendered meaningful (Noakes & Johnston, 2005:6). In the next sub-section it will be discussed how the government's action of 'banning' the national flag connected the feeling of agency with an 'in-group' identity.

4.4 Identity

In Gamson's conceptualization of collective action frames, the meaning attached to movement participation can be strengthened by the construction of a collective identity. When the agent feels part of a collective 'we', typically in opposition to some 'they' who have different interests or values', it will secure the sense of efficacy in which it is possible to alter the undesired (1992: 7). Where part of this identity-frame is strategically constructed through two main dichotomies, the research participants on the receiving end of that frame also attached their own meaning to being part of the #ThisFlag-identity group, by radically reframing the meaning attached to the use of the Zimbabwean flag. A final aspect of the identity-frame that was constructed outside of the strategic reach of the movement was the embodiment of the movement's values and interests in the persona of Evan Mawarire.

4.4.1 Opposing Values and Interests

Part of the #ThisFlag-identity was strategically framed by the movement itself. Analysing the discourse in their online communication, two clear dichotomies between opposing identity groups can be constructed. On the one hand, there is the dichotomy which contrasts the 'we'-group with the obvious perpetrator, the Zimbabwean government. Their interests are deemed to be personal and selfish and in opposition to the love and care for the country, which is ingrained in the #ThisFlag-narrative. The framing of the 'we' here is very

¹⁰³ Author's interview with movement leader (#27, 25 May 2017)

broad based, including every citizen who adheres to the core values of the movement, which are *inter alia* citizenship, patriotism, dignity and non-violence. This difference in values is communicated by #ThisFlag in an informal, very direct sense, building on real life experiences:

*“We are standing together, because this government remains beating us, you keep on arresting us. We have not fought you, we stood up in peace, we have done things lawfully, but you the government you keep breaking the law when you attack the citizens. [...] We have ideas to develop this country, but they won’t let us do it.”*¹⁰⁴

Then, the value of boldness, which is framed as “holding the government to account without fear or favour,”¹⁰⁵ represents a second dichotomy, which links the identity-component with the idea of the agent that is part of the feeling of collective efficacy as constructed in the last paragraph. Speaking out and not being afraid makes you part of the 'we'-group, opposed to the 'they'-group consisting of citizens that chooses to remain silent:

*“There is a hope inside you that this country needs. And if you don’t get involved, you are robbing us of that hope.”*¹⁰⁶

4.4.2 Taking back the Flag

Using the national flag as the main symbol for this nation-wide uprising, however, also shook up a long-standing identity divide in the country, without the strategic framing efforts of the movement leadership. Where the Zimbabwean flag used to be a symbol associated with the ruling party ZANU-PF, #ThisFlag offered a new found meaning in the flag; people that loved their country but hated their government reclaimed the symbol and used it as a vehicle to show which group they belonged to.

In 2004 Terence Ranger introduced the concept of 'patriotic history' as a coherent doctrine, used by the ruling party ZANU-PF to construct a Zimbabwean nationalism, rooted in the country's history as a “product of a bitter and protracted armed struggle” (2004: 218).¹⁰⁷ This doctrine positioned that same party as the sole ‘liberators’ of Zimbabwe, excluding other historical actors and explanations perceived as threats to its continued grip on political power. This practice blurred the lines between the ruling party and the state. By appealing to a narrow and dishonest interpretation of Zimbabwe’s liberation-struggle history, the country's nationalism has been a powerful force in the hands of the ruling elites (Munochiveyi 2011, Raftopoulos 2014: 97). Zimbabwean nationalism is monopolized by the post-independence

¹⁰⁴Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 29 August 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire

¹⁰⁵Evan Mawarire, “Rehearsing the #ThisFlag six core values”, 22 of July 2016, Accessed 10 July 2017, online via instagram.com/thisflag_zw, 26th of July 2016, also see thisflag1980.com/our-values

¹⁰⁶Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 14 July 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire

¹⁰⁷Also see Raftopoulos 2014: 97

political elites and operationalized for its own ends. In the last decade, this historiography has drawn distinctions between those who can and those who cannot legitimately lay claim to Zimbabwe's nationalist history, producing insiders and outsiders (Munochiveyi 2011: 102, Kriger 2006: 1151).

We have to understand the meaning attached to the Zimbabwean flag as an important symbol of this interpretation of Zimbabwean nationalism. ZANU-PF monopolized the meaning that should be attached to the flag, transforming it from a state-symbol into a party-symbol. This clear group divide between the ruling party as the sole actor that could attach meaning to the Zimbabwean flag was now turned up-side-down by the re-appropriation of that same symbol through the #ThisFlag-movement.¹⁰⁸ Several movement participants expressed how this newly found symbol strengthened the in-group, re-incorporating the vigorous support for one's country, expressed through the flag, into its core values.¹⁰⁹

This identity frame clearly links the use of the flag with a sense of agency, strengthened even further by the government's action of 'banning' the flag a couple of months later. Important to understand, however, is that the strategic movement narrative did not literally mention this monopolisation of the flag as an injustice. As Poletta and Jasper claim, identity construction also happens independently of movement-organizers (2001: 291). This non-strategic frame, in which a symbol was taken away from the ruling party, enabled the movement to catalyse the newly raised spirit of patriotism and point it at the people that stood in the way of the promise that the flag embodied, strengthening the in-group/-out-group divide.

"One of the unique things that happened, which people don't realize is that the flag always has been a tool that the government used. Previously, if you wore the flag, you would be associated with ZANU-PF. So that particular moment was people taking back the flag. This is not your flag, this is our flag! People were taking a tool that the government uses from them and said: we are going to use it against you. A direct act of rebellion, which led to the government banning the flag. Which was very contradicting, because they have always used the flag!"¹¹⁰

4.4.3 Evan Mawarire as the embodiment of the #ThisFlag-movement

Besides the process of defining a shared sense of movement as a collective 'we', #ThisFlag-participants strongly identified with the values and interests represented by an individual; Evan Mawarire. We should not forget the way in which the #ThisFlag-movement originated, as an expression of the personal struggle of a man to take care of his family.¹¹¹ Because of this non-strategic founding moment of the movement that was not meant to be a

¹⁰⁸ A non-strategic form of "counterframing", as a "refutation of the logic or efficacy of solutions advocated by opponents" (Benford and Snow 2000: 616).

¹⁰⁹ Now here you mention all the research participants that mentioned this aspect:

¹¹⁰ Author's interview with Munyaradzi Dodo, journalist and movement-participant (#8, 5 April 2017)

¹¹¹ As we have seen in sub-section 2.4.1.

movement, the set of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized social movement participation became strongly connected to the identity of a person, rather than a movement.

Mawarire embodied a young person and, as a minister of religion, “a man who is ideally, inspirational and honest.”¹¹² Subsequently, Mawarire represented the hardworking, tax-paying Zimbabwean, who is a professional, an entrepreneur, but fails to meet basic needs for his household. The disenfranchised Zimbabwean that had to stand up for his rights was not a constructed identity, but was already existing in him:

“The thing with that first video when I did it, it was a very personal video. I never meant it to be something that was a mass-appeal. To anybody, for anything! It was just me venting. And the issues around that were very basic and still are very basic to me. The fact that I was no longer able to dispense my duties as a father. Looking after my children. Sending them to school! That was actually the main thing that drove it, I was no longer able to provide the school fees for my two young children, to send them to school. I had no savings. I hadn’t bought a house. Business I had tried to start had all failed. And I was failing to provide even basic health care for my kids. So those for me became the issues.”¹¹³

The solutions of 'no longer being afraid' and 'raising your voice' were then directly represented by a movement leader that was openly speaking out against the sources of his grievances and fear. People were inspired by Mawarire, who in their eyes was leading by example. Even though the injustice-frame was initially a personal rant, not intentionally focused on standing up against the Zimbabwean government, several research participants interpreted his actions as a man “trying to fix things for all of us”¹¹⁴, which in turn legitimized their personal involvement in the movement:

“Why #ThisFlag became such a big movement, is because a guy was simply saying what a lot of people were thinking. And if you think about it is actually quite fantastic how oppressed we really are that speaking, it was like we found someone that was saying what we were whispering, and then we had the confidence to say it out loud. And so we started to speak.”¹¹⁵

The coalescence of the #ThisFlag-movement and its founder caused a very blurred understanding of the main entity #ThisFlag-participants identified with: #ThisFlag as a movement or Evan Mawarire as their leader? After this aspect of movement-leader identification will return in the frame I construct in the second analytical chapter, this framing-aspect will prove essential in better understanding the shift in meaning attached to movement participation in final third analytical chapter.

¹¹² Author’s interview with Charlton Tsodzo, movement-participant (#22, 13th of May 2017)

¹¹³ Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

¹¹⁴ Author’s interview with movement participant (#24, 15 May 2017)

¹¹⁵ Author’s interview with movement-leader (#18, 9th of May 2017)

4.5 Conclusion

Sub-question 1: In what ways did the use of the Zimbabwean flag by the #ThisFlag-movement appeal to perceptions of injustice, agency and identity, to construct a set of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized social movement participation?

This first analytical chapter has shown that the #ThisFlag-movement was able to become a platform through which Zimbabwean citizens dared to speak out and stand up against their government. The set of beliefs and meanings that was constructed to do so, combined a moral indignation about the disenfranchisement of the Zimbabwean citizen with the creation of a safe space to openly share anger and frustration.¹¹⁶

The ways in which the appeals made towards several components differed from their optimal application as conceptualized by Gamson. This can only be understood in light of the Zimbabwean context defined by repression. The way in which the #ThisFlag-frame was able to rationalize fear can be seen as an expansion of the emotional-component of the collective action frame. Casting blame upon the Zimbabwean citizen did not construct a clear target for the moral indignation to point at, but legitimized several low threshold solutions for people to get actively involved in the #ThisFlag-movement, without being withheld to do so out of that same fear.

The identity-frame which was then built around that same movement combined the somewhat exclusive 'we'-group of active citizens who contributed to altering the undesired with the very inclusive identity divide of the citizens versus the government. The values and interests the #ThisFlag-identity represented were strongly connected to its leader Evan Mawarire. Several movement participants then strengthened the group-identity by (re)framing the meaning attached to the national flag, as an identity symbol that was taken back from the government and turned into a symbol representing different values and interests.

It is important to note that the frame that was used to give meaning to the movement involvement in this first chapter is constructed out of strategic appeals to perceptions of justice, emotions and identity, as well as less strategic interpretations by movement participants on the receiving end of the frame. Only through an analysis of these different aspects framing can we better understand the rise of 'overnight'-movements like #ThisFlag. Their unplanned, almost elusive emergence can be a strength, but the less-strategic development of the movement-frame leaves room for perceptions of justice, agency and identity to be formed outside of the reach of the movement. This makes the development of the meaning attached to movement involvement unpredictable and hard to control.

¹¹⁶ This linkage between a “set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology” as congruent and complementary is referred to as ‘frame alignment’ by Snow et al. (1986: 464)

This construction of a first set of beliefs and meanings also leaves us with new questions. How was it possible for the #ThisFlag-movement to inspire people to make political claims where they chose to stay silent before? Also, Zimbabwe is not a one-party state, and has known a vast array of opposition political parties, increasingly since 1999. Why did people not choose to put their efforts towards a political institution which has more means and grassroots structures in place? In the next chapter I will discuss how a second set of key beliefs and meanings played a role in legitimizing political participation, through the strong use of a non-partisan framework.

Chapter 5: #ThisFlag as a Nonpartisan Movement

5.1 Introduction

In the first analytical chapter it has been discussed how the #ThisFlag-movement was able to mobilize thousands of Zimbabweans, combining strategic movement frames with less strategic interpretations by movement participants, both rallying around different meanings attached to the Zimbabwean flag. Our understanding of the emergence of the #ThisFlag-movement, however, is far from complete and the previous chapter leaves us with several questions. Almost without an exception, my research participants expressed a strong preference for their personal involvement in the #ThisFlag-movement over other entities making political claims, especially political opposition parties.¹¹⁷ Why, for them, was participation in the #ThisFlag-movement a more sensible and meaningful thing to do than guiding their efforts towards other political institutions with more means and grassroots structures in place?

To better understand how my research participants were able to legitimize their personal participation in #ThisFlag, a second set of beliefs and meanings will be (re)constructed. This collective action frame will show the importance of #ThisFlag's nonpartisan stance, differentiating the movement from other actors in Zimbabwean politics. Parts of the repressive circumstances in Zimbabwe arise from an extreme polarization in the country's political landscape. By deeming unjust the violence and fear this polarization brings with it, #ThisFlag was able to focus the cognitive judgment about what is non-equitable onto an issue that was met with apathy and acceptance before. In the construction of this injustice-frame it is important to understand the meaning research participants attach to opposition political parties, mainly the MDC-T. #ThisFlag then offers a solution, by introducing a platform to make political claims outside of the party-political sphere. Furthermore, the #ThisFlag-narrative of blame and altering the undesired was one of reform rather than revolution. Evan Mawarire's personal battle with the state authorities represents this dichotomy of values and interest, confirming the pivotal role the movement leader plays in the construction of a movement-identity.

5.2 Injustice

To be able to reconstruct the nonpartisan frame that appealed to so many, we have to better understand the nature of the Zimbabwean political landscape. The rise of the MDC in the early years of this century changed contentious politics in the Zimbabwean context fundamentally. New confrontational ways of mobilizing people introduced by one political party were met with exclusionary rhetoric by the opposing party, as a way of demobilizing

¹¹⁷ Interview #1, #3, #4, #5, #8, #9, #10, #11, #14, #16, #17, #18, #20, #22, #24, #29

them. Over time, a heavily polarized society developed, which was not limited to the political realm. “Zimbabweans viewed political and economic developments through the heavily tinted lens of party affiliation” (LeBas 2006: 420). We should understand this party-political polarization as an extension of the monopolization of nationalism discussed in chapter four, creating 'insiders and outsiders'. What these short-run strategies of polarization then brought with them was intimidation, violence and subsequently fear (LeBas 2014: 53-54). The ruling party tactics of political violence to reassure their constituencies resulted in a defensive radicalization within the MDC (LeBas 2013: 179).

5.2.1 *The Emotion of Apathy*

Besides making boundary-crossing or defection from the party difficult (LeBas 2016: 4), this political polarization caused most research participants to interpret the Zimbabwean sphere in which political claims could be made as completely inaccessible.¹¹⁸ Oosterom & Pswarayi show that especially Zimbabwean youth respond to this polarized field of political violence and intimidation by withdrawing from that public political sphere and staying away from political actors and discourses (2014: 47). According to Masunungure, Zimbabweans have come to view themselves as “subjects, not citizens” (2011).

This tendency has arisen out of a fear for the state and the political arena, in the face of its massive display of repression (Masunungure 2011: 51). Citizens would rather accept the inaccessibility of the party-political sphere than run the risk of getting caught up in the violence that it is characterized by, resulting in what Kagoro calls “the comfort of doing nothing” (2005: 21). This observation corresponds with the meaning and emotions attached to party-politics by most of my research participants, as frightening, making it an arena which the majority of the movement participants have accepted to be inaccessible, causing what I call here a 'political fatigue':

“The mere mention of politics in Zimbabwe makes people draw back. People don’t want to participate. Because politics is characterized by violence here. You can’t really say that you support this party or that party, it will not be taken lightly. So people don’t want to be active, known for being active.”¹¹⁹

5.2.2 *Blaming the Political Opposition*

It is important to understand that this political fatigue is strengthened by a disappointment that characterized the meaning attached to the current political parties. Although document-analysis shows that the #ThisFlag-movement narrative does not explicitly point blame towards any political party¹²⁰, research participants on the receiving end of the

¹¹⁸Here I should mention all the research participants that did so by number – See RLS interview (and the rest of the 'political fatigue'-node.

¹¹⁹Author’s interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#26, 16 May 2017)

¹²⁰As we have seen in chapter 4, the movement points blame to a function or a political office, mainly referring to 'the government' (chapter 4.2.2)

frame add this layer to that frame. The meaning attached to #ThisFlag's nonpartisan stance by movement participants resonated with emotions of anger and disappointment towards political parties. Interestingly, their casting of blame is mainly directed towards the biggest opposition party, the MDC-T. What is the context in which we have to understand the blame people pointed towards this party, giving meaning to #ThisFlag's nonpartisan stance?

Although the MDC had faced consistent repression, violence, and electoral manipulation throughout the 2000s, previous elections were highly competitive, which was cause for optimism about an eventual democratic transition in Zimbabwe (LeBas 2014). The idea of a Government of National Unity (GNU, from 2008 up to 2013), with ZANU-PF caused renewed hope and optimism in Zimbabwean society, although unpopular with the party-grassroots.

The hope for a better Zimbabwe that the MDC brought up to 2008 was shattered in the last decade. Especially during and after the period of the GNU, the MDC lost a lot of public support (Raftopoulos 2013: 984-985, 2014: 98). The party's grassroots structures had been badly damaged by the violence preceding the 2008 elections. The actions of the MDC-T during power sharing, damaged the party's public reputation. The side-lining of civil society from the negotiations not only put tremendous strain on the MDC-T's relations with the civic movement that had brought it to life, but also eroded the popular support for the GPA. Its upper leadership visibly benefiting from participation in the inclusive government (LeBas 2014: 60, 2016: 4), fostered the perceptions that the party had "joined the gravy train" (Aeby 2016: 719). The eventual walk-over victory of ZANU-PF in the 2013 elections sealed the fate of the political opposition. A study by Lekalake (2017) shows that trust in opposition politics collapses, from 64% in 2008 to only 34% in 2014. Personal affiliation with opposition political parties even dropped from 74% in 2008 to 28% in 2014.¹²¹

Several movement participants make sense of their political apathy by pointing blame towards the political opposition. The meaning that was attached to their conduct during the GNU also puts them in the same 'they'-group as the ruling party, representing a set of values and interests that is diametrically opposite to those represented by #ThisFlag. The rather vague movement-frame of blame is combined with this more focussed interpretation of movement participants, bridging the abstract and the concrete (Gamson 1992: 33):

¹²¹ Lekalake's study draws on an Afrobarometer survey. Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa.

“Because the current opposition MDC had a chance to do that. And they didn’t do that. [...] During that time [referring to the GNU], the economy stabilized, bla bla bla. But, they kind of jumped on to the gravy-train you know... They got relaxed and became part of the system. So people said: when you had the chance to change stuff, you could have changed a whole lot more, but you didn’t. People got disillusioned. They stopped believing in the promises of a political system of putting about effective change.”¹²²

5.2.3 Refocusing the Injustice-frame

This is the political cultural context from which my research participants were then confronted with the emergence of #ThisFlag. How was the movement able to inspire and legitimize the making of contentious political claims? Again, the sense of injustice does not come from a “suddenly imposed grievance” (Gamson 2011: 464). Instead, the struggles of daily life are transformed into shared grievances with a focussed target, by *reframing* a problem in such a way as to highlight or reveal the injustice inherent in the status quo.

The injustice-frame which is constructed in this chapter, now, was able to re-interpret the perception of the political (party) sphere. The acceptance of that sphere in which one can make contentious political claims as inaccessible was no longer tolerated. The use of violence to polarize Zimbabwean society is framed as an injustice by #ThisFlag. Instead of accepting violence and polarization as an integrated part of Zimbabwean political culture, #ThisFlag deemed it as non-equitable and morally wrong. The used narrative carries a strong tone of indignation about the intimidation and fear that was perceived as normal before. Again, we can see that the injustice frame interprets the suffering party as a collective, rather than an individual (Gamson 1992: 112):

“We are lifting up our voices and saying to our government; ‘enough is enough. This must now change’. I know that a lot of people are afraid to stand up and to speak. And that is okay, because of where we are coming from. But a lot of people across our nation and outside our nation stood up to speak, and our voice is being heard. If you keep silent, evil prevails. That is why we must keep speaking up and keep confronting what is wrong.”¹²³

As we have seen in sub-section 4.2.2, the placing of blame in the injustice-frame is done in a very unclear and almost elusive way. This opposes the clearly appointed blaming by movement participants as seen above. It does, however, fit the frame in which a nonpartisan movement places itself outside of the sphere of “dirty party politics”¹²⁴:

¹²² Author’s interview with Munyaradzi Dodo, journalist and movement-participant (#8, 6 April 2017)

¹²³ Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 20 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via [facebook.com/evanmawarire](https://www.facebook.com/evanmawarire)

¹²⁴ Authors interview with Sean Mullens (#14, 25 April 2017)

“We haven’t had the chance to speak out, but now we are here. You can’t solve problems for the people without the people. You need us. But you side-lined us. You don’t listen to us, you don’t show compassion, you don’t care for us. So now we start to care for ourselves. The honourable ministers who responded to me have only threatened me. Only shouted at me. It is not about me. It’s about the citizens, it’s about Zimbabwe, it is about where we are today. But as we have spoken out, you have only attacked us. And so we keep on lifting our flags, wherever we are. We are now standing up and building our country. Remember: don’t be violent. Don’t insult.”¹²⁵

These specific appeals made towards the perception of the contentious political arena resonated with research participants' anger and disappointment I have outlined above, and the blame they had constructed independently of the #ThisFlag-narrative. However, after cognitively rephrasing the interpretation of the violent political sphere as unjust, it proves hard to convince the audience to actively alter these undesired conditions, going against their strong emotion of fear. To better understand the way in which my research participants were able to eventually legitimize their movement participation, I will analyse the particular solutions #ThisFlag introduced in the next sub-section.

5.3 Agency

In the last chapter it has been discussed how a collective action frame combined the rationalization of fear with the low-threshold solutions of 'speaking out' and 'no longer being afraid'. In the frame that is constructed in this chapter, the nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement offered an alternative to the polarized and violent nature of the Zimbabwean political culture. It allowed movement participants to make contentious political claims, feeling they were outside of the sphere of party politics they feared so much. In this sense, the solutions #ThisFlag offered did not confront the perceived injustice head-on, but avoided the negative implications attached to making political statements by adopting a different identity, offering a 'third option', outside of the sphere of party politics. Further, the core-narrative of the solution #ThisFlag offered was one of reform instead of revolution. With this narrative, which was opposite to the solutions traditionally offered by the political opposition, #ThisFlag enabled movement participants to be a part of the feeling of collective efficacy without the burden affiliated with 'regime-change' as a solution.

5.3.1 #ThisFlag as an Alternative

By figuratively stepping outside of the political party spectrum, #ThisFlag created a new platform for making contentious political claims. In this way, we have to understand the movement as a solution in itself, distinguishing it from the more substantive solutions to alter the undesired we have seen in the previous chapter. In its core, #ThisFlag frames itself as a

¹²⁵Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 18 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via [facebook.com/evanmawarire](https://www.facebook.com/evanmawarire)

'citizens'-movement. This sole and central feature of its identity-frame, in itself, created a new option, referred to as a 'third' option by this research participants:

“And the way he was saying it was also not antagonistic. So you always have these extremes: you are either ZANU-PF or you are anti-government. And he was like: I am neither. He was like: I love my country, I love my government, but I am not proud of what they are doing. Like a third option, you don't have to be a political party to want change, you don't have to be violent to want change.”¹²⁶

In the last chapter we have seen how #ThisFlag used low threshold solutions to actively involve its audience in altering the undesired. Considering the importance of the nonpartisan stance as outlined above, we can now understand that the personal movement participation through these solutions is only possible within the safe environment that was created by the #ThisFlag-movement.¹²⁷ It is important to emphasize that, in this way, #ThisFlag not only offered solutions, but was interpreted to be a solution in itself, creating a feeling of agency among movement participants. It re-activated thousands of Zimbabwean citizens by rendering political claims meaningful in a different way: not to represent the values and interests of any political party, but to change their own situation and the situation of fellow citizens:

“For the longest time, we just have been wanting what is fair. And obviously, to be affiliated with any party would be deemed like you have interests. If you are part of ZANU-PF or whatever party, or part of the opposition, the clear difference is; If you're with the ruling you are patriotic, you are a son of the soil, bla bla bla. If you are opposition, you are a puppet, backed by Western influences. So being affiliated with either of them, you are not representing what the normal person wants. So having a neutral standpoint is more effective in the sense that you are not speaking to the values of either party, but you are speaking to what the normal person wants. A good country to live in, my kids to go to school, an opinion.”¹²⁸

In line with #ThisFlag's stance outside of party-politics, several research participants understand the claims they were able to make through the movement as non-political, expressing them to be outside of the political sphere completely.¹²⁹ Offered a nonpartisan and therefore safe platform to make contentious political claims, apparently, these research participants identified the nature of their claims with the distinguishing feature of the entity

¹²⁶ Authors interview with Munyaradzi Dodo, journalist and movement participant (#8, 5 April 2017)

¹²⁷ The #ThisFlag-movement also literally refers to this solution of offering a safe environment. For example, the 6th of July 'stay-away'-protests were organized in cooperation with the #Tajamuka-movement, and its leaders consider the objectives of both #Thisflag and #Tajamuka “obviously the same [...] in creating that same space where citizens can feel safe to participate especially those who have been passive in the past.” - Promise Mkwanzazi, #Tajamuka spokesperson, found in: Elsa Buchanan, “We are at the tip of the end of President Mugabe' Zimbabwe's Tajamuka campaign says”, 1 August 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via ibtimes.co.uk

¹²⁸ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#7, 4 April 2017)

¹²⁹ Interview #11, #13, #15, #24, #26

under which they made these claims. For them, nonpartisan and non-political become one and the same.

5.3.2 *Reform instead of Revolution*

Besides being a nonpartisan solution itself, #ThisFlag used solutions of a different nature altogether to legitimize movement participation despite the violent political context. The solutions #ThisFlag offered to alter the undesired conditions are expressed by a narrative of reform instead of revolution. The #ThisFlag-narrative towards the people in power is not one of regime change. It does not deny the people in power, or urge for a change in government. Instead it recognizes that same government, but asks them to step up their efforts and to be responsible and accountable:

“To our president the message is very simple: Sir, the people demand you to inspire them. They demand you to motivate them. They demand you to reassure them. And the promise that this flag holds when this nation was delivered into your hands in 1980, is a promise that can be delivered again.”¹³⁰

The belief in nonviolent and non-confrontational strategies was essential in the feeling of agency #ThisFlag offered research participants. The path that led to the reform of a system was in many ways a lot simpler than the one that should lead to the replacement of a party, especially because of the means that the movement offered to reach this goal. Holding government to account, speaking up about injustices, trying to make the political environment more professional and challenging other people to 'ask, speak and act' were acts far less intimidating and indirect than demanding a change in government. The #ThisFlag-narrative of reform was interpreted to be less confrontational towards the regime, forcing them to come up with different answer than violence and intimidation:

“The response to ‘Mugabe Must Go’ is really easy, you just say: Mugabe must stay. The response to ‘We want to build a society of justice, peace and dignity’, is a lot harder. What are you going to say? ‘No, no, no, we want a society of injustice, violence and corruption’? ”¹³¹

The nature of these solutions is in line with the way in which #ThisFlag points blame for the issues it frames as unjust. As we have seen above, it does not direct blame towards any particular political party, but uses the far less confrontational strategy of blaming government-functions. This point is supported by the influence of the more confrontational 'Mugabe must Go'-mantra taking over in the period after Evan Mawarire left Zimbabwe.¹³² Several research participants perceived this shift in narrative as a moment from which the movement became a

¹³⁰Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 12 July 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via [facebook.com/evanmawarire](https://www.facebook.com/evanmawarire)

¹³¹Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#28, 26 May 2017)

¹³²See sub-section 2.4.3

space for “die-hard, hard-core activists, rather than for ordinary people who want a better live and maybe don’t care too much who is in charge of the country.”¹³³

5.4 Identity

It has been discussed how #ThisFlag framed itself as representing a third group of people in Zimbabwean society, which are the citizens. In doing so, it distinguishes itself from the other two 'options', being the ruling party and the political opposition, as completely different entities. This enables #ThisFlag to strategically frame the values and interests of political parties and politicians as adversarial to those of the Zimbabwean citizen (Gamson 1992: 7). Also for this second set of values and interests that identified the in-group, I argue that they are associated at least as strongly with the persona of the leader of the #ThisFlag-movement, as with the movement itself.

5.4.1 #ThisFlag vs. Party Politics

The nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement makes for a clear distinction between the 'we'-group, who simply want “to lead a good life”¹³⁴, and the 'they' group, which is in it for themselves and whose main interest is gaining power. Where the out-group uses force and violence to get what they want, #ThisFlag plays by the rules to acquire their modest interests. The construction of this 'pure' motive, which is opposing more selfish interests of power, is done strategically and purposefully throughout.¹³⁵

It is necessary here to understand the interpretation of the political opposition to be part of the 'they'-group in this frame. The solutions that inspired movement participation oppose the 'change in power'-strategies used by the political opposition parties (Kriger 2006: 1166, CANVAS 2016: 10-11). By creating an alternative, nonpartisan identity, #ThisFlag was able to overcome the ideological bankruptcy of an opposition that is obsessed with the question of who is to succeed Mugabe since the mid-1990s (Kagoro 2005: 21).

This clear difference in values and interests made for a new in-group/out-group divide. The lack of an alternative to the crumbling values of the political opposition found research participants without a collective 'we' in the past. The 'third option' #ThisFlag offered made it possible to identify with a different set of values and interests that inspired movement participation. This identity-alternative also placed the MDC in the same out-group as the ruling party, representing the disappointment and anger with the political party sphere as a whole.

¹³³ Author’s interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#28, 26 May 2017)

¹³⁴ Author’s interview with Barnabas Thondhlana, journalist and movement participant (#13, 13 April 2017)

¹³⁵ References to this purity of motive are found in my analysis of the #ThisFlag online communication in almost every movement-message – Also see: Author’s interview with Evan Mawaire (#25, 16 May 2017): “ I think it is the purity of motive. That which says that we are purely concerned about the issues, and not about position or power. And I think that, in a big sense, was attractive to a lot of people. They felt like there was a level of genuineness that they could trust in this.”

“Why do people expect politicians to lead them, when interests of politicians are different from the interests of the common man in the streets? The interest of the politician is to assume power. But the interest of me is to lead a good life! So when he [Evan Mawarire] stood up, I said: that is interesting, somebody decided to show their discontent with these guys. Somebody who is not a politician. So I could relate to him.”¹³⁶

The #ThisFlag-movement frame was also interpreted to represent the younger generations in Zimbabwe that could no longer relate to the main argument of the ruling party to be in power. Where the ruling party still lends its legitimacy from the sacrifices that were made in the liberation-war,¹³⁷ the Zimbabwean citizen that hasn't lived through those war-years cannot relate to these values in that same sense. Their aspirations are now different from the men and woman that went to war, because “this is now not a liberation struggle, but it is an economic struggle.”¹³⁸

5.4.2 *Evan Mawarire vs. Party Politics*

The set of values and interests that my research participants found in #ThisFlag- which inspired and legitimized their social movement participation- are associated at least as strongly with Evan Mawarire as with the broader movement. Mawarire incorporated the values and interests of the ‘we-group’ in his persona, making him the embodiment of #ThisFlag.

In contrast to the identity-divide as we have seen in chapter four, the nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement was essentially not constructed strategically over time. Because of the unwitting origination of the movement, the nonpartisan identity was not strategically adopted, but became an inherent part of the identity of the movement through the persona of its founding-father. Mawarire is described as a common man from the street who can relate to the issues of an ordinary citizen. Then, as a church-leader, he is valued as a man of faith. Also Mawarire, who turned forty in 2017, was seen as representing the younger generations of Zimbabweans.

Within the identity-frame that was constructed by my research participants, the things Mawarire did *not* represent were as important as these positive identity features. He was not a politician, but also not an activist in any sense. Both these positive and negative personality features appealed to the perception of the movement leader as a genuine voice. Here we can see the link with the negative meaning people attach to being active on any side of the political sphere:

¹³⁶ Author’s interview with Barnabas Thondhlana, journalist and movement participant (#13, 13April 2017)

¹³⁷ LeBas 2014: 62, Munochiveyi 2011: 94, Kriger 2006, also see Ranger 2004: 218 on the statement by Godfrey Chikowore in an article in the Herald of 16 February 2002

¹³⁸ Author’s interview with Gift Ostallos Siziba, former student leader and movement participant (#11, 11 April 2017)

“And he was not the usual suspect. He is not related to civil society. So he was disqualified as a MDC supporter, or a regime changer or a person that fills his own pockets. Nor of a political party that tried to beat ZANU-PF. So it was kind of a safe way of speaking out. Nonpartisan, just as a citizen, talking about civic rights, human rights, that is different I think.”¹³⁹

For many research participants, the personification of the newly found identity divide was represented by Mawarire’s personal battle with the state. After the success of the initial ‘stay-away’ action on the 6th of July 2016, the Zimbabwean authorities came after Mawarire, causing a mass outcry of anger and indignation throughout Zimbabwe. On 13 July, this momentum reached a climax when thousands of Zimbabwean citizens gathered at the Magistrates Court in Harare to support the #ThisFlag-leader during his court hearings. The battle of an ordinary citizen with the state strongly appealed to the perceived forces of wrong and right, creating a huge incentive to choose a side. Several research participants interchangeably refer to movement and leader when constructing the identity they feel part of.¹⁴⁰ This complete identification of the movement with its leader is important to understand the shift in meaning attached to movement participation in the next chapter of this thesis:

“Especially when it is just such a clean and pure message. He is simply saying; we are speaking out against corruption, poverty and injustice. [...] We love our country. It’s so stark that has this pure message, that doesn’t have any political agenda. He’s just speaking about the injustices in the country. And then you have the totally absurd response, a brutal response. The forces of good and evil, that were so stark at that moment when Pastor Evan was arrested, I am talking particularly about that day. I really think that this was a key moment. There was no time for fence-sitting now. You just have a simple pastor, that didn’t do anything else than just speak out against, corruption, poverty and injustice. And then a brutal crackdown.”¹⁴¹

5.5 Conclusion

Sub-question 2: In what ways did the nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement appeal to perceptions of injustice, agency and identity, to construct a set of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized social movement participation?

In this second analytical chapter, we have seen how a set of beliefs and values rallying around #ThisFlag's nonpartisan stance was able to inspire and legitimize movement participation. The sphere in which political claims can be made is perceived to be inaccessible, caused by an extreme polarization in Zimbabwean party politics. By deeming this inaccessibility and the political fatigue it causes as non-equitable and morally wrong, #ThisFlag is able to make appeals to the perceptions of justice that connect with the emotions

¹³⁹ Author’s interview with NGO-employee (#23, 15 May 2017)

¹⁴⁰ Interview #1, #5, #7, #8, #16, #18, #21, #22, #23, #24, #26, #28

¹⁴¹ Author’s interview with movement-participant (#5, 31 March 2017)

of fear and apathy as expressed by movement participants. The movement itself then offers the solution. By constructing a nonpartisan platform for making political claims, #ThisFlag offers an alternative to the faltering political opposition. By using less confrontational tactics to alter the undesired, #ThisFlag manages to let Zimbabwean citizens make political claims without them identifying these with the violent sphere of party politics.¹⁴²

Furthermore, we are again confronted with the combination of strategic movement-frames and less strategic interpretations and attached meaning by the research participants on the receiving end of the frame. Without strategic appeals to this interpretation by #ThisFlag, the blame that was pointed at especially the opposition political parties by movement participants strengthens the moral indignation and salience of the offered solutions. Then, where the identity-divide between the young generation of citizens who simply want a better life and the old political elite who strives for political power and personal gain is strategically constructed, the coalescence of this in-group-identity with the persona of Evan Mawarire is not. This is not only important to better understand the meaning attached to movement involvement in the phase of movement emergence, but also to explain the shifting perceptions of research participants over time.

After constructing two sets of beliefs and meanings to better understand how movement participation was legitimized, we are faced with new questions. As the empirical vignette at the start of this thesis shows, the meaning attached to the involvement in #ThisFlag was not only of a positive nature. How can we better understand the shift in movement-traction by analysing the way in which people reframed their perceptions of injustice, agency and identity over time? And how can the analysis of this shift in frames help to understand the perceptions of those that still render their personal movement involvement meaningful, taking the #ThisFlag-movement forward?

¹⁴² Again, we could refer to this linkage between a “set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology” (Snow et al. 1986: 464), see footnote 116

Chapter 6: Movement Decline- Shifting Beliefs and Meanings

6.1 Introduction

The beliefs and meanings that my research participants attached to their involvement in #ThisFlag did not only cause them to be bold, brave, and fearless active citizens. We can clearly see this represented in the emotional interview-excerpt I started this thesis with. The 'superman' that once was, turned into Clark Kent again, causing emotions of disappointment, anger and renewed fear. After Pastor Evan Mawarire left Zimbabwe halfway through July 2016, things changed. Pin-pointing an exact moment where 'decline' started or where the rise of the movement came to an end is not possible and more importantly not in the interest of better understanding movement decline.¹⁴³ What is crystal-clear, however, is that along the way, the frames used to legitimize movement involvement changed.

In this chapter, I will try to better understand this change by looking at the shift in the beliefs and meanings that were used to make sense of movement involvement over time. Instead of assuming 'decline' to be as a fixed moment on the macro-level (like Owens does, 2008: 239), I will approach the meaning attached to movement involvement as a dynamic process on the micro-level of the activist. Within this process, rise and decline can happen at the same time for different people, depending on the sets of beliefs and meanings used by the particular individual to explain his or her movement involvement.

The meaning attached to movement involvement in the phase of decline is no longer a one-way-street (Owens 2008: 241). For several research participants the events that happened 'on the ground' made for a shift in the way they valued their personal participation, causing their withdrawal from the movement. For others, who still attached a positive meaning to their personal involvement with #ThisFlag, this meant they had to react and find ways to construct and cope with the meaning and implications of these new developments. Either way, every research participant had to make sense of the events and experiences that happened during this period. Analysing the frames they used to do so can bring us further in our understanding of the dynamic nature of framing, and the influence the frames used in the movement-emergence phase can have on the ways in which individuals make sense of events over time.

¹⁴³The change in meaning attached to movement involvement caused movement decline as much as much as the decline caused further deterioration of the meaning attached to movement involvement. Owens main objective is to better understand "how activist constructed, coped with and clashed over the meaning of and the implications of the decline of the movement" (2009: 18) This objective indicates her focuses on the ways in which activists deal with decline, implying that meaning-making only comes after decline. In this research, the one does not precede the other. Both decline and meaning-making happen at the same time, influencing each other.

6.2 Injustice

As we have discussed in sub-section 2.4.2 of this thesis, the events that happened in the months of June and July are important for the meaning attached to movement involvement. The arrest of Evan Mawarire on the 13th of July led to an organic mass-protest outside of the Magistrates Court in Harare, to which many research participants referred as a key-moment in their perception of the movement. Then, however, Mawarire's sudden departure from Zimbabwe did not meet the culminated expectations, causing a different focus for moral indignation and emotion.

The series of events had a huge influence on the meaning my research participants attached to their personal involvement with #ThisFlag. How did their story change over time? To better understand these changing frames, first I analyse the main objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action (Benford & Snow 1988: 137) used by research participants to indicate change, answering the question about *what* happened in the eyes of research participants. From this starting point, this research will try to analyze *why* it happened, through the lens of collective action frames.

6.2.1 *Shifting Narrative*

How decline is defined acts as a symbol of the greater movement (Owens 2009: 19). First of all, people described feelings of unmet expectation, speaking about this particular movement phase. Where their story of the movement seemed to be working towards a climax, Evan Mawarire's departure was not in line with expectations. Then, this movement phase is described as a decline in the active participation of people in the #ThisFlag-movement. Where there is still somewhat of a momentum online, there is almost no grassroots activity on the ground. This causes some interviewee's to even state that "as a movement now, #ThisFlag is dead."¹⁴⁴

A recurring narrative research participants used to describe change, however, does not refer to the movement as a whole. This movement phase is characterized by a paramount shift in the narrative that is used to describe and make sense of the movement and one's personal involvement in it. The popular narrative among research participants went from being focussed on a movement and the issues of injustice it raised, to being focussed on Mawarire and his intentions and interests. Research participants uniformly tell the story of a leader leaving the country, rather than that of a movement losing its momentum. For them, the essential experience used to make sense of the following period was that Evan Mawarire left the country and the movement was now without its leader:

¹⁴⁴ Author's interview with Barnabas Thondhlana (#13, 13 March 2017)

“He has managed to energize the temperature. But there has been lots of talk about that he abandoned, left for the United States. I am not trying to discredit anybody. But people are now saying they have lost trust. They say look: he has now taken his family to the strongest economy in the world. They are now there, well fed. And he left us here. There was nothing wrong with him going to his family, but still that is what much of the talk is about. [...] I think he had a certain charisma, and he managed to break the fear for a while. The way he used to go round, mobilizing, but the moment he left, people felt he tried to use us. Even though he is back now, people have lost faith.”¹⁴⁵

In this shifted narrative, research participants no longer organized 'the world out there' through referring to their experiences, emotions and actions related to #ThisFlag as a movement, but almost solely by referring to the actions of a single person. The new narrative is all the more striking because it completely opposes the strategic movement frame which was constructed around active citizenship. Where #ThisFlag's strategic frame stayed the same after Mawarire left the country, it was no longer able to mobilize Zimbabwean citizens to break with fear and speak out against injustice. Instead, research participants focussed their emotions and blame on the leader of the movement. How can we better understand this shift in narrative using the lens of collective action frames?

6.2.2 Injustice – Emotions and Blame

The moral indignation that was constructed in the phase of movement emergence evolved around unmet promises and a fear for political participation, which were both deemed no longer acceptable. This strategic frame of attaching meaning to action by #ThisFlag did not change. In South-Africa as well as in the United States, Pastor Evan Mawarire continued his online efforts, speaking with fellow Zimbabwean citizens, about the issues they faced and the dreams they had for their country of birth.¹⁴⁶ Among my research participants, however, these injustice-frames were now overlaid by a strong moral indignation about Mawarire's personal acts.

Several emotions that are of essential importance for research participants to make sense of these new developments can be traced back to the same context that allowed #ThisFlag to emerge and mobilize so many Zimbabweans in the first place. The emotions that characterized their reaction on this set of events were those of disappointment and anger, as was also recognized by Mawarire himself:

¹⁴⁵ Author's interview with a Zimbabwean human-rights activist (#4, 28 March 2017)

¹⁴⁶ From document analysis, we can see the #ThisFlag-video updates using a similar narrative of injustice, agency and identity as before Evan Mawarire left the country. For example, see: Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 18th of July 2016: *“Pastor Evan here, I am sitting in CNBC-Africa in Johannesburg. Just talking about the citizens, we are building our country. I continue to say this to the Zimbabweans: the work we have done is a work that cannot be stopped. We are telling the world our story. The hardships, the things that we are facing. And we have the right to be able to do that.”*

“Part of the difficultness was to explain to people the danger I felt me and my family were in. Because even that, people can still counter that, and say: wait a minute. All of a sudden you are in danger? You called me out?! You called me out on the street and now you are in danger? What the hell is going to happen to me? Oh wait, your family is now in danger? So your family is more important than my family?”¹⁴⁷

These particular emotions can only be understood in the context of the sets of beliefs and meanings constructed in the last two chapters. Research participants regularly linked the disappointment in their movement’s leader to the shattered hopes caused by politicians and political parties in the past. Punctuating these events and experiences to make sense of movement decline caused them to develop a similar kind of scepticism towards #ThisFlag and Mawarire now as they had expressed towards the political parties before. They blamed Mawarire for leaving them exposed as they blamed the political opposition for leaving them without an actual alternative to stand up against their repressive regime:

“And what you have to understand is that we had so many years in which we had promises, hope and then crash. So what people were expressing was: oh you have done this to us again! Even though you are not the government, you have done it again. So now people were saying: are you with them? Because you are acting the same way in raising our hopes and then smash us.”¹⁴⁸

A second reason for this shifted narrative can be found in the construction of the out-group in the collective action frame, as discussed in sub-sections 4.4 and 5.4. Where #ThisFlag's vague and not always adversarial frame for blaming was a strength in many ways, it also left room for movement participants at the receiving end of the frame to develop their own interpretation of the movement-identity. This resulted in the strong identification of the persona of Evan Mawarire with the movement as a whole, as we will see later in this chapter. Besides the repressive Zimbabwean circumstances, a reason for this might be that the targets of change are cultural more than political or economic (Gamson 1992: 85), as we have also seen in chapter four. Raising a new generation of active citizens has its target in those citizens rather than in concrete government actors or political structures.

6.2.3 Agency

The shift in narrative used to frame movement involvement not only caused conflicting emotions, but was also contradictory to the explicit solutions #ThisFlag offered to 'alter the undesired'. Already before Evan Mawarire got into a personal battle with the Zimbabwean state apparatus, #ThisFlag tries to prepare its audience for a situation in which something will happen to the main leader figure. In its online communication, #ThisFlag

¹⁴⁷ Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

¹⁴⁸ Author’s interview with a #ThisFlag-movement participant (#21, 12 May 2017)

literally prescribes movement participants to continue their efforts under the movement-banner in the case of a disruptive moment:

*"If anything ever happens to me don't stop. Shout louder, because these people cannot destroy our country as we watch."*¹⁴⁹

The consciousness that it is possible to alter the undesired conditions, which inspired many research participants to engage in particular solutions, are now interpreted as no longer durable. In the phases of movement emergence, fear was rationalized by #ThisFlag and then framed as an emotion that should no longer be accepted in the safe context that the movement created. The genuine fear for his personal safety, expressed by the main narrator of the message, however, went diametrically against the solutions of speaking up and no longer being afraid. This contradiction strengthened a new moral indignation.¹⁵⁰ Not so much the movement frame, but it's leader's sincerity was questioned.¹⁵¹ One of the faces of #ThisFlag that developed besides Mawarire was Fadzayi Mahere, a human-rights lawyer who supported the movement during several public events. On the 10th of August she wrote an open letter to Evan Mawarire, expressing exactly this perception:

*"He told us all not to fear - on radio, in his videos, on social media and in the street. There is no denying that many were emboldened by his mantra and his leadership. Over the months that he ran his campaign, many regular citizens made themselves more vulnerable than they otherwise would have because the citizens had joined hands and discarded their fear in demanding a better Zimbabwe. [...] Was he lying when he said he wasn't afraid? Is he now afraid? Is he ever coming back? [...] Has he had a change of heart? Surely, he has a moral obligation to let the public who followed him know about his change of heart - given that so many made themselves more vulnerable than they would have but for his "hatichatya'."*¹⁵²

Here I can conclude that, although the strategic movement frame had been preparing participants for this disruptive moment, the nonstrategic interpretations of the experiences and events that followed after the 13th of July had a stronger influence on the eventual meaning attached to movement involvement. The explanation of this particular outcome should now be understood in the way the identity-frame of the movement was constructed in the phase of movement emergence.

¹⁴⁹Evan Mawarire, Facebook update, 17 May 2016, Accessed March 2017, online via facebook.com/evanmawarire - These literal references can be found on a structural basis in the document analysis of online #ThisFlag communication throughout the whole research period

¹⁵⁰ Benford and Snow refer to "frame inconsistency" as an influence on the effectiveness or mobilizing potency of the used frame (2000: 620).

¹⁵¹ Authors interview with Charlton Tsodzo (#22, 13 May 2017)

¹⁵²Fadzayi Mahere, "Open Letter' to Evan Mawarire", 10th of August 2016, Accessed 2 May 2017, online via facebook.com/fadzayi.mahere

6.3 Crumbling Identity

Building on the ways in which the frames of injustice and agency are being reinterpreted, I argue that the essential framing-component for better understanding the shifted meaning attached to involvement with the #ThisFlag-movement was that of identity. It has been discussed how, outside of the strategic movement framing efforts, the #ThisFlag identity-frame brings together the meaning attached to the movement and the persona of its leader. In the eyes of several research participants, now, Mawarire's identity-frame developed from that of a regular citizen to an activist with political ambitions.¹⁵³ All these changes caused for a precariously built identity-frame to crumble, blurring the lines between the 'we' and 'they'-groups and their values and interests. In this context, we can better understand the withdrawal of many Zimbabweans from the #ThisFlag-movement.

6.3.1 *Shifting values and interests*

The core values and interests of the #ThisFlag-movement created a clear divide between an in-group that movement participants could identify with and an out-group that represented a different and opposing set of values and interests. The in-group identity was clearly linked with the persona of Evan Mawarire, as we have seen in the last two chapters. The shift in narrative, from a movement and the issues it fought for to a persona and his motives, had a huge influence on the meaning movement participants attached to the #ThisFlag-identity.

The values of boldness and patriotism #ThisFlag used in their identity-frame were undermined by its leader leaving the country out of fear and allegedly seeking asylum in the United States. Evan Mawarire's departure left my research participants in confusion about the motives for him to head off, and many express doubt about the genuineness of the leader.

Then, Evan Mawarire openly struggled with shifting ideas about his personal role. Despite the fact that he expressed a genuine fear of turning from a normal citizen into a “polished CSO-person”¹⁵⁴, he did develop the idea of running for political office over time.¹⁵⁵ After his return to Zimbabwe, Mawarire publically expressed the fact that, although not sure, he certainly “didn't want that door to be closed.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Interview #4, #13, #14, #18, #22, #23, #27, #28, #29

¹⁵⁴ Author's interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017) with CSO standing for 'Civil Society Organization', and a “Polished CSO-person” referring to someone which can only speak the official lingo, opposed to the “run the mill guy from the street” image Mawarire expressed to have when movement originated

¹⁵⁵ Author's interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017) Mawarire explicitly expressed his awareness of the unpopular side of running for political office, stating: “*So one of the thoughts that have crossed my mind, which is not a crime, is the thought that maybe the graduation point for some of us would be to say therefore, we are going to prepare ourselves to run for political office of some sort. It is not a very welcome thought for a lot of people, because of the way politics is viewed here in Zimbabwe. [...] Where people rather would not have you or themselves to become part of a political process actively, and yet still want to influence that process.*”

Also see: Simon Allison, “Zimbabwe's Pastor Evan Mawarire: ‘I'm coming home, and I don't know what is going to happen’”, 1 February 2017, Accessed 14 July 2017, online via dailymaverick.co.za

¹⁵⁶ Business Day, “‘Protest pastor’ Evan Mawarire could run in 2018 Zimbabwe election”, 17 February 2017, Accessed 14 July 2017, online via businesslive.co.za

The nonpartisan stance of the movement, represented by the identity of the man who started it, also became contested in this way. This new idea of a politically involved 'activist' then needs to be understood in the context of the polarized and violent political landscape as was discussed in chapter five. By considering running for political office, Mawarire's actions caused the interpretation of #ThisFlag as a safe platform to stand up and speak out outside of the sphere of party politics, to crumble:

*“Of course he is still a Pastor, but he is more viewed as an activist now. And I think it will be important for him to actually foster that pastoral role, because it is important for building trust for people. Because one the reasons why people did trust him and were mobilized by him was because he wasn't an activist. He was like: this is like anyone of us, an ordinary person. [...] I think as soon as you declare your intentions to run for any political office, the selflessness of it is immediately more ambiguous.”*¹⁵⁷

While movement participants were in the process of making sense of all these events and stories, the official movement narrative did not change. In online communication, #ThisFlag continued to spread the same message; addressing the same issues of injustice, corruption and poverty, talking with and mobilizing citizens. Furthermore, the new narrative of scepticism and disappointment was not addressed, only seizing the opportunity to counter-frame the shifting perceptions of the #ThisFlag-movement after Mawarire's return in February 2017.¹⁵⁸

The strong in-group/-out-group divide, along the lines of clearly opposing values and interests, now becomes blurred. Where a movement had been able to break fear and mobilize people to stand up and speak out under their safe banner, the leader of this movement now ran away out of the same fear he told his audience to break with. And where the nonpartisan stance of #ThisFlag separated the movement from the power-hungry politicians and political parties, it's leader was now considering to become one of them. Agent and target become conflated, breaking the essential adversarial character of the frame (Gamson 1992: 85). The continued efforts of #ThisFlag to mobilize people to stand up and get involved by making appeals to perceptions of justice and agency were not able to overcome this blurred identity frame.

6.3.2 *The relationship with movement emergence*

Why did the alleged changes in the values and interests of one person cause several of my research participants to change the meaning they attached to their involvement in the

¹⁵⁷ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#28, 26 May 2017)

¹⁵⁸For example, see #ThisFlag Facebook-update on the 6th of February 2017, stating: *“Forget Pastor E, this is about all of us. So you don't like Pastor E. That's okay, I am sure you will have your reasons. But this isn't about him. This is about all of us. Surely it is not okay for the state to arrest any citizen on charges that we all know are bogus. Surely it can't be justified and intimidate those who would speak out. They say all that is needed for evil to thrive is for good man to be silent [...].”*

movement, withdrawing from active participation? The period of initial mobilization is critical in understanding the development of the meaning attached to movement-involvement, as it is the source of its “creation myth” (Owens 2009: 36, 2008: 246). We can only understand how Mawarire's personal issues reflected poorly on the movement as a whole in the light of the coalescence of the #ThisFlag-identity with his persona, which was constructed in the phase of movement emergence.

In April 2016, the #ThisFlag-movement was founded, without the individual that was responsible for this act being aware of it. Because the movement originated in this unwitting way, the development of the movement frames happened in that same fashion. The strategies which built the movement were developed day by day. #ThisFlag's vague and not always adversarial frame for blaming was a strength in many ways, but it also left room for movement participants at the receiving end of the frame to develop their own interpretation of the movement-identity.

#ThisFlag built a strategic identity frame in which the movement was opposed to politicians, political parties and citizens who chose to remain silent. At the same time, the belief in Evan Mawarire as the embodiment of this set of values and interests was not aimed for, but attached to #ThisFlag in a nonstrategic way. Because so many Zimbabweans could identify with Mawarire, this nonstrategic origination and development became a strength, which was embraced by the movement.¹⁵⁹ Over time, however, parts of the beliefs and meanings which were developed in this way were no longer under control of #ThisFlag. When, through the above described events and experiences, the extreme identification of Evan Mawarire with #ThisFlag turned against the movement, there was no stopping this shift in meaning attached to movement involvement.

The Zimbabwean state apparatus also used this strong identification of the #ThisFlag-movement with its leader to their benefit. When Mawarire left the country, he was not only attacked for standing up against their government. The authorities also framed his absence as a betrayal towards his own people. Mawarire was accused of being a “sell-out”, his revolt being “commissioned by foreign governments.”¹⁶⁰ His intentions were framed as striving for a violent uprising resulting in regime change, opposed to the non-confrontational tactics of reform the #ThisFlag-movement actually used.¹⁶¹ This questioning of his personal motives strengthened emotions of disappointment and anger. The same government reactions that

¹⁵⁹Evan Mawarire refers to the “organic-ness” of the movement, as having “a certain spontaneity that defies usual trappings of an organization.” – Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

¹⁶⁰Robert Mugabe makes these statements on the 19th of July 2016 – See: Elsa Buchanan, “Zimbabwe President Mugabe slams #ThisFlag leader Pastor Mawarire for first time,” 20th of July 2016, Accessed on 3 July 2017, online via ibtimes.co.uk

¹⁶¹Robert Mugabe on the 19th of July said Mawarire was urging people to “adopt violence and violent demonstrations as the way of solving grievances”. He repeated similar statements on the 27th of that month – See footnote 56

strengthened the meaning attached to personal movement involvement¹⁶² now were re-interpreted, adding to his crumbling identity.

To make sense of this strong identification of the movement with its leader, many research participants refer to a 'Messiah-complex'.¹⁶³ With this concept, interviewees refer to the blind trust in a leader-figure who will save Zimbabwe, opposed to taking fate into one's own hands and pushing for a better life. This complex is expressed to be an inherent feature to the Zimbabwean citizen, which cannot be changed:

*"I think the biggest problems for movement building within the Zimbabwean psyche, is this deep desire to find a leader, a Messiah who will take them to the 'Promised Land' so to speak. And I think that definitely was kind of one of the huge weaknesses of #ThisFlag, was that it was so centred around Pastor Evan. And so I think when he left the country, because it was so much built around him as an individual, it was almost inevitable that it would collapse."*¹⁶⁴

In this way, the Messiah-complex is used to explain but also to legitimize weakened movement involvement, or even complete withdrawal. The strongest feature of the #ThisFlag-movement frame in this way also became its greatest 'weakness'. However, it is of essential importance to understand that, in the phase of movement emergence, this 'Messiah' was created by the people themselves, in the person of Evan Mawarire.

The non-strategic construction of meaning attached to Mawarire's persona raises the question how the #ThisFlag-movement is now strategically moving forward. Will the movement-identity for ever coalesce with its leader, simply becoming a vehicle for the path he chooses to go? Or will the original movement narrative of active citizenship to address injustice-issues prevail and be able to loosen itself from its identification with that leader?

6.4 Moving Forward – Legitimizing continued movement participation

Although the expression that “#ThisFlag is dead”, might suggest otherwise¹⁶⁵, there is a group of movement entrepreneurs and -participants who keep on attaching a more positive meaning to their personal involvement in the #ThisFlag-movement. During the time Evan Mawarire was outside of Zimbabwe, a group of citizens formed a new leadership team.¹⁶⁶ Together with their leader, these people had to react to the events following the 13th of July, organizing their experiences and guiding their actions in a meaningful way. In this sub-section, I will discuss how the movement leadership and several movement participants tried

¹⁶² See sub-section 4.3.2

¹⁶³ Which research participants?

¹⁶⁴ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#28, 26 May 2017)

¹⁶⁵ For example: Author's interview with Barnabas Thondhlana, journalist and movement participant (#13, 13 April 2017)

¹⁶⁶ This current leadership team consists of 7 people, including Evan Mawarire, of which most have only got involved with #ThisFlag shortly before or right after Mawarire left the country. I was able to meet all of these leaders in person, and have an in-depth interview with all but one.

to make sense of the shifting narrative. In the case of #ThisFlag, re-strategizing results in a focus on more long-term, nonpartisan engagement, to distance the movement from the shifted values and interests that are associated with the identity of its leader.

6.4.1 Making Sense of Movement Decline

The #ThisFlag leadership-team that developed into its current form in the period after Evan Mawarire left Zimbabwe, was not prepared to give up the #ThisFlag-vehicle to create a better Zimbabwe. In the interviews I had with its members, as well as in interviews with several movement participants, I found a continued belief in personal movement participation. However, these people were not blind to the events that happened after the 13th of July and the development of a different movement narrative, which caused many Zimbabweans to withdraw from #ThisFlag. As a matter of fact, every single one of them was actively coping with the meaning of and the implications of the decline of the movement. I will argue that these particular research participants framed the changes surrounding the movement in ways that can legitimize their further involvement in that same movement, towards the outside world and towards themselves. This happens in different ways.

Initially, these research participants make sense of their continued efforts under the #ThisFlag-banner by referring to their motives, and reassuring themselves of their good intentions. Several movement leaders refer to their main motivation as “wanting a better future for the country.”¹⁶⁷ The sincerity of motives not only opposed the values and interests of politicians and political parties like we have seen above, but also contradicts with those of other social movement leaders, who are allegedly in this struggle for their personal benefits. In this way, they redefine the identity-frame of the movement, creating new in- and out-groups. Here, we can clearly also see the reassurance of motives as a reaction to the sceptic interpretation of the interests of #ThisFlag, mainly towards Evan Mawarire.

Then, a second way of making sense of the decline in popular movement involvement is referring to the different interpretations of the goals of #ThisFlag. In this frame, misplaced expectations cause the decline in movement traction, for people were disappointed about their expectations not being met. Research participants set realistic goals, and express that these have been the goals of #ThisFlag all along. In this way, the withdrawal from many movement participants is explained in a way that legitimizes the efforts of those who continue to be involved with #ThisFlag. Many research participants also referred to the results that were accomplished in the past:

¹⁶⁷ Author’s interview with #ThisFlag-movement leader (25 May 2017)

"I often talk about how Zimbabweans on that day saw something that they cannot un-see. It is like the day at the court. Thousands of people gathered. People saw something they could not un-see. [...] I will apologize, because you did give me everything you had. But at the end of the day, you weren't giving it to me, you were doing it for your country, for you! But it is a hard conversation to have with someone that feels that we were so close. And I always ask: well so close to what? What were we so close to? And people come up with; we were so close to kicking them out! We were so close to toppling them! But that was never the goal to me, to topple the government."¹⁶⁸

6.4.2 *New Strategies*

A final frame used to legitimize continued movement involvement explains the shift in movement traction as a moment where "re-strategizing has to take place", recognizing and accepting the mistakes that are made in the past.¹⁶⁹ These new strategies are selected not just for their instrumental value, but also for how effectively they express and sustain specific identities (Owens 2009: 18), focussed on "stopping people talk about Evan and go back to the issues."¹⁷⁰ Where the injustice-frame of unmet promises and fear for political participation is not changed, the solutions to alter the undesired have to become more sustainable. Towards the future of #ThisFlag, my research participants emphasize the aspects which were essential to its success in the past, being the nonpartisan identity and focus on active citizenship, contrary to more confrontational tactics:

"That we operate in the political space but we are not politicians. We don't aspire to be in political office, we need to be objective, nonpartisan, a-political, holding everybody to account, trying to make the political environment more professional and challenging people to ask, to speak and to act."¹⁷¹

Then, a more long-term, strategic approach has to get young people thinking about their role in changing the country, rather than rallying them to speak out or carry a flag, without demanding their further involvement. These new strategies have to be understood as a way of resolving the identified causes of decline. #ThisFlag's nonstrategic origination and development inseparably linked its values and interests to the persona of Evan Mawarire. In the frames used to describe the future, movement strategies should be less ad-hoc. Accepting that there is no political alternative at the moment, and breaking with the party-political identity #ThisFlag was ascribed by the acts of its leader, the new long-term narrative tries to manage the expectations of its audience:

"There is nobody that captures their imagination and inspires them. Let us rather change the conversations that happen in the country, and let us create in people a hunger to aspire for something

¹⁶⁸ Author's interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

¹⁶⁹ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement participant (#28, 26 May 2017)

¹⁷⁰ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement leader (#18, 9 May 2017)

¹⁷¹ Author's interview with #ThisFlag-movement leader (#27, 26 May 2017)

*more. We know it is a long journey, but we are completely still on that journey. So what the public was hoping for might have changed, but what the team is aiming for, that is still the same.*¹⁷²

With the implementation of these new strategies, there seem to be several options. Will a change of strategy be enough to redirect the meaning people attach to their involvement in #ThisFlag? Or does #ThisFlag need a more disruptive decision to prevent that the movement will “forever be joined at the hip” of its leader?”¹⁷³ Where some believe in a more modest approach, several research participants express the desire to completely shift the movement they want to be involved in away from “what it has been associated with.”¹⁷⁴ Mawarire expresses a short term political aspiration, claiming that this is a “once in a generation season.”¹⁷⁵ Within the leadership-team, however, these political-interests are perceived as irreconcilable with the values that should arrange the #ThisFlag-vision around the above mentioned long-term narrative. Here, it seems like a choice has to be made, between the movement and the narrative. In her work on the Amsterdam squatters movement, Owens concludes that for a new movement to arise, the old one had to be ‘killed’ (2009: 174/216). Should #ThisFlag as a movement have to be sacrificed, for the narrative of active-citizenship to be saved?

¹⁷² idem

¹⁷³ Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

¹⁷⁴ Authors interview with Jessica Drury, #ThisFlag-movement participant (#29, 27 May 2017) – referring to “*Pastor Evan and what happened last year, 2016.*”

¹⁷⁵ Author’s interview with Evan Mawarire (#25, 16 May 2017)

6.5 Conclusion

Sub-question 3: How did the beliefs and meanings used to inspire and legitimize social movement involvement change over time and in what way did this influence movement withdrawal, the emergence of new frames, and movement strategies?

In this final analytical chapter, it has been discussed how particular events and experiences initiate a new phase for the #ThisFlag-movement. This phase of decline was not just an inverse of the phase of emergence, but had its own dynamics, causing change in the meaning attached to movement-involvement. This change is not only important to understand the withdrawal of several research participants. It can only be understood in light of the ways in which the original movement-frame was constructed in the phase of movement-emergence. Finally, the downward trajectory #ThisFlag found itself on also caused those who still had a more positive understanding of their personal involvement in the movement to re-frame the meaning attached to action, creating new identities and strategies towards the future.

Gamson argues that “the injustice-component of a collective action frame facilitates the adoption of the other elements” (1992: 114). In the #ThisFlag-case, the stories research participants used to frame their personal movement involvement changed over time. The focus of the moral indignation shifts from being focussed on a movement and the issues of injustice it raised, to being focussed on a personality and his intentions and interests. In this way, the shift in narrative for the injustice frame was accompanied by a reassessment of the feeling of agency and the identity-divide, which were both constructed in the phase of movement emergence. In this way, the final analytical chapter has shown how the injustice-frame is also leading in phases of movement decline.

The #ThisFlag-movement-identity was framed around a set of beliefs and values, captured in the persona of Evan Mawarire. This non-strategic identity-frame became essential in the renewed interpretation of meaning that led several research participants to withdraw. The emotions these renewed frames caused can be explained by crumbling values and interests, blurring the lines between the former in-group and out-group. In this way, the organic and nonstrategic construction of the #ThisFlag-identity turned from a strength to a weakness. By reducing the identity-divide on which the collective action frame built to Mawarire and his personal battle with the state, people missed the underlying structural conditions that produced their hardship (Gamson 1992: 33).

A group of movement-entrepreneurs and -participants had to react, legitimizing their continued involvement in the movement. The way in which these research participants interpreted the shifted movement narrative had an important influence on how #ThisFlag will move forward, placing them before the ultimate choice: would they choose to rather ‘kill’ the movement to be able to save the narrative?

Chapter 7: Conclusion & Discussion

7.1 Conclusion

The main aim of this six month research-project was to better understand the emergence and decline of the #ThisFlag-movement, through the eyes of its leaders and participants. How was it possible that so many Zimbabwean citizens took it upon themselves to make contentious political claims against their repressive government under the banner of #ThisFlag? And why did the momentum that the movement built halfway through 2016 decline over time? This final thesis has tried to answer these questions by analysing the meaning that was attached to movement-involvement by the research-participants.

The #ThisFlag-movement was able to construct two main sets of beliefs and meanings that inspired and legitimized movement involvement. In the first constructed frame, the meaning attached to Zimbabwean citizenship was reformulated. The national flag as the main symbol of the movement represented this new-found meaning. On the one hand, it was interpreted to represent the right to a prosperous and good life, contradicting the current disenfranchisement of most Zimbabweans. On the other hand, the use of the flag was interpreted as a re-appropriation of that symbol, causing a strong in-group/-out-group divide. Low threshold solutions then gave the in-group the possibility to actively alter the undesired situation.

The second constructed frame evolved around the nonpartisan stance of the #ThisFlag-movement. The polarized, violent nature of the political party sphere was re-interpreted as something unjust. By positioning the movement outside of this sphere, #ThisFlag itself became a safe alternative for making contentious political claims, preaching reform instead of revolution. A clear identity-divide was created, between the movement on the one hand and political parties and politicians on the other. In this way, #ThisFlag provided an opportunity for citizens to attach a positive meaning to their renewed political claim making, without running the risks associated with party politics.

The construction of these frames has to be understood as a combination of strategic efforts by the movement-leadership and less strategic interpretations by movement participants. The unwitting origination and early development of #ThisFlag left room for several nonstrategic aspects to be incorporated into the meaning attached to action. The interpretation of the Zimbabwean flag as creating a new in-group/-out-group divide and the particular blame which was put on opposition political parties were essential nonstrategic parts of the constructed frames. Most important was the coalescence of the identity-frame of the movement with the values and interests represented by Evan Mawarire as #ThisFlag's leader.

Then, in the final analytical chapter, we saw a shift in the meaning attached to movement involvement. The narrative which was used to make sense of events and experiences initially focussed on the movement and the issues it stood for. Over time, a person

and his intentions and motives became the focus of stories people would tell about #ThisFlag. This shift in narrative then caused a change in the framing of injustice, agency, and identity. Not only did these changes cause a group of movement-participants to withdraw; it also forced several movement-leaders and core activists to interpret and re-strategize their continued participation. In this way, the early construction of the frame and the shift in beliefs and meanings have an important influence on the future of #ThisFlag.

7.2 Discussion

7.2.1 *Theoretical Reflection*

Although this thesis distinguishes between two main sets of beliefs and meanings, in practice these frames are not constructed independently. The interconnectedness of the two constructed frames and their components of injustice, agency and identity should not be mistaken. Especially the non-strategic meaning-making which was done by movement-participants does not distinguish between two independently constructed frames. The meaning attached to the Zimbabwean flag can and should not be understood independently of #ThisFlag's nonpartisan stance.

However, breaking down the constructed frame into two sets of beliefs and meanings and subsequently in independent interpretations of moral indignation, emotion, blame, solutions, feelings of agency, values and interests does enable us to better understand particular constituent parts. Most work on framing-theory and social movements is committed to finding "master-frames" (Benford and Snow 2000: 618-619), or deducing an SMO's general, central, organizational or primary frame (Evans 1997). Allowing more focus on the constituent parts of a frame and the construction of this frame from these parts could bring us further in analysing the meaning attached to action. Analysing the collective action frames in this way could give a more in-depth and narrowed-down understanding of the different aspects of a collective action frame and the way in which these different aspects are connected.

What this thesis also shows is the need for a stronger focus on the relationship between framing and emotions. Gamson's understanding of emotions as 'hot cognition' has proven not to be satisfactory in analysing the meaning attached to movement involvement. Furthermore, our analysis of this case of collective action in Zimbabwe shows the need for more attention to emotions specifically in a repressive context. Besides mobilizing individuals through indignation, anger or hatred, #ThisFlag benefitted from the rationalization of emotions such as fear and apathy. Goodwin and Pfaff's work on managing fear in the U.S. and East-German civil rights movements (2009) could be a good starting-point.

Finally, the case of the #ThisFlag-movement proves the importance of analysing both the phases of movement emergence and movement decline. The shift in meaning attached to

movement involvement introduced a phase of movement decline as we have seen above. The foundations for this decline were laid in the construction of frames during the phase of movement emergence. As Owens says, there is a strong vibrancy and creativity in decline (2009: 13). For a holistic understanding of the meaning people attach to movement involvement, movement decline should be studied as having its own dynamics, instead of it being a mere reversal of the conditions for movement-emergence.

Should this guide us to analyse movement emergence and -decline as simultaneous processes rather than different phases? (Gamson 2011: 464). Or is the distinction of movement phases on the macro-level of analysis a helpful tool, as long as the construction of meaning attached to action on a micro-level is seen as a dynamic process, moving in different directions at the same time? By including the phase of movement decline in our analysis, we can at least understand that the micro-level construction of meaning in the early days of a movement strongly influences the meaning attached to action over time. Theoretical tools to analyse the meaning attached to *action* should be developed further, to also incorporate the possibility of a shift in this meaning and/or allow analysis of the meaning attached to *inaction* or withdrawal.

7.2.2 *Practical Purpose*

The way in which #ThisFlag originated and developed in the early days of the movement will not prove to be a unique case. It's unwitting origination through social media and the strong online nature of the ways in which contentious political claims were made will probably be something we are going to see more (and more) of in the future (Tufecki and Freelon 2013). Specifically for Zimbabwe, #ThisFlag has shown the mobilizing potential of a group of middle-class, well-educated citizens that possess the ability to create a lot of traction in society.

This organic, ad-hoc, and incremental origination and development of the movement proved to be both a strength and a weakness in the #ThisFlag-case. The room it left for movement participants on the receiving end of the frame enabled components of identity and emotion to play their part in the meaning attached to movement involvement. These same features, then, in the phase of movement decline, caused a shift in movement-narrative and eventually the complete loss of movement-momentum. How could the strength which is in the 'overnight' origination of a social movement be guided in a more strategic way, so it will bring the movement further instead of turning into a weakness?

Theories of non-violent strategy like those introduced by Gene Sharp can offer means to guide a nonviolent movement forward in a more strategic and goal-oriented way. Central to the concept of nonviolent strategy is the idea that a calculated course of action "will make it more likely to get from the present to the desired future situation" (2002: 40). Where unplanned popular action will undoubtedly play a significant role in risings against repressive regimes in the future, non-violent strategies will guide its strength by controlling it rather than

letting it flow uncontrollably. Although the repressive Zimbabwean context will make direct interference difficult, the support of non-violent strategists could be of great additional value in preventing the strength of unplanned popular action turning into a force which downplays the momentum of a movement over time.

The 2018 elections are the obvious next point at the horizon for contentious political actors in Zimbabwe. #ThisFlag and other social movements have the potential to strongly influence these elections, and the short term solutions of a change in government remains attractive to a lot of people. However, #ThisFlag's strength has proven to be mainly outside of the sphere of party politics. As we have seen through the renewed focus on a long-term investment in active citizenship, the targets of change are cultural more than political or economic (Gamson 1992: 85).

On the 28th of June 2017, Fadzayi Mahere announced her candidacy for member of parliament in the 2018-elections. As discussed in this thesis, Mahere was one of the faces of #ThisFlag in the past and is still involved in the leadership team.¹⁷⁶ The official slogan of her campaign is 'be the change', perfectly combining the cultural focus of active citizenship with the political ambition of bringing change in the political spectrum. The combination of these two targets of change could find strong support in each other. Anyone inclined to see the results of this strategy, however, might have to consider looking beyond the 2018-elections. Real political reform through cultural alteration in Zimbabwe will prove to be a marathon rather than a sprint.

¹⁷⁶ See footnote 57

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Appendix I – List of Interviews

List of Interviews – Research Phase 1 and 2:

Interview Number:	Date:	Personal information on research participant:	Categorization for this research	Interview-details
#1	15/02/17	Shaun Matsheza, former student activist now working and living in the Netherlands.	Movement Participant	Individual interview, conducted in Hilversum, the Netherlands, interview recorded
#2	25/03/17	Anonymous – male #ThisFlag leadership member	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview not recorded, notes taken
#3	28/03/17	Tamuka Chirimambowa – former student activist, academic, and founder of the Institute for Public Affairs in Zimbabwe (IPAZ)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#4	28/03/17	Anonymous – human rights activist	Context Actor	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#5	31/03/17	Sean Mullens, #ThisFlag leadership-member Anonymous, human rights lawyer and activist from Zimbabwe	Movement entrepreneurs/Movement Participant	Duo interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#6	03/04/17	Promise Mkwanzani – spokesperson for the #Tajamuka/Sesjikile-campaign	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe – interview not recorded, notes taken
#7	04/04/17	Anonymous – male Zimbabwean music-artist and movement participant	Movement Participant / Context Actor	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#8	05/04/17	Munyaradzi Dodo - journalist, professionally and privately involved in social movements	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#9	06/04/17	Anonymous – former students activist and movement participant	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview not

				recorded, notes taken
#10	07/04/17	Dirk Frey – movement leader of the Occupy Africa Unity Square (O AUS)-Movement Charles Nyoni - movement leader of the Occupy Africa Unity Square (O AUS)-Movement	Movement Entreprene urs	Duo interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#11	11/04/17	Gift Ostallos Siziba – student activist and movement leader of the #ThisGown-campaign Anonymous - student activist and movement leader of the #ThisGown-campaign	Movement Entreprene urs	Duo interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#12	11/04/17	Anonymous – male working for Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), a leading platform was started in 1996 as an effort to foster and encourage the growth and strength of human rights at all levels of Zimbabwean society through observance of the rule of law – defending several activists and their contentious actions in the episode this thesis places itself in	Context Actor	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#13	13/04/17	Barnabas Thondhlana – Harare based journalist, involved in several protests within the contentious episode, professionally and privately	Movement Participant and Context Actor	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded

List of Interviews – Research Phase 3:

Interview Number:	Date:	Personal information on research participant:	Categorization for this research	Interview Notes
#14	25/04/17	Sean Mullens – second interview, see above	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#15	28/04/17	Ro Lange-Smith - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare,

		#ThisFlag-team)		Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#16	01/05/17	Marshall Shonhai - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via #ThisFlag-team)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#17	03/05/17	Anonymous - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via #ThisFlag-team)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#18	09/05/17	Anonymous – member of the #ThisFlag-movement leadership	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#19	09/05/17	Kuda Musasiwa - member of the #ThisFlag-movement leadership	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#20	11/05/17	Tafadzwa Mugabe - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via #ThisFlag-team)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#21	12/05/17	Anonymous - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via social media selection)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#22	13/05/17	Charlton Tsodzo - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via social media selection)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#23	15/05/17	Anonymous (three participants) - interview with employees of an international developmental NGO, working on issues of youth-engagement and freedom of speech	Context Actor(s)	Trio-interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#24	15/05/17	Anonymous - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via social media selection)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#25	16/05/17	Evan Mawarire, founder of the #ThisFlag-movement	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded

#26	16/05/17	Anonymous - #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via social media selection)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#27	25/05/17	Anonymous – second interview, see above	Movement Entrepreneur	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#28	26/05/17	Anonymous – second interview, human rights lawyer and activist from Zimbabwe	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded
#29	27/05/17	Jessica Drury – #ThisFlag-movement supporter (via #ThisFlag-team)	Movement Participant	Single interview, conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe, interview recorded