Review of: "Animation and YouTube as Alternative and Counterhegemonic Digital Public Sphere in Zimbabwe"

Milan Ismangil[1]

1 International Institute for Asian Studies

General point by point thoughts as I read through the paper

In general, a decent read but with some significant points that need to be cleared out especially relating to the use and explanation of the core concepts and the choices behind the material of the case study. I hope the authors continue to work on it and further develop their argument and paper which looks promising.

- The keywords can be better attuned to the contents
- Might help to cite multiple papers when noting things such as "A significant corpus
  of literature on social media in the Zimbabwean context, for instance, has previously focused on how youths make use of
  social media platforms for political activism (Mare, 2017). On the other hand, a growing body of scholarship has also focused on political parties in Zimbabwe make use of social media platforms during national elections (Gukurume, 2017)."
- Is the definition of cartoon necessary?
- Need more context / background of Zimbabwe and the specific case study for those unfamiliar
- Also could use better explanation of the rationale other than 'selected cartoons' – otherwise might be easy to argue cherry picking
- The series of the case study has a combined viewership of 300.000 which strikes me as low considering Zimbabwe's (digital) population in how far does this form part of a (counter) public sphere and not a isolated instance of a somewhat popular YouTube channel
- The primary concepts of counter hegemony and public sphere are underdeveloped (as well as subaltern in the context of the study): this sentence does a lot of heavy lifting and can use some explanation: "As characters perform and deliberate on issues that deal with political issues, they automatically create a primary digital counter public sphere, which is simultaneously reflective of other subaltern public spheres in the world beyond social media."
- Some more background information on the YouTube channel is necessary. Do we know who the authors are? Or when these videos are placed and why. There is a risk of overblowing the importance of these videos, linking it to other forms of protest or counter discourse might make the argument more powerful.
- The exact extent of the case study and the rationale of the chosen images is unclear. A more systematic approach might be worthwhile to understand the reasoning behind the choice of videos (see also comment earlier about cherry

picking).

- The case study ends by stating that "Social media has created a virtual community of dissent that actively fostered counter-hegemonic discourses, hence affording the hitherto supressed voices an audible voice against these governments (Gukurume, 2017; Morgan, 2018)." But what about pro establishment social media voices which are amplified by state media and their power of representation?

- The conclusion needs to be rewritten to be specific to the case study as its claims now are a bit vague. "The Digital Public Sphere can become a viable alternative platform for challenging hegemonic ideas and prompting structural transformations in the political arena". Has this happened, perhaps give examples here or link it to experiences in other parts of the world (arab spring; Sunflower mvt, HK 2019 protests; etc.). The power of the digital to affect large political change through protest has been the subject of great debate and this is currently lacking.

- Would recommend changing the format, move or integrate background and synopsis as this now reads like a second introduction after the introduction, even with its own claims of the article which is already present in the actual introduction.