



Towards A Global Black Movement: Themes in Gen Z Protests in Kenya and Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States of America

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Abstract

The Gen Z Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) share certain attributes that characterise them as a representation of an emerging Global Black Movement for the emancipation and progression of the Black race. A survey of each movement was conducted, followed by a comparative exploration of the movements, aimed at testing the hypothesis of a Global Black Movement. It was observed that both movements are responses to specific challenges and concerns in their respective societies. Both movements are situated in unique historical contexts and modern realities, including the colonial history and leadership failure, the history of racial oppression, and the modern issue of police brutality in America. It was discovered that there are points of convergence in the objectives and activism of both movements. First, Africans and Black Americans have expressed solidarity with each other, supporting the plights of Black people in other societies, suggesting mutual empathy and the emergence of a decentralised form of Pan-Africanism among Black youths. Secondly, both movements were described as leader-less, tribe-less (or class-less) and fear-less, vocal against injustice, decentralised, and yet inclusive. Thirdly, in both movements, social media is embedded in activism. Fourthly, the specific concerns of each movement were classified as dissatisfaction with leadership and little faith in the police force. Finally, the specific challenges tackled by the movements were traced to a shared history of oppression.

Keywords: Global Black Movement, Gen Z Movement, Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM), Kenya, United States of America

Introduction

Prominent international news channels have been providing reports on the recent anti-government protests in Kenya, which started in June 2024. On 9 July 2025, Al Jazeera reported that, according to Kenya's human rights commission, the death toll from the anti-government protests in the country

had increased to 31 people, while 107 people had been injured. (Al Jazeera, "At least 31 dead, 532 arrested in Kenya's antigovernment protests"). In addition, CNN reported on July 8, 2025, that the Kenyan police force used tear gas and water cannons on protesters who had converged to mark the 35th anniversary of a pro-democracy rally in 1990 which reinstated democracy in the country (Princewill and Nicholls "31 dead and hundreds arrested in Kenya's anti-government protests"). As a result, "[S]ome 107 civilians were injured and 532 were arrested, the KNCHR [Kenya National Commission on Human Rights] said Tuesday. A police statement released on Monday night local time said that 11 people died, 11 people were injured and 567 people were arrested in the protests." (Princewill and Nicholls "31 dead and hundreds arrested[...]"). Other news outlets currently following the situation in Kenya are *The Guardian* ("Shoot them in the leg': Kenyan president's anti-protest rhetoric hardens as death toll rises", posted on 9 July, 2025), The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) ("Ten die for Kenya as protesters close down central Nairobi", posted on 7 July, 2025), DW ("Kenya: Tensions after more deadly protests" posted on 9 July, 2025) and a host of others. As evident in the above, the anti-government protests in Kenya, the most recent in Africa, have garnered international attention. It is arguably the most consequential among the series of demonstrations currently happening on the continent, suggesting that Kenya in particular, and Africa at large, are still plagued by economic, political, social, and developmental challenges that have inhibited them since political independence. More optimistically, the protests demonstrate the desire of African youths to transform their respective societies, completing the process of emancipation which continues to elude the continent.

The anti-government protests have been described as a Gen Z movement given the overwhelming presence and participation of youths belonging to Generation Z in the protests. On closer inspection, it may be submitted that the Gen Z movement bears resemblance to the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) which commences in 2013 in the United States of America. The far-reaching influence of the BLMM was proven by the solidarity with the African American protesters espoused by many in Africa. Reporting for WBUR, O'Dowd and Hagan ("Black Lives Matter Movement Resonates Across Africa") in 2020, stated that countries across Africa were joining global protests condemning the death of George Floyd, while clamouring for an end to police brutality on the continent. The association Africans made between the experience of police brutality in the United States of America and their countries is stressed, indicating the similarity between some of the experiences of Africans and African Americans. In like manner, Campbell observed, also in 2020, that the African media was closely following the Black Lives Matter protests, as a demonstration of solidarity with the protesters. In addition, Campbell specified that the focus of the protests on police brutality resonated strongly among African human rights groups, because for most Africans, police brutality was the norm (Campbell "Black Lives Matter Protests in Africa Shine a Light on Local Police Brutality").

Based on the foregoing, it appears that protests by Black people in Africa and the United States of America, while reacting to specific local concerns, address similar issues which affect them globally. From this hypothesis, it is possible to

speak of a Global Black Movement (GBM) which aims to liberate Black people and improve their living conditions across the world. Therefore, it becomes necessary to consider the shared plights of Black protesters and the specific ways they approach them, which are determined by particular political, social and economic realities. Many studies have been conducted on the phenomena of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Gen Z Movement with a focus on their demography, objectives, historical contexts, achievements and limitations (Gafney 2017, Faust et al. 2019, Tillery 2019, Media Council of Kenya 2024, Twinomurinzi 2024, Ohndyl2025). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has attempted to demonstrate the global dimension of Black activist movements by comparing recent protests in Africa and America. Hence, this study will explore themes in the Gen Z Movement in Kenya and the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) in the United States of America under the rubric of a Global Black Movement.

A Survey of the Gen Z Movement

The Gen Z Movement started in June 2024, led and dominated by Gen Z youths. The youths protested against the law hiking taxes (the Finance Bill 2024/15) that had been approved by parliament with a majority vote of 196/105 (Ohndyl 2). Eventually, in addition to the taxation hike, the youths included economic strain, the irresponsibility of leaders, widespread corruption, and police brutality in their petition. Consequently, over 50 youths lost their lives, but the Finance Bill was withdrawn and some cabinet secretaries were sacked by the government (Ohndyl 2). Appraising the movement, Ohndyl (2) comments that "the July 2024 Gen Z protests in Kenya witnessed a revolutionary countrywide mobilization that has never been seen in Kenya's history. The revolt sent geopolitical flu beyond the borders of Kenya to neighbouring countries sharing similar social-economic and governance challenges." The scholar's take strongly suggests that the Gen Z Movement is a historical one which is likely to stay relevant to the political culture in Kenya and other African countries.

Generation Z refer to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. It is estimated that the Gen Z-born are about 33 percent of the Kenyan population and 30 percent of Africa's 450 million youths. (Ohndyl 3). Twinomurinzi characterizes them as digital natives since they grew up in the age of ICT. Therefore, they are conversant with social media, and use these for their daily activities. The Gen Z-born value authenticity, social justice and inclusiveness. (Twinomurinzi 5). According to the Media Council of Kenya, the Gen-Z Movement is self-described as leader-less, tribe-less and fear-less (3). In agreement with Twinomurinzi, the council proposes that the use of social media platforms and other digital technologies "enabled greater inclusivity, allowing young people of various regions and demographics to participate in the protests." (Media Council of Kenya 3).

Twinomurinzi and Ohndyl propose several social, political and economic issues which have prompted the emergence of the Gen Z movement in Kenya, as well as the characteristics of the movement. First, Twinomurinzi explains that, the protest against the Finance Bill 2024, caused by deep economic grievances of the Gen Z, was the major focus of the movement. Most youths saw the Finance Bill, which was intended for increasing taxes on basic goods, as inimical to their economic condition, which had already been hit by high unemployment and limited economic opportunities (7). Ohndyl agrees, noting that “the political economy of Kenya is weak[...]Over time, the country has lost its competitive advantage and production has become expensive leading to capital flight.” (89). Secondly, the complaints of protesters about the economy soon brought to the fore the issue of government unaccountability. The movement condemned the government for endemic corruption, grafting, and the government’s attempt to draw attention away from their financial irresponsibility with the Finance Bill. Activists demanded accountability from public officials (Twinomurinzi8). From Ohndyl’s standpoint, the Kenyan Government entrenched tribalism, cronyism, corruption and social inequality in the country (89). Another issue brought to light by the protests was the attempts by the government to suppress the protests through the police force. Thus, many protesters were victims of police brutality: tear gas, rubber bullets, brute force, and arrests, were used against proponents of the movement(Twinomurinzi8).

The self-identification of the Gen Z Movement as leader-less, tribe-less and fearless was demonstrated most visibly in their use of social media for conversations about government policies, organisation of protests and drawing global attention to the situation in Kenya. The Media Council of Kenya observe that ordinary people who have limited power over mainstream media can challenge its dominance by consuming and producing content on social media, thanks to advances in ICT. In effect, they are no longer passive consumers but active “prosumers” (2). The council notes that citizen journalism is based on the empowerment of ordinary people, who have been denied any opportunity to contribute meaningfully to national conversations. With the digital technology made available to them, they create content and conduct mass mobilisation leading to what is called digital or networked journalism. (The Media Council of Kenya 2). It is inferred that citizen journalism relies on digital technology for its success. The Gen Z Movement channelled their grievances and ideas through digital technology. Hashtags such as #RejectFinanceBill, #OccupyParliament #RutoMustGo #OccupyStatehouse, #OccupyChurches, #OccupyCBD, #AngukaNayo were posted repeatedly until they trended, enabling real-time updates and attracting international attention that compelled the government to respond to the demands made. (The Media Council of Kenya 3).Remarkably,

[...]the government succumbed to these demands and did several things in response including withdrawal of the Finance Bill 2024, dismissal of Cabinet Secretaries & the Attorney General, toning down on political sentiments, and increased engagement from political leaders, including President William Ruto and Cabinet participation in @XSpaces(The Media Council of Kenya 4).

There were substantial gains from the persistence, solidarity, and courage of Kenyan youths, which were enhanced by their reliance on social media. This proves that when properly used, social media can be a powerful tool for societal transformation.

Twinomurinzi lauds the Gen Z activists for their innovative use of technology for digital activism, arguing that “[t]he use of digital tools allowed for a level of organisation and mobilisation that was previously unattainable” (8). The scholar buttresses this claim by stating that digital platforms promoted solidarity between the Gen Z activists and their allies in the diaspora and the international community (8). Moreover, the scholar advances the vital point that the digital platforms were shaped and enhanced by the needs and intentions of the activists. Thus, some social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook modified some of their features to support the activism of the youths, examples being “Twitter Moments” and “Facebook Events”, both used to create a unifying narrative that maintained the momentum of the movement (Twinomurinzi10). To further contextualise the potency of digital activism in the hands of Gen Z activists, it should be mentioned that the Communication Authority has recorded over 66 million registered mobile phones by a population of 54 million people in Kenya. As is the case in most African countries, the mobile handset is a ubiquitous asset in Kenyan households, defining lifestyles and livelihoods. (Ohndyl 86). The integration of digital culture into the lives of Kenyans explains why it has been difficult for the Kenyan Government to curtail the use of social media for activism or to weaken the Gen Z Movement.

A Survey of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM)

In contemporary America, civil rights activities which began in the 1960s remain germane to the racial problem of the society. This social reality prompted the emergence of the BLMM in 2013, after the unjust acquittal of Zimmerman, a neighbourhood watchman who killed a black boy named Trevor Martin. In response, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometti and Patrisse Cullors created a hashtag: #blacklivesmatter. Alicia reacted emotionally to the acquittal of Zimmerman by posting on her social media page a message which ended with ‘Black people, I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.’ (Clayton 6). It is further explained that

A close friend of Garza, Patrisse Cullors, 300 miles away read the post that night and shared it with her friends online. She used a hashtag each time she reposted it: #blacklivesmatter...Garza and Cullors began touting the hashtag and Opal Tometi, an immigration-rights activist Garza knew, agreed to build a social media platform using Facebook and Twitter. (Clayton 6)

However, the BLMM only became popular after the shooting of another Black victim named Michael Brown by a white officer named Darren Wilson. Then, in

2020, the BLMM experienced a resurgence which catapulted it into the global limelight. George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old man, was publicly lynched by a police officer named Derek Chauvin, who pinned him down with his knee on his neck (a positional asphyxiation stance). The Minneapolis Police Department had received a 911 call that same day (May 25, 2020) from a grocery store, which reported that a customer had tried to buy with a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill, a minor offence. Floyd died after Derek's knee remained on his neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds, despite pleading repeatedly that he could not breathe (Chen 1; Spencer 947). Since then, the movement has evolved into a form of cyber-activism, and a civil rights movement too. Tillery Jr. (298) recognises the growth of the movement thus: "Since the summer of 2014, the BLM movement has grown into a network of grassroots organizations representing more than 30 American cities and four countries outside of the United States."

Central to the robustness of the BLMM is social media. This has facilitated dialogue, collaboration, and civil action targeted at police brutality against Black people. However, the accessibility of the #blacklivesmatter to a diversity of people on social media platforms has sometimes distorted the main objectives of the movement, raising concerns about what views on the internet which count as representative of the ideologies of the BLMM. Perhaps, the most credible explanation of the BLMM can be found on its website:

Black Lives Matter imagines a world where Black people across the diaspora thrive, experience joy, and are not defined by their struggles. In pursuing liberation, we envision a future fully divested from police, prisons, and all punishment paradigms and which invests in justice, joy, and culture[...] Black Lives Matter Foundation is an abolition-centered foundation fighting institutional injustice and serving Black people globally. We fund organizations and individuals leading policy and abolitionist efforts and partner with organizations and individuals who offer direct services to support the needs of Black communities. (Black Lives Matter "About Black Lives Matter").

From the excerpt, it is inferred that the BLMM is invested in the experiences of Black people globally. Though their main base remains America. The movement is interested in liberating Black communities from institutional injustice and social prejudice, paving the way for these communities to excel.

Stating the goals of the BLMM, Faust et al. point out that the BLMM hopes to end the war on Black bodies, which targets Black folks and places them at a disadvantaged position in the American context. The movement brings to public attention police brutality and other forms of violence against Black people irrespective of their gender, sexual orientation or identity. The movement also confronts policies that are disadvantageous to Blacks and attempts to alter the dynamics responsible for categorical inequalities (245). Thus, the BLMM is not

conscious of police brutality alone but also of the disadvantaged situation of blacks in America. The movement is also sensitive to the intersectional identities of Black individuals and communities, which subsume sexuality, gender, social class, and even race (bi-racial identities, for instance). Commenting on the same subject, Alfred Smith Jr. explains: "The declarative statement, "Black lives matter," speaks to the undying historical yearning of Black people to be respected as human beings, with the God-given inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (348). The historicity mentioned by Alfred indicates that the BLMM is reminiscent because its establishment is linked to the Black history of injustice, marginalisation and deprivation in the American context. The fact that many movements or incidents that tried to assert the humanity of the Negro have existed throughout America's history points to the deeply entrenched culture of racial hate against Black people in the country, and at the same time, to the determination of Afro-Americans to supplant the culture for another one of racial diversity and equity. As a continuation of the Black struggle for respect and dignity, the BLMM reflects the past, but builds on it.

It has been implied in the history of the BLMM above that the primary aim of the movement is to end police violence against African Americans. This is significant because police brutality resembles the lynching of Black people in the past. In fact, it can be considered the latest form of lynching in the United States of America. The passing of the Emmet Till Anti-Lynching Act as recently as 2020 gives the strong impression that the law has not protected the lives and property of Black people adequately for decades, and it remains inadequate. Even after the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.A., many Blacks continue to be victims of police violence in America, and the essential motive behind the killings appears to be racism. As a rule, the victims of police violence in the 21st century are Black. Names of some victims and the years of their deaths are Trayvon Martin (2012), Eric Garner (2014), Charles Kinsey (2016), and George Floyd (2020).

The methods or means of protest adopted by the BLMM are a blend of approaches from the Civil Rights era and those adapted from digital technology and Black culture of the present. In the Civil Rights era, the approaches to racial discrimination involved protests, sit-ins and freedom rides, etc. Although the contexts of the Civil Rights period and the 21st century have peculiarities, the state of mind which informed the Civil Rights activists and the BLM activists is fundamentally the same: a sensibility that they were in a hostile society that did not consider them human, informs the activities of both movements. The BLMM, in particular, bears a name which insists that Black people are humans who deserve to be regarded as such, counteracting the implied narrative that Blacks do not deserve the same opportunities and regard given to Whites. Furthermore, the BLMM utilises nonviolent direct action to draw attention to police brutality and the oppression of African Americans in the U.S.A. Again, scholars have agreed that the BLMM is decentralised. Its leadership style contrasts with that of the Civil Rights movement's which was hierarchical and male-dominated. In accordance with Clayton (12), "Black Lives Matter has rejected the civil rights movement's "hierarchical style of leadership, with the

straight black male at the top giving orders' [...] As a movement, it is highly decentralised and unstructured." The Civil Rights movement was landed a great blow with the death of the influential Martin Luther King Jr., leading to its rapid decline. In this sense, the BLMM is strengthened by its decentralised and largely inclusive mode of operation that encourages people with various identities to lead protests and civil action. It is telling that the precursors of the movement in 2013 were all female.

The most significant channel that the BLMM relies on are digital platforms. Social media has served as a centralising force which has enabled to movement to thrive and widen its reach. Commenting on the impact of the internet on the movement, Faust et al. (243) states that: "Online activity was an essential factor in the formation of the BLM movement, although it is important to remember that the three women founders had real-life friendships and organizing experience." Hence, the BLMM is not necessarily an online movement, but a Social movement which combines tools of traditional activism with digital activism. Jenkins-Robinson (17) corroborates this view by explaining that: "Social media is the platform today's social activists like Black Lives Matter co-founder, Alicia Garza used to reach followers and friends in a letter following the shooting death of Trayvon Martin." Both scholars emphasise that the BLMM was kick-started on social media, but this has not limited its real-life impact on America's political and social spheres. It has been noted that the mainstream press can be an instrument for silencing, distorting, or amplifying social and political events. This was the case with the coverage on the BLMM's demonstrations. (Chen 2). It is certainly revealing that

Despite widely reported vandalism, property damage, and looting in the news, 96.4% of Black Lives Matter protests were nonviolent with no property damage or police injuries.¹⁰ In 97.7% of the demonstrations over the summer, no injuries were reported among participants, bystanders, or police. (Chen 2).

The misrepresentation of the BLMM by news outlets might have casted in doubt the credibility and legitimacy of the movement in the view of citizens. As a remedy to this challenge, BLMM representatives harnessed social media tools. Chen notes that,

According to Pew Research Center, 17% of Americans self-reported that social media platforms changed their political or social opinions.¹⁷ Like traditional outlets, digital platforms disseminate information, shape opinions, and inform the public, but digital outlets add to the conversation first-person testimonies. Thus, firsthand accounts of "living while Black" on social media strengthened empathy and solidarity in the Black Lives Matter movement. (Chen 4).

For the BLMM, social media has served as an alternative platform for what was previously called digital or networked journalism, which allows users to perform in the capacity of “active prosumers”, rather than passive consumers in the case of traditional media. For this reason, it is easier for BLM activists to interact among themselves and directly engage with non-members who may hold strong biases against or be ignorant about the actual aims of the movement. In effect, the BLM, through social media, can rally support among various social groups in America and other countries.

A Global Black Activist Movement?

In the previous sections, the origins, social and political contexts, central concerns, and activist approaches of the Gen Z Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) were discussed. It is apparent from the discussion that the two movements are responses to specific challenges in the concerned societies. For instance, the Gen Z Movement in Kenya was provoked essentially by the passing of the Finance Bill 2024 into law. The demonstrations against the bill soon paved the way for criticism against the government for endemic corruption, grafting, the government’s attempt to draw attention away from their financial irresponsibility with the Finance Bill, and police brutality during the protests. On the other hand, the BLMM had as its primary focus the racially motivated police brutality against Black people in America, a symptom of racism in the country. Furthermore, the historical contexts and contemporary realities which have shaped the development of each movement are distinct. The Gen Z Movement is situated in the colonial history and leadership failure that have stalled progress in most African nations. Contrastingly, the BLMM is situated in the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, slavery, racism and Black resistance in America; and the modern incarnation of racism evident in the police brutality against African-Americans.

There are also points of convergence in the objectives and activism of both movements, which support the hypothesis of a Global Black Movement. For one, it bears repeating that in 2020, Africans expressed solidarity with BLM activists, which implies their acknowledgement of a common Black identity. Furthermore, the Gen Z Movement has received support from allies in the diaspora and the international community, some of whom are Black. Therefore, both movements are simultaneously local and global, as they are in touch with the local realities of their countries but also welcome international attention to their plights. The recognition of the BLMM by Africans and of the Gen Z Movement by Blacks in the diaspora signifies a dialogue between Black people in Africa and the United States, mutual empathy, and the emergence of a decentralised form of Pan-Africanism, all pointing to an unofficial Global Black Movement.

Moreover, both movements are dominated and led by young Black people who seem to be confronting similar issues, upholding similar ideologies, adopting similar approaches and pursuing similar objectives. The characterisation of the Gen Z Movement as leader-less, tribe-less (or class-less) and fear-less perhaps

applies to the BLMM as well. It was submitted that the BLMM is decentralised, rejecting the hierarchical and male-dominated style of the Civil Rights Movement. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometti and Patrisse Cullors, who started the movement on social media, are not official leaders of a centralised movement. Both movements are also inclusive, as they welcome the diversity of people with different social statuses and identities. To a large extent, these attributes of the movement is thanks to ICT. It is evident in both cases that social media is embedded in activism. In Kenya, digital technology “[...]allowed for a level of organisation and mobilisation that was previously unattainable” (Twinomurizi8). In the same vein, Faust et al. (243) states that: “Online activity was an essential factor in the formation of the BLM movement[...].” Social media serves as an alternative to traditional media, which provides activists in both movements the freedom to challenge the false claims made by government and mainstream news outlets. Furthermore, social media has the capacity to connect billions of people, enabling them to interact directly with each other. Taking advantage of this, activists in both movements publicised their plights locally and globally using relevant tags such as #RejectFinanceBill, #OccupyParliament #RutoMustGo #OccupyStatehouse, #OccupyChurches, #OccupyCBD, #AngukaNayo, #BlackLivesMatter, #BLM, #GeorgeFloyd, #SayHerName, #Justice, and #Protests. Again, both movements are dissatisfied with leadership and have little faith in the police force.

In light of the foregoing, it can be safely assumed that Black youths in Kenya and the United States of America are reacting to the failings of their political systems. Also, a shared history of oppression on the basis of race (colonialism and slavery) means that Black youths in Africa and its diaspora are grappling with specific challenges which are rooted in a general history and perception about Black people across time. Thus, the Gen Z Movement and BLMM can be considered as representations of an emerging Global Black Movement for the humanisation, emancipation, and progression of the Black race.

Conclusion

It was proposed in this study that the Gen Z Movement in Kenya and the BLMM share certain attributes that characterise them as representations of an emerging Global Black Movement for the humanisation, emancipation, and progression of the Black race. A survey of the origins, social and political contexts, central concerns, and activist approaches of each movement was conducted, followed by a comparative exploration of the movements aimed at testing the hypothesis of a Global Black Movement. It was observed that the Gen Z Movement and the BLMM are responses to specific challenges and concerns in their respective societies. It was also observed that both movements are situated in unique historical contexts and contemporary realities, which include the colonial history and leadership failure in Africa, with respect to the Gen Z Movement, and the history of racial oppression, with the contemporary issue of police brutality, with respect to the BLMM. Then, it was discovered that there are points of convergence in the objectives and activism of both movements. First, Africans and Black Americans have expressed solidarity with each other,

supporting the plights of Black people in other societies. This suggests a dialogue between Black people in Africa and the United States, based on mutual empathy, and the emergence of a decentralised form of Pan-Africanism. Secondly, both movements were described as leader-less, tribe-less (or class-less) and fear-less, being decentralised, inclusive, and vocal against injustice in their society. Thirdly, it was stated that in both movements, social media is embedded in activism. Next, the specific concerns of each movement were classified as dissatisfaction with leadership and little faith in the police force. Finally, the specific challenges of the two countries of the movements were traced to a shared history of oppression based on race. All these seem to validate the hypothesis of an emerging Global Black Movement by Black youths all over the world, which can engender an unprecedented period of advancement and freedom for Black people.

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