

Laughing through the Virus the Zimbabwean Way: WhatsApp Humor and the Twenty-one-day COVID-19 Lockdown

Albert Chibuwe  and Allen Munoriyarwa

Abstract: In many African countries, jokes represent one of the many means used by citizens to cope with a crisis. Chibuwe and Munoriyarwa explore how Zimbabweans utilize WhatsApp jokes, which are anchored in the concept of the “everyday,” to cope with pandemic-induced lockdowns. COVID-19 jokes provide citizens momentary relief from fear and function as a defense mechanism against COVID-19 and its effects, enabling citizens to confront and rationalize fear, death, and suffering. Chibuwe and Munoriyarwa argue that jokes are also a means of speaking truth to power by disgruntled citizens attempting to cope with a health crisis, in a context characterized by corruption, state repression, and bad governance.

African Studies Review, Volume 65, Number 2 (June 2022), pp. 331–353

Albert Chibuwe is a Research Fellow at the Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice, University of the Free State, South Africa. His research interests are political communication, social media, media framing, and journalism training and practice. E-mail: albertchibuwe@yahoo.co.uk

Allen Munoriyarwa is a PDRF in the Communication and Media Department at the University of Johannesburg and affiliated with the Centre for Data and Digital Technologies, South Africa. His research interests are journalism, news production practices, big data, and digital surveillance. He is currently coordinating research on digital surveillance practices in Southern Africa under the auspices of the Media Policy and Democracy Project. E-mail: allenmunoriyarwa@gmail.com

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the African Studies Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the same Creative Commons licence is included and the original work is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained for commercial re-use. doi:10.1017/asr.2022.20

Résumé: Dans de nombreux pays d'Afrique, les blagues représentent l'un des nombreux moyens utilisés par les citoyens pour faire face à une crise. Chibuwe et Munoriyarwa explorent la façon dont les Zimbabweens utilisent les blagues sur WhatsApp, qui sont ancrées dans le concept du « quotidien, » pour faire face aux confinements induits par la pandémie. Les blagues sur la COVID-19 procurent aux citoyens un soulagement momentané de la peur et servent de mécanisme de défense contre la COVID-19 et ses effets, permettant aux citoyens d'affronter et de rationaliser la peur, la mort et la souffrance. Chibuwe et Munoriyarwa soutiennent que les blagues sont également un moyen de dire la vérité au pouvoir par des citoyens mécontents qui tentent de faire face à une crise sanitaire, dans un contexte caractérisé par la corruption, la répression de l'État et la mauvaise gouvernance.

Resumo: Em muitos países africanos, as piadas são um dos recursos usados pelos cidadãos para lidar com as crises. Chibuwe e Munoriyarwa exploram o modo como a população do Zimbabué utiliza as piadas no WhatsApp, as quais se alicerçam no conceito de “quotidiano”, para enfrentar os confinamentos impostos devido à pandemia. As piadas acerca da COVID-19 proporcionam aos cidadãos momentos de alívio temporário do medo e funcionam como mecanismo de defesa contra a COVID-19 e os seus efeitos, permitindo aos cidadãos enfrentar e racionalizar o medo, a morte e o sofrimento. Na perspectiva de Chibuwe e Munoriyarwa, as piadas são também uma forma de os cidadãos descontentes confrontarem os poderes instituídos pondo a nu a realidade, procurando assim lidar com a crise de saúde pública num contexto caracterizado pela corrupção, pela repressão do Estado e pela má governação.

Keywords: Zimbabwe; COVID-19; humor; satire; social media; health

(Received 3 February 2021 – Revised 22 January 2022 – Accepted 24 January 2022)

Introduction

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic spread rapidly around the world with tales and images of death accompanied by thick fear in early 2020, Zimbabwe, like most other countries, braced for the worst. The situation was made even more precarious by a collapsed health delivery system bedeviled by intermittent health worker strikes over poor working conditions. Coupled with an economy in distress, Zimbabweans literally stared death in the face with no way to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. In this grim context, in March 2020 President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced a twenty-one-day lockdown commencing in three days, to begin on March 30. The announcement elicited considerable humorous discussion on social media sites such as Twitter and WhatsApp.

The context in which these messages were produced and circulated was characterized by the political tensions between the government and the opposition. With the political and economic situation in the country deteriorating, misgivings were rife about the November 2017 military coup which had ousted long-time president Robert Mugabe and ushered in Mnangagwa,

who had been Mugabe's long-time ally and supporter but was now his nemesis. Opposition parties alleged that the July 2018 election had been rigged. They also recoiled at the rising political repression. However, the COVID-19 pandemic stood out from previous health crises, in that ordinary citizens as well as political and economic elites faced the same threat of infection and death (Chigudu 2019). Yet, even within this grim context, Zimbabweans still found room for levity.

Humor in the face of death may seem out of place, but humor and death often go hand in glove. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, humor is used to lighten the mood at funerals and to help relatives of the deceased deal with their loss (Moyo 2013). Humor serves a therapeutic function within Shona society; it has often been perceived "as a coping device through which people release tension, allay fear, forestall threat, defuse aggression or distance the unpleasant" (Linstead 1988:142). At funerals for male adults in Shona communities, the job of lightening the mood falls on the "sahwira" (friend) of the deceased (Moyo 2013). Jokes (sometimes obscene or sexual in nature) at funerals are cracked by sisters-in-law or nephews of the deceased. But at "nhimbe" or "humwe," humor is used to single out village delinquents such as adulterers, thieves, liars, errant leaders (headman, chief, or king), and the stingy, among others. Nhimbe or humwe are events in which villagers come together to help a fellow villager weed or harvest the fields. These events are usually characterized by song, dance, food, and drink, which is generally opaque beer and other traditional non-alcoholic beverages such as "maheu." At such events, humor sometimes takes the form of ditties, with the audience singing, dancing, and laughing. The targets of these jokes sometimes participate in the humor themselves (Taylor & Bain 2003). However, in cases where the "mambo" (king) is the target, the criticism is delivered indirectly, but nonetheless utilizing humor, song, and dance. In this light, humor in everyday Zimbabwe is used in contexts of both death and work. It is used to speak truth to power and to call errant members of society to order (both the rulers and the ruled), and to give momentary psychological relief to those in distress. Humor has, thus, both a disciplinary and a health-related function.

The use of humor (often accompanied by obscenities) in both speech and writing to ridicule the elite is widespread and has a long history in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa as well (Mbembe 1992; Thiel 2017). Peter Limb and Tejumola Olaniyan (2018) assert that cartoonists in Africa make us laugh, but, simultaneously, they also urge us to consider the situation, through their illustrations of our daily lives and crises. Limb and Olaniyan further note that cartoonists in Africa help reveal "...the idiocies or significance of politics, while bolstering the resilience of grassroots people in the face of the exercise of power" (Limb & Olaniyan 2018:xiii). Ironically, "...the role of humor and satire as a form of social and political engagement in Africa remains underexplored" (Thiel 2017:50). This article seeks to contribute to the scholarship on humor in Africa, and in Zimbabwe specifically, by interrogating jokes about the twenty-one-day COVID-19 lockdown which were produced and circulated on WhatsApp. The announcement of the lockdown

may be viewed as both a health and a political communication. Viewing jokes as both political and health actions speaks to their political as well as psychological work. By exploring ways in which jokes subvert power and speak truth to power, we can also appreciate the health or psychological work of humor. We first review the available literature on digital media and satire, subsequently present our findings, and finally conclude with a discussion. At its core, we are interested in whether jokes are produced as a release valve in response to frustration at elite political, economic, and health-related transgressions, or as a defensive and/or offensive mechanism against elite repression and/or the coronavirus, with its attendant death and fear.

Humor, Health and Repression in Quotidian Politics

Authoritarian environments are a breeding ground for jokes and humor, and the post-2000 environment in Zimbabwe is no exception (Musangi 2012). Indeed, there were earlier studies of satire and comic strips during Zimbabwe's protracted liberation struggle in the 1970s; colonial-era comic strips expressed cynicism about the racist white minority regime (McLoughlin 1989). The ubiquity of jokes in post-2000 Zimbabwe has been facilitated by the increasing availability of the internet and social media in a context of rising political repression, economic turmoil, and the mass exodus of Zimbabweans for foreign lands as both political and economic refugees.

This context spawned two distinct types of studies on humor. The first type focused on comic strips in mainstream newspapers as a form of dissenting political expression (Willems 2008). This version of humor engendered a sub-category of studies that focused on comic strips in Zimbabwean diaspora media and/or websites (Kuhlmann 2012; Musangi 2012). As Jenny Kuhlmann (2012) notes, comic strips have been used by the Zimbabwean diaspora community to lampoon Mugabe and his ruling party apparatchiks. This point is affirmed by Daniel Hammett, who notes that in Zimbabwe, satire and jokes represent resistance to and criticism of an authoritarian regime in a context where the public sphere is constrained (2012:202).

The idea that stands out in the literature is the quotidian nature of humor as an instrument of political expression and resistance (Willems 2008). But the second type of scholarship, which converges at some point with the sub-type of the first category, focuses on cyber jokes or humor. The jokes that are the focus here are not comic strips and cartoons but instead jokes that are digitally produced and disseminated. As Jennifer Musangi (2012) notes, the internet has broadened the boundaries of humor as well as its reach. It has resulted in the production and distribution of jokes and/or memes in multimedia formats, and the advent of digital media platforms such as WhatsApp have broadened the reach of this type of humor. WhatsApp is a largely mobile phone-based instant messaging social media app that also utilizes pictures, videos, audios (voice notes), video calls, and voice calls (Kaufmann & Peil 2020). In Zimbabwe, WhatsApp has a wider reach than the internet and other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook due to the

comparatively low cost of the WhatsApp data bundle. Local cellular network providers offer daily, weekly, and monthly data bundles for specific social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Twitter.

Research has demonstrated the importance of social media platforms such as Facebook for both political engagement and health information dissemination (Patterson & Balogun 2021). These various platforms afford different capabilities to users. For instance, unlike other internet-based social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook, WhatsApp does not enable the user to make anonymous comments. Metadata prevents anonymity. It allows one-to-one and one-to-group messaging, that is, a person can send jokes either to the inboxes of individual contacts or to WhatsApp groups s/he is a member of. While the original sender of the joke is readily identifiable, once the joke is re-sent and shared to other groups or individuals, the identity of the original sender is lost in transmission. Furthermore, it is often difficult to identify the creator of the joke.

This article interrogates jokes about the COVID-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe that were produced and circulated via WhatsApp. This is not to say there are no other studies of social media or WhatsApp jokes. Such studies exist (for example, Mangeya & Tagwirei 2021), but most of these studies on jokes in Zimbabwe largely focus on what Musangi calls the political joke. Whereas Musangi (2012) and Rodwell Makombe and Grace Temiloluwa Agbede (2016) focus on cyber or internet jokes and memes about Mugabe, Hugh Mangeya and Cuthbert Tagwirei (2021) interrogate jokes about the 2017 military coup in Zimbabwe. Similarly, Wendy Willems (2008, 2010) focuses on political jokes, specifically newspaper cartoon strips that mocked the elite and everyday jokes by ordinary people that critically commented on the country's political-economic crisis. The available scholarship spans online as well as offline jokes. For example, Mangeya and Tagwirei focus on WhatsApp jokes, but they specifically interrogate the discourses and dialogism of the jokes, while Musangi (2012) interrogates cyber jokes or internet jokes, specifically focusing on the website www.bob.co.za. Willems (2008, 2010) studies offline jokes, specifically focusing on their subversive and or counter-hegemonic nature.

Studies of humor in Zimbabwe and Africa and beyond (Mbembe 2001; Taylor & Bain 2003; Musangi 2012; Willems 2008, 2010; Holbert et al. 2011; Thiel 2017) have largely focused on the political work or subversive function that it performs. Humor as political action has been widely studied (McLoughlin 1989; Mbembe 1992; Hammett 2012). The use of humor in potentially scary health messages has also been studied, both as it is used to reduce defensive reactions and on the way it affects the target audience's intentions to adopt the behaviors that are being promoted (Lee, Slater, & Tchernerv 2015; Hendricks & Janssen 2018). The current study, unlike these others, conceptualizes humor not only as political action, but also as health action, specifically as psychological action. Our study goes beyond merely demonstrating how the jokes subvert or speak truth to power; it also demonstrates how humor is simultaneously used by ordinary people as an outlet for

their frustration and as a tool to rationalize or to cope with their political, economic, and health challenges.

As Achille Mbembe (1992) states, the obscene and the grotesque are both resistance and a refuge from the dominant (and perhaps the fear of sickness or death) (see also Ibrahim & Eltantawy 2017). Humor is arguably a defense or refuge from, as well as an attack on, the dominant, because it enables ordinary citizens to criticize the elite and yet possibly remain out of harm's way (Taylor & Bain 2003; Thiel 2017). However in other contexts, including Zimbabwe when it was still under the Mugabe regime, humor may not have offered a refuge from elite repression (Musangi 2012). Humor can also be a refuge from, or a defense mechanism against, the unpleasant (Linstead 1988, as cited by Musangi 2012). At a broader level, these studies acknowledge the importance of digital platforms for both entertainment and political engagement. This explains why social media platforms, even in other African contexts outside Zimbabwe, such as Guinea for instance, have become emergent sites for youth citizenship (Bergère 2020), in the process shaping young Africans' political horizons. In Kenya, Evan Mwangi (2014) notes that issues of queer culture and identity formation are cultivated through digital platforms, which offer a unique space on which queer groups can respond to homophobic representations of their experiences and desires.

We draw on Iddo Tavory's theorization of humor. Tavory makes four pertinent assertions about humor in everyday life. First, Tavory notes that "humor depends on the interplay between situation-specific and general forms of meaning" (2014:267). Jokes allow an insight into how people experience everyday life. Thus, jokes only work if they are considered in tandem with our everyday lived experiences. Second, humor takes the form of play. The joke's "punch line" usually throws the listener off a previously understood narrative to a totally different world, creating in the process "tension among different understandings of the joke's narrative" (Tavory 2014:277). Third, humor sustains tension and imparts information about the political and economic life of the context in which it is generated. Finally, humor, in all its different forms, derives its potency from its relation to the absurdities of the political and social life in the loci of its production. In the analysis of jokes about COVID-19, we seek to understand how humor may be considered as "defensive response" (Hendriks & Janssen 2018:594) by Zimbabweans to threatening health messages regarding COVID-19 and the COVID-19 lockdown.

Using the Zimbabwean case as an example, on the one hand we treat the jokes about the lockdown produced and circulated via WhatsApp in Zimbabwe as part and parcel of the banal; as reflections of the everyday, they typify the ways in which ordinary people make sense of their relationship with the ruling elite. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic is treated as a specific situation in which the jokes under study emerged. However, this article is cognizant of the fact that "humor depends on the interplay between situation-specific and general forms of meaning" (Tavory 2014:279).

Consequently, humor in this article is analyzed both in its specific COVID-19 context and more generally in the broader political-economic-socio-cultural context of Zimbabwe and beyond. By interrogating this particular type of humor, we seek to understand the meanings attached to COVID-19 and its attendant lockdown by Zimbabwean citizens, and how they negotiated the daily struggles of life in Zimbabwe—a country that academics and critics alike generally agree is repressive (Willems 2008; Thiel 2017). The concept of the everyday enables researchers to understand these jokes as political commentary that offers the citizens an opportunity to question the policies, ideology, rituals, and myths of the ruling class, as much as they are also a defensive response to the threatening COVID-19 lockdown.

To engage these issues, we utilize qualitative data extracted from WhatsApp. As Marcus Goncalves and Erika Cornelius Smith (2018) note, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, along with blogs and other digital media platforms, have made available an avalanche of data for social scientists to utilize in their research. Similarly, there is a wealth of qualitative data pouring onto our smartphones through WhatsApp. Smartphones and new media provide opportunities for the collection and generation of qualitative data (Goncalves & Smith 2018). Our research utilized archival research to gather data. Specifically, the researchers created their own archives from jokes that were circulated on WhatsApp by Zimbabweans following President Mnangagwa's March 27, 2020, declaration of a lockdown commencing on March 30. The researchers purposively selected, archived, and analyzed twenty-five jokes. Some of the jokes may have been adapted from other contexts, but for purposes of this study it was immaterial whether the jokes were re-purposed to speak about Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans in the context of COVID-19. Of the twenty-five selected jokes, which were accessed through digital archives, twenty-four were textual, while only one was a meme.

Digital platforms provide for digitized copies of analogue originals, which can be accessed as archival records by researchers. What is remembered and archived is partially influenced by available technologies. In addition to this, we are aware that archiving is a process that is linked to societal processes of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion, and the power relationships they embody (McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, & Ketelaar 2005). In this regard, archiving is a political act. Remembrance, inclusion, exclusion, and preservation were determined by the focus of the article, as the researchers only purposively selected and archived all jokes about the twenty-one-day lockdown that they received on WhatsApp during the course of the lockdown. The researchers archived all the jokes that they received in their inboxes and those that were posted on groups to which they are members.

Even though there is no anonymity on WhatsApp, jokes that ridicule the elite are circulated because people send the jokes to people in their mobile phone contact list. These are people that the sender knows do not pose any threat, even if they may be part of the elite or the repressive state apparatuses, because they are friends and acquaintances. Both researchers have friends,

relatives, and acquaintances who are embedded in the repressive state apparatuses and in the elite classes, but they nevertheless send and receive jokes from them about anything and everything, including unflattering jokes about the elite or the security services. The researchers belong to WhatsApp groups dedicated to discussing Zimbabwean issues, mainly politics and the economy; these groups are made up of people from a cross section of society, including ruling party and opposition politicians and their supporters.

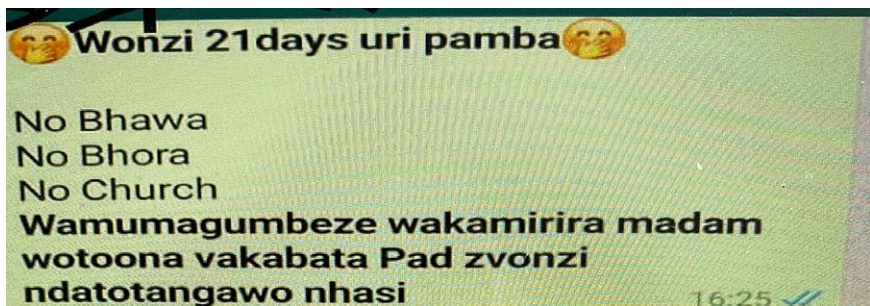
Judging by the issues addressed in the jokes, the archived messages were produced and circulated by ordinary Zimbabweans at home and in the diaspora, as these constitute the majority of the membership of the groups to which the authors belong. WhatsApp was used for the gathering of data, because digitized records are easily accessible. In the analysis, the authors integrated thematic and discourse analysis, and an analysis of the humor's target(s) and audience(s). Thematic analysis helps organize the data into recognizable patterns and provides a clear line of argument for the findings. To complete a thematic analysis, the researcher needs to carefully consider the data to identify the major themes (Braun & Clark 2006). Thematic analysis was supplemented with discourse analysis, an analytical approach common in the communication field, where researchers interpret (naturally) occurring talk through an understanding of words, phrases, sentences, and issues being raised in the conversation (Potter & Wetherell 1987). The underlying assumption of the discourse analytical approach is that language shapes and constructs the real world and people's views of it. Language predicts social behavior and action (Munoriyarwa 2020). Thus, discourse analysis presupposes that ideologies can be uncovered through a close reading and understanding of the use of language in the context of naturally occurring talk. In this article, the researchers treat WhatsApp jokes as part of naturally occurring talk. This analysis was conducted simultaneously with an interpretation of the findings based on personal experience (Corbin & Strauss 2008).

Sex, Sexual Organs, Sexual (Im)morality, and COVID-19

In identifying themes within the jokes under consideration, we found that a number of jokes made reference to sexual organs, sexual (im)morality, and sexual intercourse. Our conclusion is that this kind of humor conveys the notion that due to the lockdown, people were going to spend most of their time engaging in sexual intercourse, since that would be the only pastime still available to them. For example, one joke proffered a timetable of what people ought to do during the lockdown. The timetable was allegedly "created" by the government. It included activities like house cleaning for husband and wife, watching television, "learning new sex styles and having sex," watching television, and "romance time." Interestingly, between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., sex appears three times, from 6 to 9 a.m., 2 to 4 p.m., and 10 p.m. to midnight, with 9 to 10 p.m. designated as "romance time." Whereas midnight to 6 a.m. is designated as "sleep time," sleep is, however, interrupted by shouts of

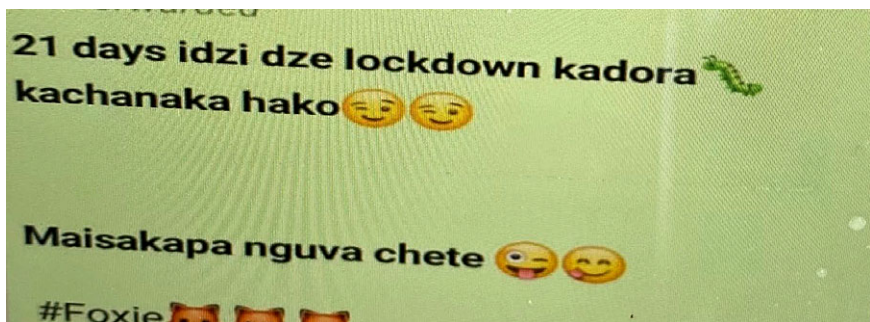
“*MBAVHA, MBAVHA, MBAVHA*” (THIEF, THIEF, THIEF [emphasis in the original]) at 2 a.m. In this scenario, sex is presented as the only notable pastime during the lockdown. This belief is also apparent in another joke in which the creator laments that it would be tough for a man if his wife were to go on her monthly periods (MPs) during the lockdown, given that there will be “*no bhawa* (beerhall), *no bhora* (football), *no church*” (see Figure 1). Since the lockdown prohibited such pastimes as watching football on television, going to the beerhalls for a drink, and going to church, sex became the only viable pastime; this line of reasoning also hints at the damage capitalism has wrought on Zimbabwean black society.

Figure 1. “21 Days at home” joke. Photo by first author, personal archive.



Other jokes commented on issues of sexual dissatisfaction by women, caused by husbands with smaller sexual organs. In one joke the message read, “21 days *idzi dze lockdown kadora kachanaka hako. Maisakapa nguva chete*” (During the 21-day lockdown the smaller manhood shall satisfy [women]. You previously did not give it enough time to do so.) “Kadora” (mopani worm) is the code name for smaller manhood in Zimbabwean Shona street lingo. The message creator joked that during the lockdown, women will realize that smaller male sexual organs are not bad after all, and the complaints about not being satisfied were because they were just not patient enough (see Figure 2). The lockdown is viewed as a welcome break for both

Figure 2. The “Mopari worm” joke. Photo by first author, personal archive.



men and women, as they will be free from work; going to work meant less time for sex, which in turn left women complaining. The joke, however, exposes male chauvinism, as being a man is implicitly equated with having a big sexual organ that “satisfies” a woman. The implication is that having a huge manhood and being good in bed is necessary to be considered a man. Ironically, apart from being viewed as a potential source of conflict, the twenty-one days of the lockdown are also viewed as providing husbands and wives more time for sex, which would in turn result in wives appreciating their husbands’ allegedly smaller sexual organs.

Contrastingly, some of the jokes commented that the lockdown would result in domestic disputes and or violence. Other jokes about sex commented on infidelity by married couples—both men and women—though the majority of the jokes pointed to infidelity by the husbands. Infidelity was viewed as likely to cause domestic disputes, as it could easily be exposed due to the couples having to spend more time together. One such joke advised men to stick to their traditional two rounds of sex and not six, since if men were to go for six rounds their wives would want to know who was getting the other four before the lockdown. The other joke observed that after twenty-one days of lockdown, a man would have slept with his maid because the more time he spent at home doing nothing, the more he would begin viewing the maid as sexually attractive, and convince himself that it is not a bad idea after all to sleep with her. The last of these jokes to comment on infidelity was created by netizens and attributed to the “MOHCC” (Ministry of Health and Child Care). By netizens, we adopt Ya-Wen Lei’s (2011) definition of the term to mean active users of internet and digital platforms who often express divergent views, and are critical of their political, economic, and social status quo. This joke urged women not to open their husbands’ phones to avoid contracting COVID-19. Jokes such as these use humor to critically comment on the widespread social ill of adultery in Zimbabwe, which has caused many divorces and cases of domestic violence. There is a reflection on how this behavior is aided and abetted through mobile technology, since the wife is urged not to open the husband’s phone to avoid contracting COVID-19. In this case, COVID-19 is equated with discovering the husband’s unfaithfulness, a scenario that will result in conflict and that will no doubt emotionally affect the wife. The mobile phone is viewed as a tool of the trade of infidelity among both men and women.

Women’s bodies also became the punch lines of jokes, arguably revealing the gendered dynamics of these jokes and humor. This further reveals the masculine aspect of Zimbabwean Shona culture, and it highlights two issues. First, it points out the perpetuation and normalization of misogyny in Zimbabwean Shona culture, where men dominate even through discursive exactions like joking and humor. Misogyny as perpetuated by humor regarding the female body highlights a phenomenon that we can refer to as “the humor gap.” The humor gap exists when women feel that they have to laugh at jokes made about their bodies, with very few “complementary” jokes about the male body, as we see in the Zimbabwean context. Where such jokes exist, they often valorize the male body.

Jokes also implied that capitalism has harmed the family, especially the relationship between husbands and their wives. This is because for husband and wife to spend twenty-one days locked down together is viewed as tedious and potentially conflict-ridden. The implication here is that work has kept them apart, and this has ruined the marriage, since if the two have to spend a mere three weeks locked down together in the home, conflict will then result. In the informalized Zimbabwean economy, the majority of people work long hours in order to make ends meet. Most of those who are formally employed are so poorly paid that they must engage in other activities such as vending, artisanal mining, and pirate taxiing to supplement their salaries. They end up spending less time with their spouses and children. The jokes also commented on infidelity by women, though the volume of such jokes seems to suggest that men are the chief culprits. In one such joke about women's infidelity, the message creator joked that most men would realize that the makeup women apply when going to work or outdoors is not meant for them but rather for other [men]; this is demonstrated by the way women will not bother applying it during the lockdown. There was also a joke directed at "small houses" or concubines, in which the message creator wonders whether "small houses" had heard about the twenty-one-day lockdown, in which men would be spending days on end at home with their families with no opportunity to visit them. The butts of the jokes discussed here were philandering men, concubines, and women. In effect, everyone was targeted, and everyone was the audience.

Humor about Government Heavy-Handedness in an Informalized Economy

Many humorous texts that circulated on the WhatsApp platform were critical of the lockdown measures. These texts criticized the heavy-handedness of the state's lockdown measures in the face of mass poverty and an informalized economy, where many people are self-employed. The jokes criticized the "militarization" of the pandemic, with the state depending heavily on armed security forces to enforce the lockdown. It was the use of the riot police which drew much of the humor, especially when it was juxtaposed with the present reality where the majority of the country's citizens' have been reduced to vendors by a comatose economy.

In one of the messages, there was an image of Zimbabwean riot police in full riot gear, complete with mask and a baton stick with the caption "Preparation in Zimbabwe" (see Figure 3). The message was accompanied by a snarling emoji. This meme mocked the expected heavy-handed enforcement of the lockdown by the authorities, and given what actually transpired during the course of the lockdown, the meme was spot on. It satirically drew attention to how the regime was preparing to infringe on citizen's rights while other regimes were preparing to combat the virus. It mocked the government's preparation to combat citizens instead of the virus. This, as shall be discussed later, was arguably because the regime understood the

Figure 3. “Preparation in Zimbabwe” joke. Photo by first author, personal archive.



futility of the lockdown in a context of hunger and the informalization of the economy.

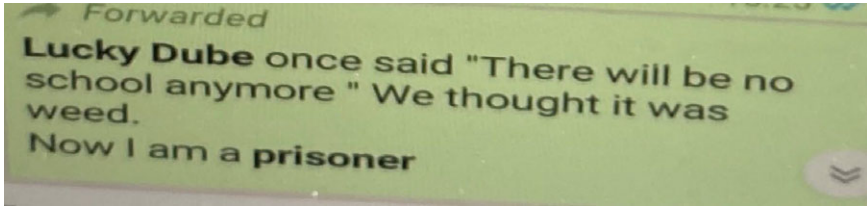
It is also a context characterized by runaway inflation. To further demonstrate the absurdity of the regime’s lockdown policy, another joke ridiculed the regime’s re-introduction of the US dollar as legal tender. The regime had, months earlier, banned the multi-currency system, replacing it with the Zimbabwe dollar, which was fast losing value. The joke compares rescue packages other governments put in place (we shall return to this later) to cushion business and citizens against COVID-19-induced economic challenges with Zimbabwe’s own response. Where other governments were providing bailout packages in US dollars and pounds sterling, the Zimbabwe government was asking people to use the US dollars that they had. Thus, instead of bailing out citizens, the regime wanted to collect from the citizens. This joke also poked fun at the regime’s parasitic and corrupt tendencies.

The motif of poverty mocked the absurdity of instituting a lockdown in light of Zimbabwe’s economic woes. The quips reflected critically on the struggles ordinary Zimbabweans would face in order to survive in the lockdown. One such joke advised people not to be surprised if they were to see an ambulance parked in front of their gate. It stated, “*mukaona ambulance pageti*

penyu musavhunduke ndini ndirikutengesa chingwa nedoro” (don’t panic if you see an ambulance parked by your gate. It is I who will be selling bread and beer). The idea of selling bread and beer from an ambulance is absurd, but it underscores the absurdity of the times Zimbabweans are living in. It speaks to a scenario whereby even those who are employed do not earn enough to sustain them, with the result that they must supplement their earnings through vending. Indeed, it references the major source of livelihood in Zimbabwe, which is vending. The idea of using an ambulance as a vending stall also addresses the collapse of the health sector in Zimbabwe. It also acknowledges the strategies that Zimbabweans have employed to survive the triple evils represented by COVID-19, poverty, and police heavy-handedness. The ambulance becomes the shield that hoodwinks the police, thus enabling the ambulance driver to sell without being harassed, while simultaneously enabling the driver to earn supplementary income that will enable them to feed the family. The ambulance becomes a guarantor of liberty, enabling the driver to move around in a restrictive lockdown context where everyone, except health personnel and others listed as critical services, was directed to stay indoors.

Resilience in the face of repression is captured in jokes that urged those outside of Zimbabwe not to worry about Zimbabweans, since they have a way of surviving sticky situations. One joke creator noted that the government once blocked the internet, but surprisingly Zimbabweans found a way around the blockade. The joke noted, “*VekuZimbabwe usavatyira zvenyu palockdown vakatombovharirwa internet asi taingovaona vari online, vane maitiro avo.*” (Do not worry about Zimbabweans during this lockdown, Internet was at some point shut down [by the regime] but they were always online in spite of the blockade. They have their own way of going round such situations). This joke, while appearing to affirm the resilience of the Zimbabweans, also speaks of the regime’s brutality and heavy-handedness. It also demonstrates the ingenuity of Zimbabweans in sidestepping the repressive regime’s draconian measures. Joking is one of the ways in which the citizens have managed to maintain their freedom of speech while largely remaining safe from arrests. Such joking further reveals the precarious economic position of the Zimbabweans and how the COVID-19 lockdown further exacerbated the situation. However, the resilience that the joker lauds is what some critics have railed against for aiding and abetting ZANU-PF’s rule, as Zimbabweans never seem to reach the breaking point. The joke also points to the threat posed by the regime to freedom of expression, as the shutting down of the internet during the January 2019 riots occasioned by sharp fuel price hikes was meant to curtail the free flow of information on social media. These jokes go hand in hand with the joke about the late South African musician Lucky Dube having sung about there being no more schools and being a prisoner; music listeners allegedly thought that he was under the influence of marijuana (see Figure 4). The message creator has realized that Lucky Dube was not high on marijuana after all, especially considering that what he sang about has come to pass. Lockdown led to the closure of schools and people being

Figure 4. "I am a Prisoner" joke. Photo by first author, personal archive.



restricted to their homes like prisoners. One of the jokes read, "Lucky Dube once said 'There will be no school anymore'. We thought it was weed [marijuana]. Now I am a **prisoner** [*bold in the original*]". Lockdown measures are likened to being imprisoned and this, together with the jokes on internet closures and "preparation in Zimbabwe" captures the motif of repression. What is implied here is that Zimbabwe is one big prison where there is no freedom of speech, there is only hunger and police heavy-handedness, and death and disease are constant companions. However, in this prison, all hope is not lost, as Zimbabweans "have their own way of going round such things." Thus, Zimbabweans use jokes not only to question the measures taken to fight COVID-19, but also to stand up to power and critique the various political abuses of the system, for example, questioning an approach to fighting the pandemic based on "rule of law." At a time when other governments were providing financial incentives to mitigate the suffering of their citizens, the Zimbabwean government was reverting to its "default settings" of enforcing normalcy through force.

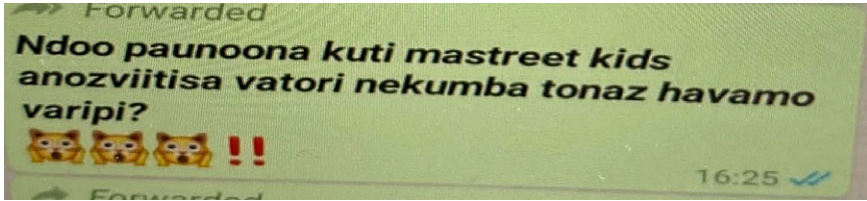
The motifs of hunger, heavy-handedness, and absurdity continue in jokes that simultaneously mocked and sympathized. For example, jokes about touts, pirate taxi drivers, and kombi drivers mocked their rudeness but also sympathized with their precarious situation during the lockdown. In one of the jokes, the message creator expressed gratitude that parents of touts would get to spend the lockdown together with their rude sons, hopefully tasting the rudeness that their sons dish out daily to the travelling public. In another joke, crafted as an urgent appeal for food aid for the touts, kombi drivers, and pirate taxi drivers, the message creator ended by saying these people are very rude. However, the jokes critically comment on hunger and unemployment exacerbated by COVID-19. The lockdown was not only expected to render the touts, and (pirate) taxi drivers unemployed, but it was also expected to create hunger in their homes, thus the "urgent appeal" for food aid. The joke poked fun at the absurdity of the lockdown in a context of unemployment, because the informally employed people such as taxi drivers and touts rendered jobless by the lockdown may escape COVID-19 but may not escape (death by) hunger.

The motif of hunger looms large. One example imagined that a new virus called "Huvid-20" had been discovered in Zimbabwe. The following joke illustrates our point: "Breaking news!!! A new virus has been found in

Zimbabwe, discovered on Monday, 30th of March, 2020, it is called Hunger Virus-20 (HUVID-20), it is causing untold pain in Zimbabwe. Symptoms: *kuperasimba* (body weakness), *hasha* (short temper), *dzungu* (dizziness), *kunzwakudakuba* (feeling like stealing) etc.” The name of this “new” virus discovered in Zimbabwe is a play on the name of COVID-19, the year in which Zimbabwe’s president first announced the initial lockdown (2020), and the hunger that was expected to ensue as a result of the lockdown. The date given as the discovery date of the virus—March 30, 2020—is the day the initial national lockdown commenced. Zimbabwean netizens viewed the national lockdown as untenable because of the country’s economic woes, and because one of its likely effects was hunger, which would in turn have its own effects such as anger and theft. The motif of violence discussed earlier in relation to domestic violence issues is again evident here, but this time as a result of hunger and starvation brought about by the national lockdown. This addresses the reality that most Zimbabweans survive on vending, and the lockdown would impact on their livelihoods; the scenario was worsened by the fact that instead of the government bringing in a bailout package, it was instead expecting the citizens to spend the few US dollars they might have. The lockdown was thus viewed as a threat to peoples’ livelihoods. In addition, the motif of the upsurge in cases of theft due to poverty is evident again, as one of the effects of hunger identified by the joke is the temptation to steal in order to self-sustain, in a context where livelihoods have been wrecked.

Jokes also mock the informalization of the economy in Zimbabwe and the impoverishment of professionals such as teachers, blaming the government for this state of affairs. For example, one joke stated that Zimdancehall artists would rewrite Ordinary-level English language to enable them to secure jobs as security guards, since even after the lockdown, people would no longer be attending their shows. The joke mocks those who poked fun at teachers’ poor salaries, arguing that at least they had job security and were earning their salaries during lockdown, while Zimdancehall artists were not. In this joke, the audiences were the teachers while the targets or butts of the joke were the Zimdancehall artists, but in the jokes about touts and taxi drivers, the butts of the jokes were the touts and drivers while the audiences of the jokes were the commuting public. The joke also implies that in the post-COVID-19 era, life may never be the same; the old world order is gone. It is also important to note that, even though the jokes may appear to be mocking fellow subalterns, they are actually mocking the rulers. These jokes point to the collapse of the economy and the impoverishment of both the formally and informally employed due to the ruinous policies of the elite. They document the obscene failures of the elite to lead, a scenario that has led to a reversal of expectations, where professionals live in squalor while Ordinary-level dropouts mock them and seemingly lead better lives than the educated. In this context, the COVID-19 lockdown ironically restores dignity to the teachers who had previously become an object of ridicule, due to the extremely poor salaries paid to them by the government. The poverty brought about by regime policy failure is laid bare in a joke about how

Figure 5. “Street Kids” joke. Photo by first author, personal archive.



suddenly the streets were devoid of street kids due to COVID-19 and the lockdown (see Figure 5). The message creator concludes that they are not really street kids, as they have homes but had been forced onto the streets by the poverty brought about by the regime’s ruinous policies.

Corruption, Bankruptcy, and Inconsistency

Jokes also tackled issues of elite corruption, inefficiency, policy bankruptcy and inconsistency, and a collapsed health delivery system. Our analysis shows that netizens mocked the regime’s policy inconsistencies, especially the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe’s (RBZ) re-introduction of the US dollar as legal tender after having abolished it just months before. That move was viewed as having been influenced by a desire to mop up the foreign currency that citizens had in their homes and in banks. The policy’s requirement for citizens to utilize their foreign currency within thirty days confirmed these suspicions. The regime was viewed as parasitic, corrupt, and predatory as it was seeking to siphon people’s hard-earned foreign currency while the trend worldwide was for countries to bail out their citizens and businesses ravaged by the COVID-19 lockdowns. In this joke, Zimbabwe’s policy is humorously juxtaposed with the multi-billion-dollar bailout packages announced by countries such as the UK, Canada, Italy, Germany, and the US for their citizens and businesses while Zimbabwe’s “bailout” policy was presented as: “*shandisai maUS amuinawo* (use the US dollars that you have).” This humorous presentation of the monetary policy is accompanied by laughing emojis. This joke implies that instead of the Zimbabwe regime seeking to support its businesses and citizens, it has instead seized on an opportunity to wipe clean the little foreign currency citizens have managed to keep out of the reach of the state. This view of the state as essentially corrupt and parasitic is given credence by the COVID-19 personal protective equipment procurement scandal that led to the arrest and dismissal of the Minister of Health and Child Care, Obadiah Moyo. The scandal also tainted the first family, as their names were also mentioned in relationship with the controversial Drax International deal, in the saga which came to be widely known as Covidgate.

The motif of corruption is captured again in another joke about a man who, during the lockdown was asked by his wife to assist in the kitchen. But to the man’s horror, he realized that “there is no stock register, no budgeting

documents, no indexing of products, no displaying of bin cards, no stock taking, no procedure of inventory evaluation, weighing scale non-existent, no maintenance of handover/takeover files, sufficient reserves are not maintained, no preparation of annual balance sheets and financial statements,” and he also discovered boxes of unaccounted-for cash in the kitchen, among other things. The joke concludes by saying, in bold, “I have been removed from kitchen duty and now given toilet cleaning duty... [emojis of despair, anger, exasperation] cartels are also within [an emoji shedding tears].” This joke should be understood in the context of stories of the alleged looting of state resources through programs such as Command Agriculture and the Agricultural Farm Mechanization Program by cartels linked to the ruling elite. There has been talk of state capture in Zimbabwe for several years now, and though the remarks in the joke appear to be about this man’s wife, the message creator is indirectly commenting about the Zimbabwe government. The message creator’s reassignment to toilet cleaning duties is a satirical commentary on the fate that befalls those who dare to notice and openly talk about the alleged looting. The husband is a member of the family, and he arguably represents those Zimbabweans who have dared to comment on elite corruption. That the husband was moved from the kitchen where the food is and relegated to the toilet where there is human waste implies that speaking against corruption brings about ostracism for both those within and outside of the ruling party. For example, former ZANU-PF Youth League leaders Godfrey Tsenengamu and Louis Matutu openly accused some businesspeople with links to the ruling party of being corrupt and of acting as figureheads for the cartels that were bleeding the economy. They were swiftly suspended and ordered to attend the ruling party’s Chitepo School of Ideology for ideological re-orientation. Tsenengamu refused and continued to criticize corruption, until he was fired from the ruling party. This is akin to being shunted from the kitchen, where the food is, to the toilet to clean human waste. For non-ruling party members, being shunted from the kitchen to the toilet is arguably akin to being silenced through imprisonment. In both cases, those who speak out against corruption are silenced.

The country’s health sector did not escape critical scrutiny by the netizens. Jokes generally ridiculed the country’s lack of preparedness for the coronavirus. The Minister of Health at the time, Obadiah Moyo, was also ridiculed. The regime, through the joke about “preparation in Zimbabwe,” was presented as less concerned about equipping the health delivery system and more concerned about equipping the police. The image of riot police officers in full riot gear in a context where nurses and doctors were complaining about the inadequacy of the PPE (personal protective equipment) materials lays bare the regime’s misplaced priorities and policy bankruptcy. The instruments of coercion/repression or the instruments of power retention are adequately equipped in order to thwart any dissent, while hospitals which are supposed to safeguard the lives of the citizens—the same citizens who vote for the rulers—are ill-equipped. The image was given currency by the events of July 31, 2020, when the regime, in the face of threats of a

demonstration against corruption, allegedly gave the security sector hefty allowances while nurses, doctors, and teachers allegedly received on average a sixth of what the junior officers in the security services were paid. The woes in the health sector were equally linked to the incompetence of the then-Minister of Health who, in one joke, was described as having studied Fashion and Fabrics, and hence, lacked competence in health administration. The joke was crafted to resemble an interview between a journalist and the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Alliance (MDCA), and it went like this:

Journalist: what do you see in Zimbabwe if coronavirus spreads its roots in the country considering Zim's (sic) state right now?

Chamisa: Mass death will be certain for people coz (because) the problem that we have is we have a minister of health who studied Fashion and Fabrics.

The joke should be understood in the context of widespread media reports that the Health Minister (at that time) Dr. Obadiah Moyo was a fake doctor. Following his appointment as Minister in 2018, the media were awash with reports that he had falsely claimed that he was a medical doctor when in actual fact he was not. The reports claimed that he was just a former disc jockey, and they called him "DJ Biscuit," allegedly because that was his stage name during his days as a club DJ. In the joke above, the butt of the joke is the Minister, while the audience are arguably MDCA supporters and sympathizers, since the "interviewee" is their party leader Nelson Chamisa. The collapse of the health sector implied by the envisaged death of Zimbabweans from COVID-19 due to the appointment of an incompetent minister is also captured in the joke about selling bread and beer using the ambulance as a vending stall, which was alluded to earlier. Instead of the ambulances carrying COVID-19 patients, they will be used for purposes of selling bread and butter so that the drivers can feed their families. This joke speaks to the underpayment of health workers, and it should be understood in a context of endless strikes by health workers for better working conditions.

COVID-19 Humor as Entertainment and Political Critique

Jokes about the Covid-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe speak truth to power about the country's political-economic and socio-cultural conditions. Our findings agree with Hammett, who noted that in Zimbabwe, satire and jokes, "present criticism of an authoritarian regime within a curtailed public sphere... they capture and represent context-specific power relations, politics and resistance" (2012:202). Humor and satire are used to criticize patriarchy, infidelity, domestic violence, elite corruption, and the policy inconsistency and bankruptcy of the regime. Furthermore, netizens exposed the regime's tendency to be heavy-handed in dealing with citizens and its negative attitudes toward freedom of expression. Through humor, Zimbabweans demonstrated that they were more worried about hunger during the lockdown

than about the COVID-19 virus. In other words, through humor and satire, Zimbabweans powerfully demonstrated their unenviable position, where in lockdown they faced the threat of death by hunger and starvation while at the same time staring at death via the virus, without a source of livelihood and in the absence of any government bailout for citizens. The foregoing confirms findings by Vanessa Thiel (2017) and Achille Mbembe (1992), that the subalterns in sub-Saharan Africa deploy humor and satire to ridicule the elite even as they may pretend to be paying homage to them. Our findings also demonstrate that through humor, the netizens criticized the regime's propensity to resort to coercion when dealing with its citizens, as demonstrated by the way the riot police were allegedly well prepared to quell any lockdown violations or disturbances while nurses and doctors and other health professionals had no adequate protective equipment.

The use of the obscene and/or the sexual demonstrates the extent to which capitalism has dehumanized Zimbabweans. It is also a powerful critique of both the regime's failure to manage the economy and the corporate sector's never-ending pursuit of capital. The failed economy has resulted in the self-employed and underpaid citizens working longer hours as they try to make ends meet, depriving them of time with their spouses and families in the process. This confirms Mbembe's (1992) observation that obscenities are used to expose or critique repression or the elite in sub-Saharan Africa. Further, the findings confirm Taylor and Bain's (2003) assertion that humor has also been used to challenge oppressive managerial control. But in this case, humor was utilized to comment on the system of capitalism in general. Our findings also demonstrate that humor and satire can also be used as tools of attack, and as such they always have targets/butts and audiences (Thiel 2017; Holbert et al. 2011; Ibrahim & Eltantawy 2017; Taylor & Bain 2003). In this case, the target of the attack or butts of the jokes were the regime, the corporate sector, and other groups who are victims of the ruling party's policy bankruptcy. The targets of the jokes, therefore, have two levels: first, the level of ordinary men and women, touts and taxi drivers, who were both the butts and audiences, and second, the level where the target of the humor and satire were the elite, the regime, and the corporate sector.

Against earlier studies (Willems 2008; Hammett 2012; Thiel 2017), humor related to COVID-19 speaks truth to ordinary people, especially those considered deviant, such as touts and taxi drivers. Humor is a double-edged sword that can be used to challenge oppression as well as to perpetuate it, as demonstrated by jokes in which women were the objects of ridicule. Humor is a form of defense against the regime's imposition of the lockdown in a context of poverty and COVID-19 (Taylor & Bain 2003). In this respect, the jokes enabled citizens to deal with fear of infection and death while at the same time speaking truth to power.

On a psychological level, humor provides relief from fear of infection and death while simultaneously providing the people with an outlet for their frustrations at elite corruption, incompetence, and poor governance. COVID-19 and its attendant lockdowns, coupled with the political repression

and economic turmoil in Zimbabwe, may be viewed as stressors (things that cause mental stress). Stress also can cause physical strain. But the use of humor or jokes enabled citizens to rationalize both the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-2000 economic and political turmoil with which they have had to contend. Whereas COVID-19 and its attendant prevention protocols, coupled with the economic and political problems in Zimbabwe, are indeed stressors, humor is a de-stressor. It is a tool that subalterns use to de-stress, that is, to release the mental and bodily strain caused by stress. Judging by the jokes, one might conclude that the netizens rationalized that coronavirus is less deadly than “Huvid-20,” that is, the hunger and starvation that would result from people being unable to work during the lockdown. Breaking the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, according to netizens, would be justifiable because that would pose less risk than “Huvid-20.”

Humor and satire demonstrate the willingness of netizens to break COVID-19 lockdown rules. In this manner, netizens appear to view hunger and economic challenges as more deadly than the virus itself. Hunger was seen as a push factor (pushing people to the streets), thus militating against observance of the COVID-19 lockdown measures in Zimbabwe. The issue became about choosing between observing the lockdown and facing hunger or defying the lockdown and facing the twin evils of COVID-19 and state brutality. The absence of a government bailout of its citizens was also seen as a disincentive to the observance of lockdown regulations. The intended audiences of the lockdown message were aware of the severity of the risk posed by the COVID-19 virus; however, they were also equally aware of the severity of the risk posed by hunger and their everyday economic challenges. The netizens were aware of their susceptibility to both hunger and COVID-19. The jokes demonstrate that netizens believed that the benefits of adhering to the lockdown and those of not adhering would lead to the same result: death. On the one hand, adhering to lockdown provides safety from COVID-19, but not from hunger and eventual death. But on the other hand, not adhering to the COVID-19 lockdown provides safety from starvation and death by hunger while potentially exposing one to COVID-19 and possible death by the virus, as well as possible governmental repercussions for disregarding the lockdown directive.

Conclusion

Using humor during the COVID-19 lockdown provided a way for Zimbabwean netizens to speak back to power and challenge repression. Humor challenges elite corruption and economic mismanagement, while at the same time it reflects the general climate of disillusionment that exists in Zimbabwe because of the failures of governance. Humor provided some comic relief, wherein citizens drew laughter at marriages, infidelities, and sensitive issues such as sex. Humor is also a good index of contemporary Zimbabwe’s political, economic, and social conditions.

But data from COVID-19 enables us to go further still in our analysis. Humor on WhatsApp platforms is an expression of what we can call “low level” and “discourse-based” discontent (as opposed to street demonstrations and violent confrontations with the police or military). Hence, it was a weapon of the weak (Scott 1985). Humor is the tip of the iceberg, signaling the fermenting discontent in the country. Following on the findings and discussion presented here, we concur with Tavory’s (2014) observation that humor’s play on the specific situation of COVID-19 and the lockdown gives us a glimpse into citizens’ views, thoughts, and attitudes about the broader social and political-economic conditions under which they live every day.

In a semi-authoritarian state such as Zimbabwe, jokes or humor do more than just speak truth to power. There is also an important psychological dimension, insofar as humor reflects a rationalization of suffering and provides relief to suffering citizens. Knowledge of this broader social reality reveals the significance of jokes beyond the immediacy of COVID-19. Considering how a plethora of media platforms have permeated the media ecosystem, future research may widen the scope of this study by focusing on audience reception of such humorous messages as the ones studied here. It may also focus on the psychological dimension of jokes and the role they play in enabling citizens to rationalize and therefore be able to deal with the stressful political-economic-socio-cultural and lately health conditions they have had to grapple with. In a state with a strong predilection for authoritarianism, further research may explore state responses to humor and attempts at cooptation.

References

- Bergère, Clovis. 2020. “From Street Corners to Social Media: The Changing Location of Youth Citizenship in Guinea.” *African Studies Review* 63 (1): 124–45.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101.
- Chigudu, Simukai. 2019. “The Politics of Cholera, Crisis, Citizenship in Urban Zimbabwe: ‘People were Dying Like Flies.’” *African Affairs* 118 (472): 413–34.
- Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Goncalves, Marcus, and Erika Cornelius Smith. 2018. “Social Media as a Data Gathering Tool for International Business Qualitative Research: Opportunities and Challenges.” *Journal of Transnational Management* 23 (2–3): 66–97.
- Hammett, Daniel. 2012. “Resistance, Power and Geopolitics in Zimbabwe.” *Area* 43 (2): 202–10.
- Hendriks, Hanneke, and Loes Janssen. 2018. “Frightfully Funny: Combining Threat and Humour in Health Messages for Men and Women.” *Psychology & Health* 33 (5): 594–613.
- Holbert, R. Lance, Jay Hmielowski, Parul Jain, Julie Lather, and Alyssa Morey. 2011. “Adding Nuance to the Study of Political Humor Effects: Experimental Research

- on Juvenalian Satire versus Horatian Satire." *American Behavioral Scientist* 5 (3): 187–211.
- Ibrahim, Amal, and Nahed Eltantawy. 2017. "Egypt's Jon Stewart: Humorous Political Satire and Serious Culture Jamming." *International Journal of Communication* 11 (18): 2806–24.
- Kaufmann, Katja, and Corinna Peil. 2020. "The Mobile Instant Messaging Interview (MIMI): Using WhatsApp to Enhance Self-reporting and Explore Media Usage In Situ." *Mobile Media & Communication* 8 (2): 229–46.
- Kuhlmann, Jenny. 2012. "Zimbabwean Diaspora Politics and the Power of Laughter: Humour as a Tool for Political Communication, Criticism and Protest." *Journal of African Media Studies* 4 (3): 295–314.
- Lee Young Ji, D., Michael Slater, and John Tchernev. 2015. "Self-Deprecating Humor Versus Other-Deprecating Humor in Health Messages." *JHealth Commun* 20 (10): 1185–95.
- Lei, Ya-Wen. 2011. "The Political Consequences of the Rise of the Internet: Political Beliefs and Practices of Chinese Netizens." *Political communication* 28 (3): 291–322.
- Limb, Peter, and Tejumola Olaniyan. 2018. *Taking African Cartoons Seriously: Politics, Satire, and Culture*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Linstead, Stephen. 1988. "Jokers wild: Humor in organisational culture." In *Humor in Society: Resistance and Control*. Edited by C. Powell and G.E.C. Paton. London: Macmillan.
- Makombe, Rodwell, and Grace Temiloluwa Agbede. 2016. "Challenging Power through Social Media: A rReview of Selected Memes of Robert Mugabe's Fall." *Communicare* 35 (2): 39–54.
- Mangeya, Hugh, and Cuthbert Tagwirei. 2021. "WhatsApp Coup Jokes and the Dialogue on Zimbabwean Politics." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 1–16.
- Mbembe, Achille. 1992. "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony in Africa." *Journal of the International African Institute* 62 (1): 3–37.
- . 2001. *On the Post-colony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McKemmish, Sue, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, and Eric Ketelaar. 2005. "'Communities of Memory': Pluralising Archival Research." *Archives and Manuscripts* 33: 146–74.
- McLoughlin, Porter. 1989. "Reading Zimbabwean Comic Strips." *Research in African Literatures* 20 (2): 217–41.
- Moyo, Jabulani. 2013. "The Interface of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication at Shona Funeral Milieu: Sociolinguistic Implications." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 2 (9): 5–15.
- Munoriyarwa, Allen. 2020. "A critical discourse analysis of *The Sunday Mail* and *The Telegraph's* representation of Zimbabwe's 2008 electoral violence." *African Journalism Studies* 1–16. DOI:10.1080/23743670.2020.1742180.
- Musangi, Jennifer. 2012. "'A Zimbabwean joke is no laughing matter': E-humour and versions of subversion." In *Crisis! What Crisis? The Multiple Dimensions of the Zimbabwean Crisis*. Edited by S. Chiumbu and M. Musemwa, 161–175. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Mwangi, Evan. 2014. "Queer Agency in Kenya's Digital Media." *African Studies Review* 57 (2): 93–113.
- Patterson, Amy S., and Emmanuel Balogun. 2021. "African Responses to COVID-19: The Reckoning of Agency?" *African Studies Review* 64 (1): 144–67.
- Potter, Jonathan, and Margaret Wetherell. 1987. *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage.

- Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Tavory, Iddo. 2014. "The Situations of Culture: Humor and the Limits of Measurability." *Theory and Society* 43 (3-4):275–89.
- Taylor, Phil, and Peter Bain. 2003. "'Subterranean Work Sick Blues': Humour as Subversion in Two Call Centres." *Organization Studies* 24 (9): 1487–1509.
- Thiel, Vanessa. 2017. "African Artivism: Politically Engaged Art in Sub-Saharan Africa." Master of Arts diss., Hochschule Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences.
- Willems, Wendy. 2008. "Mocking the State: Comic Strips in the Zimbabwean Press." In *Dilemmas of Development: Conflicts of Interest and Their Resolutions in Modernizing Africa*. Edited by J. Abbink and A. van Dokkum, 151–62. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- . 2010. "Beyond Dramatic Revolutions and Grand Rebellions: Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Zimbabwe Crisis." *Communicare Special Edition* 1: 1–17.