Humouring the state?
Zimbabwean stand-up comedians as political actors

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2021

Amanda C. Källstig

School of Social Science
Department of Politics

Table of Contents

Word count: 60571

Abstract

This thesis asks how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically. In a difficult political context with severe economic hardship, and a limited space for public debate, stand-up has flourished, growing from a handful of comedians in the early 2000s, to an industry with regular performances in 2019. Exploring original empirical material gathered during four months of fieldwork predominantly in Harare, but also Bulawayo, this thesis demonstrates that despite severe restrictions to freedom of expression in the country, and comedians being harassed, arrested and abducted, stand-up has become a space where social ordering can be interrupted. The argument made in this thesis is informed by a theoretical approach combining Homi K. Bhabha's emphasis on ambivalence, and conceptualisation of mimicry, with Judith Butler's understanding of performativity.

This thesis looks particularly at three sites where the construction of Zimbabwean-ness is interrupted: the production of state autobiographies, the creation of an 'authentic' national subject, and norms regulating how people 'should' behave. Exploring these, it argues that the genre divulges the ambivalence of Zimbabwean-ness; highlights narrative contradictions; unsettles societal conceptions and addresses that which is commonly silenced. Embracing the ambiguous nature of comedy, it examines how stand-up enacts the ambivalence of state claims to homogeneity as it reiterates 'tribal' narratives; displays anxieties pertaining to women's place in society; unsettles binary conceptions of patriotism; wrestles with gendered notions of artistry and the subordinate role of women in society, and interrupts gendered narrations of the public/private divide. As such, this thesis tells a story about Zimbabwean politics that has not been told in this depth and scope, or from this theoretical perspective before.

Doing so this thesis makes three main contributions, first to research on Zimbabwean politics by looking at comedic resistance in Harare and Bulawayo, and showing how stand-up comedy contests, whilst also reinforcing norms, narratives and discourses through which Zimbabwean-ness is constructed. Secondly, it contributes to scholarship in critical global politics by developing a theoretical approach through which to understand comedic subversion as both reinforcing and disrupting dominant power relations, advancing research that asserts its resistive capabilities whilst also grappling with jokes that appear to be both prejudicial and unsettling. Finally, it contributes to critical global politics by advancing a fieldwork-based methodology for exploring comedic resistance in countries like Zimbabwe, extending beyond the often textual or narratively based studies on the topic, facilitating a better understanding of the comedian's position within social ordering, and their ability to interrupt it.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning

Copyright statement

I. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

II. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

III. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

IV. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24420), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library's regulations (see http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/) and in The University's policy on Presentation of Theses

Acknowledgements

Last, but not least, sitting at the front row of all of my performances in life, I want to acknowledge all the ways in which my family have supported me. My sister Emma, who is always there to celebrate my achievements, big or small - there is no one with whom I laugh as much and as loudly as you. My parents, who without a question dropped everything to proofread my PhD on a rainy Sunday. *Mamma*, you are the most analytical person I know, without your comments about Trevor Noah I would never have had the idea for this research. *Pappa*, thank you for tirelessly, reading (listening to me read out-loud) almost every piece of writing since I could hold a pen. You do deserve an honorary undergraduate, masters and PhD by now. Taurai, thank you for reminding me to take a Zimbabwean approach to life. Let's keep it simple and not worry too much about tomorrow.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all of the staff and group members at Fifteen Therapeutic Community in Manchester. I continue to carry you with me as my moral compass in life.

Introduction: A funny people

This thesis is about stand-up in Zimbabwe, and it will start how it intends to continue, with jokes from local comedians:

> "I hate Robert Mugabe because of three reasons. The first reason is because Robert Mugabe is old. The second reason is because Robert Mugabe is ugly. The third and the final reason why I hate Robert Mugabe is because Robert Mugabe has killed a lot of people. [Y]es, Robert Mugabe has killed a lot of people, especially where it intersects with […] Nelson Mandela Road."[1]
>
> (Tinaye Chiketa, 2019, stand-up comedian)

> "You know the reason why Robert Mugabe was naming things after him? The reason why he was naming almost everything after him? It is because he was competing with Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela did one of the most unforgivable things as an African president, he resigned, *voluntarily* […] The final straw for him [Mugabe] was when they put Nelson Mandela's face on the money, like – ah,ah,ah,ah [upset]. [He] called an emergency meeting […] – 'why is my face not on the money? I've been here 35 years, Nelson Mandela 3 [makes hand gesture as if he is weighing it up], make it make sense' […] And John Mangudya [governor of the Zimbabwean reserve bank since 2014] speaks very fast because he is a liar [laughter] And John Mangudya was like – 'Ah, Mr President, the thing is, *ma* bond note, ah that we just introduced, we couldn't put your face on the money, we told the people that eh, *ma* bond notes are a temporary measure, and people don't, no *kuti* you don't do temporary."
>
> (Majoni, 2020, *King Kandoro's: "Conspiracy Theories")*

---

[1] This joke was originally performed in 2016 and re-told in a WhatsApp voice-note to the author in 2019.

"So, our president fell, right. He fell one time, and it was viral on the internet,

people making jokes about our president falling. So many memes […] [I] had to

travel all the way to South Africa just to watch him fall, because back at home our

internet was still buffering. So, in Zimbabwe, on our internet, Robert Mugabe is

still standing."

(Ncube, 2017, TEDArchive)

In Zimbabwean society freedom of expression is limited to the extent that the

performance of these jokes by stand-up comedians is an extraordinary and noteworthy

act. To understand this, you need to know that the Criminal Law (Codification and

Reform) Act (2002) makes it illegal to undermine the authority of government in the

country, and to "cause hatred, contempt or ridicule of the President or of an acting

President."[2] Further, you need to know that in 2019 several comedians were not only

arrested as a result of their comedy, but popular comedian Samantha Kureya, known as

Gonyeti, was taken from her home at gunpoint, stripped naked, forced to drink sewage,

and according to a source close to her in an interview with me, ordered to perform

military exercises the way that her abductors said they would usually have to - leading

my source to believe they were of military or police background (see also BBC, 2019,

Burke, 2019, Oppenheim, 2019).

---

[2] The law against insulting the president has been contested in Zimbabwean court where it was deemed unconstitutional (BBC, 2013). However, Emmerson Mnangagwa who was the Minister of Justice in 2013 when this occurred, and is the current president, did according to Tendai Marima in NPR (2018a) appeal the case. According to the United States government's 2019 country report, the law continues to remain in use because a final verdict was not delivered after the case was appealed (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2019). Amnesty International's 2019 country report describes how in January that year, in conjunction with nation-wide protests, five people were arrested for insulting or undermining the authority of the president. Mandla Ndlovu (2020) reported in local online newspaper Bulawayo24 that two men had been arrested for insulting President Mnangagwa by posting and commenting on a WhatsApp video.

These events are not isolated to 2019. Since stand-up comedy's inception in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s the relationship between comedians and the state has been fraught with tension; comedians told me in interviews that they have been beaten, arrested, intimidated, and harassed as a result of their performances (see also: Mahomed, 2018, Moyo, 2019, Langeveldt, 2000). A comedian, who, worried about the repercussions of being quoted, chose to remain anonymous, told me in an interview in 2018, that back in the early 2000s they used to be arrested every time they stepped off stage. This is a series of events that lends credence to the popular saying amongst artists that they have "freedom of expression, but not freedom after expression" (Monro, 2015, 80). Yet, and this is significant within this environment, stand-up comedians keep on performing. Stepping out on the stage, stand-up comedians told me in interviews, that whilst aware of the risks, they felt emboldened to speak out in ways that they normally would not. As one stand-up comedian told me following a performance in 2019, and here I paraphrase - I just want to do it again, right now, I feel invincible.

Having said that, very few of the comedians that I have talked to in Zimbabwe during my fieldwork periods in 2018 and 2019 consider themselves to be activists. Where party politics, politicians or polices are addressed in stand-up comedy it is most often because that is what the comedian believe the audience wants to hear. Former President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, and current President Emmerson Mnangagwa will pop-up in performances fairly regularly, but stand-up comedy in the country is predominantly a humorous re-telling of the comedian's everyday experiences, such as, being broke, living with roommates, smoking weed, cars that do not reverse, relationships, dating, and queueing for hours for fuel, food and cash.

The more performances I watched, the more apparent it became that stand-up comedy was not only political when it dangerously made fun of party and president. It

was also political when it spoke about these ordinary aspects of Zimbabwean life (see also Willems, 2010). At a cursory level this can be seen in how jokes about the 'everyday' discuss the implications of government action on peoples' day-to-day lives. An example of this is how stand-up comedian Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni, known as King Kandoro, in a joke about his long-distance relationship, quoted below, makes fun of the electricity crisis in 2019, where significant load-shedding meant that most people only had power between 10 pm and 4 am.[3]

> "This year particularly for me was a very nervous year, because I was in a long-distance relationship. I've been in long-distance for two years now. She was in England, and I'm in … I'm here, *here*. So, we are never on the same page. Because she would, sometimes we would be on Facetime, and she would be like: 'Yo, babe, *ko*, why are you in the dark?' And I'd be like: 'Yeah [looks at watch] it's not, it's not yet ten [laughs].'"
>
> (Majoni, 2020, *King Kandoro's: "Conspiracy Theories"*)

Another example of this can be found in the 2019 set performed by stand-up comedian Munyaradzi Guramatunhu, also known as Munya, where she addresses the effects of hyperinflation on peoples' everyday life in the nation by telling a story about attempting to buy meat from the butchers only to discover the price had more than doubled in a

---

[3] In 2019 Zimbabwe was suffering from electricity shortages (Muronzi, 2019a). Brian Hungwe (2019) explains to the BBC that "For the last month, as soon as the sun goes down at six o'clock, candles are lit so [children] can settle down and do their assignments. It is only after they have gone to bed that the electricity comes on - usually at around 22:00 local time. The children then have to be woken the next morning before 05:00 if they want a warm breakfast, as that is when the blackout starts again." Hungwe (2019) further states that the only solution is for people to invest in solar power, or a generator although lack of petrol and diesel causes a problem for those with generators (see also Banya, 2019). It should be kept in mind that these are expensive solutions in a country with economic difficulties (see also Chingono, 2019; The Economist, 2019, The World Bank, 2020).

week.[4] A third comedian, Tinaye Chiketa, known as simply Tinaye, or Tinaye Wayne onstage, further highlights how economic policy effects peoples' day-to-day life when he at a stand-up set in 2018 made fun of me paying with cash rather than the local electronic currency, Ecocash. This type of joke captures the implications of the government's claim at the time, that Ecocash, bond notes and USD should be valued at a one-to-one rate. [5]

The realisation that jokes about the everyday can be political resonates with scholarship in critical global politics and popular culture. Research in this area has highlighted how art and entertainment acts politically by challenging the status quo (Bleiker, 2009, Grayson *et al,* 2009, Shapiro, 2009, Shepherd, 2013, Weldes and Rowley, 2015, Payne, 2017, Lisle, 2019). Interrupting dominant world views, popular culture has been shown here to unsettle the plausibility of state actions and government policy, as well as disrupt societal power-relations (Weldes, 2003). Drawing on insights from this literature, the political nature of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy can be identified in anything from jokes about President Mnangagwa, to ZANU-PF, to the relationships and daily routines of the comedian. Intrigued by the diverse ways in which stand-up comedy in the country is political, struck by the risks comedians take when performing onstage, and building on the work of scholarship in critical global politics

---

[4] Zimbabwe's already struggling economy took a turn in 2019 when the government chose to move from a dollarized economy to again using its own currency in February that year (Muronzi, 2019b). In August 2019 the IMF reported, according to Christ Muronzi (2019b) in *Al Jazeera,* an annualised inflation of 300%, this was up from 97.85% in June that year. The increasing inflation was noticeable during my fieldwork. Whilst Zimbabwe officially in 2018 was operating on the basis that 1 USD was the same as 1 bond note and 1 Ecocash (local electronic currency) this was not the case in practice. On the black market you could get 2 Ecocash for 1 USD, even though the prices in store were the same for both systems of payment given the premise that they are comparable (one is to one). During my fieldwork in 2019, when Zimbabwe was officially using its own currency the exchange rates had changed. Although you could now only pay with bond notes and Ecocash in stores, not USD, you could still exchange USD on the black market. At one point during my stay in 2019, it was possible to get 25 Ecocash for 1 USD. The inflation in autumn 2019 also led to increases in prices in stores that would change on a weekly basis - it would often be wise to exchange for Ecocash towards the end of the week and buy food before Monday when prices would have risen during night.

[5] See footnote 4.

and popular culture, this thesis central research question is not if, but how, Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically.

The aim of this thesis is to highlight how people act politically in circumstances where it is not necessarily overtly apparent, and in contexts that tend silence them. Zimbabwean stand-up comedy provides a useful site to explore this in, operating in an authoritarian environment, yet growing, and speaking through an art form which has already been shown to intervene in complex ways that both resists and reinforces dominant power-relations (see also Weaver, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, Kar Tang, 2013, Musila, 2014, Deveau 2016, Källstig, 2021). Asking how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically I redirect my research from how people oppose and critique state actions, policies and politicians. Instead, I look towards how the genre interrupts social ordering. This thesis identifies social ordering as the structures that are created in a society based on the system of meanings norms, narratives and discourses produce.[6]

Scholarship looking at how comedy can resist has emphasised the significance of cultural context, and societal structures to what humour and laughter does in a society (Billig, 2001, 2005, Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, Kupiers, 2011, Seirlis, 2011, Dodds and Kirby, 2013). Drawing on this scholarship, this thesis explores how stand-up comedy interrupts (reproducing and unsettling) social ordering by looking at the way in which Zimbabwean-ness is constructed in the country, recognising that its production structures society by outlining the premises for who is seen as belonging. Examining stand-up comedy in relation to the construction of nation-ness, I argue that the genre intervenes politically in the country when it interrupts social ordering by divulging the ambivalence of Zimbabwean-ness; highlighting narrative contradictions; unsettling

---

[6] I discuss both my understanding of social ordering, and this literature further in the sub-section called *Comedy and social ordering* in chapter 1, and the introduction to chapter 2.

societal conceptions and addressing that which is commonly silenced. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's and Judith Butler's conceptualisation of the subject and resistance and building on scholarship within critical global politics which has looked both at how comedy resists (Bakhtin, 1984, Mbembe, 1992, 2001, de Goede, 2005, Amoore and Hall, 2013, Musila, 2014, Brassett, 2016), and reinforces dominant power relations (Beck and Spencer, 2019, Brassett, 2019, Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020, Brassett, *et al,* 2021a), this thesis engages with original empirical material from Zimbabwe to tell a story about politics in the country that has not been told before. In telling this story, it also develops a theoretical and methodological contribution to critical global politics literature, providing a toolset that allows scholars to engage with comedic resistance in a way that highlights the complexities of how people act and disrupt in international politics. Exploring Zimbabwean stand-up comedy, this thesis thus helps us understand better the complexities, nuances and messiness of resistance and comedic subversion across dominant power relations.

Next, I am going to explain the rationale of this thesis, then I will look at the central research question and methodology, before elaborating on the contributions made by this thesis and finally outlining its central argument and structure.

Thesis Rationale

When outside observers turn their attention to Zimbabwe, they are often confounded by what they perceive as a lack of opposition (Willems, 2010, Siziba and Ncube, 2015 – c.f. Bratton *et al*, 2005). This is highlighted by Wendy Willems (2010) work on oral joke telling and rumours as everyday resistance, in which she points out that during the 'Zimbabwe crisis' of the early 2000s, academics and news-media alike tended to describe citizens of the nation as peculiarly passive. Comparing Zimbabwe to

authoritarian states where popular mass movements were turning against those in power, outside observers asked why Zimbabweans did not fight back (Willems, 2010). This sentiment is visible also in journalist Fergal Keane's (2017) description of, what in the country is often referred to as, "the coup that was not a coup" - "Mr Mugabe was not forced out after decades in power by a popular mass movement, but rather as a result of political splits within his Zanu-PF [Zimbabwean National Union - Patriotic Front] party." Achille Mbembe's (1992, 2001) work on the Postcolony helps us nuance this picture. [7] He argues that we need to look "beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination […] [as] [t]hese oppositions are not helpful; rather, they cloud our understanding of postcolonial relations [where] the *commandement* seeks to institutionalise itself in order to achieve legitimation and hegemony (*recherche hégémonique*) in the form of a *fetish*" (Mbembe, 1992, 3, original emphasis). Mbembe (1992, 10) describes the *fetish* as "amongst other things, an object which aspires to be made sacred; it demands power and seeks to maintain a close, intimate, relationship with those who carry it." In order to institutionalise itself as a *fetish* the authority in the Postcolony, according to Mbembe (1992,4), creates an entire 'system of meaning': "[t]he basic goal is not just to bring a specific political consciousness into being but to make it effective." This thesis examines how stand-up comedy interrupts such a 'system of meaning'.

In Zimbabwe, the construction of a 'system of meaning' through which the *fetish* is institutionalised, can be identified in the government's tendency to narrate the nation

---

[7] Mbembe (1992, 3) describes the Postcolony as "a given historical trajectory - that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship, *par excellence,* involves" (original emphasis). He identifies the Postcolony as a particular system of signs, a space of plurality where power is imagined and reflected upon in particular ways, where authority is exercised in a distinct manner and where "a series of corporate and political institutions and political machinery […] constitute a distinctive regime of violence" (Mbembe, 1992, 3). In the Postcolony, the subordinate and the powerful have to occupy the same space (Mbembe, 1992). Living in, what Mbembe (1992, 4) refers to as, illicit cohabitation, the presence of 'carnival-like' laughter and resistance in peoples' day-to-day lives becomes even more explicit.

in ways that legitimise and aggrandise the ruling party ZANU-PF. A key part of this has been how history is narrated. Terence Ranger (2004) identifies Patriotic History as the Zimbabwean government's attempt in the early 2000s to (re)narrate the country's history in such a way as to create legitimacy for themselves and their policies. Wendy Willems (2013, 22) explains how this works, stating that "The emergence of a particular, narrow brand of 'patriotic history' served to highlight key victorious moments in ZANU-PF's history as a liberation movement and silence the contribution of other movements [presenting ZANU-PF as the only party 'worthy' of governing]." According to Blessing-Miles Tendi (2010b) Patriotic History began to be developed at the same time as the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was gaining credence in the early 2000s. Unpacking its narrative, Tendi (2010b, 1) describes how:

"Patriotic History asserts the centrality of Zimbabwe's radical revolutionary tradition […] it is premised on four themes; land, race, a dichotomy between 'sell-outs' and 'patriots'; and the rejection of Western interferences perceived as 'Western ideals' such as human rights."

Tendi (2010b) further shows how Patriotic History was promoted through a powerful propaganda machine including everything from jingles to appearances of public intellectuals on TV (see also Willems, 2013).

Further to such narrations of the country's past, the Zimbabwean state has also drawn on arts and culture, as well as a particular portrayal of the president to institute specific perceptions of Zimbabwean-ness. This construction of the nation has involved emphasis on the culture, tradition and language of those that identify as Shona (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2009, Willems, 2013, Ncube and Siziba, 2017). It has also included censorship of the arts – such as music, theatre, comedy and documentaries – by

enabling particular narratives through, for example, selective processes about what is aired on state-owned radio and TV-channels, and what is sanctioned by the Zimbabwe Censorship Board, as well as through the silencing of other expressions through intimidations, abductions and arrests (Thram, 2006a, Zenenga, 2008, Ncube and Siziba, 2017, Burke, 2019, Moyo, 2019). Part of making the government's 'system of meaning' effective can be seen in their narration of long-term Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe as a form of quasi-God, leading to a need to emphasise his strength and longevity as a leader (Siziba and Ncube, 2015). This, perhaps, begins to explain the ferocity by which the Zimbabwean government has attempted to protect the president from being mocked and laughed at; for example when in 2015 he fell exiting an airplane, media was forced to delete pictures of the fall, and once the image leaked and funny memes were created, the Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, argued that "we should have [a] reasonable and mature discussion and not start laughing at each other" (Bulawayo24News, 2015 – see also Siziba and Ncube, 2015).[8]

Julia Gallagher (2017) further reminds us that the government does not have a monopoly on how the state is imagined. Through an examination of how Zimbabweans think of the state she draws our attention to the relationship between government narratives, and societal imaginations of what constitutes a good state - demonstrating that these sometimes do, and sometimes do not, overlap (Gallagher, 2017). Gallagher (2017, 148-149) points out that "Fantasies – playing with a despised and powerful leader, laughing at him, rejecting him – lend a disempowered population a measure of control." This aligns with literature on comedy in Africa which highlights its role as an indication of democracy and freedom of speech (Seirlis, 2011, Hammett, 2014), a

---

[8] Zimbabwean stand-up comedian Carl Joshua Ncube (2017) jokes about Mugabe falling in a TedTalk that he has delivered. The joke is quoted at the start of this introduction.

resistance towards authoritarian regimes (Shehata, 1992, Hammett, 2011, Willems, 2011), and as Ebenezer Obadare (2016) explains, another way of imagining what society could look like. This thesis intervenes in these debates about national identity and collective subjectivity looking at how stand-up comedy interrupts the construction of Zimbabwean-ness by state and society alike. Building on literature exploring the imagination of state, and national identity, particularly in Zimbabwe, it moves towards the 'unserious' realm of humour and comedy looking for another site to investigate subject-society relations, listening for resistance where there appears to be none, and lending credence to a Zimbabwean subject that acts and plays a part in the constitution of collective subjectivity in the nation.

Scholarship on popular culture and critical global politics has added to the way in which resistance, identity construction and agency is thought through. Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies and Simon Philpott (2009, 157) highlight that "popular culture should not merely be reduced to a superstructure that reflects a political base […] the ongoing and phenomenal growth in the production and circulation of popular culture *makes* world politics what it currently *is.*" This thesis' focuses on comedy as a space where meanings are constructed, and contested: in other words, a space where politics is made. Kate Fox (2018) has pointed out that humour is a useful way to 'fuse' speaker with audience and that this is why it is used by activists and politicians alike as a tool of persuasion. James Brassett, Christopher S. Browning and Alister Wedderburn (2021b) in a special issue on humour and global politics in *Global Society* begin by summarizing the dispersed research that exists on comedy and global politics. Through this discussion Brassett, Browning and Wedderburn (2021b, 3) point out that:

> "even while acknowledging […] ambiguities, more radical arguments have sought
> to foreground the potential for resistance bestowed by comedy and related practices
> of subversion. While it would be hard to attribute a coherent line to this literature, a
> common thread is that humour and comedy have affective cultural power that can
> be a resource for both understanding and enacting politics."

This thesis draws on this literature that recognises the political as something to be found in comedy and unpacks how a move towards the humorous allows us to identify another site of negotiation between the subject and society, as well as providing deeper insight into our understanding of political intervention.

My turn towards stand-up comedy in particular comes from the realisation that the genre, which has grown in Zimbabwe despite economic hardship and a politically oppressive government, does something to social ordering (see also Seirlis, 2011). This was first pointed out to me by my *mamma*, Eva, who observed that Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy resisted stereotypes of the African continent, and within the South African nation, by (re)articulating them in a way that highlights their peculiarities (see also Källstig and Death, 2020). Looking closer at scholarship on the genre, research demonstrates how stand-up comedy – operating from within social ordering – ambiguously both reinforces power and disrupts it (Weaver, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, Deveau, 2016, Källstig, 2021). Exploring (anti)racist comedy Simon Weaver (2010b) demonstrates how racist tropes are co-opted and reclaimed in a way that *does* something to social ordering - but that also in their re-use reinforces it. Grace Musila (2014) further demonstrates how stand-up comedy in South Africa carves out a space where it becomes possible to talk about what is still a contested and taboo topic in the country, race. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's work in her discussion of South African stand-up, Musila (2014) highlights that comedy's engagement with power is complex.

Indeed, research on comedy and resistance has examined how humour operates as a tool of activist opposition (Amoore and Hall, 2013, Rossdale, 2019), an everyday form of resistance (Billig, 2001, 2005, Bryant, 2006, Willems, 2010) and a destabilisation of discourses, for example in the meeting between the 'rational' (world of political economy and markets: de Goede, 2005, Brassett, 2016) and the 'unserious' world of humour and emotion (Odysseos, 2001, Brassett and Sutton, 2017). Situated within literature on comedy and international political economy, James Brassett (2016) shows how a Butlerian take on humour changes what questions we ask about comedic resistance. Drawing on Butler's conceptualisation of performativity to engage with the market subject through humour, Brassett (2016, 170) approaches resistance asking not for a way to universally conceptualise subversion or looking to understand it in terms of something that is always one thing or another - always changes an outcome, or never changes an outcome. Instead, he implores us to ask: "*what does resistance do*?" Applied to this thesis, Brassett's (2016) question becomes - what does Zimbabwean stand-up comedy do to social ordering? How does it intervene politically? Asking what comedy does shifts the perspective from political intervention as often seen through resistance as something which has to disrupt, unravel or oppose something by binarily standing in contradiction to it. Indeed, asking what stand-up comedy does allows me to instead look at political intervention as something that occurs through repetition and construction as much as through disruption.

Approaching political intervention by looking at what stand-up comedy *does* to social ordering distinguishes this thesis from scholarship which has previously explored comedy and its political impact in relation to why something is considered to be funny. For example, Sigmund Freud (1989) explored the links between why people enjoy jokes, the unconscious, and anxiety. Michael Billig (2005, 2008) puts laughter at the

centre of humour, arguing that it is something people give or withhold as a form of socialising function. Henri Bergson (2010, 9) starts his study of the comic asking: "What does laughter mean? What is the basal element in the laughable? What common ground can we find between grimace of a merry-andrew, a play upon words, an equivocal situation in a burlesque and a scene of high comedy?" Moving away from the focus on laughter, this thesis will explore comedy as defined simply by what is produced on the stand-up comedy stage, arguing that its impact is not solely located in why people do or do not laugh, but in the processes that occur throughout the performance as people anticipate being entertained.

This thesis thus draws on literature on comedy and resistance, as well as Butler's understanding of power and the subject, which I combine with Bhabha's work, to examine empirical material from Zimbabwe in a move that allows me to rethink political intervention as not just being about overt resistance, or deriding disruption, but as something that can operate through the production of power, in its repetition, *doing* something to power. As such, I advance an understanding of how people can act through stand-up also when they appear passive in the face of authoritarian power, asking, how does Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervene politically?

Theoretical approach

In order to answer this question, I, similarly to James Brassett (2016), draw on Judith Butler's (1993, 1999) work. However, I further combine it with Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) understanding of subversion and agency to show how the subject can act and resist through the reiteration of a powerful 'system of meaning'. I choose to draw on Bhabha's and Butler's work as they provide insights into how resistance operates within, rather than apart, from norms, narratives and discourses. Their understanding of

resistance, which I develop through the idea of 'repetition with a difference' allows me to advance a reading of subversion which does not necessitate it always to be completely disruptive or, to hold, that resistance always necessarily is co-opted by power. Indeed, these two authors theoretical work allows me to embrace the messy co-construction of resistance, power and the subject. Examining my empirical material through an approach that uses Bhabha's and Butler's conceptualisations of how the subject acts I thus endeavour to look at how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically by turning to the way in which the genre interrupts social ordering. Looking for interruption rather than disruption, allows me to embrace how stand-up comedy both re-institutes and subverts through its repetition of norms, narratives and discourses. This type of analysis shows how the subject acts also through the production of official narratives, or societal constructions of Zimbabwean-ness, pointing to the way in which comedy can both resist and reinforce, all at once. Indeed, it embraces the nuances that exist in society thus deepening our understanding of resistance in authoritarian environments like Zimbabwe.

In line with Bhabha's and Butler's work I approach my empirical material engaging with the norms, narratives and discourses that underpin social ordering. Exploring the way in which Zimbabwean stand-up comedy repeats these norms, narratives and discourses I locate the genre's ability to interrupt in how it highlights and enacts ambivalence. Particularly Bhabha (1990, 1994), draws our attention to ambivalence as a key concept to understanding how the subject acts and resists within norms, narratives and discourses. Although Butler (1993, 1999) also points to the uncertain foundation of norms, narratives and discourses, as enabling subversion and agency. Investigating how Zimbabwean stand-up intervenes politically I thus approach

my empirical material examining the ambivalences of dominant norms, narratives and discourses, and how comedy does/does not play with them.

In order to do so, I develop a theoretical approach that draws on three key concepts, ambivalence, mimicry and performativity. What Bhabha refers to as the time-lag is used as a starting point for identifying how ambivalences in the construction of Zimbabwean-ness allows for the subject to act. Identifying these ambivalences through the time-lag leads me to look towards norms, narratives and discourses that appear to re-produce dominant worldviews in order to unpack how stand-up can (re)enact them in ways that both reinforce and resist, considering how they operate in the wider societal context to understand how, and if, the genre interrupts them. Bhabha's and Butler's conceptualisations of mimicry and performativity respectively are then used as tools to explain how stand-up comedy interrupts (resists and reinforces) through 'repetition with a difference.' Here, Butler particularly reminds me also to consider how norms, narratives and discourses are repeated both corporeally and orally. Applying Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity to my empirical material, in other words, allows me to look at what stand-up *does* to social ordering and *how* people act through humour to understand how the genre intervenes politically in Zimbabwe. This theoretical approach and the concepts used are developed further in chapter 2.

Bringing stand-up comedy to research on politics in Zimbabwe this thesis points towards another way of recognising resistance and thinking about how the subject acts in the country beyond a focus on subversion as overt and/or as necessarily always disruptive. It highlights how in Zimbabwe, where the state attempts to silence its population and control the construction of nation-ness, people do resist, and engage in a negotiation of what it means to be Zimbabwean. With the help of a theoretical approach that draws on Bhabha and Butler, I show how resistance and agency are complex and

nuanced and operate within, through, and by reinstituting power. In the next section I am going to outline how I go about my research.

Methodology

To answer this thesis' central research question – How does Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervene politically – I take a methodological approach based on qualitative research. This resonates with studies on comedy within critical global politics which tend to be based on a critical textual and/or discursive analysis (Odysseos, 2001, Musila, 2014, Brassett and Sutton, 2017, Wedderburn, 2018, Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020, Saunders and Bruun, 2020, Brassett *et. al*, 2021a). Building on this work, I employ a fieldwork-based approach. Tami Jacoby (2006, 153) describes fieldwork as involving "a series of […] choices that allow the researcher to enter briefly the lives of those being researched and to generate knowledge by observing behaviour, asking questions, and analysing data." Involving myself in stand-up comedy as I did for two periods of fieldwork totalling approximately four months – first between 26 September 2018 and 23 October 2018 and the second between 15 August 2019 and 11 November 2019 – allowed me to look beyond the few minutes that the stand-up comedian spends onstage to see more broadly how the genre operates within Zimbabwean society and intervenes politically in more ways than through the immediate telling of the joke.

The fieldwork encounter is of course fraught with power-relations, and I recognise that my positionality as a white, Swedish, doctoral researcher in a British institution affects the stories I'm told (see also Musila, 2017). Gediminas Lesutis (2018, 510) has eloquently described on the ground research "as a multifaceted experience of self-representation through which unequal power relations are negotiated, social identities are performed, and meanings are co-constructed." Honing in on interviews in

the field, Jacoby (2006) makes a similar observation. She contends that the narratives that researchers are told operate as a form of self-presentation where "those being researched do not merely respond to the agenda and questions of the researcher, but are actively engaged in shaping their own agenda of how they *want* to be represented" (Jacoby, 2006, 162, original emphasis). Examining stand-up comedy through semi-structured interviews with practitioners, and artists more broadly, as well as, conversing with audience members, and engaging in participant observation by watching, and involving myself in the day-to-day work behind stand-up shows, I was not looking to discover 'the truth' of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy. Instead, semi-structured interviews and conversations are of interest due to what they tell us about how a person (comedian or audience member) experiences the art-form, how they imbue those experiences with meaning, and how they want me to understand it. As Lesustis (2018, 512) eloquently puts it, "stories told by research participants are not seen as empirical representations of 'real life'; instead they constitute 'facts' that we come to perceive as reality."

Looking at how stand-up comedy intervenes politically in Zimbabwe I have built on the pre-existing textual and discourse analysis of comedy within critical global politics through an approach that involves myself in the day-to-day experiences of maintaining the stand-up comedy scene in the country. I interviewed stand-up comedians, attended stand-up comedy shows, shadowed comedians before, and after their shows – sat in the car whilst driving around collecting different material, sat on the set of their sitcom for an entire day talking to the cast, helped out with grant proposals, took pictures of the show for their website, attended stand-up comedy classes, and laughed and joked with them over lunch. In other words, I involved myself in the field, engaging with the minutia of the day-to-day practices around running a stand-up club in

Harare – specifically that of Simuka Comedy, an organisation that at the time was responsible for most stand-up comedy shows in the capital. Involving myself in stand-up comedy in Harare I gained a deep insight into how stand-up comedy intervenes politically. I looked both at the time spent onstage, and beyond, to understand the broader experience of performing stand-up in the country.

A consequence of involving myself in the practices of stand-up comedy is that I came to know my research subjects. I made friends. Spending the better part of three months (out of my four months of fieldwork) following a group of stand-up comedians around I got to know some of them fairly well. I was present when they prepared for shows and workshops, strategized, applied for grants (a process which I helped with), and above all spent a lot of time waiting with them. We waited for people to arrive, for audiences to get seated, for the show to start, for the stand-up comedy teacher to arrive, and for the taxi to pick me up. This gave me time to connect with them and experience the community that is built when one has a lot of time doing nothing at all together. Writing about autoethnography Roxanne Doty (2010) has emphasised the importance of connection. She argues that "the self is really always present in academic writing," although this presence is sometimes manifest in its active absence (Doty, 2010, 1048). Throughout this thesis I attempt to recognise the impact of my presence in the field. Whilst this is not an autoethnography I draw on contributions made by this scholarship, reminding myself, as well as the reader, of Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker's (2010, 780) important intervention: "To erase the author is to erase potentially important insights: it leaves us with less knowledge rather than more." I echo the comments of Chris Rossdale (2019, 10) when he states that "My intention is not to position myself as a site of pure knowledge, but to work with the understanding that our own

entanglements in relations of power […] is always already the condition of knowledge and a space from which to interrogate the world."

Keeping this in mind, the empirical material that I gathered was divided into three broad categories based on the basic structure of a stand-up comedy set: the joke, the comedian, and the audience. Having divided the material in this way I then unpacked it in each of these categories by looking firstly at what themes re-occurred, but also attempting to examine spaces where resistance happened in ways that aren't necessarily obvious. Following from this division, the original structure of this thesis included three empirical chapters looking at how stand-up comedy intervened through the joke, the comedian and the audience. However, reading the empirical material in each of these categories in relation to scholarly work on politics in Zimbabwe and through the theoretical approach advanced in this thesis, it became apparent that all jokes did not intervene in the same way, and that how the comedian interrupted social ordering was infused, and co-constructed, by the audience they performed to and the jokes they told. Indeed, another structure began to emerge when looking at the complex and nuanced ways in which stand-up comedy interacted with social ordering in the nation. Dividing the material instead based on what aspect of the construction of Zimbabwean-ness it interacted with I was able to ascertain the way in which the joke, comedian and audience bleed into each other in the stand-up comedy space, considering also the implications of the political and economic context, and day-to-day practices of the gerne, highlighting the many nuanced ways in which it interacts with politics in Zimbabwe.

Following from this, I have divided the empirical material in this thesis into three chapters looking at three sites where stand-up comedy intervenes into the construction of Zimbabwean-ness; state autobiographies (chapter 3); the creation of an 'authentic' national subject (chapter 4); and norms regulating how Zimbabweans

'should' behave, here explored in relation to sex-talk and the public/private divide (chapter 5). These three empirical sites are assessed and unpacked using the theoretical approach developed in this thesis, briefly outlined above and further expanded on in chapter 2, which engages with Homi K. Bhabha's and Judith Butler's conceptualisation of subversion and the subject. Assessing the empirical material gathered through this theoretical approach helps us recognise the complexities about how resistance works, and how subjects do act and speak in ways that interrupt. Taking a fieldwork-based approach to my research, this thesis builds on knowledge from previous studies based primarily on textual and discourse analysis, adding to our understanding of the experience of being a stand-up comedian in repressive environments like Zimbabwe.

Method

The first round of my fieldwork in Zimbabwe began in late September 2018, only a couple of months after Emmerson Mnangagwa was elected president, and lasted for approximately a month, the second round, which lasted about three months, occurred a year later. These two rounds of fieldwork had different focuses: during the first round I identified and interviewed stand-up comedians and other people in the arts community in Zimbabwe, and during the second round I focused on getting involved in the everyday practices of one of the larger stand-up comedy organisations: Simuka Comedy.[9]

---

[9] Simuka Comedy was started by Simba Kakora, known by his stage-name Simba the Comic King and, Victor Mpofu known as Doc Vikela, in 2011, as a platform for organising stand-up comedy shows in Harare (see also The Herald, 2011). The organisation is run by stand-up comedians, and *simuka* means 'to stand up' in Shona (Wencelacy Katuka, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 2, 2018). In the spring of 2019 Simuka Comedy officially registered as a company and acquired office spaces at the Creative Arts Hub in Harare. Simuka Comedy, at the time of my fieldwork, organised most, but not all, stand-up comedy shows in Harare. They are the only organisation setting-up regular monthly stand-up comedy shows in the capital and manage most of the comedians in the city.

In 2018 and 2019 there was very little material available on Zimbabwean stand-up comedy online. Stand-up comedians tended to ask their audiences not to record or upload their shows as they wanted to be able to re-use them. This meant that the only way to research Zimbabwean stand-up comedy was to attend shows and talk to the comedians themselves. Further, it meant that there was a paucity of jokes to draw upon. This was enhanced by some comedians asking me not to use a particular part of their set, explaining that they were still performing the joke in question and did not want to risk other comedians stealing, or audiences already knowing, that particular punchline. Drawing upon the jokes that are available to me, I have, in this thesis, identified several segments from stand-up comedy sets that highlight the complex and nuanced ways in which the genre intervenes politically - looking particularly to explore those jokes which interrupts the construction of Zimbabwean-ness in less than obvious ways. I have situated these jokes within the broader context of societal structures, drawing upon semi-structured interviews with comedians and other members of the arts community, conversations with audience members, and participant observation and fieldwork notes from both the shows and my experiences being in Zimbabwe.

Through my two rounds of fieldwork the contextual nature of comedy, which I discuss further in chapter 1 ('Comedy and social ordering') became apparent to me. Jokes which I did not understand at the beginning of my fieldwork began to make sense as I had the opportunity to interview comedians and artists, talk to audience members, but above all spend time in Zimbabwe. Although my experience is of course very different from someone who has grown up in the country, or spent a longer period of time there, the opportunity that I had conducting fieldwork in Zimbabwe meant that I got a better understanding of, what at the time was, the current context. For example, during my first round of fieldwork the Zimbabwean government had added a 2% tax on

online transactions which led to hoarding in stores as people expected price increases. Being in Zimbabwe I too queued outside Pick 'n Pay (a local convenience store) to ensure that the money my housemate had in Ecocash would not become useless, and that we had access to basic commodities before they sold out. Of course, having experienced this does not make me an 'insider', I still, for example, have the ability to leave the country, I am not a citizen, nor did I grow up there, however it does put me in a better position to understand jokes about price increases or queuing than I was before. Indeed, the more I learnt about Zimbabwe; norms, culture and the day-to-day life in the nation, the more I came to enjoy the jokes told onstage.

In order to enhance my understanding of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy I conducted a total of 28 semi-structured interviews with comedians and other members of the arts community. This included interviews with 15 stand-up comedians and 5 other artists in Harare; and 5 stand-up comedians and their manager in Bulawayo. An additional three interviews were held with comedians via WhatsApp call. These interviews included three with female stand-up comedians – a number that is reflective of the six active female stand-up comedians that I was able to identify at the time of my second round of fieldwork.[10] Amongst the well-known comedians in Zimbabwe only one is white, and he rarely performs stand-up comedy these days. I would let the comedians suggest interview locations, and if they didn't have any suggestions I would, where possible, suggest a place where there was no need to purchase anything to eat or drink to avoid discomfort around expectations about purchasing something on both their and my part given the difficult economic situation in the country - meaning a lot of

---

[10] I re-interviewed four stand-up comedians during my second round of fieldwork following questions that had emerged in-between the fieldwork periods.

interviews occurred on the grass outside the University of Zimbabwe, or in parks in central Harare.

My interview questions – which were designed to prompt conversation more than anything else – focused on how the interview subject had become aware of stand-up comedy, what their experience was of being onstage, their comedic persona, and what they wanted the world to know about Zimbabwean stand-up. These questions were designed to start conversations looking at what it is like to be a stand-up comedian in Zimbabwe; to enlighten me on how the interview subject experiences, make sense of, and wants me to understand the genre. Interviewing stand-up comedians and involving myself in their work was also a way to be able to ask about any parts of the set that was not performed in English. Although, in Harare where I was predominantly based, stand-up comedy was mostly performed in English, several comedians would still have, at least some, punchlines in Shona (I was told in interviews, that in Bulawayo comedians would, depending on the audience, speak in a combination of English, Ndebele or another of Zimbabwe's fifteen official languages during their sets). Interviewing stand-up comedians thus offered a way around language barriers, as well as allowing me to inquire about any other relevant background or contextual knowledge. I avoided initiating any conversations about domestic politics given the risks associated with discussing this topic in public, letting the comedians themselves bring it up if they choose to do so.

Decisions made around anonymisation are incredibly complex and difficult - especially given that many comedians want to get their work recognised. Written, or recorded, consent has been collected from all interview subjects in which they have been able to express whether they wish to be anonymised. I have also continued these conversations with my interview subjects when choosing to quote someone who did not

want to be anonymised or when using material from a comedian's stand-up set. Balancing safety, whilst also attempting to respect the wishes of my research subjects I have thus anonymised some whilst naming others. In one case someone explicitly asked to remain anonymous, and this has, of course, been respected. In other cases, I have considered the possible implications following from using someone's name, looking at the political and societal context, where the research subject is currently based (some have left the country since my fieldwork), previous statements made on similar subjects in (more) public forums, such as international news-media, and what implications this has or has not had. Where someone is anonymised, I have chosen not to indicate this as to not encourage people to attempt to find out who they are. Following from this I have only included a partial list, in appendix 1, of people interviewed to ensure that the person who chose to remain anonymous, or those whom I have chosen to anonymise cannot be identified (considering the relatively small community of stand-up comedians in the country).

Having begun to build a relationship with comedians in the country by interviewing them and attending their shows, I was able to engage further in participant observation during my second round of fieldwork. At this point I would often spend 2-3 days a week at the Simuka Comedy offices, helping out with grant proposals, observing how they would brainstorm ideas, and following the admin work going on behind a stand-up show. I would also wait with them at the venues prior to stand-up shows and join them at the set of their online comedy show *Special Class* where I observed the shoot.[11] I was invited into their WhatsApp group, and attended a free stand-up comedy class that they offered on a Friday afternoon. I, of course, also attended all stand-up

---

[11] I was also at one point offered to act in *Special Class*. I choose not to do so considering both my role as a researcher, and potential risks to my safety.

comedy shows during this period, and was once offered the opportunity to sit behind stage with the comedians.

At this point in my fieldwork, I had hoped to also engage further in conversations with audience members to enhance my understanding of how Zimbabweans interpret the jokes told onstage. However, due to the practicalities of fieldwork I was unable to do so to the extent that I had originally envisioned. Although Simuka Comedy very kindly pointed out to their audiences who I was and asked them to talk to me, most people would leave without doing so. This might partially be explained me being a recognisable 'outsider'. Indeed, Simuka Comedy would point out that I was conducting research with the University of Manchester, and at one point a comedian even jokingly asked the audience to talk to me so that I would not have to return to the country (playing on the idea of Zimbabwe as an undesirable place to be). This might have meant that audiences did not feel they trusted me the way they potentially would have if I was Zimbabwean.

Further to this, the way that the venues were set up during the time of my fieldwork did not lend itself to audiences staying behind after shows. Indeed, in 2019 when I was aiming to speak more to audience members, stand-up comedy was performed predominantly in theatre spaces, with Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre and Repertoires (Reps) Theatre being regular venues. Although both these venues have bars, at Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre the bar tended to close during the show, and at Reps Theatre the bar area is not directly linked to the stage where shows took place. This made it more difficult to speak to audience members who tended not to linger after shows. When audience members did speak to me, I was only able to talk to one group of people at the time, and the rest of the audience would have left before I had a chance to interact with them. This has meant that in this thesis I draw on some conversations with

the audience, but not to the breadth and depth that I originally wanted to. Thus, this thesis draws both on conversations that I did have with audiences and my experiences from shows – recognising that I too was an audience member at these shows. As such, I have written the thesis in order to provide you as the reader with the contextual information needed to understand the analysis that I have made of the jokes quoted, whilst also leaving room for you to become part of the audience and draw your own conclusions.

Basing my methodology on fieldwork and involving myself in the stand-up comedy scene in Harare has given me a broader perspective on the ways in which stand-up comedy intervenes politically. By expanding my horizons beyond the few minutes a stand-up comedian spends onstage I have gained insights into the materiality of the genre. Indeed, during my time in Zimbabwe, I observed how audiences would fluctuate between approximately ten people and more than a hundred. I saw ticket prices alter and increase due to inflation and based on venue. For example, in 2019 it was possible to watch Learnmore Mwanyenyeka, known onstage as Long John the Comedian, perform on 28 August at Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre for 10 Zimbabwean dollars, and then again on 30 August at Reps Theatre for 15 Zimbabwean dollars. Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre is located by Samora Machel Avenue, which comedians have described to me as the cut-off point between the richer parts of Harare and the, so called, 'ghetto'. Performances at Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre tended to draw predominantly local audiences. This can be contrasted with Reps Theatre, which is located in what is considered to be the more affluent Belgravia, where audience tended to be diverse, including expatriates' and diplomats. There is much more that can be said on the materiality of comedy, of course, and some of these aspects are discussed in the empirical chapters that follow. However, the main focus of the thesis is on how stand-up comedy intervenes narratively, keeping

in mind that in Zimbabwe stand-up is affected by difficulties such as economic hardship, lack of electricity, and equipment that is not set up as promised, whilst simultaneously being a growing field, an employment opportunity and a way in which people are empowered to speak out.

In the next section I will explain how this thesis makes original contributions to academic literature within critical global politics and Zimbabwean politics before outlining the thesis and chapter arguments.

Contributions

This thesis helps us rethink how we recognize resistance by asking us to consider the messy, less than deliberate everyday ways it plays out in the realm of comedy. Exploring stand-up comedy, it moves away from the notion that resistance is always serious, looking at how the 'unserious' realm of comedy and humour can interrupt social ordering in complex and nuanced ways. Drawing on empirical material from two periods of fieldwork in Zimbabwe this thesis makes three original contributions. These contributions can be summarised as follows:

1. **It develops an empirical contribution to research on Zimbabwean politics, looking at stand-up comedy predominantly in Harare, but also Bulawayo, and showing how it contests, whilst also reinforcing norms, narratives and discourses through which Zimbabwean-ness is constructed. This story about politics of stand-up comedy in Zimbabwe has never been told before, at least not from this theoretical perspective and in this depth and scope.** In the Zimbabwean context nationalism is predominantly interrogated as a tool used by the state, either to enforce legitimacy beyond that of free and fair elections, or to justify political policy decisions or acting with violence (Ranger, 2004, Kriger,

2006, Raftopoulos, 2007, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008, 2009, 2013, Ndlovu and Willems, 2009, Tendi, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, Willems, 2010, Dorman, 2016). Julia Gallagher (2017) has further looked at how Zimbabweans imagine the state through the international. Rather than focusing on how nationalism is wielded by the state I add to studies that explore how such nationalism is challenged (Willems, 2010, 2011, Hammett, 2011, Siziba and Ncube, 2015). Moving beyond the understanding that such opposition has to work only to undermine power, I add complexity to this discussion by looking at how it can operate in ways that reinforces Zimbabwean-ness, turning also my attention to how nation-ness is constructed through societal norms, narratives and discourses. Exploring Zimbabwean nationalism through stand-up comedy, a genre that has continued to grow in the country despite economic hardship and limits to freedom of expression, I show how constructions of Zimbabwean-ness by state and society alike can be interrupted.

Assessing empirical material from two rounds of fieldwork extending over four months in total, predominantly in Harare, but also briefly in Bulawayo, I contribute to the limited existing literature on Zimbabwean stand-up (Langeveldt, 2000, Monro, 2015, Källstig, 2021) by showing how the genre can trouble state narratives of a unified nation through the re-invocation of 'tribal' narratives (chapter 3). I also highlight how stand-up can reveal anxieties about women's place in society through a re-assertion of homophobia, and how it through day-to-day stories from the comedian's life unsettles rhetoric equating patriotism with party belonging (chapter 4), further examining how stand-up grapples with gendered understandings of artistry in the face of patriarchal power-relations (chapter 4), as well as interrupting gendered narrations of the public/private divide

by enabling comedians to break silences on sex-talk (chapter 5). Addressing gender in all three empirical chapters of this thesis, I emphasise its significance in the country's political landscape, and as such the importance of how stand-up comedy challenges and reinforces gendered power relations.

2. **To tell this story, I develop a theoretical approach in this thesis based on Homi K. Bhabha's and Judith Butler's understandings of subversion, contributing to critical global politics scholarship by showing how concepts like ambivalence, mimicry, and performativity can be used to explore humour's resistive capabilities whilst also grappling with jokes that appear to be both prejudicial and unsettling.** When comedy is discussed amongst scholars within critical global politics it is understood as either a way to oppose or support power. It is said to subvert power by mocking those who wield it and/or highlighting the peculiarities of the way in which society is ordered, or that which is held to be known (Bakhtin, 1984, Mbembe, 1992, 2001, de Goede, 2005, Amoore and Hall, 2013, Musila, 2014, Brassett, 2016). Conversely it is said to support power when used by authority in a disarming or charming way, or when it repeats and reinstitutes hierarchies or that which they are based on (Beck and Spencer, 2019, Brassett, 2019, Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020, Brassett, *et al,* 2021a). Building on this scholarship, I conceptualise the way in which comedy interacts with power. Rather than looking at either how comedy resists or reinforces power, I contribute to critical global scholarship by developing a theoretical approach which allows me to look at how it does both, sometimes simultaneously. Engaging with Bhabha's and Butler's work on subversion, this theoretical approach understands comedy as interrupting social

ordering through the repetition of norms, narratives and discourses with a difference, enabling an assessment of comedic resistance within critical global politics which enhances our understanding of the messy ways in which it interacts with the political, helping us to explain the complicated ways in which subject-society relations are negotiated. In order to highlight the nuances and ambivalences of comedic subversion in Zimbabwe I develop a theoretical approach based on Bhabha's and Butler's understanding of subversion - combining ambivalence, mimicry and performativity - that embraces the complexities and messiness of how the subject acts.

3. **In line with this theoretical approach, I advance a methodology for how to explore how comedy interrupts, specifically in repressive environments like Zimbabwe, extending beyond the often textual or narratively based studies on the topic within critical global politics, thus enabling us to see the complex ways in which subject and resistance operates in this context.** When comedy is researched in critical global politics it is often approached through critical textual or discourse analysis (Odysseos, 2001, Musila, 2014, Brassett and Sutton, 2017, Wedderburn, 2018, Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020, Saunders and Bruun, 2020, Brassett *et al,* 2021a). Scholars look at what is said either in a joke, or onstage, and sometimes in relation to broader contexts through, for example, interviews with comedians in news-media, and in relation to the political environment in which they operate (Brassett, 2009 – see also Hansen, 2011). These types of studies have limitations, especially when looking at countries such as Zimbabwe where freedom of expression is severely restricted, and information online is limited.

This thesis contributes to critical global scholarship by applying a methodological approach based on fieldwork to studies of comedy in repressive environments. Interviewing comedians, talking to audience members, and involving the researcher in the day-to-day practices of running comedy in the country this approach allows for a deeper understanding of how humour interacts with power beyond the few minutes spent onstage, and looks closely at how the genre is situated within a broader societal context - affected by things like economic hardship making the business difficult to maintain, or limited freedom of expression leading to censorship, or lack of electricity emphasising the importance of a microphone when comedians refuse to perform without it. This allows a better understanding of how stand-up comedians are located within social ordering yet can also disrupt it, highlighting the nuanced and complex ways in which the genre intervenes politically in the nation. To further our understanding of comedic resistance, especially in resistive environments, this thesis will thus show through its analysis in chapter 3-5 the need for future scholarship to go beyond the textual and engage in a fieldwork-based approach.

Next, I will outline the main argument and chapter structure of this thesis.

Main argument and chapter structure

This thesis argues that stand-up comedy intervenes politically when it interrupts social ordering by divulging the ambivalence of Zimbabwean-ness; highlighting narrative contradictions; unsettling societal conceptions and addressing that which is commonly silenced. I understand Zimbabwean-ness as a way in which society is ordered structuring ideas about the present and the past, about who does or does not belong, and how people

should or should not behave in particular spaces. I will examine how the construction of Zimbabwean-ness is interrupted looking at three sites: the production of state autobiographies, the creation of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean subject, and norms regulating how Zimbabweans 'should' behave, here examined in relation to sex-talk and the public/private divide. This will be explored across five chapters starting by showing how comedy is conceptualised in complicated ways, then advancing my theoretical approach before engaging with my empirical material.

The first chapter details how engaging with Zimbabwean stand-up contributes to our understanding of comedic resistance - especially in repressive environments. Building on existing literature on comedy and politics, particularly in Africa, I argue that this thesis illuminates the nuances and complexities of comedic resistance which both enables and limits its potential to interrupt social ordering. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section reviews research within critical global politics looking at comedy as a form of everyday resistance, highlighting its ability to subvert by covertly mocking authority (Bakhtin, 1984, Shehata, 1992, Bryant, 2006, Amoore and Hall, 2013), as well as, in a sub-section, exploring the relationship between comedy and society (Billig, 2001, 2005, Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, Bergson, 2010, Kupiers, 2011, Seirlis, 2011). I then deepen the discussion examining literature on comedy in an African context. Here, I highlight how it has been argued that comedy in general, and satirical cartoons in particular, can act as a potential indicator of the status of a democracy and freedom of expression in a country - as well as a potential challenge to these limitations (Nyamnjoh, 2009, Eko, 2010, Willems, 2010, 2011, Hammett, 2010, 2011, 2014). Finally, I turn to scholarship on stand-up comedy demonstrating how the genre has been conceptualised as both resisting and reinforcing through the comic re-articulation of common generalisations (Kar Tang, 2013, Musila, 2014, Deveau, 2016).

Taking this literature as a springboard, this thesis embraces the ambiguous nature of comedy, deepening our understanding of the complexities, nuances and messiness of resistance and comedic subversion across dominant power-relations.

The second chapter advances the theoretical approach which I use in the rest of the thesis to interrogate how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically. Having engaged with the work of scholars like Henri Bergson (2010), Giselinde Kupiers (2011), and Julia Seirlis (2011) in the previous chapter, all of which emphasise the significant relationship between comedy and societal structures, I articulate my understanding of social ordering as the structure created in a society based on the 'system of meaning' norms, narratives and discourses produce. I then draw on Homi K. Bhabha and Judith Butler's perception of subversion to conceptualise how to examine the way that Zimbabwean stand-up comedy interrupts. I argue that exploring how these two authors conceptualise resistance through, in Bhabha's case mimicry and in Butler's case performativity, allows a reading of the disruptive capabilities of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy that neither dismisses it as completely conforming to relations of power, nor portrays it as an ultimate form of resistance. Both Bhabha (1994) and Butler (1993, 1999) develop the subject as imbued in the norms, narratives and discourses that underpin, envelop and play a role in the development of social ordering. Without precluding the possibility of subversion, they illustrate that to disrupt also means, to a certain extent, to reinforce. When Bhabha (1994) speaks about mimicry he outlines it as a form of subversion that is based on an inherent flaw in discourse itself; so that the very repetition of discourse also provides the site of its resistance. Butler (1993), similarly, in her exploration of performativity emphasises that the norms that we re-iterate draw their power from that repetition; and due to this are unsettled when enacted in a variation, combination or other way than what might have been anticipated. These insights are

what I use to unpack the notion of 'interruption' in this thesis which I link to the idea of 'repetition with a difference'. Each of the following empirical chapters will draw on this theoretical work, using Bhabha's conceptualisation of mimicry, his emphasis on ambivalence (explored through what he refers to as the time-lag) and Butler's theory of performativity to demonstrate how stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering in the repressive Zimbabwean environment. By combining these concepts in my theoretical approach, I am able to demonstrate, in subsequent chapters, how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy operates within social ordering; peculiarly disrupting and enforcing it at once.

At this point, the thesis will begin to engage with the empirical material, looking at three sites through which the construction of Zimbabwean-ness is interrupted by stand-up comedy. The first site that I explore is the state construction of Zimbabwean-ness. To do so I examine state autobiographies; that is "stories states tell to and about themselves" (Subotić, 2016, 611). I argue that playing with state autobiographies stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering by highlighting narrative contradictions and unsettling societal conceptions when it enacts the ambivalence of these narratives. Crucially, drawing on Bhabha and Butler, I demonstrate that this is done from within the very narratives that construct that order - thus both resisting and reinforcing them. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores ways in which state autobiographies have attempted to write Zimbabwe as a homogeneous nation highlighting, with the help of what Bhabha refers to as the time-lag, the ambivalence of this assertion when met by dominant narratives of the country as divided into different 'tribes' (see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008, The Herald, 2018, Zimbabwe Mail, 2019). Building on this, the second section looks at how stand-up comedians Ntando Moyo, and Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni, known as King Kandoro onstage, enact the ambivalence of state claims to unity with the former mimicking state autobiographies

and 'tribal' narratives, and the latter performing them in imaginative ways that reveals the uncertainty of the authority they claim. Highlighting the messy and complicated ways in which Zimbabwean-ness is constructed in negotiation between state and society, I continue by looking further at how a joke by stand-up comedian Wencelacy Katuka, known by his stage-name Kadem the Comic, re-institutes homophobic state autobiographies describing the nation as heteronormative, whilst revealing his anxieties and interrupting patriarchal constructions of Zimbabwean society by mimicking them. This shows the complicated ways in which Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically by repeating state autobiographies with a difference, demonstrating the messy and nuanced ways in which state-society relations are negotiated.

Chapter four addresses the second site through which the construction of Zimbabwean-ness can be interrupted by stand-up comedy, this is the production of an 'authentic' national subject. To do so I engage with both state and societal narratives addressing what it means to be Zimbabwean. I argue that by turning stand-up into an autobiographical performance form, comedians are able to disrupt social ordering, enacting the ambivalence of monolithic narratives of the national subject by performing them with a difference. Engaging with Bhabha and Butler, I illustrate how this is done from within social ordering itself as stand-up comedians enact their identity by re-iterating narratives, norms and discourses. This argument is made in three parts, beginning by outlining the repressive environment that exists in Zimbabwe, where stand-up comedians are harassed, intimidated and arrested as a result of their comedy (Moyo, 2019). I demonstrate how despite being aware of these risks' comedians feel emboldened to perform a version of themselves onstage. Next, I look at how stand-up comedy can disrupt the construction of an 'authentic' national subject as produced through state narratives which conflate party and nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems,

2009, Willems, 2013, Dorman, 2016). Looking at performances by Katuka, and Munyaradzi Guramatunhu, I illustrate how they perform themselves onstage in ways that mimics state constructions of the 'authentic' national but with a difference, doing so they unsettle the binary ways in which ZANU-PF produces belonging (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, Willems, 2013, Siziba and Ncube, 2015). Then, in the final part of the chapter, I turn to look particularly at female comedians arguing that they are able to interrupt the patriarchal nature of society by 'acting out' two contradictory narratives: that of the submissive Zimbabwean woman, and the 'rebellious', and 'promiscuous' artist presented to me in an interview with stand-up comedian Tanya Sena, known as Tanya Alex, on October 3, 2019 (see also Ballard-Reisch *et al.,* 2001, Hungwe, 2006, Manyonganise, 2017). In both these cases, I argue that stand-up comedians are able to interrupt the construction of an 'authentic' national subject through stories about their day-to-day life that either mimics norms, narratives and discourses or performatively enacts them in ways that highlight their ambivalence. This captures the complicated relationship between subject and society where the construction of 'the authentic national subject' is continuously disrupted and re-instituted.

In chapter five I address the final site of the construction of Zimbabwean-ness that this thesis explores, namely norms regulating how people 'should' behave. Focusing particularly on sex-talk I interrogate how stand-up comedy intervenes into the construction of Zimbabwean values, and how society is ordered thereafter. Examining the circumstances surrounding sex-jokes I argue that stand-up comedy can interrupt wider gender norms through which the public/private distinction is narrated. To make this argument, I divide the chapter into three sections. The first section explores Guramatunhu's 2019 set, particularly her 8 October 2019 performance. Looking at how she manages to get the audience to laugh at her sex-jokes, it argues that stand-up

comedy is an ambivalent space that blurs the boundaries between the public and the private. In the second section I deepen this discussion looking at how Guramatunhu interrupts the public/private divide, and thus social ordering, by performing her gender identity ambivalently. Here I draw on the concept of *authentic inauthenticity* to show how Guramatunhu iterates her identity onstage as someone who is a lady/not a 'whore' even though she says things that gender norms in Zimbabwean society holds that 'whores' do (see also Pérez, 2013). This displaces the construction of female politicians as *either* mothers when they conform or 'whores' when they do not (Ncube, 2020a). The third, and final section, turns to explore Kudakwashe Museta's 2019 set where he, in comparison to Guramatunhu, struggles to get his audience to laugh at sex-jokes. Engaging particularly with a conversation that I had with a group of male audience members after the show, I illustrate how a form of mimicry is produced when they attempt to explain away Museta's comedic missteps. Repeating narratives commonly used to supress women's ability to act in the 'public sphere', in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite,* these audience members highlight the ambivalence of gender norms through which society is ordered. This demonstrates the complex and nuanced ways in which stand-up comedy interrupts the construction of Zimbabwean-ness through the negotiation of gendered narrations of the public/private divide.

Humour is an important way in which people in Zimbabwe identify as a nation. Talking to Zimbabwean stand-up comedian Carl Joshua Ncube in 2019 he told me that comedy was linked to suffering, and that Zimbabweans had never been as funny as they are right now (interview with author, October 23, 2019). Explaining this further, Ncube argued that in the choice between laughing and crying, people had chosen the former. This captures the sentiment amongst many of the Zimbabweans that I talked to whilst in the country, who would readily tell me that Zimbabweans, they are a funny people, they

might even be the funniest people in the world. To understand the complex, nuanced and messy ways in which Zimbabwean-ness is interrupted it makes sense to turn to comedy. Indeed, as Ncube also told me: "Why there [are] so many comics that are coming out [in Zimbabwe] is because they are articulating the problems of Zimbabwe, to a world that understands Zimbabwe, a little less, than they think they should" (interview with author, October 23, 2019). To investigate how people act in Zimbabwe I thus turn to stand-up comedy, embracing the complex and nuanced ways in which subject-society relations are negotiated through the genre.

Chapter 1 Interrupting: comedy, politics, and Africa

International politics is often thought of as a serious matter. As explained by James Brassett, Christopher S. Browning, and Alister Wedderburn (2021b, 4) – "IR has commonly sought to elevate the 'serious' over the 'silly', [and] the 'sincere' over the 'ironic'." The emphasis on global politics as a realm of the 'serious' and the 'rational' also highlights the need for the comical. Louiza Odysseos (2001) explains the importance of comic narratives to global politics, arguing that they allow us to take a broader perspective of the field by acknowledging the limits of 'logic' and 'logical concepts' to understanding politics. The significance of considering different types of epistemic knowledge has also been argued by Grace Musila (2017) through an exploration of Julie Ward's disappearance in the Kenyan Masai Mara. Musila (2017, 703-704) points out that "[a]lthough scholars of Africa might arguably be more alert to the discursive baggage that haunts the issues they study, many academic disciplines are nonetheless firmly embedded in rigid conceptions of what constitutes knowledge, evidence, data, and legitimate modes of knowing." Where scholars have examined comedy, they have been met by a complicated concept which is variously used as a tool of the powerful, a way to re-institute hierarchies, a form of everyday resistance as well as an opposition to authoritarian regimes that attempt to silence their populations (Bakhtin, 1984, Mbembe, 1992, 2001, de Goede, 2005, Amoore and Hall, 2013, Musila, 2014, Brassett, 2015, Beck and Spencer, 2019, Brassett, 2019, Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020, Brassett *et. al*, 2021a). In this chapter, I review existing scholarship on comedy and politics, particularly in Africa. Taking this literature as a springboard, this thesis embraces the ambiguous nature of comedy, deepening our understanding of the complexities, nuances and messiness of resistance and comedic subversion across dominant power-relations.

This chapter is divided into three sections. I start by looking at how studies within critical global politics have understood comedy as a form of everyday resistance. I emphasise how humour has been seen to operate as a way to mock and oppose those in power, and as a tool of the powerful; something which can upset societal structures, yet peculiarly re-states and reinforces them. Exploring this literature, I capture how James Brassett (2016) has drawn on Judith Butler to examine the resistive ability of comedy. I highlight how I build on his work by developing a theoretical approach that combines Butler with Homi K. Bhabha to look at what stand-up comedy *does* to social ordering and *how* people act through humour. This chapter then continues by surveying research exploring comedy in the African continent, looking specifically at arts and humour in the context of Zimbabwean politics. Discussing this literature, I emphasise the multiple ways in which humour can operate showing that it can both say something about democracy and freedom of expression in a country, and, at the same time, reinforce the language of the oppressor. Here, I illustrate how art more broadly has been linked to the construction of a particular form of Zimbabwean nationalism in the early 2000s, and how the state through several means have attempted to control peoples' artistic expression. Finally, I turn to literature on stand-up comedy. Reviewing literature that explores how stand-up can operate as a form of resistance to stereotypes and prejudices, I highlight how researchers have been struck by the peculiarity that such subversion occurs through a repetition, and potential reinforcement of that which it opposes. Guided by this multiplicity of ways in which comedy acts upon politics, I discuss how this thesis contributes to existing literature on comedy as resistance, and Zimbabwean politics by further illuminating the nuances and complexities of comedic subversion which both enables and limits stand-up comedy's potential to intervene politically.

Political intervention, comedy and everyday resistance

To discuss how comedy intervenes politically I will first turn to research within critical global politics which has highlighted the way in which humour can resist power. This scholarship tends to look at comedy through the 'everyday' turn in global politics. James Brassett, Christopher S. Browning and Alistair Wedderburn (2021b, 4) have explained how "the 'everyday' turn in IR has shown how apparently banal, mundane practices can be important constitutive elements of world politics." Looking at global politics through the everyday, research within this area emphasises the importance of "'ordinary' people in global politics" (Solomon and Steele, 2017, 268). This section will review scholarship on everyday resistance and comedy, as well as situating this research in relation to literature which emphasises comedy's interconnectedness with society, and ability to both reinforce and resist. Taking my cue from Brassettt (2016) I will demonstrate how the theoretical approach developed through an engagement with Homi K. Bhabha and Judith Butler in chapter 2, contributes to scholarship within critical global politics by providing a way to unpack how humour both resists and reinforces, sometimes at once; highlighting the complex and nuanced ways in which comedic subversion operates.

Scholarship in critical global politics has argued that comedy is a site where the construction of the international arena is interrupted, disrupted and (re)negotiated (Kuusisto, 2009, Kupiers, 2011, Moss, 2016, Nissen-Adlre and Tsinovio, 2019). Marieke de Goede (2005, 380) argues that, especially carnival and laughter "are ways in which people cope with the seemingly overwhelming power of finance in everyday life, and create space for imagining financial alternatives." She points out that laughter can disrupt global financial power by challenging the rationality which it is built on (de Goede, 2005). Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall (2013) similarly points towards how activists using clowning offer a resistance to detention practices at the US-Mexico

border by bringing attention to the peculiarity that this has become peoples' normal in the region. In other words, the 'fool' is the embodiment of an accepted chaos and irrationality which "brings an expanded or enhanced vision of what is normally accepted, ignored, or settled" (Amoore and Hall, 2013, 103; see also Mason, 2014). As such, critical global scholarship has begun to look at how comedy and laughter can resist by highlighting the absurdity of those practices we take for granted and allowing us to, at least, ponder another way of living.

James C. Scott (1985, 1990) is particularly influential within scholarship that looks at comedy as everyday resistance. He has examined how everyday acts, including laughter and humour, can resist those in power. Scott (1985, xvi) reminds us that revolutions "are few and far between" and that most of the time resistance is found in peoples' everyday acts, such as addressing your superior with ironic politeness, working unnecessarily slowly (foot dragging), "dissimulation, […] false compliance, pilfering and feigned ignorance." These acts might not always lead to "outright collective defiance" but do unsettle power. Indeed, in his later work, Scott (2012, 7) emphasises that when "multiplied by many thousandfold, such petty acts of refusal may, in the end, make an utter shambles of the plans dreamed up by generals and heads of state." As such, Scott captures both the slightly covert nature resistance might take, and its potency.

Applying the concept of everyday resistance to comedy highlights how humour can disrupt in the absence of grand revolutions, rebellions and protests. Samer Shehata (1992,76) argues that political laughter is "cathartic as it allows people to temporarily overcome their oppressors, to momentarily triumph by ridiculing and criticizing those whom they otherwise would not have been able to ridicule or criticise." A demonstrative example of this is provided by Chad Bryant (2006) who shows how people in the Czech

Republic used jokes to challenge Nazi occupation. Bryant (2006, 135) captures how comedy can oppose oppressive regimes quoting someone from within the Czech Republic at the time: "'We didn't have arms' […] '[our] only weapon was the joke, which, like a beetle, gnawed away at the feeble foundations of that monstrous colossus." In the face of a repressive regime, comedy thus affords the subordinate the opportunity to challenge power in ways that are not necessarily obvious. This places comedy in what Scott (1990, 2) refers to as the public transcript – "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate." Located in the public transcript, rather than concealed in spaces the dominant never enters, comedy becomes something, which, according to Scott, is investigable.

To explain how everyday resistance operates in the public transcript, Scott (1990) turns to Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) exploration of carnival laughter. Bakhtin (1984) distinguishes between carnival laughter and modern satire. He argues that the former is not directed at any particular person, institution or process, indeed it interrupts societal structures as a whole, operating through its ambivalence. This, according to Bakhtin affords people the opportunity to address matters which would otherwise be considered vulgar and/or unspeakable. Bakhtin (1984, 11-12) eloquently summarises the disruptive potential of carnival laughter stating that "it is gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives." Laughter's ability to resist in this way, Bakhtin argues, is due to the carnival being a space free from normal hierarchies of power - a contention that Scott contests. Scott (1990, 176) reminds the reader that language itself is enveloped in power, and that: "the grotesquerie, profanity, ridicule, aggression, and character assassination of carnival make sense only in the context of the effect of power relations the rest of the year." The carnival is thus, according to Scott, not absent of power, but an instance in which people interact with it

differently. Highlighting how language is enveloped in power, Scott shifts the focus

within research on comedic resistance onto how it interacts with, and potentially disrupts

societal structures. In the next part of this section, I am going to briefly look at how this

shift complexifies the relationship between power and resistance in comedy,

highlighting its messy co-existence.

Comedy and social ordering

Research which examines comedy's ability to resist has also emphasised that humour

plays an important role in our social structure. The argument here is, as Giselinde

Kupiers (2011, 68) puts it, that "Although humorous genres are known globally, humour

is notoriously culture-specific. In different countries and context, people have different

notions of what constitutes good humour and what is off limits to joking" (see also

Douglas 1999, Lockyer and Pickering, 2005). The context-specific nature of humour is

further highlighted by Julia Seirlis (2011, 514) who through her study of stand-up in

post-apartheid South Africa emphasises that "Comedy's relationship with power and the

social order is always precarious, slippery, complicated, but it provides a compelling

means to understand the workings of power and the nuances of social order" (2011,

514). Given the embeddedness of humour in society and culture, Henri Bergson (2010,

7) states that to properly study laughter it is important to put it into context: "[when

studying laughter we should] put it back into its natural environment, which is society,

and above all [to] determine the utility of its function, which is a social one."

Michael Billig (2001, 2005) makes a key contribution to such research on

laughter's role in society. He argues that comedy has a socialising function. To make

this argument he points out that laughter is rhetorical, and more than an expression of an

emotion, it is learnt social behaviour - something that can be given or withheld. As such, Billig (2005, 189-192) delineates it in binary terms, stating that:

> "Language is paradoxical to the extent that it enables us to perform contrary discursive acts: we can assert, because we can deny; we can question because we can answer; we can criticize because we can justify, and so on. Because laughter is rhetorical, it cannot be a single, simple thing that can be considered apart from the rhetoric of communication."

Situated within this understanding of laughter as rhetorical Billig (2005, 192) introduces unlaughter – "the display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for, or demanded." This notion of unlaughter has been used by scholars to explore how comedy in general, and laughter more specifically, is used as a powerful tool by audiences to set the limits for what can be joked about, showing how it is bound-up in power-relations as well as highlighting the importance of societal structures to the study of humour (Smith, 2009, Dodds and Kirby, 2013, Greene, 2018).

The notion that comedy is tied-up in social structures has further been advanced in relation to the way in which it repeats, sometimes through stereotypes, dominant norms, narratives and discourses (Weaver, 2010a, 2010b, Musila, 2014, Tidy, 2021). This might pertain to how society is structured based on, for example gender or race, but can also have to do with how politicians, diplomats and states legitimise their actions and represent themselves (Dodds and Kirby, 2013, Brassett *et al*, 2021a). Scholarship which looks at how politicians use comedy draws on humour as a way to produce a certain image of those in power that can make a person appear as disarming, or charming (Brassett, 2019), and which can support policy decisions by creating a

particular view of a nation or producing national identity in a specific way (Nissen-Aldre and Tsinovi, 2019, Crilley and Charrejre-Doody, Manor, 2021).

Acknowledging that humour can operate both to resist and reinforce power, sometimes at the same time (see also Musila, 2014), there is a move within the 'everyday' turn in critical global politics toward looking at humour as not only resistive when it critiques states (de Goede, 2005). This can begin to be seen already when Bakhtin (1984) speaks of carnival laughter as disrupting societal structures rather than critiquing a particular event or person, and is also captured in James Brassett and Alex Sutton's (2017) exploration of British satire. Similarly, to Bakhtin's (1984) argument that carnival laughter disrupts societal structures, Brassett and Sutton (2017, 247) argue that beyond critiquing the actions of states: "satire can provide an important everyday commentary on the site and nature of politics, raising questions over the state form of global capitalism, the language of political engagement and the nature of political agency."

In further studies of British comedy, Brassett (2009, 2016, 2021) likewise contends that comedy can resist politics differently. Drawing on the theoretical work of Judith Butler, specifically performativity, Brassett (2016, 180) urges a turn towards understanding comedic resistance as operating "(with)in, not against subjectivity." Arguing that comedy provides a possibility to see the market subject outside of the rational approaches through which it is often conceptualised, he points out that comedic "Resistance is […] a performative practice; as central to the making of power relations as it is to their re-imagination over time" (Brassett, 2016, 175 – see also de Goede, 2005). Taking my cue from Brassett (2016, see also Brassett and Sutton, 2017) I draw on Butler's (1993) conceptualisation of resistance and the subject when interrogating my empirical material.

However, differing from Brassett, I combine Butler's understanding of subversion and agency with Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) work. Engaging with both Butler's and Bhabha's conceptualisations of resistance and the subject advances Brassett's (2016) work by not only showing that subversion works productively within subjectivity but highlighting further how this occurs through a repetition that captures the ambivalence, and un-foundational claim to power, that is made by norms, narratives and discourses. Pulling together a set of useful theoretical tools, specifically Butler's conceptualisation of performativity, and Bhabhaian mimicry, as well as Bhabha's emphasise of the significance of ambivalence (which I explore through what he refers to as the time-lag) I develop an understanding of interruption (resistance and reinforcement) as 'repetition with a difference'. This allows me to advance an approach to explore what comedy *does* to social order and *how* people act through humour which is further detailed in chapter 2. By not trying to separate resistance from reinforcement I am able to look at the complex and nuanced ways in which stand-up operates in repressive environments like Zimbabwe. Applying this to my empirical material, this thesis contributes to literature within critical global politics by helping us understand better the complexities, nuances and messiness of resistance and comedic subversion, as well as its challenges, across dominant power-relations. Next, I am going to review research addressing comedy in an African context highlighting, again, the multiplicity of ways in which humour acts as a tool of the powerful, a reinforcement of dominant worldviews, and also as opposition.

Politics and comedy in Africa

Humour, as highlighted by Ebenezer Obadare (2009, 244), is "one of the most important means by which the majority define, 'get even with', and 'resist' the power elite and the

dominant power relations." It allows "the put-upon postcolonial subject to imagine a place and reality that is radically different from the current one of widespread abjection, constant humiliation and desperation" (Obadare, 2016, 63). More specifically, according to Obadare (2010, 94-95) comedy serves two political purposes: those of "engagement and subversion." The former has been discussed by John D. Cameron (2015), who argues that comedy is a good tool to engage societies in the global north with serious issues and politics of the global south. Obadare (2009, 2010, 2016) examines the latter in relation to comedy in Nigeria highlighting its complex and ambivalent nature. Obadare (2016, 60) draws our attention to humour as an informal type of resistance and a tool that can be used by both the subordinate and the state. He also reminds us of the serious nature of comedy in the Postcolony referencing an incident in Nigeria where a humours comment in an article in *ThisDay* newspaper led to protests where between 150 to 200 people died and at least 320 were hospitalised (Obadare, 2009). Thus, he underlines that jokes "as they say, are serious things, and may have serious and often unexpected consequences" (Obadare, 2009, 206). What is significant about this discussion of comedy in relation to civil society in Africa is that it emphasises how humour operates in society in multiple, overlapping and sometimes oppositional ways – as a tool of those in power, or the subordinate, but also as something which engages, provokes and causes action with consequences beyond the state-citizen binary. In this section I am going to survey literature which explores politics in Africa through comedy, emphasising the diverse ways in which it operates in society. I will end the section by focusing on scholarship looking at politics, humour and the arts in Zimbabwe.

In the African context comedy is often investigated as a form of resistance to the state. Within this literature it is argued that satirical cartoons provide a measurement for the "health of a democracy" (Hammett, 2014, 204). Francis Nyamnjoh (2009, 98)

elaborates on this, stating that "Everywhere in the continent, cartoonists have mushroomed since 1990, most of them focusing daringly and narrowly on politics." This, of course, is not to say that satire in general, and satirical cartooning in particular does not exist in countries where freedom of expression is contested. Lyombe Eko (2010), demonstrates how satirical cartoons are used as a tool of resistance also in countries where cartoonists are subject to intimidation and violent consequences if they criticise the state (see also Hammett, 2011). According to Eko (2010, 88) "[political cartoons] are at the forefront of journalistic resistance against abuse of power and violations of human rights in Africa. Cartoons […] also represent something larger: they are symbolic demands for respect of the universal journalistic paradigm and the freedom of expression that is its lifeblood." According to Andy Mason (2009, 249) in South Africa there was a difference in what cartoons depicted during and after the apartheid era:

> "The cartooning of the late apartheid period was sombre, darkly satirical, and obsessively focused on the country's political crisis, whereas post-apartheid cartooning is light, lively and eclectic expressing the concerns of a young democracy fiercely critical of itself, struggling to come to terms with diversity."

This indicates that examining satirical cartoons can tell us something very complex about the society in which they were drawn. This suggestion is further developed in Daniel Hammett's (2010, 95) statement that "Political cartoons provide insight into the ambiguities of a particular moment in a nation's psyche and deserves serious attention because of this." [12]

---

[12] Further explorations of cartooning in Africa, and how it interacts with politics can be found in: Koelbe and Robins, 2007, Nyamjoh, 2009, Dodds, 2010, Mason, 2010.

A key contribution to literature on comedy in Africa, is made by Achille Mbembe (1992, 2001). Mbembe (1992, 2001) captures how comedy and laughter can upset state-power in the Postcolony by disrupting the 'system of meaning' through which the powerful try to legitimise their authority.[13] He argues that "The question of whether humor in the postcolony is an expression of 'resistance' or not, whether it is, a priori, opposition, or simply manifestation of hostility toward authority, is […] of secondary importance" (Mbembe, 2001, 108).[14] Indeed, Mbembe (2001) asks us to look beyond the binaries of power and opposition to examine what it is that humour does to, or perhaps with, the *commandment*. He (2001, 107-108) explains comedy's ability to interrupt, pointing out that "those who laugh are only reading the signs left, like rubbish, in the wake of the *commandment*." In other words, the language of power and authority is itself what is funny, something which he further explains by describing what could be comical about the president's anus: "[it] is not something out of this world - although to everyone's amusement, the official line may treat it as such; instead, people see it as it really is, capable of defecating like any commoners" (Mbembe, 2001, 108). The reference to the president's anus here, according to Mbembe, is funny because it challenges the fantasy that the *commandment* is incomparable to its subjects, highlighting their similarities as human beings. Mbembe (2001, 109) clarifies this further explaining that: "[t]he *commandment* aspires to act as a total cosmology for its subjects - yet owing to the very oddity of this cosmology, popular humour causes it, often quite unintentionally, to capsize."

Research on comedy in the African continent has also looked at stand-up. This scholarship has explored the linguistic, communicative and performative tools used by

---

[13] For a definition of the Postcolony see footnote 6
[14] Lyombe Eko (2010, 71) contests this stating that "The ridicule that Mbembe speaks of is, in fact, resistance that dare not speak its name!"

the comedian onstage (Adetunji, 2013, Filani, 2018, Ogoanah and Ojo, 2018), with a sub-set looking closer at the relationship between stand-up and the environment in which it is performed (Donkor, 2013, Githatu and Chai, 2015). Whilst these studies look more broadly at countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana, a lot of research on the topic focuses on South Africa (see, for example Parker, 2002, Seirlis, 2011, Musila, 2014). Julia Seirlis (2011) and Grace Musila (2014) stand out in this literature, engaging with the role of stand-up comedy in relation to power and resistance in post-Apartheid South Africa. Seirlis (2011, 518) highlights how, paraphrasing journalist Bafana Khumalo, "young men […] who were throwing rocks at the police are now throwing wit from a stage." Whilst the resistive properties of stand-up comedy are more nuanced, this captures how the genre has been understood as a tool of resistance in the region. Musila (2014, 164), who investigates stand-up comedy utilising Homi K. Bhabha's conceptualisation of the productive ambivalence of stereotypes interrogates the complexities of comedic resistance in stand-up comedy, stating that "The centrality of the stereotype as the vehicle of laugher in much South African comedy invites the question signalled by Simon Weaver (2010, 32-33): what does it mean to simultaneously rehash and challenge stereotypes?" This question speaks to the complexity of humour, as also highlighted in my exploration of research on comedy as a form of everyday resistance in critical global politics. It emphasises comedy's peculiar nature by drawing attention to how it both resists and reinforces - on occasion all at once. Delving into this further, I am going to finish this section on comedy in the African context looking particularly at how humour and the arts have been linked to literature on politics in Zimbabwe.

Amongst those who have written about Zimbabwean comedy in general and stand-up comedy in particular two articles by its practitioners stand out. Samm Farai Monro (2015) and Edgard Langeveldt (2000) write in the *Index on Censorship* about the realities of being a comedian in Zimbabwe. Whilst these two articles are published fifteen years apart, they both highlight the difficulties of being a comedian in the country and how, the limits on freedom of expression are negotiated through humour. As Monro (2015) describes in his article, it is not that shows are stopped or people dragged off stage; intimidation and limitations are exercised in other ways. This was also discussed by Langeveldt (2000, 87), the self-assigned pioneer of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy, when he explains how he started joking about the government waiting cautiously for them to react:

> "I kept pushing the limit, waiting for the terrible split second when you must choose between sitting on a hot stove or jumping from the fourth floor because you mocked a minister's insane statements about fuel prices not going up, a day before they sky rocketed."

When there eventually was a reaction, the reprisal, according to Langeveldt (2000, 88) was violent - he describes how he got beaten outside a nightclub in Harare in November 1999 and was told that "Big people have wanted you dead for a long time." Monro's (2015, 80) story is similar. He explains how actors on the satirical news show, *Zambezi News,* in which he performed, were subject to threats: "being a leading satire show and poking fun at the powerful, comes with risks: one of our main actors in Zambezi News has been threatened by people we suspect are state security agents." These are not isolated incidents but rather indicative of a trend in the country where people are

intimidated, harassed and sometimes detained or abducted as a result of their art. In this part of the section, I will briefly explore research on how comedy resists in the country, as well as looking at the relationship between the arts and politics.

The oppressive environment, and the way that comedy can operate as resistance is addressed in literature looking at Zimbabwean humour. Gugulethu Siziba and Gibson Ncube (2015), for example, examine the way in which comedic memes of President Robert Mugabe falling provided a way to resist a state which has based much of its legitimacy on how its leader is perceived. An example of how comedians have joked about Robert Mugabe falling, beyond the memes that circulated online, can be found in Carl Joshua Ncube's joke quoted in the introduction to this thesis. Interviewing Ncube in 2019 he explained to me that this joke, which has him telling his audience that he had to travel to South Africa to watch Mugabe fall due to bad internet in Zimbabwe, is not just about the president falling when exiting an airplane, but also about Mugabe still standing as a dictator. Indeed, Ncube told me that he wanted his audience to ask themselves why, more than because of the internet connection, might he have needed to go to South Africa to view memes that were making fun of his president.

Similarly, Wendy Willems (2011, 128) argues that jokes told in Zimbabwe operate as a form of everyday resistance affecting the relationship between citizens and the state: "there are some indications that [humour and rumour] contributed to some changes in the relationship between rulers and the ruled [in Zimbabwe]." Willems (2011) has also engaged with Zimbabwean satirical cartoons, showing how the laugher generated by a comic strip in Zimbabwe, referred to as Chikwama "cannot simply be treated as resistance against those in power but instead fulfils a self-reflexive role in which those subject to power reflect on their own powerlessness and lack of agency." Daniel Hammett (2011), on the other hand, who engages with comical drawings and

caricatures from Zimbabwe, treats cartoons as a source of more straightforward resistance. Focusing on a deck of cards featuring caricatures of highly ranked military personnel and politicians (which was circulated in 2006), he argues that "The anonymous publication of these ephemera is symptomatic of the curtailed public sphere in Zimbabwe and demonstrates the perceived need to oppose the ruling party through a disguised voice" (Hammett, 2011, 206).

Research into theatre, music and other performance arts further illustrates how artists in the country are compelled to self-censor (Thram, 2006a, Zenenga, 2008, 2010, 2011, Siziba and Ncube, 2017, Nenjerama, and Sibanda, 2019). This is done through legislations regulating what people can address in their art, and how police and government can intervene, as well as through intimidation, harassment, violence, abductions, and self-censorship (Thram, 2006a). The latter is explained by Gugulethu Siziba and Gibson Ncube (2017, 829) who look at the government's emphasis on Shona practices and language. They argue that this has culminated in a Shona hegemony that compels artist from Matabeleland "to censor themselves, adopt the 'legitimate' and valorised [Shona] 'voice' and language, as well as relocate to Harare, the centre that defines Zimbabwean-ness." I develop on how stand-up comedy engages with Shona hegemony in chapter 3. Diane Thram (2006a) similarly argues that a lot of musicians self-censor adapting their art in order to fit within government guidelines. Apart from ensuring the safety of the artist, doing so will enable them to have their music aired on state-owned television and radio allowing them the possibility to make a living from their art. It is of significance here that the government owns almost all media in Zimbabwe, and that there is legislation regulating what you can and cannot say, despite the constitution guaranteeing freedom of expression (Zenenga, 2008).

Attempts by the state at controlling peoples' expression have also been researched in relation to the (re)narration of nationalism in the early 2000s (Ranger, 2004, Kriger, 2006, Raftopoulos, 2007, Ndlovu and Willems, 2009, Tendi, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, Willems, 2010, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008, 2009, 2013, Dorman, 2016). Here, the argument has been that ZANU-PF, in the face of political unrest and a strong opposition party, used the construction of nationalism as a way to legitimise their regime (Ranger, 2004, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2009, Tendi, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, Dorman, 2016). Attempting to create such unity, ZANU-PF turned towards the arts, particularly music (see also Kaarsholm, 1990, Thram, 2006b, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2009). As eloquently captured by Wendy Willems (2013, 255) in her exploration of the addition of a music gala to national day celebration in the early 2000s: "[it] led to an intensification of state-led national-day celebrations and should be understood in the broader context of ZANU-PF's growing appropriation of music, performance and popular culture; and effort to salvage the decreasing legitimacy of the ruling party through resurgence of 'cultural nationalism' in Zimbabwe" (see also Kaarsholm, 1990, Thram, 2006b, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2009). This thesis builds on scholarship on politics and nationalism, looking at how comedy not only allows people to oppose a repressive regime, but acts in complicated and messy ways, intertwined with practices of power and so interrupting social ordering in a way that is both productive and deriding. This multifaceted nature of comedy will be explored further in the final section of this chapter where I turn to look at stand-up comedy scholarship.

Stand-up comedy, power and resistance

Oliver Double (1997, 2014, 2018) is an influential voice within research on stand-up comedy. His work has highlighted the significance of the notion of authenticity to stand-up. Examining the genre, of which he is also a practitioner, he has argued that what separates stand-up comedy from theatre is the perception, amongst audience members, that the comedian is being themselves onstage:

> "In straight acting, the boundaries of truth and fiction are fairly clearly drawn. However fine an actor's portrayal of Macbeth may be, we are unlikely to genuinely mistake them for the actual eleventh century Scottish king. […] Ultimately, it is stand-up comedy's ability to play with the truth that makes it so powerful and potent."
>
> (Double, 2014, 182)

The tension between stand-up comedy as a performance art, and as an embodiment of the performers 'true' self has been explored by researchers who argue, in different ways, that stand-up disrupts power by critically examining the world around us; the unexpected, incongruent and implausible (Gilbert, 1997, Kar Tang, 2013, Deveau, 2016). This section will look at how literature on stand-up comedy has described the way in which it resists, highlighting, again, the complicated ways in which humour's ambiguous nature leads it to oppose and re-institute power.

It has been argued that stand-up comedy provides an opportune space for resistance. Elise DeCamp (2017, 451), who has conducted an ethnographic field study of stand-up comedy in the Midwest of the United States, argues that the comedy setting provides a unique opportunity for social commentary as "the club showroom is widely understood to be a space of transgression and taboo, specially by those who are regular

club goers", constructing a 'safe-space' where people might be more open-minded in regard to questioning pre-held conceptions. Sophie Quirk (2010, 116) further explains this stating that "just as the joke is a theoretical safe-space under the terms of comic licence, the performance room is a physical space in which marginal rules of joking reign supreme." This 'safe-space', and ability to address otherwise taboo topics, is, according to Fabiola Scarpetta and Anna Spagnolli (2009), regulated by the stand-up comedians' interactions with the audience through which relevant background knowledge and trust is built in order to grant, what has been called, the comic licence. Ian Brodie (2016, 54) has also drawn our attention to the power-imbalance in a stand-up set, where the stand-up comedian is placed physically above the audience, and "[t]he amplified performer's voice literally overpowers that of any one member of the audience." As emphasised by Quirk (2010, 121) "[s]tand-up comedy is both fundamentally democratic and deeply dictatorial. While the audience certainly has the right and power to limit comic licence, rejecting these jokes to 'go too far', this right is not easily exercised." This provides the stand-up comedian with an advantage in addressing, and resisting, otherwise taboo, or silenced topics.

Research on stand-up comedy's ability to resist power tends to focus on so-called marginalised comedians. It has been argued that these comedians, often disadvantaged in society in one or several ways, have the opportunity to challenge oppression through comedy (Gilbert, 1997, 2004 see also Colleary, 2015). The oppression referred to here is often discursive and/or structural. Performing their identity and experiences onstage marginalised stand-up comedians capture and present the arbitrary nature of their situation. Jasmine Kar Tang (2013, 248), who examines the stand-up comedy of Asian-American comedian Henry Cho, for example, demonstrates how he disrupts stereotypes by embodying them in incongruent ways: "[his] southern accent in combination with his

Asian body provokes a type of laughter that is predicated on the imagined corporeal dissonance of the visual and the aural." Simon Weaver (2010a, 149, see also Weaver, 2010b) demonstrates what this type of resistance might look like, introducing the idea of reversed discourse which: "[employs] the terminology of a pre-existing discourse but aims to develop an opposed semantic interpretation." Relying on pre-existing norms, stereotypes and narratives, Weaver (2010b, 33) highlights that these reversals can simultaneously resist and reinforce discourse as "while we may see the presentation of the reversed voice of the 'other' as the preferred meaning, there is a prior reliance of the sign-system of earlier [discourse]."

This tension between resistance and co-optation has often been discussed in relation to female stand-up comics. Philip Auslander (1993, 317) argues that traditionally in Anglo-Saxon societies, humour in general, and stand-up comedy in particular has been seen as male - men are supposed to illicit the laughter and women to do the laughing. In other words, the power is held by the man. This has meant that female stand-up comedians have been viewed as resistive; unsettling gendered hierarchies by claiming power onstage (Gilbert, 1997, Deveau, 2016). According to Joanne R. Gilbert (1997), however, some scholars have argued that the resistive act of performing stand-up has been diminished by the tendency of female comedians to perform self-deprecatory jokes. The tendency to make fun of yourself onstage arguably entrenches rather than challenges patriarchal norms. Danielle Russell (2002) has defined self-deprecation as "a form of accommodation - accommodating the perceptions of others", stressing the way in which it co-opts negative views of, for example, female bodies. However, this does not necessarily mean that self-deprecation cannot be resistive, as Gilbert (1997, 318-319) reminds her reader:

"self-deprecatory humour may be construed as cultural critique. Ironically, many critics of humor seem to forget that they are analysing *jokes* - humorous discourse that reminds the audience not to take it (or themselves) seriously with every punchline" (original emphasis).

A sub-section of this literature has looked towards Judith Butler's theoretical work to understand the multifaceted nature of how stand-up comedy intervenes in the production of stereotypes and prejudices (see Harris, 2008). This scholarship helpfully illuminates the many ways in which stand-up can interrupt power. Drawing on a Butler's (1993) conceptualisation of performativity, which emphasises that peoples (gender and sex) identities are continuously constituted through a forced iteration of norms (operating also corporeally), readers are reminded of the fluidity of the stage - wherein the power-relations and discourses that operate off-stage are also present and played with onstage. Exploring how stand-up operates in this way Keith M. Harris (2008, 36) argues that the autobiographical parts of Richard Pryor's sets highlight the "'fact and act' of race." Harris, who looks at the performativity of race in particular, argues that this reading of Pryor's comedy illuminates "the difference of race and the static meaning of colour [giving it] privilege as critical agency" (2008, 24). Danielle Deveau (2016), who also draws on Butler, takes a bit of a different approach. She argues that Butler's work highlights how it is that stand-up comedy can operate as resistance under the radar of those in power. Deveau (2016, 540) states that "while the content of comedic performances can be read as political narrative, the performativity of the field also enables the performer to deny - or indeed at times remain oblivious to - these politics." This captures, the complex and messy ways in which comedy in general, and stand-up in particular, interacts with politics and power.

Messing with power

Although comedy is not necessarily understood as a 'serious' topic, there is much it can teach us about international politics. Surveying literature within critical global politics shows how comedy can operate as an everyday resistance, mocking and challenging the powerful and disrupting hierarchies whilst also reinforcing and aiding those in power (Bakhtin, 1984, Mbembe, 1992, 2001, de Goede, 2005, Amoore and Hall, 2013, Musila, 2014, Brassett, 2016, Beck and Spencer, 2019, Brassett, 2019, Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020, Brassett *et al*, 2021a). This duality, and multifaceted nature is further seen in research which looks at comedy in an African context. Here, it has been demonstrated that comedy can tell us something about the "health of a democracy", at the same time as it also has been seen as a precursor of power, using its language to resist it (Hammett, 2014, 204, see also Mbembe, 1992, 2001). Looking particularly at comedy in Zimbabwe, scholars have argued that it provides a means to resist within an authoritarian regime that attempts to silence (Willems, 2010, Hammett, 2011, Siziba and Ncube, 2015), and in a context were arts has played a role in constructing a nationalism that serves to legitimise the governing party (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008, 2009, 2013, Ndlovu and Willems, 2009). This highlights the ambiguous and messy nature of comedy in general and stand-up comedy in particular.

To answer how stand-up comedy intervenes politically in this thesis I embrace the polysemic and complicated nature of humour as a way to rethink resistance in its multifaceted nature. In order to do so, I will, in the next chapter develop a theoretical approach using Homi K. Bhabha's and Judith Butler's conceptualisations of subversion and the subject. Bhabha and Butler are particularly useful theorists to assess comedy as they both look at the continuous iteration of norms, narratives and discourses as having the potential to both resist and reinforce. Engaging with Bhabha and Butler in the next

chapter, I advance a theoretical approach through which I will assess my empirical

material in the rest of the thesis, exploring particularly how the ambiguous nature of

stand-up comedy enables it to intervene politically.

Chapter 2 Interrupting social ordering: mimicry, performativity and the subject

Achille Mbembe (1992, 4) addresses the significance of investigating social ordering in the Postcolony, arguing that: "We […] need to examine the way the world of meanings […] is ordered, the types of institutions, the knowledges, norms, and practices that structure […] 'common sense' [to understand how power and subordination operates in this environment]." Whilst Mbembe (1992) looks particularly at the "world of meaning" created by authority in the Postcolony, this captures the scope of social ordering which imposes structure on the way in which the world is represented more broadly - not necessarily by the state. Drawing on Mbembe's work and situated within scholarship that emphasises the link between society and comedy (Billig, 2001, 2005, Lockyer and Pickering, 2005, Kupiers, 2011, Seirlis, 2011, Dodds and Kirby, 2013), this thesis thus refers to social ordering as the structure created in a society based on the 'system of meaning' produced by norms, narratives and discourses. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) examines the imposition of such structure based on a 'system of meaning' looking at colonial discourse. Describing colonial discourse, Bhabha (1994, 96) explains that "[i]t is a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discrimination that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization." This highlights how structure in society is held together by racialized colonial norms, narratives and discourses. As eloquently put by Judith Butler (2004, 221) "[norms] function as part of a reasoning process that conditions any and every social order, and which gives that order coherence." Indeed, norms, narratives, and discourses produce knowledges through which we understand the world and our place in it; through which Zimbabwean-ness is constituted and power-relations (re)iterated. To understand how stand-up comedy intervenes politically in Zimbabwe, this thesis thus looks at how it

plays with power-relations in the nation, honing in on how it interrupts the way that society is ordered based on the construction of Zimbabwean-ness. This chapter will develop a theoretical approach, drawing on Bhabha's and Butler's conceptualisation of the subject and resistance, that provides the basis for how I assess my empirical material in the rest of the thesis.

In order to develop this theoretical approach, I will engage with ambivalence, through what Bhabha refers to as the time-lag, as well as his conceptualisation of mimicry, and Butler's understanding of performativity. Combining these concepts, I will argue, allows for a reading of how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering that neither dismisses it completely as conforming to relations of power, nor forces me to say that it operates as an ultimate form of resistance. To develop this approach, the first section of this chapter will introduce the time-lag showing how the subject can act, and resistance can occur, within norms, narratives and discourses as past meanings are re-negotiated in the present. This section is followed by an exploration of how Butler (1993, 1999) understands performativity. Drawing also on Bhabha's perception of agency to unpack some of Butler's work, this section demonstrates that the subject is not only imbued by norms, narratives and discourses but constituted through them. This, rather than erase the possibility of resistance, leads towards a framing of the term were the subject 'acts-out' a repetition of norms, narratives and discourses that highlights their ambivalence and un-foundational claim to power. Agency can then be understood as an 'acting out' of resistive capabilities rather than intentional and purposeful action. This notion of resistance through repetition is further explored in the subsequent section, as I introduce Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry. According to Bhabha (1994, 122), mimicry is an internal process where norms, narratives and discourses attempt to mend their flaws, through an iteration that is "*almost the same, but*

not quite." Looking at this understanding of mimicry closely, I discuss how this type of resistance can be enacted by the subject as they make choices that shapes their iteration. At the end of this section, I draw the discussion of Bhabha's and Butler's understanding of how the subject can act to a close by advancing a theoretical approach to my empirical material which looks at ambivalence, through the time-lag, as well as mimicry, and performativity to unpack how stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering by repeating norms, narratives and discourses with a difference. Re-focusing the exploration of how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically to the very ambivalence and ambiguities of the genre through the work of Bhabha and Butler allows me to look at how the subject acts also in instances where it is not necessarily obvious.

The subject, language and temporality

Homi K. Bhabha's understanding of subversion and the subject proves to be an important starting point to outline a theoretical approach that usefully unpacks how stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering. According to Bhabha, the subject is imbued in discourse. Indeed, Bhabha argues (1994), it is through norms, narratives and discourses that the subject understands themselves and society. This does not preclude the possibility of resistance: "Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as a difference once perceived" (Bhabha, 1994, 157-158). Locating resistance as happening within, not apart, from discourse, Bhabha (1992, 1994) proports that individuated agency is found in the subject that 'acts out' disruption rather than necessarily deliberately instigating it. In this section I am going to examine what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the time-lag. Through this exploration I will argue that, prompted by the ambivalence of norms, narratives and discourses, the time-lag is a space where

resistance can occur, and the subject can re-negotiate meanings of that which they have experienced. Identifying the time-lag in the way that norms, narratives and discourses construct Zimbabwean-ness is thus a useful starting point for examining how stand-up comedy intervenes politically in the nation.

Bhabha (1994) explains how the subject can interrupt social ordering, introducing what he refers to as the time-lag. In order to unpack what he means by the time-lag, Bhabha (1994) applies a linguistic metaphor to his reading of colonial authority, culture and the nation. He argues that his "shift from the cultural as an epistemological object, to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up the possibilities of other 'times' of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical)" (Bhabha, 1994, 255). In other words, it enables him to think about temporality differently; as not necessarily linear, but as messy and disordered. The space that is opened up by thinking through culture in this way is the time-lag; a "temporal caesura"; a break between the "event of the sign […] and its discursive eventuality" (Bhabha, 1994, 263). Thinking about the subject and resistance in this way advances a theoretical approach through which to unpack how stand-up comedy could resist whilst encapsulated by norms, narratives and discourses.

To unpack how the time-lag can help us understand how stand-up comedy operates in relation to the production of Zimbabwean-ness, I turn to Bhabha's engagement with the concept of the nation. Bhabha (1990) argues that "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye." In this discussion Bhabha draws on Benedict Anderson's influential work on nations as imagined communities. He reminds us that the nation, in many ways, is a narrative, a continuous construction always in the process of becoming. Whilst imagined as stable, fixed and with a particular origin, Bhabha (1990, 1-2) points out that

"The nation's 'coming into being' as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social *life* rather than the discipline of social *polity* emphasizes [an] instability of knowledge" (original emphasis). David Huddart (2006, 61) captures this ambivalence of the nation in his discussion of Bhabha's work on the topic, stating that:

> "our sense of national identity is both static (something we are taught) and open (something we are changing through our everyday actions), we do not 'own' our nation. It is something that is simultaneously our own and not our own, because its identity is always coming from the future, or in short, changing."

Returning to the linguistic metaphor, Bhabha (1990) looks at the nation as a narration that is always retrospective. The meaning of the nation can be negotiated in the time-lag between the event of the nation and its subsequent narration:

> "This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in medias res*; and history may be half made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image."
>
> (Bhabha, 1990, 3, original emphasis)

It is in the attempt, on the one hand, to narrate the world in a particular manner, and on the other hand its continued construction and diversification, that the ambivalence of the norms, narratives and discourses that underpin social ordering can begin to be situated. Applying this notion of the nation to Zimbabwe, the ongoing nature of the construction

of Zimbabwean-ness becomes apparent, but also the difficulty to capture a sense of national identity that suits all people and occasions.

To locate the subject and resistance within norms, narratives and discourses Bhabha (1994) investigates the time-lag through Roland Barthes essay on Tangiers. Bhabha (1994) focuses on Barthes introduction of 'writing aloud' as a type of discourse. Interrogating Barthes' essay Bhabha (1994, 263) stipulates that there is a time-lag in the 'pause' between "the event of the sign (Tangiers) and its discursive eventuality (writing aloud)." Interrogating this moment, Bhabha (1994, 263) reads Barthes as negotiating the meaning of the event retrospectively, arguing that intentionality is part of this narrative enactment: "The sign finds its closure retroactively in a discourse that it anticipates in the semiotic fantasy." Focusing on the time-lag Bhabha conceptualises the subject as having individuated agency hinting at the significance of repetition and the body. He argues that agency:

"is the art of guiding one's body into discourse, in such a way that the subject's accession to, and erasure in, the signifier as individuated is paradoxically accompanied by its remainder, an afterbirth, a double. Its noise – 'crackle, grate, cut' – makes vocal and visible, across the flow of the sentence's communicative code, the struggle involved in the insertion of agency – wound and bow, death and life – into discourse."

(Bhabha, 1994, 264)

This makes the time-lag a space for (re)inscription of the subject into norms, narratives and discourses; and allows for a reading of the stand-up comedian as someone who does not stand apart from social ordering critiquing it but operates within it, re-negotiating meanings.

As such, exploring what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the time-lag provides the foundation for a theoretical approach that can help us understand the way in which stand-up comedy can resist, whilst speaking from within social ordering. This is essential to this thesis task of showing how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering as it begins to speak to a key point highlighted by scholarship on the genre. This scholarship characterises its practitioners' repetition of norms, narratives and discourses as humorously highlighting the arbitrary in society to some, whilst reinforcing (sometimes disempowering) categories as true and/or real to others (Kar Tang, 2013, Musila, 2014). Being able to identify forms of resistance that is occurring in the midst of this contradictory and polysemic exchange allows me to look at stand-up comedy as part of a negotiation and exchange embedded in the construction of Zimbabwean-ness - feeding into common conceptions and disrupting them. This moves our understanding of comedic resistance away from only intervening politically when it jokes about actions taken by state agents, party representatives and institutions. Taking a theoretical approach to my empirical material which considers the time-lag leads me to look at how stand-up comedy interrupts by exploring how it engages with dominant norms, narratives and discourses in the country. Examining these norms, narratives and discourses I look towards their ambivalences to identify how the subject can act and resist in what Bhabha refers to as the time-lag. Deepening this discussion, the next section will expand on the way in which I think theoretically about stand-up comedy as interrupting social ordering through an exploration of Judith Butler's conceptualisation of performativity and agency, beginning to show how it is possible to identify the way that the genre highlights the ambivalence of norms, narratives and discourses as the subject acts in the time-lag.

Performing the subject and resistance

Judith Butler's conceptualisation of performativity usefully pushes the relationship between the subject and social ordering even further, allowing a reading of stand-up comedy where forced iterations of norms, narratives and discourses are unsettled through their very repetition. Butler (1990, 1993) advances Bhabha's argument that the subject is imbued in discourses, further showing in her theory of performativity that its identity is constituted through their very (re)iteration. As such, Butler states that the subject does not exist prior to the norms, narratives and discourses which, according to her, constitute its identity. Embedded within, and interpellated by norms, narratives and discourses, Butler (1993, 1999), similarly to Bhabha, advocates an understanding of agency as an 'acting out' that occurs within social ordering. It is through this internal 'acting out' that both theorists argue that resistance occurs. This conceptualisation of the subject directs my exploration of how the Zimbabwean subject acts and resists through stand-up comedy to the way that it 'acts out' the ambivalence of norms, narratives and discourses through their repetition. Approaching my empirical material assisted by Butler's conceptualisation of performativity, and an understanding of agency as operating through the re-iteration of norms, narratives and discourses, this thesis looks to assess how the stand-up comedians' choices highlights the ambivalence of the construction of Zimbabwean-ness both corporeally and orally.

Butler explains how we can understand the subject and resistance as located within norms, narratives and discourses through an exploration of, what she terms, performativity. Performativity to Butler (1993, xii) is a forced iteration of norms through which peoples' (gender and sexual) identities are constituted: "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names." The subject is

thus imbued in and constituted through this continuous repetition of norms, narratives and discourses. Butler usefully summarises her take on this process in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity.* Addressing misconceptions of performativity from the book's original publication in 1990, Butler (1999a, xv) describes performativity stating that:

> "In the first instance, then, performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration."

This locates the subject as not just embedded by norms, narratives and discourses as argued by Bhabha, but also constituted by them. Far from limited by constraints, Butler (1993, 59-60) argues that restrictions are "that which impels and sustains performativity."

Butler (2017) explains this continuous production of the subject's identity referring to John L. Austin's conceptualisation of the speech act. According to Butler (2017) Austin locates the efficacy of the speech act in the way in which it calls upon social conventions/norms. Butler (2017) does not see the speech act as a single occurring event, rather she understands it in relation to the past acts which it invokes. Indeed, Butler (2017, 175) argues that the speech act is "a citational form, a repetition of what has come before, even a break with that prior context of the utterance." This locates the power of the speech-act, and performativity in the multitude of norms, narratives and discourses which it calls upon.

A consequence of this when applied to stand-up would be that comedians could be understood as succeeding the norms, narratives and discourses through which their identity is constituted. This appears to add a layer of difficulty to resistance, given that the subject is interpellated into a pre-existing world of norms, narratives and discourses through which it views society. This is usefully unpacked through the process of naming. To name someone, according to Butler (1993) is to enter them into the world of meaning. She explains that when we gender an infant, exclaiming, at an early stage (at birth, or sometimes these days already before birth, for example at an ultrasound) that "it's a boy/girl" the infant is "brought into the domain of language and kinship" (Butler, 1993, xvi-xvii). Particular expectations come with being called either a boy or a girl, gendering does not begin and end at birth, it is continuously reiterated by authority throughout your life (Butler, 1993). The expectations that come with being a particular gender preceded the subject's existence and is reiterated through their choices and actions. How and what the stand-up comedian talks about onstage thus becomes part of a citational chain through which norms, narratives and discourses are reiterated and reinstituted.

This process extends beyond the subject's utterances to corporeality. Applying Butler's theory to stand-up comedy highlights that norms, narratives and discourses are also operating through the body of the comedian. Indeed, Butler (1986, 39) reminds us that we "never experience or know ourselves as a body pure and simple […] because we never know our sex outside of its expression as gender." Butler (1986) unpacks this process through a reading of Jean-Paul Sartre; arguing that he illustrates that the mind and body are interlinked. According to Butler (1986, 38) Sartre thinks of the mind as both at one with, and beyond the body: "The duality of consciousness (as transcendence) and the body as intrinsic to human reality, and the effort to locate personal identity

exclusively in one or the other, according to Sartre, is a project in bad faith." Beginning from within this understanding, Butler (1986) argues that Simone de Beauvoir explores how gender and sex are connected so that there isn't necessarily a body distinct from gender, or cultural inscription. The process of 'becoming' a woman is thus occurring in relation to gender and power-relations pre-existing the body (Butler, 1986).

Butler (1993) unpacks this process further arguing that discussions of the extent to which gender and sexuality are constructed or determined are often overtly Manichean in nature. She states that understanding performativity is highlighting the complexities involved in the construction of identity. To Butler (1993, 59) "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it simply be equated with performance." Your identity is not something that you can pick and choose the way you might an outfit in the morning (see preface to Butler, 1999, Salih, 2002), and whilst someone might acquire or renounce Zimbabwean citizenship, on the other hand being Zimbabwean, acting in a Zimbabwean manner and having Zimbabwean experiences is not something that is as easily acquired or renounced. Yet, Butler (1999) argues, that agency and resistance is possible, locating both in performativity; pointing towards how *variations* of the iteration of norms, narratives and discourses unsettles them. It is useful here to briefly return to Bhabha's work on the subject, which overlaps with how Butler conceptualises agency, before looking further at how social ordering can be interrupted through performativity.

Ilan Kapoor (2008) captures the similarities between Bhabha's and Butler's understandings of how people act whilst imbued, and/or constituted through norms, narratives and discourses. To explain this Kapoor (2008) distinguishes between, what he calls, 'performative' agency (where performative is not used in a Butlerian sense) and expressive agency. The difference between 'performative' and expressive agency is that

the latter "reveals an ontological subject with intentions, morals and consciousness, as opposed to [the former] in which these subjective qualities are 'acted out' by the agent, not given cut and dried beforehand" (Kapoor, 2008, 125). Kapoor (2008) argues that both Bhabha and Butler think about agency as 'performative' in this sense. Discussing this further Kapoor (2008, 133) highlights that this means that Bhabha and Butler are moving away from ideas about the Enlightenment subject towards an agency that:

> "refers to being able to act only *within* a discursive context: the (social or political) script to which you respond is given to you; it is your inheritance whether you like or want it or not. How you act it out, however is up to you. The discursive text *enables* you to act, no matter whether it is relatively benign or repressive; but on the other hand, you cannot act from somewhere 'outside.'"

A 'performative' reading of agency re-directs my empirical research to the actions taken by the stand-up comedian as opposed to the reasons for taking them. It also speaks to a resistance that rather than being reductive works in productive ways through the 'acting out' of norms, narratives and discourses. This changes the way in which I think about how stand-up comedy can intervene politically, as it identifies a resistance, and a way to interrupt social ordering, through the way that the comedian repeats norms, narratives and discourses.

The way that this move towards agency as an 'acting out' can aid our discussion of how stand-up comedy interrupts the construction of Zimbabwean-ness is clearly demonstrated in Bhabha's (1992, 1994) exploration of Toni Morrison's book *Beloved* (1987). Reading Morrison's book, Bhabha captures how attention to the way in which norms, narratives and discourses are repeated helps us understand the subject's role in political intervention. *Beloved* follows the women and children that live at 124

Bluestone Road, particularly former slave Sethe who at one point committed infanticide. Telling Sethe's story, Morrison, in Bhabha's (1994, 8) words "revives the past of slavery and its murderous rituals of possession and self-possession." Engaging with Morrison's book, Bhabha (1992, 1994) pays particular attention to the repetition of the number '124' (which is the address where Sethe lives), illustrating how in, and through, the writing process linear time is unsettled, and meanings are re-negotiated. Repeated throughout the book '124' is not spoken about in 'home-y' terms or given a 'proper' name, as Bhabha (1992, 60) illustrates by quoting Morrison: "124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children." Engaging with this quote, Bhabha argues that the address is personalised through its actions; haunted by Sethe's child. The repetition of '124' is thus, according to Bhabha, a re-inscription of slave history in the (narrative) present; a re-articulation that disrupts linearity. The number breaks-up the narration within Morrison's novel providing a dissembling of time: "The number as a sign […] can add without adding up but may disturb the calculation" (Bhabha, 1992, 60).

In choosing not to speak of history linearly but having '124' 'act out' that which it contains Morrison produces a space, a void, of continuance; a break in the narration of history and slavery within which Bhabha locates the subject's ability to act (Bhabha, 1992). Highlighting how the repetition of '124' in Morrison's book unsettles static narrations of the world around us, Bhabha (1992, 58) describes how agency is enacted through "a third space that does not simply revise or invert the dualities, but *revalues* the ideological bases of division and difference" (original emphasis). Bhabha (1994, 2011) unpacks what he means by this third space in later writings. Reading Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), for example, Bhabha (2011) usefully explores the third space through Conrad's description of an encounter between the

book's protagonist Marlow and 'a native' in the Belgian colonised Congo. Bhabha illustrates how Conrad's narrative approach allows for a different identification and witnessing of the situation. A third space ensues from the narration as Marlow comes physically closer to the supposed 'native enemy.' As the physical space decreases Marlow begins to view 'the native' differently. Expecting to see an enemy he instead finds himself to be curious about a worsted around 'the natives' neck. Through Marlow's questions about why 'the native' carries the worsted as an accessory, and where he has come from, a different space of interrogation opens up within which 'the native's' 'otherness' becomes ambivalent. Through Marlow's gaze the worsted is at once an accessory and a reminder of economic and colonial exploitation. Marlow's witnessing of 'the native', similarly to Morrison's repetition of '124' thus produces a temporal pause (the time-lag) within which new ways of narrating history can open-up. This type of temporal pause, and re-narration can result from the stand-up comedian's decisions about what stories to tell onstage, what to emphasise to make those stories funny, and what they choose to wear onstage. These choices, like the repetition of '124', or Conrad's witnessing of the meeting between 'the native' and Marlow, can create a temporal break, a space for narration and re-negotiation through the production of a third space of difference. Taking a Bhabhaian and Butlerian perspective on agency as 'acting out', thus broadens our understanding of how, and where, and by whom, resistance is enacted, and disruption in social ordering happens.

To explain how resistance occurs through this 'acting out', Butler (1993) draws our attention to the baselessness of the authority with which norms, narratives and discourses speak by looking at the relationship between the law and the judge.[15]

---

[15] Bhabha makes a similar claim in his investigation of stereotypes. This is emphasised already in his definition of the stereotype as "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha, 1994, 94-95).

According to Butler (1993, 70), the authority the judge has to exercise the law is not derived from the judge as a subject; "the judge does not originate the law or its authority, rather he 'cites' the law, consults and reinvokes the law, and in that reinvocation, constitutes the law." It is not the judge that ascribes the law with authority; s/he is not the reason that we hold their judgement to be legitimate; instead authority is derived from its constant repetition and constitution (Butler, 1993). As expressed by Butler (1993, 70) "[the judge is situated in the] midst of a signifying chain, receiving and reciting the law and, in the reciting, echoing forth the authority of the law." Akin to how Butler (1993) describes gender through de Beauvoir, the law bases its authority on its own continuous iteration - it functions by bringing itself about. When the law operates as "ordinance or sanction" it invokes that which it prescribes (Butler, 1993, 70). Resistance, according to Butler, is thus a process wherein the groundlessness of norms, narratives and discourses' claims to power is made explicit - through their performative 'acting out'.

Butler (1999) has demonstrated how this can work by looking specifically at drag. Introducing what she refers to as parodic recontextualization, she illustrates how, by enacting norms in an unanticipated way, drag disrupts perceptions of gender and sexuality in society. Butler (1999, 187) states that drag presents three "contingent dimensions of corporeality […] anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance." Assuming that all three dimensions are distinct from one another the performance of drag illustrates the discord between gender and sex. Drag, according to Butler (1999, 187-188) provides a parody of gender norms claim to originality; by unsettling "the very notion of an original." The play on gender in drag reveals the self-constituting basis of gender as a phenomenon; where, in a similar fashion to how the judge and the law base their authority upon one another, gender is self-grounding.

Significantly, this type of disruption is not occurring from outside of norms, narratives and discourses:

"If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible."

(Butler, 1999, 198-199, original emphasis)

Drag still operates within misogynist culture, and continuously cites (and reinforces) certain features as feminine (Butler, 1999).

Butler further helps us unpack how this type of performative resistance can aid our assessment of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy broadening her discussion by, crucially, looking into fantasy as a concept. Butler (2004, 29) argues that fantasy "is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside" (Butler, 2004, 29). Fantasy does not operate beyond 'reality' instead, drawing on the norms, narratives and discourses in society, it re-configures them in imaginative ways; "Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home" (Butler, 2004, 29). Imagining a different Zimbabwe, or another way of being Zimbabwean is thus not about speaking outside of discourse but about re-articulating norms, narratives and discourses in novel ways.

Indeed, stand-up comedy has been shown to be deeply embedded in social ordering, drawing upon it as a tool to make the audience laugh (see Weaver, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, Seirlis, 2011, Kar Tang, 2013). Viewing stand-up comedy through the lens

of a performative resistance acknowledges the insights of previous scholarship on the genre and provides a way to further explain how this works. It allows me to look at how comedians through their choices onstage can repeat norms with a variation – whether that is as a result of norms that we normally do not associate with one another being iterated together (a good example of this can be found in Kar Tang, 2013) or due to other ways in which the arbitrary and un-foundational aspects of social ordering is being highlighted. Performative resistance usefully acknowledges the intertwined nature of power and subversion, and thus the complexities of interrupting social ordering.

Investigating stand-up comedy through this lens I locate the genre somewhere in the intersection between Butlerian performativity and theatrical performance. The comedian cannot choose their identity, nor can they strip themselves of that identity when they leave stage, however as expressed by Joanne R. Gilbert (1997, 317) when discussing her own stand-up comedy, the comedian can emphasise certain aspects of their identity - "[l]ike any comic, I was performing a version of myself that suited the audience and the occasion […] select[ing] bits and pieces of [myself] to share" (1997, 317). The 'acting out' of these choices are what Bhabha and Butler refer to as agency; as the comedian through these repetitions can disrupt norms, narratives and discourses from within. Turning towards a Bhabhaian and Butlerian understanding of the subject and agency thus allows for an approach to Zimbabwean stand-up comedy, that sees it as imbued in social ordering, and stand-up comedians as constituted through it. Investigating how stand-up comedy resists, this theoretical approach asks me to look at the way in which the genre acts-out norms, narratives and discourses. Indeed, Bhabha and Butler show that it is in this enactment that agency and resistance is located. Perceiving the subject as imbued in, and constituted through, the 'system of meaning' that underpins social ordering, I approach analysing my empirical material in the

following chapters by looking at how stand-up comedians add a variation to the repetition of norms, narratives and discourses. I look at how this alteration of their re-articulation (corporeal and oral) of norms, narratives and discourses enacts and highlights their ambivalence and un-foundational claim to power. In order to do so I make sure to contextualise norms, narratives and discourses within the broader social and political environment seeing how they interact with one another through stand-up. Looking closer at Bhabha's work on mimicry in the next section it will become even clearer how the repetition of norms, narratives and discourses can interrupt social ordering, thus highlighting the significance of looking at these reiterations to understanding the complex and nuanced ways in which Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically.

The enactment of ambivalence: interruption, mimicry and the subject

In this section I will continue to explore how Bhabha and Butler helps us understand how stand-up comedy interrupts by interrogating, primarily, what Bhabha refers to as mimicry. The way that Bhabha (1994) conceptualises mimicry proves to be especially useful to our understanding of how stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering. This is because it acknowledges the way in which resistance can work alongside reinforcement. As Bhabha (1994, 122) puts it:

> "Within the conflictual economy of colonial discourse which Edward Said
> describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination –
> the demand for an identity, stasis – and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of
> history – change, difference – mimicry represents an ironic compromise."

Here it is not only the subject that is imbued in, and/or constituted through discourse, also resistance is almost inextricably intertwined with power - as it is the result of a repetition of an ambivalence which is inherent to the norms, narratives and discourses that underpin social ordering. To demonstrate this, I will explore Bhabha's (1994) examination of ambivalence and mimicry through colonial authority. Bringing the discussion back to Butler, I will also examine how norms, narratives and discourses base their authority on their own iteration further unsettling their claim to power. Finally, I will illustrate that mimicry is a useful theoretical tool to our reading of stand-up comedy in Zimbabwe, emphasising how it operates as a productive resistance within norms, narratives and discourses, through repetition (with a variation) rather than confrontation or opposition. Drawing on mimicry when analysing original empirical material gathered during fieldwork helps me unpack how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy highlights and enacts ambivalence through its repetition of norms, narratives and discourses.

Applying Bhabha's conceptualisation of mimicry to stand-up comedy shows how resistance and reinforcement are intertwined in the genre and demonstrates the ways in which it goes about interrupting social ordering. Bhabha (1994) conceives of mimicry slightly differently from its common day-to-day usage where it denotes a form of comical imitation. Indeed, Bhabha (1994) argues that mimicry is not simply a form of imitation but a way to disrupt colonial authority. To explain how mimicry can do so he defines colonial mimicry as the "desire for a reformed recognisable other, *as a subject of difference that is, almost the same but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1994, 122, original emphasis). According to Bhabha (1994, 122) this type of mimicry is able to interrupt colonial discourse due to an inherent ambivalence; "in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."

Bhabha (1994) explains the ambivalence of colonial discourse, and mimicry's claim for an 'Other' that is *almost the same, but not quite,* by introducing a distinction between imitation and identification. He states that the child holding the newspaper like the parent is imitation, whilst the child learning how to read is identification (Bhabha, 1989). Applying this to colonial discourse he argues that the articulation of colonial discourse purports that the coloniser wants to help the colonised become like them (identification) (Bhabha, 1989). This can be seen, for example, in rhetoric about colonialism as a civilising mission. Yet, in order for the power-relations upon which colonial discourse is built to be upheld this cannot become the case. As David Huddart (2006, 40) explains "these ideologies [of colonial discourse] assume that there is a structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior which explains why any one group of people can dominate another at all." If the coloniser managed to help the colonised become like them, their difference, the basis of the power distinction, would cease to exist. This is where imitation comes into play. The colonised that imitates the coloniser will never completely become them, they will always be somehow, and somewhat, other. This leads colonial discourse to endeavour to produce an 'Other' that is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994). In doing so, Bhabha (1994) argues, colonial discourse attempts to mend the incoherent claims of difference and possible similarities between coloniser and colonised. It is this process of reparation that Bhabha (1994) calls colonial mimicry.

Highlighting the ambivalence already contained in colonial discourse, by reiterating the discourse itself, mimicry draws attention to its incompleteness. This makes mimicry a form of resistance that operates through repetition: "The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a

process of disavowal" (Bhabha, 1994, 122). Applied to stand-up comedy, mimicry can describe how the (re)iteration of norms, narratives and discourses, whilst repeating the language of social ordering, can also disrupt it. It allows us to point out that when stand-up comedy iterates these norms, narratives and discourses in order to induce laughter they often do so in a manner that emphasises its ambivalence - perhaps even using it as comedic value. Mimicry thus helps us explain why to resist, it sometimes appears that the stand-up comedian has to reinforce, and equally, why in reinforcing they may find themselves resisting.

It should be noted that mimicry is not solely an effect of colonial discourse but also operates within other aspects of social ordering. Key to this thesis, given its focus on how stand-up comedy intervenes in the construction of Zimbabwean-ness, is the way in which mimicry is entangled with the norms, narratives and discourses of the nation. The ambivalence required for mimicry to become a source of resistance has also been identified by Bhabha (1994) in regard to the narration of the nation. Bhabha (1994, 201) argues that the nation "As an apparatus of symbolic power […] produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference' in the act of writing." Returning to the linguistic metaphor, he describes how the nation requires a "'doubleness' in writing" (Bhabha, 1994, 202). In other words, to encompass all of that which it claims to hold, the narration of the nation needs to be malleable and able to alter back and forth between different aspects of society and culture. Yet, if it achieves this, then it will, in Bhabha's (1994, 202) words "disperse the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society." The nation is thus faced by two incompatible claims; that of a fixed society, with a particular temporality, and origins (which Bhabha associates with the work of the historian), and that of its multiplicity and

diversity of people, processes, moments and experiences. It is this that, according to Bhabha (1994, 204), is the ambivalence of the nation, and its narration:

> "It is indeed only in the disjunctive time of the nation's modernity – as a knowledge caught between political rationality and its impasse, between shreds and patches of cultural signification and the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy – that questions of nation as narration come to be posed."

Applying this notion of the narration of the nation to the construction of Zimbabwean-ness lays the foundation for a study of the ambivalences inherent in its construction, and an interrogation of how this operates in stand-up comedy in the country. It prompts me to look for resistance in the repetition of norms, narratives and discourses. Further it allows me to focus on the ways in which the choices made by stand-up comedians (re)iterates norms, narratives and discourses in such a way that they highlight the ambivalence of the construction of Zimbabwean-ness. This re-focuses resistance from binary notions, and destructive accounts, towards the notion of an interruption that operates in productive ways, creating and building through its challenge. Taking this approach responds to Achille Mbembe's (1992, 2001) call to look beyond the binary structures through which domination and subordination is often conceptualised in the Postcolony. Indeed, this understanding of how social ordering can be interrupted fits with scholarly accounts of how stand-up comedy reproduces power (see Gilbert 1997, Russell 2002). It also explains how comedy can resist both societal power-relations and the state whilst not removing the latter's material might (Bakhtin, 1984, Mbembe, 1992, 2001, de Goede, 2005, Weaver 2010a, 2010b, 2011, Brassett and Sutton, 2017).

This conceptualisation of resistance through mimicry has received critique as it appears to eliminate the subject from the process of interruption. Indeed, the way that Bhabha (1994) understands mimicry seems to imply that power and resistance are so intertwined that only power itself can resist. Robert J.C. Young (2004) has argued that mimicry is one way in which colonial discourse produces its own demise. This reading of mimicry leads Young (2004, 188) to hold that it produces an "agency without a subject […] a sameness which slips into otherness, but which still has nothing to do with any 'other'." Young (2004) interprets mimicry as a loss of control for the coloniser where the process of imitating the structure of domination produces a circle of disavowal of colonial power, exposing its flaws. The problem that Young (2004) emphasises here is that Bhabha's (1994) exploration of mimicry appears to evoke the colonised subject as a vehicle for change, rather than a purposeful actor in the process of it. Bhabha (1994) appears to argue that subversion of colonial discourse lies within the colonial condition itself. Yet, thinking about stand-up it appears counter-intuitive to argue that the comedian who writes, edits and performs the set plays no part in its potential resistive properties, or how it interrupts social ordering.

To explain how the comedian can have agency, and stand-up can resist through mimicry, I return to Kapoor's take on 'performative' agency. Kapoor (2003) argues that significant to Bhabha's understanding of resistance and agency within discourse is the idea of repetition. Rather than, as Young (2004), argues, holding that resistance through repetition insinuates an assimilation of subversion by power, Kapoor (2003, 566) states that "subaltern agency is about exposing the doubling and constructedness of discourse/power, while domination, to *be* domination, is about fixing or hiding them" (original emphasis). Additionally, Kapoor (2003, 566) points out that "Bhabhaian

politics are a kind of variation on a (discursive) theme: mimicry is not just returned, it is returned as mockery."

I have discussed the implications of Kapoor's reading of Bhabha together with Carl Death (Källstig and Death, 2020) in our examination of Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy. Building on Kapoor's discussion we argue that "Contrary to many accounts of non-Western subaltern subjects, comedians like Noah explicitly *enact* and *display* the ambivalence of colonial discourse rather than just anxiously repeat them, and they derive power and publicity from this enactment" (ibid, 8; original emphasis). This notion of resistance as an enactment of ambivalence and agency as an 'acting out' which returns mimicry as mockery aligns with Butler's (1999) take on the subject and subversion. She argues that agency occurs through the addition of a 'variation' to the habitual repetition of norms; the constitution of the subject "a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that governs the intelligible invocation of identity […] 'agency,' then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition" (Butler, 1999, 198).

Recognising how these norms, narratives and discourses derive power from their own repetition changes the way in which it is possible to conceptualise how stand-up comedy intervenes politically. It becomes enough to demonstrate the un-foundational claim that these norms, narratives and discourses make to power, or to highlight the ambivalence of those which attempt to produce the world in a fixed way. Stand-up comedy can thus intervene into social ordering through an enactment of the ambivalence of the norms, narratives and discourses through which it is constituted. Mimicry, and performativity, provide useful ways of exploring *how* this is done as they refocus our investigation of how stand-up comedy intervenes to the way in which it interrupts by

repeating with a variation (what I am calling 'repetition with a difference') - encompassing both a reinforcement and a resistance.

Repetition with a difference

To answer the central research question and explore how stand-up comedy intervenes politically by *doing* something to social ordering this thesis thus engages with Bhabha and Butler when interrogating the empirical material gathered. Doing so, it looks for the way that stand-up comedy intervenes by identifying how it interrupts social ordering through 'repetition with a difference'; a concept which is unpacked through Bhabha's conceptualisation of mimicry, as well as his emphasise on ambivalence, and Butler's understanding of performativity. To locate ambivalence within the stand-up comedy setting I engage with norms, narratives and discourses also beyond the comedy setting. After all, the power-relations that exist outside of the stand-up comedy stage are also present in it. The presence of power in all spaces where the subject exists is emphasised by both Bhabha and Butler as they describe how norms, narratives and discourses are continuously repeated, in the latter case, also corporeally as identities and subjectivities are constituted.

Engaging with what Bhabha refers to as the time-lag I will, thus, identify the ambivalence of norms, narratives and discourses and how the subject can act through them by looking at how they fit within the wider societal context. Combining this focus on ambivalence with Bhabha's conceptualisation of mimicry and Butler's understanding of performativity I look further at *how* stand-up comedy interrupts (resists and reinforces) as it repeats norms, narratives and discourses with a difference – highlighting their ambivalence. Applying this theoretical approach, which draws on ambivalence, mimicry and performativity, I am thus able to, in the following chapters,

assess my empirical material to answer how stand-up comedy intervenes politically, looking at what the genre *does* to social ordering as it interrupts it through 'repetition with a difference', rather than attempting to identify how it critiques political leaders, parties or decisions. I will start by doing this in the next chapter where I examine how stand-up comedy intervenes politically by interrupting state narratives. Here, I will look particularly at how stand-up engages with 'tribal' narratives and homophobia in the country, demonstrating how in repeating these narratives comedians can interrupt state constructions of Zimbabwe has homogeneous, as well as the production of patriarchal power-relations in the country.

Chapter 3 Interrupting state constructions of Zimbabwean-ness: homogeneity, 'tribal' narratives, sexuality and gender

The construction of nation-ness has been important to the Zimbabwean government. This became especially evident in the early 2000s when the governing party, the Zimbabwean National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), faced by increased support for the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), began to formulate a version of the country's past that legitimised their authority (Ranger, 2004, Kriger, 2006, Raftopoulos, 2007, Tendi, 2010a, 2010b). This narration of the past, referred to as Patriotic History, in several ways re-invokes the country's struggle for independence and land since the British South Africa Company arrived in the 1800s (Ranger, 2004, Tendi, 2010a, 2010b). It attributes heroic status to ZANU-PF, who were said to have been victorious in the country's independence struggle against the British, as well as the war veterans who fought on their side, simultaneously purporting that the liberation struggle was an ongoing fight, and that this was why the governing party must continue to lead the country (Kriger, 2003, 2006, Dorman, 2006, Raftopoulos, 2007). Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) captures how such narratives have been used to legitimise the authority of the government stating that state narratives of the past were deployed "to claim primal political legitimacy by ZANU-PF that needs no renewal every five years via holding of free and fair elections, since the party received prior permanent oracular blessings from spirit mediums during the struggle for independence in the 1970s."[16] Highlighting the liberation struggle, and what has been referred to as the country's revolutionary tradition, these narratives have constructed those in power

---

[16] Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 157) is talking particularly about what he refers to as *Chimurenga* ideology, which he describes as "[identifying] colonialism as the enemy of every black person and anti-colonialism as the rallying point of African unity and the basis for imagination of a postcolonial nation."

as inviolable claiming, for example, that "nothing intrinsically inadequate, demeaning or bad can be done or happen to those in power, particularly [President Robert] Mugabe who over the years has been christened the 'Messiah', Moses' and the 'big Mountain'" (Siziba and Ncube, 2015, 524). Making fun of president and party, comedy is viewed as dangerous given that it, in Achille Mbembe's (2001, 109) words about laughter in the Postcolony, "[kidnaps] power and force[s] it, as if by accident, to examine its own vulgarity."[17] Delving into the nuances of how stand-up comedy interrupts state narrations of Zimbabwean-ness this chapter will emphasise how state power can be resisted, at the same time as its narratives are reinforced, by exploring jokes that highlight contradictions and ambivalences within state autobiographies.

Jelena Subotić (2016, 611) defines state autobiographies as "stories states tell to and about themselves." According to Will K. Delehanty and Brent J. Steele (2009, 523) state autobiographies "draw upon national histories and experiences to provide continuity and 'substance' to a state's conception of Self-identity." In other words, state autobiographies are a way in which states construct collective identities distinct from external 'Others.' Relying on these autobiographies' states make sense of, and justify, their actions both internally and externally. Molly Patterson and Kristen Monroe Renwick (1998, 322) capture this in relation to national identity, stating that "[s]tories about the origin and development of a nation provide a shared sense of who we are, where we came from, and how we fit together. These narratives permeate culture and are essential to any kind of collective functioning." Julia Gallagher (2017) has examined the construction of collective identity in Zimbabwe. She argues that the international is key to "domestic meaning and coherence" in the country - where narrations of self are

---

[17] I explore further the relationship between the state and comedians in the country in Chapter 4. In this chapter I show how the government has harassed, arrested and intimidated comedians who have made fun of the party and the president.

tied up with colonial history, and reinvocations of a destructive foreign 'Other' (ibid., 2). Engaging with state autobiographies in this chapter allows me to unpack how stand-up comedy intervenes into the construction of Zimbabwean-ness - how people view themselves, others, and their nation. Embracing the ambiguity of stand-up comedy, and the messiness of state autobiographies that are not always coherently, or unanimously, articulated, this chapter highlights contradictions and ambivalences in the construction of Zimbabwean-ness, and how comedy can act these out in familiar but also in unexpected ways through 'repetition with a difference' (see also Dorman, 2016).

Applying the theoretical approach outlined in the previous chapter, I am going to interrogate how stand-up comedy interrupts state autobiographies by exploring their ambivalence with the help of what Bhabha refers to as the time-lag and looking at how they are resisted and reinforced by engaging with Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity. Drawing particularly on transcripts of jokes, contextualised through semi-structured interviews with comedians, I will demonstrate how stand-up comedy highlights narrative contradictions by repeating state autobiographies with a difference, and how they by doing so divulge the ambivalence of state constructions of national belonging. Making this argument, the chapter is divided into two main sections. The first looks at how stand-up comedy interrupts as it repeats state autobiographies of unity through, and in relation to, 'tribal' narratives. It starts by outlining narrative contradictions between how state autobiographies construct the homogeneous nation, and 'tribal' narratives. Looking at jokes by Ntando Moyo and Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni, known onstage as King Kandoro, it argues that whilst the binary between the Shona and Ndebele people is continuously reinforced, the jokes these comedians tell do question what the existence of these 'tribes' mean for the cohesion of the Zimbabwean state. Following that, the second section looks at how stand-up comedy interrupts

gendered narrations of society through a repetition of homophobic state autobiographies with a difference. Examining a joke by Wencelacy Katuka, whose stage name is Kadem the Comic, I argue that he, through a homophobic joke, puts his anxieties of women's place in society on display, enacting the ambivalence of patriarchal power-relations. Interrogating how stand-up comedy interacts with state autobiographies, I thus show, in this chapter, how people in Zimbabwe intervene politically in complex ways, that are not necessarily obvious, or operating in the realm of the 'serious.'

Zimbabwe: A homogeneous Shona nation

Zimbabwean society is divided into what is referred to in the country as 'tribes'. The two major denominations are the Shona and the Ndebele. Jokes about these two 'tribes' were a re-occurring theme in Zimbabwean stand-up comedy during my time in the country in 2018 and 2019. Joking about the Shona and/or the Ndebele, comedians would play out stereotypes and rivalries between the capital city Harare (associated with Shona people) and Zimbabwe's second city Bulawayo (often seen as the capital of the former Ndebele kingdom), as well as, on occasion make jokes directly addressing stereotypes of the 'tribes' themselves. A Harare-based stand-up comedian that I interviewed in 2019, for example, has a joke about what it would be like to be robbed by people from different countries and ethnicities, playing with how he would react to a Ndebele person robbing him given that he does not understand the language. However, jokes addressing, unsettling, and reinforcing 'tribal' narratives are not always this explicit. Another Harare-based stand-up comedian, Tanya Sena, known onstage as Tanya Alex, subtly re-invokes 'tribal' narratives in her 2020 stand-up performance at Simuka Comedy's online festival (Sena, 2020, *Simuka Phakama Episodde 1 - Tanya Alex*). In a joke about her take on leadership she plays with narrations of the nation's past that describes former

Ndebele king, Khumalo Lobengula, as a participant in the colonisation of Zimbabwe; he is said by some to have 'sold his country' to the British South Africa Company (Lindgren, 2002, see also Majoni, Whatsapp voice-note, January 22, 2020 quoted in the next section). Amongst Shona families this version of the past has developed into a story about how King Lobengula sold his country for a packet of sugar, a tale which Sena calls upon in her joke:

> "I have come down to a preferred method of leadership. I believe in colonisation… yes, we can all do it! I want to find a man and introduce him to Jesus, so he always has a higher power to answer to [points to herself]. Yes man think about it, stay woke! And then I will give him some sugar for all his land, and then I'll build an army and we will raid, and then we will pillage and take over his property: yes, hey, me and the kids are going to have so much fun. Their poor dad won't even see it coming. He's going to think I'm a peaceful settler until one day all his traditions have changed."
>
> (Sena, 2020, *Simuka Phakama Episodde 1 - Tanya Alex*)

Talking about how she would give her husband sugar for his land Sena plays into narratives of the Zimbabwean past that hold that the Ndebele king is partially responsible for its colonisation by selling the country to the British South Africa Company (see Lindgren, 2002). Looking particularly at two jokes, one by Bulawayo-based comedian Ntando Moyo, and one by Harare-based comedian Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni, known as King Kandoro onstage, this section will argue that although the jokes Zimbabwean stand-up comedians tell do not resist the Shona/Ndebele divide, what they are doing is putting on display the ambivalence of the stories ZANU-PF tell about these 'tribes' in its version of the state autobiography.

Whilst the Shona and the Ndebele 'tribes' are being reproduced as ever-present, with the former as the 'original' people living in Zimbabwe, there is some discussion as to whether this is the case. Gerald Chikozho Mazarire (2009, 2) for example, states that "[the] term [Shona] was not used before the nineteenth century, and even then it was seen as an insult, a term used by one's enemies; no one thought of themselves as 'Shona'." He argues that, in fact, the landmass that today is referred to as Zimbabwe was part of "a large region of broadly similar languages, beliefs and institutions" (Mazarire, 2009, 2). James Muzondidya and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007) describes how 'tribal feeling', and the animosity that is often linked to it can be attributed to Rhodesian colonialism, where hierarchies were constructed based on people belonging to different 'tribes', and the country's territory divided accordingly. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) helps us unpack this explaining how domination under colonialism in the African continent also included indirect rule. An aspect of this type of rule, which was often applied to the "'free' peasantry", was that "tribal leadership was either reconstituted as the hierarchy of the local state, or freshly imposed where none had existed as in the 'stateless societies'" (Mamdani, 1996, 146; see also Ranger, 2019). Looking particularly at South Africa as a case study Mamdani (1996, 150) points to how this division continues to impact politics in the continent, arguing that rural protests are often "framed in the language of ethnicity." The impact of 'tribal' divisions in Zimbabwe was also present in my interviews with stand-up comedians in 2018 and 2019, especially those from Bulawayo who often pointed towards what they perceived as the benefits of being based in Harare particularly in terms of paid performance opportunities.

The division between Shona and Ndebele has come to permeate politics in independent Zimbabwe. ZANU, a party that was linked to the Shona 'tribe', won most

of the parliamentary seats in Zimbabwe's first ever election in 1980 (Bratton, 2016, Mpofu, 2017). PF-ZAPU, which was associated with the Ndebele people, was the second largest party (Bratton, 2016). PF-ZAPU was later absorbed by ZANU to become ZANU-PF, in what is called the Unity Accord 1987 (Bratton, 2016). However, even as ZANU-PF, the emphasis has been put on Shona culture, traditions and practices as the party has attempted to create a party-nation and one-party state (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2009, Willems, 2013, Dorman, 2016). It is from within this environment that ZANU-PF narrates the nation in a way that both emphasises unity and Shona culture (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000, Tendi, 2008, Willems, 2013, Bratton, 2016, Dorman, 2016). This section will be divided into two parts, the first will explore how, what Bhabha refers to as, the time-lag is produced in the meeting of state autobiography and 'tribal' narratives in the country, the second part will then examine how the jokes that stand-up comedians tell interrupt these narratives by highlighting contradictions through a 'repetition with a difference'. Through this discussion it will be concluded that whilst the jokes Zimbabwean stand-up comedians tell do not resist the Shona/Ndebele divide, what they are doing is putting on display the ambivalence of the stories ZANU-PF tell about these 'tribes' in its version of the state autobiography.

The time-lag in Zimbabwean state autobiography

As is true of many states, it has been important to the Zimbabwean state to write itself as a unified country. According to Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008, 28), Robert Mugabe, who was the president until 2017 told Daily News in 2005 that:

> "Zimbabwe is one entity and shall never be separated into different entities. It is
> impossible. I am saying this because there are some people who are saying let's do

what Lesotho did. There is no Lesotho here. There is one Zimbabwe and one

Zimbabwe only."

(Mugabe, in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008, 28).

In August 2019, current President, Emmerson Mnangagwa similarly asked that

Zimbabweans "dedicate ourselves to peace, as violence, tribalism, regionalism and

corruption must be rejected and have no space in the new Zimbabwe […] Zimbabwe

remains a unitary state, full stop" (The Zimbabwe Mail, 2019 – see also The Herald,

2018). In this part of the section, I am going to demonstrate how a time-lag is produced

in the meeting of ZANU-PF narratives about the nation, and 'tribal' narratives,

producing the foundation for Zimbabwean stand-up comedy to interrupt.

The Zimbabwean government has attempted to write the state autobiography of

a homogenous country. Whilst they do not deny the existence of other 'tribes', they

emphasise, particularly, Shona language, practices and culture (Alexander, McGregor

and Ranger, 2000, Tendi, 2008, Willems, 2013, Bratton, 2016, Dorman, 2016). When

Mugabe, during his presidency, visited Matabeleland he would speak Shona, not having

any translator present (Ncube and Siziba, 2017). Indeed, according to Wendy Willems

(2013) Mugabe would also use Shona in his Independence Day speeches as a way to

signal the difference between the in-group (Zimbabwean Shona speakers) and out-group

(people who do not speak Shona). Gibson Ncube and Gugulethu Siziba (2017) have

demonstrated how this Shona hegemony affects artists in the country who feel they have

to perform in Shona in order for their art to be accessible, yield an income, as well as

for them to become recognised. This experience was shared by some of the Bulawayo-

based comedians that I interviewed. In fact, one Bulawayo-based stand-up comedian

told me in an interview in 2019 how he once was informed only minutes before

stepping onstage at Harare International Arts Festival that he could not perform in

Ndebele but had to perform in Shona or English. Another one talked to me about Shona-privilege, and a couple of Bulawayo-based stand-up comedians, as previously mentioned, told me in interviews in 2019 that their perception was of Harare as a city where there are more paid opportunities for comedians.

The idea of a single, unitary Zimbabwe can be uncomfortably contrasted with the simultaneous iteration of 'tribal' identities in the country. Although there are attempts to reconcile ZANU-PF's aims for unity and Shona hegemony, the production of both narratives creates an ambivalence within Zimbabwean state autobiography. ZANU-PF are not alone in producing narratives within the territory referred to as Zimbabwe. Movements such as *Umhlabo WeSizwe SikaMthwakazi* not only oppose the Zimbabwean state but argue in favour of a separate Ndebele state (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008). They reproduce a state autobiography for the Ndebele people as separate from Zimbabwe with the latter as a colonising country (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008). Significant in how these two state autobiographies are produced is the way that the massacre, referred to as *Gukurahundi,* is narrated. *Gukurahundi* was a massacre that occurred in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of Zimbabwe between 1983 and 1987 (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation, 2007, Bratton, 2016, 55). The massacre killed at least 20 000 people and was committed by the North Korean trained, Fifth Brigade, an arm of the government's military (Bratton, 2016). The Fifth Brigade was sent by the government to the region, ostensibly to deal with dissidents (Bratton, 2016). However, they ended-up killing a lot of innocent people and committing atrocities (see Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation, 2007).

The Zimbabwean state has taken two approaches to narrating these events. The first is arguing that the Fifth Brigade went rogue and was not acting on government

instruction (Dorman, 2016). This has been contradicted by a report from the Catholic

Commission for Justice in collaboration with the Legal Resources Foundation (2007)

that indicates that the Zimbabwean state was aware of the Fifth Brigade's actions. The

second approach has been to attempt to erase these events from the country's

autobiography. This was part of a broader re-narration of Zimbabwean history, referred

to as Patriotic History. Blessing-Miles Tendi (2010b, 238-239), highlights how Patriotic

History omits and attempts to silence events which do not fit within ZANU-PF's

version of the state autobiography:

> "Patriotic History is silent on those historical events which are perceived as
>
> detrimental to its attempt to 'unify' Zimbabwe and glorify nationalism. […]
>
> Patriotic History is silent on the *Gukurahundi* and Mhanda narratives, guerrilla
>
> fighters' arbitrary violence against alleged sell-outs in the liberation war period, the
>
> contribution of Ndabaningi Sithole to independence, and the importance of civil
>
> and political rights in the liberation struggle."

As such, Patriotic History exemplifies what Bhabha talks about when he refers to the

time-lags that are produced in the narration of the nation. As explained in chapter 2,

Bhabha (1994) demonstrates how understanding time as not necessarily linear allows

for the possibility of (re)negotiating the meaning of past events in the present. Patriotic

History is an excellent example of such a negotiation, where the Zimbabwean

government attempts to re-write and alter the meaning of the 'past' in 'the present'. In

omitting and threading together a narrative of the country's past, the government is

always going to face inconsistencies. The time-lag that occurs "between the event of the

sign [ie. *Gukurahundi*] and its discursive eventuality [ie. The state autobiography]"

allows for resistance (Bhabha, 1994, 263). David Huddart (2006, 61) eloquently

explains how this resistance comes to be, highlighting the ambivalence produced in the time-lag as the narrative is "not quite one with [itself], and receives uncertain confirmation of [itself] from 'the future'."

Attempts by the Zimbabwean state to silence alternative narrations of, for example, *Gukurahundi*, has extended to the arts. As recently as 2018, the Zimbabwean government put pressure on filmmaker Zenzele Ndebele, intimidating him and bringing him in for police questioning, to avoid the airing of a documentary about the atrocities (Burke, 2018). Whilst I have not been made aware of any such attempts to silence comedians talking about *Gukurahundi* in particular, comedians have told me about how they have been harassed, intimidated and arrested as a result of their comedy, and the only Harare-based stand-up comedian to mention *Gukurahundi* explicitly in their interview with me did so only to tell me that this was one of the topics that the government did not want people to talk about. These risks associated with performing stand-up in Zimbabwe are discussed in further depth in chapter 4.

The government's silence regarding *Gukurahundi* is reflected in most of my interviews with Harare-based stand-up comedians. The following quote from my follow-up interview with Harare-based stand-up comedian Tinaye Chiketa in 2019, is an excellent example of this. Here he speaks about *Gukurahundi* without at any point in the interview mentioning it by name, simply referring to it as 'a sensitive *issue'* (emphasis added):

"That is a sensitive issue for *them,* for the Ndebele people. Yeah, yeah, I can, I have seen comedians joke about that yeah. […] I don't see the funny, or I wouldn't joke about that, for that reason. […] People get offended because they are like a minority, so especially if I go there and ah, I might not come back [laughs]. Sikhayniso [Harare-based comedian from Bulawayo] can come and do… It's like

me coming to the UK and making fun of white people, they might laugh. But if a

white person comes here: 'ehhh slave trade, what, what, ahh.' You know like that

is the story it is all about, it's similar."

(Interview with Chiketa, September 20, 2019).

Whilst Chiketa attempts to side-step talking about *Gukurahundi* he does still speak

about 'tribal' differences. The reference to Ndebele people as '*them*' and 'a minority' is

a striking example of this.

In Bulawayo, on the other hand, stand-up comedians would often talk about

'tribal' differences, and language issues, when telling me about the demography of

audiences. *Gukurahundi* was here referred to as a genocide and is an important part in

how people understand the country's past, present and future, just as Ndlovu-Gatsheni

(2008, see also Lindgren, 2005) has emphasised in his research on Ndebele nationalism.

These multiple co-existing autobiographies, and continuous attempts to narrate the

country's past, opens-up time-lags between the events, and in Bhabha's (1994, 261)

words, their 'discursive eventuality'. Within these time-lags jokes told by stand-up

comedians can disrupt the state autobiography. Next, I will look at how jokes by

Bulawayo-based comedian Ntando Moyo, and Harare-based comedian Mukudzei

Kandoro Majoni, known onstage as King Kandoro, interrupts state autobiographies as

they repeat them with a difference, highlighting these types of ambivalences which

exists in the construction of Zimbabwean-ness.

Leaving Zimbabwe: the king who sold his country for a package of sugar

In my interview with stand-up comedian Ntando Moyo he not only referred to

Gukurahundi as a genocide, but he also describes how people in Bulawayo distanced

themselves from Zimbabwe:

"There is this statement that people say when they are going to Harare from here,
they saying: 'I'm now going to Zimbabwe' […] call someone and they are in
Harare and they are like: […] 'I'm in Zimbabwe right now, I will call you when I
get back"

(Interview with Moyo, October, 24, 2019).

In this statement, Moyo captures how people will co-opt the state narrative of a unified
Zimbabwe and the foregrounding of Shona languages and practices, but then re-
negotiate the meaning by separating Bulawayo from Zimbabwe. In this part of the
section, I am going to look at how such re-interpretation of past events occurs in
Zimbabwean stand-up as comedians repeat state autobiographies with a difference.

In Moyo's 2013 stand-up comedy performance at Bulawayo Theatre, he
explores the complicated relationship between ZANU-PF narratives about a unified
nation, and 'tribal' affiliations through his opening statement:

"Do we have any Ndebele ladies in here? I know we've got Zimbabweans, I know
we have many races, do we have any Ndebele sisters in here?"

(Moyo, 2013)

Moyo's question about whether there are any Ndebele ladies in the audience highlights
the ambivalence of narratives about a unified Zimbabwe. In this statement Moyo enacts
two contradictory narratives as if they were conducive with one another. Ignoring the
tension between the idea of a unified Zimbabwe ('I know we've got Zimbabweans') and
a distinct (separate) Ndebele identity he curiously acts out and draws attention to the
ambivalence of the state narrative. Reading Moyo's opening statement through

Bhabhaian mimicry thus illustrates how he highlights the ambivalence of ZANU-PF narratives of the homogeneous nation, by recognising the existence of a unified *Shona* Zimbabwe, apart from the Ndebele state/kingdom. This is not a rejection of state autobiographies, but rather a play upon different ways in which society is ordered. 'Acting out' state autobiographies through 'repetition with a difference', Moyo interrupts claims to originality and universality by highlighting the contradiction between Zimbabwean state autobiographies, and Ndebele independence - all the while reinforcing the basic trope of the state version of Zimbabwean-ness; that the country is unified.

Similarly, to Moyo, Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni, known as King Kandoro, interrupts state constructions of Zimbabwean-ness by repeating them with a difference. Majoni, who is a Harare-based stand-up comedian, performs the following joke addressing, like Sena at the beginning of this section, a story told by Shona people about the second Ndebele King, Khumalo Lobengula, in 2019. The transcription of the segment below is based on a WhatsApp voice note that Majoni sent to me 22 January 2020 and is a recording of a set that I have watched him perform live during my fieldwork in 2019 (unfortunately I do not have the date of the original performance):

> "ZANU-PF has one of the most powerful things ever, the quality of propaganda that ZANU-PF [chef's kiss]. The quality is just too much! The quality… These days it's a little bit shaky cause there is new guys. Jonathan Moyo [former Minister of Information] days – eeehh! Jonathan Moyo days, that was brilliant! We could export him to the Olympics, that's how good the propaganda was.
>
>   Cause I grew up… one of the things we grew up hearing, and the thing that divided us most, cause we are a divided nation; the Shonas, the Ndebele, the colour- we can never come together because there is propaganda amongst us.

One of the things that I grew up hearing as a Shona kid was, there was a guy called Lobengula who sold this country for a packet of sugar. I'm pretty sure you guys heard it too [audience mm in agreement]. But as I grew up, I started realising, this story it doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense. Because I was sitting alone at home and thinking *kuti* [Shona filler word] – '*nooo, noo.*'

Because even if Lobengula had done that, even if Lobengula had sold the whole country for a packet of sugar – how is that a bad thing? Can you imagine being the only guy with sugar? No, no, no, can you imagine? Can you imagine, the amount of power that you are the only guy drinking *maheu* [local brew made of maize] with sugar. I can't imagine having that level of responsibility. I would be making peoples' wives test - like -'hey come here, come here…' No just to make her understand, just to make you understand, that's like being the only person with electricity right now, that's the level of responsibility. How is that a bad thing?"

(Majoni, WhatsApp voice-note, October 22, 2020).

In this joke Majoni interrogates a story told in Shona families about King Lobengula, to ultimately, in the punchline, question the implication of the tale; that the king was so 'stupid' that he sold the country for a packet of sugar. He does this by re-contextualising stories told about Lobgengula in his joke.

Lobengula is a key figure in state narrations of the country's past as his fate has been tied by historians in different ways to the beginning of colonisation and by some to the end of the Ndebele kingdom (Lindgren, 2002). Molly Patterson and Kristen Renwick Monroe (1998, 322) remind us that a country's history, which is often passed down through the education system is meaningful to how collective identities are constituted; "who we are, where we came from, and how we fit together […] play a significant role in the broader popular culture." The way in which Khumalo Lobengula is narrated in

relation to history is significant to how Zimbabwean-ness is constructed through popular culture, and plays the backdrop to Majoni's joke, as he explains to me in a WhatsApp voice-note:

> "[T]he Lobengula joke it relies mainly on Zimbabwean history which tells us that the people that colonised Zimbabwe entered primarily from Matabeleland. And in Matabeleland there was a king, called King Lobengula. So, John Smith, Moffat, Charles Rudd, some of them they created a friendship first and then they manipulated those friendships into convincing Lobengula into signing concessions and treaties that would allow these guys to come in and mine and not allow anyone else to mine."
>
> (Majoni, Whatsapp voice-note, January 22, 2020)

King Lobengula is here narrated as having been tricked into allowing the colonisation of Zimbabwe. This reduces the important leader of the Ndebele kingdom to someone who was easily manipulated, and the reason Zimbabwe could, eventually, be colonised. This feeds into state autobiographies that emphasise the significance of ZANU-PF and the Shona people to Zimbabwe's independence. In his 2019 set, Majoni interrupts these constructions.

Recalling my discussion of how performativity can resist through Judith Butler's understanding of fantasy as that which "reality forecloses" in chapter 2, I want to suggest that Majoni imagines the world through social ordering, not apart from it. Indeed, Majoni draws on norms, narratives, discourses, and realities in Zimbabwean society to contextualise the Shona story in a different way without altering the basic plot. He does this by re-telling the Shona story that claims that Lobengula sold his country for a packet of sugar, whilst contextualising it in 2019 Zimbabwe. In 2019, the

Zimbabwean government had recently changed the country from being a dollarized economy to using its own currency (Muronzi, 2019a). In August 2019 the IMF was already estimating that the Zimbabwean dollar had an annual inflation of 300%, and rising (Muronzi, 2019b). Prices increased frequently, and in late October 2019 – during my fieldwork – I observed prices in stores changing on a weekly basis, and exchange rates fluctuating daily. There was a lack of electricity in the country, and significant, frequent, and unpredictable load-shedding meant that most households were disconnected from electricity a majority of the day (see also Banya, 2019). This was a situation which led stores to having to alter their opening hours, as a lack of fuel prohibited them from using generators, and solar power is expensive to come by and install (Dzirutwe, 2019). The country's economic and political situation, together with a drought has also led to a lack of food (Munhende, 2020, see also Moyo and Gladstone, 2019).

Majoni's repositioning of Lobengula in modern times allows for a moment of witnessing similar to that which Bhabha (2011) explores in his explanation of the third space which I discuss in chapter 2 as a 'revaluing' of the foundation for difference, and a way in which the subject acts. Through his joke, Majoni, 'meets' and 'witnesses' his childhood story and the actions taken by King Lobengula with a similar curiosity to that with which Bhabha describes how Marlow met the 'native' in Joseph Conrad's book *The Heart of Darkness* (1899). When Majoni finally, in the punchline, asks himself, as much as the audience, why Lobengula's actions are "a bad thing?" he opens up a third space of interrogation; a new interpretation of Lobengula signing over mining rights to the British South Africa Company. This comedic punchline mimics state autobiographies and introduces new perspectives that contain traces of other narratives, but nevertheless are different to them. In these narratives of Zimbabwe, the continued

(present, past and future) existence of 'tribes' appears to be taken for granted. Indeed, what is questioned is not the existence of Shona and Ndebele people, what is questioned is how to understand Zimbabwean history, and identity in relation to this. Specifically, what is interrogated is ZANU-PF's attempts to write the country as one of unity, pushing the importance of Shona language, people and practice. Furthering this discussion, the next section will look at how Wencelacy Katuka, known as Kadem the Comic, finds himself, in a Butlerian way, performing gender anxieties that interrupts patriarchal constructions of the Zimbabwean nation whilst reinforcing heteronormative state autobiographies.

Bluetooth sex, black magic, and homosexual experiences

"We ask was he [Barack Obama] born out of homosexuality? We need continuity in our race, and that comes from the woman, and no to homosexuality. John and John, no; Maria and Maria, no. They are worse than dogs and pigs. I keep pigs and the male pig knows the female one"

(Mugabe, Al Jazeera, 2019a).

This statement by Robert Mugabe from an interview on ZBC radio in 2015 emphasises the importance of heterosexuality for the nation. Homosexuality is perceived as a 'white man's disease' brought to the country through colonisation (Epperecht, 1998). Dismissed as 'un-natural', homosexuality is tied to gendered narratives about women as mothers and carers, and sex as key for reproduction (Youde, 2017). This construction of gender feeds into patriarchal power-relations in the country where women are understood to be subordinate to their male counterparts. I will argue that stand-up comedian Wencelacy Katuka, known as Kadem the Comic, disrupts patriarchal power relations in the country by re-iterating and re-instituting homophobic narratives about

the nation as "not gay" and in doing so highlighting his anxieties about women's position in social ordering.

There are topics in Zimbabwean society that are peculiarly both written and erased from the state autobiography. Examples of these are sex and sexuality which are simultaneously both talked about and silenced in public discussions (see chapter 5). It is in this air of silence on sex and sexuality that an acceptance has developed for publicly condemning homosexuality – something that has been described by Mugabe as 'un-Zimbabwean' (Aarmo, 1999, Al Jazeera. 2019). Mnangagwa, has not made such strong condemnations of homosexuality, however, he has told international press that it is his job to uphold the Zimbabwean constitution which holds that same-sex sexual acts are illegal, and that it is up to others to advocate for change if they wish to do so (Quest and McKenzie, 2018).

Through the public homophobic discussions of Zimbabwe as a nation that is 'not gay', narratives of heterosexuality, and men and women's role in society are also being constructed (see Philips, 2000). Godwin Makaudze (2015, 140-141) ties women's sexuality to larger societal structures and customs, stating that women are viewed as the "weaker sex", understood as belonging "to the man who commands her that she must respect him and satisfy his sexual needs each time he desires because he paid bride wealth [*lobola*]." Molly Manyonganise (2017, 154), who discusses sex and sexuality in relation to HIV/Aids prevention in the country emphasises that the "[d]ominant ideology of femininity in Zimbabwean society casts women in subordinate positions with virginity, chastity, motherhood, moral superiority and obedience as key virtues of the ideal women."

It is from within this context that stand-up comedian Wencelacy Katuka, known as Kadem the Comic, in 2018, made a joke about what would happen if homosexuals

where given access to black magic. The following transcription is made from a WhatsApp voice note sent to me by Katuka on 15 January 2020, I have also watched performances of this joke live:

"So, I learnt at a boys high, Marist Brothers, and you know there was nothing much really to do to the extent that we ended-up playing sports, like spin the bottle, yeah like Tinashe kissed Tendi for two minutes [laughs]. You guys, you know, you guys know that I am joking right? Yeah, it was just 20 seconds. But you know what hey, hey come on I, I, I, I, I don't judge gay people you know, I don't judge gay people, but the thing is you know, I respect Bluetooth, I respect WIFI, including mubobobo [black magic wherein a man has sex with a woman without having any physical contact, also referred to as Bluetooth sex due to the lack of physical contact], yah if you don't know what mubobobo is, it is an African hotspot.

But you know, in as much as I don't hate gay people, I just pray that they will never get hold of mubobobo. Because if they do hey, my brother we are dead! Like dead, dead like hey!

Because imagine you are in a kombi [local commuter bus] you are going home and you are seated, you tired seated next to this guy hmm, then all of a sudden: 'mudhara, yamuri kuita ndeipi [man, what the hell are you doing!?]', and some crazy situation [jumps off seat].

And so, you know that I don't hate gay people don't get me wrong. I actually wish that my son was gay, yeah, yeah, don't judge me! I wish my son was gay, yes in case [someone] ever don't want to return back my money I will just send him to them: 'hey son, you know'."

(Katuka, WhatsApp voice-note, January 15, 2020).

Reading this segment from Katuka's stand-up comedy routine, through Bhabhaian mimicry it becomes evident that he is 'acting out' norms pertaining to sex and sexuality normally ascribed to women in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994). In this joke, Katuka engages with homosexuality and homosexual experiences through mubobobo, a form of black magic where men "obtain magical muti [traditional medicine]" from traditional healers "which enables them to have sexual intercourse with a woman without any physical contact" (van Schalkwyk, 2018, 87). Mubobobo is gendered, in that the victim is generally a woman, the perpetrator most often a man facilitated by a traditional healer (often a woman) who provides the magical muti or juju needed. Samantha van Schalkwyk (2018) has investigated stories about mubobobo told by Zimbabwean women who live in South Africa. Her investigation focuses particularly on Shona women that she engaged with through focus groups (2018, 86-87). She argues that considering that female sexuality is not a topic widely discussed in Zimbabwe mubobobo is a way through which women can "express aspects of [their] sexual subjectivity" (van Schalkwyk, 2018, 94). It can usefully be thought of as "a narrative strategy through which [women] break the moulds of patriarchal power" (van Schalkwyk, 2018, 108). Katuka, in his joke, uses mubobobo in a similar way to these women, speaking about sexual experiences that in other circumstances would be taboo.

The setting that Katuka chooses for his story, a kombi, is a space within which it is well-known that women in Zimbabwe are subject to sexual harassment and violence. When the Zimbabwean state brought back the state-owned buses in 2019, at lower prices than the private kombis, they quickly became overcrowded (Phiri, 2019). A Zimbabwean hairdresser told the Thompson Reuter Foundation that "[t]he buses are crowded, as would be expected, but there are creeps who ride the buses to fondle women […] you just feel a hand feeling you up and then disappearing" (Phiri, 2019) Another

Zimbabwean woman, Maureen Sigauke writes in January 2019 on *CityLab*, an online

news page with the goal of "creating cities for the future", about her journey into town

to buy groceries. She states that "[t]oday, […] I am mostly worried about the harassing

kombi conductors (mawindi) constantly yelling for passengers and at many of the

women walking by." According to Zimbabwean newspaper *DailyNews* (2018), the

national police spokesperson, Charity Charamba spoke at an event organised by Plan

International in late 2018, stating that:

> "The police are aware of random thefts, touting, uncouth conduct by commuter
>
> omnibus [kombi] drivers that pose danger to the general public and affect women
>
> and children in particular, and we are conducting operations to curb such unruly
>
> behaviour."

In 2019, Auxilla Sibanda, an assistant inspector with the Zimbabwe Republic Police

confirmed that rapes and sexual harassment on buses are increasing (Phiri, 2019). In

other words, kombis are a known space in Zimbabwean society where women

experience sexual harassment. Katuka's exploration of what would happen if

homosexuals had access to mubobobo puts on display the reality faced by many women

in Zimbabwean society.

Imagining what it would be like if homosexuals had access to mubobobo,

Katuka's joke parodies claims of fixity in gender norms in the Zimbabwean state

autobiography. Katuka imitates Zimbabwean society in a way that is "*almost the same,*

but not quite" (1994, 122). He reinforces and displays anxieties of homosexuals in

Zimbabwe, and reproduces scenarios faced by women. However, he recontextualises

these narratives; allowing the possibility that the man is the victim of mubobobo;

pondering what it would mean to occupy a space where an 'invisible' perpetrator might

attack you, Katuka "reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone" (Butler, 2004, 29). This parodic recontextualization, an imitation of what is, in an unexpected way, ends up questioning "what is real and what must be" (Butler, 2004, 29).

As such, Katuka's joke appears to arbitrarily highlight fears of having to live in the world that women inhabit in Zimbabwe, where they do not necessarily feel safe in public. The tension, and ambivalence, between male acceptance of this reality for women, but fear of it being their own is what is articulated, enacted and highlighted through this segment of Katuka's stand-up comedy set. This ambivalence in the narrative construction of women's role in Zimbabwean society, as opposed to men's, is highlighted by a female stand-up comedian to me in an interview in 2018:

"They [she is speaking particularly about black men] will pretend like they don't understand consent and then once you introduce a homosexual man into it, they are like: 'oh, no, no, no.' Suddenly it is important that I never led you on, suddenly they understand the fact that it is not about what you wear, suddenly [they] understand the fact that you need to ask for consent, but when it is about us, they are like: 'well oh you know these things are just natural', and I'm like 'well it's still natural if you are gay'."

This disruption of gender roles, through the acknowledgment of anxieties about women's position in social ordering in the country is significant to state autobiographies in Zimbabwe. Women's place in the Zimbabwean social ordering is contested. Deborah S. Ballard-Reisch, Paaige K. Turner and Marcia Sarratea (2001, 70) remind us that "[t]he struggle for independence as constructed by President Mugabe over twenty years ago embodied claims that 1) liberation for Zimbabwe meant reclaiming traditional

African values and 2) liberation was co-determinate with the emancipation of women."
Sita Rachod-Nilsson (2006) argues that calls for women's emancipation that became
part of ZANU's party programme towards the end of the independence struggle
probably stems from dealing with sexual abuse in the liberation group's camps, where
women were involved in the fight for independence, amongst other things, as
combatants. She also points out that calls for women's liberation where not without
ambiguities, and differing experiences across liberation groups and camps meant that
there was not clear agenda once independence had been reached in 1979. Women's
position in Zimbabwean society has thus been both contested and imagined in different
ways.

Whilst Katuka's joke is deeply homophobic, and both indulges in, and
reinforces anti-gay sentiments in the country, it simultaneously, in the way that it
marries different narratives, enacts the ambivalence inherent in the stories the
Zimbabwean government tells about women. This is done through a parodic
recontextualization of different narratives, where Katuka acts out his anxieties of
women's role in Zimbabwean society. This demonstrates, how even when Zimbabwean
stand-up comedy is deeply reinforcing, the uncertainty of narratives allows jokes to, in
Alan Sinfield's (2000, 105) words, "[play] back the dominant manner in a way that
discloses the precariousness of its authority." Enacting his anxieties about women's
place in society, Katuka is able to unsettle the state autobiography, by questioning the
fixity of gender norms in society.

Messing with matters of state

Zimbabwe is actively in the process of constructing its state autobiography. Julia
Gallagher (2017, 153) reminds us that "[b]ecause [many African states are] new,

because collective selfhoods are uncertain and in flux, with tensions and anxieties much closer to the surface, an African state might be particularly active in its search for a sense of self and other." This can be seen in Zimbabwe, where the ZANU-PF government has actively engaged in the construction of national identity through what has been termed Patriotic History, including propaganda campaigns, such as those seen in the early 2000s when the Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo composed jingles, and drew on pre-existing historical narrations to justify the land reform program. This, sometimes more visible, search for self-identity does not make Zimbabwe "exceptional in how or why it does this […] [but] instructive for an exploration of state subjectivity more generally" (Gallagher, 2017, 153).

In the process of putting together a funny joke, comedians play with the narratives that constitute society, managing to draw attention to their ambivalence. Homi K. Bhabha reminds us that all modern nations are constructed in an ambivalent manner, their claims to consistent histories and ever-present existence are contrasted by the evolving nature of society. In Zimbabwe such narratives can be found in relation to 'tribalism' and sexuality, the former a construction that is so ingrained that most people take it for granted, and the latter a complicated narrative landscape where silence meets public discussions and taboos. Applying the theoretical approach outlined in chapter 2, I have shown that jokes told by stand-up comedians, whilst sometimes iterating societal narratives, are able to subvert the state autobiography. Enacting the ambivalence of state narratives, in different ways, these jokes interrupt official constructions of Zimbabwean-ness, not by opposing it, but rather through a repetition that draws upon the ambiguities of social ordering, embracing the messiness of stand-up comedy. Exploring this further, the next chapter will turn from state autobiographies towards both state and societal constructions of the national subject. Recognising the limitations

put on peoples' freedom of expression it will illustrate how stand-up comedy can interrupt constructions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean subject through articulations of the everyday.

Chapter 4 Interrupting the everyday: the state, citizens and constructing a national subject

The exploration in this thesis of how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically continues in this chapter by looking at how the genre interrupts both state and societal constructions of the 'authentic' national subject. Julia Gallagher (2017, 100-101) who has investigated international relations through peoples' imagination of the state in the country explains that: "Zimbabwe's population is diverse, comprising groups whose members speak several languages and see themselves as ethnically different, some expressing close affinity to people on the far side of the country's border with whom they share cultural linguistic and historical ties." Speaking to these diverse belongings in the country, Gallagher (2017, 101) points out that Zimbabweans have experienced "tough economic conditions and political divisions [and that] sometimes it is difficult to know how to be Zimbabwean in such conditions." In this context, the governing party, ZANU-PF, has played an active role in attempting to construct an 'authentic' national subject. Since the country's inception in the 1980s the party has made moves towards a Zimbabwe that is a one-party state and party nation; equating party-support and national belonging (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009, Siziba and Ncube, 2015, Dorman, 2016). Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) describes how President Robert Mugabe exacerbated divisions in the country through his rhetoric where he implemented a Manichean distinction between those who belonged, supporters of ZANU-PF, and those who did not, opposition supporters and co-conspirators with 'Western' imperialist nations. This rhetoric, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009, 1140) "enabled a politics of exclusion of a large number of people from the nation and the authorisation of violence against those who were written out of the nation." My discussion of *Gukurahundi* in chapter 3 captures a situation where the state attempted to

use this type of rhetoric to authorise violence. In this chapter I will explore both state and societal narratives addressing what it means to be Zimbabwean. I will focus on how the national subject is articulated thematically in narratives that construct Zimbabwe both in terms of a one-party nation, and by structuring society patriarchally. Discussing these themes through interview material and excerpts from stand-up comedy shows I will argue that by turning the genre into an autobiographical performance form, comedians are able to interrupt social ordering, enacting the ambivalence of monolithic narratives of the national subject.

It is significant that stand-up comedy in Zimbabwe has become a space of self-expression and autobiography. Although the Zimbabwean constitution guarantees peoples' freedom of expression, and freedom of artistic expression, in practice censorship, and self-censorship is widespread (see Ncube and Siziba, 2017). Many of the stand-up comedians that I talked to told me how they had been harassed, intimidated and arrested for making fun of the 'wrong' political party, policy or person. To legitimise such intervention the Zimbabwean state relies on a set of laws that infringes upon peoples' freedom of expression (see also Thram, 2006a, Dorman, 2016, Siziba and Ncube, 2017). These include the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act (1967), the Law and Order Maintenance Act (1998), and the Public Order and Security Act (2002) – which together regulate peoples' artistic expression, right to assemble, and increase police powers. To add to this, in 2002, the Zimbabwean government made it illegal to undermine the authority of, or insult, the president.[18] These laws are all regulated by the feared Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) whose confidential informants roam the street, meaning you do not know who to trust – people have been arrested for what they have said in commuter buses and in family WhatsApp group chats (Willems, 2010).

---

[18] See footnote 2

Within this context, where freedom of expression is severely limited, and peoples' speech acts are under constant surveillance, the fact that stand-up comedy appears to embolden people to speak out in front of a crowd is unusual and significant.

Drawing on the theoretical approach outlined in chapter 2, specifically Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity, I am going to interrogate the construction of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean in relation to narratives that produce the country as a one-party nation and a patriarchal society. Drawing particularly on interview material, and looking at segments from stand-up comedy shows, I will demonstrate how by performing themselves onstage, stand-up comedians highlight narrative contradictions and enact the ambivalence of state and societal construction of national belonging. To make this argument, I will begin by highlighting the risks of being a comedian in Zimbabwe where people have been harassed, arrested and abducted as a result of their comedy (see Mahomed, 2018, Burke 2019a, Moyo, 2019). I will show that aware of these risks, Zimbabwean stand-up comedians feel emboldened to speak out onstage, and that this has allowed the genre to transform into an autobiographical performance form. I will then turn to the state's construction of an 'authentic' Zimbabwean, illustrating how the national subject is viewed in binary terms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, Willems, 2013). Looking at stand-up comedy sequences from Wencelacy Katuka, known as Kadem the Comic, and Munyaradzi Guramatunhu, known as Munya, I will demonstrate how being themselves onstage they add nuance and complexity to the states' Manichean narratives. Finally, in the third section, I turn to the construction of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean in regard to gender. Exploring the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society, I argue that stand-up comedy is able to interrupt such productions by 'acting out' contradictory narratives of femininity and artistry. I demonstrate how female stand-up comedians in Zimbabwe 'act out' both the

'rebellious' artist and the (submissive) decent woman (Chitauro *et al,* 1994, Chitando and Mateveke, 2012, Manyonganaise, 2017, van Schalkwyk, 2018), in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994). Emboldened to be themselves onstage stand-up comedians intervene politically by repeating both state and societal notions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean with a difference - highlighting other ways of being in the nation.

Looking for kryptonite

Despite severe limits to freedom of expression and a difficult economic situation comedy in Zimbabwe continues to grow. As expressed by Zimbabwean artist Samm Farai Monro, also known as Comrade Fatso, comedy in the country is "quite unique even […] in the arts industry in Zimbabwe, in terms of managing to speak truth to power [in] a very tight controlled political context and also managing to still thrive in a completely dis-functioning economy" (interview with author, October 19, 2018). Moreover, stand-up has grown in Zimbabwe. Whereas Edgar Langeveldt (2000) claims to have been the only stand-up comedian in the early 2000s, in 2018 there were over 20 stand-up comedians in Harare and regular monthly comedy shows; and a year later Simuka Comedy had registered as a company in the country managing a growing number of comedians. At the same time, in Bulawayo when I visited in 2019 there was already two stand-up comedy clubs operating in the city. Looking at how the genre has evolved in Zimbabwe I will, in this section, show how stand-up has developed into an autobiographical performance form, demonstrating that despite an awareness of the risks, comedians feel emboldened to be themselves onstage.

To be a stand-up comedian in Zimbabwe is not without consequence. Several of the stand-up comedians that I talked to had been intimidated, harassed and arrested as a result of their comedy (see also Monro, 2015, Burke, 2018, Mahomed, 2018 Burke,

2019, Moyo 2019). In the first nine months of Emmerson Mnangagwa's presidency at least four comedians were arrested (Moyo, 2019). In February 2019, comedians Samantha Kureya, known as Gonyeti, and Sharon Chideu, known as Magi were brought into Harare Central Police station and charged a fine for criminal nuisance in relation to a 2016 comedy skit that they had posted online (Sharon Chideu, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 28, 2019 – see also BBC, 2019, AllAfrica, 2019). In the satirical skit Kureya is wearing a costume that the police argued resembled one of their uniforms and acts out a scene where she is beating people by the road, whilst Chideu speaks to the camera about how 'Western imperialists' have created false videos of police violence (Allafrica, 2019). In August 2019, another incident occurred when Kureya was abducted from her home at gunpoint. She was beaten, stripped naked, forced to drink sewage and left at the side of the road (Burke, 2019). Talking to a source close to her a couple of months after the abduction I was told that Kureya had also been ordered to perform military exercises the way that 'they', the abductors, would usually do - something that had led people close to her to assume the abductors were either police or military personnel. These types of incidents are not new. Indeed, they were common during the Mugabe-era (see also, Monro, 2015). Although a brief reprieve following his removal in November 2017 had people hoping that this was the start of a freer society, this has not been the case (Mahomed, 2018).

Despite the risks involved with being a stand-up in Zimbabwe several of the comedians that I interviewed reported feeling emboldened onstage - as if in those moments they were untouchable. Chideu, prior to her February 2019 arrest, and the August 2019 abduction of her co-star, described the sensation of stepping onto stage, in an interview with me, like "wearing a superman costume and the only thing that can get you is kryptonite, and by now you are like: 'ah, there is no kryptonite here'" (Sharon

Chideu, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 10, 2018). Continuing to describe this sensation she highlights how onstage she will joke about matters that she would not address in her day-to-day life:

> "You can talk about your sex-life onstage, like straight-up, your mum could be sitting
> in the audience but you're like: 'I'm onstage, I'm working' - that's that [laughs].
> And also, I'm like: 'You don't really know if I'm telling the truth or if I'm lying.'
> You'd be like: 'ah its stand-up comedy'. But yeah, there is an element of truth in
> there. Politics as well, you, you can joke about politics. [W]hen you're not on stage
> you […] start talking in hushed tones, […] you're worried about who's listening.
> But onstage you're shouting it out […] so yeah, that's what happens. It's different,
> stage and off-stage. You get this bravado from nowhere, once you're off its gone."
>
> (Sharon Chideu, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 10, 2018)

Following the incidents in 2019, Chideu's tone had altered slightly. Re-interviewing her at the end of October that year, she explained that comedy was how she made money and supported her family - and that stopping was not an option as it would render her unemployed. Further she highlighted the importance of not "letting them [the government] win" and argued that these situations provided good source material for her comedy. Her perseverance, and boldness is evident watching her perform - in a set in October 2019, only a couple of months after Kureya's abduction she is onstage making fun of the incident and her own fears as they relate to it.

The emboldened feeling described by Chideu and other comedians can be traced back to them having some level of control. A quote from my interview with stand-up comedian Brian Mafuso on October 13, 2018 captures this in relation to the risk of arrest

experienced by Zimbabwean stand-up comedians. He argues that as a comedian he has the opportunity to manage the risks by choosing how he addresses an issue:

> "I mean there, there are moments, even especially politically wise, there are things that you can say: 'ah nah this one is messing up no.' But on stage you can have a kind way of saying it, you wouldn't necessarily like put it blank because sometimes, you know, you get concerned about like - 'oh today I think I really want to sleep in my bed, I don't want to get arrested and everything'."

The type of indirection that Mafuso speaks about here is common in Zimbabwean stand-up. I was told by several comedians that this was a way in which they could mitigate the risks of performing. As Sara Rich Dorman (2017, 3) has explained: "Paradoxically the regime's seemingly fetishistic adherence to legal mechanisms also provided a space for contestation, which in later years would prove to be remarkably effective." In other words, being able to say that your joke was not about Robert Mugabe, or Emmerson Mnangagwa but your uncle or old relative could get you out of trouble, as could imitating them without using their name, as this allowed the comedian to claim innocence in relation to the law.

Apart from having a level of control, being onstage also involves a rush. As one stand-up comedian explained to me after a show, and I paraphrase, he felt invincible, like nothing could touch him and he wanted to get back onstage immediately. This feeling is further explained by Philip Auslander (1993, 317) who reminds us that comedy is "inextricably linked to social power and dominance." This holds true for stand-up, even those that describe the genre as a dialogue with the audience will agree that the comedian has more control of their set than the audience (Quirk, 2010). The comedian picks the topics discussed, decides on the premises and perspectives that will

be considered and in other ways 'manipulate' the situation, for example, simplifying certain issues (Quirk, 2010). The comedian's power is further enhanced by the use of a microphone. As, mentioned in chapter 1, Ian Brodie (2016) has highlighted how the comedian's voice, through the microphone, overpowers that of the audience. Stand-up comedy thus affords the comedian a certain type of power, even if ever so briefly.[19]

This feeling of empowerment has had important consequences for stand-up comedy as a genre in Zimbabwe. It has allowed it to develop into an autobiographical performance where it is almost expected that you speak about yourself. Several of the stand-up comedians that I interviewed in Zimbabwe made the point that stand-up comedy was a space for self-expression - to tell humorous stories from the comedian's life. This way of approaching stand-up comedy was also taught to students at Simuka Comedy Academy (a free Friday school where youths are taught stand-up comedy). Attending classes during my fieldwork in 2019 I was taught that a stand-up comedian makes fun of their own experiences. As homework we were told to observe *Mawindi* (conductors of local commuter buses – kombis) or street vendors and write a joke based on our own experiences. When one of the students asked if he could joke about being married, the immediate response was only if he was himself married. Drawing on your own experiences is seen as a way to both make your comedy unique and more relatable. Stand-up comedian Ian Phiri explained this to me in an interview in 2018, telling me how more experienced comedians had mentored him after one of his first shows:

> "[They told me:] 'okay what you are doing is nice, you are creative, and you are a
> bit intellectual, but what we want you to do is stop being American, be Ian Phiri.'
> That's when [I] started having a different perception towards stand-up comedy[,] I

---

[19] I will explore further how stand-up facilitates discussions of topics that are silenced normally in chapter 5, discussing some of the tools that allows the comedian to approach sensitive topics.

started being analytical about what they were saying, [and] I learnt stand-up

comedy is self-expression[;] everything else has been done except your life. And

then I started, eh, bringing my […] own life experiences into my stand-up comedy

and, uhm, my own observations like my political view, everything like, I was, I

didn't have any fear."

(Interview with author, October 20, 2018).

The move towards stand-up comedy as a site of self-expression is facilitated by the

genre's tendency to operate as if the stories told onstage are autobiographical.

Attempting to define the genre, Oliver Double (2014, 19-20) has highlighted how stand-

up involves putting a comedian on "display in front of an audience, whether that person

is an exaggerated comic character, or a version of the performers own self." Talking

about her own experiences as a stand-up, academic Joanne R. Gilbert (1997) underlines

Double's argument. Gilbert explains how during her time as a stand-up comedian in

New York in the 1980s club owners would tell her that she had too happy a childhood to

be a stand-up comedian. This, according to Gilbert (1997, 317) was another way of

saying that she "was not performing enough autobiography." What both these scholars

do, that many stand-up comedians that I interviewed in Zimbabwe did not, was to talk

about the comic persona as *a version* of themselves, or as a comic persona apart from

the self that is performed as if it is your identity. Indeed, in Zimbabwe, most of the

comedians I interviewed argued that they aimed to be truly themselves onstage.

The reason that stand-up comedians in Zimbabwe gave me for being themselves

onstage was that it facilitated a comedy performance where the material is original,

relevant and funny. To explain this, in my 2018 interview with Chideu she referred to

the cholera outbreak that had been in Harare that year, telling me how many comedians

were making the same joke - "have you heard about the recent cholera outbreak, it's a

shitty situation." However funny this may be the first time, Chideu points out that after a while it will get repetitive. A comedian that talks about their own experiences of the cholera outbreak will avoid this, as no one else will have exactly the same take on it. Adding on to this, Sikhanyiao Mlambo (interview with author, October 17, 2018), known as Cknayniso Dat Guy, a stand-up comedian and teacher at the Simuka Comedy Academy, told me that a good way to ensure that local audiences would not compare you to international talent was to draw on your own experiences - setting yourself apart. Further to this, to experienced stand-up comedian Victor Mpofu, known was Doc Vikela, this was a question of professionalism, and making sure that you do not steal other peoples' jokes. Again, your own experiences, it was argued, will always be unique (interview with author, October 12, 2018). Mentoring one another, Zimbabwean stand-up comedians have thus developed the genre into an autobiographical performance form, and one of the few spaces in the nation where people feel emboldened to be themselves and express their opinions in front of a crowd. In the next section I will look at how performing themselves like this, stand-up comedians disrupt state notions of what it means to be Zimbabwean. To do this I will particularly explore the construction of an 'authentic' Zimbabwean in relation to the conflation of party, state and nation.

My party, my nation

The Zimbabwean government articulates a narrow, yet complicated, view of what it means to be a national in the country (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, Willems, 2013). In the early 1980s ZANU was making moves towards transforming the multi-party nation into a one-party state (Dorman, 2016). Although they did not manage to legally implement this policy (see Dorman, 2016), as noted by Guguletu Siziba and Gibson Ncube (2015, 523) "Zimbabwe has since the 1980s been a one-party state simulating multiparty

structures and rituals." The implications of this are also visible in how ZANU and later ZANU-PF (following the Unity Accord 1987) produces Zimbabwean-ness and the Zimbabwean subject. Here, the narrow view of party and state as one and the same extends to the nation - meaning that to be a patriotic citizen is also to be a supporter of ZANU/ZANU-PF (Willems, 2013). All of this is perhaps most evident looking at the early 2000s, when ZANU-PF was facing opposition from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC); a party, which in the elections in the early 2000s was challenging ZANU-PF's claim to power, holding only one percentage less seats in parliament after the 2002 elections (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). At this point in time, ZANU-PF was making several moves to control who was legally a citizen, as well as who was narrated as part of the nation (Dorman, 2016). However, the government's attempt to create Zimbabwean-ness through binary rhetoric has not always been successful. Indeed, Julia Gallagher (2015) in her exploration of the 2013 election, won by ZANU-PF, has explained that having lived with the Government of National Unity (a compromise where ZANU-PF and MDC governed together) the electorate in Zimbabwe moved away from viewing the political landscape through polarisation towards ambivalence. The MDC was no longer perceived as the ultimate 'Other' to ZANU-PF after having been in government. Zimbabweans during the 2013 election and its aftermath, in Gallagher's (ibid., 47) words:

> "did not feel neutral or indifferent to what party rules them, or the kind of state they expected from it. Rather, Zimbabweans, in a moment of critical national introspection, appear to recognise that they have chosen a form of state that embodies the instrumentalism of violent prebendalism and patronage, and a welfare state that understands and embodies collective identity. It is a 'good' state and a 'bad' state."

Looking at how ZANU-PF was constructing the 'authentic' Zimbabwean through the conflation of nation and state I will explore how stand-up comedians interrupt social ordering by performing themselves and their experiences onstage in a way that highlights the ambivalence of the government's monolithic narratives.

In the early 2000s ZANU-PF was making several moves to secure who was to count as part of the nation's citizenry. Legally, they were introducing amendments to the Citizenship Act making it more difficult to renounce foreign citizenships in order to keep Zimbabwean nationhood. It was illegal, at the time to hold dual (or multiple) citizenships (Dorman, 2016). Making these legal changes, according to Sara Rich Dorman (2017, 150), "was […] highly significant in creating and reinforcing ideas about 'outsiders' and foreigners versus 'authentic' and 'patriotic' Zimbabweans", as well as regulating who could legitimately participate in the 'political life' of the nation. As James Muzondidya (2004, 221) has argued:

"in the few definitions of nationalism and constructions of citizenship that were proposed in the post-independence period, it was apparent that subject minorities [such as descendants of immigrants from neighbouring countries and mixed-race people] were not viewed as part of the post-colonial state."

This was true also of white Zimbabweans, whom, as Gallagher (2017) has pointed out came to represent, in Mugabe's rhetoric, the foreign (British) 'Other' on the inside. Indeed, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) explains that at this time "[c]itizenship was redefined in nativist terms that excluded white races."

Rhetorically, Mugabe was thus further dividing the country into binary categories. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009, 1140), Mugabe's speeches set out

nationhood in terms of party membership: "Those who had voted for the MDC became categorised as traitors, sell-outs, puppets and enemies of Zimbabwe. Only those who voted for and belonged to the ruling [ZANU-PF] qualified as patriots and 'authentic' national subjects." Wendy Willems (2013, 23), similarly points to this black and white approach to national belonging stating that ZANU-PF "[mediated] their official version of the nation that defined 'Zimbabwean-ness' in terms of everything that the MDC was not - as a historically revolutionary, black, rural nation." Indeed, Gallagher (2017, 39) has highlighted how "Mugabe's rhetoric and policy attempted to purge political social relations of heterogeneity and to establish coherence around a simplified and ideologized Zimbabwean identity." This construction of Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans took place in the re-writing of history, political speeches, national day celebrations, as well as through arts, music and televised propaganda (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 2009, Tendi, 2010b, Willems, 2013). Blessing-Miles Tendi (2010b) has illustrated how the government used public intellectuals as a way to institute their version of past, present and future.

A key division in this construction of belonging in Zimbabwe was that between patriots and sell-outs. This distinction can be traced back to colonial Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and the liberation struggle (Tendi, 2010b). The term 'sell-out' was at this point used to refer to those who were part of, or cooperated with, the colonial settler state (Tendi, 2010b). Gallagher (2017, 38) has highlighted the significant role of the British as the ultimate 'Other' in this narration, pointing out that "Mugabe conflated 'sellouts' or 'outsiders' with foreignness, and in particular the British." Whilst who counts as a 'sell-out' has altered throughout the years, at different points referring to, for example, the colonial state, ZAPU, ZANU, and/or the Ndebele people, the binary distinction between the two categories, whomever belongs to them, remains – and was

135

further re-invoked in ZANU-PF's rendition of Patriotic History (Tendi, 2010b).

Addressing this distinction within Patriotic History, Tendi (2010b, 154) captures its

significance to ZANU-PF and their claims to legitimacy:

> "To be typecast as ['sell-outs', 'puppets', 'un-African' and 'pro-colonial'] is to be
>
> rendered 'illegitimate', 'alien' and a saboteur of revolutionary *Chimurenga*
>
> principles defined by ZANU PF. This evokes a 'state of emergency' for ZANU PF,
>
> in which extra legal means and political violence against 'counter-revolutionary'
>
> elements is 'legitimate'. To be cast as a 'sell-out' is to lose one's right to
>
> Zimbabwean citizenship. It is to lose the right to one's heritage."

Whilst nuances have changed, with new President Emmerson Mnangagwa, for example,

appealing to white farmers for support in the election – including them again into

national belonging – the divisionary rhetoric of the early 2000s continues to have effect

(BBC, 2018, Deutsche Welle, 2018). Fred Muvunyi writing for *Deutsche Welle* in

August 2020 captures Mnangagwa's divisionary rhetoric. Talking about political

opponents and protestors he is said to have "warned that he would 'flush out' the people

he called 'bad apples' who have attempted to divide Zimbabweans and weaken the

country's system." This is not an isolated incident, in 2015, Mnangagwa is said to have

addressed a crowd of people in the Midlands telling them that "we have come to cleanse

you of the sins of the MDC." In the article Muvundyi (2020) quotes Vanguard Africa's

(a non-profit pro-democracy initiative) director Jeffery Smith as having pointed out that

"This sort of incendiary rhetoric may seem shocking, but in fact it's the norm for

Mnangagwa well before he was president."

The construction of this restricted view of what it means to be Zimbabwean, as

divided along the lines of party-membership, is interrupted by stand-up comedy. Indeed,

performing their identities and experiences onstage, stand-up comedians are able to provide alternative ideas about what it means to be an 'authentic' Zimbabwean. In the following joke, by Wencelacy Katuka, known as Kadem the Comic, he blurs the lines between the governing party, and the opposition by performing a persona that appears to belong to both parties and neither at once:

> "So you know what, I did a joke on Morgan Tsvangirai [former leader of MDC], and then he passed on the same day. It was scary.
>
> I did a joke on Winnie Mandela, she passed on two days later [pause] I'm telling the truth!
>
> So tonight, I just want to do some Emmerson Mnangagwa [current president] jokes, just to see what will happen to him [anticipated laughter].
>
> Ey, ey, ey, I just did that joke to expose the MDC! So the CIOs [Central Intelligence Officers], everyone who laughed, that's MDC for you."

> (Wencelacy Katuka, WhatsApp voice-note, 2 December, 2019).

In this joke Katuka iterates a person that does not fit in the government's construction of the 'authentic' national subject. He is first a sell-out insinuating that he wants Mnangagwa dead, and then also patriot helping to weed out the conspirators of the MDC. He is difficult to categorise because he mimics, in a Bhabhaian sense, state autobiographies, repeating them with a difference, highlighting their ambivalence and begging the question - what about those that are not either, or, but neither?

However, stand-up comedy does not have to be this explicitly party political to interrupt government constructions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean. Through their

autobiographical stories, stand-up comedians iterate another possible version of the national subject, that whilst connected to party politics does not explicitly address it. This can be seen in Munyaradzi Guramatunhu's 2019 set, particularly a segment where she speaks about a trip she made to Europe. In the segment Guramatunhu uses several examples to explain the bizarre in what has become 'normal' in Zimbabwe, including how in the country if you are having problems with electronic transfer at a store you can make a 'deal' with the person behind you in the queue. This, Guramatunhu realised, was not the case in Europe. Attempting to 'deal' with the person behind her in the queue in France, instead of finding a solution, she was given a look as if to say: "*I don't speak poor.*" In another example, Guramatunhu tells the audience about a crush that she had on the trip. To overcome the language barrier between her and her crush she decided that they could connect via "the universal language of music." Guramatunhu describes how she had saved an adapter that you could insert into your music device and then connect two headphones to it. The only problem was, she needed a second pair of headphones to connect to it, and so she asked people on the bus if they had a spare. In the punchline of the joke Guramatunhu captivatingly recounts how everyone on the bus turned to look at her with airpods in their ears as if to say "*I don't speak poor.*" Repeating how during the trip she is faced by people looking at her as if to say "*I don't speak poor*", Guramatunhu carves out Zimbabweans as 'Other' from Europeans; a narrative that is not controversial to the government who often places 'Westerners' as a malevolent other through which to see the self (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013 – see also Christiansen, 2009, Gallagher 2017).

Rather than ascribing blame though, Guramatunhu draws on this comparison to look at social ordering in Zimbabwe differently. Through this comparison she articulates the 'authentic' Zimbabwean, allowing the audience to question, in Butler's words "what is real, and what must be" (2004, 29). The 'authentic' Zimbabwean, in Guramatunhu's

joke, is not defined by who they vote for, instead, they are defined by having a certain set of experiences and skills, which, to utilise her own term, is equated elsewhere with *'speaking poor'*. Defining Zimbabwean identity in this way, Guramatunhu subtly unsettles the link between national belonging and party politics. Mimicking, in a Bhabhaian sense, state narratives of the 'Western' 'Other', and performing experiences from her day-to-day life, she displays a version of Zimbabwean identity that is not aligned with domestic politics, instead it is related to having a set of experiences that people foreign to the country might not. Guramatunhu's set thus speaks within social ordering and through government narratives, interrupting them by letting them interact with her everyday experiences.

Attempting to divide the nation into those who belong, supporters of ZANU-PF, and those who do not, supporters of MDC and their 'Western' co-conspirators, the government narrative disregards nuances and complexities within Zimbabwean society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). These nuances are brought to the fore as Zimbabwean stand-up comedians perform themselves, and their experiences onstage. Feeling emboldened to talk about what they have been through stand-up comedians interrupt the monolithic construction of the national subject articulating, in not so many words, other ways of being in the nation. As such, Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes into social ordering in the country, by, telling stories from their day-to-day lives. Through these stories they repeat state and societal norms, narratives and discourses with a difference – divulging their ambivalence – and as such interrupting the construction of Zimbabwean-ness. Next, I will explore how stand-up comedy interrupts constructions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman.

Rebelling against the patriarchy

Zimbabwean women are constructed in society as subordinate to men.[20] Chipo Hungwe (2006, 42) describes the ideal Ndebele and Shona women as "self-effacing, restrained in [their] public behaviour, family-oriented and caring towards [their] male partner and relatives." Jane Parpart (2008) captures how this perception of Zimbabwean women translates to politics in the country. Looking at masculinities in Zimbabwe, she explains how despite women's active role in the liberation struggle, they were still cast as those who should be 'protected', whereas men were seen as the 'protectors'. These patriarchal gender narratives, it is argued by Lene Bull Christiansen (2009, 177), continues to feature in *Third Chimurenga* discourse where: "public figures, especially politicians, have had to perform gendered identities that relate to their role in the country's history, most notably the liberation struggle, in order to gain legitimate authority." The impact on political narratives on Zimbabweans everyday life has been highlighted by Marjoke A. Oostreom (2019) exploring how youth in the rural district of Murewa are affected by the repressive environment in the country. Oostreom (2019, 507) points out that:

> "social navigation by youth in Murewa was informed by their embodied knowledge of 'politicized youth'. This in itself was a product of their regime's strategies for consolidating its power; the ways in which it has contributed to constructions of youth as violent as well as 'born-frees' and 'sell-outs'."

Godfrey Maringira (2016) has similarly highlighted how the repressive environment in Zimbabwe affects peoples' everyday life and choices. Exploring the Zimbabwean military through life-history interviews and focus groups with soldiers Maringira (2016)

---

[20] I discussed gender in relation to sexual harassment in chapter 3, and will discuss gender further in relation to sex-talk in chapter 5. In both chapters I also discuss patriarchal gender norms.

illustrates how soldiers also in their day-to-day lives in the barracks were expected to support ZANU-PF. Thus, capturing further how peoples' everyday lives are affected by political narratives, and the repressive environment in the nation. Following from this, this section looks at how narratives of the 'submissive Zimbabwean woman' meet notions of the 'rebellious' artist, I will argue that female stand-up comedians' 'act out' both roles with a difference, performing them in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994). In doing so, I will demonstrate how female stand-up comedians interrupt patriarchal power-relations in Zimbabwe.

Patriarchal gender norms are ingrained in Zimbabwean political life. Blessing-Miles Tendi (2016) outlines this in his discussion of Joice Mujuru's bid for presidency in Zimbabwe. He examines how gendered surveillance practices were used to delegitimise Mujuru by Military Intelligence Leadership supporting Mnangagwa as the person who should take over ZANU-PF after Mugabe. Claims were made to have footage of Mujuru naked and performing witchcraft (a gendered practice in Zimbabwe) against Mugabe (Tendi, 2016). The patriarchal nature of politics in Zimbabwe is further captured in discussions about, and framing of, actions taken, both by former first lady Grace Mugabe, and, at the time of writing, current first lady Auxilla Mnangagwa in the transition of power between their husbands (Dendere, 2018). Grace Mugabe, who had showed political intentions during her husband's regime, was depicted as his downfall, smeared on national TV, at the same time as it was quickly announced that Auxilla Mnangagwa would step down from her political positions and focus on being 'the mother of the nation' (Dendere 2018). This demonstrates how views of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman as submissive to men oppresses attempts at claiming (political) power by women.

These patriarchal gender norms also affect the performance arts. In Zimbabwe the performance arts are generally seen as men's purview. An exception has been made for performances in church where women are invited to join in. This, Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri (2011) believes, is due to the spaces in which performance arts takes place - bars for example are understood as a male space and dangerous to women (stand-up comedy in Harare during my fieldwork in 2018 and 2019 predominantly took place in theatre spaces rather than bars). Ezra Chitando and Pauline Mateveke (2012, 43) contextualise the relative absence of women in the arts in Zimbabwe, stating that:

> "Given the patriarchal control of women, it is not surprising that Zimbabwean women have found it difficult to pursue careers in the arts. The sharp distinction between decent, married women (*madzimai*) and 'prostitutes/loose women' (Chimhundu 1995, 151) has prevented many talented women from venturing into the arts […] women who venture into entertainment industry are regarded as dangerous because they dare to access spaces that are defined as masculine."

Moreblessings Chitauro, Caleb Dube, and Liz Gunner (1994) have interviewed a female musician in Zimbabwe who argues that if you want a career in the arts you should not get married as your partner might stop you from continuing performing. This aligns with what I heard about the experiences of an actress in Zimbabwe who was due to leave the performance arts as her husband did not like the male attention she was receiving.

Interviewing female stand-up comedians, they provided me with a slightly different perspective. Speaking to how she experienced gender norms as someone who was already in the arts, stand-up comedian Tanya Sena, who goes by Tanya Alex onstage, explained that there were a lot of 'sexual connotations' with the arts in Zimbabwe (interview with author, September 3, 2019). She stated that it is expected that

women in the arts act the same way as men supposedly do for the brief period that they can be expected to be artists before becoming mothers.[21] She then provides a range of explanations as to why women might engage in these activities, none of which grants women agency in their own right, but rather assumes that they are affected by the male presences around them:

> "men are allowed a lot of stuff, like they are allowed to drink, they are allowed to smoke, they are allowed to, they are allowed to be womanizers, it's normal. So, when you are caught up in the same industry people would expect you to act the same, because when it's just guys they do it, right, and they influence each other, and guys will be guys. […] So, they automatically assume that a woman in the same industry probably does the same things because she's alone there and she's probably being pressured to do this stuff […] like peer pressure […] so they expect that you drink, smoke, probably sleeping with all the guys in the comedy company. So, they will give you some, they will give you like a grace period and then after some time they will be like, when is she gonna leave? You are allowed to have your fun, but you need to leave, you need to go get married and settle down and have kids."

> (Interview with Sena, September 3, 2019).

The 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman is a mother and a carer, someone who is subservient to a man, and the masculine space of stand-up and the arts is 'rebellious' and 'promiscuous' (Youde, 2017, Manyonganise, 2017, Dendere, 2018, Ncube, 2020). An active female stand-up comedian thus inhabits an ambivalent in-between space as my interview with Sena illustrates. Attempting to reconcile different messages making room

---

[21] Key research on expectations of women to be mothers: Youde, 2017, Manyonganise, 2017, Dendere, 2018, Ncube, 2020a.

for why it is that female artists 'should be'/are assumed to be both subservient and respectful, as well as 'promiscuous' and 'rebellious' provides a space where they are able to 'act out' social ordering in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite,* drawing attention to ambivalence in the norms, narratives and discourses that construct the 'authentic' national woman as subservient, as well as allowing women to speak about matters, especially in regard to sex-talk, that they would otherwise not be able to address.[22]

Looking at my interview with Guramatunhu the agency that stand-up comedians have in performing themselves onstage becomes apparent. Talking to Guramatunhu she highlighted to me – see discussion below – the ways in which gender norms affects the practicalities of stand-up, showing how she reiterates them in her outfit choices, but also how she possesses agency through the way that she 'acts out' these norms:

"Male stand-up comedians have the: either you are in a suit and pretty well done up, or you are very casual. I have never seen a woman step out to do stand-up comedy in a ball gown [laughs], or office attire [which] would be the equivalent of their suits, because that's too much: […] if you're in heels everybody is judging how you are walking, if you are in heels and a skirt everybody is like: 'ohh and then we could see up her skirt, and she was dressed so appallingly.' And then if you are dressed too casually: 'no wonder she is a stand-up comedian, she doesn't take herself seriously she probably has all these jokes she makes with her cats, with her six cats or something.' Like it's *just*, *a, lot* – because now this is also one of the few times you are onstage as yourself."

(Munyaradzi Guramatunhu, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 15, 2018)

---

[22] Chapter 5 looks particularly at how stand-up comedy facilitates sex-talk, focusing on both male and female comedians.

This process of picking an outfit for her stand-up performances is a clear example of Butlerian performativity, as Guramatunhu's choices, in this case of clothing, iterates societal norms. Indeed, Guramatunhu shows how she, and here I am borrowing an expression from Joanne R. Gilbert's (1997, 317) explanation of stand-up, "simultaneously perform[s] both self and culture." Guramatunhu's outfit choice becomes a re-iteration of gendered norms in Zimbabwean society, as her audience will read her identity through the iteration of everything from her mannerisms, gestures and jokes (that is not to say that she is picking and choosing her identity but rather that her choices impact what and how she reproduces norms, narratives and discourses). Crucially, though, Guramatunhu still has agency in her ability to choose. As this quote from her 2018 interview with me demonstrates she is acutely aware of how each of these choices may be read by her audience and is picking an outfit with this in mind. Referring back to my discussion of Bhabhaian agency in chapter two, particularly his exploration of Toni Morrisons' book *Beloved* (1987) what Guramatunhu is doing through her choice of clothing is to 'act out' the norms, narratives and discourses which produce the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman. Repeating these norms, narratives and discourses in this way, Guramatunhu can still interrupt constructions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman. This can be done, for example, by performing jokes that do not align with peoples' perception of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman/the woman she invokes through her outfit.

This type of an interruption is evident as Chideu in her 2018 set performs both narratives of Zimbabwean women as care-givers, and the role of the 'rebellious' artist expressing herself through stories from her day-to-day life. In the set, Chideu jokes about engaging in what she refers to as 'situationships', casual sexual relationships, as well as being a single mother. At one point she jokes that when her child first was born

it was 'ugly'; stating that the baby looked just like her mother-in-law. She then quickly added that the child has grown to become cute. In the meeting between these two clauses, it is possible to see mimicry at work. The first statement, which arguably fits within the way Zimbabwean society narrates artists is mediated through the second statement in which Chideu reverts back to more 'maternal' characteristics promoted by the social construction of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman, so that Chideu finds herself performing, in a Butlerian sense, a version of both the 'promiscuous' artist, and the nurturing mother in a way that highlights how both are incomplete. Through her joke, Chideu performs herself as *almost the same, but not quite;* almost the 'promiscuous' artist, but not quite, almost the nurturing mother, but not quite (Bhabha, 1994). In doing so, Chideu draws attention to the ambivalence of both narratives.

This very same process can be seen in a joke that Sena performs in her 2019 set. In this joke Sena ends up 'accidentally' flirting with a cashier at Pick n' Pay (a local convenience store). Re-counting the story, Sena tells us how the cashier asked her if she needed a plastic (a term used to refer to both plastic bags and condoms) for her 'big package' and offered to take it to the car. Sena tells us that she thought they were talking about her groceries, until he told her when he finished work and she realised he had been flirting. In this joke Sena plays out the narrative of artists as 'promiscuous' and 'rebellious', whilst simultaneously altering it to fit within the narrative of the submissive woman. Sena was not flirting, she was 'accidentally flirting'. In adjusting the narrative to fit the gendered nature of societal constructions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean woman, Sena, similarly to Chideu, simultaneously performs narratives of womanhood and artistry, in a way that is almost what these narratives preach, but not quite, highlighting the ambivalent portrayal of artists and women.

Performing themselves onstage female stand-up comedians are able to disrupt society's construction of the 'authentic' national subject. They do this by marrying norms, narratives and discourses that construct women as subordinate, with those that produce performance arts as a male space of rebellion and promiscuity. Already being artists Zimbabwean society attempts to mitigate the ambivalence ascribed to each of these narratives by the other. In doing so a space is created for the female stand-up comedians to 'act out' in a way that interrupts both; intervening into the construction of Zimbabwean-ness in the country through the iteration of social ordering in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994, 122). This gives female stand-up comedians an opportunity to interrupt patriarchal gender norms by performing themselves and their experiences onstage. The ability to interrupt social ordering through an autobiographical performance is significant in Zimbabwe where freedom of expression is severely limited, and people have been arrested due to statements made in public spaces.

Being myself, performing other

The removal of Robert Mugabe and election of Emmerson Mnangagwa as president offered some of the stand-up comedians that I interviewed hope of better times ahead, where they would be free to perform their comedy without risk of getting arrested. However, this has not been the case (Mahomed, 2018). Despite a Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information stating that the government "supports freedom of expression as enshrined in our constitution; [where] artistic expression, satire or even dark comedy, is part of that freedom" (Moyo, 2019), several comedians have been arrested since Mnangagwa's election, with one comedian being abducted at gunpoint (see also Monro, 2015, Burke, 2018, Mahomed, 2018 Burke, 2019, Moyo 2019).

Legislation limiting peoples' freedom of expression remains in place, and Mnangagwa's regime has quashed protests and strikes with internet shutdowns (Al Jazeera, 2019b). In this environment stand-up comedy has turned into a site of self-expression with stand-up comedians continuing to perform whilst aware of the risks this entails. Performing their everyday experiences onstage stand-up comedians are able to interrupt monolithic constructions of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean, in a repressive environment where peoples' speech-acts are restricted.

Looking at how autobiographical performances interrupts monolithic perceptions of the Zimbabwean national as someone who votes for ZANU-PF (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, Willems, 2013 Siziba and Ncube, 2015), and the 'authentic' woman as someone subordinate to their man (see Hungwe, 2006), this chapter has illustrated how performing their everyday experiences, stand-up comedians repeat societal norms, narratives and discourses as well as state rhetoric with a difference. Doing so they displace the fixity and certainty by which state and society constructs Zimbabwean-ness; providing alternative ways of being in the nation. This move interrupts the construction of an 'authentic' Zimbabwean national highlighting ambivalences within the norms, narratives and discourses through which it is produced. Stand-up comedy in Zimbabwe, thus, intervenes politically by constructing another way of being in the nation that interrupts monolithic narratives of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean by both state and society. Building on the emboldened feeling that Zimbabwean stand-up comedians have onstage, and looking closer at patriarchal hierarchies in the country, the next chapter explores how the genre enables comedians to discuss topics that are normally silenced. Focusing particularly on sex-talk it will show how stand-up turns a public performance into something that feels like a private conversation and how through this process comedy is able to interrupt gendered constructions of the public/private divide in Zimbabwe

Chapter 5 Interrupting gendered orders: sex, intimacy and Zimbabwean values

As we reach the final empirical chapter of this thesis, I turn my discussion of how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically to the norms that regulate what people should and should not do in society. Looking specifically at sex-talk, I examine how stand-up comedy interrupts the construction of Zimbabwean values, and how society is ordered thereafter. In Zimbabwe sex is a sensitive, or even taboo, topic. Talking about sex openly tends to cause discomfort. This is captured in the British government's travel advice to the country on 10 March 2020, which states that "Public displays of affection may cause offence, regardless of gender and sexuality." Molly Manyonganaise (2017, 154) explains that "In Shona culture, any public discussion about sex and sexuality is considered vulgar. When one dares say the Shona terms for 'penis', 'vagina' or even the sexual act itself, people shy away, unless those contexts are deliberately 'sexual' among peer-groups, particularly men's peer groups." Public discussions of sex are thus rare, but not a non-existent occurrence. Marc Epperecht (1998) in his historical examination highlights how sex-talk amongst the Shona can be acceptable when done through 'ribald humour'. In this chapter I will look at two instances where sex was addressed by stand-up comedians, one where the audience appreciated jokes on the topic and another where it led to more discomfort. Discussing these instances in relation to interview material, conversations with audience members and my own experience of the performances, I will argue that stand-up comedy can interrupt wider gender norms through which the public/private divide is narrated in Zimbabwe. Making this argument, the chapter will show how Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically by interrupting the gendered way in which society is ordered in the public/private divide.

There is a gendered dimension to silences about sex in Shona communities. It is more acceptable if men talk about sex than women. Men are not, as women are, "expected to be ignorant of sexual issues" (Manyonganaise, 2017, 154). Tinashe Dune and Virginia Mapeszahama (2017, 19) explain in their study of Zimbabwean, particularly Shona, migrant women's experiences of sexual education in Australia that Shona women "are taught to never express interest in sex otherwise she risks being labelled as one of 'loose morals', thus bringing shame upon her family." These views are exemplified by an opinion piece in Zimbabwean newspaper *The Chronicle,* where the author, Tsungai Chekerwa-Machokoto (2016a) attended a workshop entitled "SuperGirls of Zimbabwe" in which women try to teach other young women about sex (again note the same-gender nature of this encounter). Talking about what she learnt at the workshop Chekerwa-Machokoto (2016a) points out that "Sex is still taboo and parents and children blush profusely if they even see two consenting adults on a television show making out." This resonates with my interviews with female stand-up comedians as several of them emphasised that people in Zimbabwe did not think women should talk about sex, or that women enjoying sex was important.

Framing my discussion through the theoretical approach outlined in chapter 2, especially ambivalence, Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity, this chapter will show how jokes and discussions about sex that emerge in the stand-up comedy setting can highlight uncertainties around the gendered way in which the public/private distinction is narrated in Zimbabwe. To make this argument, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will examine the 2019 set of stand-up comedian Munyaradzi Guramatunhu, also known as Munya, looking specifically at her 8 October 2019 performance. Exploring how Guramatunhu manages to get her audience to laugh at sex-jokes, this section will illustrate that stand-up comedy is an ambivalent space that

blurs the boundaries between the public/private distinction. The second section will deepen this discussion. It will interrogate how Guramatunhu interrupts the public/private divide, and thus social ordering, by performing her gender identity in ambivalent ways, for example through *authentic inauthenticity* as someone who is a lady/not a 'whore' even though she says things that gender norms in Zimbabwean society holds that 'whores' do. This displaces how Zimbabwean society conceptualises women in politics as either mothers (when they have done something that re-institutes patriarchy) or 'whores' when they claim power (as a way to remove them from the 'political sphere'). The third and final section will then look at a performance by Kudakwashe Museta in 2019 where he struggles to get his audience to laugh at sex-jokes. Examining particularly a conversation that I had with male audience members after the show wherein they described why Museta's set had been uncomfortable to them I illustrate how a form of mimicry is produced as they try to 'save the situation'. I explore how these male audience members repeat narratives normally used to supress women's ability to act in the 'public sphere', in a way that is *almost the same but not quite,* to explain Museta's missteps. Doing so these audience members draw attention to the ambivalence that exists in the reasons given for why women should or should not behave in certain ways. As such, they highlight the misplaced certainty with which the public/private divide is gendered in Zimbabwe.

Ambivalent performances of sex in the intersection of the private and the public

Munyaradzi Guramatunhu headlined Simuka Comedy's 'Divas Night' on 9 October 2019. The show was part of Mitambo International Festival meaning the audience included both people based locally and abroad (other acts were given free tickets to the shows). Amongst people who identify as Shona sex is often a sensitive topic, so it may be somewhat surprising to some to find out that in her 2019 set Guramatunhu makes

several jokes on the topic, and that the three Zimbabwean audience members that I talked to after the show stated that sex-jokes were their favourite part of the night. Exploring one of the sex-jokes that Guramatunhu made that night, I will show how she manages to have the audience laugh at what is a controversial utterance by turning a public performance into something that feels like a private conversation. Interrogating how she does this, I will illustrate how stand-up comedy ambivalently places sex-talk done onstage between the private and the public sphere, as Guramatunhu interrupts gendered conceptions of when and how women can talk about sex.

Guramatunhu makes several explicit sex-jokes during her 9 October set. At one point she jokes that she had read online that if you don't use your muscles for an extended period of time they might wither away, and that she was now worried that this might happen to her vagina. In another, longer segment Guramatunhu insinuates that she learned how to perform blowjobs during her time in private school, querying how she was still single. I have summarised this joke in my fieldwork notes from an earlier show on 25 September 2019, where Guramatunhu performed the same joke:

"[Guramatunhu stated] that she went to private school, did anyone else in here go to private school? She said in private school she was taught how to be a lady. So, she sang in the choir. Not an African choir [Guramatunhu acts out what a 'stereotypical' African choir might look like], no, a white choir. Where you are taught how to stand and sing with your mouth open [Guramatunhu illustrates by singing and pulling down her jaw] [one person in the audience applauds]. […] The second thing she was taught in private school was to not have any crazy hair styles, your hair should be neatly tied up and out from your face. The third thing she was taught in private school was that that your skirt should be down to your knees. [Guramatunhu explains that] they used to have checks where you had to sit down

on your knees and make sure your skirt covered it. And so, she said, I was taught to
sit down on my knees [she demonstrates], with the hair out of my face, [again she
demonstrates by sitting on her knees and pulling her hair back], and my mouth open
[she opens her mouth and holds the microphone in front of it] – and still I am single
[end of set]."

The explicit sexual nature of these jokes stands in contrast to the silence that exists on
the subject in Shona culture, especially amongst women (see also Epperecht, 1998,
Dune and Mapeszahama, 2017, Manyonganaise, 2017). As previously discussed, there is
a gendered dimension to who can talk about sex, and how, in Zimbabwe
(Manyonganaise, 2017, 154). In order to not be labelled 'loose', and to be considered
'decent' and 'respectable' gendered norms on sex-talk regulate that women in particular
should not address the subject, especially not in public, and not to talk about the pleasure
of the act (see also Dune and Mapedzahama, 2017). Yet, talking to local audience
members after the show they stated that sex-jokes were the best part of it. Audiences'
appreciation of sex-jokes was confirmed by stand-up comedian Sharon Chideu in an
interview with me in 2018. Chideu explained that she will talk about sex onstage in a
way that she would not do in her day-to-day life for reasons probably connected to the
emboldening aspects of stand-up performances as discussed in chapter 4. Telling me
how narratives pertaining to gender, sex, tradition and culture limit sex-talk Chideu
explains that onstage there appears to still be room for laughter when a woman jokes
about sex:

> "Okay, traditionally, culturally, especially with us women, joking about sex – 'what
> do you know you're a woman!?' Don't enjoy sex, you're a female, you are just
> there to make babies, you are just there to be a wife, and you don't enjoy sex, don't

have partners […] that you sleep with, and one-night stands, don't cheat that's for

guys. […] When you [are] talking [onstage] about how [you] had sex, and you can

sense the reaction, like: 'wow, she is talking about *that.'* […] The initial thing is

like: 'What!? She is going there?' and then they laugh."

<div align="right">(Interview with Chideu, October 10, 2018).</div>

Gerard Matte and Ian McFayden (2011) have explored how it is that stand-up comedians

are able to joke about sensitive topics onstage by looking at Joan Rivers. Drawing on

Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's theory on how to manage offensive acts

they highlight how stand-up comedy is not just framed as a conversation but can feel

like a *private* conversation. This sense that stand-up comedy is a private conversation,

and that this facilitates discussions of sensitive issues has further been highlighted by Ian

Brodie (2014, 141) who explains that when "the audience accepts the performer as an

intimate [they], as we do among friends, [permit] him or her a certain latitude in

opinions and the freedom to express them, for the audience knows that, like our friends,

the comedian means well" (Brodie, 2014, 141, see also Mintz, 1985). Significantly, in a

Zimbabwean context, transforming a public performance into a private conversation

situates sex-talk done onstage ambivalently both within the public and the private.

Transforming a public performance into something that feels like a private

conversation, stand-up comedy thus interrupts wider norms about public/private

divisions in Zimbabwe. Peter Ekeh (1975) in his seminal piece, *Colonialism and the two*

publics in Africa: A theoretical statement, argues that 'Western' understandings of

society as divided into the private and public realm does not explain state-society

relations in the continent. Instead, Ekeh argues that African societies, as a result of

colonisation, are characterised by two publics, one primordial in which morality

operates, and one civic, which is amoral. Achille Mbembe (2001, 102) takes this even

further arguing that whilst the Postcolony is "chaotically pluralistic; it […] nonetheless [has] an internal coherence." According to Mbembe (2001, 103) to understand this internal coherence we must look beyond binaries such as "state vs. civil society." Instead, what is key is the 'system of meaning' that the state participates in constructing (producing themselves in the form of a fetish), which is turned "into part of people's 'common sense' […] [integrated] into the period's consciousness" (Mbembe, 2001, 103). Julia Gallagher (2014) has explored the relationship between state and society through a discussion of peoples' perception of the 'good' and the 'bad' state in Zimbabwe. Gallagher (2014) argues that Zimbabweans' understanding of both the 'good' and the 'bad' state is affected by the colonial 'Other' (even when they have 'physically' left). She points out that "*pace* Ekeh, the state *is* inextricable from the personal ethical realm. Instead of being a source of material benefit, the civic public has become a cause of deprivation; instead of inadvertently supporting the primordial public, it is undermining it" (Gallagher, 2014, 69). Indeed, Gallagher highlights that also the civic public is imbued with morals in Zimbabwe.

The way in which the supposed private and public is linked to the moral can be seen in Zimbabwe by looking at the way in which sex-talk in both realms are regulated by gender norms. Gibson Ncube (2020a) has pointed out that patriarchal power-relations in Zimbabwe have led public spaces to generally be narrated as masculine, whereas the private is characterised by domesticity and femininity. Women who operate in public spaces, attempting to claim political power, are thus, according to Ncube (2020, 29) sexualised and designated as 'whores':

"the sexualisation of Grace Mugabe highlights the fact that men and women politicians are not held to and judged by the same moral standards. Whilst male politicians can say and do the most outlandish and aberrant of things, women

politicians are expected to safeguard and maintain a certain level of respectability

and domesticity."

This demonstrates how norms penetrate discussions of Zimbabwean politics where

gendered power-relations attempt to "put women in their place" outside of party-politics.

Here gender norms about how a Zimbabwean should act is used to narratively dismiss

women in politics. Examples of this have been discussed in chapter 4, where I outline

how sexualised narratives have been used to disempower Joice Mujuru, Auxilla

Mnangagwa, and Grace Mugabe. These distinctions, however, are blurred by

Guramatunhu when she manages to make a public performance feel like a private

conversation. Empowered by the stand-up space she is able to speak in public about

matters that normally 'belong' to the private, and enact the ambivalence of how society

is ordered, in this case, on the basis of gender.

Throughout her set Guramatunhu thus, pushes the boundaries for *when* women

can talk about sex, whilst still in her blowjob joke conforming to how women are

supposed to talk about sex in those exceptional circumstances where it is considered

permissible. She does this by relying on insinuation and indirection in her blowjob joke

where she never explicitly uses words like, penis, vagina, or blowjob for that matter (van

Schalkwyk, 2018). Pauline Mateveke's (2017) study of the use of Shona and English

words by Zimbabweans during sexual intercourse highlights how women use indirection

when speaking about, and during sex. Mateveke (2017, 130) notes that both men and

women find Shona words to be 'dirtier' than English words when used during sex, she

argues that one possible explanation for this can be found in cultural dynamics which:

"control women's sexuality": she states that "while men have always been sexually

liberated and were at liberty to use sexual expression during sex, for most women, it was

a controlled discourse and she could not easily say these words, instead she had to use metaphorical language." Joking about sex in front of an audience in the ambivalent stand-up comedy space that is created as the performance is turned into a private conversation, Guramatunhu interrupts constructions of gender norms that limit women's role in politics in Zimbabwean public life. Guramatunhu re-claims narratives of sex, and promiscuity which have been used as a way to delegitimise female political actors (see also Tendi, 2016, Dendere, 2018, van Schalkwyk, 2018, Ncube, 2020a, Ncube, 2020b). Taking charge of their articulation through an ambivalent enactment of the private/public divide Guramatunhu interrupts gendered conceptions of when and how women can talk about sex. The way in which Guramatunhu interrupts gendered narrations of the public/private divide will be explored in the next section where I examine how she reiterates her gender identity ambivalently onstage.

Having a "boy's name" and ambivalent gender enactments of the public/private divide

Like many stand-up comedians, Guramatunhu starts her 9 October 2019 performance by introducing who she is to the audience. She does this by referencing one of her joke sequences from her 2018 set where she used to spend some time on the fact that her first name, Munyaradzi, is 'normally' seen as a male name in Zimbabwe. In the 2019 version of the set, this sequence has been significantly shortened, and I describe it in my notes from her show on 25 September 2019 in the following way:

> "[Guramatunhu] started off her set as she did last year with a joke sequence about
> her name. This time around she asked how many people in the audience were
> expecting a guy. Not many people raised their hands. She still managed to play out

the sequence well, looking at her audience saying: 'ah, it looks like you are getting

to know me by now'."

Introducing herself to her audience, Guramatunhu establishes a connection with them. This contributes to building an intimacy which can turn the public performance into something that feels like a private conversation (Matte and McFayden, 2011). After all, friends are people that we know at least something about. Investigating how Guramatunhu performs an ambivalent gender identity, I argue that she interrupts gendered constructions of who can talk about sex, by mimicking narratives describing decent women as people who do not (see also Dune and Mapeszahama, 2017, Manyonganaise, 2017, van Schalkwyk, 2018). Highlighting the ambivalence of gender norms that have been used to limit women in politics by describing them as either 'mothers' or 'whores' Guramatunhu interrupts patriarchal power-relations in politics.

Becoming an 'intimate' or friend of the audience involves introducing your comic persona to them (Quirk, 2015). In Zimbabwe, where stand-up comedy is autobiographical, that means highlighting and displaying certain aspects of your identity. Guramatunhu does this, by elaborating on her positionality as a woman with what is 'traditionally' a boys-name. By identifying herself as a woman with a 'boys-name' Guramatunhu iterates narratives and norms through which her gender identity is constituted with a difference. As Judith Butler (1993, xvii) has pointed out, naming is not without discursive consequence: "naming is at once setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm." In regard to Guramatunhu we thus see the repetition of female norms, and a 'girling', but also male norms as expectations of her audience might first be set, or confused already by, the MC introducing 'her' as 'Munya.'[23]

---

[23] An MC is the Master of Ceremonies, the person that acts as a host in a stand-up comedy show. In Zimbabwe they are commonly another comedian performing a few jokes before introducing the next act.

Speaking from within this ambivalent position may afford her some leniency in terms of talking about sex. More than being marginal due to her status as a female stand-up comic, Guramatunhu seems to perform a marginalised gender identity.[24] Involved in Bhabhaian mimicry when she performs, in a Butlerian sense, her identity, the emphasis on her name as a 'boys name', as well as the invocation of other 'female' norms, for example her pronoun, leads Guramatunhu to iterate gender norms in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994).

This production of her gender identity, and comic persona, does not end following her introduction. As Sophie Quirk (2015) has argued, the stories that the stand-up comedian tells to build up to a punchline also lets the audience know who they are, and allows them to provide the required knowledge, and build the intimate relationship needed for them to be able to address sensitive issues. Quirk (2015) demonstrates this process through an exploration of a joke sequence by Stewart Lee where he manages to get his audience to applaud the IRA (Irish Republican Army) for being 'good' terrorists. Quirk (2015, 110) points out that in order for Lee to get this reaction he has to deliver the joke "within a logical order and time frame which allows the audience to gradually warm up to the point where, around eighteen minutes into the show, he can request and be granted applause for IRA terrorism."

This type of build-up also exists within Guramatunhu's stand-up where she early on frames her set as discussing the difficulties that exists for people living in Zimbabwe at that point in time. Guramatunhu establishes common ground with, and between audience members, by discussing everyday occurrences that most people in the country

---

[24] Joanne Gilbert (1997, 2004) has written about how it is seen as a benefit being marginal as a stand-up comedian. Located on the margin a comedian can speak from the 'inside' of several 'belongings'. In Zimbabwe this was the case for some stand-up comedians, such as female comedians like Guramatunhu, but also stand-up comedians who had one parent who was Ndebele and one parent who was Shona. However, the vast majority of stand-up comedians in Harare in many ways represented the 'everyday' Zimbabwean.

will have had, queueing for petrol, only to have to join a queue that you watched form whilst in another queue, saving up to buy something only to find that the price has doubled by the time you have the money, and the difficulties trying to online date in a country where this is not yet well established – as Guramatunhu inquires with her audience – "have you ever reached the end of the internet? I have." Interwoven between these stories is the narrative of a single woman trying to have sex in Zimbabwe, a story that slowly becomes more explicit as the audience get to know her.

The ambivalence in Guramatunhu's enactment of herself onstage, and the consequence this has for what the audience will allow her to say about sex, is usefully unpacked through Raúl Pérez (2013) work. Pèrez introduces *authentic inauthenticity* conceptualising it through a discussion of his own experience attending a stand-up comedy class in Los Angeles. Concentrating on the way that stand-up students were taught to joke about race, Pérez (2013, 483) defines *authentic inauthenticity* as the illusion that "I am not a racist even though I say racist things." This notion resonates with how Bhabha (1994, 122) describes mimicry as *almost the same, but not quite.* What Pérez (2013) argues that the stand-up comedy teacher is asking their students to do, is to play out jokes in a way that the comedian appears as *almost the same as a racist, but not quite.* By being *almost the same, but not quite,* Pèrez argues that stand-up comedians can get away with joking about subjects that they otherwise would not be able to address because they are sensitive topics within the context where the joke is performed. This because the comedian is, in Pérez (2013, 496) words, "[performing] strategically by creating distance and denying racism; (2) [performing as] a 'perceived' member of that group, even when deliberately misrepresenting reality; and (3) [when what they say] was funny." In Guramatunhu's case, this means establishing that she does not have 'loose morals' or is someone who brings shame upon her family, that rather she belongs to the

category of women who are indeed decent. Presenting herself in this way then skews what she says when she talks about sex in a way that is considered indecent.

Looking back at Guramatunhu's blowjob joke through this lens, it becomes apparent how she engages in *authentic inauthenticity* by early on in the joke establishing a distance to the notion that she is indecent, but then performing 'indecent' things. Stating that she went to private school where she learnt how to act like a lady, Guramatunhu is essentially telling her audience that 'she is not racist', or in this instance 'she is a lady'. The use of indirection throughout the joke continues to emphasise this notion and create a distance between her and 'loose women'. In the process of creating this distance, and denying being 'loose', Guramatunhu is also 'acting out' her membership of the 'desired group' of decent women. Her ability to do so is perhaps more apparent to women who have also attended private school. A female audience member that I talked to after the show, for example, who had gone to private school stated that the blowjob joke was her favourite that night. She explained that she could relate to the experiences that Guramatunhu was talking about in the joke; like singing in the choir and having to have their skirt be a certain length. Things that they had also had to do in order to learn how to behave like a lady. Having established this community Guramatunhu acts the joke out with a twist, her body enacting another type of sexual narrative, that she confirms, and destabilises, in the final sentence, when she states that "and still I am single."

Performing the joke sequence in this way Guramatunhu mimics multiple discourses about women in Zimbabwean society in a way that is, and where she is, *almost the same but not quite* (Bhabha, 1994). She is almost a lady, but not quite. Throughout the joke she highlights the ambivalence of gendered narratives on sex-talk that produce Zimbabwean women both as people who should not know, talk about, or

have sexual intercourse - for pleasure, and most certainly not before marriage. As stated by Dune and Mapedzahama (2017, 19) women should only have sex "within the boundaries of socially approved heterosexual marriage […] for either procreation (especially for women), and or for male gratification (i.e. the 'good wife' provides sex-on-demand to her husband)." At the same time Guramatunhu hints at having to learn how to have sex, through some other way than experience. Performing her identity in this way, Guramatunhu creates a connection with the audience that contributes to her set feeling like a private conversation. Further, in setting herself up to be able to talk about sex, and thus unmuting silences on the topic, she also performs, in a Butlerian sense, her gender identity in a way that interrupts gendered narratives on who can/should engage in sex-talk. Guramatunhu does not necessarily dismiss the notion that women should not talk about sex but, iterating narratives and norms containing women's speech-act, she performs herself as a marginal in-between character able to talk about sex because she also inhabits male characteristics.

Performing herself ambivalently in this way interrupts gender norms, and gendered narrations of the, so called, 'public sphere' of politics. Indeed, through her 9 October 2019 set, Gurmatunhu enacts, through the norms, narratives and discourses that underpin social ordering, an instance that is not accounted for by the gendered norms that regulate the public/private distinction in Zimbabwean society. Guramatunhu's performance can thus be read as questioning and highlighting the ambivalence of the gendered production of private and public spheres in Zimbabwe. The way in which stand-up comedy engages with norms regulating sex-talk, and interrupts the narration of private versus political, will further be investigated in the next section, where I look at a set where Kudakwashe Museta performs sex-jokes.

How to delegitimise a political actor: sex, cheating, and going 'too deep'

In October 2019, stand-up comedian Kudakwashe Museta performed a set at the University of Zimbabwe addressing cheating. The set, which re-tells the story of his most recent relationship moves from him not wanting to cheat on his girlfriend to learning that he needs to do so in order to not end up cheating on his wife. Playing on sex at several points throughout the set, Museta tells his audience that he met his ex-girlfriend for the first time in the university library joking that it was: "lust at first sight." Explaining how he fell in love he contends that this made him stupid. Instead of listening to his friends' advice and cheat on his girlfriend he opted to remain faithful:

> "[Museta] talks about how all his friends told him that he needed to cheat on her, because it was not going to last. They told him he needed to 'spread his investments' in case it ended so that he still had someone else to go to, but he says: 'I was so in love.'"
>
> (Fieldwork notes, October 2019)

Following on from this experience, Museta explains to the audience that he has learnt a lesson:

> "'Cause you know, all guys cheat. And I don't want to cheat on my wife, so instead I cheat on my girlfriend. That way I can make sure I don't cheat on my wife."
>
> (Fieldwork notes, October 2019)

Despite playing into common Zimbabwean conceptions that all men cheat (see Njovana and Watts, 1996) this set yielded mixed reactions. There was a tense atmosphere in the room with some of the audience members laughing, others audibly disagreeing, and

some jokes leading to an uncomfortable silence. Exploring this set, I will, in this section show how, whilst repeating gendered conceptions of masculinity and cheating in his set, Museta struggles to get his audience to laugh at his sex-jokes. Reflecting on a conversation that I had with a few male audience members after the show, I demonstrate below how in explaining Museta's impropriety when talking about sex, these audience members engage in a form of mimicry where they repeat narratives commonly used to suppress women's ability to act in the 'public sphere' in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite.* Doing so they draw attention to the ambivalence of gendered norms that regulate how women should or should not act, thus interrupting patriarchal power-relations in Zimbabwe.

To understand Museta's set, it is important to know that in Zimbabwe it is considered normal for men to cheat. Eunice Njovana and Charlotte Watts' (1996, 49) capture this explaining that men are seen as unable to control their urges, making women responsible to ensure that they do not have an opportunity to cheat: "Whilst strict controls are placed on women, men are permitted substantial freedom both within and outside of marriage. Nowadays, it is commonly accepted that men will have sexual relationships outside of marriage." Lene Bull Christiansen (2013) elaborates on this in her study of literary works addressing HIV and cheating in Zimbabwe. She explains that, most often, the person seen as responsible for men's cheating is the mistress (in Zimbabwe referred to as the 'small house' with the 'main house' being the wife), as "Self-worth is […] ascribed to the married women, while 'small houses' appear to suffer its lack" (Christiansen, 2013, 520).

This conception of cheating is ambiguously placed within other narratives in the country emphasising the significance of virginity. The tension between these narratives is captured in an opinion piece written by Tsungai Chekerwa-Machokoto (2016b) in

Zimbabwean newspaper *The Chronicle*. She argues that both men and women should remain virgins until marriage (thus also launching a critique on the idea that men can have sex before marriage). However, she points out that this is not the prevalent attitude in the country, stating that: "The man who has a child before marriage is [seen as] 'a well-functioning man.' A well functional woman would be the one who accepts the husband's past and makes a home for his children before she even has any of her own" (Chekerwa-Machokoto, 2016b). Despite Museta's set speaking to this prevalent conception that men cheat, and that this is not their fault, the atmosphere during the set is tense.

This uncomfortable atmosphere in the room can perhaps begin to be explained by looking at how a distance is created between Museta and the audience. When Museta steps out on the stand-up comedy stage he alters his voice. Instead of conversing with his audience he projects his voice in a theatrical manner coming across, in my opinion, as rather animated; or as an audience member told me after a show in September 2019, he lacks stage presence and struggles with using the microphone to his advantage. Ian Brodie (2014) has highlighted the significance of the microphone to stand-up comedy. He argues that it allows the comedian to talk normally, facilitating the feeling of a private conversation, whilst remaining in control as they can use the entire register of their voice (even whispering) and still be louder than their audience (Brodie, 2014; see also Matte and McFayden, 2011).[25] This contributes to the creation of an intimacy between the audience and comedian and helps lay the foundation for a circumstance where the comedian can address sensitive issues (see also Mintz, 1985; Scarpetta and Spagnolli, 2009). Struggling to do this, Museta, instead, creates distance between

---

[25] This significance of the microphone has been registered by Zimbabwean stand-up comedians. When at one point the organiser of a show I attended had forgotten to set up the microphone the comedians chose not to perform as they worried that the audience would not hear them.

himself and the audience. This sense of distance was exacerbated by the fact that he tended not to interact with them.

Museta further entrenches the feeling that he is performing a character onstage towards the end of the set where he changes his stance on cheating. Having first enacted a joke sequence that seems to argue that all men should cheat, he towards the end of the set articulates another view. This segment, less of a joke and more of speech, renders more applause than the previous section. These two different views emphasise the feeling that Museta was actually playing a role during the first part of his set, and that maybe in this latter segment his true self and views are coming out. Key to this, is that when he articulates the view that people should not cheat, he heightens his energy, and in contrast to the previous part of the set appears less animated (see Pèrez 2013). The impression that I got as an audience member was that the final speech articulated the view of the comedian off-stage as opposed to the character onstage. Here I would like to highlight a comment made by an audience member at a show on 28 August 2019, stating that authenticity is essential to a set being funny: "When it is real *to the comedian* it resonates" (emphasis added; fieldwork notes, 28 August 2019). Appearing to perform a character, Museta thus struggles to get his audience onboard with the jokes he is telling (see Double, 2014 on how authenticity is what separates stand-up from theatre). Instead of disrupting norms on cheating Museta's set seems to ambiguously reiterate them.

The result of this uncomfortable atmosphere is also that Museta's sex-jokes are not received well by his audience. This is captured in a conversation that I had with some of his male audience members after the show, I have summarised it as follows in my fieldwork notes:

"[Museta's] comedy was specifically pointed out as having gone 'too deep'.
Someone joked that: 'the women were horny instead of laughing at the end of the

performance.' They said that it was not okay to be touching yourself like that

onstage [at one point in Museta's set he swings the microphone in front of his

scrotum as if it was his penis]. The reason that people should not joke about sex

according to these audience members was that people take their beliefs seriously –

so it's okay to touch upon these topics but you should not go overboard. […]

Further it was stated that people felt embarrassed about this because of

Zimbabwean culture – that talking about sex this way went against it." [26]

This demonstrates how in this instance Museta's sex-talk was seen as a transgression,

and rather than interrupting silences on the topic it appears to entrench them as the

audience members explain to me what is problematic about the way in which he talks

about sex (it is important to state here that I did not bring up sex but simply asked the

audience what they thought about the show).

However, exploring the audience response further through the theoretical

approach outlined in chapter 2, it becomes apparent how in the process of explaining to

me why Museta should not joke about sex, gender norms and gendered narrations of, so

called, 'public spaces' are interrupted. Here, it is useful to return to my discussion of

mimicry in chapter 2. Remember, when Homi K. Bhabha (1994, 122) first articulated

mimicry it was as a way in which colonial discourse attempted to deal with its

ambivalence, hiding it through a repetition that was *almost the same, but not quite.* As

Bhabha (1994, 122) himself so eloquently explains "Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a

double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which

---

[26] Similarly, to the audience reaction at Museta's set, another group of male audience member that I talked to after a show earlier in 2019, also expressed discomfort at stand-up comedians (both male and female) joking about sex. They also pointed out that such explicit sex-talk went against their culture, and further explained that it meant they did not feel comfortable bringing female friends, partners, or relatives to a show. Amongst the audience members that I talked to this discomfort with sex-jokes was quite common and brought up on a few occasions, but notably not after Guramatunhu's show.

'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power." Examining the response of Museta's audience members we can see such a mimicry operating as they 'act out' gendered narratives commonly used to suppress women's sexuality in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite*, reverting gender norms (Bhabha, 1994, 122). In this instance, rather than men having uncontrollable urges that are to be blamed on the woman, Museta is the one eliciting the uncontrollable urges of the opposite sex: "the women were horny instead of laughing at the end of the performance." Here, Museta is the 'small-house' to blame for women having sexual urges.

This re-invocation is further entrenched as the audience calls upon Zimbabwean culture as a way to highlight the significance of Museta's transgression. According to Tandeka C. Nkiwane (2000, 328) Zimbabwean culture is commonly invoked as a way to control women who are "told that they are custodians of cultural and traditional values, no matter how perverse or retrogressive, and that they must preserve what little we have left that has not been tainted by Western values." This emphasis put on women as having to protect Zimbabwean culture is usefully demonstrated by Christiansen (2009). Discussing the debates around a vote for a domestic violence law in the early 2000s she highlights the extent to which culture is used to suppress women (Christiansen, 2009). She does this by pointing out that it was important to those in favour of the law to show that women having rights did not stand in contradiction to Zimbabwean culture:

> "[Mushonga, leader of The Women's Coalition at the time] […] is here
> challenging the view that women's rights are a Western influence unbefitting
> African culture […] Simultaneously she attempts to indigenize her own point of
> view by pointing out that she and her organization represent patriotic citizens who
> are challenging the misuse of their culture for the purpose of power and control."

(Christiansen, 2009, 185)

Referring to culture in their condemnation of Museta's sex-jokes, the audience is thus invoking a contested and complicated space of debate in regard to women's rights in Zimbabwean society.[27] Articulated in relation to a discussion of Museta as having unduly aroused women, this reference acts to further the repetition of gendered norms on sex in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite,* thus highlighting the ambivalences of these narratives.

Exploring further the way in which these male audience members narrate Museta's actions as *almost the same, but not quite* highlights how they also interrupt gendered narratives of the public/private divide in the country. As they cast Museta as arousing the female audience members they invoke narratives commonly used to delegitimise female politicians who are perceived as not adhering to the construction of the private/public divide (see Ncube, 2020a, Ncube 2020b). Indeed, Gibson Ncube (2020a) has pointed out how in gendered narrations of the public/private divide women who conform are portrayed as 'mothers', whereas women who do not are cast as 'whores'. Looking specifically at how former first lady Grace Mugabe was narrated following the removal of Robert Mugabe in 2017 highlights the similarities in the way that the audience describes Museta: "Grace was labelled a prostitute owing to allegations that she had become so powerful that she could seduce men on two fronts: in terms of money and physically" (Ncube, 2020b, 344). Narrating Grace Mugabe as promiscuous delegitimises her as an actor in Zimbabwean party politics (similar narratives about Joice Mujuru's sexuality and use of sex to get ahead were used to delegitimise her bid to

---

[27] In my interview with Munyaradzi Guramatunhu in 2018 she points towards how it is seen as being against Zimbabwean culture to show skin, yet, she argues, before colonisation Zimbabwean women used to walk around with their breasts out. Another female comedian, further explained how no more than ten years ago women who were perceived as not covering-up enough could be subject to sexual abuse and harassment in the central business district in Harare.

be next in line for presidency in 2014 - see Tendi, 2016). As the audience calls upon these narratives in a way that is *almost the same, but not quite* when explaining to me what they did not like about Museta's set, they invoke the ambivalence of gendered narratives which are used to silence female voices in both, so called, private and public spheres (see Ncube, 2020a). Indeed, Museta, a man, appearing in public, is said to be using his sexuality to further his comedy, something that is reprimanded for being against 'Zimbabwean culture' and delegitimises his expression. By explaining to me why Museta's set is uncomfortable, these audience members interrupt gendered narrations of the public/private divide in Zimbabwe, highlighting the ambivalence of the way that society is ordered patriarchally.

Ambivalent enactments of a gendered public/private divide

Stand-up comedy is an ambivalent space that blurs the boundaries between what is often articulated as the private/public distinction, and through sex-jokes can interrupt the gendered norms upon which this division is constructed. Looking at how sex-talk is articulated in this space illustrates how the genre can interrupt the construction of gender norms that limit women's role in Zimbabwean political life. It does this when Guramatunhu reiterates her gender identity as ambivalently male/female to then also through her sex-jokes iterate herself further through *authentic inauthenticity* as someone who is a lady/not a 'whore' even though she says things that 'whores' are understood to do. This displaces how Zimbabwean society conceptualises women in politics as either 'mothers', when they have done something that re-institutes patriarchy, or 'whores', as a way to remove them from the 'political sphere' (Ncube, 2020a). It further enacts this displacement when audience members at Museta's show attempts to explain away his impropriety in talking explicitly about sex. Attempting to explain to me why Museta's

set was uncomfortable, these audience members enact a form of mimicry which ends up highlighting the ambivalence of the reasons given for why women should or should not act in particular ways in public. This draws attention to the ambivalence of norms, narratives and discourses through which patriarchal gender norms are reiterated in Zimbabwean political life. Looking at how Zimbabwean stand-up comedians address sex, a topic that is generally silenced in public thus draws attention to how the subject can act through norms, narratives and discourses. Interrupting the way that public spaces are constructed through gendered conceptions of what Zimbabwean women should and should not do stand-up comedy intervenes politically in the nation. Exploring Zimbabwean stand-up comedy in relation to sex-talk, this chapter has shown how people act resistively in the repressive Zimbabwean environment. These questions of resistance beyond protest will be taken up in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion: The nuances of comedic resistance

So, what is the significance of stand-up comedy in relation to politics in Zimbabwe? A sceptic might respond to this thesis by querying whether it matters if stand-up in the country is performed only in the major cities, if comedians are met by the same group of audience members each time, or if at some shows, the venue is empty? If no one shows up, or the venue is half full, does that reduce stand-up comedy's impact on politics, compared to, for example, if it was performed to hundreds, or even thousands of people? Whilst the audience of course is a central part of a stand-up comedy show, these questions miss the central point and argument of this thesis. Across the past five chapters I have not attempted to look at why people laugh, rather, I have examined what stand-up comedy *does* to the norms, narratives and discourses which produces a particular social ordering in the country. I have identified the ways in which stand-up comedy interrupts the construction of this social ordering by highlighting its ambivalence – arguing that this process allows for a comedian to exercise agency that occurs within norms, narratives and discourses. In other words, I have argued, that stand-up comedy is a discursive resistance through which the subject can speak, act and disrupt in Zimbabwe also when, and if, no one is looking.

The central argument of this thesis is therefore that Zimbabwean stand-up comedy intervenes politically when it interrupts social ordering. In other words, when it reveals something about the way in which society is structured based on what might be called 'common sense', or what I have referred to as the 'system of meaning' which norms, narratives and discourses produce. Looking at how stand-up comedy resists and reinforces these norms, narratives and discourses I have argued that the genre interrupts social ordering by divulging the ambivalence of Zimbabwean-ness; highlighting narrative contradictions, unsettling societal conceptions, and addressing that which is

commonly silenced. Telling a story of the politics of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy that has not been told in this depth and scope before, or through this theoretical perspective, I have enhanced our understanding of the complex, messy and nuanced ways in which resistance operates contributing to both literature on Zimbabwean politics, and scholarship addressing comedy in critical global politics. In what follows I will outline how this argument has been made and the significance that it has.

Main arguments: interrupting social ordering

This thesis has understood the construction of Zimbabwean-ness as a way in which society is ordered and structured as it delineates who does and does not belong, as well as expectations for how people should or should not act. To understand how stand-up comedy interrupts social ordering, I have thus focused on how the genre engages with Zimbabwean-ness. I have investigated three sites where Zimbabwean-ness is constructed; the production of state autobiographies, the creation of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean subject, and norms regulating how Zimbabweans 'should' behave, here explored in relation to sex-talk and the public/private divide. Interrogating stand-up comedy in regard to these sites through a theoretical approach developed using Homi K. Bhabha and Judith Butler, and an assessment of original empirical material gathered, I have been able to illustrate how the genre intervenes politically in several ways.

In order to argue that stand-up intervenes politically I started by reviewing, in chapter 1, the ways in which comedy has been said to resist. This illustrated how scholarship within critical global politics, African studies, and stand-up comedy has grappled with how comedy both resists and reinforces, sometimes, seemingly at once. Developing a theoretical approach, in chapter 2, I drew on Bhabha and Butler as they enabled me to explain both the way that stand-up can reinforce and resist. Combining Bhabha's and Butler's work I advanced a theoretical approach based on the idea that

interruption occurs through 'repetition with a difference' drawing on ambivalence, mimicry and performativity as useful tools to unpack what comedy does to power, especially in repressive regimes that attempt to silence their populations. Having advanced a theoretical approach that recognises the messy ways in which the subject interacts with power, I turned towards my empirical material to investigate how stand-up comedy intervenes politically.

In chapter 3 I argued that stand-up comedy can intervene at a state level. However, it does this not by removing the state's material might, but by interrupting state autobiographies. These narrations which construct cohesive stories about the nation's past and present are significant in Zimbabwe where ZANU-PF have used them as one way in which to legitimise its regime beyond free and fair elections. To explore how stand-up interrupts state autobiographies, I looked at two ways in which the state constructs itself - as homogeneous and heteronormative. Drawing on what Bhabha refers to as the time-lag, as well as Butlerian performativity I illustrate how stand-up comedy highlights the ambivalences in state constructions by reiterating 'tribal' narratives in unfamiliar ways thus disrupting the production of homogeneity, and reinforcing heteronormativity in a way that reveals anxieties about women's place in society. This has implications for future studies of the construction of nationalism, and the relationship between state and society in repressive regimes as it enforces the importance to look beyond 'traditional' means of resistance, as well as 'pure' opposition to understand the power-relations in these environments.

In chapter 4 I explored further how stand-up comedy can interrupt given the repressive environment in which it operates. I highlighted how laws and legislation, as well as intimidations and harassment attempt to control peoples' expression in the country. Drawing on empirical material, especially interviews, I argued that stand-up

comedians in Zimbabwe, despite being aware of the risks, felt emboldened to be themselves onstage. I further looked at how by performing autobiographically stand-up comedians are able to interrupt monolithic narratives of the 'authentic' Zimbabwean. Engaging with stand-up comedy through Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity I illustrated how stories about other ways of being in Zimbabwe disrupt state claims that equate party and patriotism, and interrupt patriarchal power-relations by playing out the contradictions between the submissive woman and the 'rebellious' and 'promiscuous' artist. This captures the complicated relationship between subject and society, as well as highlighting that in order to understand how people resist in repressive environments we must look beyond activism, and criticisms of the state to look at how people interact with the 'system of meaning' produced by both state and society. Daring to widen our perspective of how people might act in repressive regimes will reveal the ways in which the relationship between dominant and subordinate are constantly being (re)negotiated.

In chapter 5 I turned to look at how stand-up comedy interrupts power-relations that exist in society beyond the state. Indeed, in Zimbabwe, women's ability to operate in public spaces are not just regulated by state actions, but also by the gendered norms through which the public/private divide is constructed in society - and which give claims to, for example sexual promiscuity, a delegitimising ability. Looking at how stand-up comedians engage in sex-jokes onstage, in a more or less successful way, I drew on Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity to show how they interrupt norms that produce a gendered public/private divide. Through this discussion, I illustrated how techniques such as *authentic inauthenticity* where the comedian states that they are, for example, a lady, even though they say things ladies don't, enables an interruption of gender norms, as well as how audiences attempt at explaining a comedian's

transgression onstage can reveal ambivalences in the way that women's actions are delegitimised. Interrogating the public/private divide, and resistance against a gendered political space, this chapter illustrated the significance of looking beyond the public sphere to see how people interrupt and act politically. In line with Achille Mbembe's (1992, 2001) work this thesis advances a way to understand systems of power and domination in the Postcolony, and *how* they are interrupted, through a theoretical approach that looks beyond binaries, and a site (stand-up comedy) that embraces and highlights the ambiguities of society.

An untold story of politics in Zimbabwean stand-up

This thesis has made three contributions: an empirical contribution to research on politics in Zimbabwe, and both a theoretical and a methodological contribution to studies of comedy in critical global politics.

This thesis started (chapter 1; a note on Zimbabwe) by highlighting how scholarship on Zimbabwean politics has emphasised the significance of the construction of nation-ness in the country. Focusing predominantly on nationalism as a tool of the state, researchers demonstrated how it has reinforced government claims to legitimacy beyond free and fair elections, justified political policy decisions, and explained acts of violence. Julia Gallagher (2017) also explores the topic examining how the state is constructed through peoples' imagination of the international. Looking at how the arts and politics has interacted in Zimbabwe it has been demonstrated that researchers have identified comedy as a potential challenge to state authority. Building on this scholarship, I have complexified the discussion of how comedy can resist power. Having explored Zimbabwean nationalism through stand-up comedy, a genre that is continuing to grow in the country despite economic hardship and a repressive

environment, I have shown how constructions of Zimbabwean-ness by state and society alike can be interrupted.

Engaging with empirical material from two rounds of fieldwork in predominantly Harare, but also briefly in Bulawayo, during 2018 and 2019, I have contributed to the limited scholarship that exists on Zimbabwean stand-up. I have shown how the genre can reinforce 'tribal' narratives in a way that disrupts state claims to national unity (chapter 3). I have demonstrated how homophobic jokes reveal anxieties about women's place in society (chapter 3). I have argued that stand-up has developed into an autobiographical performance form, and that through stories about comedian's day-to-day lives it is able to, in a repressive environment, highlight the ambivalences of ZANU-PF's attempt to equate patriotism and party support, showing also, how female comedians interrupt patriarchal power-relations by revealing contradictions between depictions of them as 'rebellious' artists, and 'submissive' women (chapter 4). Finally, I have examined how transforming stand-up comedy into a private conversation situates sex-talk done onstage ambivalently both within the public and the private; demonstrating how the genre can interrupt norms that construct the private/public distinction in a gendered way in the country (chapter 5). Engaging with gender in all three empirical chapters I have emphasised its significance in the country's political landscape, and as such the importance of how stand-up comedy challenges and reinforces gendered power-relations. Through these discussions in this thesis, I have developed an empirical contribution to research on Zimbabwean politics by looking at how stand-up comedy contests, whilst also reinforcing norms, narratives and discourses through which Zimbabwean-ness is constructed.

Telling a story about the politics of stand-up comedy in Zimbabwe that has never been told before, at least not to this depth and scope, or from this theoretical

perspective, this thesis has deepened our understanding of the nuanced and complex ways in which resistance operates in the country. It has highlighted that politics in Zimbabwe occurs outside of the 'serious' realm of parties, policies and institutional decisions. Further, it has showed that stand-up comedy should be understood as a form of resistance that occurs outside of organised protests, non-governmental organisations, or internal party divisions. Indeed, it has drawn attention to what might be deemed the 'unserious' space of entertainment as a platform through which people not only challenge and critique political leaders but participate in an ongoing conversation about how society should be structured in the nation. This thesis has demonstrated that politics in Zimbabwe is something that happens also through arts. It has drawn our attention to the way in which art that does not address parties, policies and politicians is still political. Broadening the understanding of politics in Zimbabwe in this way, this thesis has demonstrated that the construction of the nation is not always a top-down endeavour, and that the state does not have a monopoly on narrating nationhood. More than a way in which the Zimbabwean state attempts to legitimise its regime beyond free and fair elections, national narratives are also a space in which people contest the way that the country is being run.

Exploring stand-up comedy in Zimbabwe this thesis has thus made a number of observations about politics in the country. It has contributed to literature on Zimbabwean nationalism which tends to engage with the way in which it is produced by state and society alike in relation to binaries – whether that is by contrasting belonging to 'Others' who are internal or external to the country (see, for example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009) – focusing instead on the ambivalences of narratives through which nation-ness is constructed. Indeed, this thesis has shown that to understand nationalism in Zimbabwe it is important to recognise that it is produced by a diverse set of norms,

narratives and discourses that often contradict and contravene one another, sometimes in ways that are disruptive. Further, this thesis has shown that to understand gender relations in Zimbabwean politics it is important to also examine how women themselves talk about what it means to belong. It has illustrated that a space to find such narratives in the country is stand-up comedy – which uniquely emboldens its practitioners to speak out about issues that they normally would not. Crucially, these stories are not told from outside of patriarchal power-relations in the nation but are spoken from within them. Finally, this thesis has contributed to scholarship which addresses the patriarchal power-relations that exists in Zimbabwe by showing that women can re-claim legitimacy as political actors in the country through stand-up comedy.

The implication for future research that results from this is the realisation that to understand politics, resistance, and state-society relations in Zimbabwe focus needs to be placed also on its entertainment sector. In other words, building on previous scholarship, there is a need to broaden the scope of what is researched when trying to understand resistance in Zimbabwe to include those areas of social life that are often deemed 'unserious', and perhaps even 'unpolitical'. This includes considering those acts that disrupt in less than straightforward ways, recognising and embracing the complexity of how the subject acts and resists as also part of the story of politics in the nation. Indeed, to support democratisation in Zimbabwe, policy experts might want to consider not only supporting the arts in general but supporting also those artists that do not necessarily engage in political satire, or overt attacks on the regime. There is political value in arts that speaks to the everyday, and supporting it provides a space for people in the country to develop themselves what they want Zimbabwe to look like, rather than having to adapt and adhere to 'Western' ideals of what others think their nation should be.

More than a story of Zimbabwean politics, this thesis has contributed to scholarship within critical global politics through its investigation of stand-up. Indeed, as emphasised by feminist scholars, the personal is political, and in the words of Cynthia Enloe (2014, 350) "the personal is international." This has been captured in relation to Zimbabwe by Gallagher (2017), who has previously explored how people in the nation understand the 'good' and 'bad' state through imaginations of the 'Other'. The way in which the production of the state and nation is intertwined in the construction of the international has also been highlighted by James Brassett (2021, 139), who advances a conceptualisation of resistance within international political economy which focuses on British humour to understand global politics:

> "Everyday comic resistances perform *within* a context of global social power relations. While certain jokes, in certain circumstances, may question, subvert, or otherwise undermine the everyday hierarchies of global market life, others may work to affirm such exclusions, or else provide a socially resonant, if potentially violent, mode of inclusion. Simply put, comedy does different things in different circumstances and that is precisely why it is political."

Brassett's (2021) work speaks to other literature within international political economy which has looked at how humour can unsettle economic discourses and global market life (de Goede, 2005), but also other scholars who have examined comedy as a way in which global power structures relating to security (Amoore and Hall, 2013), the environment (Mason, 2013), and development (Cameron, 2015) are disrupted. This thesis has contributed to this literature by developing a theoretical approach based on Homi K. Bhabha and Judith Butler which can be applied to different contexts in order to unpack, and highlight, the complex, messy

and less than straight forward ways in which the subject acts and resists through humour in global politics.

Making the decision to not simplify the complexity of comedy's interaction with power, but rather embrace the messiness that is humour, this thesis has drawn on Bhabha's and Butler's work to advance a theoretical approach that looks at contradiction and ambivalences in order to study what comedy *does* to social ordering. To explore how stand-up specifically, or humour more generally, interrupts power this approach calls for the researcher to look at how sets engage with wider norms, narratives and discourses beyond the comedy space in order to be able to situate moments of ambivalence. Having located these, the combination of Bhabha's and Butler's work in the approach usefully highlights how the repetition of norms, narratives, and discourses reveals this ambivalence in ways that interrupt. This interruptive re-articulation is what I have called 'repetition with a difference' and can be identified through Bhabhaian mimicry and Butlerian performativity. Pulling together a set of useful theoretical concepts this approach helps me assess the complex ways in which stand-up operates in the repressive Zimbabwean environment, developing an approach that can also be used in future research looking to understand what comedy *does* to social ordering, and *how* people act through humour in messy and nuanced ways.

This theoretical approach could be applied to different contexts, both in Africa and the global north, to bring out the nuances and messiness of how people act and resist through comedy. Drawing on this approach, for example, when exploring civil society and humour in Nigeria, Ebenezer Obadare (2009, 2010, 2016) would have been able to not only explore how comedy is an 'actor' in civil society, but also how people through humour can participate in the (re)negotiation of what civil society is in the

country. In other words, what comedy *does* to social ordering in Nigeria. Beyond the domestic context, this theoretical approach helps us understand the complex ways in which comedic stories about the everyday can interrupt global narratives. Indeed, I have previously, together with Carl Death (2020), used Bhabha's understanding of mimicry in order to show how Trevor Noah as a non-Western actor, was able to resist global narratives on race, disease and poverty that portray the African continent in demeaning ways. Building on this, the theoretical approach developed in this thesis, can be used to advance our understanding of how comedy performed to international audiences, either through shows on streaming platforms, or live performances in comedy clubs or at festivals, such as Edinburgh Fringe, interrupts global narratives, not only through what is said onstage, but also through its embodied nature.

Combining both the oral and the corporeal to explore how ambivalence operates in humour complicates our understanding of comedic resistance. For example, Grace Musila's (2014) important demonstration of how stand-up in South Africa has become a space where the otherwise controversial subject of race is 'speakable' can be complexified by considering also how norms, narratives and discourses are repeated corporeally, and what implications that has for who can speak about race in this context, and how it can be done. The complex ways in which embodied identity, and jokes operate in stand-up was highlighted to me by South African comedian Angel Campey in an interview in 2018 where she told me about what comedian Kagiso Lediga had said about her prospects as a performer:

> "[Kagiso Lediga said that] Trevor [Noah] is half black and half white so he can talk
> about race to anyone, 'cause he represents all three - cause coloureds also identify
> with him. And then he [Kagiso Lediga] said: 'we as a country are now ready to
> hear from white people, we wanna know what it's like being a white person in

post-apartheid South Africa. But it's too soon to hear from a man, so you're a woman, so you can talk to us about being white and we still don't find you threatening because you're still a woman', and so, he is like: 'you've got a unique privilege point as a white.'"

Looking at both the way that norms, narratives and discourses are repeated through what is said and embodied thus nuances our perception of how comedic resistance operates in global politics. Complicating the way in which people act and resist this theoretical approach usefully helps us unpack the nuanced and messy ways in which comedy intervenes politically *doing* something to norms, narratives and discourses.

As such, the theoretical approach developed in this thesis, also answers a call from scholars within the African context who have noted that subversion in postcolonial settings does not necessarily adhere to binaries through which it is often conceptualised, and that exploring comedy could put on display the complicated ways in which power and disruption operates in the continent (see, for example, Mbembe 1992, 2001). As Musila (2014, 149) has noted in her exploration of South African stand-up, engaging with the questions posed about comedy's role in society not only:

"[invites] us to […] rethink the possibilities of humour as a vehicle of resistance, but to revisit the very question of resistance, and particularly hegemonic understandings of resistance in Africa [where in] recent years, many scholars have questioned the conceptual reach of the idea of resistance in making sense of […] realities [on the continent]."

Indeed, as Obadare (2016, 62) also comments in his investigation of comedy and silences in Nigeria: "humour deserves closer academic scrutiny, […] [it] plays an

important, if ultimately ambiguous, role in the relationship between the political elite and underclass in Nigeria." Answering the call by Africanist scholarship to complicate the relationship between the dominant and subordinate by developing a theoretical approach that looks at how norms, narratives and discourses are repeated with a difference, this thesis advances a way to explore humour in different contexts that engages with its messy and ambiguous nature and draws on this complexity to understand the nuanced ways in which people act and resist on the international arena.

In line with this theoretical approach, I have also advanced a methodology to explore how comedy interrupts, specifically in repressive environments like Zimbabwe, that extends beyond often textual or narratively based studies on the topic within critical global politics, thus enabling us to see the complex ways in which subject and resistance operates in this context. Exploring Zimbabwean stand-up comedy through a fieldwork-based approach this thesis has looked beyond the few minutes spent by the comedian onstage, deepening our knowledge of how the genre operates politically by also examining what happens before and after a show, and how it is situated within the broader societal context. Interviewing stand-up comedians and artists, talking to audience members, attending shows, and involving myself in the day-to-day practices of a Zimbabwean stand-up comedy club, Simuka Comedy, this thesis has looked at how the genre operates politically, and is affected by ethnic divisions (see chapter 3), patriarchal gender structures (see chapter 3 and chapter 4), a repressive political environment where expressing your opinion is risky (see chapter 4) and norms that regulate what should and should not be said (see chapter 5). In line with Roxanne Doty (2010), I have recognised that the researcher is always present in their writing, even when this is through an active absence. I have reflected upon how my being present for the minutia of day-to-day activities – writing grants, waiting for shows to start, and

negotiating how to organise lunch – all feeds into the way in which the genre is understood, and knowledge built around it, in this thesis.

Taking this methodological approach has allowed for a better understanding of how stand-up comedians are located within social ordering yet are able to interrupt. A fieldwork-based approach was thus not only useful because it allowed me to access material which at the time was not available online, with stand-up sets, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, largely performed live and not recorded, but also because it speaks to the located and embodied nature of stand-up comedy. Oliver Double (2014, 20) in his definition of stand-up comedy, points out that it is a genre that "happens in the present tense, in the here and now […] [acknowledging] the performance situation." Stand-up comedians tend to comment on what happens in a room and adapt their performances also based on the 'energy' in a particular venue, or amongst a particular audience (see also Quirk, 2015). This 'energy' is something that is experienced during the performance by those present.

Further to this, as illustrated throughout this thesis, stand-up comedy is situated within a particular societal context brought into the performance setting by both audience and comedian, reiterated through the jokes told, and repeated through the way the comedian talks, walks, and gestures. For example, a lot of comedians tend to start with jokes that speak particularly to the context they are in, a comedian from Harare performing in Bulawayo may comment on something they've noticed in the city, just like a comedian from the US that has a set in the Netherlands may say something about the culture in the country that they have experienced as visitors. This makes it important to be both present at the show, and in the cultural context in which it is performed in order to understand how stand-up comedy operates politically. Investigating Zimbabwe as someone who is not from the country, it is even more important to be able to talk to

comedians and people in the country who can explain and locate the humour in relation to current news and societal norms.

Introducing this fieldwork-based approach to investigating stand-up comedy in critical global politics, this thesis builds on previous studies which have been mostly narrative and discursive. Broadening our understanding of the impact of stand-up comedy beyond what happens onstage, as well as emphasising the importance of being able to situate stand-up comedy within the venue and societal context that it is performed, this methodological approach enables the researcher to further unpack and understand the messy and complex ways in which people act and resist through this genre. Building on the knowledge gained from previous studies of the genre, applying a fieldwork-based methodology of this kind has allowed for a better understanding of how stand-up comedians are located within social ordering, yet can also interrupt: this adds to a more nuanced understanding of how the subject acts. To further our conceptualisation of comedic resistance, especially in repressive environments, this thesis has shown the need for future scholarship to go beyond the textual and engage in this type of fieldwork-based approach.

This becomes especially significant as stand-up comedy is growing on the African continent, making it an increasingly common way in which people express themselves locally, regionally and internationally. Indeed, stand-up comedy currently exists as an art form in several African countries including Tanzania, Cameroon, and Kenya (Oneya, 2019, Asala, 2020, theBeat, 2020). In countries like Nigeria the stand-up scene has produced well-known international performers like Bright Okpocha, known as Basketmouth, and in South Africa, stand-up comedians like Loyiso Gola and Trevor Noah have launched international careers hosting their own Netflix specials and performing to audiences around the world (Noah, 2020, Basketmouth, 2021, Logan,

2021). Stand-up comedy has also been used as a way to raise money and awareness on the African continent. As recently as 13 December 2020, UNHCR organised "Comedy with a Purpose", a stand-up show bringing together comedians from across the continent to raise money for refugees by telling humorous stories from the comedians' day-to-day lives (LuQuluQu, 2021). Stand-up comedy is not only a way to earn a living in Africa, but also, according to several of the Zimbabwean stand-up comedians that I interviewed, a way for people to tell their version of life on the continent to people living in neighbouring countries, or sometimes, as in the case of Zimbabwean stand-up comedian Carl Joshua Ncube, even further abroad (see also Ncube, 2021).

With stand-up comedy growing on the continent and operating as a way in which people speak about their day-to-day experiences to local and international audiences, this thesis operates as a springboard, providing theoretical and methodological tools, as well as a current and informative example of how engaging with stand-up comedy can help us unpack, and highlight, the complex, messy and nuanced ways in which people act and resist in global politics. As such this thesis has contributed to scholarship on Zimbabwean politics, and within critical global politics, by turning to the African continent as a source of knowledge to understand resistance and agency.

Resisting in Zimbabwe

Resistance in Zimbabwe has been investigated by exploring civil protests. In recent years this has meant not only examining mass movements on the streets, but also online opposition (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The power of social media as a tool in resistance has been investigated by scholars in Zimbabwe engaging particularly with the online #MyFlag protest (Gukurume, 2017, Matsilele and Ruhanya, 2020, Mpofu and Mare,

2020). This social media protest started to move from the internet on to the streets when the instigator Pastor Evan Mawarire challenged John Mangundya, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe governor, to a public debate on the introduction of bond notes (Gukurume, 2017). However, the 'landmark' event was a day of 'national stay away' called 'Shutdown Zimbabwe' on July 6 2016 (Gukurume, 2017). Hearing about this type of protest in Zimbabwe you might ask why it has not led to long-term change in the country. A reason given by critics of protest movement in Zimbabwe, according to Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), is that people in the country tend to accept superficial solutions and then adapt to the new circumstances. Blessing-Miles Tendi (2016) in a widely cited piece in *The Conversation Africa* has pointed towards the need for not only online, or even offline protest but also a political agenda in order for long-term change to happen. He argues that it is crucial to know what you want the change to lead to, what will happen when, for example, the president is removed. There have been attempts to create such a national agenda beyond party politics. For example, after the removal of Mugabe, the organisation Citizens' Manifesto held events to create an environment where Zimbabweans could meet and imagine what they wanted the future for their country to look like; "our Zimbabwe dream" (Citizens Manifesto, 2018).

Focusing on stand-up comedy as interrupting and resisting through a productive process I view the genre also as part of an ongoing discursive negotiation of what it means to be Zimbabwean. This differs from the current literature on comedy in Zimbabwe as a way to resist political leaders and an authoritarian regime (Willems, 2010, 2011, Hammett, 2011). The significance of stand-up as a space to tell Zimbabwean stories, about the Zimbabwean experience, and day-to-day life was made apparent not only in my interviews with comedians but also in my conversations with audience members. Speaking to one audience member, who had only watched

international performances before, I was told that local stand-up was a lot more impactful because the comedians spoke to her reality and day-to-day life (Fieldwork Notes, 9 October 2019). Although, as I have emphasised, this thesis presents an argument about what stand-up comedy can do discursively, I think there is room in future research to think even more about what stand-up comedy can do for negotiating a political agenda, and an understanding of nationalism and what it means to be Zimbabwean that is produced between state and society, and society and the subject. After all, stand-up comedy is a space in Zimbabwe where the public and private blurs, where risks are disregarded for emboldened feelings and a negotiation between the comedian and the audience appear to take place, as boundaries are negotiated about what is acceptable to say and do. Whether or not this does translate off-stage, or could continue after the show, is a worthwhile research avenue to pursue. As this story of Zimbabwean stand-up comedy comes to end, I thus want to, similarly to how the thesis started, turn to the voices of stand-up comedians themselves, this time drawing from my interviews to highlight how stand-up comedy is embedded within, and speaks to social ordering:

> "At the end of the day, what people forget is that, that comedians also go through whatever it is the audience is going through, you know, because I'm also Zimbabwean and I'm performing for Zimbabweans. […] [So] trying to be the one who brings the funny, it's a very difficult thing, it's a very difficult thing"

(Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 9, 2018)

> "[I want my stand-up comedy to deal with the] monumental task that is being Zimbabwean and loving your country."

(Munyaradzi Guramatunhu, stand-up comedian, interview with author, October 15, 2018)

Bibliography

Aarmo, Margret. 1999. "How Homosexuality Became 'un-African': The Case of Zimbabwe." In *Same-sex relations and female desires transgender practices across cultures*, edited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa, 255-280. New York: Columbia University Press.

Adetunji, Akin. 2013. "The interactional context of humor in Nigerian stand-up comedy." *Pragmatics* 23(1): 1-22. doi:10.1075/prag.23.1.01ade.

Al Jazeera. 2019a. "Robert Mugabe's most famous quotes", *Al Jazeera News*. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/robert-mugabe-famous-quotes-171115094122605.html (accessed: 02/20/2020).

Al Jazeera. 2019b. "Zimbabwe imposes internet shutdown amid crackdown on protests", *Al Jazeera News.* Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/1/18/zimbabwe-imposes-internet-shutdown-amid-crackdown-on-protests (accessed: 29/01/2021).

AllAfrica, 2019. "Zimbabwe: Bustop TV Actresses Gonyeti, Maggie Arrested Over Skit in Police Uniform", *AllAfrica*. Available at: https://allafrica.com/stories/201902270061.html (accessed: 14/12/2020).

Amnesty International. 2019. "Freedom of expression", *Zimbabwe 2019.* Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/zimbabwe/report-zimbabwe/ (accessed: 10/12/2020).

Amoore, Louise and Hall, Alexandra. 2013. "The clown at the gates of the camp: Sovereignty, resistance and the figure of the fool." *Security Dialogue* 44(3): 93-110. doi:10.1177/0967010613479994.

Asala, Kizzi. 2020. "Cameroonian Youth are Revolutionising the Stand-up Comedy Industry", *Africanews.* Available at: https://www.africanews.com/2020/11/09/cameroonian-youth-are-revolutionising-the-stand-up-comedy-industry// (accessed: 16/07/2021).

Auslander, Philip. 1993. "'Brought to You by Fem-Rage': Stand-Up Comedy and the Politics of Gender." In *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, edited by Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan, 315–336. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. (1965) 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ballard-Reisch, D.S., Turner, P.K. and Sarratea, M. 2001. "The Paradox of Women in Zimbabwe: Emancipation, Liberation, and Traditional African Values." *Women and Language* XXIV(2): 65-71.

Banya, Nelson. 2019. "Power crisis turns night into day for Zimbabwe's firms and families", *Reuters.* Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-economy-power/power-crisis-turns-night-into-day-for-zimbabwes-firms-and-families-idUSKCN1UR4SA (accessed: 05/03/2020).

BBC. 2013. "Zimbabwe court says Robert Mugabe 'insult law' invalid", *BBC News.* Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24757351 (accessed: 06/01/2019).

BBC. 2018. "Zimbabwe's President Mnangagwa appeals for racial unity ahead of election." *BBC News.* Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44912515 (accessed: 31/01/2021).

BBC. 2019. "Zimbabwean comedian Gonyeti 'abducted and beaten' in Harare", *BBC News.* Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49433387 (accessed: 20/01/2021).

Beck, Daniel and Spencer, Alexander. 2020. "Just a bit of fun: the camouflaging and defending functions of humour in recruitment videos of the British and Swedish armed forces." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* [available online]. doi.10.1080/09557571.2020.1719039.

Bergson, Henri. (1990) 2010. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Reprint, London: Digireads.com.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1989. "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition." In *Remaking History*, edited by Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani, 131–148. Lillington: Dia Art Foundation.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1990. "Introduction: narrating the nation." In *Nation and Narration,* edited by Homi K. Bhabha, 1-7. Abingdon: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1992. "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt." In *Cultural Studies,* edited by Nelson L. Grossberg and Paula Treichler, 56-68. UK: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi. 2011. "Our Neighbours, Ourselves: Contemporary Reflections on Survival." In *Hegel Lectures,* edited by Cancik-Kirschbaum E, Fisher-Lichte E., Hempfer, Kalus W., Küpper, 1-19. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Billig, Michael. 2001. "Humour and Embarrassment: Limits of 'Nice-Guy' Theories of Social Life." *Theory, Culture & Society* 18 (5): 23-43. doi:10.1177/02632760122051959.

Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule Social Critique of Humour*. London: Sage Publications.

Bleiker, Roland. 2009. *Aesthetics and world politics.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brassett, James. 2009. "British Irony, Global Justice: A Pragmatic Reading of Chris Brown, Banksy and Ricky Gervais." *Review of International Studies* 35 (1): 219–245. doi:10.1017/S026021059008390.

Brassett, James. 2016. "British Comedy, Global Resistance: Russell Brand, Charlie Brooker and Stewart Lee." *European Journal of International Relations* 22 (1): 168–191. doi:10.1177/ 1354066115586816.

Brassett, James and Sutton, Alex. 2017. "British satire, everyday politics: Chris Morris, Armando Iannucci and Charlie Brooker." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19(2): 245-262. Doi:10.1177/1369148117700147.

Brassett, James. 2019. "British Comedy and the Politics of Resistance: The Liminality of Right-Wing Comedy." In *The Joke is on Us Political Comedy in (late)neoliberal Times*, edited by Julie A. Webber, 117-192. Maryland: Lexington Books.

Brassett, James. 2021. *The ironic state: British comedy and the everyday politics of globalization.* Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Brassett, J., Browning, C.S., O'Dwyer, M. 2021a."EU've Got to be Kidding: Anxiety, humour and Ontological Security." *Global Society* 35(1): 8-26. doi.10.1080/13600926.2020.1828298.

Brassett, J., Browning, C.S., Wedderburn, A. 2021b. "Humorous States: IR, New Diplomacy and the Rise of Comedy in Global Politics." *Global Society* 35(1): 1-7. doi.10.1080/13600826.2020.1828302.

Bratton, M., Chikwana, A., Sithole, T. 2005. "Propaganda and public opinion in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23(1):77-108. doi.10.1080/0258900042000329466.

Bratton, Michael. 2014. *Power politics in Zimbabwe*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Brigg, Morgan and Bleiker, Roland. 2010. "Autoethnographic International Relations: exploring the self as a source of knowledge." *Review of International Studies* 36(3): 779-798. doi.10.1017/S0260210510000689.

Brodie, Ian. 2014. *A vulgar art: a new approach to stand-up comedy.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Bryant, Chad. 2006. "The Language of Resistance?: Czech Jokes and joke-telling under Nazi Occupation, 1943-1945." *Journal of Contemporary History* 4(1): 133-151. doi:10.1177/0022009406058687.

Bulawayo24News. 2013. "Man confesses to molesting more than 6000 women using 'bluetooth sex' mubobobo", *Bulawayo24News online.* Available at: https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-29751-article-Man+confesses+to+molesting+more+than+6000+women+using+%27bluetooth+sex%27+mubobobo.html (accessed: 04/03/2020).

Bulawayo24News. 2015. "Jonathan Moyo defends Mugabe photograph deletion", *Bulawayo24News.* Available at: https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-

62874-article-jonathan+moyo+defends+mugabe+photograph+deletion.html (accessed: 04/02/2019).

Bureau of Democracy Human Rights, and Labor. 2019. "2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Zimbabwe", *U.S. Department of State*. Available at: https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/zimbabwe/ (accessed: 24/01/2021).

Burke, Jason. 2018. "Zimbabwe's new artistic freedoms are tested by film on Matabeleland violence", *The Guardian Observer.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/30/documentary-1980s-massacre-director-threatened (accessed: 02/10/2018).

Burke, Jason. 2019. "Zimbabwean comedian goes into hiding after abduction and beating", *The Guardian.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/23/zimbabwean-comedian-samantha-kureya-goes-into-hiding-after-abduction-and-beating (accessed: 20/10/2019).

Butler, Judith. 1986. "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex." *Yale French Studies* 72: 35–49. doi:10.2307/2930225.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter on the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Abingdon: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative.* New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. (1990) 1999. *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Reprint, Abingdon: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge.

Cameron, John D. 2015. "Can Poverty be Funny? The Serious use of Humour as a Strategy of Public Engagement for Global Justice." *Third World Quarterly* 36 (2): 274–290. doi:10.1080/01436597.2015.1013320.

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. 2007. *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: a report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980-1988.* London: Hurst and Company.

Chekerwa-Machokoto, Tsungai. 2016a. "SuperGirls of ZImbabwe: Let's talk more about sex", *The Chronicle.* Available at: https://www.chronicle.co.zw/supergirls-of-zimbabwe-lets-talk-more-about-sex/ (accessed: 14/09/2020).

Chekerwa-Machokoto, Tsungai. 2016b. "The sexism of virginity towards women", *The Chronicle.* Available at: https://www.chronicle.co.zw/the-sexism-of-virginity-towards-women/ (accessed: 14/09/2020).

Chiatu, M., Dube C., Gunner L. 1994. "Song, Story and Nation: Women as singers and actresses in Zimbabwe." In *Politics and Performance Theatre, Poetry and Song in*

Southern Africa edited by Liz Gunner, 111-138. Johannesburg: Witwaterstand University Press.

Chingono, Nyasha. 2019. "Empty stomachs and unpaid salaries, Zimbabweans face a bleak 2020 as economic crisis deepens", *CNN World.* Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2019/12/31/africa/zimbabwe-economic-crisis-intl/index.html (accessed: 20/01/2021).

Chitando, Ezar and Mateveke, Pauline. "Challenging Patriarchy and Exercisisng Women's Agency in Zimbabwean Music: Analysing the Careers of Chiwoniso Mararire and Olivia Charamba." *Muziki Journal of Music Research in Africa* 9(2): 41-52. doi.10.1080/18125980.2012.742234.

Christiansen, Lene Bull. 2009. "'In Our Culture' – How Debates about Zimbabwe's Domestic Violence Law Became a 'Culture Struggle.'" *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 17(3): 175-191. doi.10.1080/08038740903117190.

Christiansen, Lene Bull. 2013. "'Respectable Women' versus 'Small Houses': Feminist Negotiations of Sexual Morality, Marriage and the Challenge of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39(3): 511-526. doi.10.1080/03057070.2013.826069.

Citizens Manifesto. 2018. "Citizens' Manifesto", *Citizens Manifesto* [Facebook]. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/citmanifesto/photos/852160391639303 (accessed: 26/03/2021).

Colleary, Susanne. 2015. *Performance and Identity in Irish Stand-up Comedy: The Comic I.* USA: Palgrave MacMillan.

Crilley, Rhys and Chatterje-Doody, Precious N. 2020. "From Russia with Lols: Humour, RT, and the Legitimation of Russian Foreign Policy." *Global Society* [available online]. doi. 10.1080/13600826.2020.1839387.

Dailynews. 2018. "Police warns touts, kombi drivers over sexual harassment", *Dailynews online.* Available at: https://dailynews.co.zw/articles-2018-12-08-police-warns-touts-kombi-drivers-over-sexual-harassment/ (accessed: 05/03/2020).

DeCamp, Elise. 2017. "Negotiating race in stand-up comedy: interpretations of 'single story' narratives." *Social Identities* 23(3): 326-342. doi:10.1080/13504630.2016.1235968.

De Goede, Marieke. 2005. "Carnival of Money Politics of dissent in an era of globalizing finance." In *The Global Resistance Reader*, edited by Louise Amoore, 379-391 London: Routledge.

Delehanty, Will and Brent J. Steele. 2009. "Engaging the narrative in ontological (in)security theory: insights from feminist IR." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22(3): 523-540. doi.10.1080/09557570903104024.

Dendere, Chipo. 2018. "Finding Women in the Zimbabwean Transition." *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 17(2): 376-381. doi.10.1215/5366936-7176505.

Deutsche Welle. 2018. "Zimbabwe's President Mnangagwa woos white voters with reassurances." Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/zimbabwes-president-mnangagwa-woos-white-voters-with-reassurances/a-44773889 (accessed: 31/01/2021).

Deveau, Danielle Jeanine. 2016. "Navigating the boys' club: Debra DiGiovanni and the performative strategy of comic self-deprecation." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(5): 535-547. doi.10.1177/1367877915595479.

Dodds, Klaus. 2010. "Popular Geopolitics and Cartoons: Representing Power Relations, Repitition and Resistance." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 113–131. doi.10.1080/20407211.2010.10530760.

Dodds, Klaus, and Philip Kirby. 2013. "It's Not a Laughing Matter: Critical Geopolitics, Humour and Unlaughter." *Geopolitics* 18 (1): 45–59. doi.10.1080/14650045.2012.668723.

Donkor, David A. 2013. "Selling the President: Stand-up Comedy and the Politricks of Indirection in Ghana." *American Society for Theatre Research* 54(2): 255-281. doi.10.1017/S0040557413000057.

Dorman, Sara Rich. 2016. *Understanding Zimbabwe: from liberation to authoritarianism*. London: C Hurst & Co Publishers LTD.

Doty, Roxanne. 2010. "Autoethnography – making human connections." *Review of International Studies* 36(4): 1047-1050. doi.10.1017/S026021051000118X.

Double, Oliver. 1997. *Stand up!: on being a comedian*. Great Britain: Palimpset Book Production Limited.

Double, Oliver. 2014. *Getting the joke: the inner workings of stand-up comedy*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen.

Double, Oliver. 2018. "The origin of the term 'stand-up comedy' – update." *Comedy Studies* 9(2): 235-237. doi.10.1080/2040610X.2018.1428127.

Douglas, Mary. 1999 (1975). *Implicit meanings: essays in anthropology*. Reprint, London: Routledge.

Dune, Tinashe and Virginia Mapedzahama. 2017. "Culture Clash: Shona (Zimbabwe) Migrant Women's Experiences with Communicating about Sexual Health and Wellbeing across Cultures and Generations." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 21(1): 18-29. doi.10.29063/ajrh2017/v21i1.1.

Dzirutwe, MacDonald. 2019. "Zimbabwe increases fuel price again amid shortages", *IOL*. Available at: https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/international/zimbabwe-increases-fuel-price-again-amid-shortages-30360024 (accessed: 05/03/2020).

Ekeh, Peter, P. 1975. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17(1): 91-112.

Eko, Lyombe. 2010. "The Art of Criticism: How African Cartoons Discursively Constructed African Media Realities in the Post-Cold War Era." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 65–91. doi.10.1080/20407211.2010.10530758.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2014. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (2nd edition). Berkley: University of California Press.

Epperecht, Marc. 1998. "The 'Unsaying' of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24(4): 631-651. doi.10.1080/03057079808708594.

Filani, Ibukunu. 2015. "Discourse Types in Stand-Up Comedy Performances: An Example of Nigerian Stand-Up Comedy." *The European Journal of Humour Research* 3 (1): 41–60. doi:10.7592/EJHR2015.3.1.filani.

Fox, Kate. 2018. "Humitas: Humour as Performative Resistance." In *Comedy and Critical Thought: Laughter as Resistance,* edited by I. MacKenzie, F. Francis, G. Krista Bonello Rutter, 83 -99. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.

Freud, Sigmund. (1905) 1989. *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious.* London: Routledge.

Gallagher, Julia. 2014. "'Good' State, 'Bad' State: Loss and Longing in Postcolonial Zimbabwe." In *The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa,* edited by Ebenezer Obadare, 61-75. New York: Springer.

Gallagher, Julia. 2015. "The battle for Zimbabwe in 2013: from polarisation to ambivalence." *The Journal of Modern African studies* 53(1): 27-49. doi.10.1017.S0022278X14000640.

Gallagher, Julia. 2017. *Zimbabwe's International Relations Fantasy, Reality and the Making of the State*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gilbert, Joanna R. 1997. "Performing Marginality: Comedy, Identity, and Cultural Critique." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 17 (4): 317–330. doi:10.1080/10462939709366196.

Gilbert, Joanna R. 2004. *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender and Cultural Critique*. USA: Wayne State University Press.

Githatu M. Mary and Furaha Chai. 2015. "Discursive Structure of Humour in Stand-up Comedy Kenya: Discourse Topics and Stylistic Devices in Churchill's Performances." *International Journal of Language and Linguistic* 3(6): 409-415. doi.10.11648/j.ijll.20150306.24.

Goddard, Keith. 2004. "'A Fair Representation' GALZ and the History of the Gay Movement in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 16(1): 75-98. doi.10.1300/J041v16n01_05.

Gov.uk. 2020. "Local Laws and Customs", *Foreign travel advice: Zimbabwe*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/zimbabwe/local-laws-and-customs (accessed: 10/03/2020).

Grayson, K., Davies, M., Philpott, S. 2009. "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum." *Politics* 29(3): 155-163. doi.10.1111/j.1467-9256.2009.01351.x.

Greene, Viveca. 2018. "All They Need Is Lulz: Racist Trolls, Unlaughter and Leslie Jones." In *The Joke is on Us Political Comedy in (late)neoliberal Times*, edited by Julie A. Webber, 37-64. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Gukurume, Simbarashe. 2017. "#ThisFlag and #ThisGown Cyber Protests in Zimbabwe Reclaiming Political Space." *African Journalism Studies* 38(2): 49-70. doi.10/1080/23743670.2017.1354052.

Hammett, Daniel. 2010. "Zapiro and Zuma: a Symptom of an Emerging Constitutional Crisis in South Africa?" *Political Geography* 29 (2): 88–96. doi.10.1016/j.polgeo.2010.01.009.

Hammett, Daniel. 2011. "Resistance, power and geopolitics in Zimbabwe." *Area* 43(2): 202-210. doi.10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00980.x.

Hammett, Daniel. 2014. "Narrating the Contested Public Sphere Zapiro, Zuma and Freedom of Expression in South Africa." In *Civic Agency in Africa: Arts of resistance in the 21st century*, edited by Ebenezer Obadare and Wendy Willems, 204-225. Great Britain: James Currey.

Hansen, Lene. 2011. "Theorizing the image for Security Studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammed Cartoon Crisis." *European Journal of International Relations* 17(1): 51-74. doi.10.1177/1354066110388593.

Harris, Keith M. 2008. "'That Nigger is Crazy': Richard Pryor, Racial Performativity, Cultural Critique." In *Richard Pryor the life and legacy of a 'crazy' black man*, edited by Audrey Thomas McCluskey, 23-38. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Huddart, David. 2006. *Homi K. Bhabha*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hungwe, Brian. 2019. "Letter from Africa: Zimbabwe descends into darkness", *BBC Africa.* Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49097080 (accessed: 20/01/2021).

Hungwe, Chipo. 2006. "Putting them in their place: 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' women in Zimbabwean gender struggles." *Feminist Africa 6: Subaltern Sexualities* 6: 33-47.

Jacoby, Tami. 2006. "From the trenches: dilemmas of feminist IR fieldwork." In *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations,* edited by B. Ackerly, M. Stern, and J. True, 153-173. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaarsholm, Preben. 1990. "Mental Colonisation or Catharsis? Theatre, democracy and cultural struggle from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16(2): 246-275. doi.10.1080/03057079008708233.

Kapoor, Ilan. 2003. "Acting in a Tight Spot: Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Politics." *New Political Science* 25 (4): 561–577. doi:10.1080/0739314032000145233.

Kapoor, Ilan. 2008. *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kar Tang, Jasmine. 2013. "'A Tennessean in an Unlikely Package': The Stand-up Comedy of Henry Cho." In *Asian American in Dixie*, edited by Joshi Y. Khyati and Jigna Desai, 245-263. USA: University Illinois Press.

Keane, Fergal. 2017. "Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe resigns, ending 37-year rule", *BBC News Africa.* Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42071488 (accessed: 26/11/2020).

Koelbe, Thomas A. and Robins, Steven L. 2007. "Zapiro: The work of a Political Cartoonist in South Africa – Caricature, Complexity, and Comedy in a Climate of Contestation." *Political Science and Politics* 40(2): 315-318. doi.10.1017/S1049096507070515.

Kriger, Norma J. 2003. *Guerilla veterans in post-war Zimbabwe: symbolic and violent politics, 1980-1987.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kriger, Norma J. 2006. "From Patriotic Memories to 'Patriotic History' in Zimbabwe, 1990-2005." *Third world quarterly* 27(6): 1151-1169. doi.10.1080/01436590600842472.

Kupiers, Giselinde. 2011. *Good humour, bad state: A sociology of the joke*. The Netherlands: De Guyter.

Kuusisto, Riikka. 2009. "Comic Plots a Conflict resolution strategy." *European Journal of International Relations* 15(4): 601-626. doi.10.1177/1354066109345052.

Källstig, A. and Death C. 2020. "Laughter, resistance and ambivalence in Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy: returning mimicry as mockery." *Critical African Studies* [available online]. doi.10.1080/21681392.2020.1743191.

Källstig, Amanda. 2021. "Laughing in the Face of Danger: Performativity and Resistance in Zimbabwean Stand-up Comedy." *Global Society* 35(1): 45-60. doi.10.1080/13600826.2020.1828295.

Langeveldt, Edgar. 2000. "Side road, dark corner." *Index on Censorship* 29(6): 86-89. doi.10.1080/03064220008536840.

Lesutis, Gediminas. 2018. "Research Note: The politics of narrative: methodological reflections on analysing voices of the marginalized in Africa." *African Affairs* 117(468): 509-521.

Lindgren, Björn. 2002. "Power, Education, and Identity in Post-colonial Zimbabwe: the fate of King Lobengula of Matabeleland." *African Sociological Review* 6(1): 46-67.

Lindgren, Björn. 2005. "The Politics of Ethnicity as an Extended Case: Thoughts on a Chiefly Succession Crisis." *Social Analysis* 49(3): 234-253. doi.10.3167/015597705780275129.

Lisle, Debbie. 2019. "For Alex: The art of International Relations." In *Routledge handbook of critical international relations,* edited by Jenny Edkins, 91-104. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lockyer, Sharon and Pickering, Michael. 2005. *Beyond a joke: the limits of humour.* Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan.

Logan, Brian. 2021. "Interview: 'This feels like a breakthrough': comedian Loyiso Gola on his new Netflix show", *The Guardian.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/mar/23/this-feels-like-a-breakthrough-album-comedian-loyiso-gola-on-his-new-netflix-show (accessed: 16/07/2021).

LuQuLuQu. 2021. "Comedy with a Purpose", *LuQuLuQu.* Available at: https://luquluqu.org/comedy/ (accessed: 16/07/2021).

Mahomed, Raheela. 2018. "Zimbabwe's new information era", *Al Jazeera.* Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/zimbabwe-information-era-181017151728882.html (accessed: 18/10/2019).

Majoni, Mukudzei K. 2020. "King Kandoro's Conspiracy Theories| Stand Up Comedy| Madhorofiya Republik", *Madhorofiya Republik* [Youtube]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itx_rCOpccw&t=2133s (accessed: 29/11/2020).

Makaudze, Godwin. 2015. "Sex and the Female Body in Shona Society." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 7(8): 140-152.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. "Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The African Dilemma." *Social Justice* 23(1/2 63-64): 145-150.

Manor, Ilan. 2021. "The Russians are Laughing! The Russians are Laughing! How Russian Diplomats Employ Humour in Online Public Diplomacy." *Global Society* 35(1): 61-83. doi.10.1080/13600826.2020.1828299.

Manyonganise, Molly. 2017. "HIV-Positive Women 'Virgins': the complexities of discourse on issues of sex and sexuality in Zimbabwe." In *Research on Gender and Sexualities in Africa*, edited by Jane Bennett and Sylvia Tamale, 151-160. Oxford: Codesria.

Marima, Tendai. 2018a. "After Mugabe, Zimbabwe Still Enforces A Law Against Insulting The President", *NPR.* Available at:

https://www.npr.org/2018/12/20/676055453/after-mugabe-zimbabwe-still-enforces-a-law-against-insulting-the-president (accessed: 06/10/2019).

Marima, Tendai. 2018b. "A new dawn or more of the same for Zimbabwe?", *Al Jazeera*. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/180826142204904.html (accessed: 27/08/2018).

Maringira, Godfrey. 2016. "Politicization and resistance in the Zimbabwean national army." *African Affairs* 116(462): 18-38. doi.10.1093/afraf/adw055.

Mason, Andy. 2009. "Ten years after: South African Cartooning and Politics of Liberation." In *Cartooning in Africa*, edited by John A. Lent, 247-302. USA: Hampton Press Inc.

Mason, Andy J. 2010. "The Cannibal Ogre and the Rape of Justice: A Contrapuntal View." *Critical African Studies* 2(4): 32-64. doi.10.1080/20407211.2010.10530757.

Mason, Kelvin. 2014. "Becoming Citizen Green: prefigurative politics, autonomous geographies, and hoping against hope." *Environmental Politics* 23(1): 140-158. doi.10.1080/09644016.2013.775725.

Mateveke, Pauline. 2017. "Language, sex and Power Relation: An analysis of Shona sexual Expressions." In *Research on Gender and Sexualities in Africa*, edited by Jane Bennett and Sylvia Tamale, 125-131. Oxford: Codesria.

Matsilele, Trust and Pedzisai Ruhanya. 2020. "Social media dissidence and activists resistance in Zimbabwe." *Media, Culture and Society* 43(2): 381-394. doi.10.1177/0163443720957886.

Matte, Gerard and McFadyen, Ian. 2011. "Can we talk? The reframing of social permissions in the comedy of Joan Rivers." *Comedy Studies* 2(2): 161-171. doi.10.1386/cost.2.2.161_1.

Mazarire, Gerald Chikozho. 2009. "Reflection on Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe, c850-1880." In *Becoming Zimbabwe A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008,* edited by Brian Raftopoulos and A.S. Mlambo, 1-38. Harare: Weaver Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 1992. "Provisional notes on the Postcolony." *Journal of the International African Institute* 62(1): 3-37. doi.10.2307/1160062.

Mbembe, Achille. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Berkley: University of California Press.

McGregor, Alexander, and Ranger, Terence. 2000. *Violence & Memory One hundred years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*. Great Britain: James Currey.

Mhiripiri, Nhamo Anthony. 2011. "'Welcome singing *sungura* queens': Cultural studies and the promotion of female musicians in a Zimbabwean male-dominated music genre." *Muziki Journal of Music Research in Africa* 8(1): 103-119. doi.10.1080/18125980.2011.570304.

Mintz, Lawrence. 1985. "Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation." *American Quarterly* 37(1):71-80. doi.10.2307/2712763.

Monro, Samm Farai. 2015. "Comedy of Terrors." *Index on Censorship* 44(2): 78-82. doi.10.1177/0306422015591457.

Moss, Joshua L. 2016. "Defining transcomedy: Humor, tricksterism, and postcolonial affect from Gerarld Cizenor to Sacha Baron Cohen." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(5):487-500. doi.10.1177/1367877915595476.

Moyo, Jeffery. 2019. "Politics: no laughing matter in poverty-hit Zimbabwe", *Reuters.* Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-comedy/politics-no-laughing-matter-in-poverty-hit-zimbabwe-idUSKCN1SE1PW (accessed: 08/05/20).

Moyo, Jeffery and Gladsone, Rich. 2019. "'We'd prefer the food': Zimbabwe Fears a Famine in its future." Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/25/world/africa/zimbabwe-hunger-famine.html (accessed: 11/03/2020).

Moyo, Ntando. 2013. "Ntando Van Moyo 2" [Youtube]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aFeGR05Pp4&t=224s (accessed: 10/03/2020).

Mpofu, Shepherd. 2013. "Social media and the politics of ethnicity in Zimbabwe." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34(1): 115-122. doi.10.1080/02560054.2013.767432.

Mpofu, Shepherd. 2017. "Making heroes, (un)making the nation?: ZANU-PF's imaginations of the Heroes' Acre, heroes and constriction of identity in Zimbabwe from 2000-2015." *African Identities* 15(1): 62-78. doi.10.1080/14725843.2016.1175920.

Mpofu, Shepherd and Mare, Admire. 2020. "#ThisFlag: Social Media and Cyber-Protests in Zimbabwe." In *Social Media and Elections in Africa Volume 2,* edited by Martin N. Ndlela and Winston Mano, 153-173. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mumera, Wisdom. 2018. "Gabbuza's arrest pegs back free speech", *Openparly.* Available at: https://www.openparly.co.zw/gabbuzas-arrest-pegs-back-free-speech/ (accessed: 06/01/2019).

Munhende, Leopold. 2020. "'What meat! Eat Vegetables', Mnangagwa says to hungry resident", *New Zimbabwe News You Trust.* Available at: https://www.newzimbabwe.com/let-them-eat-vegetables-mnangagwa/ (accessed: 13/04/2020).

Muronzi, Christ. 2019a. "Powerless: Rolling blackouts in Zimbabwe hit businesses and jobs", *Aljazeera.* Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/8/6/powerless-rolling-blackouts-in-zimbabwe-hit-businesses-and-jobs (accessed: 20/01/2020).

Muronzi. Chris. 2019b. "IMF: Zimbabwe has the highest inflation rate in the world", *AlJazeera impact online.* Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/imf-zimbabwe-highest-inflation-rate-world-190927004536305.html (accessed: 05/03/2020).

Musila, Grace A. 2014. "Laughing at the Rainbow's Cracks? Blackness, Whiteness and the Ambivalences of South African Stand-up Comedy." In *Civic Agency in Africa: Arts of Resistance in the 21st Century*, edited by Chris van Wyk, 147–166. Woodbridge: James Currey.

Musila, Grace. 2017. "Navigating epistemic disarticulations", *African Affairs* 116(465): 692-704. doi.10.1093/afraf/adx031.

Muvunyi, Fred. 2020. "Rights activists 'worried' by Zimbabwe President Mnangagwa's speech", *DW*. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/rights-activists-worried-by-zimbabwe-president-mnangagwas-speech/a-54438393 (accessed: 04/01/2021).

Muzondidya, James. 2004. "'Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans': Invisible subject minorities and the quest for justice and reconciliation in post-colonial Zimbabwe." In *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, edited by Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage, 213-235. Institute for Justice and Reconciliation: South Africa.

Muzondidya, James and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2007. "'Echoing Silences': Ethnicity in post-colonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2007." *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 7(2): 275-297. doi.10.4314/ajcr.v7i2.39418.

Ncube, Carl J. 2017. "Carl Joshua Ncube: Confessions of a Zimbabwean comic", *TedArchive* [Youtube]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcvUGKCvGhs&t=198s (accessed: 5/12/2020).

Ncube, Gibson and Siziba, Gugulethu. 2017. "Compelled to perform in the 'Oppressor's Language? Ndebele Performing Artists and Zimbabwe's Shona-Centric Habitus." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43(4): 825-836. doi.10.1177/1354066117745365.

Ncube, Gibson. 2020a. "Eternal mothers, whores or witches: the oddities of being a woman in politics in Zimbabwe." *Agenda* 34(4): 25-33. doi.10.1080/10130950.2020.1749523.

Ncube, Lyton. 2020b. "Misogyny, Sexism and Hegemonic Masculinity in Zimbabwe's Operation Restore Legacy." In *The history of political transition of Zimbabwe: from Mugabe to Mnangagwa,* edited by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Predzisai Ruhanya, 331-357. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni. 2008. "Nation building in Zimbabwe and the challenges of Ndebele particularism." *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 8(3): 27-55. doi10.4314/ajcr.v8i3.39430.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2009. "Making Sense of Mugabeism in Local and Global Politics: 'So Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe.'" *Third World Quarterly* 30(6):1139-1158. doi.10.1080/01436590903037424.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2013. *Empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity.* New York: Berghan Books.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2020. "The Zimbabwean National Question: Key Components and Unfinished Business." In *The History and Political Transition of Zimbabwe,* edited by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Predzisai Ruhanya, 51-84. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. and Willems, Wendy. 2009. "Making sense of cultural nationalism and the politics of commemoration under the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35(4): 945-965. doi.10.1080/03057070903314226.

Ndlovu, Mandla. 2020. "2 men arrested for insulting Mnangagwa on Whatsapp group", *Bulawayo24.* Available at: https://bulawayo24.com/news/national/184716 (accessed: 14/12/2020).

Nenjerama, Tinashe Theophilus and Nkululeko, Sibanda. 2019."Navigating between Protest Theatre and Journalism in Post-2000 Zimbabwe: A Study of *All systems out of order.*" *Communication, Cultural, Journalism and Media Studies* 18-33. doi.10.1080/02500167.2019.1626457.

Nissen-Adlre, Rebecca and Tsinovoi Alexei. 2019. "International misrecognition: the politics of humour and national identity in Israel's public diplomacy." *European Journal of International Relations* 25(1): 3-29. doi.10.117/1354066117745365.

Njovana, Eunice and Watts, Charlotte. 1996. "Gender violence in Zimbabwe: A need for collaborative action." *Reproductive Health Matters* 4(7): 46-55. doi.10.1016/S0968-8080(96)90005-1.

Nkiwane, Tandeka C. 2000. "Gender, Citizenship, and Constitutionalism in Zimbabwe: The Fight Against Amendment 14." *Citizenship Studies* 4(3): 325-338. doi.10.1080/713658795.

Noah, Trevor. 2020. "About." Available at: https://www.trevornoah.com/about (accessed: 16/07/2021).

Ncube, Carl Joshua. 2021. "Carl Joshua Ncube." Available at: http://carljoshuancube.weebly.com/biography.html (accessed: 16/07/2021).

Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2009. "Press Cartoon and Politics: The Case of Cameroon." In *Cartooning in Africa*, edited by John A. Lent, 97-110. USA: Hampton Press Inc.

Obadare, Ebenezer. 2009. "The uses of Ridicule: Humour, 'Infrapolitics' and Civil Society in Nigeria." *African Affairs* 108(431): 241-261. doi.10.1093/afraf/adn086.

Obadare, Ebenezer. 2010. "State of Travesty: Jokes and the Logic of Socio-Cultural Improvisation in Africa." *Critical African Studies* 2(4): 92–112. doi.10.1080/20407211.2010.10530759.

Obadare, Ebenezer. 2016. *Humor, silence, and civil society in Nigeria.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Odysseos, Louiza. 2001. "Laughing Matters: Peace, Democracy and the Challenge of the Comic Narrative." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30 (3): 709–732. Doi10.1177/03058298010300030501.

Ogoanah, Felix N. and. Ojo, Fredricj O. 2018. "A multimodal generic perspective on Nigerian stand-up comedy." *The European Journal of Humour Research* 6(4): 39-59. doi.10.7592/EJHR2018.6.4ogoanah.

Oneya, Faith. 2019. "Kenya: Stand-up Comedy Where No Topic Is Off Limits". *AllAfrica.* Available at: https://allafrica.com/stories/201901160552.html (accessed: 16/07/2021).

Oosterom, Marjoke A. 2019. "Youth and social navigation in Zimbabwe's informal economy: 'Don't end up on the wrong side.'" *African Affairs* 118(472): 485-508. doi.10/1093/afraf/ady048.

Oppenheim, Maya. 2019. "Zimbabwe satirist abducted, stripped and forced to drink sewage amid crackdown on opposition", *The Independent.* Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/samantha-kureya-gonyeti-zimbabwe-satirist-adbucted-gonyeti-harare-a9076256.html (accessed: 2/12/2020).

Parker, Zoe. 2002. "Standing up for the nation: An investigation of stand-up comedy in South Africa post-1994 with specific reference to women's power and body." *South African Theatre Journal* 16(1): 8-29. doi.10.1080/10137548.2002.9687739.

Parpart, Jane L. 2008. "Masculinity/ies, gender and violence in the struggle for Zimbabwe." In *Rethinking the man questions: sex, gender and violence in international relations*, edited by Jane L. Parpart and Marysia Zalewski, 181-202. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Patterson, Molly and Monroe, Kristen Renwick. 1998. "Narrative in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1: 315-331. doi.10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.315.

Payne, Rodger. 2017. "Laughing off a Zombie Apocalypse: the value of comedic and satirical narratives." *International Studies Perspectives* 18(2): 211-224. doi.10.1093/isp/ekv026.

Pérez, Raúl. 2013. "Learning to make racism funny in the 'color-blind' era: Stand-up comedy students, performance strategies, and the (re)production of racist jokes in public." *Discourse and Society* 24(4): 478-503. doi.10.1177/0957926513482066.

Phiri, Marko. 2019. "Zimbabwe's women are 'braving' being assaulted on public busses", *World Economic Forum in collaboration with Thomson Reuters Foundation.* Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/zimbabwes-women-assaulted-buses/ (accessed: 05/03/2020).

Quest, Richard and McKenzie, Sheena. 2018. "President Mnangagwa: 'Zimbabwe is open for Buisness'", *CNN online*. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/24/africa/zimbabwe-president-emmerson-mnangagwa-davos-intl/index.html (accessed: 05/03/2020).

Quirk, Sophie. 2010. "Who's in charge? Negotiation, manipulation and comic licence in the work of Mark Thomas." *Comedy Studies* 1(1): 113-124. doi.10.1386/cost.1.1.113/1.

Quirk, Sophie. 2015. *Why stand-up matters: how comedians manipulate and influence.* London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

Raftopoulos, Brian. 2007. "Nation, Race and History in Zimbabwean Politics." In *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa,* edited by S.R. Droman, D.P., Hammett, and P. Nugent, 181-194. Boston: BRILL.

Ranchod-Nilsson, Sita. 2006. "Gender Politics and the Pendulum of Political and Social Transformation in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32(1), 49-67. doi.10.1080/03057070500493751.

Ranger, Terence. 2004. "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: the Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe." *Journal of southern African studies* 30(2) 215-234. doi.10.1080/0305707042000215338.

Ranger, Terence. (1992) 2019. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." In *The invention of tradition,* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 211-262. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rossdale, Chris. 2019. *Resisting Militarism Direct Action and the Politics of Subversion.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Russell, Danielle. 2002. "Self-deprecatory Humour and the Female Comic", *Third Space,* 2(1) (November). https://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/view/d_russell.

Salih, Sara. 2002. *Judith Butler*. London: Routledge.

Saunders, Robert A. and Bruun, Hanne. 2020. "'Radio Free Sweden': Satire, National Identity, and the Un-PC (Geo)Politics of Jonatan Spang." *Global Society* [available online]. doi.10.1080/3600826.2020.1828297.

Scarpetta, Fabiola and Spagnolli, Anna. 2009. "The Interactional Context of Humor in Stand-up comedy." *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 42(3): 210-230. doi.10.1080/08351810903089159.

Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Scott, James C. 2012. *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play*. Princeton: PUP.

Seirlis, Julia. 2011. "Laughing all the way to freedom? Contemporary stand-up comedy and democracy in South Africa." *International Journal of Humour Research* 24(4): 513-530. doi.10.1515/humr.2011.028.

Sena, Tanya. 2020. "Simuka Phakama Episode 1 – Tanya Alex", *Simuka Comedy International* [Youtube]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_dPPerm6mI (accessed: 22/03/2021).

Shapiro, Michael J. 2009. *Cinematic geopolitics.* London: Routledge.

Shehata, Samer S. 1992. "The Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarek in Egyptian Political Jokes." *Folklore* 103(1): 75-91. doi.10.1080/0015587X.1992.9715831.

Shepherd, Laura J. 2013. *Gender, violence and popular culture: telling stories.* London: Routledge.

Sigauke, Maureen. 2019. "Getting around the city with kids, when formal transit has collapsed", *Citylab online.* Available at: https://www.citylab.com/perspective/2019/01/moms-families-transit-harare-zimbabwe-after-mugabe/579298/ (accessed: 05/03/2020).

Sinfield, Alan. 2000. "Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and the Ethnicity Model." In *Diaspora and Visual Culture Representing Africans and Jews*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 95–114. London: Routledge.

Siziba, Gugulethu and Ncube, Gibson. 2015. "Mugabe's fall from grace: satire and fictional narratives as silent forms of resistance in/on Zimbabwe." *Social Dynamics* 41(23): 516-539. doi.10.1080/02533952.2015.1106124.

Smith, Moira. 2009. "Humour, Unlaughter, and Boundary Maintenance." *Journal of American Folklore* 122(484): 148-171. doi.10.2307/02487675.

Smith, Sidonie, and Watson, Julia. 2010. *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives: Reading Autobiography* [second edition]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Solomon, Ty and Steele, Brent.J. 2017. "Micro-moves in International Relations theory." *European Journal of International Relations* 23(2): 267-291. doi.10.1177/1354066116634442.

Subotić, Jelena. 2016. "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12(4): 610-627. doi.10.1111/fpa.12089.

Tendi, Blessing-Miles. 2008. "Patriotic History and Public Intellectuals Critical of Power." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34(2): 379-396. doi.10.1080/03057070802038041.

Tendi, Blessing-Miles. 2010a. "How intellectuals made history in Zimbabwe", *Africa Research Institute understanding Africa today.* Available at:

https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/counterpoints/how-intellectuals-made-history-in-zimbabwe/ (accessed: 28/02/2020).

Tendi, Blessing-Miles. 2010b. *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe Politics, Intellectuals and the Media*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Tendi, Blessing-Miles. 2016. "State intelligence and politics of Zimbabwe's presidential succession." *African Affairs* 115(459): 203-224. doi.10.1093/afraf/adv074.

TheBeat, 2020. "Stand-up comedy and its special place among Dar revellers", *The Citizen.* Available at: https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/magazines/the-beat/-stand-up-comedy-and-its-special-place-among-dar-revelers-2702998 (accessed: 16/07/2021).

The Economist. 2019. "Zimbabwe faces its worst economic crisis in a decade", *Middle East and Africa.* Available at: https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/08/15/zimbabwe-faces-its-worst-economic-crisis-in-a-decade (accessed: 20/02/2021).

The Herald. 2011. "Laugh it off with Simuka", *The Herald arts and culture.* Available at: https://www.herald.co.zw/laugh-it-off-with-simuka/ (accessed: 24/01/2021).

The Herald. 2018. "'Zim must remain a unitary state'", *The Herald.* Available at: https://www.herald.co.zw/zim-must-remain-a-unitary-state/ (accessed: 13/04/2020).

The World Bank. 2020. "The World Bank In Zimbabwe", *Overview.* Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/zimbabwe/overview (accessed: 20/01/2021).

Thezimbabwemail.com. 2019. "Zimbabwe is a unitary state, says Mnangagwa", *The Zimbabwe Mail*. Available at: https://www.thezimbabwemail.com/main/zimbabwe-is-a-unitary-state-says-mnangagwa/ (accessed: 13/04/2020).

Thram, Diane. 2006a. "ZVAKWANA! – ENOUGH! Media Control and Unofficial Censorship of Music in Zimbabwe." In *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*, edited by Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan, 77-88. Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing LTD.

Thram, Diane. 2006b. "Patriotic history and the politicisation of memory: manipulation of popular music to re-invent the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe." *Critical Arts* 20(2): 75-88. doi.10.1080/02560040608540456.

Tidy, Joanna. 2021. "The Part Humour Plays in the Production of Military Violence." *Global Society* 35(1): 134-148. doi.10.1080/13600826.2020.1828300.

van Schalkwyk, Samantha. 2018. *Narrative Landscapes of Female Sexuality in Africa: collective stories of trauma and transition.* Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Weaver, Simon. 2010a. "The Reverse Discourse and Resistance of Asian Comedians in the West." *Comedy Studies* 1(2): 149–157. doi.10.1356/cos.1.2.149l.

Weaver, Simon. 2010b. "The 'Other' Laughs Back: Humour and Resistance in Anti-Racist Comedy." *Sociology* 44(1): 31–48. doi.10.117/0038038509351624.

Weaver, Simon. 2011. *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour US, UK and Global Race Joking*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Wedderburn, Alister. 2018. "Cartooning the Camp: Aesthetic Interruption and the Limits of Political Possibility." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47(2): 169-189. doi.10.1177/0305829818799884.

Weldes, Jutta. 2003. "Popular Culture, Science Fiction, and World Politics: Exploring Intertextual Relations." In *To Seek Out New Worlds Science Fiction and World Politics,* edited by Jutta Weldes, 1-27. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weldes, Jutta and Rowley, Christina. 2015. "So, how *does* popular culture relate to world politics?." In *Popular Culture and World Politics: Theories, Methods, Pedagogies*, edited by Federica Caso and Caitlin Hamilton, 11-34. Bristol: E-International Relations.

Basketmouth. 2021. "The Son of Peter: Who is Basketmouth?" *Basketmouth.* Available at: https://basketmouth.tv/about-me/ (accessed 16/07/2021).

Willems, Wendy. 2010. "Beyond dramatic revolutions and grand rebellions: everyday forms of resistance during the 'Zimbabwe crisis.'" *Comminicare* 29:1-17.

Willems, Wendy. 2011. "Comic Strips and 'the Crisis': Postcolonial Laughter and Coping with Everyday Life in Zimbabwe." *Popular Communication* 9(2): 126-145. doi.10.1080/15405702.2011.562099.

Willems, Wendy. 2013. "'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again': changing celebratory styles and meanings of independence." *Anthropology in Southern Africa* (36): 22-33. doi.10.1080/02580144.2013.10887021.

Youde, Jeremy. 2017. "Patriotic history and anti-LGBT rhetoric in Zimbabwean politics." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 51(1): 61-79. doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2016.1276850.

Young, Robert J. C. (1990) 2004. *White Mythologies* [second edition]. London: Routledge.

Zenenga, Praise. 2008. "Censorship, Surveillance, and Protest Theatre in Zimbabwe." *Theatre* 38(3): 66-83. doi.10.1215/01610775-2008-006.

Zenenga, Prasie. 2010. "Hit-and-Run Theatre: The Rise of a New Dramatic Form in Zimbabwe." *Theatre History Studies* 30: 14-41. doi.10.1351/ths.2010.0033.

Zenenga, Praise. 2011. "A voice in the teeth of power: popular theatre under the censorship radar in Zimbabwe (1998-2008)." *Themes in theatre* 6: 217-241. doi.10.1163/9789401200820_012.

Appendix 1: Partial list of interviews

The Zimbabwean stand-up comedy community is still relatively small. In order to make interviewees less easy to identify and protect those who have been anonymised, or who have chosen to remain anonymous, I only provide a partial list of interviews.

Interview with Brian Mafuso (13/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Carl Joshua Ncube (23/10/19). Stand-up comedian, interviewed via WhatsApp call (Victoria Falls).

Interview with Ian Phiri (20/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Learnmore Mwanyenyeka (16/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Louis T. Napta Chinyanga (12/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Lucky Aaroni (11/10/2018). Founder of BustopTV, Harare.

Interview with Mandlenkosi Simbarashe Mathe (17/10/18). Stand-up comedian, interviewed via WhatsApp call (Bulawayo).

Interview with Mukudzei Kandoro Majoni (09/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Munyaradzi Guramatunhu (15/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Ntando Moyo (24/10/19). Stand-up comedian, Bulawayo.

Interview with Sharon Chideu (10/10/18). Comedian, Harare.

Interview with Samm Farai Monro (19/10/18). Co-founder of Magamba Network, Harare.

Interview with Sikhanyiso Mlambo (17/10/18). Stand-up comedian, interviewed via WhatsApp call (Bulawayo).

Interview with Tanya Sena (03/09/29). Stand-up comedian, Harare

Interview with Tinaye Chiketa (20/02/2019). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Victor Mpofu (12/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Interview with Wencelacy Katuka (02/10/18). Stand-up comedian, Harare.

Appendix 2: Other interviews

I originally interviewed comedians performing at Edinburgh Fringe (2018) and in Cape Town as part of this project. As the project altered to focus on Zimbabwe this material has been excluded bar one quote used in the conclusion. The interview which this quote is from is referenced here:

Interview with Angel Campey (1/11/18). Stand-up comedian, Radio host, and script writer, Cape Town.