

Social Media Narrations and the Dialogue on Mugabe's legacy during the Zimbabwe "Coup"

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Introduction

The chapter is a dialogic analysis of jokes on former Zimbabwe president, Robert Mugabe, during the week-long "coup" that took place from the 14th to the 21st of November 2017. It argues that the jokes can be read as dialogic reaction to both the official narrative presented by the military and also to existing official narratives advanced by the ruling ZANU-PF party (especially through the state controlled media). Zimbabweans instantly understood the army's political intervention as a "coup", even though the military itself presented it as nothing more than an intraparty restructuring exercise. The jokes produced by the ordinary people during this crucial turning point in the country's political development, provide an opportunity to understand the people's perceptions of the country's long-serving president. They help answer the crucial question of whether Robert Mugabe was a hero or a villain. The question was first posed by Winters (2017) following Mugabe's resignation on 21st November 2017, and was later to dominate the local and international media in September 2019 as news of his death broke out (Ahelbarra 2019; Shumba 2019; Wario 2019). It is a complex question which, as the jokes on Mugabe during the "coup" show, does not have a straight forward answer. The dialogue on Mugabe, personally and/or the office, is inherently characterised by ambivalence, multiplicity and open-endedness. Adopting the concept of Alltagsgeschichte, a grassroots approach to the archiving and interpretation of history, the jokes reflect a multiplicity of histories and their contested nature, largely dependent on one's vantage point (Sorensen, 2008). They, therefore, provide a glimpse into the thought of the "common people" (Wozniak, 2014).