



**CELSA Conference**

# **Humour and Conflict in the Public Sphere**

Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu  
September 4–6, 2024

**Programme and abstracts**

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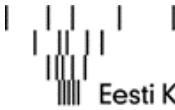


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CELSA Conference “Humour and Conflict in the Public Sphere”,  
September 4–6, 2024  
Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia

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## Dear conference participant!

In today's media-saturated European societies, humour often takes centre stage in social conflicts. This conference deals with the question of humour and conflict, and is the final outcome of the CELSA project "Humour and Conflict in the Public Sphere: Communication styles, humour controversies and contested freedoms in contemporary Europe". In this project, we conducted a comparative study on the matter, bringing together a multidisciplinary team from three top universities from Poland, Belgium, and Estonia. The aims of our study were twofold: first, how humorous communication expresses protest, persuasion, cohesion or aversion; and second, how and when humorous communication is met with indignation or retaliation.

The data that we collected covered seven languages in four countries: Belarus, Belgium, Estonia and Poland. The huge open access database covers various kinds of data: humour (memes, humorous banners, cartoons, etc.) related to specific societal conflicts, and reactions to humour (comments, more memes) and helps systematically map the role that humorous expression plays in conflicts.

These two years have been busy for the members of the project and have flown past unbelievably fast. In the course of these two years, we have prepared, submitted and published numerous articles, many of which you will hear about at this conference. We have also secured further cooperation projects, most remarkably a EU-funded MCSA project lead by prof Władysław Chłopicki. It will bring together scholars from a range of European nations into a larger consortium. Active in 2025-2028, the project "HUMLIT: Developing humour literacy: analysing production, content and reception of humour to bring positive change in the public sphere" will result in a comprehensive description of the form, content and context of (mostly online) humour and its reactions.

This conference is the grand finale of the CELSA network project. We are looking forward to sharing our findings and getting feedback and insights from humour scholars and practitioners interested in similar topics. The conference will be a platform to develop collaborations and think of new

ways to discuss the importance of humour at the time of crisis. Tartu, in addition to being the home for one of European top Universities, is this year the European capital of culture. In the coming three days, we invite you to enjoy what this town has to offer and hope that you will be impressed enough to return many times in the future.

CELSA project leaders Giselinde Kuipers, Liisi Laineste and Władysław Chłopicki

Conference organisers: Liisi Laineste, Anastasiya Fiadotava, Guillem Castañar

## PROGRAMME

### Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> September

#### **9:00 Conference opening**

Liisi Laineste, Giselinde Kuipers, Władysław Chłopicki  
(Estonian Literary Museum, Vanemuise 42, Tartu)

#### **9:30–11:00 Academic session: CELSA results**

Chair: Carmen Maíz-Arévalo

Agata Hołobut, Władysław Chłopicki "Virtually drunk: TikTok humour as a trigger for public debate"

Jonas Nicolai "Social media and anti-social(ist) satire: Humour and critique in the Belgian digital public sphere"

Anastasiya Fiadotava "(Almost) dying to turn press photos into memes: A Belarusian case study"

#### **11:00–11:30 Coffee break**

**11:30–13:00 Academic session / CELSA in-depth session** (a close look at the Päts monument controversy: The head that made our heads spin)

Chair: Guillem Castañar

Guillem Castañar "Memes, memory and monuments: Humorous debate on memory politics in Estonia"

**Roundtable** with Anastasiya Astapova, Andrus Tamm and Ann Vaida

#### **13:00–14:30 Lunch**

**14:30–15:30 Academic session: Political humour across decades**

Chair: Anastasiya Astapova

Maarja Lõhmus, Merike Kaunissaare "Political reality as humour: The creation of the "SpecialCare" Secret Library / Erihoid in the Estonian SSR"

Dorota Brzozowska, Władysław Chłopicki "Humor and conflict: The case of a Polish Netflix series"

**15:30–16:00 Coffee break**

**16:00–18:00 Practical session by Titia Hoogendoorn and Dick Zijp** (Utrecht University) "How to communicate academic results on social media"

**19:00 Conference reception** (Estonian Literary Museum) with folk music and dance (by Eller Music school students)

## Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> September

**9:00–10:00 Keynote by Bradley Wiggins** (Webster University Vienna)

“Make memes not war”

Chair: Liisi Laineste

**10:00–10:30 Coffee break**

**10:30–12:00 Academic session: Black, dark and gallows humour**

Chair: Sergey Troitskiy

Åsa Harvard Maare, Max Evstropov “Black humour and political despair:  
Making politics with the dead”

Carmen Maíz-Arévalo “‘This is no laughing matter’: Reactions to dark  
humour from a European cross-cultural perspective”

Reeta Karjalainen “Gallows humour, depression, and funny pictures:  
Resemiotization and humour in mental health memes”

**12:00–13:00 Lunch**

**13:00–14:30 Academic session: Using humour as a political weapon**

Chair: Dorota Brzozowska

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, Joonas Koivukoski “Social accountability  
dynamics in the memetic politics of Instagram”

Paul Martin “A heart surgeon breaking bad: Communicating humour  
scandal in Bassem Youssef’s *Revolution for Dummies*”

Jan Chovanec “The interactional construction of joking threads in  
YouTube comments”

**14:30–15:00 Coffee break**

**15:00–16:30 Academic session: Othering with humour**

Chair: Massih Zekavat

Aleksandar Takovski, Nenad Markovik “‘To laugh or not to love’: The politics of conflicting attitudes on controversial humour in Macedonia”

Martin Nõmm “The “Mickeyfied” Estonian in humorous representations”

Sergey Troitskiy “‘Instead of hats they wear a shawl wrapped round their heads’. National stereotypes of the Turkish in geographical textbooks and caricatures of the late Russian Empire”

**16:30– 18:00 Practical session by Jan Rybicki** (JJagiellonian University in Kraków) “DH methods in humour studies on the example of CELSA data”



## Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> September

### **9:00–10:30 Academic session: Tricksters and scandals**

Chair: Jonas Nicolai

Tsafi Sebba-Elran "What does it take to be a hero? Between the Jewish and the Israeli trickster"

Jarno Hietalahti "The relevance of trickster humour in social conflicts"

Władysław Chłopicki, Alisa-Anastasiia Kavetska "Polish humour scandals 1990–2023"

### **10:30–11:00 Coffee break**

### **11:00–12:30 Academic session: Humour of/at populists and alt-right movements**

Chair: Władysław Chłopicki

Anthony Mitzel "'This meme bonks fascists': An unlimited memeiosis of the Jug of Justice / Bonk the Police meme"

Massih Zekavat, Amber Willems "Lubach's satiric response to the rise of populism and far-right extremism in the Netherlands"

Joonas Koivukoski, Juha Herkman "Transgressive humour and calculated ambivalence in populist radical right communication: The Finns Party's damage control strategies for responding to racism accusations during humour scandals"

### **12:30–14:00 Lunch**

**14:00–15:30 Academic session: Aspects of contemporary humour and conflict**

Chair: Anastasiya Fiadotava

Amy Friedman “Satire literacy”

Marianna Keisalo “Social conflict and the line between public and private in stand-up comedy”

Ian Brodie “Why wait for ‘conflict’? The merits of humour”

**16:00–18:00 Practical session by Paranduskelder**

How many humour scholars does it take to change a lightbulb? Taking a creative look at stuff

**19:00 Conference dinner**

## KEYNOTE

### Make memes not war

Bradley Wiggins, Webster Vienna Private University

My talk will address some of my current research, specifically looking at the @Ukraine Twitter/X account and its memetic expressions prior to and since the Russian invasion. Looking more widely, my talk will also consider the uses of humour during times of crisis, both historically and currently. I will also highlight some of my own contributions on aspects of what I like to call 'digital culture', specifically the ways memes capture complicated issues visually and semiotically communicate often different meanings to various audiences, imagined or otherwise.



## WORKSHOPS

### How to communicate academic results on social media

Titia Hoogendoorn and Dick Zijp,  
Utrecht University

Wednesday, September 4, 16:00



### DH methods in humour studies on the example of CELSA data

Jan Rybicki,  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Thursday, September 5, 16:30



## How many humour scholars does it take to change a lightbulb? Taking a creative look at stuff

Paranduskelder @ The Widget Factory (corner of Kastani and Riia street),  
Kastani 42, Tartu, Estonia

Friday, September 6, 16:00

Paranduskelder (Repair Cellar) is a creative space located in the Aparaadi-tehas complex not far from the Estonian Literary Museum. Paranduskelder is a place which promotes a circular economy. Its aim is to convince people that one can repurpose almost any object instead of throwing it away. Paranduskelder offers the tools and know-how, and has created a special workshop to connect repurposing with humour – just for our conference.

Check out their [website](#) and [YouTube page](#) for some awesome ideas!

During the workshop we will create something out of nothing. Think of a topical scandal concerning a politician, event or institution, and bring it to life using the objects in the workshop. You will just need your academic experience and an open mind; everything else you can find on the spot. Some refreshments will be available to help stimulate the brain, especially its creative cortex.



## ABSTRACTS

Ian Brodie, Cape Breton University

### Why wait for 'conflict'? The merits of humour

Humour elates, it delights, it brings joy. Humour is its own benefit, contributing to the social fabric at all occasions. Yet, largely through the vestiges of dour functionalism that permeates funding agencies of the neoliberal present, humour scholars often find themselves locating their object of inquiry within a framework that justifies itself as a response to or a defence against oppressive, 'serious' contexts. Without contradicting the role that humour can play in such moments, this paper argues for an exegetical pause that hovers on humour as an unconditional good prior to seeking further conditions.

Dorota Brzozowska, University of Opole  
Władysław Chłopicki, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

## Humour and conflict: The case of a Polish Netflix series

The aim of the presentation is to identify types of contemporary Polish conflicts reflected in the Netflix series *1670* (produced in 2023), a historical mocumentary highly popular among Polish viewers. The series was taken under scrutiny as a good illustration of the possibilities that this genre offers to comment on the contemporary conflicts, especially between broadly conceived liberalism (cosmopolitanism) and conservatism (patriotism), and generally on the political and ideological situation in Poland and worldwide. Global problems and discussions are present as points of reference to highly culture-specific topics.

Intersecting Circles Model of humorous communication combined with Discourse Theory of Humor are used to provide analytical tools for the research of the verbal side of the series, the scripts that can be identified there, and the broader cultural, social and generic context.

Main cultural scripts, stereotypes and characters were depicted in incongruous 17<sup>th</sup>-century rural contexts, which allowed class system, religion, different ethnic groups and gender roles to be mocked. The contradicting opinions and views expressed by grotesque film characters evoke discussions about modern political state, work ethos, institutions, business, international corporations, family relations and different values represented by particular characters and groups they belong to.

Guillem Castañar, University of Tartu

## **Memes, memory and monuments: Humorous debate on memory politics in Estonia**

This paper studies a humour-mediated controversy on memory politics in the Estonian online public sphere. The debate started in Autumn 2022, when a monument to Konstantin Päts, a controversial but important Estonian political leader of the interwar period, was erected in central Tallinn. The statue soon became a target of online visual and verbal jokes, particularly on digital platforms. The analysis of 38 humorous items and its associated comments and metacomments reveals that humour around this sculpture does not constitute a fully-fledged debate on memory politics: most of the items, and many of the comments and metacomments, are related to the aesthetics of the monument. However, these humorous materials are an example of democratic participation and opinion sharing, as well as an expression of dissent towards a statue erected without the participation of the citizens.



Władysław Chłopicki, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Alisa-Anastasiia Kavetska, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

## Polish humour scandals 1990–2023

The study presents a qualitative analysis of a corpus of humour scandals sparked in the Polish public sphere between the years 1991 and 2023. The data pool was collected from Polish media sources along the working definition of a humour scandal adapted from Kuipers (2011: 68–69) to incorporate ‘humour-related controversies framed as “scandalous” which received broad media coverage in leading media organisations’. The identified cases have been coded according to the codebook suggested by Herkman and Koivukoski (2024), and subsequently analysed and classified based on distinguished parameters. The tendencies that can be observed from the analysis reveal, among others, that the majority of humour scandals broke out in the early 2020s, with social groups as the predominant victims of failed humour, and politicians being the most numerous perpetrators.

Insightful observations can be made regarding the dynamics of political affiliations in humour in the public sphere. Specifically, a great number of the identified instances of humour scandals have been provoked by the representatives of right-wing movements. Some examples illustrating the most characteristic features of Polish humour scandals are offered in the paper for a detailed discussion.

Jan Chovanec, Masaryk University

## The interactional construction of joking threads in YouTube comments

While antagonism and conflict are among the most common aspects of polylogic interpersonal communication in the digital sphere (Bou-Franch & Blitvich 2014), they are frequently accompanied by various forms of humour, whether malevolent or benevolent (Vásquez 2019; Tsakona 2020). This paper seeks to explore the dynamic of interactional humour in the YouTube commenting section, i.e. a media platform that is not, for a number of reasons, typically seen as inductive to the emergence of (interactional) humour.

The paper is based on a case study analysing two related aspects of YouTube communication: a video in which an atheist influencer discusses the acceptability of humour in relation to the 2019 burning of the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, and the complete set of the accompanying comments – reactions from the anonymous viewers of the prompting video (Chovanec & Tsakona 2023). The analysis shows the emergence of several distinct types of humour, namely religious, disaster and interactional humour.

The qualitative analysis yields several relevant findings about the type of humour and the nature of the interaction. First, despite the subject matter and the ideological set-up of the prompting video, the humour – typically based on punning and cultural allusions – does not appear to be substantially anti-religious, and thus does not have a distinctly conflictual nature. Second, users tend to recontextualize the triggering event in relation to other currently relevant issues, most notably (inter)national politics; consequently, the humour assumes the function of social commentary. Third, the data indicate that the comments constitute relatively separate joking threads, where initial attempts at humour are either met with other humorous comments or metapragmatic comments. Within the joking thread, users can thus deploy reciprocal forms of humour, or have the chance to evaluate – positively or negatively – the comments produced by others. The YouTube commenting section thus gives rise to potential conflict in three distinct directions: towards the outgroup, towards political elites, and towards each other.

Anastasiya Fiadotava, Estonian Literary Museum

## **(Almost) dying to turn press photos into memes: A Belarusian case study**

On May 9, 2023 Belarusian authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko was attending the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow despite obviously feeling unwell. This caused the first wave of humour and rumours which intensified during the next several days when he was not seen in public. The first post-Victory Day photos of him were released only on May 15, and they caused another wave of conspiracies and humorous reactions as they did not prove that Lukashenko had recovered his health. Despite – or rather because of – the excessive graphics editing they gave the impression that the politician is still seriously ill.

Humorous reactions to this case made prolific use of press photos. 32% of the items in our corpus used such photos, either with or without additional textual or visual elements. Among the CELSA dataset, this is a rather exceptionally high proportion: in the total dataset of 550 items less than 15% use photos, even though many of the controversies under investigation were extensively covered by media.

In this presentation, I outline the possible reasons for such popularity of press photos in this case, as well as show the ways internet users employed to turn press photos into memes. Even though these memes turned to be short-lived, they went viral beyond the Belarusian segment of the internet and underscored the bidirectional information flows between mainstream and social media.

Amy Friedman, Temple University

## Satire literacy

It can be strongly argued that we are not widely satire literate, that is, able to identify satire and understand how it works and what it means. But when satire is misunderstood or causes offence, the outcomes can be dire and even deathly. My paper argues that becoming literate in satire helps satirists to convey their messages and to reach their targets, but also most crucially, satire literacy can afford us all as consumers of global culture the skills to undertake difficult but needed conversations in the most contentious areas we face. Satire literacy includes acknowledging the important, and historically long-standing, social and political role of the satirist in society as a source of needed and appreciated informed critique.

Åsa Harvard Maare, Malmö University

Max Evstropov, artist, philosopher, founder of the Party of the Dead, member of the Independent Institute of Philosophy (IPHI), Paris

## **Black humour and political despair: Making politics with the dead**

How can you as an artist – or as a citizen – act when confronted with an obviously rigged election, where the possibility to question or critique is minimal and risk for repercussions is high? Activist art group Party of the Dead explores absurdism, satire and black humour in order to protest against Putinism and the war it has unleashed. In this paper we will focus on the Party's performances in spring 2024, with the shared theme of deconstructing electoral propaganda connected to Russia's presidential elections – from the start of the electoral campaign in January until the inauguration of the president in May. With this example of action in the situation when any protest activity seems ineffective (there's no choice in the "election", the result is known to everyone in advance etc.) we'll try to analyse the specific dialectics of black humour and political despair: despair as the starting and final point, humour as the cure from despair and its reverse.

Jarno Hietalahti, University of Jyväskylä

## The relevance of trickster humour in social conflicts

In my presentation, I will analyse so-called trickster humour in the context of social conflicts. To begin with, tricksters are 'lords of in-between' (Radin 1956) who challenge the prevailing morality in a twisted but humorous manner (Hyde 1998). In this sense, they are often considered as agents of disruption.

Tricksters are versatile, and they can, for instance, boast about tragedies and foster them (like the African Anansi), or offer comfort and give hope for salvation (like the Greek Prometheus). Of course, a trickster may belittle the whole experienced crisis (like the Joker in DC Comics).

Typically, tricksters are seen as agents who rattle the societal cage through humour. To broaden this viewpoint, I will argue that the most subversive potential of a trickster is achieved when it forces us to reflect beyond a current conflict and to understand it about the broader human condition.

Agata Hołobut, Jagiellonian University in Kraków  
Władysław Chłopicki, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

## Virtually drunk: TikTok humour as a trigger for public debate

On November 5, 2022, the Polish governing party leader Jarosław Kaczyński alluded to the lowering birth rate in Poland by claiming that 'if we see a continuation of the situation where, until the age of 25, young women drink as much as men their age, then there will be no children'. He subsequently stated, 'a woman has to mature into a mother... but, if she hits the bottle until the age of 25 – I'm joking a bit here – then it doesn't bode well'.

His comment sparked a huge public outcry and ultimately contributed to Kaczyński being reprimanded by the parliamentary ethics committee. Quite significantly, apart from the official voices of criticism coming from his political opponents, his remark on women hitting the bottle (or, 'giving in the neck', if we wished to translate the idiom he used literally) inspired a wave of internet humour, much of which came from women and their allies who used TikTok as their communication platform.

In our presentation, we demonstrate how deprecating humour used by the politician triggered a chain of mock (self-)deprecating humour from the outraged public. We focus specifically on the types of reactions and comments that these humorous items instigated among TikTok users. Based on a sample of fifty most popular humorous videos in our database (ranked by the number of views, likes and shares), most of which feature reclaimed 'ladette' humour inspired by Kaczyński's remark, we present a quantitative analysis of viewers' reactions in terms of the following:

- the themes discussed in the comments on humorous items (e.g. alcoholism, womanhood, motherhood, politics, age, this specific scandal, TikToker and their humour quality, etc);
- number of comments expressing dis/solidarity with the TikTok humorist;
- the number of humorous comments in response to humour;
- the types of humour and communication styles used in the humorous comments.

Our case study aims to demonstrate how humour provokes public controversy and how public controversy provokes humour; how spontaneous humorous responses serve to express protest, aversion and solidarity and how they affect the public understanding of social conflicts, sparking heated social debate.



Reeta Karjalainen, University of Jyväskylä

## **Gallows humour, depression, and funny pictures: Resemiotization and humour in mental health memes**

Discourses around mental health crises are becoming increasingly visible worldwide. Mental health problems are discussed also on different internet channels and social media. Due to the rapid visualisation of our culture and media, mental health discourses are also becoming multimodal. Memes, commonly understood as humorous images spreading virally in various internet spaces and social media, also discuss mental health from different perspectives and show individual and shared experiences on the treatment, diagnoses, and living with mental health problems. This paper examines how mental health themed memes create dark and absurd humour through resemiotization (Iedema 2003), the process of semiotic change in which pieces of internet and popular culture are taken from their original context and reconfigured into new cultural artefacts in different modes and contexts – in this case, memes carnivalising the serious topic of mental health issues. The data of this paper consists of 968 mental health themed memes collected for a PhD project. Lastly, the aim is to discuss how memes use humour as an entry-point in depicting the underlying ideologies and socio-cultural discourses surrounding mental health.

Marianna Keisalo, University of Helsinki

## **Social conflict and the line between public and private in stand-up comedy**

In November 2023, a video was shared on social media, showing Finnish stand-up comedian Ali Jahangiri and an audience member shouting violently at each other. The one-minute clip starts when the conflict is already underway and ends as two audience members start to approach the stage. The video sparked a discussion on how far a comedian can go in a situation of conflict. Stand-up comedy holds an ambivalent position in terms of public/private. It is a public performance, but rests on creating an intimate connection between the performer and the audience. While both comedians and audience members have responsibilities regarding how they act in the situation, back and forth engagement between the performer and the audience is expected. While comedy generally involves some form of transgression, breaching limits may also create conflict. Video clips made and circulated (often without permission) expose comedians and possibly audience members to criticism from a far wider audience than those present at the show. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research on stand-up comedy in Finland, in this paper I will discuss how the line between public and private is routinely drawn and crossed in performance, and how it is re-negotiated in cases of conflict.

Joonas Koivukoski, University of Helsinki

Juha Herkman, University of Helsinki

## **Transgressive humor and calculated ambivalence in populist radical right communication: The Finns Party's damage control strategies for responding to racism accusations during humour scandals**

Populist radical right actors worldwide have ridiculed 'the corrupt elites' and other social groups in mainstream and social media, creating public spats about what is acceptable and what is not at a given time and place. In this study, we identify 11 national humour scandals related to the populist (radical) right Finns Party between the late 2000s and the early 2020s. Our study shows that these scandals were triggered by racism accusations regarding populist politicians' texts or performances that were framed as humour or irony by them or their fellow party members after public accusations. In most of the scandals, the target of ambiguous humour was an ethnic group. We analyse the party's confrontational and submissive damage control strategies for responding to the accusations during these scandals.

Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, University of Helsinki  
Joonas Koivukoski, University of Helsinki

## **Social accountability dynamics in the memetic politics of Instagram**

Political humour has taken on new forms on the internet and social media platforms. Through memes, GIFs, and parody accounts, active citizens and other political actors engage in public debate and frame issues, often in ways that support their agenda (e.g., Phillips & Milner 2018; Young 2018; Laaksonen et al. 2021; Hatakka 2020). In recent years, also the previously lifestyle-oriented Instagram has also turned into a political space: first adopted by social activists and politicians (Dumitrica & Hockin-Boyers 2022; Ekman & Widholm 2017), and later emerged as a site for subversive political communication and resistance towards those in power. Our study focuses on 13 politically oriented pseudonymous Finnish Instagram accounts that use humour to critique political actors. Through multimodal qualitative analysis of 3,155 posts from 2021-2023, we explore how these accounts create counter-publics that challenge government policies and value statements. Our findings show how the unique aesthetic of memes combines visuals and text in an ironic and critical manner, reflecting a sophisticated understanding of political economics and self-aware communication. By analysing these dynamics, our paper discusses how digital media influences civic engagement and redefines power relations between citizens and political elites, contributing to a more complex landscape of social accountability.

Maarja Lõhmus, journalist, newspaper Free Estonia Word  
Merike Kaunissaare, Estonian Academy of Arts

## **Political reality as humour: The creation of the “SpecialCare” Secret Library / Erihoid in the Estonian SSR**

The Estonian state from 1940 to 1991 did not exist in its home country; there existed a government-in-exile and active cultural life took place in exile countries. Lots of books and journalistic articles were published in different countries – including Germany, Sweden, USA, Canada, UK, of which the people were not allowed to know in the Estonian SSR. This is how GLAVLIT (General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press) existed in the USSR to control the publication of “non-secret” publications. There also existed an Exile-Literature Secret Library, officially ‘Special Care’. Only particularly faithful elite members were allowed to apply for Special Care only within a specific subject, to read specific works of Estonian literature in exile (sometimes half a page had to be covered because the rest was not relevant to ‘the subject’). Political censorship is a tragic area of humour. For example, between 1982 and 1984, only 37 people had been granted permission to enter the Secret Library ‘Special Care’. In my presentation, I analyse the entrants to the Secret Library Special Care and politically confirmed subjects as a specific field of humour research.

Carmen Maíz-Arévalo, Complutense University of Madrid

## **'This is no laughing matter': Reactions to dark humour from a European cross-cultural perspective**

Given its culture-bound nature, the study of humour can provide insights into understanding cultures better. Thus, the study of controversial humour (including its darker side) becomes particularly useful to find out the cultural limits to humour (if any). In fact, the study of dark humour on controversial issues is one of the main trends recently followed in humour studies (Chłopicki 2024: v).

According to Steir-Livny (2024: 290), dark humour "is deliberately used to cope with particularly difficult situations where the harshness of reality cannot be changed, but the attitude toward this reality can be inflected". In fact, there is much research on dark humour as a coping mechanism (Dyrel & Poppi 2018; Kim et al. 2024; Lenggogeni et al. 2022). However, little is still known about the effects of culture on how dark humour is perceived (Tehan-Stanley & Turner 2024).

The present study aims to focus on reactions to dark humour from a cross-cultural perspective. To that purpose, an online questionnaire gathered the response of over 100 participants across Europe. Preliminary results show interesting cross-cultural differences, with some cultural groups (e.g. Polish) finding dark humour more appealing than others (e.g. Spanish), which tend to find this humour quite offensive.

Paul Martin, University of Bristol

## **A heart surgeon breaking bad: Communicating humour scandal in Bassem Youssef's *Revolution for Dummies***

This paper explores the role of humour in challenging hierarchies of social and political power and how socially divisive satire can also function as a cohesive force. To do so I focus on Bassem Youssef, who was arrested for his jokes in 2013 by President Morsi and fled Cairo in 2014 in fear of prosecution. Youssef's book, *Revolution for Dummies: Laughing through the Arab Spring*, tells the story of Bassem's humour scandal in Egypt, the challenges and social backlash he faced as the host of the satirical news programme *Albernameg*, repackaged for an American audience.

In this paper I show how in this book Bassem Youssef both demonstrates the power of satire to confront social conflict and how he draws his audience's attention to the powerful resonance of Egypt's social divisions and revolutions for a Trump-era USA. In doing so we see humour's capacity to transcend national boundaries and provide a platform to bring communities together, even in the face of death threats.

Anthony Mitzel, University of Bologna

## **'This meme bonks fascists': An unlimited memeiosis of the Jug of Justice / Bonk the Police meme**

Studying the intricate interplay between memes, humour, and social discord unveils crucial insights into contemporary communication dynamics. In today's media-saturated landscape, humour emerges as a pivotal instrument, often assuming a central role in navigating, sparking, and addressing social conflicts and injustices. This phenomenon is encapsulated by the concept of 'memeiosis', where memes proliferate and transform within cultural contexts, traversing seamlessly from virtual realms to the prime world. An interesting example of this is the emergence of the Jug of Justice/Bonk the Police meme. Originating from the April 2024 student-led Pro-Palestine occupation of a California Polytechnic State University building, this meme went viral when police intervention was called to disperse the protestors. Amidst the ensuing chaos, one protester seized an empty water jug, using it to 'bonk' a riot officer on the head multiple times. The absurdity of this act, captured in a livestream broadcasted on Facebook Live, swiftly propelled it into unlimited memeiosis. This presentation looks into the humour of this memetic event, analysing a curated selection of related memes to illustrate the use of interaction, horizontal and decentralised humour in protest praxis. Through the lens of the JoJ/BtP meme, we explore the infinite potential of memeiosis in perpetuating humour and social commentary, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of contemporary communication and its intersection with humour and social conflict.



Jonas Nicolai, KU Leuven

## **Social media and anti-social(ist) satire: Humour and critique in the Belgian digital public sphere**

This study analyses the ideological diversification of digitally mediated humour in online public spheres, following a political scandal surrounding Flemish socialist politician Conner Rousseau in 2023. Through a content analysis of humorous items (n=50) and the discourse they sparked in digital public spheres (n=2259), we examine the ideological scope of political satire and its potential as a site for public debate. Results show how contrary to conventional interpretations of satire as inherently progressive, social media equally facilitate the spread of explicitly right-wing humour or reactionary satirical critiques. Additionally, openly right-wing humour is found to spark more discussion (i.e., higher incidences of metacomments) but is found to be more antagonistic in nature (i.e., higher incidences of expletives and ad-hominem retorts about political actors). As such, this study underlines how social media environments can serve as anti-public spheres which employ humour as a vehicle for deliberately polarising views.

Martin Nõmm, University of Tartu

## The 'Mickeyfied' Estonian in humorous representations

The Estonian diaspora has had a notable presence in North America since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The largest communities in the United States formed after WWII from the people fleeing the Soviet occupation. In the following decades and especially with the restoration of independence, members of this diaspora have visited and returned to live in Estonia. The Americanised (or the 'Mickeyfied' / 'Mickey Mouse', a term used for Estonians with Anglo-American cultural and linguistic influences or an ultra-capitalist mindset) Estonian archetype and figure have appeared in literary and media representations both within the diaspora and in the homeland; the former in parody of assimilation to host society and the latter in parody of returning Estonians. In this paper, I will examine some examples of representations of this 'Mickeyfied' Estonian to offer an insight into the characteristics of this archetype and the perceptions of diaspora Estonians both from within and outside the community.

Tsafi Sebba-Elran, University of Haifa

## **What does it take to be a hero? Between the Jewish and the Israeli trickster**

A prominent Israeli meme cycle, created during May 2021, in (another) military conflict between Israel and Hamas, identifies the 'Israeli side' with child or woman figures, with distraction and confusion. This, in contrast to the 'warlore' of other western groups, which use these very features to mark the opponent's inferiority and to patronise him.

How should we explain this unique aspect of Israeli humour? Should we treat it as self-criticism, one that is historically associated with Jewish (diasporic) humour? And what justification does it have in the Israeli context?

The presentation will focus on an Israeli adaptation of a Jewish joke, and will point out the characteristics of the Israeli trickster against a history of religious and national conflicts. It seeks to learn about the functions of national humour during wartime in giving expression to common emotions and ethos, as well as clarifying the incongruity between them.

Aleksandar Takovski, AAB College, Kosovo

Nenad Markovik, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Macedonia

## **'To laugh or not to love': The politics of conflicting attitudes on controversial humour in Macedonia**

Humour that ridicules individuals and groups jeopardises rejection, condemnation, and censorship. The appropriateness and limits of humour have been discussed in due details (Lockyer 2008, 2009; Lockyer & Pickering 2010). Recently, events like the Charlie Hebdo incident, the refugee crisis, the emergence of woke culture and the call for political correctness have energised the social (and the academic) debate on what constitutes an appropriate, socially acceptable subject of humour. The plethora of incongruent, at times conflicting views on what constitutes permissible humour and what constitutes transgression and violation of human moral and civil rights are conditioned on several factors, among which are states' political histories, cultural views and practices, humour traditions to name a few.

Motivated by the global spread of identity politics and its inclination towards the political left, this study seeks to examine the social attitudes of Macedonian citizens and politicians on humour and their correlation to political affiliation (political right and political left). The endeavour is worthy because Macedonia presents an understudied case where many global trends and external discursive conflicts, such as the one over the limits and censorship of humour, are being imported and domesticated to the national socio-political milieu without much scrutiny.

In this context, the study is an exploratory attempt to map out the conflicting attitudes of Macedonian citizens on different subjects of disparagement humour including religion, gender, family, nation(hood), ethnic, linguistic and social minorities, and their relation to political affiliation. To do so, it will conduct a survey among Macedonian citizens and interviews with Macedonian politicians to register their opinions on the permissibility and censorship of humour in the Macedonian society.

Sergey Troitskiy, Estonian Literary Museum

## **'Instead of hats they wear a shawl wrapped around their heads': National stereotypes of the Turkish in geography textbooks and caricatures of the late Russian Empire**

The presentation discusses how a cultural (mental) map of US and Others is created through the construction of visual images of the Ottoman that reflect cultural stereotypes. The aim of the presentation is to reconstruct the system of visual images in political caricatures of the late Russian Empire (1890–1905). In order to uncover the main national stereotypes, the article draws on descriptions of the mental characteristics of Turkey (Turkish) from Russian geography textbooks used for teaching on the eve of the late Russian Empire period. Geography textbooks convey common national stereotypes that are anchored at the level of everyday consciousness through teaching. The caricature is a continuation of the cultural or political discourses whose attitudes it translates. The visual images of the caricature therefore enable the researcher to identify (stereo-) typical content in everyday culture (at the level of everyday consciousness), to determine the characteristics of the cultural and political discourse of the time and to record any changes in the stereotypes. The presentation shows how a mental map of the world from the geography textbook in which Russia takes centre stage, is concretised and transformed into an everyday mental map of the world containing stereotypical monsters, others, who easily become enemies.

Massih Zekavat, University of Groningen  
Amber Willems, University of Groningen

## **Lubach's satiric response to the rise of populism and far-right extremism in the Netherlands**

*De Avondshow met Arjen Lubach* is a Dutch late-night television program renowned for its incisive satire and socio-political commentary. It has responded to political developments in the Netherlands during and in the aftermath of the 2023 general election in which Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) emerged as the largest party, marking a significant shift in Dutch politics.

This paper analyses season five of the show (January–March, 2024) that aired in the wake of the election and during the formation of the new government. We will examine how Lubach employs satire to address conflict in the polarised public sphere and contested freedoms in the Netherlands. First, all the episodes of season five will be examined for the use of humour and satire about populism, nationalist and far-right politics. The relevant episodes and segments will be analysed to identify the object of satire and the satirist's political attitude in a polarised public sphere. The findings show that two parties receive more attention on the show although four parties have been engaged in formation talks. Satire is largely used to criticise Wilders and the long and frustrating coalition talks. Patrick Giamario's work on gelopolitics will inform the analysis.