https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2025.97.transnational

When the Transnational Rules: Humorous Reactions to the Wagner Group Rebellion in Estonia, Poland and Belarus

ANASTASIYA FIADOTAVA
Senior Researcher
Estonian Literary Museum
anastasiya.fiadotava@folklore.ee

LIISI LAINESTE
Research Professor
Estonian Literary Museum
liisi.laineste@folklore.ee

GUILLEM CASTAÑAR RUBIO
Lecturer
Tallinn University
guillem.castanar_rubio@tlu.ee

WŁADYSŁAW CHŁOPICKI
Associate Professor
Jagiellonian University in Krakow
w.chlopicki@uj.edu.pl

https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol97/transnational.pdf

Abstract: At the time of globalisation and digitisation, the news about important events easily and quickly cross national boundaries, and so does the humour that emerges as a reaction to the news. Memes and jokes about conflicts can be found far beyond a country or region where the conflicts occur. In the present article we investigate whether humour on the same conflict differs across different countries. We compare the humour of three countries – Belarus, Estonia and Poland – that comment on the Wagner group rebellion that took place in late June 2023 against the backdrop of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Our analysis of humour genres, its mechanisms and communication styles reveals that although humorous reactions to the Wagner group rebellion have been similar – but not identical – across different countries in many ways, there were also important national differences related to the political climate in the countries in question and their relationship with Russia. The content of humour, general popularity of certain characters and communication styles tended to differ across cultures as well. We conclude that the transnational aspects of humorous communication dominate over the national humour features - not only with regard to the individual humorous items, but on the more abstract levels of genres and humour mechanisms.

Keywords: national, global, humour, conflict, Belarus, Estonia, Poland

1. INTRODUCTION

The global reach of internet humour surfaced as early as 2001 when the cycle of jokes about Bin Laden and the attack on the WTC spread far beyond the US (Kuipers 2002). Nowadays memes and jokes revolving around conflicts and controversies that take place in some country or region often travel far, although the distance between the location where an event takes place and the location where the humour circulates affects humour content (Laineste et al. 2024). The closer the controversy is to the humour creators and sharers, the more nuanced and detailed their humorous representations of the controversy become. The differences between instances of topical humour across countries may also emerge when adaptations and local references are added to "domesticate" issues and bring them closer to local audiences (Yus 2012: 129; Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman 2016; Nissenbaum & Shifman 2020).

This paper zooms in on the topic of national differences in the humorous representation of a conflict known as the Wagner group rebellion by comparing the humour of three countries – Belarus, Estonia, and Poland. The rebellion took place in late June 2023 against the backdrop of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine that had started in February 2022. The Wagner group is a private military company that took an active part in the invasion. In 2023, the tensions between the Wagner group (and, in particular, its then-leader Yevgeny Prigozhin) and the Russian Ministry of Defence became acute as Prigozhin accused the Ministry of Defence of not supplying enough ammunition to his private army, and therefore causing a lot of injuries and deaths among the Wagner group mercenaries. The tensions reached their peak on June 23, 2023

when Prigozhin announced a march towards Moscow. He and his army occupied a part of Russian territory, including the regional centre Rostov-on-Don. Despite the initial upheaval that it caused, the rebellion turned out to be short-lived: already on June 24, 2023 the Wagner group turned back and, supposedly following the negotiations with Belarusian illegitimate president Alyaksandr Lukashenka, withdrew to Belarus. The rebellion was broadly covered in the news in the region, and also caused a lot of humour, mostly due to its unexpectedness and the sharp contrast between Prigozhin's grand plans and the outcome of the rebellion. The humour also ridiculed Putin's and Lukashenka's reactions to it.

The countries from which the humour was collected for the current study have different degrees of involvement in the rebellion. Belarus became an (unforeseen) retreat location for the Wagner group troops, while Estonia and Poland were not directly involved in the conflict. However, as the latter two countries are located close to the war zone, and the war events are regularly covered in their news and social media, it was not surprising that the humour on the Wagner group rebellion was also notable there.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 National and Transnational Features of Humour in the Public Sphere

The digital/online public sphere (for the definition of the term, see Schäfer 2015: 322) has contributed to the transnationalisation of humour topics and formats. Some humour topics such as sex or animals (Shifman 2006: 199) or jokes about general stupidity (for the history and spread of stupidity jokes, see Davies 1990 and later) travel especially well. Using general script oppositions (e.g. smart/dumb) in jokes guarantees their propensity to spread and recycle, often on a large scale. Humour can become a powerful (albeit often invisible) agent of globalisation (Shifman & Levy & Thelwall 2014: 727) as it proliferates stereotypes that can be and are used all around the world.

However, these processes are bi-directional: although the global nature of online public communication makes humour more transnational, the local audiences domesticate the humour to match their tastes, styles and expectations. From the late 2000s onwards, online meme culture has witnessed a rise of localised internet memes (Börzsei 2013). The blending of the national and transnational brings faraway issues closer (e.g. the Occupy Wall Street movement and its local expressions; see Blank 2012: 9–12) and, similarly, allows the local topics to gain a wider international audience and recognition (e.g. the Russian war in Ukraine, see Laineste et al. 2024). Thus, units of digital humour such as memes resemble ecotypes. This term, defined by Hasan-Rokem (2016: 111) as "a variation in an international type [...] specific to an area or group", draws from botany to metaphorically refer to processes of adaptation and re-elaboration of alien elements to new environments that can be easily

transposed to explain the interaction of national and transnational patterns in memes (cf. Laineste et al. 2024).

The nature of humour travelling transnationally is affected by the particular communication style, defined by linguists as a cluster of discourse features that include formal and pragmatic features, the latter comprising emotionality of expression, politeness, metaphoricity, the use of neologisms as well as the use of humour (Chłopicki 2017a: 1). The general and well-established distinction that is appropriate to use in the studies on internet data is that between direct and indirect communication styles (see e.g. by Hall 1989; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988; Liu 2016). This is especially useful when only individual online humorous items are available, and not a corpus of data produced by identifiable users, which would allow for more fine-grained distinctions. Another reason why using a directness and indirectness scale fits the context of the study of humour was that there are two essential discursive mechanisms that evoke humour: humour can derive either from the presence of the unsaid (the concealed, elusive), also described as understatement (see Dolitsky 1983), or from exaggeration: then it is evoked by "the revealed" (Chłopicki 2017b: 148), i.e. repetition, hyperbole or overstatement. This follows Simpson (2003), who distinguished two opposed strategies of satirical discourse called saturation and attenuation, which correspond to Ermida's (2008) hyperbole (overstatement) and understatement (associated with parody).

In the present article, we attempt to associate various known humour mechanisms with what we dub direct or indirect communication style. And so, exaggeration and related saturation mechanisms would include repetition, grotesque, caricature, sarcasm or stereotyping and would be the province of direct communication style, as they tend to rely on what is explicit in discourse. In contrast, parody, sexual innuendo or other transgressive mechanisms, wordplay, juxtaposition of text and image, ambiguity or nonsense would belong to that of indirect style, since they all require the audience to reach for interpretation clues outside of the discourse. Some other mechanisms that we discuss here can be either direct or indirect, depending on the context, like status challenging mechanisms, recontextualization in the broad sense (see Tsakona 2020) or irony, which can be overt or covert (see Dynel 2018).

2.2 Representations of Conflicts in Humour

An almost global access to the internet is accompanied by an increase in the amount, speed and geographical span in information flows. News about conflicts or other incidents reach audiences worldwide in a matter of minutes, often taking on the form of memes. These range from critical reflections on the triggering event to intertextual, absurdist remixes referring to an insignificant and superficial detail of it.

Humorous reactions to conflicts might have different functions for those who create and those who spread them during the conflict and in the aftermath

of it. They help people cope with the situation, bond the group together (often by "othering" the opposite side of the conflict), or, on the contrary, make a conflict more acute, attack, cover up the issue or even deny the problem (Lewis 2006: 7–8; Zelizer 2010). However, they also play an important role when we observe the conflict from a spatial and/or temporal distance – humorous reactions to conflict shape our interpretations of it alongside its serious representations (Holman & Kelly 2001: 249). The humorous representations create a distorted version of the conflict, highlighting certain aspects of it – usually the most incongruous and thus easy to ridicule – and downplaying others. They are not neutral, as they display a certain stance (Shifman 2014; Wiggins 2019) that can be deduced from their content or meta-pragmatic information (Laineste & Fiadotava 2024). Their analysis, thus, requires a detailed study not only of the immediate context of the conflict, but also the broader context of the societies where the humour spreads.

Despite – or maybe precisely due to – their seemingly different nature, humour and conflicts (almost) always go hand-in-hand. Humour may cause a conflict, and conflicts very often are met with humorous reactions. One of the first anti-war comedy plays was Aristophanes's "Lysistrata" that was written already in the 5th century BC at the time of Athens' disastrous losses in the Peloponnesian war. It humorously portrayed women's sex strike that made their husbands halt the war. It could be read both as an anti-war comedy (Morreall 2005: 63) and as an expression of Aristophanes's cynical mindset and dissatisfaction with his city's dysfunctionality (Severini 2010). Humour also accompanied later conflicts, such as, for example, French wars of religion in the 16th century where satirical pamphlets such as Jean Boucher's *Vie et faits notables de Henry de Valois* (1589) and the anonymous *Satyre Menippee* (1594) were used by both sides of the conflict to mock religious and political views of the opponents and dehumanize them (Hayes 2022). Similarly, during the British Civil wars in 1642–1651, both Royalists and Parliamentarians used humour in the form of scatological jokes to denigrate each other, mainly MPs and the Archbishop (McKellar 2011). The French Revolution inspired a lot of graphic satire not only in France itself but also in Britain: for example, James Gillray's satirical print *Petit Souper,* à *la Parisienne* greatly affected its London audience with its exaggeration and cleverly embedded incongruities (Lahikainen 2015). Both World Wars also abounded in humour despite their grim and tragic nature: for example, Kazecki (2012) explores humorous German novels, short stories and other literary works of the time of World War I and shows that humour was employed not only as a weapon against political and military opponents, but also as a way to "punch up" and "punch down" within the rigid military hierarchy. Holman and Kelly (2001) note that humorous expressions became even more numerous and widespread during World War II, and alongside humorous literature, caricatures, songs and other previously known forms of comic expression there appeared new ones – for example, aerial propaganda that was dropped over

the occupied territories. War propaganda also took the dramaturgical form to redefine socio-political and racial identities (Zangl 2022).

Highly mediatised conflicts of the 21st century also provoke a significant amount of digital humour. The emergence of web 2.0 technologies and social media has democratised (humorous) content creation and facilitated the access of the broader public to political discussions (cf participatory culture, see Jenkins 2006). New technological affordances allowed users to react to conflicts immediately and stimulated the emergence of new genres that are particular to the internet realm: memes, image macros, reaction videos etc. Digital reactions to events, however, represent the whole continuum of sentiment and it is frequently difficult to distinguish between clearly humorous reactions and what can be named playful ones. Although some researchers claim that humour is essentially play (e.g. McGhee 2018, who tried to answer the thorny question whether apes have a sense of humour or just play), this does not mean that all play must be humorous or at least be received as humorous by audiences. Play tends to aim at entertainment; it uses the human capacity to exercise creative powers but is not necessarily aimed at making the audience laugh. Suffice it to mention the types of playful behaviours, sometimes regarded as activism, which aim at easing tensions or resolving conflicts (e.g. Sørensen 2013; Gil & Moti 2015; Laaksonen & Koivukoski & Porttikivi 2022). Digital humour faces the same dilemma – the recently popular Tik-Tok videos or POV videos or users' comments on these may evoke an incongruity by engaging in playful, teasing or parodying behaviour, but need not aim at humour, unless they resolve the incongruity by offering a form of punchline. Thus, the relationship between play and humour is a continuum and the memes which we are discussing in the section below represent examples of the humorous end of the spectrum, as long as the inherent ambiguity of humour (also discussed in our analysis) can be contextually resolved.

With regard to political or military conflicts, social platforms allow "a convergence of the domestic environment and the battlefield by offering new ways for participation in warfare" (Asmolov 2021: 342). For example, in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict TikTok is used as a form of "playful activism" (Cervi & Divon 2023) or as a tool to mobilise international support (Yarchi & Boxman-Shabtai 2023). One of the most recent conflicts, the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, became a powerful catalyst for humorous expression on both sides of the confrontation already at its initial stages in 2014 (Wiggins 2016). It has continued to be so as the conflict became a full-scale war in 2022 (see, for example, Brzozowska & Chłopicki 2023; Brassett & Browning 2024; Laineste & Fiadotava 2023, 2024; Laineste et al. 2024). Nowadays humour even becomes one of the central elements of non-violent confrontations such as political and cultural debates (Nieuwenhuis & Zijp 2022), thus making the study of humorous representations of conflict a timely endeavour.

At a time of conflict, cultural communication and humour styles clearly come into the open, especially when a "humour scandal" breaks out (Kuipers & Zijp 2024, a special issue on humour in the public sphere). Kuipers and Zijp (2024) draw attention to the fact that humour used in the face of conflict tends to differ across cultures and genres, although there are similarities as well: for example, Hungarian protesters against the anti-democratic Orban regime prefer and appreciate indirect nonsense style (Hyttinen 2024), and the Dutch react negatively to a direct, openly satirical "roast" of a right-wing politician, clearly dispreferring direct references to antisemitism and a politician's personal relationships (Nieuwenhuis 2024). The humour communication style is also correlated with political stance: the antidemocratic humour in authoritarian Russia and Belarus may be more direct – sarcastic, offensive or rigid, while a prodemocratic one may be more indirect, the reasons including the need to avoid censorship (see Laineste & Fiadotava 2024); similarly, in polarised Poland conservative humour tends to be more direct and sarcastic, while a liberal one may be more distanced and indirect (see Chłopicki 2023).

As humour comments on and gives meaning to events that matter to the joke-tellers, it has to articulate its relevance to local audiences. Humour has been equally described as transnational and culture-specific both in terms of its topics and its limits (Kuipers 2011: 68), which are in turn related to the communication style predominantly used in a particular culture and language. Transnational cultural references are mixed with national or regional references, especially in the case of political and topical humour (Laineste & Voolaid 2016; Nissenbaum & Shifman 2020) and become instances of vernacular creativity that successfully use humour to articulate meaning locally (Dumitrica 2021).

As is clear from the above discussion, the national and transnational features of humour as well as the relation between humour and conflict have been thoroughly studied. The novelty of the current paper lies in the fact that it pays special attention to the connection of humorous reaction to communication styles, humour mechanisms and genres. To do so, it aims at answering the following **research questions**:

- What are the similarities and differences between the genres, humour mechanisms and communication styles of humour in the three countries?
- What are the transnational vs national trends that characterise the humour of these three countries?

3. METHODS AND DATA

The data consist of 150 humorous items (50 per each of three countries) that were collected within the framework of the CELSA network project "Humour

and Conflict in the Public Sphere: An interdisciplinary analysis of humour controversies and contested freedoms in contemporary Europe" (Chłopicki et al. 2024). It derives mostly from the social media of the three countries, namely, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Telegram, Vk (the latter three were used only for collecting Belarusian data), but also from the Estonian satirical news portal Lugejakiri, Polish humour aggregators Jbzd.com.pl, Kwejk.pl, Obrazkowo.pl, Demotywatory.pl, Joemonster.org, and mainstream media Postimees (Estonia) and Niezależna (Poland).

The data were collected manually by (a) browsing the most popular humorous media outlets and (b) searching by the keywords "Wagner", "Prigozhin", "memes", "jokes", "humour", "caricature", "cartoon" in relevant languages in the mainstream media of the three countries. The differences between the platforms used in the three countries stem from the specificities of their (humorous) media landscape. Estonian and Polish data could be collected from social media platforms, mainstream media, aggregators and satirical newspapers. However, in the case of Belarusian data, the search was restricted to social media. The specificities of national media landscapes also caused some of the topics and genres to be more popular in the initial full dataset and therefore more prominently represented in the final sample: for example, Poland has several meme/humour aggregator websites that collect and showcase humour in Polish, whereas Estonia and Belarus lack such online infrastructure. On the other hand, Estonia has a specific Facebook group dedicated to memes and humour about the Russian war in Ukraine (titled "Ukraina meemid") that was a prolific source of humour also about the Wagner rebellion. Due to the political censorship in Belarus, most humour is confined to (semi-)anonymous social media, with Telegram playing an important role as one of the most popular messengers in Belarus (Auseyushkin 2021). Nevertheless, despite the differences in the sources available and certain restrictions on genres and formats, some common patterns appeared in the humour of the three countries as the analysis below will show.

Most of the data were collected during the two days of the rebellion (June 23 – June 24, 2023) and the next week after it. As the flow of the humorous items gradually decreased towards the end of June 2023, humorous and non-humorous media were occasionally revisited in July and early August, but the search yielded only 3 more items (two of them being a TV comedy and a stand-up routine recording that require more time to be produced). Thus, the initial full dataset consisted of 94 items of Estonian humour, 107 items of Polish humour and 181 items of Belarusian humour. In order to produce samples that would enable systematic comparative analysis within the framework of the CELSA network project (i.e., that would be quantitatively and qualitatively comparable to the datasets produced in other countries within the project), these original figures were cut down to 50 humorous items per each of the countries involved, resulting in the already mentioned figure of 150 items in total.

These 50 items per country were selected from the larger initial datasets, and included in the final dataset, according to several criteria that were devised to ensure sufficient diversity in terms of (a) sources of data, (b) genres, (c) specific topics represented within the broader topic of Wagner rebellion, (d) professional or amateur creators. Each humorous item in the initial full datasets was coded according to these criteria; then all the sources, genres and formats, topics and creators' types (professional/amateur) were listed, and 50 humorous items were selected in such a way that all the listed sources, genres, topics and creators' types would be represented proportionally to their representation in the full dataset. All the criteria were weighted equally, but since some of the criteria were more diverse (topics, genre), first the items were sorted according to these criteria, and then their diversity in terms of sources and creators' type was also taken into account. The fact that all the sources, genres, topics and creators' types that were present in the initial full datasets were also present in the datasets of 50 items per country determined that sufficient diversity was achieved.

The humorous items were coded[1] via the multiple choice Qualtrics survey according to several categories that were jointly developed by the participants of the above-mentioned CELSA network project:

- Genre or combination of genres (video recording of an event, photo, cartoon, internet meme (image only), internet meme (image and text), internet meme (video), text-only joke, humorous comment, satirical news article, blog post, stand-up performance, television comedy, non-humorous comment, or other);
- Presence of verbal, visual, or both verbal and visual elements;
- Humour mechanisms (humorous stereotype, sexual innuendo, status reversal or challenging, transgression, grotesque, juxtaposition of text and image, parody, caricature, ambiguity, exaggeration, irony, recontextualization, word play);
- Communication style of the items that had verbal element(s) (direct and/or based on overstatement, or indirect and/or based on understatement);
- Rhetorical format of the items that had verbal element(s) (statements, questions, commands/imperatives, verbless phrases, expletives, paraverbal comments, longer texts including several of the above).

While analysing the humorous representations of the Wagner group rebellion, we focused specifically on several of these codes, namely, genres, humour mechanisms and communication styles of the humorous items. These particular codes were selected for the current study as they reflect both transnational and culture-specific patterns of online humorous communication – for example, the prevalence of certain genres reflects multimodality, that is one of the

typical universal features of new media humour (Dynel & Chovanec 2021), and communication styles are often culture-specific (Fitzgerald 2003; Chłopicki 2017a). Humour mechanisms were selected as the variables for the analysis because they not only allow cross-cultural comparison but also shed light on more general peculiarities of humour revolving around this topic. These peculiarities could be conditioned by various factors, such as the nature of conflict, formal characteristics of humour and the overall cultural context in which the humour emerged and spread. We use quantitative analysis for descriptive purposes, not for predictive ones. In addition to comparing and analysing our data according to these Qualtrics codes, we also conducted in-depth thematic analysis of the Wagner group rebellion humour with the primary aim of identifying the topics within the humour related to the Wagner rebellion that were the most recurrent in all the three countries.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Genres

The genre distribution in our data (see Table 1) can be partly explained by the platforms and sources from which the data was collected: for example, as mentioned above, much of the Polish data derives from meme aggregators, while Estonian data come primarily from Facebook, and almost half of the Belarusian data was collected from X (which can explain a large share of text-only jokes typical for this platform). The relative popularity of different genres can also be explained by specific media landscapes of the three countries. For example, the absence of caricatures and the abundance of text-only jokes in Belarusian data is due to the fact that all the print media – that are the primary medium where caricatures are published – are pro-government and therefore also pro-war, which meant that they avoided making fun of this topic.

However, there are also some trends in the genre distribution that all the countries share. One of them is the larger proportion of static (image + text or image only) memes than dynamic (video) memes. The other trend is a relatively low reliance on photo and video recordings of the event itself, even though these recordings were easily available in the media that was covering the events. On the other hand, images that became memetic earlier in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine were used in all datasets. This shows that most of the humour creators preferred to recycle and adapt the previously available memes in order to fit this novel and unexpected event into the audience's pre-existing knowledge (compare with the notion of intertextuality of internet memes, Laineste & Voolaid 2016).

Table 1. Genre distribution per country

Genre/country	Belarus	Estonia	Poland
Cartoon	0%	14%	4%
Internet meme (image and text)	20%	**40%**	**60%**
Internet meme (image only)	12%	10%	0%
Internet meme (video)	2%	16%	4%
Photo and humorous comment	10%	2%	16%
Photo and non-humorous comment	4%	0%	0%
Text-only joke	**44%**	12%	14%
Satirical news article	0%	2%	0%
Video recording of an event	0%	4%	2%
Television comedy	4%	0%	0%
Stand-up performance	2%	0%	0%

4.2 Communication Style

Estonian and Polish humour on the topic of the Wagner group rebellion turned out rather similar with regard to the ratio of direct/indirect communication styles (see Figure 1). This is to a certain extent surprising when compared with earlier research on the communication styles of the two cultures, with Polish being defined as cooperative and expressive, while Estonian being labelled as reserved (Chłopicki & Laineste 2019: 15) – thus one would expect more directness on the Polish side. The finding may perhaps be explained in terms of the inherent ambiguity of humour rather than cultural preference, and also in terms of popularity of certain humour genres and mechanisms that are connected either to direct or to indirect communication style as explained above. In contrast, Belarusian humour was much richer in indirect communication style, although again the explanation seemed more political than cultural. Namely, the reasons might be twofold: firstly, some Belarusians might consider it to be unsafe to refer to the event too explicitly out of the fear of political persecution, and secondly, due to the familiarity with the topic (the Wagner group had already been a prominent target of Belarusians' humour in 2020 when several of its members were detained in Belarus), the humour creators and sharers tended to create fewer explicit jokes.

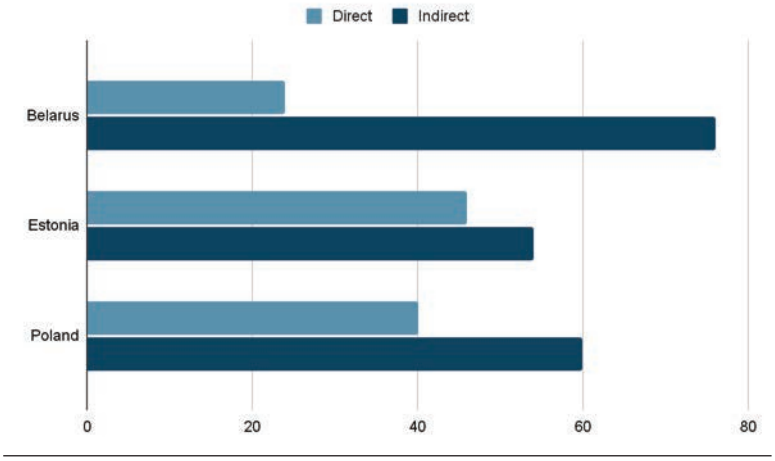

Figure 1. Communication style distribution per country.

4.3 Humour Mechanisms

The distribution of many humour mechanisms (namely, humorous stereotype, irony, sexual innuendo, status reversal or challenging and transgression) was similar across the three countries (see Table 2). Some differences between the popularity of different humour mechanisms can be related to the differences between the genre distribution in our datasets: for example, the juxtaposition of text and image and recontextualisation are typical for internet memes that combine text and image which abound in the Polish dataset (see Table 1). Another difference, namely, the higher share of ambiguity in Belarusian data goes parallel with the indirect communication style and is likely to be explained with the same reasons (see the previous section).

However, there are several curious differences in the popularity of humour mechanisms that have only partial or no relation with the genres and communication style. In the Estonian dataset, for example, there are more humorous items that employ exaggeration (considered a mechanism associated with a direct communication style) than in the Polish and Belarusian datasets. It can partly be explained by the more prominent presence of cartoons in Estonian data (more than half of Estonian cartoons in our dataset employ exaggeration), but it may also be due to the fact that Estonian humour about the Wagner group rebellion tends to employ this mechanism in relation to many different targets: the fear of Putin and his supporters is exaggerated; Prigozhin overestimates his rebellion and its consequences; Zelenskyy and Ukrainians explicitly withdraw from the war now that the Wagner group and Russian ministry of defence are fighting between themselves; Russian generals exaggerate their success in putting an end to the rebellion; Lukashenka is extremely confused; and even insignificant Estonian local events have an exaggeratedly high priority over the rebellion in the regional politics.

Another difference that stands out is the lower number of humorous items that employ grotesque (clearly a mechanism associated with a direct communication style as well) in the Polish dataset as compared to the Belarusian and Estonian datasets. The humorous items employing grotesque in these datasets also differed slightly in terms of their content: while in the Estonian and Belarusian datasets most of the grotesque was related to the improbable courses of events that will happen in Russia in the future if Prigozhin wins or if he loses (see example 1), in the Polish dataset grotesque was rather related to the elements in the rebellion itself that were illogical from the point of view of humour creators, and to Prigozhin in particular. This might stem from the fact that fantasising about the future of Russia is more relevant to Belarus and Estonia than it is to Poland – given that Belarus is dependent on Russia both politically and economically, and Estonia shares much of its border with Russia and has a significant proportion of Russian-speaking population.

> Example 1. Original text in Belarusian.
> *What a twist of history, though. It is quite possible that Lukashenka will have to send his troops to Russia instead of Ukraine.*
> **Source:** https://www.facebook.com/alespilecki/posts/pfbid02J4Q8VEz6LLA2hrsvriVzeRX1WxhPc9HyruHBkYquYJzMWCCLz3uwDqifyS5TE4E6l

Finally, it can be observed that Belarusian humour uses parody (a mechanism of indirect communication style since parody alludes to the unmentioned original that the readers need to know) more often than Estonian and Polish. The Belarusian humorous items on this topic mostly parody either Lukashenka (and Belarusian officials and propaganda more generally) or Putin (and the Russian government). Parodies of both characters have been popular in Belarusian humour long before the Wagner group rebellion, therefore, the outbreak of the rebellion just provided one more topic for those Belarusian humorists who had parodied Lukashenka and Putin before.

Table 2. Humour mechanism distribution per country

Humour mechanism/Country	Belarus	Estonia	Poland
Ambiguity	**30%**	10%	12%
Caricature	0%	16%	4%
Exaggeration	24%	**38%**	24%
Grotesque	52%	50%	**28%**
Humorous stereotype	20%	18%	20%
Irony	16%	22%	26%
Juxtaposition of text and image	26%	28%	**58%**
Parody	**42%**	28%	22%

Humour mechanism/Country	Belarus	Estonia	Poland
Recontextualization	54%	46%	64%
Sexual innuendo	4%	4%	2%
Status reversal or challenging	86%	88%	82%
Transgression	10%	10%	16%
Word play	14%	6%	8%

4.4 Transnational Trends in Humorous Representation of the Rebellion: Thematic Analysis

Although there are no completely identical items in the three national datasets we analyse, there are several recurrent thematic trends that have emerged in the humour of all three countries. Some of the trends involve the appearance of identical or similar visual and/or verbal elements, while other trends only revolve around the same topic but use different ways to approach it.

Firstly, several humorous items in each dataset (Belarusian[2], Estonian[3] and Polish[4]) underscored the surreality (Wiggins 2019) of the event. They compared following the news on the rebellion to watching a film or a TV series, fantasised[5] about a possible Netflix adaptation of the rebellion and made jokes about the need for popcorn and popcorn prices going up and down following the course of the rebellion (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. A meme from the Estonian dataset.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/lauri.talve/posts/pfbid0pTTZWCQYo3JBSk82BEb3sZuWuchyMqHP4TKdQbMpupUZzZfmna1mCEtPJktB1Srzl, accessed on March 19, 2025.

Secondly, there is a thematic trend that suggests that the Russian aggression in Ukraine is turning into a civil war. The Ukrainian army (and in some cases also their allies) are depicted as observers of the fight between the Wagner group and the Russian army. In the Belarusian[6] and Estonian[7] datasets there are even memes with identical visual backgrounds, the only difference being

in the captions: in the Belarusian meme, it is not only the Ukrainian army, but also NATO and Anglo-Saxons that are cheering the fighters (Figure 3), while in the Estonian meme all the observers are labelled "Ukrainians". In a Polish[8] cartoon, Ukrainians remark: "Seems like they have started without us".

Figure 3. Labels in Russian (left to right): Anglo-Saxons, NATO, Ukrainian armed forces. A meme from the Belarusian dataset.

Source: https://t.me/belteanews/24875, accessed on March 19, 2025.

The third trend is the mocking of the Russians' initial plan to conduct a "three-day special operation". Belarusian[9] and Estonian[10] humorous items ridicule Russians' intentions to "capture Kyiv in 3 days" (see Figure 4), while Polish humorous items do not mention Kyiv in particular, but also mock the fact that a 3-day military operation turned into a civil war.[11]

Figure 4. Upper caption: Kyiv in 3 days. Lower caption: Kremlin in 3 days (both in Belarusian). A meme from the Belarusian dataset.

Source: https://twitter.com/gypsynkov/status/1672510214887600133, accessed on March 19, 2025.

Fourthly, some humorous items in all three countries targeted Putin for being afraid of the Wagner rebellion. A Belarusian humorous TV show released a mock telephone conversation between a crying Putin and Lukashenka who is trying to comfort him[12]; the Estonian dataset features caricatures that show the extent of Putin's fear[13] and Polish humour draws upon a famous quote by Zelenskyy but recontextualises it to refer to the rebellion[14] (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Upper caption: I need ammunition not a ride. Lower caption: I need a ride not ammunition (both in Polish). A meme from the Polish dataset.

Source: https://img25.demotywatoryfb.pl//uploads/202306/gallery_1687617919_162377.jpg, accessed on March 19, 2025.

Figure 6. A meme from the Polish dataset.

Source: https://jbzd.com.pl/obr/3118559/krotkie-podsumowanie-sytuacji-w-rosji, accessed on March 19, 2025.

Finally, there was a trend to reverse the statuses of Putin and Lukashenka (or Russia and Belarus in general) and show that Russia has now become dependent on Lukashenka's help. Understandably, there were more jokes on this topic in the Belarusian dataset (for example, a stand-up routine[15], a satirical news episode[16], verbal jokes[17] etc.), although this topic also featured in Estonian[18] and Polish[19] humour (see Figure 6). A related trend was drawing the connections between the Wagner group rebellion outcome and potato cultivation, as the latter is a stereotypical activity associated with Belarus. Curiously, only one such joke is present in the Belarusian dataset[20], but several such jokes can be found in the Estonian[21] and Polish[22] datasets.

5. DISCUSSION

Despite memes often travelling freely and even without adaptations from culture to culture, there were no completely identical humorous items in our datasets, and only a few items shared the same visual background (see the discussion of Figure 3). The differences between the three national datasets were mostly related to the political climate in the countries in question, historical and present-day references, the emotional distance from the conflict and their relationship with Russia. Other differences were conditioned by the variety of targets or the previous popularity of certain characters (Prigozhin, Putin, Lukashenka) in the country's humour. National differences in terms of communication styles can also be observed in our data: contrary to the expectations which stem from earlier research, Polish data feature a more indirect style (notably less grotesque), while Estonian data seems more direct (with more exaggeration). Belarusian data feature the indirectness (especially parody and ambiguity) which results more from political circumstances (censorship) rather than cultural ones. There were also the differences that stemmed mainly from the sources of data typical of or more popular in one country but not the others: specific social media platforms determined the popularity of certain genres, which then determined the prevalence of certain humour mechanisms. This indicates that various formal elements of humour such as genres, mechanisms and communication styles cannot and should not be studied in isolation – neither in isolation from one another, nor in isolation from the contextual factors, such as the nature of the conflict and the medium where they spread. The interplay between genres, mechanisms and communication styles helps us understand the evolution of conflict-related humor in digital spaces. Drawing from our examples, conflicts easily trigger humour (though depending on their humour potential, e.g. controversiality and idiosyncratic details), and there is a notable dependency between forms of humour and their humour mechanisms / communication styles, but even more so the nature of the conflict and the humour that evolves as a response to that. Individual humorous items and their thematic compilations such the datasets used

in this study reveal people's attitudes toward the conflicts and more general national and transnational patterns in humorous communication at the time of conflicts only when their various formal and contextual elements are taken into account. For further conclusions concerning humour studies and conflict communication, a larger scale comparative study that includes more cases should be conducted.

The analysis also reveals that the humorous reactions to the Wagner group rebellion were similar in many ways across countries. As we have noted elsewhere (Laineste et al. 2024), geographical location where the data is collected hardly affects the genre of the humour (though it does depend on the particular platform). Most of the humour in all our datasets belong to the genre of memes – this seems to be a typical feature of online data. Memes and other forms of multimodal humour are shaped by the patterns of online communication in general and not by the particular cases or controversies (see also the discussion in Denisova 2019: 163–170). In line with these patterns, in our data the proportion of genres containing visual elements is significantly larger than those that feature only verbal elements.

On the whole, the humour themes related to the Wagner rebellion and most of the humour mechanisms are transnational: we can see that there are many similarities in the Estonian, Belarusian and Polish humour about the Wagner group rebellion. Humour mechanisms are also similar across the humour of the three countries (with the exception of the mechanisms that depend on the genre of the data). This shows that they are conditioned by the nature of the conflict rather than the culture wherein they spread. The memes attempted to make sense of the Wagner group rebellion, which indicates that for the people creating and spreading humour, it was an unexpected and dramatic turn of events. This might explain the use of humour mechanisms such as grotesque or exaggeration, representing the direct communication style. Since the story also involved quite a few powerful politicians and military men, a significant amount of humour used the mechanism of status reversal or challenging. The differences in humour mechanisms stem from the previous presence of the same characters in national humour and the more general context of international relations.

Therefore, we can see that the transnational aspects of humorous communication dominate over the national humour features – not only with regard to the individual humorous items, but on the more abstract levels of genres and humour mechanisms. As reacting to conflicts with humour is common, the patterns of these reactions also become common across countries thanks to the quick spread of humour via online social media. Whereas the perspectives of those who take part in the conflict themselves might be different, for most internet audiences – including the ones from which we collected our data – the conflict is mediatised (following it is like watching a film as described above) and fits more into the intertextual paradigm of popular culture than into their

real lives. The references to previously known memes and other pop cultural phenomena thus become more recurrent than attempts to embed the humour in the real-life settings (for example, by using photos of the event).

The localisation of humour is a process that is used in some contexts and not in others; when a humorous trigger (e.g. the physical appearances or names of the actors involved in the triggering conflict) seems understandable for people of different cultures, the meme makers might think that adaptations are not worth the effort. Localisation might even have an opposite effect: it may cause alienation, because showing the conflict from an unfamiliar angle departs from the globally-spread memes and thus feels out of place. For example, only two humorous items in the Estonian dataset and only seven humorous items in the Polish dataset referred to local personalities or events of these countries (see Fiadotava & Castañar & Laineste 2024 for the discussion of Estonian items). Such a low level of localisation in this case can be explained by the fact that "these jokes [that add local references to the global topics] do not offer anything new in terms of social reality, they are not cognitively functional and are thus not as frequent" (Laineste 2002: 23), similarly to Estonian jokes on global issues (for example, the 9/11 tragedy in 2001) that rarely blended global and local references.

The present study has its limitations in terms of its scope and generalisability. By restricting our dataset to 50 items per country we have inevitably excluded a great deal of humour on this topic that was circulating online, and thus we describe the trends within the chosen dataset and our conclusions are applicable to the particular data that we used. Moreover, the similarities between the three countries' datasets that we have shown might pertain only to humour on this particular conflict. A possible direction of future research would be to look at humorous representations of other conflicts in different cultures in order to establish whether the transnational trends also dominate over the national peculiarities in them. On a broader level, the study invites further in-depth discussions on how we can define the national aspects of universally popular internet humour, and how the globalisation and mediatisation of humorous representations of conflict determine our perspectives on it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the CELSA network project entitled "Humour and Conflict in the Public Sphere: Communication styles, humour controversies and contested freedoms in contemporary Europe", Estonian Ministry of Education and Research grant EKKD 126 "Source documents in the cultural process: Estonian materials in the collections and databases of the Estonian Literary Museum II", research grants of the Estonian Literary Museum EKM 8-2/20/3 and EKM 8-2/23/5 "Contemporary crises and their online humorous representations".

NOTES

1 The 100 items of the Belarusian and Estonian dataset were coded by a single coder (Author 1) and the 50 items of the Polish dataset were coded jointly by two authors (Author 1 and Author 4). In the latter case the ambiguous issues of coding were discussed and consensus was found.

2 https://www.facebook.com/hajtaktv/posts/pfbid0MLeNEkGkpmbqJry3VdqKLK7BWoq963S5WZULN3xkGCRBEriQbef7fzmUWfsvJsm8l, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

3 https://www.facebook.com/groups/534314991238265/posts/810427196960375/, last accessed on 17 March 2025, and https://www.facebook.com/lauri.talve/posts/pfbid0pTTZWCQYo3JBSk82BEb3sZuWuchyMqHP4TKdQbMpupUZzZfmna1mCEtPJktB1Srzl (memetic image of Prigozhin pointing at the popcorn prices) , last accessed on 17 March 2025.

4 https://jbzd.com.pl/obr/3117148/juz-wkrotce-w-kinach, last accessed on 17 March 2025, and https://kwejk.pl/obrazek/3986700/za-szybko.html, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

5 The joint fantasising or joint joke constructions is well researched in humour studies, see e.g. McGhee (1979), Norrick (1993), and more recently Chovanec (2012), Tsakona (2018), Haugh and Priego-Valverde (2024).

6 https://t.me/belteanews/24875, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

7 https://www.facebook.com/groups/534314991238265/posts/810446656958429/, last accessed on 17 March, 2025.

8 https://files.niezalezna.tech/storage/images/upload/2023/06/25/Q6qDvppS2iuFKuGKk1ODxgv3rwbBfSsRnv6wSXLy.jpg, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

9 https://twitter.com/gypsynkov/status/1672510214887600133, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

10 https://www.facebook.com/groups/534314991238265/posts/810427786960316/, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

11 https://twitter.com/TygodnikNIE/status/1672368154834530304, last accessed on 17 March 2025, and https://kwejk.pl/obrazek/3986150/wojna-rusko-ruska.html, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

12 https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=227358106915145, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

13 https://arvamus.postimees.ee/7802318/juhtkiri-me-saame-aidata-uksnes-ukrainat-mitte-venemaad, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

14 https://img25.demotywatoryfb.pl//uploads/202306/gallery_1687617919_162377.jpg, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

15 https://www.instagram.com/p/Cvb7aaJrk6S/, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

16 https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2198214387029106, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

17 For example, https://www.facebook.com/alespilecki/posts/pfbid02J4Q8VEz6LLA2hrsvriVzeRX1WxhPc9HyruHBkYquYJzMWCCLz3uwDqifyS5TE4E6l, last accessed on 17 March 2025, and https://twitter.com/gypsynkov/status/1672332643638099968 , last accessed on 17 March 2025.

18 https://www.facebook.com/groups/534314991238265/posts/811324546870640/, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

19 https://jbzd.com.pl/obr/3118559/krotkie-podsumowanie-sytuacji-w-rosji, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

20 https://www.facebook.com/groups/1716227065346657/permalink/3140991202870229, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

21 https://www.facebook.com/groups/534314991238265/posts/812341740102254/, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

22 https://jbzd.com.pl/obr/3117921/negocjacje-edycja-kartoflany-baron, last accessed on 17 March 2025.

REFERENCES

Asmolov, Gregory 2021. From sofa to frontline: The digital mediation and domestication of warfare. *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 342–365. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635221989568.

Auseyushkin, Yan 2021. Telegram is more than a messenger in Belarus. *Visegrad / Insight*. Available at https://visegradinsight.eu/telegram-is-more-than-a-messenger-in-belarus/, last accessed on 23 October 2024.

Blank, Trevor 2012. Introduction. In: Trevor Blank (ed.) *Folk Culture in the Digital Age. The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*. Denver: Utah State University Press, pp. 1–24.

Börzsei, Linda K. 2013. Makes a meme instead: A concise history of internet memes. *New Media Magazine: Digital Visual Culture*, Vol. 7, pp. 152–193.

Boxman-Shabtai, Lillian & Shifman, Limor 2016. Digital humor and the articulation of locality in an age of global flows. *Humor*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2015-0127.

Brassett, James & Browning, Christopher S. 2024. "Russian warship, go fuck yourself": Humour and the (geo) political limits of vicarious war. *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 59, No 3, pp. 311–336. https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367241228861.

Brzozowska, Dorota, & Chłopicki, Władysław. 2023. When vulgar becomes humorous: the case study of Idi... . In: Melita Aleksa Varga & Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt & Wolfgang Mieder (eds.) *Diligence brings delight: A Festschrift in honour of Anna T. Litovkina on the occasion of her 60th birthday*. Osijek: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, pp. 297–315.

Cervi, Laura & Divon, Tom 2023. Playful activism: Memetic performances of Palestinian resistance in TikTok #Challenges. *Social Media + Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157607.

Chłopicki, Władysław 2017a. Communication styles: An overview. *Styles of Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 9–25.

Chłopicki, Władysław 2017b. Humor and narrative. In: Salvatore Attardo (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor.* London: Routledge, pp. 143–157.

Chłopicki, Władysław 2023. The drama of dialogue action in distinct discourse spaces: Conservative and liberal humour in television talk shows. *Language and Dialogue*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 383–406. https://doi.org/10.1075/ld.00156.chl.

Chłopicki, Władysław & Laineste, Liisi 2019. Communication styles: Between deliberate strategy and ambivalence. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 153, No. 2, pp. 15–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.08.001.

Chłopicki, Władysław & Kuipers, Giselinde & Laineste, Liisi & Castañar, Guillem & Fiadotava, Anastasiya & Hołobut, Agata & Nicolaï, Jonas 2024. Specific Humor Scandal Database. *KU Leuven RDR*. https://doi.org/10.48804/PTPQVB.

Chovanec, Jan 2012. Conversational humor and joint fantasizing in online journalism. In: Jan Chovanec & Isabel Ermida (eds.) *Language and Humor in the Media*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 139–161.

Davies, Christie 1990. *Ethnic Humour around the World: A Comparative Analysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Denisova, Anastasia 2019. *Internet Memes and Society: Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts*. London: Routledge.

Dolitsky, Marlene 1983. Humor and the unsaid. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 39–48.

Dumitrica, Delia 2021. "Chuck Norris, please help!" Transnational cultural flows in the 2017 anti-corruption protests in Romania. *Media and Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 239–248.

Dynel, Marta 2018. *Irony, Deception and Humo*r. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Dynel, Marta & Chovanec, Jan 2021. Creating and sharing public humour across traditional and new media. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 177, No. 5, pp. 151–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.02.020.

Ermida, Isabel 2008. *The Language of Comic Narratives: Humor Construction in Short Stories*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Fiadotava, Anastasiya & Castañar, Guillem & Laineste, Liisi 2024. Humorous reactions to controversies in the Estonian public sphere: Form, content, mechanisms and comments. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 93, pp. 143–166. https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2024.93.controversies.

Fitzgerald, Helen 2003. *How different are we?: Spoken discourse in intercultural communication: The significance of the situational context.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Gil & Moti 2015. Available for You: The activist art of hospitality and friendship. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 3, No. 2/3, pp. 102–118. https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR2015.3.2.3.moti.

Gudykunst, William B. & Ting-Toomey, Stella 1988. Verbal Communication Styles. In: William B. Gudykunst & Stella Ting-Toomey & Elizabeth Chua (eds.) *Culture and Interpersonal Communication*. Newbury Park: SAGE, pp. 99–117.

Hall, Edward T. 1989 [1976]. *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Books.

Hasan-Rokem, Galit 2016. Ecotypes: Theory of the lived and narrated experience. *Narrative Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Article 6. Available at http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/narrative/vol3/iss1/6, last accessed on 23 October 2024.

Haugh, Michael & Priego-Valverde, Béatrice 2024. Conversational humour. In: Thomas E. Ford & Władysław Chłopicki & Giselinde Kuipers (eds.) *The Handbook of Humour Research*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 307–326.

Hayes, Bruce 2022. The contested politics of humour at the end of the French wars of religion. *Australian Journal of French Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 4, pp. 348–360. https://doi.org/10.3828/ajfs.2022.27.

Holman, Valerie & Kelly, Debra 2001. Introduction. War in the twentieth century: The functioning of humour in cultural representation. *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 123, pp. 247–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/004724410103112301.

Hyttinen, Anniina 2024. Possibilities and limits of political humour in a hybrid regime: A visual ethnographic study of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 171–193. https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR.2024.12.1.849.

Jenkins, Henry 2006. *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New York: NYU Press.

Kazecki, Jakub 2012. *Laughter in the Trenches: Humour and Front Experience in German First World War Narratives*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kuipers Giselinde 2002. Media culture and Internet disaster jokes: Bin Laden and the attack on the World Trade Center. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 450–470. https://doi.org/10.1177/1364942002005004296.

Kuipers, Giselinde 2011. The Politics of Humour in the Public Sphere: Cartoons, Power and Modernity in the First Transnational Humour Scandal. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549410370072.

Kuipers, Giselinde & Zijp, Dick 2024. Humour and the public sphere. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 1–14. https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR.2024.12.1.937.

Laaksonen, Salla-Maaria & Koivukoski, Joonas & Porttikivi, Merja 2022. Clowning around a polarized issue: Rhetorical strategies and communicative outcomes of a political parody performance by Loldiers of Odin. *New Media & Society*, Vol. 24, no. 8, pp. 1912–1931. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444821989621.

Lahikainen, Amanda 2015. "Some species of contrasts": British graphic satire, the French Revolution, and the humor of horror. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 93–117. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2014-0143.

Laineste, Liisi 2002. Take it with a grain of salt: The kernel of truth in topical jokes. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 21, pp. 7–25. https://doi.org/10.7592/fejf2002.21.jokes.

Laineste, Liisi & Voolaid, Piret 2016. Laughing across borders: Intertextuality of internet memes. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 26–49. https://doi.org/10.7592/ejhr2016.4.4.laineste.

Laineste, Liisi & Fiadotava, Anastasiya 2023. Heroes and villains in memes on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 90, pp. 35–62. https://doi.org/10.7592/fejf2023.90.laineste_fiadotava.

Laineste, Liisi & Fiadotava, Anastasiya & Castañar, Guillem & Troitskiy, Sergey 2024. The Power of Memes: Personification as a Marker of Psychological Distance in Memes about the War in Ukraine. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 383–419. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2023-0112.

Laineste, Liisi & Fiadotava, Anastasiya 2024. Polarised but similar: Russian and Belarusian pro- and anti-democratic humour in the public sphere. *European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 194–215. https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR.2024.12.1.835.

Lewis, Paul 2006. *Cracking Up: American Humor in a Time of Conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Liu, Meina 2016. Verbal Communication Styles and Culture. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Available at https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-162, last accessed on 23 October 2024.

McGhee, Paul E. 1979. *Humor, Its Origin and Development.* San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

McGhee, Paul E. 2018. Chimpanzee and gorilla humor: Progressive emergence from origins in the wild to captivity to sign language learning. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 405–449. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2018-0017.

McKellar, Sara Regnier 2011. Manhood and humour in the construction of the "other" during the British Civil Wars, 1642-1651. In: Malte Hinrichsen & Elliott Hicks & Joanna Frew & Nazim Can Cicektakan (eds.) *Creating the Other.* Colchester: University of Essex, pp. 75–88.

Morreall, John 2005. Humour and the conduct of politics. In: Sharon Lockyer & Michael Pickering (eds.) *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 63–78.

Nieuwenhuis, Ivo 2024. From mocking pastors to roasting politicians: Humour scandals, media dynamics and cultural change in the Netherlands, 1963–2021. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 101–115. https://doi.org/10.7592/ejhr.2024.12.1.887.

Nieuwenhuis, Ivo & Zijp, Dick 2022. The politics and aesthetics of humour in an age of comic controversy. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 341–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221084118.

Nissenbaum, Asaf & Shifman, Limor 2020. Laughing alone, together: Local user-generated satirical responses to a global event. *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 7, pp. 924–941. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2020.1804979.

Norrick, Neal R. 1993. *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Rogers, Richard & Giorgi, Giulia 2024. What is a meme, technically speaking? *Information, Communication and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 73–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2023.2174790.

Schäfer, Mike S. 2015. Digital public sphere. In Gianpietro Mazzoleni (ed.) *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 322–328.

Severini, Giorgia 2010. *From elite to exclusive: Lysistrata and gender, democracy, and war*. MA thesis. University of Alberta. https://doi.org/10.7939/R3Z118.

Shifman, Limor 2006. Humour in the age of digital reproduction: Continuity and change in internet-based comic texts. *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 1, pp. 187–209.

Shifman, Limor 2014. *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Shifman, Limor & Levy, Hadar & Thelwall, Mike 2014. Internet jokes: The secret agents of globalization? *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 727–743. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12082.

Simpson, Paul 2003. *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humor.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Sørensen, Majken Jul 2013. Humorous political stunts. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 69–83. https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR2013.1.2.sorensen.

Tsakona, Villy 2018. Online joint fictionalization. In: Villy Tsakona & Jan Chovanec (eds.) *The Dynamics of Interactional Humor: Creating and Negotiating Humor in Everyday Encounters*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 229–255.

Tsakona, Villy 2020. *Recontextualizing Humor: Rethinking the Analysis and Teaching of Humor.* Berlin: De Gruyter.

Wiggins, Bradley E. 2016. Crimea river: Directionality in memes from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 10, pp. 451–485.

Wiggins, Bradley E. 2019. *The discursive power of memes in digital culture: Ideology, semiotics and intertextuality*. London: Routledge.

Yarchi, Moran & Boxman-Shabtai, Lillian 2023. The image war moves to TikTok evidence from the May 2021 round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Digital Journalism*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2291650.

Yus, Francisco 2012. Relevance, humour and translation. In: Ewa Wałaszewska & Agnieszka Piskorska (eds.) *Relevance Theory: More than Understanding*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 117–145.

Zangl, Veronika 2022. Politics of humour in extremis: Cabaret and propaganda in the Netherlands during the Second World War. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 389–405. https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221086311.

Zelizer, Craig 2010. Laughing our way to peace or war: Humour and peacebuilding. *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 1–9.

Anastasiya Fiadotava (PhD) is a Senior Researcher at the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu. Her fields of interest include the use of humour in family communication, the spread of jokes and memes in social and mainstream media and the reflections of current political and social issues in humour.

anastasiya.fiadotava@folklore.ee

Liisi Laineste (PhD) is Research Professor at the Department of Folkloristics of the Estonian Literary Museum. Her main research pertains to folk humor and its online manifestations, ethnic humor, visual forms of humor (e.g., caricatures and memes), digital folklore and online communication, many of which represent an interdisciplinary angle and combine folkloristics with linguistics, psychology, sociology and communication studies.

liisi.laineste@folklore.ee

Guillem Castañar Rubio (PhD) is a Lecturer of Hispanic Studies at the School of Humanities of Tallinn University. His research interests are related to ethnic humour and the multimodal analysis of digital humour and its role in the public sphere.

guillem.castanar_rubio@tlu.ee

Władysław Chłopicki (PhD) is Professor of Linguistics and Translation at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His academic interests include interdisciplinary humour research in the context of cognitive linguistics, linguistic pragmatics, narratology and cultural studies (most recently humour in the public sphere – https://humour-in-europe.project.uj.edu.pl/). He published extensively on humour related issues. He is past president of the ISHS, and a founding editor of The European Journal of Humour Research and Tertium Linguistic Journal.

w.chlopicki@uj.edu.pl