

Laughing Through Tears: Online Reactions to Trauma-related Humor in Estonia

Liisi Laineste

Estonian Literary Museum
Tartu, Estonia

Abstract

Humor is a way to cope with trauma. Reclaiming one's experiences and getting back in control through humor has been reported in disaster jokes (Kuipers 2002), celebrity scandals (Blank 2013), wartime humor (Stokker 1995), and death-related humor in general (Narvaez 2003). However, there is another aspect to this issue, whereby humor may trivialize the traumatic experience. Anyone can make a joke, and gallows humor is not only the prerogative of the victims. Humor usually implies punching upwards at oppressors, terrorists, rapists, ultra-right wingers, and thus fulfills the therapeutic aim, might turn against the victims themselves and become a tool in the hands of those who already have the upper hand. Accordingly, reactions to trauma-inspired humor may range from high praise to unlaughter (Billig 2005)—a deliberate withholding of humor appreciation—, although it is unclear how the society negotiates these opposing positions.

This article will take a close look at examples of trauma-inspired humor in the Estonian public discourse to clarify that point. It will discuss reactions to humorous takes on trauma (specifically concerning WWII and its aftermath, the Soviet occupation of Estonia) and analyze them against the backdrop of recent humor theory. The material will lend grounds to discuss humorous reactions to trauma diachronically, touching upon the topics of power and entitlement, and above all, negotiations over the right to joke about sensitive topics.

Keywords: trauma, humor, forced migration, Estonia, *Tujurikkuja* ('Mood spoiler')

Introduction

Trauma and humor are two notions that have nothing in common at first sight, and it might seem insensitive and thoughtless to connect the two phenomena. In reality, though, there is a correlation that surprises and shocks some people yet offers hope and consolation to others. The different reactions to witnessing an instance of trauma-related gallows humor appear, among other things, to reflect different degrees of emotional engagement with the distressing event, but also a specific taste for 'tasteless' humor (Kuipers 2008). Regardless of the perceiver's judgment, humor regarding traumatic events such as the Holocaust, 9/11, or hurricane Katrina tended to follow quite naturally. It is uncertain how long a trauma can last and how

long it can continue to inspire humor, but there seems to be a “best before” date for which a traumatic experience can legitimately generate new jokes (see Ellis 2002).

The present article discusses questions of entitlement, power, and control in the context of sharing gallows humor about war and forced migration. Studying reactions to instances of gallows humor seeks to answer the central question of how the public negotiates varied standpoints ranging from indignation to praise. Additionally, there is a lack of studies that focus on humor directed towards traumatic events that have occurred only in the past (as opposed to immediate reactions to ongoing trauma, which have been analyzed by, e.g., Ellis 2001; Davies 2003; Blank 2016). This article thus fills this academic lacuna by investigating the diachronic dimensions and mechanisms of humor and ‘unlaughter’ (Billig 2005). Unlaughter is a deliberate withholding of humor appreciation to point at discrepancies in the joke teller’s and recipients’ sense of humor (see also Smith 2009 and Marsh 2016 for examples and discussion of the phenomenon). I suggest that understanding the balance between “laughter” and “unlaughter” can illuminate the complex relationship between trauma and humor, and has a growing relevance in the context of negotiating humor in a globalizing world where standards and tastes in humor vary and can have real and even tragic consequences (like in the case of Mohammad cartoon controversy that started in Denmark; see, e.g., Lewis et al. 2007). In order to better present the concepts involved in the study, I will give a short overview of humor theories and related definitions, as well as the context of such jokes in Estonia and elsewhere. The following section will connect the Estonian context of trauma and humor. I will then discuss examples of online discourse that comment on the trauma-related humor of Mood Spoiler, an Estonian TV humor program. The discussion will tackle the polemics of entitlement to perform controversial humor to broad audiences and potential reasons for unlaughter reactions, which seek to clarify further the relationship between (gallows) humor and trauma on a grander scale, not only in the Estonian context.

Humor

Humor is a way to cope with trauma. Obrdlik (1942, 715) describes an urban legend-like case from a Czech village during WWII where the German Gestapo found a hanged hen with the inscription “*I’d rather commit suicide than lay eggs for Hitler*” fastened to her neck. This kind of gallows humor, he concedes, allows those sharing such humor to see the larger picture while remaining aware of the temporality of suffering. He calls such humor an “index of good morale and the spirit of resistance,” concluding that the purest kind of humor is born out of painful experiences accompanied by grief and sorrow (ibid., 716). Reclaiming one’s experiences and getting back in control through humor has been reported in the contexts of disaster jokes (Kuipers 2002), celebrity scandals (Blank 2013), wartime humor (Stokker 1995), and death-related humor in general (Narvaez 2003). Analyzing Jewish humor has offered an essential contribution to the scholarly discussions over the functionality and nature of such humor (e.g., Oring 2016, 178 explains the mythical connection between the tragic Jewish history and the legendary “Jewish joke”). A “sword and shield” metaphor can describe

the essence of humor, implying a joke can be used as a weapon against the aggressor and a defense against attack (Helmy & Frerichs 2013). These varied viewpoints show humor as a functional phenomenon that people ‘use’ to achieve a specific aim – either as a weapon or as a form of relief or therapy.

Researchers in diachronic and comparative studies have questioned the functionality of humor. Notably, the studies of Davies (1998; 2011) and Oring (2003) reveal that the relationship between social circumstances (e.g., real-life aggression or conflict) and humor are far from straightforward. Jokes are undeniably social facts in that they are a facet of a particular social world, and thus need to be analyzed at a collective level, i.e., not reflecting the tastes and perceptions of individuals but rather that of specific groups or society as a whole (Davies 2011, 4–5). However, discussions and polemics on what humor is (Laineste 2011), what forms good and acceptable humor (Kuipers 2008), and who is entitled to make jokes (Kramer 2011) have always kept researchers aware of the complexity of the phenomenon. Similarly, a question of power (of defining humor and telling good humor from bad) guides the dynamics of laughter and unlaughter. One can conclude that, at best, humor holds a distorting mirror towards society (Davies 1998, 13; cf. Dundes 2007 [1969]).

The question of how humor precisely relates to those who share it always has interested researchers. Plato and Aristotle (and later Hobbes, see Carrell 2008, 306) laid the foundations of the *superiority theory* of humor that claims that we laugh at those we want to belittle. Several scholars have since agreed that there is inherent aggression to be found in humor. The ‘sword and shield’ metaphor stressing the functionality of humor evolved from this approach. Sociologists have posed three main hypotheses concerning the functionality of humor, whereby humor is used to (1) maintain social order (laughing at wrongdoers and causing humiliation; excluding outsiders through strengthening group norms and borders), (2) create group cohesion (laughing with the community), and (3) provide a path of relief from conflict and stress (for an overview, see Kuipers 2008). At the same time, humor assumes a certain detachment from reality, supported by the notions of incongruity (first suggested by Kant; see Carrell 2008, 308). Talking about functions is speculative to a large extent, but at the same time, very tempting. Knowing why something is as it is requires getting to the very heart of the phenomenon. However, the height of popularity of this approach was in the mid-20th century, and the then-popular “Why?” question has now been replaced with a safer “How?” question. However, this does not mean that researchers have abandoned the idea of nailing down the functions of humor altogether. McGraw et al. (2014) have suggested an explanation of humor as a function of spatial, temporal, and emotional proximity of the distressing event, based on their study of Hurricane Sandy jokes circulating in 2012. They claim that distance—not too close nor too far—creates a “comedic sweet spot,” and this occurs when the psychological distance from a tragedy is big enough to buffer people from threat (creating what they call a “benign violation”) but not so significant that the event becomes a purely benign, nonthreatening situation.

There are numerous lay and professional terms that denote the kinds of humor that accompany or follow a traumatic event, and in this article, I will use the terms

“black” or “gallows” humor.

Gallows humor is, by definition, a way of making fun of death, life-threatening situations, and danger (Nilsen & Nilsen 2014, 254–56). Black humor or black comedy¹ is a comic style that makes light of themes that are generally considered severe or taboo, but not primarily death, and is recently perhaps a more contemporarily used term than gallows humor². Essentially, however, black humor and gallows humor can be seen as synonyms (Encyclopedia Britannica, March 18, 2019). Sick humor is humor that breaks social conventions: e.g., making fun of issues such as death, illness, or other serious misfortunes (Beermann 2014, 691–93). The genre gathered popularity in the late 1950s in the US and was practiced by those referred to as “sicknicks” (The Sicknicks 1959). Other less frequent alternatives include ‘tasteless humor,’ which is an emic term for taboo topics in humor (as in “alt.tasteless” [see Encyclopedia Dramatica, March 18, 2019] and ‘twisted humor,’ neither of which are used in scholarship). “Blue humor” is focused heavily on topics such as nudity, sex, homophobia, and racism (Rock 2013), while ‘brown humor’ focuses on bodily functions, above all scatological and often in a political context, to name just a few related lay terms (as seen in, e.g., Brexit humor, Trump jokes; see Chiaro 2018).

Although many of these terms are interrelated and partly overlap with each other (Beermann 2014, 692), as well as with the general notion of obscenity and insult, humor is different from insult in that it is subtler and does not necessarily have the explicit intention of offending people. Instead, it strives to provide entertainment and social criticism (Davies 2011). Another observation based on the prolific terminology is that people consider the phenomenon necessary. Disaster humor seems to mushroom naturally during tough times, visible, e.g., in the popular *Sickipedia*,³ an online initiative to gather examples of anything that might be distasteful yet still humorous. The fast dissemination of gallows humor is the rule rather than an exception, and this is a growing trend in the globalizing, internet-connected world of today (as an example, the global internet joke cycle concerning the 9/11 attacks are the first example of the fast online spread of black humor). Milner (2013) has looked at the example of 4chan⁴ and has described online humor as weird, bitter, biting, and ironic, referring to it as the “logic of lulz,” which is something that hits the audience “right in the feels.”

There is no place for sentimentality, sincerity, or naivety within the genre of (online) gallows humor, and even before the internet, catastrophes triggered jokes (for example, sinking of the Titanic in 1912 [see Chovanec 2019], the sinking of the ferry Estonia in 1994, the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986 [see Smyth 1986], or the untimely death of Princess Diana in 1997 [see Davies 2003]). Research has documented the contemporary humorous reactions to disasters (and the reactions to these reactions) have well, but there is a lack of studies that focus on humor related to traumatic events that have occurred further back in time.

Trauma and Humor in Estonia

Many would refuse to see the painful experiences of war and any consequential forced migration as being a “laughing matter.” Such a migration, e.g., mobilization or depor-

tation, is a source of trauma. It involves up-rooting from a familiar environment and trying to fit in under new circumstances that are usually not friendly towards the involuntary migrant. Especially, people in migrant destinations often perceive migrants as ‘others’ and treat them with anger, fear, or even disgust. However, I argue that collective discursive processes (including humor) can help transform traumatic events into cultural trauma (Eyerman 2019, 3; see also Alexander 2004, 1) and open the past events up for re-interpretation and contestation. Trauma is always a process because nothing is “culturally traumatic” in itself; it is “made, not born” (Smelser 2004, 37). The powerful emotions triggered by collectively experienced traumatic events, e.g., forced migration, are processed by succeeding generations (on collective trauma, see Aareleid-Tart 2006; 2010; Laanes 2017). The migrants’ children and grandchildren do this in order to understand and channel the often-hidden emotions, even though the interpretative lens and narrative elements may vary from generation to generation and individual to individual. The contesting and provocative form of humor challenges traditional narratives and reopens discussions of cultural trauma even more effective than many other ways of talking about trauma. The connection between these two notions—humor and trauma—is thus especially significant to understand.

In Estonia, trauma, injustice, and humor are closely connected. Already in the 19th century, when folklorists collected the first humorous folkloric texts in Estonia, the upward-punching nature of the tales was notable, e.g., humor about landlords and the clergy were among the most frequent categories (Laineste, Jonuks & Fiadotava 2019). If we narrow the context down to migration and its aftermath, we can find plenty of examples of humorous treatment.

Estonian history is complex and troublesome, filled with opportunities for black humor to arise. Estonia’s political situation at the end of WWII was decided mainly by the Soviet and Nazi struggles over the territory, and historians have estimated that a total of about 100,000 Estonians served in the Red Army and German armed forces, which has remained a traumatic and frequently raised issue in Estonian life histories (e.g., Kõresaar 2011). As the Soviets recruited one-third of these soldiers into the Red Army and the remaining two-thirds served in the German armed forces, this often divided family and friends to different sides of the battlefield, turning brothers against brothers regardless of their ideological convictions. This problem (embedded in deep cultural memory [Wertsch 2009]) still feeds into present-day public discourse when talking about the history of the 20th century. For instance, more personal accounts of history in the form of folk stories add an emotional tinge to these traumatic events, like rumors about a human meat sausage factory that were common at the end of WWII (Kalmre 2007, 144).

As actual contacts with a different, threatening ‘other’ increased during the war and its aftermath, peculiar habits, hygiene, and looks created both tensions and humor. Cartoons published during and after WWII on both sides of the front show soldiers going to war and returning severely disabled (see, e.g., Laineste & Lääne 2015, 86). A caricature from 1943 depicts a Russian migrant arriving in Estonia and an Estonian railway station janitor reminding him to wipe his feet before stepping on the street, lest the newcomer would make the streets dirty (Laineste and Lääne 2015, 91).

Encounters with the belligerent ‘other’ were traumatic for the local populace, and this is evident in the folkloric expression of the time and times that followed (see Jaago 2018, Kirss 2013).

The aftermath of WWII was also a source for humor. Among other humorous genres, two comic books emerged concerning DP (displaced persons) camps in Germany, one by Raul Edari and Arnold Sepp and Endel Kõks. Depicting life in migrant camps in the 1940s, they reflect on the dilemmas and humiliations of displaced persons. These included (inter-alia) frequent and often unnecessary medical examinations (Kõks & Sepp 2014 [1943], 76); absurd ways to pass the time by forming committees and assessing the quality of life in the camp (Kõks & Sepp 2014 [1943], 68–69); and these stories often ask the equally tragic, even though visually comically framed question: What will happen to them next?⁵

We can find examples from later periods as well, and it is a widely known and published fact that jokes flourished in the Soviet period. Significantly, the 1980s were the most fertile times for this genre of joke, when censorship had loosened up, and political absurdity abounded (Krikmann 2009). Of course, as a libertarian form of folklore, jokes were not in hibernation during more difficult times either, and in the 1950s, according to one widely known joke, there was enough humor for Stalin to collect entire concentration camps of jokes:

Q: What did Stalin collect?

A: Jokes about himself. He had two camps full of them.

(Krikmann 2004, 71.)

Generally, these examples seem to point out an Estonian interest in subdued, at times gallows humor, and a dislike of physical “pie-in-the-face” humor that is often categorized as “American” by Estonian audiences (for a diachronic overview of trends in caricature art, see Hiibus & Veetamm 2011, 57–58). Estonian humor has more of a down-to-earth, often sarcastic or dark (Lukas 2019) character. Nevertheless, in reality, delineating a “national sense of humor” is often seen as an act of futile speculation (see Ziv 1988 for attempts to describe Italian, Jewish, Belgian, Australian senses of humor). Instead, as a rule, joke-tellers tend to accredit themselves with the best *taste* of humor and the best *sense* of humor (Kuipers 2006), while accusing out-groups of a lack of any humor taste or sense. Trauma-related humor (which is often self-deprecating) places that verdict in doubt, and in this context, discussions about what humor is are bound to arise.

Mood Spoiler

A comedy group called the ‘Mood Spoiler’ (‘Tujurikkuja’), active in 2008–2015, had acquired an important role in Estonian contemporary humor discourse. They had a reputation of providing uncomfortable reinterpretations of the past in their (in)famous television program that aired annually on New Year’s Eve on Estonian national TV. Always a source of controversy due to its provocative and satirical content, it fre-

quently received polarized comments from viewers, especially in online forums and various social media outlets (Külmoja 2016), which proved that the comedians had targeted something that was seen as relevant to the people watching. Mood Spoiler has a history of excelling at gallows humor. Some of the more controversial issues they covered concerning Nazis,⁶ patient care,⁷ the 'Estonia' ferry tragedy,⁸ tragic events from Estonian history,⁹ or parodies of patriotic songs.¹⁰ It is precisely the online reactions to these sketches of Estonian traumatic historical events (especially the last two that feature in the list of controversial examples) that inform this study. The comedians of Mood Spoiler have received various awards, proving that their art is generally appreciated. Nevertheless, the show has a controversial reputation, and despite positive public recognition, parts of the audience have taken offense to the sketches performed and have condemned the group's insensitive approach to painful issues.

Data and Analysis

In what follows, I will discuss two cases: online reactions to a 2010 sketch depicting mass deportations of Estonians to Siberia and a 2015 sketch reflecting the traumatic final decade of the Soviet occupation of Estonia and reinterpreting it in the light of present-day xenophobic anti-refugee sentiments. The analysis will focus on the public reactions of Internet users¹¹ that followed the airing of the sketches. These reactions were scraped using a designated python script that harvested all comments¹² to news connected to the topic (21 articles in total). I chose four major news sites in Estonia (*delfi.ee*, *ekspress.ee*, *epl.ee*, and *ohtuleht.ee*) to obtain more representative and balanced data.¹³ Altogether, the database consisted of 3965 comments. Next, I tagged the data with mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis software, QDA Miner, to identify the main trends and opinions within the data. The comments were initially in Estonian and were translated into English by the author. As indicated in a previous study on online comments (Laineste 2020), the tone of the majority of comments (around 60 percent) was negative, while only less than 20 percent were supportive of the humor texts that made fun of past trauma (the rest being irrelevant to the topic or neutral in tone). The comments frequently argued over the entitlement to joke at such traumatic events (deportations and a struggle against the Soviet occupation) and, ultimately, the entitlement to judge if this is funny or not. The commenters also justified their reasons for reacting with unlaughter, which led to discussions about good or bad humor.

The questions that arise are many-layered and complex; they are connected to a particular triggering event that inspired the authors of the sketches (e.g., the wave of migration in present-day Europe) and the past traumatic events or circumstances (e.g., living under foreign rule and oppression), but they include much more. The reception may depend on intergenerational differences, knowledge about other relevant cultural texts (the TV series *Windward Land*, in the case of the deportation example),¹⁴ or taste in humor, among other things. In the context of trauma theory, the first sketch about mass deportations is connected to the notion of historical trauma (LaCapra 2014 [2001], 82), whereas the second example, a parody of the patriotic song "No country stands alone," links to the ideas of structural trauma (LaCapra 2014 [2001], 82; Ataria

2017). I argue that the process where the traumas are recontextualized, joked about, and then hotly debated by various audiences is, in the vein of Eyerman (2014, 6), a way to debate and reformulate collective identity and memory.

The 2010 deportation sketch starts with the camera approaching a small house at night, with the subtitle “*Somewhere in Estonia, in 1941*”. Next, we can see a family eating supper, with the father cutting bread and the mother pouring coffee into cups, when suddenly there is a brutal knock on the door and three men with guns enter. In the following interaction, it turns out that the men have come to deport them to Siberia. However, as the family does not know the meaning of “deporting” or “Siberia,” the procedure is explained to them as “you will be going on a trip.” The atmosphere changes as the family is positively overwhelmed by the opportunity to travel, and what is more, for free. They hurry to get their things packed, offer drinks to the men and toast them, while the puzzled ‘deporters’ offer hesitant congratulations. The sketch closes with a picture of the family in snowy Siberia and the sentence: “*This clip was financed by the Historical Truth Committee of the Russian State Duma.*”

The reactions touch upon three main issues: (1) agreeing that the sketch was humorous and underlining that the target of humor was, as the last frame indicated, Russia’s propagandistic reinterpretation of history; (2) claiming that the sketch was blasphemous and wrong; and (3) refraining from a straightforward judgment about the sketch but joining the argument about what humor is in the first place.

There are commenters who say that they considered the sketch funny: *It was funny indeed. It must be a strong nation who can laugh like this* (Source 22, January 4, 2010, 8:52 pm). Or they praise the use of humor for its potentially beneficial nature: *Humor is always welcome!! And those who don’t get the joke have to blame themselves!! I support [the sketch] because laughter and humor keep people alive* (Source 34, January 4, 2010, 8:56 pm). The discussion also provides grounds for comparisons with other cultures and contexts: *Well the joke was quite a good one. I laughed indeed. Let’s not be like the Jews with their Holocaust* (Source 54, January 4, 2010, 9:38 pm). The commenters bring up the topic of freedom of speech: *We are not America where some topics are taboo, we have a democratic country where human rights, including freedom of speech, are held in high esteem* (Source 89, January 4, 2010, 10:25 pm). An interesting aspect is a frequent reference to who may laugh at the deportations and who may not: *Yes, it’s ok [to laugh at deportations]. But of all the parties involved, only we can laugh at it* (Source 46, January 4, 2010, 9:12 pm), and *depends who makes the joke, whether the deportee or the deporter* (Source 58, January 4, 2010, 9:41 pm).

An opposite but loudly expressed point of view is present in the straightforward indignation directed towards the comedians’ reinterpretation of traumatic history. Some just shortly state “No,” while others take time to explain their thoughts in more detail. The latter often refer to actual experiences or memories from history: *I truly hope that my grandaunt didn’t see this sketch, her 7-month-old baby and 3-year-old child died of hunger in Siberia. Also old people died, but I think it’s more painful to lose a child. Grandaunt alone returned* (Source 32, January 4, 2010, 8:54 pm). Or *Go to Siberia and see if you will still be laughing.* (Source 61, January 4, 2010, 9:47 pm). Some point out that *Everything that doesn’t happen to us or our close ones is funny; disgusting how low Estonian humor can*

sink (Source 43, January 4, 2010, 9:02 pm) so, theorizing in their way about what humor is. However, in the opposite vein, commenters claim:

If the ones who deported others are joking, then why not. But if those people are joking whose grandfathers-grandmothers were taken to Siberia, from where only a few came back alive, then they don't know the limits of humor, nor do they respect their parents, grandparents, or their suffering. Will they laugh at the Estonia ferry catastrophe next? (Source 101, January 4, 2010, 11:44 pm)

The prediction of laughing at the Estonian ferry catastrophe came true a few years later (see endnote 8). In more emotional moments when arguments got heated, irony may emerge together with a textual emphasis (created by typing capital letters): *Endless horror, pain, misfortune, calamities...!! AWFULLY FUNNY, ISN'T IT? WHY NOT LAUGH OUT LOUD, RIGHT? Haaaaaaaaaaaa-haaaaaaaaaaaa-haaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!!!!!!* (Source 97, January 4, 2010, 11:32 pm).

Ultimately, shame and shaming is also brought into the equation (see also the examples from the following case below):

The young don't care about what happened in the distant past... i.e. they spit on everything or show indifference, they don't respect history nor do they honor the memory of their forefathers. Sad! Even depressing! And I am afraid of the future. We don't have such men who would protect and love their fatherland with their body and soul. (Source 82, January 4, 2010, 11:06 pm)

Another set of comments ponders about question of what humor is. They claim that *humor may be a psychological defense mechanism: we interpret a traumatic event through the prism of humor and tension is released* (Source 51, January 4, 2010, 9:21 pm). The widely known stereotype of Estonians worrying about what others think of them is evident in the following comment:

The Estonian is a true "break" ["stick-in-the-mud" (тормоз), a nickname given to the slow Estonians by Russians]. The Estonian makes a joke and then starts discussing in hundreds of comments whether it was a joke or not. This news and the comments is a joke in itself. (Source 63, January 4, 2010, 9:59 pm; for additional thoughts on the Estonian stereotype see Laineste and Krikmann 2015)

A few years later, in 2015, the sketch '*Ei ole ükski ükski maa*' ('No country stands alone') parodied a song considered one of the flagships of the Estonian singing revolution.¹⁵ In the 1980s, it was among a song repertoire that united the country against the Soviet occupation. The original song names different regions in Estonia (Läänemaa, Saaremaa, etc.), praised one after another for fighting for the country's independence. The parody does the same thing, showing beloved famous singers praising the regions of Estonia – but this time not for fighting against oppressors, but instead against refugees and other Estonians. Contrary to the original song, the parody criticizes the xenopho-

bic Estonians and their tendency to fight with each other (for more detailed discussion, see Laineste 2020).

The online commenters who reacted positively to the sketch and agreed that it was indeed funny (and can thus be defined as humor) claim: *I am not saying I am sinless /.../ but at least I am able to laugh at myself* (Source 212, January 1, 2016, 12:23 am). The positive comments see those who oppose the sketch as lacking in knowledge or being narrow-minded: *It hit the nail on the head. But well, those who don't understand it or who don't like it, maybe they are unfamiliar with present-day politics and life, or they don't see past the nose on their face* (Source 224, January 1, 2016, 1:56 am). Referring to 'them' as people with no sense of humor comes combined with unintelligence: *Most of the Delfi [media thread] commenters are clowns with only primary education who should educate themselves instead of posting here* (Source 321, January 1, 2016, 5:35 am).

Various ways of expressing hate, indignation, or umbrage towards the sketch dominate the comments culled from the Delfi news online forum. A way to symbolically express indignation towards the reinterpretation of the patriotic song is to describe the sketch as an act of spitting on the nation or its 'face': *Especially unpleasant was the final song that spat on the opinions and fears of the majority* (Source 210, January 1, 2016, 12:15 am). Commenters use conjunctions and disclaimers: *Generally I like [Märt] Avandi, I understand humor... but this time, yes, they probably made a slightly wrong joke and [chose] a wrong topic to laugh at* (Source 539, January 6, 2016, 9:38 pm).

Some comments show both support and dismissal simultaneously, and such polyvalent statements reveal the inherent complexity of the topic of the discussion: *The song was very good and will be in my playlist. Self-irony is a good expression of a sound mind, as is being against refugees.* (Source 201, January 1, 2016, 12:04am). Thus, opinions are not always clear-cut and simple, and commenters combine various opinions into condensed statements.

Discussion

The examples mentioned above (wartime cartoons, comic books, Soviet jokes, and contemporary humorous sketches) all belong to different genres, but they express one idea: using humor about traumatic times can hold a healing power, but it can also tear open a painful wound. The reactions and discussions about the right to create and enjoy humor targeted towards the hardships of forced migration further illuminate the complicated relationship between trauma and humor. Specifically, they illustrate a situation where the customary humor theories based on superiority and the functionality of the humor cannot explain why these particular jokes come about. Studying humor reception gives a better insight into how questions of power and entitlement affect the production and enjoyment of trauma-related humor. Tsakona (2017, 179) stresses the importance of taking humor's performance/reception aspect into account when discussing whether humor influences and reflects reality and public opinion, how, to what extent, and under what circumstances, especially when humorous texts involving discriminatory content (e.g., racist, sexist) are discussed.

The key term to understand issues related to the right to joke about hardships of

life is “unlaughter.” Based on the work of the social psychologist Michael Billig (2005), I define unlaughter as non-amusement that explicitly follows a recognized, but not appreciated attempt at creating humor. The term fits not just because the success or failure of humor has significant social consequences but also because it reveals power relations that “humor scandals” highlight (see Smith 2009). Unlaughter is the pivotal component in the power struggle between different voices, opinions, and definitions of humor. It also shifts the attention from isolated examples of humorous texts to their reception, i.e., the performative context. As the online environment brings together bigger audiences and a greater selection of humorous texts, the potential for an unlaughter reaction is almost inevitable. Unlaughter introduces a facet of humor that the public has until recently deliberately downplayed: the high value placed on having a sense of humor means that not understanding a joke is regarded as socially awkward and thus generally undesirable. However, it is an unexpected yet increasingly indispensable outcome of humorous communication. The fact that some people do not agree to recognize, understand or appreciate the humor they encounter (see Hay’s [2001] model of failed humor) does not make it “better” humor, but stirs more intensive reverberations, more opposite reactions, and may ultimately help the humor to reach wider audiences eventually (Laineste 2020).

In the studied online comments, the commenters often referred to Estonia’s traumatic history and claimed that the comedians did not have a right to joke about it. Thus, they blamed ‘the laughers’ for having a bad sense of humor, and so underlined an ‘us’ (‘unlaughers’) and ‘them’ (those who laughed) division. Creating such a division is a recognized strategy in the struggle for power and entitlement. Unlaughter has consequences: when unlaughter occurs, it is not merely noteworthy (and thus possibly regrettable) but is socially significant. It will unquestionably draw a sharp line between those who find something laughable and those who do not (Dodds 2010). The two polarized sides will consequently see each other as not possessing a proper and acceptable sense of humor. The positive comments on the sketches praised the brave and unexpected account of the past trauma and accused the opposite party of lacking a sense of humor and being narrow-minded, aggressive, racist. Those against the sketches claimed that it did not qualify as humor at all.

Such a heated debate shows that humor has a strong potential for drawing people together and pulling them apart. Those who evaluate humor differently are ostracized, which in more extreme cases can lead to violent, reactionary actions against the satirists (Smith 2009). The power of humor to divide societies takes the polemics to the next level, including not just academic considerations but also a broad set of moral, political, practical, and legal issues (Kuipers 2015, 31). People use laughter and unlaughter to communicate meanings and position themselves in discussions (Billig 2005, 189–92), thus regulating personal and group boundaries. However, this brings about the polarization of opposing statements and makes dialogue more complicated.

Why were these sketches met with unlaughter? The joke was on a very sensitive topic, i.e., a traumatic experience taken from history. It touched upon “them” as endangering “us,” involving important concepts like national identity, sacred symbols of the nation, and revived painful memories like those of Soviet repressions. However,

the painful reactions of unlaughter made the sketch highly visible online, as everyone needed to either see what the discussion was about, refresh their memory or feelings of indignation and exhilaration, or perhaps a bit of both. As Marsh posits, “risk is part of the challenge and appeal of jokes; the louder the unlaughter, the more credit goes to the jokers for having risked it” (2016, 39). The final verdict on the laughability of a joke depends on the power lines and status of the parties involved (see also Kuipers 2015).

The comments containing unlaughter express strong xenophobic and racist opinions and used strong metaphorical imagery, referring to the comedians as those who “spit in the face of the nation.” Therefore, they interpret the initially humorously intended sketches as a blasphemous attack on the nation, its complex history, and the traumatic experiences involved. On the other hand, the favorable comments that praise the humor and laughability of the sketches claim that those who do not understand or appreciate the sketches lack a sense of humor. For them, any reference to humor as attack represents censorship and should be disapproved. The thin line between humor and insult is stepped on, redrawn, and maneuvered in these online discussions, often with the excuse “I was only joking,” making it even more challenging to spot and define definitive boundaries. Both sides ostracize each other and try to assert themselves and their definition of “good humor” (Kuipers 2006).

Studying the complicated online reaction patterns help us understand the power relations embedded in humorous communication. In an online context, the emerging discussions are even more emotional than those of face-to-face communication, and in this context, laughter and unlaughter become two sides of the same coin that contribute to constructing an online affective-discursive order around humor (Malmqvist 2015, 747).

There is an inherent difficulty in seeing humor as a functional tool to ensure one’s (mental) superiority over an aggressor. To follow up on the metaphor discussed earlier, the sword (and the shield) of humor turn against the victim and becomes a double weapon. So, laughing at a traumatic experience can quickly become an argument about “who gets the last laugh.” Theories of superiority and functionality do not apply well here because the humor is directed equally at the aggressor, as well as the unfortunate events and the unfortunate people who experienced them (for discussions on self-directed humor, see Martin 2007, 47–49). Hence, aggression is somewhat difficult to spot at this juncture.

Furthermore, to say that the functions of humor can explain the basic mechanisms of humor is a circular argumentation, claiming that people use humor in the context of trauma because it helps, and it helps because it is used. Like other social phenomena, humor does not necessarily carry the same function for everybody and can even be dysfunctional. Also, the reactions to humorous utterances are difficult to predict. Due to the ambiguity and complexity of any humorous text and its numerous intertextual references, it is impossible to infer any unidirectional aims or draw any conclusions about the intentions of the joke-tellers or predict the outcomes of the intended humor.

The ability to deny any serious intentions by pointing at the ambiguity of humor with the phrase “I was only joking!” is part of what makes humor simultaneously so effective and ineffective in the face of trauma. However, researchers have argued–

taking us a step closer to answering the question of “Why does humor rise alongside trauma?” – that humor creates a discursive space that allows for open discussions to take place about matters that would otherwise be silenced or tabooed (Goldstein 2003; Malmqvist 2015). So, a justified question arises: how do people joke about past traumatic experiences and who has the right to joke about traumatic experiences?

De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015, 5) refer to the concept of *story ownership* to respond to who can tell stories and how underlining that it is a question of power and exemplifying the embedding of story-telling in different contexts and practices. They claim that negotiations and contestations about the rights to own and tell stories to link them to broader societal stances about “who can talk, what is tellable, and by whom” (ibid.). Joking about a traumatic experience can turn the trauma into a productive, creative act – at least in an ideal world. More important than the definite purpose of such an act, we must ask whether the victims of trauma need an audience to reclaim their experiences and power and who ultimately has the right to joke about difficult times. The next logical question is who has the right to laugh at these jokes. Those who argue publicly about the acceptability of joking about deportation or the Soviet occupation (as described in the case above) argue about who can say certain words and how trauma can and should be discussed. The sides that people take in such arguments sort people into social groups and reinforce or reassess their identities (Kramer 2011; Shuman 2015). However, ultimately, this concerns a question of who is entitled to judge whether other people are entitled to talk—or, more specifically, to joke—about trauma. The question of entitlement is inextricable from questions of power. So, in those heated arguments over who has the right to decide what is funny and what is not, when to react with laughter or unlaughter, the commenters are implicitly making claims about who is powerful enough to be a censor in the first place. Consequently, the issue of the functionality of humor takes a back seat, despite appearing to be the principal question. Humor effectively triggers societal discussions and debates, negotiating past traumas from novel and productive angles.

Notes

- 1 While black comedy stresses the performance aspect, black humor is a more general term.
- 2 Black humor is attributed to the French surrealist Andre Breton (in his *Anthologie de l'humor noir*, ‘Anthology of Black Humor’, 1997 [1940])
- 3 <http://www.sickipedia.net/>
- 4 www.4chan.org
- 5 A parallel case can be found in Latvian culture where Irina Pilke’s drawings from the post-war period have been assembled into an animated documentary film “Little bird’s diary” (released in 2007).
- 6 “Estonia is looking for the neo-Nazi,” a parody of the program “Estonia is looking for a superstar,” similar to e.g. “American Idol”; ERR archive, <http://arhiiv.err.ee/guid/201005120050552010010002081001517C41A04000005020B00000D0F066767>, 4:00

- 7 A mockumentary of coma patients struggling for survival, one being voted out every week; ERR archive, <http://arhiiv.err.ee/guid/201005120050552010010002081001517C41A040000005020B00000D0F066767>; 21:00
- 8 A fake ad of an exhibition depicting the sinking of the ferry Estonia <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaABXCWQ2Mg>
- 9 A sketch about deportations of Estonians to Siberia after the end of WWII: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWLKiLXBGhg> (with English subtitles).
- 10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FNKJGBtmM8>
- 11 For additional statistics on Internet usage coverage among various demographic groups, see <https://news.err.ee/981944/90-percent-of-households-in-estonia-have-internet-at-home>
- 12 Although the authors of comments were not approached for getting their consent during the study, nor were they warned that their comments would be used for research purposes, the translation process and additional anonymization of names is considered a sufficient measure to meet online research ethics requirements.
- 13 *Delfi.ee* and *ohtuleht.ee* represent a more provocative and tabloid journalism (see Laineste 2020, 114) with an anonymous commenting option, and *ekspress.ee* and *epl.ee* publish less sensationalist articles and allow only sign-in commenting.
- 14 A connection can be made between this sketch and the 2008 TV series *Tuulepealne maa* ('Windward Land'). Its reception by critics and audiences pointed out the propagandist way Estonian 20th century history was depicted in the series, filmed with state funding and consulted by historians and research institutions (Tohvri 2008).
- 15 The Singing Revolution is a commonly used name for events that fell between 1987 and 1991 that led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia and other Baltic countries. For further information, see the trailer of a 2006 documentary <https://singingrevolution.com/>.

Works Cited

- Aareleid-Tart, Aili. 2006. *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*. Helsinki: Kikimora Publications.
- Aareleid-Tart, Aili. 2010. "The Theory of Cultural Trauma and Applying to Explain the Estonians' Soviet-Time Mentality (Based on the Biographical Method)". In *Inheriting the 1990s. The Baltic Countries*, edited by Baiba Metzale-Kangere, 38–64. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Alexander, Jeffrey Charles. 2004. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka, 1–30. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Ataria, Yochai. 2017. *The Structural Trauma of Western Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beermann, Ursula. 2014. "Sick humor." In *The Encyclopedia of Humor*, edited by Salvatore Attardo, 691–93. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule: Toward a Social Critique of Humor*. London: Sage.
- Blank, Trevor. 2013. *The Last Laugh: Folk Humor, Celebrity Culture, and Mass-Mediated Disasters in the Digital Age*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Blank, Trevor. 2016. "Giving the "Big Ten" a Whole New Meaning: Tasteless Humor

- and the Response to the Penn State Sexual Abuse Scandal." In *The Folklor-
esque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*, edited by Michael D. Fos-
ter, and Jeffrey A. Tolbert, 179–204. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of
Colorado.
- Breton, Andre. 1997 [1940]. *Anthology of Black Humor*. Translated from the French and
with an introduction by Mark Polizzotti. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Carrell, Amy. 2008. "Historical Views of Humor." In *The Primer of Humor Research*,
edited by Victor Raskin, 303–69. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Chiaro, Delia. 2018. "Yuck, Yuck, Yuck: Laughing at Disgust." Paper presented at the
30th ISHS Conference 'Humor: Positively (?) Transforming, Tallinn University,
Tallinn, Estonia, June 25–29. [https://www.folklore.ee/ri/fo/konve/ishs2018/ab-
stracts/](https://www.folklore.ee/ri/fo/konve/ishs2018/abstracts/). Accessed on January 7, 2022.
- Chovanec, Jan. 2019. "Early Titanic Jokes: A Disaster for the Theory of Disaster
Jokes?" *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* 32, no. 2: 201–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2018-0090>.
- Davies, Christie. 1998. *Jokes and Their Relations to the Society*. Berlin, New York: Mou-
ton de Gruyter.
- Davies, Christie. 2003. "Jokes That Follow Mass-mediated Disasters in a Global Elec-
tronic Age." In *Of Corpse: Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture*,
edited by Peter Narváez, 15–34. Logan, Utah: University Press of Colorado.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nsg5>.
- Davies, Christie. 2011. *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- De Fina, Anna, and Alexandra Georgakopoulou. 2015. "Introduction." *The Handbook
of Narrative Analysis*, edited by Anna De Fina, and Alexandra Georgakopou-
lou, 1–18. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dodds, Klaus. 2010. "Popular Geopolitics and Cartoons: Representing Power Rela-
tions, Repetition, and Resistance." *Critical African Studies* 2, no. 4: 113–31.
- Dundes, Alan. 2007 [1969]. "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture." In *Meaning of Folklore:
The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*, edited by Simon Bronner, 53–66. Logan:
University Press of Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt4cgrzn6>.
- Ellis, Bill. 2002. "Making a Big Apple Crumble: The Role of Humor in Constructing
a Global Response to Disaster." *New Directions in Folklore* 6. [https://scholar-
works.iu.edu/journals/index.php/ndif/article/view/19883/25953](https://scholar-works.iu.edu/journals/index.php/ndif/article/view/19883/25953). Accessed on
December 21, 2021.
- Encyclopedia Britannica = Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Black humour." En-
cyclopedia Britannica, November 8, 2019. [https://www.britannica.com/topic/
black-humor](https://www.britannica.com/topic/black-humor). Accessed on January 7, 2022.
- Encyclopedia Dramatica = Editors of Encyclopedia Dramatica. "alt.tasteless." Ency-
clopedia Dramatica, August 16, 2014. [https://encyclopedia.dramatica.rs/Alt.
tasteless](https://encyclopedia.dramatica.rs/Alt.tasteless). Accessed on January 7, 2022.
- Eyerman, Ron. 2019. *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goldstein, Diana. 2003. *Laughter out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio
Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hay, Janet. 2001. The Pragmatics of Humor Support. *HUMOR: International Journal of*

- Humor Research* 14, no. 1: 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.14.1.55>
- Helmy, Mohamed, and Sabine Frerichs. 2013. "Stripping the Boss: The Powerful Role of Humor in the Egyptian Revolution 2011." *Integrative Physiological and Behavioral Science* 47, no. 4: 450–81.
- HiiBUS, Hugo, and Agu Veetamm. 2011. *Piibu ja pliatsiga* ('With a pipe and a pen'). Tallinn: Kadmirel.
- Jaago, Tiit. 2018. "Trauma ja elulood" ('Trauma and Life Stories'). *Mäetagused* 71: 111–42. <https://doi.org/10.7592/MT2018.71.jaago2>.
- Kalmre, Eda. 2007. *The Human Sausage Factory. A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Kirss, Tiina. 2013. "Seeing Ghosts: Theorizing Haunting in Literary Texts." *Haunted Narratives. Life Writing in an Age of Trauma*, edited by Gabriele Rippl, Philipp Schweighauser, Tiina Kirss, Margit Sutrop, and Therese Steffen, 21–44. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kramer, Elise. 2011. "The Playful is Political: The Metapragmatics of Internet Rape-joke Arguments." *Language in Society* 40, no. 2: 137–68.
- Krikmann, Arvo, ed. 2004. *Netinalju Stalinist = Интернет-анекдоты о Сталине = Internet humour about Stalin*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum.
- Krikmann, Arvo. 2009. "Jokes in Soviet Estonia." *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 43: 43–66. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2009.43.krikmann>.
- Kuipers, Giselinde. 2002. "Media Culture and Internet Disaster Jokes: Bin Laden and the Attack on the World Trade Center." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4: 450–70.
- Kuipers, Giselinde. 2006. *Good Humor, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kuipers, Giselinde. 2008. "The Sociology of Humor." *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, 361–98. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kuipers, Giselinde. 2015. "Satire and Dignity." *The Power of Satire*, edited by Marijke Meijer Drees and Sonja de Leeuw, 19–32. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kõks, Endel, and Arnold Sepp. 2014 [1943]. *Mis teha – siin ta on. Pagulase elu piltides* ('Refugee: Refugee life in pictures'). Tallinn: Eesti Diasporaa Akadeemia.
- Kõresaar, Ene. 2011. "Introduction: Remembrance Cultures of World War II and the Politics of Recognition in Post-Soviet Estonia: Biographical Perspectives." *Soldiers of Memory: World War II and its Aftermath in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories*, edited by Ene Kõresaar, 1–34. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042032446_002.
- Külmoja, Inga. 2016. "No Country Stands Alone – Except Maybe Syria!" *UT (University of Tartu) Blog*, January 15. <http://blog.ut.ee/no-country-stands-alone-except-maybe-syria/>. Accessed on February 10, 2019.
- Laanes, Eneken. 2017. "Trauma keelde tõlgitud. Kultuuriülesed mäluvormid eesti laagri- ja küüditamislugudes" ('Translated into the Language of Trauma: Transcultural Memorial Forms in the Estonian Memories of the Soviet Deportations and the Gulag'). *Keel ja Kirjandus* 4, 241–57.

- LaCapra, Dominick. 2014 [2001]. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Laineste, Liisi. 2011. "Politics of Taste in a post-Socialist State: A Case Study." *Studies in Political Humour*, edited by Villy Tsakona, and Diana Popa, 217–42. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Laineste, Liisi. 2020. "'Zero is our quota': Constructing the Other in Online Forum Comments." *Folklore and Social Media*, edited by Andrew Peck, and Trevor Blank, 108–28. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Laineste, Liisi., and Arvo Kirkmann. 2015. "'The Favourite Food of an Estonian is Another Estonian.' A Paremiological Insight into National Communication Style." *Culture's Software*, edited by Dorota Brzozowska and Władysław Chłopiczki, 89–108. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Laineste, Liisi, and Margus Lääne. 2015. "Images of the Enemy from both Sides of the Front: The Case of Estonia (1942–1944)." *War Matters: Constructing Images of the Other, 1930s to 1950s*, edited by Dagnosław Demski, Liisi Laineste, and Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, 222–43. Budapest: Editions L'Harmattan.
- Laineste, Liisi, Tõnno Jonuks, and Anastasiya Fiadotava 2019. "Naljad kirikutegelastest Eestis ja Valgevenes XIX–XXI sajandil ('Clergy jokes in Estonia and Belarus in the 19th–21st century')." *Keel ja Kirjandus* 12: 937–59.
- Lukas, Jaan. 2019. "Huumori juured on Eesti talupojakultuuris ('Estonian humor has roots in its peasant culture')." *Vooremaa*, March 2. <https://www.vooremaa.ee/huumori-juured-on-estii-talupojakultuuris/>. Accessed on January 4, 2022.
- Malmqvist, Karl. 2015. "Satire, Racist Humor and the Power of (Un)laughter: On the Restrained Nature of Swedish Online Racist Discourse Targeting EU-migrants Begging for Money." *Discourse & Society* 26, no. 6: 733–53.
- Marsh, Moira. 2016. "Unlaughter, the Unfunny, and the Dreadnought." Paper presented at the *Australasian Humour Studies Network Conference*, Women's College, University of Sydney, Australia, February 6–8. http://sydney.edu.au/humorstudies/docs/2016_AHSN_Program_Final_Rev.pdf. Accessed on July 10, 2018.
- Martin, Rod A. 2007. *The Psychology of Humor. An Integrative Approach*. Burlington: Elsevier.
- McGraw, A. Peter, Lawrence E. Williams, and Caleb Warren. 2014. "The Rise and Fall of Humor: Psychological Distance Modulates Humorous Responses to Tragedy." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5, no. 5: 566–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550613515006>.
- Milner, Ryan. 2013. "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement." *International Journal of Communication* 7, 2357–90.
- Narvaez, Peter. 2003. *Of Corpse: Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- Nilsen, Don, and Alleen Nilsen. 2014. "Gallows Humor." In *The Encyclopedia of Humor*, edited by Salvatore Attardo, 255–56. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Obrdlik, Antonin J. 1942. "Gallows Humor – A Sociological Phenomenon." *American*

- Journal of Sociology* 47: 709–16.
- Oring, Elliott. 2003. *Engaging Humor*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Oring, Elliott. 2016. *Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis, and Aesthetics of Humor*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Rock, Chris. 2013. "Comedy 101: Blue Humor." *The Laugh Button*. <https://thelaughbutton.com/features/laugh-guide-blue-humor/>. Accessed on December 22, 2021.
- Shuman, Amy. 2015. "Story Ownership and Entitlement." In *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, edited by Anna De Fina, and Alexandra Georgakopoulou, 38–56. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Smith, Moira. 2009. "Humor, Unlaughter, and Boundary Maintenance." *Journal of American Folklore* 122, no. 484: 148–71.
- Smyth, Willie. 1986. "Challenger Jokes and the Humor of Disaster." *Western Folklore* 45, no. 4: 243–60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1499820>.
- Stokker, Kathleen. 1995. *Folklore Fights the Nazis. Humor in Occupied Norway, 1940–1945*. Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- "The Sickniks". *Time*, July 13, 1959. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,869153,00.html>. Accessed on January 4, 2022.
- Tohvri, Erik. 2008. "Jant vabadussõjast ('A Vodeville about the War of Independence')." *Postimees*, October 27, 2008. <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/43808/erik-tohvri-jant-vabadussojast>. Accessed on January 4, 2022.
- Tsakona, Villy. 2017. "Humor research and humor reception: Far away, so close." *Humorous Discourse*, edited by Władysław Chłopicki, and Dorota Brzozowska, 179–201. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501507106-009>.
- Wertsch, James V. 2009. "Collective Memory." In *Memory in Mind and Culture*, edited by Pascal Boyer, and James P. Wertsch, 117–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ziv, Avner, ed. 1988. *National Styles of Humor*. New York: Greenwood Press.