

## 2 Laugh or not 2 love: disparagement humour and Macedonian humour ideologies

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### Abstract

*Views and evaluations of humour are governed by sociocultural assumptions about what humour is, how it works, and where its limits lie. These assumptions are shaped by various forces, including states' political histories, sociopolitical views and identities, humour traditions, and more. All these factors inform popular humour ideologies—sets of beliefs and attitudes—about what humour is and how it works or should not work. In a sense, humour ideologies represent a spectrum of attitudes toward humour. This spectrum spans from the benign “just a joke” perspective, through positive evaluations of humour as a means of social criticism, resistance, and change, to severe criticism of humour as a tool that exacerbates social divisions, reproduces inequalities, and perpetuates discourses of racism and gender discrimination. The latter perspective has dominated American and Western European scholarship on disparagement humour. Within this context, our goal is to analyse material (humour ideologies) distinct from what these research trends typically rely upon. Our focus in this study is on the evaluations and attitudes toward humour held by Macedonian citizens. By analysing this material, we aim to demonstrate the contextual dependence of humour ideologies on specific political histories, power relations, and humour traditions.*

*Keywords: disparagement humour, humour ideologies, Macedonian citizens, popular opinions.*

### 1. Introduction

Understanding and appreciation of humour are governed by humour ideologies, which we shall loosely define as a body of knowledge manifested in particular beliefs and opinions, and in consequence actions, about what humour is, how it works, how it should or should not be used, where its limits should be set, what/who can or cannot be ridiculed through humour. In this sense the term *humour ideology* is a conceptual kin to the term *metapragmatic stereotypes*

defined as ideological assumptions that govern definitions, mechanisms, limitations, social impact and understanding of humour, etc. (Tsakona, 2020; Tsakona & Chovanec, 2024). Humour metapragmatic stereotypes, much in the same manner as humour ideologies, frequently result in conflicting debates about humour, including

the definition of humour, the circumstances under which humour is considered to be successful or failed, the relationship between humour and free speech, the limits of humour and its potential censorship, its impact on social relationships and affairs, and the fuzzy boundaries between humour and offense/impoliteness or aggression

(Tsakona & Chovanec, 2024, p. 293).

The two terms – ideologies and metapragmatic stereotypes - seem almost identical, yet we shall adapt the term *humour ideologies* to refer to the systems of shared beliefs and ideas, and corresponding attitudes and evaluations, of what humour is, what it does, and what its limits are. We believe that humour ideology is a broader term, one that includes metapragmatic stereotypes (i.e. beliefs about humour), while at the same time it has a broader and somewhat more explicit addressivity, connectivity and directionality towards other ideologies (systems of beliefs) such as political, economic, social, and historical, that intertextually and interdiscursively affect the beliefs and attitudes that constitute humour ideologies. This conceptual difference helps us explain how history and politics, in particular as distinct systems of beliefs (ideologies), actively shape humour ideologies.

The expression of humour ideologies gains extra force and consequently produces conflicting attitudes when it comes to disparagement humour that ridicules different ethnic, gender, religious, and other social groups. These ideologies are social constructions rooted in specific historical trajectories, political cultures, and social circumstances, as well as personal and collective humour preferences. As such, they differ in their understanding, acceptance, and tolerance of humour. Many societies and social groups hold non-judgmental, cavalier beliefs regarding humour, considering it “mere fun” (Davies, 1998; 2002; 2011). At the same time, there are societies and social groups whose humour ideologies are critical of humour. This criticism draws on the negative social impacts of humour, such as the perpetuation of stereotypes, discrimination, injustice, and social divisions.

Humour in this context disguises and hides racism, circumvents consciousness and critical reflection (Weaver, 2011; 2016), exonerates racist insult, and provides a license to be offensive (Pickering & Lockyer, 2008). It allows the uncensored expression of prejudice and discrimination because it suspends usual serious or critical ways of thinking about socially unacceptable or “taboo” topics. It creates an agreement that it is acceptable to make light of discrimination, and by creating a norm of tolerance, humour allows people high in prejudice to express their prejudice in an unsanctioned manner (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; 2008).

While the assumptions that (disparagement) humour contributes to social injustice, perpetuation of stereotypes, and discrimination may be valid for some societies, they are not a universal truth. Such claims are far-fetched for several reasons. First, they only account for a part of societal attitudes toward humour. Moreover, such attitudes often neglect and downplay the fact that humour participants may be amused by the humour mechanism without being “unaware embodiments of humour-embedded prejudice” (De Sousa, 1987). Humour may be enjoyed without embracing the values communicated in the jokes (e.g., a joke about a serial killer does not motivate or justify killing, nor do tellers of disparagement jokes necessarily bear negative attitudes toward the target). Third, these assumptions overstate the role of humour and overlook the fact that humour may be only a marginal factor in the creation and perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes, social inequality, and injustice. In this respect, structural inequality,

unequal access to the labour market, education, and social services, and political ideologies are far more important factors overlooked by these studies.

Our motivation in this respect is not to criticise these ideologies or the studies thereof, but to present material that is an academic *terra incognita* — the humour ideologies of Macedonian citizens. In this context, our first objective is to map out the humour ideologies (i.e., views and beliefs of what humour does and is permitted to do) held by Macedonian citizens. More specifically, we will analyse popular opinions on humour in general and opinions on different, specific, verbal forms of disparagement humour. By demonstrating the existence of different humour ideologies less critical and judgmental, our second objective is to provide a plausible explanation of the underlying assumptions and the different historical trajectories, socio-political circumstances, and humour traditions in Macedonia that inform the humour ideologies registered. To do so, we conducted an online survey with Macedonian citizens to collect data on their views and evaluations of different types of disparagement humour.

## **2. Views on humour**

### **2.1. Humour ideologies**

People's opinions and evaluations of what humour is, how it works, and what its limits are constitute the building blocks of what we have termed *humour ideologies*—sets of assumptions that govern the understanding of and response to humour. Kramer (2015) speaks of “humour ideologies” as shared sets of beliefs that make humour socially meaningful and guide speakers in their production and consumption of humour. The meta-humorous speech (i.e., speech about humour) signals these ideologies and, in turn, indexes specific types of people and identities. The different and often conflicting attitudes present in meta-humorous speech stem from the different approaches to the distinction between humorous narration and the narrated event. As Kramer puts it, “laughing at a joke about X is not the same thing as laughing at X, because the narrated event is dislocatable from the narrating event” (Kramer, 2011, p. 153).

Humour, Kramer contends, has a referentially empty message, the intention of which is entertainment (i.e., what the speaker intends to do in telling a joke). However, the interpretation of the intention gives rise to two conflicting attitudes on humour based on conflicting readings (entertainment vs. criticism). These attitudes relate to different moral judgments, social identities, and social values (e.g., free speech versus censorship, humourlessness versus moral insensitivity, mere fun versus racism and xenophobia). These polarised reactions index two types of social identities embedded with different moral judgments, social, and political values.

Similarly, meta-pragmatic research on humour (Tsakona, 2013; 2020; 2024; Ruiz Gurillo, 2016) argues that the perception and reaction to humour are governed by speakers' meta-pragmatic awareness of humour, which involves, among other things, speakers' meta-pragmatic stereotypes on what humour is (or is not), how, why, and when it should (or should not) be used, etc. These stereotypes, which we see as constitutive of humour ideologies, form people's positioning towards widely held beliefs on what humour is and how it is expected to be used and function in communication. These views become explicit, among other things, through contextualisation cues and reactions to humour—that is, through meta-pragmatic indicators, simply described as evaluative comments concerning the definition of humour, the attitudes towards humour, the role of humour, limits of humour, etc. These indicators eventually bring speakers closer together if they are used in a more or less similar manner and/or convey compatible meanings; on the contrary, they may drive speakers apart if they are used differently or in opposing ways.

Humorous texts thus bring to the surface different humour ideologies within which two main conflicting attitudes collide: those of speakers who disapprove of humour, which they find exaggerated and beyond the limits of “propriety,” and those who consider it mere fun or acceptable behaviour. In humour scholarship, these may be referred to as benign/malign views of humour.

Humour thus becomes a site of ideological struggle where different opinions are expressed and identity claims made, and where participants construct and enact their collective, individual, or situated identities while interpreting and commenting on humorous instances. Sinkeviciute (2019) explains that people build collective identities when they align themselves with a linguacultural group in their assessment of what is (not) funny. Conversely, they may build individual identities when they differentiate themselves from what others belonging to a specific group perceive as humorous.

## **2.2. Benevolent views on humour**

The interpretation of humorous texts varies. The same text can be perceived as funny, amusing, offensive, or discriminatory (Lockyer & Pickering, 2001; Lockyer, 2006; Kramer, 2011; Laineste, 2011; Dynel & Poppi, 2019). Building on the previous discussion about the interplay between social identities and attitudes toward humour (section 2.1), these views can generally be divided into two categories: a) benign or cavalier views that see humour as harmless fun (Davies, 2002; 2007; 2010; Oring, 2003), and b) malign views that consider humour a tool for perpetuating social injustice and discrimination (Weaver, 2010; 2011; 2016; Perez, 2017; 2022).

Christie Davies, a strong advocate of the cavalier perspective, argues that jokes are largely inconsequential (2002; 2007; 2011). According to Davies, the significance of jokes lies not in their effects—though they may produce some—but in their role as thermometers that reflect societal dynamics where they are created and shared (Davies, 2007; 2010, p. 10). Jokes provide insights into societal trends but do not significantly influence the processes that generate them (Davies, 2007, p. 300).

In specific political contexts, Davies observes, humour can have notable political resonance. In liberal democracies, humour serves as entertainment, while in authoritarian regimes like Soviet socialism, it becomes a means of expressing alienation and dissatisfaction with the political, economic, and social system. Outside such scenarios, humour is a widespread phenomenon that brings enjoyment to many people. Consequently, Davies argues, it is highly unlikely that humour, on its own, significantly affects social order, especially when compared to stronger social forces. He maintains that humour is not a primary outlet for hostility or aggression, and its role in shaping society is marginal. For instance, Davies remarks “the pre-existing Yugoslav jokes about stupid Bosnians played no significant part in creating or exacerbating the present conflicts; the conflicts had been rumbling since the last years of that ailing curiosity, the Ottoman Empire” (Davies, 1998, p. 5). Similarly, humour played no decisive role in the fall of communism, the Berlin Wall’s collapse, or the Russo-Ukrainian war (Adriaensen et al., 2023).

Jokes only produce adverse effects when met with violent or aggressive responses, but the joke itself is not the cause of such reactions (Davies, 2002). Davies contends that jokes do not inherently give offense; rather, people take offense (Davies, 2002). Understanding who takes offense and why is crucial. This issue is particularly relevant in contemporary Western societies, where demands for political correctness and calls to condemn jokes for being aggressive or oppressive often come not only from the targets of humour (e.g., ethnic groups, religious groups, or women) but also from unaffiliated political actors. In this context, Davies highlights that humour is not the root cause of conflicts; rather, it is the sense of offense and harm—amplified

and politicised—that becomes a tool in debates over the morality of humour (in Lewis et al., 2008, p. 6).

Assessing offense and harm in humour raises questions about how jokes and humour differ from equivalent non-humorous discourse. This leads to an exploration of the morally relevant distinctions between humorous and non-humorous speech. Davies' dichotomy between comic and serious disparagement (2002; 2007) aligns with Kramer's (2011) differentiation between humorous narration and narrated events. From the perspective of speech act theory (Austin, 1962), the question is whether moral judgment should focus on the locutionary force (i.e., the act of saying something) or the illocutionary effect (i.e. the intended impact) of humorous acts.

Philosophical debates about humour's morality grapple with similar issues. Bicknell (2007) distinguishes between cognitivist (belief-based) and consequentialist (harm-based) views of humour. The cognitivist perspective suggests that "a joke that belittles women could only be humorous to someone holding higher-order beliefs like 'women are mentally or morally inferior to men'" (Bicknell, 2007, p. 459). However, being aware of offensive beliefs or stereotypes is not the same as endorsing them. A person can enjoy a joke employing a stereotype without necessarily endorsing the stereotype itself (Benatar, 2014, pp. 28-29). Consequentialist accounts, on the other hand, judge jokes as morally suspect if they cause harm or are likely to do so. By this logic, a joke is morally problematic "if it is intended to harm people or where there are good grounds for expecting it to harm people" (Benatar, 1999, p. 196). Yet, how do we determine or measure harm caused by a text that lends itself to multiple interpretations?

There will always be societies and social groups for whom a joke is just a joke, and nothing more than that (Davies, 2004). Such groups will inevitably face criticism from proponents of the harm-based view of humour. In the next section, we outline these harm-based perspectives as a backdrop to our own position on the issue.

### **2.3. Malignant views on humour**

Consequentialist, harm-based views on humour have levelled strong criticism of its negative social effects. In this view, humour legitimises, reinforces, and normalises discourses of aggression, subjugation, and discrimination, while reproducing social, ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities (Billig, 2001, 2005; Lockyer & Pickering, 2005, 2008; Weaver, 2011, 2016; Abedinifard, 2016; Pérez, 2013, 2017, 2022). For a more insightful overview, we shall outline the criticisms organised in terms of general comments (section 2.3.1), criticism of racist and ethnic humour (section 2.3.2), and criticism of sexist humour (section 2.3.3).

#### *2.3.1. General criticism*

The Superiority Theory of Humour (Hobbes, 1839; Plato in Morreall, 1987; Gruner, 1997) views humour as an expression of superiority, hostility, and aggression towards the ridiculed target. In this view, ridicule is a form of evil, and laughter serves as a pleasurable form of malice directed at those perceived as less intelligent, physically attractive, or successful. Laughing at someone less fortunate or successful maintains a hierarchy between jokers and targets, thereby widening the social gap. In this way, humour contributes to social 'alignment' and 'alienation,' reinforcing divisions between 'us' and 'them,' and, consequently, exacerbating existing social divisions (Kuipers, 2006; Pérez, 2022).

From a psychological perspective, laughing at those less fortunate demonstrates a lack of social empathy and intentionally degrades members of socially subordinated groups (Tapley, 1989). In doing so, it perpetuates social gaps and inequalities. As Lockyer and Pickering (2005, pp. 3-15) argue, when the ridicule of 'Others' is linked to deep-rooted and naturalised social inequalities, humour can function as a social and political mechanism that divides social groups by reinforcing existing divisions and hierarchies (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class).

There is a widespread belief that laughing at the “other” presupposes acceptance and endorsement of the prejudice expressed in humour. De Sousa (1987) argues that those amused by disparagement humour accept and share the stereotypical views and assumptions of the targeted individuals and feel superior to those who are the targets. To him, making or laughing at a joke that trades upon a negative stereotype reveals an endorsement of the hateful attitude (De Sousa, 1987). In this way, De Sousa equates the attitudes expressed in offensive jokes with the attitudes held by the audience, presupposing that shared laughter in a joke requires shared attitudes (see also Phillips, 1984, pp. 90-91).

Finally, by binding both the jokers and the audience into a “laughing community” through shared intimacy (Phillips, 1984, pp. 90-91), disparagement humour allows for the uncensored expression of prejudice and grants a license to be offensive (Lockyer & Pickering, 2008; Hodson & Prusaczyk, 2021). According to prejudice norm theory (Ford & Ferguson, 2004), joking relaxes critical sensitivity and allows the expression of attitudes and behaviours that would otherwise be considered inappropriately prejudiced. In this context, listeners adopt a non-serious mindset, which allows such attitudes to be tolerated and communicated. The playful, non-serious nature of humour meta-communicates the message that it is acceptable to laugh at the target without fear of social sanction. In this manner, disparaging jokes effectively disarm resistance to the prejudice they carry.

While humour undeniably allows for the uncensored expression of prejudice, its precise contribution to existing social divisions is uncertain without empirical evidence. These prejudices may be more deeply rooted in powerful forces such as structural inequality, mass media, the entertainment industry, and even political figures, rather than solely in humour.

### *2.3.2. Criticism of racist and ethnic humour*

Criticism of disparagement humour intensifies in the context of racist and ethnic humour. Critical humour studies widely assume that racist humour perpetuates, reinforces, normalises, and legitimises discourses of discrimination, injustice, and inequality, while reproducing social, ethnic, racial, and gender inequalities (Billig, 2001, 2005; Lockyer & Pickering, 2005, 2008; Weaver, 2011, 2016; Abedinifard, 2016; Pérez, 2013, 2017, 2022).

Racist humour uses rhetorical devices to influence perceptions of truth and promote ambivalent discourse. Weaver (2011) explains that all humour, like metaphors, is structured with incongruity or contrast. Therefore, humour should be seen as a rhetorical device that can be persuasive and have an impact on readings of social reality. More specifically, humour serves the function of reinforcing embodied racist “truths” by removing the appearance of ambivalence (Weaver, 2011, p. 67). As a result, racism appears “natural,” unproblematic, and acceptable. Humour, through its rhetorical devices, thus masks racist ideological assumptions and prevents critical reflection, reinforcing ethno-racial stereotypes that facilitate the reproduction of racial superiority and inferiority ideologies. Importantly, it turns these notions into pleasurable, unifying, and divisive social activities (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985; Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Pérez, 2022). Comic incongruity can thus reinforce problematic discourses for both the target of the joke and society at large (Billig, 2001; Weaver, 2011; Abedinifard, 2016; Pérez, 2017), and can be disastrous for the various social identities and relationships involved (Lockyer & Pickering, 2009).

Exposure to racist humour increases tolerance for racist behaviour (e.g., Ford, 1997; Maio et al., 1997; Stangor et al., 2001; Saucier et al., 2018; Pérez & Kuipers, 2024). The phrase “just kidding” serves as a legitimising excuse that allows ethnic and racial humour to express racist sentiments that would otherwise be deemed inappropriate (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Ford et al., 2014; Pérez, 2022). Arguably, humour remains one of the few avenues for the open expression

of prejudice in contemporary society (e.g., Ford et al., 2008; Hodson et al., 2010; Hodson & MacInnis, 2016).

### *2.3.3. Criticism of sexist humour*

Similar claims are made regarding the criticism of sexist humour. It is widely accepted that sexist humour increases tolerance for sexism, encourages sexist behaviour, trivialises gender-based discrimination (Ford et al., 2008), and is used to express hostility toward women (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). Research has shown that exposure to sexist humour increases tolerance of sexist behaviour (e.g., Ford, 2000) and may disinhibit sexist actions, especially in individuals already predisposed to sexist attitudes (Ford et al., 2008; Ford et al., 2014). Amusement in response to a sexist joke communicates that the joke is hedonically valuable, whereas interpreting sexist jokes as inoffensive conveys that such jokes are harmless and socially acceptable (Hodson et al., 2010). Those who respond favourably to sexist jokes are thus more likely to dismiss sexism and view women as acceptable targets for bias (Hodson & MacInnis, 2016).

## **3. Macedonia and its humour**

Macedonia presents an intriguing case study for discussing the cultural determinism of humour ideologies due to its history of ethnic, religious, and social relations and conflicts, which differ significantly from those of Western European or American states. After the Second Balkan War (1913), the territory populated by Macedonians, among other ethnic groups, was divided between Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Between the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War II (1941), the part annexed by Serbia underwent incessant cultural assimilation by the Serbian administration. With the outbreak of the war, the territory fell under Bulgarian occupation as a Nazi ally of Germany. The Bulgarian occupation lasted for less than five years, but the territorial and cultural assimilationist pretensions continued covertly after the end of World War II. Following WWII, the territory became an independent republic, part of the Yugoslav Federation. While tensions between Serbia and Macedonia reconciled as both were political units of the same state, tensions with Bulgaria remained dormant on the international stage until 1991, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

During the Yugoslav era, the favourite targets of humour were the “stupid” Bosnians and the “stupid and backward” Albanians. Macedonians were ridiculed for the linguistic features of their mother tongue (Takovski, 2025). With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Bulgarian assimilationist politics gained new momentum in response to the open contestation and denial of Macedonian statehood and identity by Bulgaria through its official political, historiographic, mass media, and popular discourses including humour. Bulgarian online ethnic jokelore over the past decade or two is filled with jokes that ridicule Macedonian identity, such as: “Why are Macedonians and Greeks fighting over West Bulgaria?” or “Why are they cutting 300-year-old trees in Macedonia? Because they heard the trees have Bulgarian roots.” While Macedonians may not be delighted by these jokes, they are not overly threatened by them either, as the Bulgarian veto on Macedonia’s EU accession based on the unilateral dispute of Macedonian identity is viewed as a far more potent threat (Takovski, 2015; 2018).

Macedonians may not be pleased by the ridicule of their identity, partly due to their historical engagement with disparaging humour across different genres. The most popular folk trickster in Macedonian oral tradition is *Itar Pejo*, a folk prankster whose ridicule of his fellow villagers often crosses the line from humour to humiliation, which according to superiority theories of humour is thin next to none. Print satire, such as *Osten* (i.e., the most popular satirical outlet in Yugoslav times) and *Koza Nostra* (i.e., a 21st-century print satirical outlet), as well as

TV satire (e.g., *K-15* and *Ednooki* [One-eyed]), often rely on gender, ethnic, and social stereotypes to create amusement. Interestingly, gender-based humour in Macedonia is never misogynistic and often ridicules men (Takovski, 2019). Finally, Macedonia has a vibrant conversational humour tradition, often referred to as “bazar humour,” especially in the cities of Kumanovo and Kavadarci. This humour is characterised by biting moves, banter, verbal duels, and sometimes open insults. In summary, Macedonians have a history of appreciating, and even being resilient to, disparaging humour.

What Macedonian humour and online jokelore lack are examples of racist humour or sexist/misogynistic humour commonly seen in American and Western European contexts. For instance, jokes like:

- (1) Q. How long does it take a black lady to shit?  
A. 9 months.
- (2) Which sexual position produces the ugliest children? A: Ask a Muslim.

do not exist in Macedonian digital jokelore, nor do examples like:

- (3) Why don't women need to wear a watch? Because there is a clock on the stove.
- (4) What do nine of ten people enjoy? Gang Rape.

The absence of such jokes is not surprising. Racially speaking, Macedonian is (pre)dominantly white society. Ethnic groups, not racial, constitute the social and political fabric of the society and the state. Institutionally and practically the category of race does not exist in Macedonia, and most of the Balkans for that matter, as a viable identity category. Ethnicity, instead, is the fundamental political principle that organizes social and political structures and relations. On the other hand, even the sexual jokes in Macedonia are not as sexist, insulting, or misogynistic as those from the U.S. and Europe. Humorous sexism in Macedonia tends to be of a different kind, more “gentle,” mocking sexual ineptness, impotence, infidelity, and betrayal—often targeting men more than women. Popular joke sites such as *Vicoteka* offer ample empirical evidence (Erotic jokes, 2022)

#### **4. Methodology**

To identify and discuss Macedonian popular humour ideologies and the views on specific types of humour, we have conducted an online survey with Macedonian citizens. The purpose was to collect data (i.e., popular opinions and attitudes of Macedonian citizens about disparagement humour, its appropriateness and limits). The survey contains 39 questions organised into four sections:

- 1) Section A: demographic section with five questions (age, gender, nationality, education, and religious affiliation),
- 2) Section B: Political attitudes/positions (six statements such as “My people is better than the other and that is why I am proud of it,” with Likert framed responses spanning on four points scale: completely agree / partially agree / partially disagree / completely disagree),
- 3) Section C: humour ideologies (six multiple choice questions intended to collect respondents’ opinions on censorship of humour and humour’s contribution to discrimination, aggression and social divisions), and
- 4) Section D: Jokes evaluation section with twenty questions based on ten jokes, each joke followed by two questions registering the respondents’ evaluation of the joke as offensive and amusing.

The first question immediately following the joke offered three options to measure the jokes offensiveness (very offensive / partially offensive / not offensive at all) and the second questions measured how much was the joke perceived as amusing (very amusing / partially amusing/ not amusing at all).

The ten jokes were collected from Macedonian and Serbian humour web pages and sites (see Appendix). Initially, a data set of more than 100 jokes was created out of which ten jokes were chosen for the survey. The selection was based on the principle of representation. The first pair of jokes were religious jokes targeting Orthodox Christians and Muslims respectfully, the second pair were sexual jokes, one targeting women and the other targeting men. The third pair of jokes targeted two vulnerable groups (the blind / visually impaired and victims of Chernobyl). The fourth group of jokes consisted of four jokes targeting different ethnic groups: Macedonians, Albanians, Roma and Vlachs. The reason for choosing jokes representative of four distinct types is to measure humour ideologies relevant differences in the understanding and evaluation of humour that targets different social groups, and thus identify nuances in beliefs and attitudes shaped by the particular target group and the joke hearer relation with it. The last question (q39) is an open-ended question that invited participants to share their opinion on humour, its role in society and its limits / censorship. The survey was conducted online in the period between 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 and 7<sup>th</sup> August 2024, shared via the personal FB profiles of the two researchers. Surprisingly, it managed to gather 451 responses, most of which in the first two days of sharing.

## **5. Data**

The survey was taken by 451 respondents, the demographic structure of the population gathered through the questions in Section A, is as follows:

- 1) age: 42.8% (41-50 years of age), 30.8% (31-40); 14% (18-30),
- 2) gender: 52.4% males, 46.7% females,
- 3) ethnicity: 84.7% Macedonians,
- 4) education: 47.7% high education, 41.2% MA or PhD, 10.2% high school, Religion: 57%, Orthodox Christian, 29.6% Atheist; 4.2% Muslim.

### **5.1. Humour ideologies (section C)**

Due to limitations in space and the necessity to maintain focus, we shall not report the results of the second section of the survey, namely the section that measured the political attitudes and positioning of the respondents. The section is intended for future research focused on the correlation between political attitudes and humour attitudes.

The third section of the survey “Humour ideologies” consisted of six multiple choice questions intended to register and measure ideologies on humour. The short forms of the questions are given in the left column in the table below, whereas the respondents’ answers are provided in the right-hand column.

Table 1. Humour ideologies

Questions	Answers in descending order
Q12. What type of humour should be censored or banned?	none (57%); socially vulnerable groups (40.4%); ethnic humour (11.6%); religious (12.4%); gender (10.4%); black humour (5.3%).
Q13. Should all instances be banned?	no instance should be banned (56.7%); some instances should be banned (32.3%); all instances should be banned (11.2%).
Q14. If any category should be banned, or limited, where it should be banned?	I don't think it should be banned (52.7%); Educational institutions (37.4%); Mass media (36.8%); Work place (27.4%); Internet (26.2%); Social media (23.3%); Public spaces (17.3%).
Q15. What would be the reason to ban/censor humour?	I would not ban humour (45.4%); It creates aggression and conflict (23.7%); It insults and offends (22.6%); It promotes stereotypes, intolerance and discrimination (21.5%); All of these (20.8%).
Q16. Humour's contribution to ethnic, gender, and religious intolerance, injustice and discrimination in the society?	not at all (29.8%); very little (26.4%); moderately (25,8%); great extent (18%).
Q 17. Would censorship help overcome injustice and discrimination in the society?	not at all (51.7%); little (24.8%); moderately (17.9%); to a great extent (5.6%).

More than half of the respondents believe that humour should not be limited, banned, or censored (n=259; 57.6%). The greatest number of respondents who would ban humour (n=182; 40.4%) believe that humour targeting vulnerable groups, such as those with disabilities, should be censored. Interestingly, as high as 88% (n=410) would not ban gender, ethnic, or religious humour, and even fewer would ban dark humour. Even in these cases, the general mood is that either no instances of disparagement humour should be banned (n=253; 56.7%) or only some instances should be banned (n=143; 31.2%).

Humour should not be permitted, or at least should be controlled, in educational institutions (n=167; 37.4%), mass media (n=164; 36.8%), workplaces (n=122; 27.4%), the internet (n=117; 26.2%), and social media (n=104; 23.3%), or controlled at best. The mechanisms of such control have yet to be revealed and discussed. Again, the majority of respondents (n=235; 52.7%) are against censorship. The reasons for censoring humour vary from: a) creating aggression and conflict (n=106; 23.7%), b) insulting and offending someone's identity (n=101; 22.6%), c) promoting stereotypes, intolerance, and discrimination (n=96; 21.5%), d) all of the above (n=93; 20.8%).

Almost third of the respondents (n=134; 29.8%) do not see humour as a contributing factor to the ethnic, gender, religious, and political intolerance, injustice, and discrimination in society, whereas additional large group of respondents (n=119; 26.4%) share the opinion that humour is an insignificant contributor in the perpetuation of prejudice and discrimination. Aware that humour is only one, generally considered insignificant factor, the respondents largely agree that the ban or censorship of humour will not dramatically affect, or will have no effect at all, on the present existence of prejudice and discrimination. The majority (n=231; 51.7%) think that censorship will not bring any change, while (n=111; 24.8%) believe that censorship will have minimal effect. Only 5.6% (n=25) of the respondents think that banning humour will significantly change the present social state of affairs.

In a nutshell, popular opinion holds that humour should not be banned. If any type of humour needs more regulated circulation, it is humour that targets vulnerable groups, especially in educational institutions and mass media. However, humour targeting ethnic, religious, or political groups does not require such regulation. More importantly, in the court of public opinion, humour is not seen as a significant factor in the perpetuation of social prejudice and discrimination. Even more importantly, its ban will change little, if anything. The general sentiment is that Macedonian citizens are permissive of biting humour, aware of the need to control certain types of humour in specific contexts, and fully aware/holding the opinion that humour is barely a significant factor in the perpetuation of social injustice and discrimination.

## **5.2. Jokes evaluation (section D)**

Section C of the survey presented the respondents with four groups of jokes organised thematically into jokes on religion (2), jokes on gender (2), jokes on vulnerable groups (2) and jokes on ethnicities (4) here represented in the first column of the table. Each joke was followed but two questions, one that measures offensiveness and another that measured amusement on a three-point scale very (offensive/amusing) – partially – not offensive amusing at all. The table below shows the evaluations of respondents) of each joke. The second column (joke script) is added to give a better understanding of the joke content and its potential impact on the evaluation.

Table 2. Evaluations of jokes offensiveness and amusement

Targets	Scripts	Offensive			Amusing		
		Very	Partially	Not at all	Very	Partially	Not at all
Orthodox	Sexualised	6.9%	8.9%	85.2%	20.7%	52.7%	26.6%
Muslims	Religious practice	9.1%	23.3%	67.4%	22.4%	52.4%	25.1%
Females	Promiscuity	14.2%	29.9%	55.7%	15.3%	43.8%	40.9%
Males	Genital size	5.3%	14%	80.5%	32.9%	40.7%	26.4%
Vulnerable	Blind	20.8%	27.3%	51.7%	19.8%	40.4%	19.8%
Vulnerable	Chernobyl	6.9%	18.2%	74.7%	36.7%	43.8%	19.6%
Macedonians	National identity	11.8%	22.2%	65.9%	26%	44%	30%
Albanians	Cunning/stupid	6.2%	24.8%	68.7%	32%	43.8%	24.2%
Roma	Incest	15.7%	27.7%	56.3%	28.2%	45.8%	26%
Vlachs	Stinginess	2%	16.6%	81.2%	41.8%	44%	14.2%

Generally, the jokes are not considered offensive (responses range from 51% to 85%). The least offensive are jokes targeting Orthodox religion, Vlachs, and males, with percentages higher than 80%, while the most offensive are jokes about the blind, females, and Roma, though they still have somewhat high response percentages of more than 50%.

The evaluations of the religious jokes show a high percentage of acceptance and tolerance (85% and 67%, respectively), with respondents considering them not offensive. Interestingly, although 57% of respondents are Orthodox, 29.6% declared themselves as atheists, and only 4% as Muslims, the joke making fun of Christianity is considered less offensive than the one making fun of the Muslim religion, by a significant 17.8% difference. For Christian respondents, this may indicate a willingness to joke at one's own expense, while for atheists, it may show an inclination and/or greater caution about joking at the expense of Muslims.

The joke targeting men is perceived as far less offensive than the one that targets women, with a 29.8% difference. What is more interesting is that 34.5% of the respondents who consider the fourth joke not to be offensive are women, whereas men constitute only 21% of the respondents who find the third joke offensive. There is an obvious gender-based difference in evaluation that warrants further exploration.

A similar tendency is seen with jokes ridiculing two vulnerable groups (the blind and Chernobyl victims). Taken together, both jokes are considered not offensive by the majority of respondents. However, there is a great 23% difference between the respondents who believe that the joke about the visually impaired is much less offensive than the one about a Chernobyl victim. This difference is also corroborated by the percentage of respondents who find the 6th joke very offensive (20.8%), compared to a relatively insignificant 6.9% who think that joke 5 is very offensive. Again, the percentage of respondents who are accepting of black humour is quite high. The distribution of evaluations across ethnic jokes (7-10) shows that the joke about

the Roma is the most offensive, followed by the joke about Macedonians, Albanians, and Vlachs. However, these figures are relatively low, ranging from 15.7% (joke 9) to 2% (joke 10). The scores on the other side of the evaluation spectrum (not offensive) support the same observation, with numbers as high as 56.3% (joke 9) up to 81.2% (joke 10).

We will leave aside the popular evaluations of jokes' amusement for several reasons: a) the figures do not show any relevant or discernible pattern, b) we are more interested in evaluations of offensiveness as these more directly relate to humour ideologies, and c) spatial limitations.

Bearing this in mind, it is worth reiterating that the results generally demonstrate a tendency toward greater tolerance of disparagement humour among the Macedonian population. This can be further validated by the qualitative answers to the last question (q39), which some respondents (n=260) were willing to provide. The question, "Which of the jokes would you ban and/or censor, and why? Would you censor humour? Why?" produced 260 answers, which we organised using a simple coding procedure: marked with 1 – would censor, 0 – neither/nor, and 2 – would not censor.

### **5.3. Humour ideologies**

Based on the qualitative answers to the last survey question (q39), most respondents reacted most strongly to the jokes about vulnerable groups (n=34), followed by the joke about Roma (n=12); religion (Christianity: n=6, Islam: n=3, religion in general: n=2), women (n=6), Albanians (n=3), and Macedonians (n=3). Only one respondent reacted to the joke about men, and no one commented on the joke about Vlachs as a potential subject for censorship. Below are the key reasons (also meta-pragmatic indicators) underlying the critical attitudes toward each target group:

- **Vulnerable groups:** 1) unequal social group the members of which are often born with the condition that is unalterable, they cannot do anything about it, 2) such jokes stigmatise and enhance their pain, 3) when conditions are suffering, ridicule is inadmissible, 4) they are already facing serious social problems (movement, acceptance, accessibility), 5) other groups do not feel down because they are Macedonians or men or women, it's not an ideology to change it. 6) its inhuman.
- **Roma:** 1) it's about incest, not funny at all, 2) it has double offense: upon their ethnic group and their belonging to a vulnerable social group (the only ethnic group that belongs in this group), so ridicule pushes them even further away to the margins of society.
- **Religion:** 1) ridiculing religion pushes people away from God, 2) it's blasphemy to ridicule Christianity; 3) there is no joking with God, doing so communicates the message that it is ok to ridicule everything; 4) radical Muslims are offended easily.
- **Women:** 1) promotes wrong sexual education and ideas about women, 2) state of women in the society is vulnerable (victims of family violence, femicide).
- **Albanians.** language is not to be joked about.
- **Macedonians:** because the jokes support the Bulgarian propaganda.

The results show a strong social empathy toward vulnerable groups, particularly those with physical and/or mental challenges, which makes people strongly opinionated. The prevailing attitude is that joking about these groups is inadmissible. Attitudes toward the Roma community are similarly resolute, as the joke not only ridicules a marginalised group but also touches on a taboo subject (incest). It would be interesting to see if reactions would be the same if the joke were based on another script, as well as to understand why the Roma are the only ethnic group

that seems to deserve protection. The reasons can easily be speculated (e.g., institutional discrimination, structural inequality).

Attitudes toward other types of jokes are somewhat more relaxed. According to some of the respondents, jokes about religion should not be made because religion is sacred and also serves as the last line of moral defence against ridicule. Similarly, part of the respondents see jokes about women as more problematic because their social position is perceived as more vulnerable than that of men. Based on this attitude, respondents think that humour targeting women would push women further to the margins of society, in the same manner that humour disparages and marginalises vulnerable groups and the Roma community. Some respondents suggest avoiding jokes about ethnic groups for various, yet related, reasons: the insult to national identity (i.e., language in the case of Albanians and identity in the case of Macedonians). Generally, critics of disparagement humour believe it contributes to the marginalisation of certain social groups, giving a “green light” to offense and discrimination. These attitudes, however, are shared by only 30% of respondents. A small number of respondents who are neither fully critical nor supportive of disparagement humour raise awareness that humour should be kept out of certain institutions (education and work), and that people should be critically educated to be resilient to the dangers of stereotyping and social marginalisation.

The respondents who would not ban humour are more than twice as numerous (n=158) as those who would ban it (n=73). Their reasoning can be categorised as follows, along with the arguments provided by respondents:

- **Humour should not be taken seriously:** It's only a joke; you laugh, and that's it. In the end, it's just humour.
- **Humour has positive social value** (encourages critical engagement): Humour provides an opportunity to criticise one's own group and learn about others through critical engagement. “It's better to speak the truth through humour than direct offense.” Humour exposes taboo subjects and reduces complexity, making them accessible for scrutiny. Political correctness only preserves the social status quo. Humour unmask the intention to offend and exposes prejudice. It is an important social tool for criticism and social change. Jokes are here to laugh at stereotypes, not with them.
- **Banning humour would have negative results:** Banning humour cannot prevent hatred and discrimination. It will have counterproductive effects and might even reinforce stereotypes, while allowing humour can lead to the banalisation of stereotypes and a loss of their social power.
- **Banning humour violates rights:** Banning humour is anti-constitutional. People have the right to humour. It is self-defeating and goes against the very nature of humour (freedom and democracy).
- **Criticism of humour is misplaced:** Humour is not the battleground for human rights. Jokes do not kill people, cause wars in Ukraine, or contribute to genocides in Gaza. “I'd rather we joke and poke fun than stay silent.” Humour is not discrimination.

The attitudes vary from the “just a joke” argument to seeing humour as a tool for critical engagement with society, to the negative effects of banning it (widening the gap and violating rights), and deflecting criticism of humour as unwarranted.

## 6. Discussion

The data collected in Section C of the survey (“Humour Ideologies”) confirms that humour is a site of ideological struggle and provides evidence of the existence of two conflicting humour

ideologies based on different ideological assumptions about humour, as reflected in the meta-pragmatic comments offered by respondents (Tsakona, 2020; 2024). The conflicting ideologies are those supportive of humour and those critical of humour. The majority of respondents would not ban humour, while those who would ban it would only limit certain types, mostly humour targeting vulnerable groups (e.g., disabled individuals) and, to a far lesser degree, humour targeting other social groups (ethnic, religious, gender). This humour ideology advocates for the controlled circulation of humour, rather than a complete ban. The reasons for this position align with the dominant critical views in humour scholarship, which suggest that humour grants license to be offensive (Lockyer & Pickering, 2005) and perpetuates stereotypes, injustice, and discrimination. Yet, this humour ideology is shared by a smaller segment of the respondents, who believe that only some types of disparagement humour have these negative social consequences. Contrary to claims that humour normalises discourses of discrimination and inequality (Billig, 2001; Lockyer & Pickering, 2005; Weaver, 2011; 2016; Perez, 2013; 2017, 2022), masks ideological assumptions (Weaver, 2011; 2017), reproduces superiority, and widens social gaps (Boskin & Dornison, 1985; Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Perez, 2022), the data supports the assumption that humour has no significant effect on social, political, and ethnic discrimination or inequality. Moreover, banning or controlling humour will not accomplish anything because humour does not possess the sociopolitical power that it is ascribed by scholarship that favours a critical stance on humour. This does not mean that humour is not offensive or free of risk; it merely indicates that these effects are individual, local, and socially insignificant. Humour has no perceptible significant effect on social divisions, hierarchies, inequality, or discrimination. The respondents' views in this respect resonates Davies' assumption that humour has no significant effect when compared to other social forces (Davies, 2011).

The underlying assumptions of these humour ideologies are also manifested in respondents' qualitative responses (i.e., the last question of the survey). Again, a smaller group of respondents is critical of humour. The criticism varies in strength and intensity, as evidenced by the quantity, scope, and quality of the opinions offered. The strongest anti-humour attitudes relate to vulnerable groups (i.e., the disabled and Roma). Only with regard to these two particular social groups do the opinions that humour reproduces inequalities, marginalises, and discriminates align with research assumptions in U.S. and Western European scholarship (Billig, 2001; 2005; Weaver, 2011). The attitude is interesting from the perspective of critical language awareness. It shows that the respondents are also aware of the ideological and discriminatory effects of language, whether humorous and non-humorous, upon certain social groups such as vulnerable groups, Roma and to a lesser degree women. Similarly to previous findings, this study shows that gender/sexist humour is seen as widening the gender-based gap, legitimising mistreatment, and trivialising gender-based discrimination (Ford et al., 2008), but it is impossible to assert whether it encourages sexist behaviour or increases tolerance for sexist events.

According to this humour ideology, it is vulnerable groups, Roma, and women who should not be exposed to humour that ridicules them. This critical stance, however, does not apply to other social groups, particularly ethnic and religious groups. These groups are not considered "helpless underdogs" who need protection. It seems that these groups have a resilience towards disparagement humour and the mechanism for their own "protection." Moreover, neither the survey results nor the existent research provides convincing evidence that humour reproduces asymmetrical power relations, ethnic inequality, or feelings of superiority, or that it masks ideological assumptions or legitimises discrimination, as claimed in the literature. Thus, the meta-humorous assumptions of Macedonian citizens critical of humour only partially overlap with the critical humour attitudes/ideologies discussed in the literature.

The ideology supportive of humour manifests in several different, yet related, meta-humorous assumptions and meta-pragmatic indicators (Tsakona, 2013; 2020). The non-

consequentialist position, “it’s only a joke,” is present throughout the data, but what permeates this ideology is the assumption/indicator that “humour has positive social value” (i.e., encouraging critical engagement with stereotypes and taboos, inviting scrutiny, and serving as a vehicle for social change). Respondents’ reflections on humour highlight the implicit call embedded in each joke that invites listeners to examine the humour-inherent ambiguity, and raise questions such as “is there any truth in the humour stereotype deployed,” “why this group is ridiculed for that particular script,” “does the ridicule harm the target,” etc. Although the likelihood of the occurrence of this critical approach to reading humour is empirically uncertain at this point, without further examination. At this point we do not know how large a population among joke audience engages in this sort of response to humour, yet, the existence of the belief and the existence of individuals who point to and act upon it, is a sufficient proof for the existence of a humour ideology that is incongruent to the criticism of humour as a tool that relaxes critical sensitivity (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). On the contrary, this attitude points to the function of humour as a tool that invites and enhances critical sensitivity, and consequently encourages social change. In this sense, humour invites critical examination rather than uncritical acceptance and endorsement of the stereotypes expressed (Phillips, 1984; De Sousa, 1987). Humour in this ideology is defined as a democratic, state-guaranteed (by the Constitution) right, the banning of which would have more costly social impacts (such as enforcing stereotypes or expressing aggressive attitudes in a more harmful manner). Most importantly, this pro-humour ideology fully embraces the assumption that, when compared to other more powerful social forces (e.g., military conflicts, but also systemic, institutionalised inequality), humour is a completely negligible social factor.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that disparagement humour can be biting, “merciless,” and offensive to certain individuals or groups in specific circumstances. What may be seen as laughing stock for one person can easily be a bitter insult to another. The question is whether disparagement humour has the socially harmful effects (insults, discrimination, injustice) that it is often accused of. For highly prejudiced individuals who already exhibit discriminatory attitudes toward different groups in a non-humorous manner, humour may simply fuel and reinforce existing discriminatory behaviours.

In this sense, humour may be a releaser or a catalyser of existing prejudices created by other forces. Jokes do not cause or shape these behaviours, Disparagement jokes merely reflect existing social hierarchies, structures, and behaviours. They neither create these systems nor inject them with new life. The assumptions underlying these claims are far-fetched and empirically difficult to validate, if not outright impossible. They fail to account for more powerful factors that contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of injustice and discrimination. Social inequality, race- or ethnicity-based discrimination, and discourses of prejudice and alienation are the results of far more significant social and political forces, such as structural inequalities, unequal access to education, the labour market, healthcare, means of cultural production, political representation, and others. The primary vehicles for perpetuating the discourses of injustice, inequality and discrimination are mass media and state institutions, not jokes. For example, there is a political gap between Macedonia and Bulgaria that has led to Bulgaria’s veto on Macedonia’s EU accession. Although there are Bulgarian jokes that ridicule Macedonians, this gap is the result of a history of political disagreements and conflicts, as well as Bulgarian discriminatory politics, not humour.

Moreover, claims that humour significantly contributes to discrimination and racism focus on the content of humour, not the context. They fail to recognise that even members of the targeted group may have differing responses to disparagement humour. The widespread claim is that humour masks ideological assumptions and lures people into identifying with the harmful claims made through humour. People who enjoy certain humour are said to embody the stereotypes it expresses (Phillips, 1984; De Sousa, 1987). This view is ideologically biased. It

implies that no motive for engaging with humour other than malice is possible, and, more problematically, it assumes that humour audiences are gullible, unaware subjects of ideological indoctrination—uncritical of the contents of humour that they enjoy. The assumption fails to differentiate between the joke text and the joke work (i.e., the narrated event and the humorous narration, in Kramer’s 2011 parlance). It overlooks the possibility of enjoying a joke that trades on a negative ethnic or national stereotype without endorsing that stereotype.

Ironically, calls to disengage from humour that “punches down” at the underdogs in order to show social empathy and narrow the gap between the joker and the target are, in fact, disempowering to the target. They place them in a powerless position, requiring advocacy and protection from jokes.

Finally, the assumptions that humour contributes to racism and sexism are not universal truths. These claims reflect very specific historical, political, and social circumstances, and are products of specific societies. They do not necessarily apply to all societies or social realities. Some societies, such as Macedonia, are mono racial, and racism is an imported political idea that has little, next to none, significance in the society. Moreover, not all cultures have the same (in)tolerance for sexist jokes. Some humour communities are more accustomed to, prone to, and resilient in the face of biting humour. This is the case in Macedonia, where history has shaped different humour ideologies.

## **7. Conclusion**

Humour is undeniably a site of ideological struggle. The data confirms the existence of two humour ideologies, with a significant difference in scope among the population (3:1 in favour of those who support humour). What seems to underpin this particular difference, internally, between the two ideological positions are the political ideologies of the respondents, a subject that remains to be studied in future research. On the other hand, the two ideologies (i.e., critical and supportive) held by Macedonian citizens differ from the humour ideologies emerging from U.S., U.K., and Western European sociopolitical contexts. In this respect, the Macedonian humour ideology critical of humour does not fully align with the dominant research assumptions (e.g., humour being a green light to offence, a tool that disengages critical engagement and reproduces inequality and discrimination), whereas the ideology supportive of humour introduces new assumptions. Thus, besides being an easier approach to difficult subjects and being embedded in democratic values (Kramer, 2011), humour also functions as a buffer zone where potentially offensive subjects can be mitigated, examined, and “steamed out.” Moreover, this ideology believes that criticism of humour is misplaced, which presupposes awareness of the existence of other social factors contributing to the social ills that humour is accused of.

Why are these cultural differences present? Why is American and Western European scholarship, and partly the humour ideologies it bases its criticism upon, so different from South Balkan, Macedonian humour reception and evaluation? We strongly believe that the differences arise from different sociopolitical trajectories. U.S. and Western European capitalist, colonial states and societies have a long tradition of colonisation, slavery, immigration, and, as a consequence, political, social, and economic exploitation and oppression of different social, cultural, and ethnic groups that have been and still are the targets of much humour. The sentiments caused by a past marked by oppression and the ongoing presence of systematic injustice are still fresh, making humour a reminder of pain and suffering. On the other hand, the newly emerged politics of identity, along with the overextension of “woke” and “cancel culture,” have contributed to the creation of a hypersensitive response to humour. However, in a country run by openly declared xenophobes and misogynists, humour is the least of people’s problems.

The political milieu in the Balkans is very different in this respect. The Balkans has not been troubled by racism in the same manner as some other societies and states. All societies in the Balkans are ethnically structured with ethnicity at the core of the socio-political everyday life in the states, while inter-ethnic, not racial, mistrust, hostility, and open conflict have shaped the history of the states. Paradoxically, the open conflicts in the Balkans in the 20th century created generations of Macedonians, Albanians, Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, etc., who have ridiculed each other for decades, yet very few consider humour an important contributing factor in inter-ethnic relations or intrastate politics. People have been exposed to and experienced inter-ethnic conflicts and political oppression, and for them, claiming that humour contributes to social divisions is, in itself, laughable. Jokes neither started nor ended the two Balkan Wars (1912/1913), the post-Yugoslav conflicts, or Greek and Bulgarian political blackmail of Macedonia. This is why some are able to laugh at these subjects without feeling threatened by “masked assumptions” or assertions of superiority.

Humour ideologies, in this manner, are conditioned by different histories, social identities, political values, and beliefs. Hence, it is not surprising that one society or social group would have more relaxed attitudes towards humour, while another may be highly critical, even in response to the same humour instance. Even the members of a single society embrace different, opposing humour ideologies. The reaction is a product of different, specific political histories and social contexts. Therefore, emerging humour ideologies should be considered only within the local context.

This study intended to offer a material that evidences the existence of humour ideology that does not leverage rigorous, uncompromising and we would say misplaced criticism of humour. In so doing, it also demonstrated some weaknesses and opened important questions that cannot be accommodated in a single study. Methodologically, the use of personal Facebook profiles to gather data may attract biased, likeminded individuals, but this is the perception of a foreign eye. In reality, the survey was shared eight times by individuals affiliated with the authors, thus reaching a very diverse demographics. The study furthermore hints at other important variables such as critical language awareness and its impact on humour ideologies, but in our own opinion that constitutes a subject of an entirely new study that will shed extra light on the complex phenomena of humour ideologies.

### **Appendix – Jokes used in the survey**

1. Gods were bored and decided to throw a party, and started making suggestions where to have the party. Zeus suggested Mars, Buddha said Neptune, Krishna suggested it should be Venus, while Alah proposed Planet Earth. Hearing the last proposal, the Christian God jumped out of his seat and yelled: “Everywhere but not there!” All Gods looked at him with shock, to which he replied: “Guys. Two thousand years ago, I visited planet earth, had a one night stand there, and they are still talking about me.

2. - When does a radical Muslim feel worst?  
- When he gets the pig’s flu.

3. A primary school teacher asks her students: “What is Mary in the sentence “*Mary goes first, hundred men follow?*” Little George shouts out: “A lady of easy virtue, teacher.”

4. - Which four words can destroy male’s ego?  
- Is it in yet?

5. How does a blind man find Aisle C, Row 7, Seat 9 in a cinema?

-With difficulty.

6. How do you call a Slovenian who returned from Chernobyl?

- Triglav. (literally. it means three headed, but it also refers to the highest mountain peak in Slovenia)

7. Macedonians complain to God: “Why did you do this to us dear God? All people descend from apes, and we are the only to descend from Bulgarians.”

8. Serbian police are looking for ALA (Albanian liberation army) soldiers in Kosovo. They have lined up few Albanians and ask them to say “shovel.” One of them says “shovel” and asks why they need to say shovel. The Serbian police officer replies “Well, Albanians will say *shovelj*. To which the Albanian replies “My God you are very *llucrative*.”

(The joke is impossible to translate. It dwells on the phonologic fact that Albanian language does not have the same intra-dental /l/ phoneme as the south Slavic languages, so Albanian speakers of South Slavic languages often substitute the intra-dental /l/ with a softened alveolar /lj/. This has been a subject of ridicule to many south Slavic ethnic groups.)

9. A Roma guy was in hospital and the doctor asked him if has slept with a medical sister (the literal translation of nurse in Macedonian). To this, the Roma replies, “No doctor I have only slept with a regular sister. “

10. Two Vlachs (an Aromanian ethnic group) are talking

“How much is one and one?”

“Two.”

“Sounds very little (not enough)”

Link to the survey

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11ILwfmku\\_6yLXCdS9bSjw00XmbFeIRfOKjdjWgs6dqs/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11ILwfmku_6yLXCdS9bSjw00XmbFeIRfOKjdjWgs6dqs/edit)

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