

Commentary piece

The humorous rewriting of Orwell's 1984: the Greek version

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Abstract

This commentary piece offers some preliminary thoughts concerning Greek memes produced since COVID-19 disease arrived at Greece at the end of February 2020 through identifying an analogy between the sociopolitical conditions in Greece-under-lockdown and Orwell's Oceania in his 1984 novel. It is specifically argued that such texts constitute political humour commenting on the abrupt, yet pervasive changes attested due to state measures against the spread of COVID-19 disease. To this end, memes collected from social media are discussed and interpreted in comparison with extracts from Orwell's novel to point to striking similarities between the 1984 sociopolitical context and the Greek one. It is, however, suggested that there is a significant difference between the two contexts: in Orwell's dystopia, humour seems to have no place at all; on the contrary, humour thrived in Greece-under-lockdown, especially among participants in the social media, in the form of rapidly created and disseminated memes. Memory (a central notion in Orwell's novel) emerges as a crucial factor for the production of such humour in contemporary Greece and for its absence from Orwell's Oceania.

Keywords: COVID-19, memes, lockdown, incongruity, political humour.

The spread of memes is like the diffusion of the coronavirus itself.

They 'go viral'
(Nicholls 2020: 296)

1. From 1984 to 2020: far away, so close

In 1984, I was 9 years old and the first time I heard about Orwell's 1984 (2018 [1949]) was through the song *Sexcrime (Nineteen eighty-four)* by Eurythmics, whose video clip included scenes from the 1984 movie released in October 1984. Children of my age were not considered

to be the appropriate audience for the movie (at least not in Greece), yet I can clearly remember listening to the song, watching the video clip on TV, singing its lyrics, and dancing to it, without of course having any idea about who *Big Brother* was and what *sexcrime* meant. Later on, as a student and a young scholar, I bumped into references to *Newspeak* and *Doublethink* and it was not until 2016-2017 that I watched a theatrical play in Athens based on the 1984 novel. The performance was sold out, but as soon as we got to the theatre, we were told that some people from the audience left during the play because they could not stand its violence and torture scenes, or even fainted, especially if they were seated in the front rows. I managed to survive an exceptionally good performance, still I was not convinced that I wanted to read the novel.

In early March 2020, when measures against the spread of COVID-19 disease started to be imposed and lockdown was eventually enforced in Greece, 1984 came to my mind. The way we perceived and spoke about mundane things changed surreptitiously but fast from one day to the other. *Newspeak* and *Doublethink* showed up: taking care of each other meant keeping ourselves apart; showing affection entailed exchanging brief phone calls or participating in chats on the social media; a public health crisis to be handled by the state became our personal responsibility to be handled in the privacy of our homes. The central motto launched through the media *Μένουμε σπίτι* 'We stay home' meant different things simultaneously: specific groups of people could enjoy the safety of their homes, others were left at home jobless or became victims of domestic violence, while others simply could not stay at home but were necessarily exposed to the disease (e.g. medical staff, employees in public cleaning services and supermarkets), etc.

Gatherings were severely restricted; online meetings became a significant part of our everyday lives. *Big Brother* was watching: we could only leave home to go to work (if we still had one), the hospital, the doctor, the pharmacy, the bank, the supermarket (most other shops were closed), to attend a ceremony of maximum 10 people (e.g. a funeral), to exercise or walk our pets, and to visit people 'in need' (e.g. the elderly or sick). Such movements had to be reported in advance to the state via text messaging to obtain appropriate permission, also via text messaging. Those who did not comply were forced to pay a fine. So, we spent several weeks alone in our homes, separated from our loved ones and our co-workers. Our homes turned into hospital rooms and our neighbourhoods into hospital wards, where we waited (no visitors allowed) for the medical and state authorities to provide us with the discharge note, whether we had been sick or not in the meantime.

Interestingly, I was not alone in comparing these conditions to Orwell's Oceania. Erll (2020: 48) observes that "[i]n many countries, the lockdowns bring back memories of curfews under dictatorships". The analogy between contemporary lockdowns around the world and 1984 also appeared in news articles or commentaries online (see, among others, Adams 2020; Chanda 2020; Holmes 2020; Iakovou 2020; Kaye 2020; Lewis 2020; *Newsbeast* 2020; Sen 2020). This comparison between real-life events and a work of fiction may seem odd at first, but "[i]n these extraordinary times fiction has become reality and contemporary 'reality' is akin to fiction" (Mrowa-Hopkins, personal communication, as cited in Nicholls 2020: 305).

In general, 1984 has been interpreted as a fictional representation of, or allegory for, the Stalinist Soviet Union, warning against the actual circumstances under communist regimes. Such an interpretation is close to, but not exactly the same as, what the author himself seemed to have in mind:

My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (...) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralised economy is liable and which have already been partly realised in Communism and Fascism. I do not believe that the kind of society I describe will necessarily arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling could arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas have taken roots in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences.

(Orwell 2004 [1949]: 44, emphasis in the original)

As a result, Orwell's name and the derivative adjective *Orwellian* are nowadays often used as metonymies to denote dystopic contexts associated with totalitarian regimes imposing movement restrictions and monitoring people's everyday activities and lives. According to the online edition of *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2020), *Orwellian* means "relating to, or suggestive of George Orwell or his writings especially: relating to or suggestive of the dystopian reality depicted in the novel *1984*" and *Orwellianism* refers to "authoritarianism coupled with lies". In a similar vein, the online edition of *Cambridge Dictionary* (2020) suggests that the adjective *Orwellian* is "used to describe a political system in which the government tries to control every part of people's lives, similar to that described in the novel 'Nineteen Eighty Four', by George Orwell". In Greek, the adjective *οργουελικός/ή/ό* 'Orwellian' has similar meanings (see the entries in the *Utilitarian Dictionary of Modern Greek* 2014 and the Greek edition of *Wiktionary* 2020). It is therefore not accidental that contemporary lockdowns remind people of this particular novel and some articles even recommend it as a 'coronavirus reading' (see, among others, Adams 2020; Iakovou 2020).

After two months in isolation, I bumped into the meme of Figure 1:

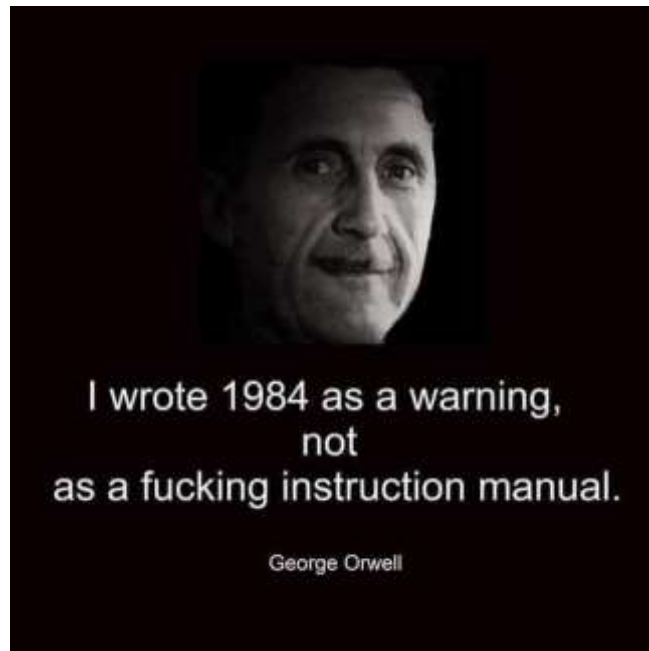


Figure 1. Source: Facebook.

The humorous meaning of Figure 1 is obviously based on the above-mentioned comparison, interpretation, and metonymy, and implies that current restrictions and state measures against the spread of COVID-19 disease were perceived as analogous to the circumstances in Oceania in *1984* (Orwell 2018 [1949]). At a more personal level, it implied that it was about time I read Orwell's novel.

In this context, I intend to offer some preliminary thoughts concerning the Greek memes produced since COVID-19 disease officially arrived at Greece at the end of February 2020. More specifically, I will try to demonstrate that such humorous texts comment on the abrupt, yet pervasive changes that were attested in our lives due to state measures against the spread of COVID-19 disease. To this end, first, I will discuss some indicative examples collected from social media (mostly Facebook) and, simultaneously, I will employ extracts from Orwell's *1984* (2018 [1949]) to point to striking similarities between the sociopolitical context therein and the Greek one (Section 2). However, as I will also try to suggest, there appears to be a significant

difference between the two contexts: in Orwell's dystopia, humour seems to have no place at all; on the contrary, humour thrived (and still thrives) in Greece-under-lockdown, especially among participants in social media, in the form of rapidly created and disseminated memes. So, I will also try to account for this difference by arguing that *memory* (a central notion in Orwell's novel) is a crucial factor for the production of such humour. I will also argue that, since COVID-19-related memes are premised on the comparison between past and present sociopolitical conditions, they should be further investigated as instances of political humour (Section 3).

2. Humorously accounting for the lockdown

In this Section, I discuss some indicative examples of a corpus of 140 Greek humorous memes circulated online, referring to the Greek lockdown and its consequences, and collected from February until July 2020. In particular, I intend to suggest that such humour is produced through a more or less implicit comparison between pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 everyday life. The comparison brings to the surface the differences and oppositions between these two sociopolitical contexts, which form the core of humour. If humour is based on *incongruity* or *script opposition* (i.e. an opposition between experience-constructed mental frames evoked to interpret aspects of social reality; see Raskin 1985; Attardo 2001, 2020), the memes examined here represent the post-COVID-19 context in Greece as incongruous and 'abnormal' when compared *and opposed to* the 'normal' pre-COVID-19 one. In other words, the new scripts emerging under lockdown conditions are evaluated as abnormal and incompatible with the old ones. Alongside humorous memes, I will use quotations from Orwell's *1984* (2018 [1949], below the analysis of relevant Figures) to highlight the similarities between the Greek lockdown and Orwell's Oceania.

The most striking and unexpected change in our daily lives was the fact that we were forced to notify the Greek authorities about where we were going when leaving home and why. Those who went to work carried with them a special permission signed by their employers, while for all other movements we had to send a text-message to get permission from the state (see Section 1). Our mobile phone screens became the Orwellian telescreens through which our movements were monitored. Figures (2-3) satirise these new conditions:¹



Figure 2. “50 years later: ‘Grandpa, which side were you on during the coronavirus years?’. ‘Son, I was with the rebels’ (he got out to buy bread without texting)”. Source: Facebook.

¹ All the data presented here was translated by the author for the purposes of the present study. Unconventional spelling was maintained in the Greek original texts, but was not reproduced in the English translations. Square brackets include additional explanatory material.



Figure 3. “‘Lord, may I go out?’ Send ‘come out’ to 13033”
[text-messages for movement permissions had to be sent to 13033]. Source: Facebook.

Figure (2) humorously comments on the fact that people could not even go outside to buy some bread without notifying state authorities. Not texting before going out would be perceived as an act of resistance against the measures, performed only by rebels. Figure (3) frames such text-messages as incongruous by suggesting that even Lazarus who walked out from his grave alive had to ask for Jesus Christ’s permission to go out via text-messaging (cf. the New Testament narrative in John 11: 1-46). A comparable monitoring of people’s movements even inside their homes was part of everyday life in Orwell’s Oceania:

The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. (...) You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised. (...) With the development of the television, and the technical advance which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, private life came to an end. Every citizen, or at least every citizen important enough to be worth watching, could be kept for twenty-four hours a day under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda, with all other channels of communication closed. The possibility of enforcing not only complete obedience to the will of the State, but complete uniformity of opinion on all subjects, now existed for the first time.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 5, 259-260)

People who were caught by the police for not carrying the required authorisation for going out had to pay a fine. Figure (4) humorously suggests that even stray cats were expected to comply with these measures:



Figure 4. “I got out to chase mice!!” Source: Facebook.

Police patrols were omnipresent so it was not easy to escape. In Figure (5), police officers are humorously represented as friendly people to have a chat with, since nobody else was out and available:



Figure 5. “Are you tired of staying indoors? Do you feel lonely? Do you want to talk to somebody? In every corner of the city, you will find one of our people [i.e. police officers] to chat with. It’s the person who will ask you: What are you doing? Where do you go? Why do you go [there]? What time did you leave [home]? What time will you be back... And all this only for 150 euro [i.e. the fine for ‘illegal’ movements at that time]. [The Greek police is] always at citizens’ service”. Source: Facebook.

Especially during Easter holidays, Greeks were not allowed to leave their homes or go to the countryside at all. Fines and police patrols were doubled and the meme in Figure (6) proposes new ‘possible’ ways of travelling for Easter without being caught by the police:



Figure 6. “Regular itineraries for Easter have begun”. Source: Facebook.

The “complete obedience to the will of the State” (Orwell 2018 [1949]: 260, see above) was enforced through patrols in the streets of Oceania as well:

Indeed, it was unwise to be seen in such places, unless you had definite business there. The patrols might stop you if you happened to run into them. ‘May I see your papers, comrade? What are you doing here? What time did you leave work? Is this your usual way home?’

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 106)

Figures (2-6) frame as incongruous and abnormal the new conditions or, in other words, the new scripts of living under lockdown: being outside without state permission was not allowed and we had to pay fines for daring to do something like this (Figures 2-5), while we could not travel even within the Greek borders (Figure 6). A comparison with scripts of previous conditions, where we could go wherever we wanted whenever we wanted, is implicit but omnipresent in such humour.

At the same time, the meaning of some words changed and/or contradictory information was disseminated by the state (see *Newspeak* and *Doublethink* in Section 1). Figure (7) humorously comments on restrictions on movements and social gatherings through a fictional meaning change:

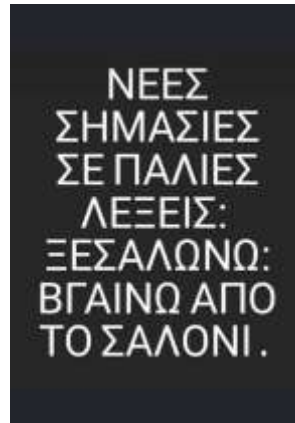


Figure 7. “New meanings of old words – To party hard: to exit the living room”. Source: Facebook.

A pun is used here to create humour. The pun is based on folk etymology: the informal verb *ξεσαλώνω* ‘party hard’ [ksesalóno] is reinterpreted as a compound word consisting of the prefix *ξε* [kse] signifying exit or distancing (among other things) and the noun the word *σαλόνι* ‘living room’ [salóni], thus supposedly meaning ‘exiting the living room’. It is therefore implied that exiting the living room is nowadays perceived as a night out partying hard and/or the furthest we can go without permission. The meaning of words was also modified because of the new sociopolitical conditions in 1984:

Its [i.e. Newspeak’s] vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 377)

A COVID-19 version of *Doublethink* forms the basis of the humour in Figure (8):



Figure 8. “If I got it right, the mask that we are forced to wear from Monday onwards does not protect from the virus but from the fine”. Source: Facebook.

Before and during the lockdown, we were warned against wearing masks because, as we were told, they would do more harm than good (and most probably due to limited availability of masks). When lockdown measures became loose (and masks were manufactured and available for sale in Greece by then), the use of masks was recommended and even obligatory in certain places (e.g. hospitals, shops, transportation) or for certain people (e.g. medical staff and patients, customers and employees in public transportation and shops). The meme points to the

contradictory information conveyed by state officials who first deterred us from wearing masks and then forced us to wear them for exactly the same reason: “our own protection”. The political regime in Oceania was built on similar contradictions:

His mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing both of them, to use logic against logic. (...) The official ideology abounds with contradictions.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 44, 272)

The lockdown had significant repercussions on our perception of social reality and our everyday activities. First of all, after a few days of staying indoors, we gradually lost our sense of time, while at the same time we could not see any end to this situation or any way out of it:



Figure 9. “This March has lasted for 5 months plus two weeks which will be critical”. Source: Facebook.



Figure 10. “We will remember all this at the retirement home while playing dominos, listening to Tsiodras [i.e. the Greek epidemiologist in charge of the medical committee consulting the Greek government on how to handle the COVID-19 disease] saying that the next two weeks will be critical, and we will laugh”. Source: Facebook.

Figure (9) alludes to the fact that staying indoors for several days in a row made us lose our sense of time, while Figure (10) humorously predicts that the lockdown will last for several years, namely until we become old and live in retirement homes. In both memes, reference is made to the “next two weeks which will be critical” for the spread of the disease, that is, a phrase often repeated by the epidemiologists who participated in the medical committee collaborating

with the Greek government. The phrase was perhaps intended to provide a time-frame or perspective to the citizens who coped with the harsh reality of the lockdown, but it ended up being repeated week after week, so nobody could tell when these “two critical weeks” would end. Losing one’s sense of time is represented as incongruous, while the same holds for not being able to see a way out of the lockdown. In ‘normal’ life and scripts, a month usually feels like a month (and not like 5 months) and not many incongruous situations are normally prolonged indefinitely for everybody. Similar experiences were part of people’s lives in 1984:

A sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984. It must be around that date (...); but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two. (...) And what way of knowing [did he have] that the dominion of the Party would not endure FOR EVER?

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 10, 34, emphasis in the original)

The lockdown also severely affected social relationships: people could not meet in person, as social gatherings were restricted (see Section 1). Social distancing made people feel like strangers to one another, intimacy and solidarity seemed to fade out and were often replaced by feelings of mistrust, indifference, or even hostility, especially if one suspected that the other might be infected with the virus. The following memes are illustrative:

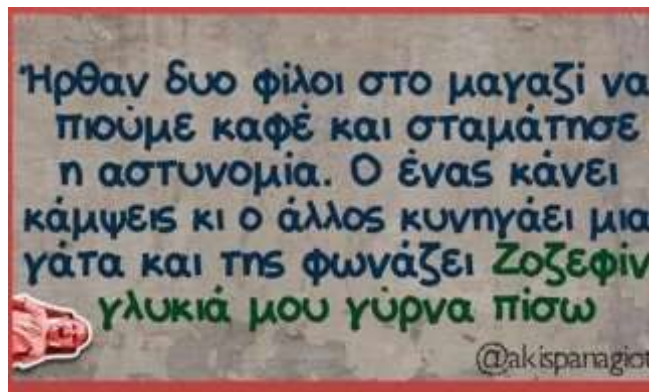


Figure 11. “Two friends [of mine] came to the shop to have a coffee and the police stopped [and entered the shop]. One of them is doing pushups and the other is chasing after a cat shouting ‘Josephine sweetheart, please come back’”. Source: Facebook.



Figure 12. “My best friend is a doctor and I ask her ‘what should I do for my cold?’ and she says ‘Be careful not to infect me’”. Source: Facebook.



Figure 13. “[This is] you when you try not to cough and [make] other people think that you are infected with the coronavirus”. Source: Facebook.



Figure 14. “We keep our distance and we are forced to gossip aloud; this is what they did to us”. Source: Facebook.

In Figure (11), restrictions on social gatherings are represented as incongruous since they force people to pretend that they are working out or walking their pets, which are both activities allowed during the lockdown (see Section 1). People do not care for each other anymore (doctors do not offer medical advice, according to Figure 12) and instead become suspicious of anyone coughing in public (Figure 13). In addition, in the past, people came close to each other to gossip in low voices so as not to be heard by third parties. This script has changed as nowadays social distancing forces us to speak and gossip aloud, even if we risk being heard by third parties (Figure 14). All such incongruities emerge from humourists' comparison between scripts accounting for present and past conditions: in the past, people could meet for a coffee in a shop, care for the sick, and enjoy some privacy when gossiping. Previous scripts of everyday life are being replaced with new, opposing and abnormal ones. In Oceania, people's private conversations could be overheard by the state, while people showed no compassion for each other and would betray their loved ones to save themselves from suffering:

As they drifted down the crowded pavements, not quite abreast and never looking at one another, they carried on a curious, intermittent conversation which flicked on and off like the beams of a light house, suddenly nipped into silence by the approach of a Party uniform or the proximity of a telescreen, then taken up again minutes later in the middle of a sentence, then abruptly cut short as they parted at the agreed spot, then continued almost without introduction on the following day.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 161-162)

‘Sometimes’, she said, ‘they threaten you with something you can’t stand up to, can’t even think about. And then you say, ‘Don’t do it to me, do it to somebody else, do it to so-and-so’. And perhaps you might pretend, afterwards, that it was only a trick and that you just said it to make them stop and didn’t really mean it. But that isn’t true. At the time when it happens you do mean it. You think there is no other way of saving yourself, and you’re quite ready to save yourself that way. You WANT it to happen to the other person. You don’t give a damn what they suffer. All you care about is yourself’. ‘All you care about is yourself’, he echoed.

‘And after that, you don’t feel the same towards the other person any longer’.

‘No’, he said, ‘you don’t feel the same’.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 369, emphasis in the original)

Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the ancient time, to a time when there was still privacy, love, and friendship, and when the members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason. (...) Such things, he saw, could not happen today. Today there were fear, hatred and pain, but not dignity of emotion, no deep and complex sorrows.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 38)

To sum up, the limited number of memes discussed here demonstrates how Greek people perceived the changes effectuated to prevent COVID-19 disease from spreading in the Greek community. On the basis of their lockdown experiences, they build scripts which are compared and opposed to those of the recent past, thus creating humorous representations and evaluations of their current living conditions. The differences examined here pertain to restrictions on movement, the role of the police in enforcing the measures, the contradictions in the public discourse concerning the disease and the changes in words’ meanings, as well as the negative consequences of social distancing on social relationships. All those aspects of life under lockdown in Greece appear to remind us of the conditions in Orwell’s (2018 [1949]) Oceania.

3. Memory and humour

Orwell’s (2018 [1949]) characters live in a society where there is no memory of the past:

The past, he reflected, had not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed. For how could you establish even the most obvious fact when there existed no record outside your own memory? (...) Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth. (...) History has stopped.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 45, 95, 195)

The present discussion has tried to show that such memory (in the form of scripts; see Section 2) is the main ingredient of humour: that is, the benchmark against which current conditions are evaluated as opposing or incongruous to previous ones (see also Sheftel 2011). Lack of memory could be one of the reasons why there seems to be no humour in Orwell’s world. On the contrary, the existence of memory is exactly the reason why we have witnessed the generation of so many memes during the lockdown and the spread of COVID-19 disease in general: people remember, humourists remember. And what they remember is more or less different from what they currently experience. Moreover, at least so far, the past is assessed as normal compared to the present, which is represented as abnormal and incongruous. In other words, through humour, the scripts of the past are represented as normal, while these constructed during current lockdown experiences are projected as abnormal. In this sense, jokes are a kind of *memory exercise*: they keep our memories alive and project them in a positive manner, bringing together those who share them.

Orwell goes one step further by suggesting that memory and the ensuing comparison between the past and the present could make people protest and revolt against the regime. In Oceania, however, people could not make any comparison between their current situation and the past one, namely before the revolution that changed their lives:

The masses never revolt of their own accord, and they never revolt merely because they are oppressed. Indeed, so long as they are not permitted to have standards of comparison, they never become aware that they are oppressed. (...) [T]he Party member, like the proletarian, tolerates present-day conditions because he has no standards of comparison.

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 261, 268)

Jokes are indeed based on memory and comparison, but could they generate revolutions?

Humour scholars have for a long time argued against the idea that political jokes and political humour, in general, constitute means for resisting against, and eventually subverting, repressive conditions and regimes. Cochran convincingly argues that

[t]he joke is a protest, certainly, even in its sharing of risk and laughter a more than private protest. But its efficacy is psychological, not political. Generically, the joke is Janus-faced – at once assertion of defiance and admission of defeat, it disparages itself even in its telling, proclaims its own limits, is always at least partly told on the teller. A private independence is maintained, but no public change is effected.

(Cochran 1989: 272)

In a similar vein, Billig (2005: 213) claims that jokes which seem rebellious “provide alibis for those who do not dare to rebel” and “enable those who do not risk rebellion to live with their conscience”. On the contrary, “the consequences of such humour might be conformist rather than radical, disciplinary, not rebellious” (Billig 2005: 211), that is, indicating people’s obedience to and acceptance of the ‘new’ sociopolitical conditions (see also Speier 1998: 1358, 1395; Kishtainy 2009: 53-54, 61-63; Tsakona 2015, 2020: 33-48; Waterlow 2018; Nicholls 2020: 301, 313, and references therein). This is more or less true of the Greek case examined here, as it seems that Greek people complied with the measures against the spread of COVID-19 disease to a significant extent. The humorous texts and the comparison they involve most clearly confirm that Greeks were fully aware of what was asked of them and why. Jokes and memes thus became the pages of a bleak calendar or journal illustrating our sinking into oppression, and marking our effort to take a quick breath and imagine a reality where such measures would be ridiculed, ignored, and subverted. After all, humour can function as a counter-memory allowing us to “express dissent from dominant narratives” (Sheftel 2011: 145) without, however, seriously damaging the dominant narratives.

In this sense, lockdown or COVID-19 jokes referring to the sociopolitical changes occurring in various societies resemble other political or crisis jokes, which are also generated as reactions to abrupt and radical changes in people’s lives. Given that political jokes allow people to express their anxieties and protests against their living conditions, bolster people’s morale, and strengthen their hope for the future, lockdown or COVID-19 jokes can safely be subsumed under this category (on the sociopolitical functions of political humour see, among others, Cochran 1989; Speier 1998; Kishtainy 2009; Sheftel 2011; Tsakona & Popa 2011: 5-16; Tsakona 2015, 2020, and references therein). It could also be suggested that they exhibit similarities to the whispered jokes or other forms of humour produced in totalitarian regimes, especially communist ones (see Davies 1998, 2011; Krikmann & Laineste 2009; Waterlow 2018, and references therein).²

² An in-depth comparison between COVID-19 jokes and communist ones seems most challenging, but lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Due to space limitations, this paper has examined only a very small number of COVID-19 jokes coming from the Greek context, where the spread of COVID-19 disease was comparatively limited and a relatively small number of casualties were documented during the first lockdown in spring 2020. The jokes emerging in countries with different sociopolitical characteristics, epidemiological profiles, and more numerous cases and casualties (e.g. Italy, Spain, USA, Great Britain, Brazil) may reveal different tendencies, topics, and incongruities: “collective memory will take shape differently, depending on whether the pandemic was experienced in places with few or many corona victims, in autocratic regimes, in failing or successful democracies, from the top or the bottom of global society” (Erlil 2020: 50). It would also be interesting to compare them with Greek data from the second lockdown which began in November 2020, when the numbers of cases and casualties officially announced by the Greek state authorities were much higher than in spring 2020. After all, different sociocultural assumptions and conditions are expected to give rise to different jokes (Tsakona 2020). Furthermore, there are several topics attested in the Greek data examined here that were not mentioned at all in this paper: for example, memes commenting on the lockdown consequences on education, tourism, internal political affairs, people’s mental and physical health, and the representation of the disease and the lockdown by the media. Consequently, further research is called for to account for such humorous texts as well.

As a final note, it seems reasonable to suggest that jokes are and will be created about COVID-19 disease and its repercussions as long as people still feel that their lives have changed or are changing. For us, humour scholars, it would definitely be interesting to wait and see, among other things, when such jokes will *stop* being produced: Will this happen when the virus is contained (e.g. through vaccination or medical treatment)? When the media lose (and loose) their interest in the spread of the disease? When changes are consolidated and manage to shape new ways of living? Or perhaps when people stop remembering that there was a different kind of life back then? Such loss of memory also troubled Orwell:

Was he, then, ALONE in the possession of a memory? (...) He meditated resentfully on the physical texture of life. Had it always been like this? (...) Always in your stomach and in your skin there was a sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something that you had a right to. (...) Why should one feel it to be intolerable unless one had some kind of ancestral memory that things had once been different?

(Orwell 2018 [1949]: 75-76, emphasis in the original)

On the other hand, “[t]he memory of the corona crisis could also become entirely blocked out or overwritten by ensuing economic or political crises” (Erlil 2020: 50). Time and jokes will tell.

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