

Humor en Radicalisering binnen Collectieve Actie

Linde Zandt

Studentnummer: s3989526

Afdeling Psychologie, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

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Begeleider: dr. Hedy Grejdanus

Tweede beoordelaar: dr. José Heesink

In samenwerking met: Ian Bruinenberg, Nienke Euverman, Luka Sophie Junge, Joske

Lamberink en Sidartha Mamedio Costa.

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Humour and Radicalisation within Collective Action**Abstract**

Humour can play a role in collective action in many ways. Research shows that humour can increase cohesion within a group. Such greater group cohesion appears to be an important factor in the process of radicalisation. It also seems that humour can overshadow a real message, making it easier to accept ideas. By conducting interviews, this study examines how left-wing and radical activists view the role of humour in radicalisation within collective action. Within a period of seven days, a total of eight participants were interviewed by conducting an open conversation. This included their opinions on the influence of humour on ties within the group and on the role of humour in stimulating radicalisation. Results showed that humour can strengthen the ties within a movement; it can also stimulate the process of radicalisation by normalising a radical idea. Radical left-wing movements seem to lack humour. From this we can conclude that humour plays a role in the process of radicalisation in collective action, but radical groups use little humour.

Keywords: Collective action, humour, radicalisation, groupcohesion

Samenvatting

Humor kan op meerdere manieren een rol spelen bij collectieve actie. Uit onderzoek blijkt dat humor kan zorgen voor een grotere samenhang binnen in een groep. Zo'n grote groepscohesie blijkt een belangrijke factor te zijn voor het proces van radicalisering. Daarnaast lijkt humor een werkelijke boodschap te kunnen overschaduwen, waardoor ideeën makkelijker aangenomen worden. In dit onderzoek wordt doormiddel van het afnemen van interviews onderzocht hoe (radicaal-) linkse activisten de rol van humor in radicalisering binnen collectieve actie zien. In totaal zijn binnen een periode van zeven dagen acht deelnemers geïnterviewd door het voeren van een open gesprek. Hierbij wordt zowel gekeken naar hun mening over de invloed van humor op banden binnen de groep en over de rol van humor in het stimuleren van radicalisering. Resultaten lieten zien dat humor de banden binnen een beweging kan versterken, ook kan humor het proces van radicalisering stimuleren door het normaliseren van een radicaal idee. Radicale linkse bewegingen lijken een gebrek aan humor te hebben. Hieruit kan geconcludeerd worden dat humor een rol speelt in het proces van radicalisering bij collectieve actie, echter gebruiken radicale groepen weinig humor.

Trefwoorden: collectieve actie, humor, radicalisering, groepscohesie

Humor en Radicalisering binnen Collectieve Actie

Op het moment ervaren we de grootste golf van massale sociale bewegingen ooit (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel, 2020). Er is sprake van collectieve actie wanneer een gedeeld maatschappelijk belang een groep mensen motiveert om in actie te komen. Dit kan tot stand komen wanneer een situatie van ongelijkheid, onderdrukking of ander ongenoegen voorvalt (Horn, 2013). De actie die vervolgens ondernomen wordt, is meestal om een doel te bereiken, waarvan de activisten overtuigd zijn dat het de samenleving zal verbeteren (Gage, 2018). Deze acties hebben de potentie om grote veranderingen te veroorzaken binnen de samenleving (Chenoweth et al., 2011). Collectieve actie komt wereldwijd voor. Van het Black Lives Matter protest in de Verenigde Staten (Buchanan et al., 2020) tot kleinschalige protesten op de Grote Markt in Groningen (DVHN-redactie, 2021). Collectieve actie hoeft zich echter niet per definitie te uiten in protesten, maar kan zich ook in een online vorm laten zien (Yannopoulou et al., 2019). In dit onderzoek zal het concept collectieve actie dus ook in een brede zin bekeken worden.

Bij collectieve actie wordt al sinds jaren gebruik gemaakt van humor ('t Hart, 2007). 't Hart (2016) geeft de volgende definitie van humor:

Humor behoort tot de rijke instrumenten van communicatie en kan als zodanig worden gebruikt bij sociaal protest. (...) Typische middelen van humor zijn grappen, spotprenten, humoristische gezangen, absurd theater, carnavaleske festiviteiten. Een andere vorm van humor met een lange traditie is de parodie en de satire. (p. 198)

Het concept humor is in dit onderzoek nog verder uitgebreid naar lachen en plezier hebben rondom collectieve actie, daarbij komt ook een modernere vorm van humor kijken, namelijk memes op sociale media.

In dit onderzoek staat de rol van humor in radicalisering van collectieve actie centraal. Recent is er een groeiende focus op het proces van radicalisering, dit is het ontwikkelen van

een houding en bepaalde overtuiging die zou kunnen leiden tot radicaal gedrag, waaronder terrorisme (Wolfowicz et al., 2019). Terrorisme is dus een extreme vorm van radicaal gedrag, daarom wordt in dit onderzoek ook informatie over terroristische bewegingen meegenomen in het vooronderzoek. Een radicale activist is niet per definitie een terrorist, maar andersom is dat wel het geval. Meerdere factoren dragen bij aan het proces van radicalisering. Dit zijn individuele processen, groepsprocessen en massa-publieke mechanismen (McCauley et al., 2008). Het is een langdurig proces wat niet snel en makkelijk voorvalt (Silke, 2008). Om radicalisering te kunnen koppelen aan het gebruik van humor en collectieve actie is het van belang om eerst wat dieper in te gaan op collectieve actie en humor.

Collectieve actie en humor

Van Zomeren et al., (2008) vormen een voorspellend model met betrekking tot collectieve actie, het Sociale Identiteits Model van Collective Actie (SIMCA). Dit model is gebaseerd op drie concepten: sociale identiteit, het gevoel van oneerlijkheid en het gevoel van groepsefficiëntie. SIMCA stelt voor dat de sociale identiteit het gevoel voor oneerlijkheid en de groepsefficiëntie voorspelt en de ervaringen van beiden beïnvloedt. Sociale identiteit is het subjectieve gevoel van het identificeren met een bepaalde groep mensen. Een sterkere sociale identiteit zal voor een grotere motivatie zorgen om een steentje bij te dragen collectieve actie.

Humor helpt bij het versterken van de collectiviteit van een beweging en zorgt voor een sterkere samenhang binnen de groep (Fominaya, 2007). Ook helpt humor bij het vormen van een gedeelde identiteit en creëren van solidariteit (Helmy & Frerichs, 2013). Deze functie van humor lijkt een mooie koppeling te zijn aan het proces van radicalisering.

Groepscohesie blijkt namelijk een grote rol te spelen bij het proces van radicalisering. Hoe sterker iemands identificatie met de groep en hoe meer “wij” versus “zij” op de voorgrond ligt, hoe sneller vooroordelen over de ‘out-group’ zullen ontstaan (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Deze vooroordelen zullen vervolgens gebruikt worden om agressiviteit richting de

andere groep te veroorloven (Bar-Tal, 2013). Daarnaast blijkt wanneer iemand zich in hogere mate identificeert met de groep, de motivatie geweld te gebruiken om een gezamenlijk doel te bereiken groter is (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018). Een soortgelijke redenatie is te vinden in onderzoek van Olès (2019). Dit komt overeen met de bevinding dat voormalig terroristen voornamelijk de hechtheid met andere groepsleden, het gemeenschappelijke doel en het risico wat samen werd gedeeld missen aan hun voormalige activiteit binnen een terroristische beweging (Silke, 2008). Een van de kenmerken van terroristische organisaties is dan ook het “wij” versus “zij” idee (Moghaddam, 2005). Groepssamenhang speelt in radicale bewegingen dus een grote rol.

Zoals hierboven aangestipt kan humor dus de banden tussen groepsleden versterken en zorgen voor een sterkere groepscohesie. Een sterke groepscohesie is een belangrijke factor binnen het proces van radicalisering. Zou dit kunnen betekenen dat het gebruik van humor binnen collectieve actie op deze manier invloed heeft op radicalisering?

Een andere manier waarop humor zou kunnen bijdragen aan radicalisering van collectieve actie is de manier hoe het een gebrachte boodschap verandert. Humor verzwakt de verdediging van het publiek en versterkt daardoor de overtuigingskracht van de boodschap (Speier, 1998). Kritiek die als een grap wordt gebracht, is moeilijker te weerleggen met rationele argumenten ('t Hart, 2007). Hierdoor zou een radicale boodschap dus ook moeilijker te weerleggen zijn, wanneer het doormiddel van humor wordt gebracht, wat radicalisering stimuleert. Humor biedt de mogelijkheid om overheersende ideeën te bespotten en minderheden een communicatiemiddel te geven (Downe, 1999). Dit zou kunnen betekenen dat radicale ideologieën op deze manier een makkelijkere weg naar de voorgrond kunnen krijgen. Dit effect van humor is ook terug te zien in het alledaagse leven. Onderzoek naar pesten toont bijvoorbeeld aan dat humor de kracht heeft om de ware bedoeling van een

grap/opmerking te overschaduwen (Carrera et al., 2011), waardoor er, zoals Swain (1998) benoemt, een dunne lijn is tussen een grap en pesten.

Wellicht bestaat deze dunne lijn ook bij collectieve acties. Zou humor de kracht hebben om een te vergaande actie toch goed te keuren, omdat het maar een grap is? Daarnaast blijkt dat humor de kans op het krijgen van negatieve reacties verkleint (Wettergreen, 2009). Zou dit ervoor zorgen dat te vergaande acties door de invloed van humor sneller wordt geaccepteerd? Zou dit samen kunnen zorgen dat activisten sneller over hun eigen grenzen heen gaan bij het voeren van collectieve actie door middel van humor?

Het huidige onderzoek

In dit huidige onderzoek wordt dus onderzocht hoe activisten de invloed van humor zien op de samenhang binnen een groep en op radicalisering van een beweging. Dit wordt onderzocht door het in gesprek gaan met Duitse (radicaal-) linkse activisten, die banden hebben met o.a. de Duitse ANTIFA-beweging. Dit is een interessante onderzoeksgroep, omdat deze mensen zowel ervaring hebben met mainstream activisme als radicaler activisme. Hierdoor kunnen deze personen vanuit hun eigen ervaring spreken over zowel (extreem) radicaal activisme als algemener activisme en kunnen ze ook een vergelijking maken tussen die twee. Tijdens de gesprekken zullen open vragen gesteld worden met betrekking tot deze concepten, waardoor de participanten vrij staan om een eigen invulling te geven aan de beantwoording van de vragen. Niet alleen de meningen van de participanten over de losse invloeden van humor op groepscohesie en humor op de verschuiving van grenzen zijn hierbij interessant, maar ook hoe ze een eventueel verband hiertussen zien. De gesprekken zullen geanalyseerd worden en zullen gebruikt worden om de volgende onderzoeksvragen te beantwoorden: Wat is volgens activisten de invloed van humor op groepscohesie? Hoe zien activisten de invloed van humor op het verschuiven van grenzen van wat zij acceptabel vinden binnen collectieve actie?

Methods

Both the method and the results were written collectively by all students, to make this project fit into the timeline and course credits for the bachelor thesis. Hence, the method and results sections describe my own core topics of humour on radicalization and group cohesion as well as the other students' topics. This project received ethics clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (research code: PSY-2122-S-0088).

Participants

In total, eight participants were recruited via the personal network of one of the bachelor thesis students in this project. The sample was recruited in order to grasp a wide range of perspectives on humour in collective action. We asked different activists, from various left-wing movements, who were available to participate in our research. This resulted in a sample that is relatively small and heterogeneous in both age and movement categories. The sample consisted of four males, three females, and one non-binary person. Ages ranged from 18 to 77 years old ($M=37$), with four people from generation Z (born 1997-2012), three people from generation X (born 1965-1980), and one person from generation Post War (born 1928-1945). Participants all originated from Germany, all have anti-fascist beliefs, and have a focus on collective action in Germany. Interviews were conducted with participants with different left-winged political interests and ties to various movements, including the ANTIFA, *Rote Armee Fraktion*, anarchists, and climate movements such as Fridays for future and Extinction Rebellion. We feel it is inappropriate to categorize the participants as members of specific movements, because it would inadequately represent the activists as they are all fluid members of multiple movements. Therefore, in the result section we will use quotes of the participants themselves to elaborate on the movements they are or were active in and the political interests they have. During recruitment, participants were told that we were

interested in humour in the context of past experiences with protest. No inducement to participate was given. Two persons who were invited to participate, did not participate after all, due to the COVID-19 situation.

Semi-structured interviews

Individual, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the information. This made it possible to gather information about the different topics of interest, and also leaving room for individual experiences and diverse points of view related to humour and collective action. Interviews were done with two or three interviewers at a time, as it was more feasible to keep track of the questions asked with another interviewer, as well as having the interview be more of a conversation. One interview was done with only one interviewer because of scheduling reasons. The main language for the interviews was English, however some parts were said in German as it seemed more easy for participants to express themselves more freely. Furthermore, one interview was done entirely in German due to the language barrier, with some explanations in Portuguese for the second interviewer. The other interviews have been conducted in English as the entire project was laid out in English and most interviewers do not speak German. All interviews, except for one, were conducted in real life, in a safe environment in a quiet apartment. One interview has taken place online through Google meet, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The duration of the interviews ranged between 44-97 minutes. All interviews were double audio recorded with mobile phone devices and were transcribed manually. All the recordings were deleted after transcription, due to the privacy regulations. The topics that were covered in the interviews, were (1) involvement in collective action (e.g. ‘What kinds of activism have you taken part in?’), (2) functions of humour in collective action, (3) appropriateness of humour (e.g. ‘Do you think there is anything that might make humour/fun around this cause inappropriate?’), and (4) violence around collective action (e.g. ‘Have you ever experienced a moment in which protest/collective action reached a

tipping point, when the atmosphere became tense/grim/ when the atmosphere changed?’). The main focus of our questions was which effects humour can have in collective action, as we tried to ask the participants as much about their experiences as possible. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The interviews were conducted as casual conversations, using open questions (see the above) as a guideline, in line with the semi-structured interview approach. At the end of the interview there was room for the participants to ask questions or add information or discuss topics they felt were relevant to the interview.

Analytic approach

We chose to use thematic analysis as an analytic method due to it being compatible with open-ended inquiry and a deductive theoretical framework. An initial coding scheme was provided by our supervisor, based on the first four interviews that were transcribed. After that, each transcript was coded by one of the researchers, using the initial coding scheme. Additional codes were added if it was needed, based on new relevant information. We made an attempt to construct a coding scheme that was extensive and that fitted the research questions. See Appendix A for the interview questions and Appendix B for the final coding scheme. A second researcher went over the transcripts again using the enhanced coding scheme. In that way we tried to make sure that all the relevant information in all eight transcripts were coded, allowing us to answer our research questions as thoroughly as possible.

Results

The analysis contains three parts, divided into sub-parts. The analysis begins with an introduction of the participants. After that, we look at different functions of humour within collective action. Finally, we will look at situations in which humour use might be considered inappropriate.

Participants' demographic backgrounds

First and foremost, for the interpretation and understanding of the quotes, it is of importance to be aware of the content of the sample. The sample consists of people from different generations, indicating different eras of left-wing activism. This may have an influence on their points of view about humour in activism, thus this needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the quotes. The political identity of the participants is rather difficult to categorize into specific movements, as this is not set in stone and is always subject to change. An overall striking aspect one should keep in mind is that most participants did not feel like they were part of a solid group.

P3, P4, P5 and P7 are all part of the older generations of the sample (post-war and generation X). These participants have taken part in many forms of activism in the past. Currently, all four participants are implementing their experiences from earlier decades in journalism. In this way, they can still advocate for the things they consider important. P3 is currently furthering political action professionally as part of a political newspaper addressing and informing many activists of current events.

P3: I was mainly in antifascist protesting because in Germany after the reunification there was quite a wave of neo-Nazis and not only neo-Nazi movement but also militant neo-Nazis who attacked people with a migration background but really, we had to sometimes to go to houses where they lived and just stay there to protect them because we knew Nazis are coming, (...). Well, it's [also] important for me to protest around Fridays For Future and against furthering this climate crisis. (...) What I established in my paper was a small group of people like a project who do only climate issues and they reach out to the movement and try to reach the movement to channel the information from the movement in Instagram as mainly, that's where we do it.

P3 became involved in anti-fascist activism after the Berlin Wall fell and there was a rise of neo-Nazi movements. The climate crisis is also a focus of hers.

A striking similarity between P3, P4 and P5 is the start of their activism, in which antifascism was especially prominent. P4 was first involved in street protest and then moved his interest to investigative political journalism. *P4*: Well, I started being active when I was sixteen/seventeen years old [in the '80s] when I was still going to school and for many years that was mainly in an antifascist movement so protesting against Neo-Nazis, green research, organising blockades on the streets when a Neo-Nazi march was scheduled, structural work. So, antifascism is an entire set of different activities from street activities to organising behind the scenes. Later on, in my twenties, I also engaged in the Anti-gentrification movement so like community neighbourhood activism. The whole neighbourhood was in the process of gentrifying so like the rent went up, people were squeezed out and rich investors came in. So those kinds of activities as well. And I basically also participated in what we in Germany would call the Autonomous movement, like anti-G, G8, G20 summits. Generally, it would be more like Anti-capitalism activities. So, a broad variety of different things with these two focusses, Anti-fascism on one hand and Anti-gentrification work on the other hand.

Both P3 and P4 are now contributing to social movements with their career, they have chosen professional journalism as their form of activism.

P5: And we [me and my friends] put fascism on the daily to-do list. We had a hunch that it was in many ministries that there are Nazis in there (...) It was about the rigid solid everyday culture that included Nazis. That still lived and still does now. That we [students] suffered from, in school for example. And we slowly started to fight against that [oppression]. Because we couldn't dream of any kind of future in this country. (...) I started being part of the SPK [*Sozialistische Patienten Kollektiv*]. The SPK is the socialist patient collective. (...) I was only half a year in the RAF [*Rote Armee Fraktion*].

P5 has mentioned his participation in two different movements. He mentions in both participations of the SPK in 1971 and the RAF, his focus on any form of anti-fascism from a socialist and communist point of view. P5 has participated in various street demonstrations, squatting actions as well as the most militant forms of activism such as hostage-taking of an embassy.

P7 has never felt part of a specific movement, which is why eventually he founded his own collective. However, the focus of this collective was similar to the already established movements, the participant mentions leftist, radical, social movements.

P7: Before I also have been a lot in like social movements, I went to some kind of whatever ... leftist left radical and punk rock concerts and places, and you know, so I've been like running around there... (...). I have never really been part of a group, like I never like I never wanted to, be part of the group. (...) I would like to look at it and I wouldn't feel good because there's this dogmatism or there is just like, I don't know what it is. I'm just not uhm... yeah, I'm not someone who is like entering a political group... that easily. Rather, after a while, I just created my own!

Despite the generation gap between the various participants, there is a great deal of overlap between the goals the activists are pushing for. Noteworthy is the shift of the main focus points. Among the older generation, antifascism was the greatest goal to fight for. Given the German history concerning World War II, the split of Germany, as well as the building of the wall in Berlin undoubtedly had an immense impact on the participants' lives. In addition to antifascism, recent activism has included its focus on for example the climate crisis, racism, and feminism. Not only is the younger generation pushing for these, but so are the older ones, through for example journalism, as named above.

In our sample, the younger generation (generation Z) is represented by P1, P2, P6 and P8. These participants are all active in street protests, for various purposes. They have

corresponding political opinions among each other, but also differ in their points of focus. P1 and P8 both mention that they have ties to the ANTIFA.

P8: In Germany, in Berlin... it's a mix between political parties that I identify with and then social-political groups and movements outside that I identify with. Of course, generally, I would identify with ANTIFA, just because I think everybody should, and everybody should be antifascist. So that's something that I identify with. Obviously, I attended a lot of Fridays For Future demonstrations, so I would identify with that as well. Those are groups outside of the traditional political parties that I would identify myself with.

Alongside the ANTIFA, P8 makes a stand against climate change. Before he got the right to vote, because of his age, P8 put out his opinion by attending street protests, for the purpose of contributing to democracy. Climate change is for multiple participants a reason for activism.

P2: It [my focus on collective action] is different things. (...) There was like Fridays for Future, but just some general stuff that I was interested in. And then I also went to this really like left-wing, not left-wing but like leftish political school that really has their own fight against racism club in school. (...) I feel like I'm very interested in feminism just because I feel like that's a topic or an issue that is still very present in my generation [Generation Z] and in my friend groups and in all of my encounters, sort of. (...) It's like everyone, well not everyone, obviously, but like racism or climate change or even the living situation is easier to address and people are more perceivable to it.

Furthermore, P2 feels strongly about the squatting movement and has strong ties to them. She has also participated in different actions concerning the planning of a squatting operation.

A commonality among mainly female participants is the great struggle for feminism. This is not only an important issue for P1 and P2 from generation Z, but also overlaps with the ideologies from P3 from generation X.

P1: I consider myself to be left-radical, radical-left if you say that. I do have connections within the Berlin ANTIFA, but I'm not part of it. I always feel like I have like a half foot in it. (...) I think especially the topic around feminism, this is a huge topic for me and definitely attending a lot of women-organized demonstrations and intersectional feminism also. Since last year, since the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, there has definitely been a shift [of attention to BLM].

In addition, P1 mentions how she has connections to many people in the activism scene, especially a famous street squat in Berlin. She does not consider herself to be an active part of that movement even though she does participate in many events and demonstrations. P1 also mentions that she is anti-capitalistic and thereby critical of the system.

Being critical of the system is a similarity within the sample. All participants want to see change and are committed to it, however, most participants do not feel part of a solid group.

P6: How can I say, it's a lot of social issues I have a problem with and I want to fight against. A lot of issues with racism, fascism, and people being repressed. So what I want to fight for is freedom for everyone, let's call it that, unity.

P6 does not consider themselves to be part of a group. The only group P6 has a connection with is an anarchist group. They meet up with them and go to protests together. As noted, down in the quote above, P6 is fighting for freedom for everybody and makes a stand against racism, fascism and people being repressed.

Concluding, participants were all associated with left-winged, social injustice protests. However, most participants specifically stated that they do not in fact identify with one specific group.

Functions of humour

In this section we cover 1) how humour can serve as a tool for interpersonal relationships 2) the role of humour in radicalisation, 3) the clashing of radical action and humour and 4) the role of humour in coping with activism.

Humour as a tool for strengthening existing interpersonal ties

All participants mentioned the influence and contribution of humour on bonding with the ingroup. Various ways of using humour that can contribute to the bond between people within a group have been named. These included chanting, laughing together and dancing together among other things.

Interestingly, multiple participants mentioned bonding as an effect of making fun of an outgroup. For example, P7 said the following:

P7: If you're inviting people to laugh about someone more powerful, this is bonding.

P7 was not the only interviewee who mentioned bonding as an effect of making fun of an outgroup. P1 and P6 also talked about laughing at an outgroup but they specifically mentioned the police as the outgroup who they made fun of. P6 said the following:

P6: The people got together, and they were singing songs, making fun of the police, holding together, listening to music, singing.

Another example of bonding by joking about an outgroup but then in a context of feminism is mentioned by P1: "also to bond, again, it's a bonding moment if we make fun of the stupid men that just don't get it." The participant points out that for women who have experienced for example body shaming or another hurtful event, joking about men who don't understand the pain that it causes, also is a bonding experience. Making jokes about or

laughing at another group can thus help to form a bond within the group. It seems that the explanation for this is that by making fun of the outgroup the activists in the ingroup distance themselves from the outgroup making the bond between the ingroup stronger.

However, making jokes about a less powerful outgroup or a minority can be problematic as mentioned by P7:

P7: Sexist humour or racist humour or antisemitic humour is always trying to bond over a minority. Like, I mean, women are not a minority, but like, like a less powerful group.

The interviewee is talking about how one of the main international bonding attacks among young men is talking about the hotness of women and making sexist jokes. Hereby the participant expresses their disapproval of this manner of uniting. Apparently, this way of using humour as a goal to form a bond with the ingroup can therefore also bring harm to a minority.

The previous quotes concerned ingroup bonding between activists but can humour also strengthen new ties with the non-activist outgroup?

Humour as a tool to strengthen new ties

There was a pattern of responses from participants that suggested that humour may in fact be a useful tool to strengthen new ties and for broadening a movement of any collective action. P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 and P8 all indicated the above. P3 said the following:

P3: bonding also with people not of your group but with people around you

This participant mentioned this in the context of cynical humour use. They mentioned that cynical humour makes everyone feel like they can still be part of the movement and make others feel more included, even people of the outgroup. P8 mentioned something similar by saying “when there’s a lot of humour it helps to bond people together, bond groups.” Both participants stressed that in a street protest humour can bond different groups and even the ingroup with the outgroup.

In addition to street protests, humour can increase activists' reach through the media.

For instance, through graphics on social media:

P1: With humour [in communist memes] you can just reach a lot more people. And I think it's way more fun to follow them.

Or through music:

P4: I think everybody who listens to that [satirical] song feels like part of a club. So I think yes but there must be more than just humour, you probably need to direct it and pinpoint specifically how you want to use it.

On one hand, most participants seem to agree that humour can be used to bond with the ingroup and to broaden the movement.

Humour cannot broaden a movement

On the other hand, P3 expressed doubts about whether humour broadens a movement. This is in contrast to above-mentioned statements.

P3: When I said that I loved memes or just jokes in whatever channel, I don't think that that those jokes really reach people who aren't into this already. (...) Yeah but I still think, so it would be great if all those jokes would reach other people, but I don't think that it's really... [laughs]

J.L.: So, you actually don't think it raises awareness among people who aren't already invested in the...

P3: No, I don't think so. I didn't think about that before but talking with you, I don't think so because I always, I try to imagine like clowns being at demonstrations and doing stuff, that's funny, but it doesn't ... and then people see it, okay, but I don't think it changes the mind of people who are not invested in the topic before.

The participant thinks out loud about their own experiences. Furthermore, she mentions a love for memes before this specific statement. The memes led to her thought that humour does in fact not broaden a movement but rather includes more people that are like-

minded already. This participant was the only one saying anything about humour not broadening a movement, however corrected herself again in a later statement. It seemed an overall agreement that humour may broaden a movement.

Thus, most participants agree that humour can create new ties between activists and the outgroup, involve people and mobilise a broader audience for collective action. This can happen through different channels, such as music. In other words, humour seems capable of stimulating collective action. However, can it also stimulate involvement in radical action?

Humour stimulates radicalisation

P1, P3, P4 and P6 talked about how humour can normalise a radical thought or action and therefore can contribute to radicalisation: “Even if you’re not communist, I mean I don’t consider myself communist either, but that moment if you read it [an anti-capitalist meme by Simin Jawa], you’re like... (...) it seems so obvious when you make a joke and it’s funny. It just seems obvious to you, like yes of course. (...) And I think that’s probably a process of radicalisation.” (P1) By presenting radical thoughts as normal, through humour, such an idea is more likely to be tolerated.

P6: In politics there may be a lot of humour to like normalise your cause, let’s say it like that, make it more reachable for the people, kind of joking about it, so maybe you can present more radical themes, more radical ideologies or ideas a lot toned down because you’re being funny about it, or joking about it. So, I guess humour is a quite powerful weapon in politics, too.

According to P6, humour can cause radical thoughts or ideas to be expressed with less severity, which ensures that it can reach more people. P6 also mentioned that they think that the first step towards radicalisation is people believing that what they are doing is right or normal, and an ideology can be built on that basis. In addition, P6 deems humour an appropriate means of justifying extreme ideology: “Maybe some people would say humour is not okay to legitimize left-wing radicalism and I, of course, say it is okay.” (P6)

Normalising radical behaviour or thoughts as seen as the basis of radicalisation by P6 is also seen in street protests. Additionally, street protests may turn violent in an instant. An instant, where joking about police allowed street activists to engage in more violent behaviour towards police officers. In doing so, policemen were made smaller as individuals, so the activists approved more of their own behaviour. The same jokes to disparage the police are also used to lower the strain. This use of humour to reduce tension gives the idea that humour use also has an opposite effect of preventing radicalisation.

P3: If you're banning all humour and you're getting more and more straight and getting into a fight mode, then that [banning of humour] makes radicalisation and not the humour. (...) in the Fridays For Future movement people are more laughing than in the Extinction Rebellion so the more you radicalise yourself, the less there is humour I would say. So quite the opposite. (...) So the other way around, perhaps humour can avoid a bad radicalisation.

Quite frankly suggesting that radicalisation is a humourless process, and that humour therefore can halt the development of more radical convictions. Humour and radicalisation are negatively correlated according to P3, which is contradictory to the views of participants mentioned above. If humour and radical action do in fact not seem to work together, then the question arises whether radical activists overall also use less humour.

Radical action and humour clash

An interesting finding regarding the question mentioned above, was the absence of humour within the radical left. It was explicitly stated by P1, 4, 5 and 6 that radical leftists tend to be very serious and make no use of humour. "Especially since a lot of social protests take themselves extremely seriously like the burden of saving the world is on your shoulder, there is no time to laugh." (P4) "They [activists] take it [their actions] quite seriously, I have not really experienced that much humour, it's always like, try to do quite tough and how serious is what we're doing and there was not a lot of space for humour, I felt." (P6)

P4 and P6 describe how the gravity of the activism beliefs leaves little room for humour. The radical left ideology is not something to be joked about, as it is severe and to be taken seriously. However, this lack of humour is considered to be a flaw by other participants. “I still have some [left-wing activist] contacts here in Berlin and also the young sometimes, are all, absolutely humourless. I consider this a serious limit” (P5). Additionally, P1 substantiated the statement by saying:

P1: The radical left (...) are very humourless. They are really not funny. [laughter] It’s just serious shit all the time and everything is taken so seriously. And I think that’s what’s sometimes really annoying because I’m like “Oh my God, don’t take it so seriously, like, do you ever have fun?” (...) However, the radical left is, again, way too serious on topics and way too emotional on topics. And like, weakens themselves, with no effect.

High levels of strictness and solemnity might result in internal conflict and division. P5 provides an example of how the radical left is fragmented into separate leftist groups: “There has been a shift that we [radical left activists] are more and more pointing out or focusing on, or putting political movement into the singular, into the individual, (...) And that’s also, I think from there it also comes that people are fighting against each other all the time. Like “Oh my God, this other left person just silenced me or like misgendered me”, and I think that’s definitely a big topic, and I’m not... but this shouldn’t be the main focus.” This damages the activist solidarity that is vital to successful collective action, because the activists are no longer fighting together towards a collective cause, but each fighting for their own specific beliefs - even against other leftists.

The absence of humour is thus considered harmful to a movement. Even though multiple participants mention that joking around might lighten the tension and further the relationship between activists, participants report that the radical left is not known for its banter among activists. Humour might not fit into that image, but it may serve as a tool in

alleviating some of the psychological pressure that many activists experience as a consequence of their continual fighting for change.

Humour as a coping mechanism in activism

Humour as a coping mechanism has been used for a long time to cope with the feeling of being responsible for saving the world. P4 explains this by saying:

P4: Well, there is this famous Emma Goldman saying, ‘If I can’t dance I don’t want to be in your revolution’ and I like that very much. She said this in the early 1900 and it was meant as a part of the socialist and communist revolutions. Emma Goldman was an anarchist and what she wanted to express is that political activism can’t always be super serious, super severe, super tough, and super straight, there must be room for some fun like dancing and it must be possible to dance and not always to say: “Today we have to save the world.” I think it expresses something which is really important, that beyond these severe and serious business there must be some space for fun, humour, and enjoying emotions. So she at a very early stage way before the internet and the memes she in a way nailed it in that one sentence.

The importance of humour in activism is emphasized here. Humour can be utilized to cope with different aspects of activism. We will analyse four ways in which humour can function as a coping mechanism, based on the different aspects of activism. This will be done in different sub-sections.

Humour as a coping mechanism to better interact or deal with other groups.

Activism can get burdensome due to interactions with the police or other groups of activists. In some situations, these confrontations can even result in violence. According to P1,3,4,5,6 and 8 humour can help to cope with these interactions and the emotions that arise from them.

I.B: Do you think it [humour] also helps to release some stress from activists?

P4: Definitely, especially when you have these confrontations like when we drew a blockade in front of the nuclear power plant or when you have confrontations at the G8-summits with

the police, there is an enormous level of stress on a physical and psychological level so laughing always eases these moments.

P3: So I remember a lot of more cynical jokes amongst us when we were dealing with all this Nazi movement. Because you had to get out your feelings somehow (...) but also kind of coping with the hatred you see or the threats you see and all that to also sometimes to make the situation better for those who are threatened really.

P3 and P4 describe different emotions that can arise from confrontation with the police or other groups. Humour can help deal with these feelings of stress, hate, tension and fear. P3 also mentions a specific kind of humour, cynical humour, when dealing with feelings of hate towards the other group. The use of cynical humour in this context might be used to downgrade the other group, related to the above-mentioned joking about outgroups, which might lead to less negative feelings during and after a confrontation with that group. P8 mentions ironic humour when dealing with feelings of helplessness that can arise in situations where you feel powerless:

P8: The humour that I do like in protest is just being kind of ironic, when for example, when, I've witnessed being at a protest during corona like when the coronavirus was happening and then the police told the organizers to everyone have one like three feet apart, but then the police were so close that the people couldn't be apart. And just taking that with a bit of irony that's something that I find okay, that I do as well, because (...) the organizers make an announcement; alright guys try to be three feet apart, also with the cops or something ... then I mean, it's fine, it's funny. There's nothing you can do about the situation, so you just take it lightly, I guess. So, I guess humour just helps take things lightly

Thus, it seems that different emotions can lead to different styles of humour being used, in the context of confrontation with others. Another differentiation that becomes apparent within dealing with other groups, is the moment in which humour is used. This can be during or after the confrontation:

P6: (...) Like, everybody sat in a circle, singing “Wir haben Spaß”, [laughter] as the police were like surrounding the people, and that was the moment when I was really laughing about it because we’re having fun here, we’re sitting, listening to music, taking drinks, everybody was talking to each other, the police were standing there around us. In that situation, if everybody would have been like surrounded by the police, it could have been something so evil, like “Oh my God, we’re here now, the police is around us”, but the people got together and they were singing songs, making fun of the police, holding together, listening to music, singing.

P4: When you’re in such a tough confrontation and everything is so serious including your physical integrity then afterwards the news that you watch on tv about it is all super heavyweight, I think it’s incredibly important to somehow let it go and share it with others. It’s usually much easier to laugh together than to do something else, but it is also important that you see how others feel.

This indicates that humour can sometimes help during confrontations to avoid a clash, and therefore avoid negative emotions that would otherwise arise during those clashes. By using humour, the tension decreases which creates more room to take a breath. In other words, humour can help de-escalate the situation. At other moments, emotions can get so high that there is no room for humour during the confrontation. In those situations when de-escalation is not possible, humour can function as a coping mechanism after the confrontation to then create the possibility to deal with those emotions and then let go of them.

Humour as a coping mechanism to deal with emotions as a group. Most activism takes place in groups, which means that people can also deal with emotions together. Examples of these emotions are hatred, anger, anxiety, sadness, and helplessness. Humour can be used to cope with these emotions. According to P1,3,4,5 and 8, it is important to laugh together because it is a good way to get your feelings out and talk about what happened. In this way, humour can also help to de-stress and take away tension. Lastly, humour can also help to deal with feelings of repression.

P4: (...) So similar to the clowns you have the possibility to be straightforward and attack someone or to take a different route which is maybe not from A to B directly but surrounding. By using humour, you make fun of someone, and you allow people to express emotions and to laugh about the guy even though you feel like you want to cry because he's so super tough and so unfriendly, but you can laugh about it and that's also an opportunity to let emotions flow

P8: yeah, after a protest, you get like, you could go to a supermarket, buy something to drink and then just sit down on a bench and just kind of talk about the protest, kind of joke about it. And that does help unwind in my opinion. Sort of build down like, regress those feelings of anger you might have had.

P7: (...) there was an Indian move- or like in an Indian village, whenever there would be a new repressive law, they would gather and read it out loud and laugh collectively about it. So, this would be like a gathering to kind of ridicule or to like free themselves from this repressive feeling, which is like standing in front of them.

At different moments, humour can be used in different ways to deal with emotions as a group. For example, during preparation for a protest or demonstration, humour can be used to ease the moment and release tension. In contrast, after a protest or confrontation, humour can make it easier to talk about the cause they stand for in a less heavy way. In addition, humour used after a protest or confrontation can also help to cope with things that happened during activism.

P4: Sometimes there were like twenty people in preparation for an event and everybody was so extremely tight and tense and if someone made a good joke all the tension flowed down like a river that flows down to the valley.

P2: I mean I feel like listening to the music made us feel like we're talking about this. And it just makes it more of a fun activity. I don't think we would have done it if we were just like if we never had a beer and if we never went out after it, we would have just been at the library just painted our posters and then we went. It made it more relaxed, more something enjoyable together.

P2: And this friend of mine, who also gave a speech she was like and next is the neighbourhood legend. And it was really fun, and everyone was really just laughing and just, I don't know, it makes it less formal and makes it more of a get-together.

Humour as a coping mechanism to deal with emotions individually. In addition to coping with emotions as a group, activists individually cope with emotions as well. Activists can deal with these feelings before, after and during collective actions. These negative emotions for instance are anger, anxiety, or feelings of responsibility. These emotions can for example arise during protests when situations get heated.

P6: If you're in a situation, and you're walking along there and suddenly the flames are burning up, you hear the hammering of glass all around you, there's stones flying, cars burning, police officers beating people to shit if you see stuff like that... My heart was pounding, I really was in a state of survival there, I went down to primal instincts like, I don't know, live or die kind of. You see how people get beat to shit, get arrested, people officers are running behind you, and you know if you are not fast enough, they are going to catch you and beat you to shit on the ground.

Besides the functions of humour when coping with emotions in a group, participants talk about two additional functions of humour in the context of coping with emotions on an individual level. The first function is to cope with things they have seen. The second one is to tell themselves that what they did was the right thing to do. It is a way to justify what has happened and lower feelings of doubt and anxiety.

P1: Yeah. I feel like humour is sometimes a good thing to lower your own burden.

Aside from humour being a tool to lower the burden it is also a way to justify things you have done during a protest. Afterwards, activists realize what happened during a protest or demonstration. At moments like those, humour is a way to tell yourself that what you did was the right thing. It makes it easier to cope with feelings of doubt and anxiety.

P6: You need the humour to also kind of tell yourself you're right. Because maybe in situations like that you doubt your activism, you doubt what you are doing, because things

sometimes get quite ugly. So, I guess humour is important to me sometimes too, to cope with the things I saw.

Concluding, humour can serve two additional purposes: to cope with what they saw and to justify their actions.

Humour as a coping mechanism to continue the work of being an activist. As stated above, humour can be used to deal with confrontations and emotions on an individual and group level. This can ease some of the burdens that activists experience, making it easier to continue the work of being an activist. Nevertheless, there are various reasons why being an activist can also be burdensome. For example, activism does not always result in the change you wish to see, it costs a lot of effort, and there are various negative emotions to deal with. Also, activists often tend to put a lot of pressure on themselves, because they feel highly responsible for the cause they are fighting for.

P6: (...) it really brings you down if you see how much effort is put in by people, how many people get hurt, and how little change, how much power the state still has. Seeing how many people get hurt and how many bruises there have been, how many head injuries from police batons, and still so little change. So yeah, it puts a lot of pressure on you.

P2: I feel like especially in left wing activism, there's always this really high standard that people put on themselves, speaking correctly and behaving correctly and just always having to be on the good side, I guess, and never allowing for anything populist. And I think sometimes it gets very tiring of always having to be the ones that phrase what they think well and that they really are thorough in how they express themselves and not never discriminating (...) That [humour] really helps relieve some of that responsibility that you feel like you have if you have a certain political opinion... if you identify with a certain group.

Humour as a coping mechanism to deal with feelings of pressure and responsibility is especially used after events or protests. Humour can then help to cope with these feelings. Also, laughing about things that have happened and being sarcastic can help to keep the

morale up. This is especially useful when feelings of helplessness arise. There are always causes to keep fighting for, which can make it feel like there is no end to activism. Using humour might help with this.

P3: Demonstrations can get nasty as well, so there's always a kind of tension or even fear (...). You can't be active in this, in some ways, border ways to militants, without coping with it, without lowering the tension.

P6: (...) It is always so emotional if you see things like that [policemen beating activists], again maybe to process it, but in situations like that you maybe only give humour to process the situation, to keep the comadre up, to not focus on the bad things that are happening. But kind of making a joke out of it, like 'We gotta do this, what happened was shit'. Laughing about it, being sarcastic about it, and next time is going to be better. Maybe that can help to keep the morale up and the fighting spirit, but it doesn't necessarily relieve the pressure. It's still there, because you always experience it again and the humour doesn't stop it, because it's not my choice, it's the state and the problems in the world.

Another way in which humour can help activists to continue their work, is by bringing back some of the joy into activism. By making fun of situations, you can take away some of the seriousness.

P6: Humour is probably quite a powerful weapon because you can make fun of things and probably take the piss out of some situations, tone things down. (...) humour brings interest or brings away from the seriousness and more to the joy and the fun and kind of like, it brings people more into it I think.

P4: Political activism can't always be super serious, super severe, super tough, and super straight, there must be room for some fun like dancing and it must be possible to dance and not always to say: 'Today we have to save the world.' I think it expresses something which is really important that beyond these severe and serious business there must be some space for fun, humour, and enjoying emotions.

In conclusion, there are numerous reasons why activism can get burdensome. Humour can function as a coping mechanism in different ways to avoid the burden of being an activist getting too heavy, making it possible to continue the work of being an activist.

Inappropriateness of using humour in collective active action

Humour is widely used by activists; however, humour is not always appropriate. There are different situations in which humour might not be appropriate. First of all, when others have been treated badly, and therefore emotions are high.

P4: If you see that others have been treated, let's say much worse than you and are crying, then it's inappropriate. So it very much depends on the situation. I think humour general a great weapon but you need to be very aware of how you can use it and direct it.

P8: (...) because if someone gets arrested and they also get like punched in the face and they're bleeding while being carried to the police truck, it's, I don't think it's appropriate to laugh about that, because somebody actually suffered and paid a heavy price. So it depends on the outcome if... if it was difficult, but everyone got home safely, then of course humour is a great way. If it didn't go well and people went to jail, then it's, I'm not sure if I would use humour. (...) But if someone you know suffers then that's not an appropriate moment for humour in my opinion.

P6: I'd say humour is not okay if you are talking about any of the serious issues, like humour at George Floyd. Taking humour for that, that'd be like totally out of place. Humour at serious issues where people got hurt, people even died, or people could die, or people's lives could be, how can I say, diminishing the actual worth of a human through humour. So as soon as humour attacks like, as soon as humour gets inhumane, like calls for violence maybe, in a sarcastic way, against minorities or people that don't really have to do, that can't do anything for their ethnic identity, for their skin colour, their age, whatever. I think as soon as humour attacks something people can't change, as soon as humour kind of calls for violence, it's not okay.

As described by these participants, these are conditions where there is no room for laughter. These conditions are all centred around the people from the ingroup, with a focus on the personal consequences of a clash with other groups or the police.

The second situation in which the use of humour might be inappropriate is when it takes away the focus from the cause that activists fight for.

P1: (...) but... I feel like the radical left is, they're not really funny. They're really serious.

And I think that, I don't know, sometimes it's really important because I mean especially on those days, you have, it's really important to remind yourself what this day actually is about and that this is a serious topic, and sometimes humour can also make the topic seem less important.

P4: (...) if you're always funny there could be the danger of losing focus on the whole message. In a way it's naturally the case that the topics that you raise are in a way serious topics like injustice, BLM-movement, neo-Nazis, racism, protests against summit G-8 and so on. In a way it's all serious business so if there's an overdose of humour it carries the risk that you lose the focus of your whole message. If you only make fun about things, then people maybe don't take you serious enough so it's a question of dosing.

So, in order to keep focused on the goal, according to P1 and P4, you should abstain from using humour.

The last situation, which is mentioned by the participants, in which humour is not appropriate, is when it is used to make fun of someone on a personal level.

P6: So as soon as humour attacks like, as soon as humour gets inhumane, like calls for violence maybe, in a sarcastic way, against minorities or people that don't really have to do, that can't do anything for their ethnic identity, for their skin colour, their age, whatever. I think as soon as humour attacks something people can't change (...) it's not okay.

I: And would you say there are moments where humour could be appropriate or not appropriate?

P2: Um, it's like always when it goes on, like personal level, but I feel like that's more generally my opinion than, like specifically on activism. And I feel like discriminating is never no, I don't ever like that in anyways and don't think that is supportive, ever. I think there are some lines that you should not, you should not cross them. (...) In fact, for me, it's mostly certain words that I use. I don't like when people say disabled, like in Germany, you know, it's a very common word to say. Yeah, It's discriminating, and oftentimes I'm like please don't use that word. Why are you doing that? Because I feel like language is really impactful. And the only thing and that's the whole thing also with gendering. That's because our language is like the whole way we think, you know, and so impactful. So, I think we should watch it.

When humour attacks specific people or groups, especially minorities it is thus not okay to use humour.

Concluding, when considering the use of humour in activism, it is important to keep in mind the situations in which humour might not be appropriate.

Discussie

Het doel van dit onderzoek is meer inzicht krijgen in de invloed van humor op collectieve actie. In het specifiek zijn de volgende vragen van belang: Wat is volgens (radicaal-) linkse activisten de invloed van humor op de mate van groepscohesie? Hoe zien (radicaal-) linke activisten de rol van humor in het proces van radicalisering van een beweging? Zien zij hier ook een verband tussen? Deze vragen zijn onderzocht door het afnemen van een klein aantal semigestructureerde interviews, die vervolgens doormiddel van thematische analyse zijn onderzocht. De belangrijkste bevindingen zijn als volgt: Ten eerste heeft humor een positieve invloed op het versterken van de banden binnen een sociale beweging. Ten tweede zorgt humor dat een radicale gedachte of actie wordt genormaliseerd, waardoor het proces van radicalisering vergemakkelijkt wordt. Er was echter ook bewijs dat humor juist ingezet kan worden om radicalisering te voorkomen. Tot slot is gebleken dat extreem radicale linkse groepen een gebrek aan humor hebben.

Belangrijkste bevindingen

De bevinding dat humor een positieve invloed heeft op het versterken van de banden binnen een sociale beweging ligt in lijn met onderzoek dat aantoonde dat humor zorgt voor een sterkere samenhang binnen in een beweging (Fominaya, 2007) en dat humor helpt bij het vormen van een gedeelde identiteit (Helmy & Frerichs, 2013). Ook ligt de bevinding dat humor een radicale actie kan normaliseren in lijn met het onderzoek naar pesten van Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras (2011). Zij toonden namelijk aan dat humor de kracht heeft om de ware bedoeling van een grap te overschaduwen, dit bleek ook zo te zijn bij humorgebruik rondom collectieve actie. Deze bevinding komt ook terug in het onderzoek waaruit blijkt dat humor de verdediging van het publiek verzwakt (Speier, 1998). Participanten benoemden dat dit effect ervoor kan zorgen dat een radicaal idee makkelijker te verspreiden is door het gebruik van humor.

Onze resultaten voegen echter belangrijke informatie toe aan de bestaande literatuur. Ondanks dat humor volgens participanten kan zorgen dat meer geweld aan acties te pas komt, is er ook een bevinding dat humor juist exact het tegenovergestelde effect kan veroorzaken. Participanten benoemden namelijk dat humor juist kan zorgen dat spanningen worden verminderd. Op deze manier zou humor dus juist kunnen zorgen dat radicalisering wordt voorkomen. Dit is interessant, aangezien humor zo dus juist op een manier kan worden ingezet om radicalisering tegen te gaan.

Het hebben van een sterke groepscohesie is, zoals eerder besproken, een belangrijke factor in het proces van radicalisering (Olès, 2019). Radicale bewegingen hebben dan ook vaak een sterke groepscohesie (Silke, 2008; Moghaddam 2005). Een logische bevinding zou dan zijn dat radicaal linkse activisten dit ook hebben. Humor kan zorgen voor zo'n sterkere groepscohesie (Fominaya, 2007). De participanten gaven echter aan dat ze over het algemeen radicale linkse activisten als humorloos zien. Dit gebrek aan humor wordt door de

participanten gezien als een tekortkoming. De plechtigheid en striktheid die te vinden is binnen de radicale kant van het linkse activisme kan namelijk zorgen voor interne conflicten en verdelingen in de groep. Deze tekortkoming wordt dus gezien als een negatieve invloed op de samenhang binnen een radicale beweging. Dit is een interessante bevinding, aangezien deze negatieve invloed wellicht juist de samenhang in de groep verslechterd, waarbij dus ook het goede klimaat voor radicalisering verslechtert. Het zou kunnen zijn dat er bij radicale groeperingen een andere factor dan humor van invloed is, die zorgt voor de grote samenhang binnen de groep. Wellicht heeft het gebrek aan humor daardoor weinig invloed op deze samenhang. Zou het echter ook mogelijk zijn dat humor aan het begin van het proces van radicalisering wel een belangrijke rol speelt en gedurende het proces de humor steeds minder wordt?

Praktijk toepassing

Door dit onderzoek is meer kennis verkregen over effecten van humor op samenhang van een activistische groep en de rol van humor in radicalisering. De positieve invloed van humor op de samenhang van een groep geeft een mooie ondersteuning voor het stimuleren van humor en plezier binnen groeperingen om de banden binnen een groep te verbeteren.

De bevinding dat humor kan zorgen dat spanningen worden verlaagd, is een mooie ondersteuning voor het in praktijk gebruiken van humor tijdens collectieve actie om spanningen te vermijden. Al hoewel dit al gedaan wordt, door activisten die zich bijvoorbeeld als clowns verkleden, zijn deze resultaten een goede ondersteuning voor de daadwerkelijke werking van deze acties. Dit benadrukt nog extra de manieren van het vermijden van dergelijke spanningen en kan een eventuele fundering zijn voor het opstarten van campagnes vanuit de overheid en het onderwijzen van o.a. politie-eenheden.

Beperkingen

Dit onderzoek heeft verscheidene beperkingen waarmee rekening moet worden gehouden. Ten eerste is de generaliseerbaarheid van dit onderzoek gelimiteerd. De onderzoeksgroep bestaat uit acht participanten die ieder wonen in Berlijn in Duitsland. Al deze participanten behoren tot de categorie (radicaal-) linkse activisten. Dit betekent dan ook dat resultaten enkel toepasbaar zijn op linkse activisten, omdat de bevindingen niet zijn vergeleken met resultaten van rechtse activisten. Natuurlijk kan op basis van de bevindingen een hypothese gecreëerd worden over hoe de verhoudingen bij rechtste activisten liggen, echter is het mogelijk dat deze twee van elkaar verschillen. Ten tweede zijn de bevindingen gebaseerd op de visies en ervaringen van de gesproken activisten. Niet is er gekeken naar de werkelijke situatie en de resultaten zijn niet in praktijk geëvalueerd. Hierdoor moet er rekening gehouden worden met eventuele verkeerde interpretaties van de data. Ten derde is het bij kwalitatief onderzoek altijd van belang in gedachten te houden dat de resultaten beïnvloed kunnen zijn door suggestieve vragen of interpretaties van de interviewer zelf. Ook kan het zijn dat participanten antwoorden voor zich hebben gehouden of zich toch niet zodanig op hun gemak voelden, waardoor ze niet de volledige waarheid hebben verteld. Uiteraard is alles gedaan om dit zo veel mogelijk te voorkomen, door een zo prettig mogelijke sfeer te creëren en de anonimiteit van de deelnemers stevig te benadrukken.

Vervolgonderzoek

Het huidige onderzoek brengt meerdere interessante vooruitzichten voor toekomstig onderzoek met zich mee. De participanten hebben aangegeven dat extreem radicaal linkse activisten een gebrek aan humor hebben, waardoor soms interne conflicten ontstaan. Het is interessant om te onderzoeken in hoeverre deze interne conflicten ook daadwerkelijk schade aanbrengen aan de belangrijke groepscohesie. Zijn er eventueel andere factoren die de groepscohesie weer extra versterken? Daarnaast is het interessant om verder te onderzoeken wat de rol van humor is in het proces van radicalisering. Is er een punt in het proces van

radicalisering waarbij humor verdwijnt of is humor in sommige gevallen van radicalisering nooit aanwezig geweest?

Doordat dit onderzoek op dit moment enkel te generaliseren is naar (-radicaal) linkse activisten, is het ook interessant om te kijken hoe humor een rol speelt bij collectieve actie van rechtse activisten. Maken rechtse activisten net zoveel gebruik van humor binnen collectieve actie als linkse activisten? Zitten hier verschillen in? Is dit dezelfde soort humor of maken ze gebruik van andere vormen? Door dit soort vervolgonderzoek kan meer kennis verkregen worden over verschillen en overeenkomsten tussen links en rechts activisme, wat interessante kennis kan opleveren voor politieke doeleinden.

Conclusie

Uit het onderzoek kunnen een aantal dingen geconcludeerd worden. Ten eerste zorgt humor volgens (radicaal-) linkse activisten voor het versterken van de banden binnen (radicaal-) links activistische groepen. Ten tweede kan humor radicalisering stimuleren door het normaliseren van radicale ideeën door het gebruiken van humor bij het brengen van een boodschap. Wat onduidelijk blijft is de invloed van humor op radicalisering door het versterken van banden binnen een groep. Ondanks dat humor een stimulerend effect op radicalisering blijkt te hebben, lijken extreem linksradicale activisten niet of nauwelijks humor te gebruiken.

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Appendix A

Interview questions

1. Introduction about our interests in the functions of humour around collective action. (*limit this to a couple of minutes*)

1. Oral informed consent as specified in the document for the ethics request.

1. Involvement in collective action (*limit this to a couple of minutes*)

1. What kinds of activism / fighting for social change have you taken part in?

Think of any kind of action you've undertaken to further the collective cause, for instance on the streets or on social media.

b. For which cause(s)?

a. How would you describe your involvement in fighting for this cause / these causes?

How involved have you been, in which roles (participating, organizing), and for how long?

3. Functions of humour

a. So, are these actions always serious, or are you also having fun?

b. Can you think of a time when you had fun or made fun in any way around your fight for social change? I'm interested in fun broadly connected to action, so not only during a specific action, but also during the lead-up to or aftermath of an action.

c. Can you walk me through what exactly was fun about this instance?

d. Can you explain why you were having or making fun? Did you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?

i.If they don't understand what you're asking for, you can probe for specific functions / give

examples: For instance, sometimes people have fun to lighten their mood or to strengthen

their bonds with others. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or

they present something as "just a joke" to avoid others' disapproval.

e. Can you provide other examples of when you have had or made fun in any way around your fight for social change? That is, during, in the lead-up to, or after an action.

a. *If no occasions* □ Why not?

2. Appropriateness of humour

a. Why do you think fun is so frequent/rare around the cause you are fighting for?

b. Do you think there is anything that might make fun around this cause inappropriate?

3. Violence around collective action

. Protests can reach a certain tipping point, when the atmosphere becomes tense or grim.

a. Can you think of a time when you felt that this tipping point happened?

b. Can you walk me through what you experienced during this instance?

c. Why do you think the tipping point was reached here?

d. In situations like this, when the atmosphere changes, some people move to the front and others step back. Have you noticed people in your environment who enjoy these situations, who are having fun?

e. Can you explain why they/you were having or making fun? Did they/you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?

i. *If they don't understand what you're asking for, you can probe for specific functions / give*

examples: For instance, sometimes people have fun to lighten their mood or to strengthen their bonds with others. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or they present something as “just a joke” to avoid others’ disapproval.

f. We have now talked about fun during such an event. Sometimes people also have fun when looking back at grim or tense situations. Can you think of a time when this happened?

g. Can you walk me through what you experienced during this instance?

h. Can you explain why you were having or making fun? Did you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?

If they don't understand what you're asking for, you can probe for specific functions / give

examples: For instance, sometimes people have fun to lighten their mood or to strengthen their bonds with others. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or they present something as “just a joke” to avoid others’ disapproval.

i. Can you provide other examples of when you or others had fun around a grim or tense protest? That is, during, in the lead-up to, or after a grim or tense protest.

j. Can you walk me through what you experienced during this instance?

k. Can you explain why they/you were having or making fun? Did they/you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?

4. Is there anything else you would like to mention about fun around collective action?

5. Checklist: Probe about specific functions of humour, based on literature / our interests

. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in shifting the boundaries of the acceptable / radicalisation / acceptance of violence?

a. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in increasing awareness / mobilization of the wider public?

.Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, if people use funny memers or signs during a demonstration to attract the general public’s attention.

b. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in coping with psychological pressure from activism / stigmatized identity / activist burnout?

.Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, using a joke to cheer someone (or yourself) up or to make the cause you stand for less heavy on your shoulders.

c. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in strengthening ties among activists / strengthening social identity?

.Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, joking among each other and laughing together.

d. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in self-presentation of activists to the outside world / non-activists?

.Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, making a joke about your involvement in activism to make an interaction with someone less awkward.

e. Can you think of situations in which fun around the fight for this cause would be inappropriate?

.Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, joking about a certain topic as taboo because the topic is a serious real-life problem.

6. Demographic details: Age (in broader categories to prevent identification), gender, country of residence

7. Thanks, finish interview, ask whether they know someone else with whom we might want to talk about these topics of fun and protest too.

Appendix B**Final coding scheme**

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Sample description	CA background: Movements and topics	Anti-facism
		Feminism
		Racism / BLM
		Anti-capitalism
		Anarchist / anti-system
		RAF
		Climate activism
		Communism
		Not fitting in with existing groups
		Social injustice
	Ways of activism	Protest on the streets
		Journalism

Squitting

Identity politics

Solidarity

Social context

Mention of (radical-)left sub-groups / fractioning

Competition / negativity between sub-groups

Criticism of “performative action”

Division between mainstream “woke” people and “real” left

Emotions around CA

Anxiety / scared

Anger

Enjoyment / enthusiasm / having fun

Empowerment / feeling strong

Humour can take away the seriousness

General typology of humour

Subject of humour

Making fun of police

Making fun of non-activists

Making fun of right-wing

Making fun of politicians

Different media of humour around CA Memes / social media

Other (non-meme) graphic / visual / art

Music / chants

Performance (also including clowns during demo)

Verbal / conversational (telling jokes)

Functions of humour Humour and radical action / radicalisation / escalation Radical action and humour clash / radicals tough activists have no humour / feelings of anger or taking a topic seriously clash with humour

Humour can stimulate radicalisation / escalation

Humour can prevent radicalisation / escalation

Humour and political identification / mobilization

Humour can be used for ingroup building / bonding

Humour can energize CA

Humour can cause a nice atmosphere
/ entertainment / having fun together

Humour can broaden the movement, create
insight / recognition / awareness among a
broader audience

Humour and making
people smaller / more
human

Humour can make activists seem more
“human” / approachable to non-activists

Humour can make police seem more “human” /
less power = easier and less scary target /
opponent (escalating)

Humour can make police seem more “human” /
less power = reducing necessity for violence
against them (de-escalating)

Humour and coping

Humour can help cope with responsibility of being an activist / can make activists feel good about what they do

Humour can help cope with danger / threat / anxiety, can help people admit they are scared or overwhelmed

Humour can distract from pressure / fear

Humour and creating distance

Humour can create distance from a situation = facilitate de-escalation

Humour can create distance from police = facilitate escalation (“they are not like us”)

Humour can create distance between activists and the general public = no increase in awareness / mobilization

Inappropriateness of humour

Group & topic: for left-wing activists politically incorrect humour is inappropriate

OR Arguments against humour use

Use: humour is not appreciated if it is the only form of CA (e.g. only joking / memes, instead of part of the repertoire)

Topic & group: humour about other people's (not own) suffering is inappropriate

Humour to facilitate violence is wrong

Humour as ineffective (this is another argument against humour use, other than whether it is appropriate)

Humour as not fitting with one's personality (this is another argument against humour use, other than whether it is appropriate)

Violence / radical
CA

Attitudes towards violence

Avoidance of violence

Violence undermines the message

Violence can be fun

Violence is (sometimes) necessary to achieve change

Violence is provoked by police mere presence

Violence is provoked by police behavior

Image of ANTIFA as violent

Being targeted by police violence provides status

Violence as male / testosterone thing

Other (inductive) themes we note in the interviews

Inter-generation comparisons / relations among activists

Different generations coming / working together

Different generations having different approaches

Note. CA stands for Collective Action.