

**The Functions and Appropriateness of Humour Around Collective Action in Human
Rights Activism**

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Abstract

This current qualitative study serves to analyze possible functions of humour and its appropriate use in a sample of 17 human rights activists. By using findings from previous literature, six possible areas of interest were deductively determined. Based on these areas, semi-structured questionnaires were devised and 30-min online interviews were conducted, using student volunteers and full-time employees of Amnesty International Netherlands. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed and evaluated using the thematic analysis method. The results showed that most functions previously established during the interdisciplinary studies, remained true, even in the context of the collective actions in human rights activism. Thus, humour can be used as a powerful communication tool to criticize authorities, to cope against frustration, to strengthen in-group ties and to mobilize people. Furthermore, the subjectivity of humour was emphasized and the importance of achieving a balance between appropriate fun and seriousness during collective actions was established. Overall, the study adds to the previous findings by evaluating negative functions of humour, for instance by illustrating humour as a tool of escalating violence. Additionally, this study expands on previous studies in terms of an assessment to a different setting, here human rights activism. Lastly, new points about humour and its influence on tipping points, and humour as an earned right were added. Recommendations for further studies include analyzing a more heterogeneous sample and changing the methodology of the study to explore any possible causal relationships or comparisons between groups.

Keywords: humour, collective action, human rights, appropriateness, functions

The Functions and Appropriateness of Humour Around Collective Action in Human Rights Activism

Being constantly surrounded by humour in our everyday lives, it may come to no surprise that humour has been vastly studied across multidisciplinary fields, including interpersonal communication (Bippus, 2007; Case & Lippard, 2009), media (Chattoo, 2019; Sorensen, 2008; Takovski, 2020), advertising (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019), the workplace, (Duncan, 1982; Vinton, 1989) and politics (Dumitrica, 2022; Merziger, 2007; Sorensen, 2008; Takovski, 2020). Strikingly, most studies prescribe a positive impact of humour on mental health, communication, political opinion, motivation, and other social mechanisms (Chattoo, 2019; Dumitrica, 2022; Rosenberg et al., 2021).

Still, while present in everyday life and rising in popularity, concrete significant findings of humour studies remain limited (Dumitrica, 2022; Guenther et al., 2015; Sorensen, 2008). One limitation, for instance, pertains to the context of the humour studies. Although, humour is often explored in commercial and political settings, studies on collective action, human rights activism, and peaceful protests appear to be meagre (Dumitrica, 2022; Sorensen, 2008). The world is currently facing reoccurring conflicts, such as war, censorship, and exploitation (Amnesty International, 2001). Helping to resolve these issues, hereby, often requires the collectively voice of criticism against injustices (Amnesty International, 2001).

One prominent way to do that is by participating in collective actions. *Collective actions* are defined as “any voluntary behaviours carried out either publicly and in groups [...] or privately and individually [...] with the intention of subverting the status quo and improving the social conditions of an oppressed group” (Riquelme et al., 2021, p.1). Particularly, a study by Sorensen (2008) showed the benefit of humour as a tool to communicate serious messages, persuade people’s opinions and motivate others to participate. Keeping that in mind, it would be beneficial to study humour around collective action in

relation to human rights activism. This is due to the fact that it might help to assess whether functions of humour can be applied in order to persuade, motivate, and communicate with people. Thus, analyzing if humour can help during the fight against injustices across the globe (Chattoo, 2019).

Similar limitations can be found in humour studies that focus on negative influences of humour (Billig, 2005). Generally, the information on possible negative impacts of using humour remains scarce with studies showing bias towards a positive direction (Billig, 2005; Dumitrica, 2022). Dumitrica (2022) notes that said bias might stem from the association of humour with overly positive words, such as laughter, fun, amusement, and desirability. This misbalanced assessment of humour serves as a challenge, since the resulting pitfalls and their consequences are not fully accounted for (Dumitrica, 2022).

Moreover, it is difficult to account for the impact of humour in general. The reason for this is that the researchers are still uncertain about the exact underlying mechanisms of humour that dictate whether actions and/or jokes will be perceived as humorous or disparaging (Rosenberg et al., 2021). This, in turn, leads to the difficulty of defining humour, and also displays further implications on the appropriateness and sensitivity of humour (Rosenberg et al., 2021). Therefore, according to Rosenberg et al. (2021), it is highly beneficial to research the unique experience of humour more attentively. Especially, fields that are socially and culturally diverse, like human rights activism, can greatly benefit from further studies as it becomes increasingly important to appeal to the majority of the audience in order to not offend anyone (Dumitrica, 2022).

Given this information and the importance of human rights activism in today's society, our research goal is to shed light on any possible functions (negative and positive) and the appropriateness of humour around collective action in human rights activism. For that reason,

volunteers and workers of the non-governmental allyship organization, Amnesty International Netherlands, were interviewed.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of humour around collective action in human rights activism, two main concepts will be explored in the literature review below. The main themes are (a) *collective action* and (b) *humour*. It should be noted that collective action will always be defined in accordance with the example set forth by Riquelme et al. (2021). To further elaborate on collective action, we also included acts like signing petitions, going to demonstrations, protesting, and writing letters to authorities in that definition (Riquelme et al., 2021; Takovski, 2020; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Since *humour* is an elusive construct, the common but not exclusive definition of humour as “the ability to find things funny” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) will be used. In order to specify this definition further, we included any kind of comedy and jokes (e.g., satire, puns, and funny protest signs) as well as activities such as singing, dancing, and chanting in the definition.

Literature Review

Collective Action

But why participate in collective actions in the first place? Inspired by this question, van Zomeren et al. (2008) sought to successfully explain people’s motivation behind the participation in collective actions. The information on how to mobilize and motivate people seems most beneficial, since many human rights organizations are built around the aim to fight human rights violations by organizing collective actions (Amnesty International, 2001). Therefore, it is important to know what the underlying reasons for participation in collective actions are. This will be further explored by looking at the theory on collective action as proposed by van Zomeren et al. (2008).

Theory on Collective Actions

By conducting a meta-analysis, van Zomeren et al. (2008) constructed an integrative social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) and found three predictors for motivating people to engage in collective actions, namely: (a) identity, (b) efficacy, and (c) perceived injustice. The three predictors were found to have moderate causal effects, and thus, are said to be sufficient predictors for the motivation to participate in collective actions (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

For identity, the relation between a person's group identity and the participation in a collective action was examined. Herewith, van Zomeren et al. (2008) reported that if the activists experienced high levels of group identification with the disadvantaged group, they were more likely to participate in collective actions to fight for the rights of these groups. In line with the findings of van Zomeren et al. (2008), van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) and de Weerd and Klandermans (1999), respectively, found significant evidence to support the claim that a high identification with the group identity increases the likelihood of collective action participation. But, whereas, one study referenced increased feelings of obligation as a reason (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), the other study explained that an increased group identification might stimulate group members by eliciting an energizing feeling of connectedness between the members (de Weerd & Klandermans, 1999). During the current study, this aspect will be addressed through the assessment of the social identities of the volunteers and the energizing properties of humour during collective actions organized by Amnesty International.

Secondly, the group efficacy was also examined and named as a primary predictor for the engagement in collective actions (Cohen-Chen & van Zomeren, 2018; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Hereby, it was assumed that the efficacy influences engagement positively by way of heightening the sense of agency for social situations and social change in activists (Cohen-Chen & van Zomeren, 2018). As participation is mostly on a voluntary basis in non-

governmental organizations, it is also important to understand how group efficacy can influence participation in collective actions. In our sample of Amnesty International volunteers, the participation in collective actions is - as stated above - also voluntary and non-obligatory (Amnesty International, 2001). Therefore, it can be quite beneficial to test this predictor within our sample in order to examine if the group efficacy indeed has an effect on collective action participation.

Lastly, it was also discovered that feelings of injustice can serve as a motivator to participate in actions. The reasoning for that might not only be the strong feelings that the activists experience but also their motivation to fight for a better world (Chattoo, 2019). As indicated in their manual, Amnesty International aims to empower people that experience human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2001). In order to successfully combat injustices, it is essential to inquire about the assumptions on the effects of perceived injustice in connection with collective action in human rights activism. Therefore, it might be important to look into this aspect closely as well. That will be accomplished by assessing feelings of perceived injustice during the semi-structured interviews.

Humour

Another core aspect that might motivate people to fight for change, besides the feelings of injustice, is humour (Chattoo, 2019). In ancient Greece, humour was already used as a communication tool and a rhetorical strategy for social criticism and the fight against the social injustice by examples of mirroring, storytelling, and comedic plays (Bippus, 2003; Chattoo, 2019; Quirk, 2015). Moreover, that is in line within the context of the collective actions in human rights as humour can be re-defined into a light-hearted way of challenging the distribution of power and injustice in society by subversion of hierarchies and social norms (Dumitrica, 2022; Holm, 2017).

However, even though, the effects of humour are increasingly explored and trends like challenging authorities are identified, it still remains unclear in what way exactly humour has an impact on collective actions, especially in the context of a peaceful protest (Sorensen, 2008). Inasmuch as the Amnesty International often uses peaceful collective actions to advocate for human rights (Amnesty International, 2001), it is important to explore the possible impact that humour can have on peaceful collective actions. For that matter, possible functions of humour based on other areas of literature have to be explored first.

Functions of Humour

As previously established, employing humour as a rhetorical strategy in social protest may open up opportunities and offer various functions and advantages by means of encouraging a reflection on situations (Riquelme et al., 2021). That in turn, can help to promote engagement, either socially (‘t Hart, 2007) or politically (Baumgartner & Lockerbie, 2018; Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014; Riquelme et al., 2021). One example for using humour in politics and collective action to encourage a reflection on a peculiar situation is the Romanian anti-corruption demonstration in 2017.

“Your money, your life, or your moustache” [Rumanian: “Banii, viața sau mustața”] (Dumitrica, 2022, p. 189) was one out of many humorous lines that could have been encountered on protest signs in the Romanian anti-corruption demonstration in 2017 (Dumitrica, 2022). Based on the familiar movie line ‘your money or your life’, commonly used in Western films and bank robbery film sequences, the protest signs referenced pop-culture. However, by using the rhyme “viața” [life] and “mustața” [moustache], the signs were also used to reference the moustache of former Romanian Social Democratic Party Leader, Liviu Dragnea. More specifically, the signs and humour within were used in a friendly and comic attempt to voice political criticism against Dragnea’s corruptive political

ways (Dumitrica, 2022; Holm, 2017; Sorensen, 2008). Furthermore, the signs were also used to question and criticize authority in a less harsh manner (Dumitrica, 2022).

Therefore, one of the main utilities and functions of humour is to challenge authority by criticizing, confronting, and questioning inequality, conservative ideologies and discrimination (Case & Lippard, 2009; Saucier et al., 2018; Riquelme et al., 2021). More specifically, humour can be applied to delegitimize and dehumanize claims and people, facilitating to overthrow the hierarchy and ridicule conservative societal taboos (Freud, 1905; Hodson & MacInnis, 2016). During collective actions, the Amnesty International Netherlands often critiques and voices their discontent towards the authorities and higher political powers. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore whether this function of humour can prove itself useful in peaceful human rights activism as well.

Another function of humor stems from the findings of the researchers Weinberger and Gulas (2019), who explored the influence of humour in advertising. Weinberger and Gulas (2019), found that humour can positively help in conveying messages and generally appeals to the audience. This is based on the discovery that humorous ads allocate more resources to memory than non-humorous ads (Takovski, 2020; Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). Therefore, advertisements with a humorous message seem to captivate the audience as compared to the non-humorous ads; thus, enhancing the remembrance and exposure of the message (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). Overall, human rights-related movements seek out various members, who can assist them in voicing their opinion and who are willing to participate in collective actions. Therefore, grasping the concept if humour can help to successfully relay a message and to capture someone's attention, could potentially be helpful in terms of the mobilization of more members and volunteers.

In reference to the mobilization, humor can also indirectly motivate collective action participation through strengthening the group identity and ties. For instance, Riquelme et al.

(2021) showed that using humour as a motivational tool proves effective to increase participation and group identification. In accordance with that 't Hart (2016) further claimed that a stronger group identity can positively influence participation in collective actions. Consequently, humour can be a significant factor for human rights activists as most of them belong to an activist group. Nevertheless, it is of importance to note that it is not enough to create a solid group identity in collective action groups by solely using humour (Fominaya, 2007; 't Hart 2016). Even if it does help with the motivation and positive group energy as established by previous non-qualitative studies (Fominaya, 2007; 't Hart 2016).

Lastly, Fominaya (2007) found that humor can serve as a coping mechanism and safety valve for group members. By the sheer act of joking around, a majority of the group members reported to have become less tense and experienced a positive feeling, especially after dealing with an intense situation and emotion (Fominaya, 2007). Similarly, the relief theory of humour concerns itself with the coping property of humour (Dumitrica, 2022). This theory suggests that humor can be used for coping with frustration through laughing about the negative energy or authorities (Dumitrica, 2022; Sorensen. 2008). Furthermore, according to 't Hart (2007), humor can be used for not only bonding but also to decrease a discontent within the group, which is important because discontent has been previously linked to negatively affecting the collective action participation ('t Hart, 2007).

Appropriateness

However, one thing that might be very funny for a person, does not necessarily mean that it is funny to another person (De Graaf, 2018). Given that information, jokes can easily be misunderstood and people might feel excluded or attacked (Dumitrica, 2022; De Graaf, 2018). Therefore, humour can play a negative role in life as well as (presumably) collective actions too (Holm, 2017). As the exploration of humour is often biased towards the positives in research, it is important to take the negatives into account and to examine the appropriateness

of the perception of humour (Billig, 2005; Holm, 2017). That is because in human rights activism, people want to motivate others to fight for human rights and not to increase violence or alienation (Amnesty International, 2001).

For example, humour might seem confrontational to the point that it seems like the person that jokes around is provoking and ridiculing someone (Sorensen, 2008). That assumption is based on the superiority theory of humour, which suggests that people use humour to make themselves feel better by strengthening their ego and laughing, provoking and ridiculing others (Dumitrica, 2022). Disparaging jokes, such as these, have the potential to be misunderstood and to escalate the situation towards a tipping point instead of de-escalating it ('t Hart, 2016). Since the Amnesty International is mostly engaging in peaceful protest, it is important to assess if humour can be used to reach a negative tipping point that might result in violence. Additionally, if humour has the power to escalate or de-escalate collective action, it should also be assessed in what ways it can be utilized in order to combat violence, misunderstandings, and hurt.

Furthermore, using humour in a serious message might make the message appear as less serious due to the light-hearted connotation that the concept of humour portrays ('t Hart, 2016). Moreover, that might be especially harmful within a very serious situation which some human rights-related issues such as racial persecution and female reproductive rights may present (Sorensen, 2008). It is important to take these issues seriously as a lot of people are affected by them and might have experienced traumatic experiences around them (Amnesty International, 2001).

Lastly, Case and Lippard (2009) found that how someone perceives a joke is actually dependent on several contextual factors, such as cultural background as well as someone's age group and someone's sex, etc. As Amnesty International is an international human rights organization that includes many different members (e.g. in age and motivation) from many

different cultures, it is important to assess how Amnesty International can use demographic information in order to motivate people to participate in collective action (Amnesty International, 2001). Additionally, assessing the influence of demographics might help human rights movements to stick to humour that does not hurt anyone during collective actions. That is, since empowerment and solidarity is the goal (Amnesty International, 2001).

Disadvantaged Groups vs Allyship Groups

Another factor that might influence how humour is perceived is based on how people are affected by the situation that is joked about (Baltiansky et al., 2021). Studies showed that there are differences on how disadvantaged groups (personally affected by the issue) and allyship groups (not personally affected by the issue) think about the appropriateness of humour, and how they use humour (Baltiansky et al., 2021; McGraw & Warren, 2010).

An analysis by Baltiansky et al. (2021) found that people thought that making fun of a difficult social situation or someone that is underprivileged is in bad taste and can causes more harm than relief, even if disadvantaged group might benefit from humour (especially politically incorrect one) to help cope with negative feelings after having encountered a discriminating situation (Baltiansky et al., 2021; McGraw & Warren, 2010). That is perhaps due to the fact that making fun of someone that is defenseless violates unwritten social norms and makes the 'joker' seem insulting as the jokes do not seem to provide a clear function (Baltiansky et al., 2021; McGraw & Warren, 2010; Veatch, 1998).

As an international organization that focuses on protecting human rights, Amnesty International regularly calls upon people with diverse backgrounds to against human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2001). Thus, Amnesty International is an allyship group, which means that not every member is necessarily personally affected by the human rights violations that they are protesting against. Therefore, it will be explored how allyship groups perceive the appropriateness of humour (especially in regards to politically incorrect humour)

and how humour should or should not be used by allyship groups during collective actions to empower and not offend members of the disadvantaged groups.

Current Study and Relevance

To summarize, this current study used a qualitative analysis approach to achieve the two following goals. The first goal is to possibly assess positive as well as negative functions of humour in connection with collective actions in human rights activism. With that intent, we examined trends that we found deductively through reviewing previous literature. The second goal is to reflect on the appropriateness of humour in the same context. The overall goal is to contribute valuable information to the already existing research, for instance, by adding new insights about the assumed negative influences (e.g., humour as a tool to escalate violence). Additionally, it is well established that most theoretical studies explore humour and/or collective action within the political and commercial settings. Therefore, this paper's relevance lies in extending the information on previous studies by studying both constructs within the human rights setting. Lastly, this paper also adds possible insights into the nature of humour around collective actions in human rights activism (allyship group) as it is qualitative in nature and explores many elaborations of the participants. That further establishes this paper's relevance.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited through one of our researcher's contacts, who volunteers for Amnesty International Netherlands as National Student Coordinator. We conducted semi-structured interviews via video call. Prior to commencing the interviews, the participants were informed about the aim of our study; to explore the different functions of humour within collective action. There was no compensation for participation, participation was entirely voluntary, and all the data was anonymised. Our sample consisted of $N = 17$

participants in total. About half of the participants were Amnesty International Netherlands employees ($n = 9$), and the other half were students who actively volunteered in collective actions organised by Amnesty International Netherlands ($n = 8$). The participant's age range was between 20 - 60 years, and we divided them in five-year categories. The study included participants from the ages between 20 and 25 ($n = 6$), participants from the ages between 26 and 30 ($n = 5$), a participant from the age between 35 and 40 ($n = 1$), participants from the ages between 45 and 50 ($n = 4$) and a participant from the age between 55 and 60 ($n = 1$). Of the participants, four were male, and 13 were female. Of the nine employees who participated, all participants were from Europe. Of the eight student participants, their origins included Europe ($n = 4$), Asia ($n = 2$), South America ($n = 1$) and North America ($n = 1$).

Semi-structured Interviews

The interview structure included scheduling online meetings with one participant and two researchers. The interviewer asked open questions. The assistant to the interviewer would record the interview and use a checklist to check if all relevant topics were discussed (see Appendix A for the entire interview set-up and Appendix B for the checklist). The interview consisted of four phases. In the first phase, participants were introduced to the topic and were asked to give informed oral consent. In the second phase, the interviewer began the interview with an open discussion about the participant's views and experiences surrounding injustices and collective action. In the third phase, the interview asked more specific and theoretically driven questions. The topics covered in the interviews were derived through a deductive approach: (1) the perception of injustice and identification as an ally (e.g. 'Who is treated unfairly?'); we asked our participants this to ensure they considered themselves allies, (2) participation in protest (e.g. 'How have you tried to make your voice heard?'), (3) functions of humour (raising awareness, strengthening ties, coping mechanism, a weapon of the weak, shifting the boundaries of the acceptable) and (4) the appropriateness of humour (e.g. 'Do you

think it is always ok to use humour around this cause?’). In the fourth phase, we concluded by asking the participants what their hopes were for the future, making sure to end on a positive note. The interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes, and verbatim transcriptions were made by the researchers individually after dividing them equally among all researchers. The researchers did this by listening to every interview and typing them down.

Approach of Analysis

In our examination of the transcriptions, we used thematic analysis. It is well suited to analyse semi-structured interviews that deal with individual experiences and are based on an existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our supervisor created a preliminary coding scheme based on the first two interviews. The coding scheme included constructs and topics from the checklist. After all the interviews were transcribed, we added new codes to the preliminary coding scheme if participants had made remarks we deemed relevant. After this, we coded two interviews together as a group to ensure we coded all the interviews in the same manner. Following this, we coded the rest of the interviews in pairs and double-checked the codes individually to ensure we agreed with the quotes used for each code. The research analysis was conducted in an exploratory manner to find which themes around the functions of humour are present in the context of collective action within our present sample. We used both a deductive and an inductive process to identify themes and patterns. The strength of a theme or construct was measured by the prevalence of codes that were used for that specific theme. However, some themes or constructs cannot be tallied up or measured by count-of-hand. We would, for example, have varying answers on the appropriateness of humour that indicated that some participants found humour appropriate and some participants found humour inappropriate. In these instances, direct quotations can illuminate some of these intangibles.

After the thematic analysis was conducted, six main themes were found: (1) *Humour and increasing awareness/mobilisation of the wider public*, (2) *Humour and strengthening ties among activists/strengthening social identity*, (3) *Humour and coping with psychological pressure from activism/stigmatised identity/activist burnout*, (4) *Humour and power/(in)equality*, (5) *the appropriateness of humour* and, (6) *Humour and shifting the boundaries of the acceptable/radicalisation/acceptance of violence*. All of the six themes described above were deductive since they came from previous literature and were included in our interview set-up. However, we found some subthemes inductively within the last two themes (5 and 6). Specifically, the trends: increasing sensitivities surrounding the use of humour, the idea of ‘earning the right to joke’, humour as a provocation, humour as a means of de-escalation of violence and as a means of accepting violence, were found based on the data we gathered. We should note that the identified themes apply to this specific data set and should not be extrapolated.

Results

Humour and Increasing Awareness/Mobilisation of the Wider Public

Within the present sample, the theme of humour as a way of raising awareness and mobilising the wider public was the most prevalent. The theme indicates how the participants perceive humour in spreading awareness and mobilising collective action. Two sub themes that fall under this concept are how humour can broaden the movement but also how the subjectivity of humour can negatively impact its mobilising abilities.

Humour Can Broaden the Movement, Create Insight/Recognition/Raise Awareness Among a Broader Audience

Humour has the potential to spread awareness among a broader audience, specifically as a tool of communication:

R.B.: What kind of impact does it [humour in collective action] have on the people around you?

P4: If you think about impact on different levels: humour is reaching the media. If there's humour involved in an action, the press tends to report on this, I think, more than with a super serious action. So that's definitely important for us, obviously, to get the media involved. Also, if we send out a press release about an action that involves humour, I think the media is more responsive.

The extract above demonstrates how humour can impact the mobilisation and awareness of collective action. It indicates that humorous content is more likely to be spread via the media than content that is not humorous. This can impact the spread of awareness of collective action, as the information is more likely to reach a broader audience. In addition, humour can also broaden the movement, as it can help people become aware of the action or even join the movement. This was further corroborated in the interviews with other participants. It also sheds light on the premise that humour can grab the attention of people, which may also impact the mobilisation of an action seen in the following:

P7: You're already dealing with really heavy issues. And sometimes, adding a funny side to it can make it maybe even a bit more approachable and easier to talk about and get more people involved. And it also catches a lot of attention.

This may indicate that humorous messages may also draw attention to the protest at hand by communicating its goal in a manner that is more accessible to the broader audience. As collective action is usually centred around grave topics, humour has the potential to make serious issues more accessible to a general audience. This also implies that people who might

not have much knowledge about the action at hand might be able to understand it due to humour. Furthermore, in the following extract, the participant stated that humour might make people more willing to engage with social issues:

P15: Maybe it does some good if more activists or more NGOs use humour instead of always, you know, the horrible images. Where people at one point are a bit like: “oh, can't watch it anymore, I look the other way”.

The extract above sheds light on the fact that using only serious images or content may deter people from learning about injustice and violation of human rights. Instead, the use of humour can mobilise a serious topic, as it makes it less heavy. Thus, more people may be willing to engage with it. Other participants also agree with this, and most denote that striking the right balance between humorous and non-humorous content may affect the accessibility of a serious topic.

The Subjectivity of Humour can Negatively Impact its Mobilising Abilities

Although activists can use humour to broaden a movement and create awareness amongst a broader audience, some participants offer a different perspective on this:

P4: So, maybe our actions and the humour we use are a bit more targeted towards people in certain bubbles, certain groups. If that makes sense.

R.B.: Yeah, it does.

P4: So, if there would be a critical note to using this humour, it could be that not everyone gets it or that it can be taken the wrong way. And then, you know, you can completely fail to bring across the message or people feel like they cannot be a part of

it because they don't get it or because they don't, you know, relate to it in any way. So that might be a risk.

The extract above further elaborates on the fact that humour is subjective. The participant mentions that humour might fail to broaden a movement as individuals may not understand the humour used. This would also indicate that humour could fail to create awareness and insight about an action as individuals may not understand the humour or fail to connect to it and thus, may not choose to become a part of the movement. This was further corroborated by:

R.B: Could you tell me a little bit about the effects of humour and the type of situations where humour is used? Do you think it achieves something?

P3: For me, usually when I see something funny, it gives me some sympathy for the one with the message because I think humour is a sign of being clever, and that's something I appreciate. I think this also might be a reason why for Amnesty, we're using humour less because we don't just want to appeal to people who understand the cleverness of it. We want to appeal to a larger group. When using humour, you are at risk of just appealing to a smaller group.

The extract above indicates the risk of using humour in collective action. Humour may limit the number of individuals that comprehend the content. This has implications for mobilising people to an action and excluding some individuals from the purpose and collective action group. This also illuminates the idea that activists may deliberately choose against using humour in an action to avoid excluding any groups or individuals.

Humour and Strengthening Ties Among Activists/Strengthening Social Identity

Another theme that was discovered to be quite prevalent in our research is that humour strengthens ties among activists and their social identities. After looking at the interviews, we found that many interviewees mentioned that humour could be used to build stronger ties between in-group members. Moreover, humour can also help to create a nice and energetic atmosphere that can motivate others to participate in social activism and to feel more positive towards the cause. With all of this information, three sub-themes and possibly functions of humour were identified. Namely, that humour can be used for in-group building and bonding, that humour can cause a nice atmosphere, and that humour can energise collective action.

Humour Can Be Used for In-group Building and Bonding

Participants' responses indicated that humour was perceived to be an essential communication tool that can help to strengthen or create new bonds between in-group members. One possible reason that was named was that humour could help create a common goal and a sense of unity within a group. This was seen in the following:

R.B.: Can you tell me something about the effect of humour in these situations?

P5: It creates a bond between activists to sort of make fun of them together and sing about them, like we also have this song: 'Hey, hey, ho, ho, [person/thing] has got to go'. So yeah, it definitely creates a feeling of unity and of standing together against the common enemy.

Additionally, it was also stated that humour can help to create and share positive situations with one another:

P15: I think lots of people understand humour and it's something that unites people, because if you laugh at the same joke together, you share a feeling and you kind of want to be part of it.

As seen by the extract above, using humour to joke around can make people feel more connected since it helps people to engage positively with each other. That is because humour seems to be understood by most people, so it might be an excellent tactic to use to engage with each other. Furthermore, humour could also potentially help create new opportunities to experience an event together and share one's feelings about the event. Moreover, by using humour, most shared experiences might be experienced very positively and an experience that one wants to be a part of. Sharing a positive experience with others, in turn, might help establish satisfying social ties.

Humour Can Create a Nice Atmosphere and Serve as Entertainment

That introduced another important function of humour, namely to help and create a nice and entertaining atmosphere in a group. That also applies to groups that participate in collective actions, as seen by the insights of a participant:

D.W.: Do you also think that [...humour] is applicable to an organisation or to a lot of people? I mean during ally-ship demonstrations or something like that?

P16: I think they are fun because they take place in a relaxed environment. You can have drinks and snacks and a chat before, after and in-between the event. It's just a really informal setting. Also, you can interact with like-minded people that share your opinion. So, talking with them can also be very fun and can help to create a stronger bond.

This part of the interview indicates that humour is very important to create a better atmosphere. A better atmosphere, in turn, is believed to help create a better social bond because you are more inclined to share your opinion in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, just having fun, joking around in general, and sharing this fun experience already connects people. Lastly, some participants also mentioned that, next to feeling more positive in general, humour can also help diffuse already tense and negative situations. As seen in the following:

R.B.: What are the benefits of using humour?

P5: So, humour can sort of diffuse the tension a bit. A joke unrelated to the topic can sort of break the tension. [*P5* nods]. Humour makes it fun and creates a memory to look back on.

Humour Can Energise Collective Action

Finally, another sub-theme discovered is that humour and fun can help energise the people participating in collective actions. That, in turn, can result in more motivation, as stated:

P5: I think humour and making jokes is really important and crucial for keeping your movement and your people and your community together and happy and alive and kicking. The songs are usually sung with a lot of energy and laughing, and like, it's not a serious at all. It's fun to look back, and it is fun to make the jokes about where you were together and it also will motivate you to come again.

The extract shows that humour and fun can energise people and make a situation less serious. That, in turn, can help others to be more motivated and happy. Most participants also agree with this and mention that humour is an essential tactic to interest people to participate and create memories with others during collective actions. Moreover, most participants also mentioned that sharing those memories help people build a social identity and ties in their groups. They also state that humour helps keep most people happy, which is crucial to building positive experiences and in-group relations.

Humour and Coping With Psychological Pressure From Activism

As mentioned before, both the employees and the student activists we interviewed often deal with topics they deem very serious or heavy. This part of our analysis examines the psychological impact those heavy topics can have on activists. We then look at how the activists cope with the issues they encounter during their work at Amnesty International or during and after a collective action.

Humour Can Help Cope With the Responsibility of Being an Activist/Can Make Activists Feel Good About What They do

In the responses, a pattern appears which suggests that activists need to cope with the heavy topics that the activists see in pictures or read about. Multiple participants mention this struggle during the interviews:

P4: For a lot of people working at Amnesty, it can be very draining, especially if you are a researcher. So I think also for our mental state, it's sometimes important to use humour to kind of unwind just a little bit.

P5: You kind of want to leave the protest with a feeling of hope and agreement.

You want to leave it with a feeling of power and you can create that also by singing and by chanting.

P9: Like you are going through some really gruesome pieces of information in your everyday life. And then there is a way that you can battle it by, well not joke about that, but by just engaging with humour in general.

P13: Amnesty International, it's a very serious company to work for, obviously, the information we see every day is, it's tough. You know, we see a lot of details about torture and stuff. For these participants, the impact of the pictures or texts of the subject for their activism can be hard to deal with. The participants mention that it is draining and that they need something to distract them from the impacting information. The participants show that this is an important issue for them and that they use humour to cope with it.

These excerpts portray the different ways in which the activists use humour as their coping mechanism. Many participants mentioned that they joke around the office or during collective action to cope with the heavy subjects. For them, humour can truly function as a 'safety valve'. The participant's answers suggest that different kinds of humour can be used to cope with the psychological pressure from collective action. The older participants use more politically incorrect humour, while younger participants use social media to post memes.

Humour and Power/(In)equality

Besides coping mechanism, humour is used to undermine people perceived as powerful, such as presidents and ministers. A strong theme that arose was that activists try to ridicule them or make them seem less powerful than they are.

Humour Can Be a Tool to Undermine Powerful People

Many activists use humour to show their discontent with how the influential people in a country rule. The participants think that ridiculing powerful people can impact those people:

P2: You're kicking up against power. Against people that have might, who are like the most ridiculous, powerful men. Always men who have no sense of humour. And the thing they hate is being ridiculed. So that's where you can get them.

P5: You know, in the climate movement, they often say 'Rutte stop met kutte' [*P5* and *R.B.* both laugh]. It basically says that the Dutch prime minister should stop shitting around and it also rhymes. So, you know, it's funny and it's also painful and you kind of make fun of this person in power.

These participants suggest that ridiculing people in power is a way to reach those people and help them see that what they are doing is ridiculous. Many of the participants specifically mention that this kind of humour is directed at powerful people and not toward human rights defenders, as can be seen in the quote of participant 5. Other examples are “humour is usually directed at the perpetrators”, “mocking prominent authoritarian leaders”, and “make jokes about, you know, politicians and people in power”. These examples suggest that humour as a tool of mocking people is used in different collective actions. Secondly, the participants mention that this kind of humour is delivered through songs and signs:

P5: It's definitely about the people who cause the unfair treatment. You can see that in the slogans and on the signs.

P6: They were doing songs in which they mocked people. People like the government, oppressors and all of that.

P10: [Some] artists or musicians use humour in their lyrics or in cartoons or in their artwork, and they're making fun of the president.

P12: We also have a song in Ireland that is like a working-class kind of song. It's about all of the elected officials that shouldn't be elected, and they should be shot instead.

Appropriateness of Humour

As the last quote illustrates, whether the use of humour around collective action is perceived as appropriate depends on the subject matter, the audience, and the person making the joke. Multiple participants already mentioned the subjectivity of humour, but some also shared experiences in which they noticed that using humour was deemed inappropriate.

Increased Sensitivities and Cultural Boundaries

In some of these experiences, a trend is noted because there seems to be an increased awareness about the appropriateness of using humour around collective action. Especially the older employees of Amnesty International have the experience that some jokes are no longer considered appropriate or are not considered appropriate in different countries.

P8: But I guess you can, you can go too far. And now I'm going to sound like the white male, of a certain age. But I think society is getting more sensitive about these matters as well.

P14: In the old days, like I would say, like five or 10 years ago, satire was a way of being ironic and a way to post several issues. But this has now also been taken badly in different cultures.

P14: So we noticed that in the Netherlands the sense of humour differs very much from other countries. We made a video which can be described as humourous, which was not found humourous by all our colleagues internationally. We hired an expensive car. One of our colleagues drove it and inside was someone who was

dressed up as the Grim Reaper, portraying to be Death visiting after Khashoggi was killed. In the Dutch context, that was taken up very well. But international colleagues, and I can completely understand that, thought it was like, well, not the right thing to do. You don't play with the death of people and very serious business like that.

The anecdote of the participant shows that, when using humour as a communication tool, one must consider the cultural context in which one operates. Whereas in our earlier section on the subjectivity of humour, our participant merely contemplated the misuse of humour, the extract above pictures the actual consequences.

Earning the Right to Joke

One interesting find was that a participant argued that by virtue of her participation in protesting and organising, she had 'earned the right to joke' about the subject:

R.B.: How do you feel about the use of humour around protest against unfair treatment of groups in society?

PI: Yeah, but that also depends on the case. Like, you know, when we go back to the women's March: I am a woman, so there are jokes that I can make. I am protesting there, so obviously I'm not an ignorant person that is just calling out things. I'm with a group I've organised, I've put in a lot of effort and time to do something, you know? So I feel like it gives you the right to joke, but it also makes, yeah I don't know, less offensive.

Humour and Shifting the Boundaries of the Acceptable/Radicalization/Acceptance of Violence

In extreme cases, humour cannot just be inappropriate but can be found to be very provocative and incite violent reactions. On the other hand, jokes can also trivialise or normalise the use of violence during protests.

Humour as Provocation

An ill-considered joke can be very provocative, as two participants note.

P7: I think humour can be, if taken wrongly, quite provocative. So I think if people take things too lightly, or joke about something that's very sensitive, it might provoke a potentially disproportionate reaction by other people, which could then result in violence.

P17: I think you cannot make jokes about people and their personal story, or about what they've experienced because that would be really disrespectful. I think that can create discomfort and can possibly be seen as a provocation rather than a joke.

Humour as a Means of Accepting Violence

One participant noted that if violent language is taken as a joke, it can normalise the violence and escalate the situation.

P5: The joke can bring this community together, where there is a risk of going violent. If the humour does start, I think there's a risk that you can also escalate. And I mean, sometimes people also think that this sort of violent, very violent, language is a joke, which I think can also escalate to more violent language as well as to actual physical violence.

Contrary to the concept of the ‘safety valve’ that helps protesters blow off steam, the use of humour can also provoke and elicit extreme reactions during collective action. Also, when during a protest, passions run high, joking can potentially trivialise more extreme behaviours. These dynamics are not particularly prevalent within the literature, but considering the observations of our interviewees, they are very much worth investigating in further research.

Humour Can De-escalate Violence

This finding is in line with the idea that humour can function as a ‘safety valve’. In fact, participants believed that as humour can energise and create a positive atmosphere, it can also impact the de-escalation of violence:

D.W: Do you think humour plays a part in reaching a tipping point?

P16: De-escalate, definitely, because humour, as we mentioned, has usually a calming effect.

This participant suggests that humour can be used to de-escalate violence in collective action, as it positively impacts people. We also found that some participants believe that humour can be used to “break tension”, “de-escalate protests and collective actions”, and “de-escalate tension between the police and activists.

Discussion

The aims of the current study were two-fold. The first aim was to explore possible positive and negative functions of humour around collective action in a sample of human rights activists. The second aim is related to exploring situations in which humour might be perceived as appropriate/inappropriate during collective actions. Hereby, the findings relate to human rights activists that volunteer at Amnesty International Netherlands specifically.

Through the analysis of already existing humourous studies, six prevalent themes were deductively deduced and explored. The first theme encountered was *humour and increasing awareness/ mobilization of the wider public*. This theme roughly examined how activists used humour as a tool to help mobilize people during collective action. The second theme *humour and strengthening ties among activists/strengthening social identity* focused on humour and its role in energizing activists and strengthening ties between activists during collective actions. The third theme *humour and coping with psychological pressure from activism* related to humour as a tool to cope with heavy topics that can be encountered while protesting human rights-related issues. On the other hand, the fourth theme *humour and power/(in)equality* dealt with humour as a communication tool to criticize authority during collective actions. In order to address the second aim of this current study, theme five (*appropriateness of humour*) and theme six (*humour and shifting the boundaries of acceptable/radicalization/acceptance of violence*) were analyzed. Theme five analyzed possible contexts where humour might seem inappropriate to the audience. While theme six explored the ability of humour to influence tipping points during collective actions. The influence can be positive (de-escalate violence) or negative (escalate violence) in nature. In the following section, the six themes and their implications will be discussed. Afterwards, limitations and suggestions for possible future research will be given. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusive remark.

Humour and its ability to mobilize people, is one of the most prevalent themes found in humour literature (Bippus, 2007; Chattoo, 2019). The findings of this current study support the assumption that humour is a highly successful communication tool that has the power to broaden human rights movements. That is done by catching the attention of people and inviting the people to participate. These findings are in line with research that was conducted by Baumgartner and Lockerbie (2018). Analyzing the American National Election Survey

(ANES), Baumgartner and Lockerbie discovered positive correlations between the exposure of comedic messages in political sitcoms and increased political participation. Given the success of humour as a mobilization tool, human rights movements could benefit from incorporating jokes and humorous activities during collective actions to broaden their following. That is because a bigger following makes it easier to fight against human rights violations during collective actions.

Another finding that this current study discovered and that is in line with Baumgartner and Lockerbie's (2018) research is that social media can especially benefit from humour. Humorous social media posts, in turn, can successfully influence mobilization. That is not only because humorous social media posts are successful in grabbing the attention of people, but also because humorous posts seem to stick to the minds of the people (Bippus, 2007). Several humour studies that were conducted in different settings, also largely agree with the findings that social media can benefit from humour by increasing the exposure and attention of a person (Baumgartner & Lockerbie, 2018; Bippus, 2007; Bragnan; 2007; Campo et al., 2013; Chatoo, 2019; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977, Riquelme et al., 2021).

However, the current study also assessed the risk of using humour for mobilization purposes. That is because humour is very personal and subjective in nature, making it a difficult tool to use correctly. Thus, there might be an increased risk of possibly offending or excluding someone during collective actions. That in turn can result in a smaller rather than a larger following. In line with this finding, Dumitrica (2022) claims that "ambiguity [of humour] is also at play in political satire and parody, which use ridicule and mock" (p. 184) and that there are "potentially damaging effects [...] for instance, by generalizing cynicism, exclusion, and mistrust" (p. 184). Taking this warning into account, a balance between using humour as a communication tool and staying serious should be achieved. Only then, can everyone account for each other's needs and perspectives without offence. If everyone is

content, then it is also easier to expand the following and make people stick to the group. That is relevant for Amnesty International as well since they do not only want more people to attend their events to show solidarity and to fight against human rights, but they also want members to attend more than one collective action and to continue to volunteer. So, knowing that jokes should be used sensibly and most probably in social media platforms can help them greatly to focus on the right tools to mobilize, and thus, to successfully mobilize.

The second biggest theme identified is the role of humour in strengthening the ties and the identity of group members in human rights activism. Findings of this respective study assessed that using humour during collective actions can make people feel a stronger sense of unity. Moreover, humour can help people to bond with each other. That is because humour can be seen as a shared common trait within a group that binds a team together (Bippus, 2007). Furthermore, humour can turn an action or a joke into a shared memorable experience that group members can think back to fondly (Faina, 2013; Takovski, 2020). These positive experiences can help to release tension and to create a calm and warm atmosphere (Bippus, 2007). This, again, impacts individuals in groups as it gives them the opportunity to thrive and feel excited, making people feel more welcome and connected to the group (Bippus, 2007; Case & Lippard, 2009; Faina, 2013; Takovski, 2020; Young, 2013). Overall, the findings of this current study on humour as a tool to strengthen group bonds are in line with previous research conducted in different fields (Bippus, 2007; Case & Lippard, 2009; Faina, 2013; Takovski, 2020; Young, 2013). Therefore, humour might be seen and used as a nice strategy to use in team collective actions. Especially during the planning of the collective action this insight might be helpful because it is the most prominent time where you are connected to the team. By using jokes, the team connection can then possibly be deepened with joking around with each other. Moreover, knowing that humour can energize the group and create fond memories is also beneficial in order to create and present introductions to the collective

actions (e.g. starting with a chant) or speeches (e.g. starting with a humorous quote) to capture the attention of everyone attending.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study showed that humour can indeed be used as a tool to help with coping. By enhancing the feelings of happiness, humour creates a ‘safety valve’ of positive emotions. That in turn, results in a successful diffusion of feelings of frustration and anxiety (Katz et al. 1974; Merziger, 2007; Roy, 2000; Takovski, 2020; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). Overall, this finding is in line with the relief theory of humour that prescribes that humour and laughter serve as relief mechanisms to successfully release pressure and psychological tension in everyday life (Dumitrica, 2022). With this knowledge, humour can be used to combat anxiety and frustration in actions that deal with cruel and gruesome acts of human rights violation, such as torture. Thus, humour might be very important to use as Amnesty International wants to empower their human rights activists. The human rights activists, however, encounter a lot of frustrations while volunteering due to the nature of human rights violations.

Further findings of the current study show that humour can be used as a tool to criticize authority as well. Using humour and fun at the cost of the authorities is a common way to protest as it feels good to criticize and laugh about the common enemy. That not only makes people feel more united during collective action as they share the same enemy and goal but poking fun at authorities also makes the tension grow lighter (Case & Lippard, 2009; Merziger, 2007; Quirk, 2015). Moreover, the phenomenon of establishing a common enemy and making fun of authorities is a concept that has been used for several decades. According to Merziger (2007), humour was also used during National Socialism in Germany. There *whispering humour* was commonly used to quietly express discontent, establishing the historical prevalence and widespread of humour as a tool of criticism. Additionally, the concept of using humour to criticize authority might be closely related to the superiority

theory of humour. The theory describes that humour and laughter are used as a way to establish someone's superiority over another person, criticizing and ridiculing the inferior receiver of the joke (Dumitrica, 2022). This aspect might be important to validate since Amnesty International seeks to criticize authority in order to promote social and human rights-related change. That opens up new strategies and opportunities for Amnesty International to criticize authorities successfully.

To assess the second aim of the study, which deals with establishing the appropriateness of humour, the themes of appropriateness and violence were analyzed. Generally, findings show an agreement between human rights activists on the use of violence. Specific findings indicate that activists consent that it is never appropriate to use violence during protests. However, humour was still named to play a prominent role in escalating or de-escalating tipping points during protests (Sorensen, 2008). One finding of this current study, however, adds a new viewpoint to the already existing literature. That is because this study introduces a new point mentioning that someone has to earn the right to joke about an issue. Herewith, the right to joke relates to whether you are personally affected or knowledgeable about the topic of the collective action or not. If someone does not have any experience, the right to joke is not fulfilled. Making a joke anyways can have some consequences as the person that does not have a right to joke might seem condescending and mean (Rappoport, 2005). Overall, Rappoport (2005) summarized the findings on appropriateness quite well by stating that the appropriateness of humour depends on how someone uses it and what someone makes out of it. Humour as a tool can be used as a sword to attack and be violent, but it can also be used as a shield to appropriately protect oneself from frustration and harm. That has implications to humour in collective actions as it becomes increasingly important to make sure to account for everyone's feelings while making jokes.

Moreover, it again shows the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between using humour as a coping mechanism and expressing an opinion.

Similarly, most of the younger Amnesty International Netherlands volunteers agreed that it is important to try and be politically correct in order not to hurt someone. That is in line with the findings of the analysis by Baltiansky et al. (2021). Here, it was stated that allyship groups should be cautious about using politically incorrect humour since it might come across as insulting as allies are not immediately affected by the issue themselves (Baltiansky et al., 2021). Contrary to that, the older generation mentioned that they might have cracked a few jokes that might not seem appropriate to everyone. That was another finding that could potentially add to already existing literature since previous studies suggested that normally younger people should actually be more open to controversial humour than older people (De Graaf, 2018; Kuipers, 2001). One explanation for that could be that women were found to be more critical of disparaging humour as compared to subversive humour (Kuipers, 2001). Gender difference could, thus, be the reason for the differing opinions of our participants even if they were young in age.

Limitations and Future Research

This current research employed a relatively small and homogenous sample, which mainly consists of young European women. Therefore, a limitation might be that the findings may not be applicable to everyone outside of this study. Since differences between women and men regarding their perception of humour were previously established, future research should ideally include more men next time (Kuipers, 2001). Moreover, the whole focus can be switched to different kinds of groups, as well as identities and relationships to determine the boundary conditions for the processes examined even more.

In addition to that, previous research suggests that qualitative analyses regarding the influence of humour are scarce in collectivistic cultures (De Graaf, 2018; Kuipers, 2001).

Therefore, another suggestion for future research could be to focus on people that are part of collectivistic cultures as opposed to individualistic cultures.

Furthermore, another future recommendation could be to conduct similar studies using different methodology and study designs. That is because qualitative studies do not show the whole picture (e.g. no causal relationships can be established), even if they are highly beneficial in uncovering the nature of a construct and topic. Therefore, I would recommend to conduct more quantitative and even comparative studies on that topic to grasp the concepts even more clearly in the future.

Lastly, another suggestion for future research that would be meaningful and interesting is to implement a clear comparison between allyship and personally affected groups. As of right now, the literature that specifically compares two groups on humour and collective actions is limited. So, adding comparative studies would be a great contribution to the future. That is because it would enhance the understanding of humour and collective action in diverse settings and audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative study examined the functions and appropriateness of humour around collective action in human rights activism. Herewith, positive functions of humour include mobilizing and energizing people, strengthening group ties and identities, criticizing authority, coping and de-escalating tipping points. Nevertheless, there are two negative aspects of humour, namely that humour can escalate the tipping point and can result in violence. Also, humour is highly subjective, making the appropriate use difficult. In accordance to that the appropriateness of humour is highly related to contextual factors, such as culture, sex, age and affectedness. Still, overall, the findings show that if humour is used sensibly, then it is a successful communication tool with many benefits.

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Appendix A

Interview Set-up

1. Injustice perceptions & social identity – allyship group membership

We are interested in your views, as a human rights activist, on unfair treatment of groups in society. Can you tell me about this?

- a. Who is treated unfairly?
- b. Treated unfairly by whom?
- c. How does this unfair treatment make you feel?
- d. Do you personally belong to the group that is treated unfairly, or do you consider yourself their ally?

2. Protest

When people feel treated unfairly (or: see others being treated unfairly – depending on Q1 responses) they often decide to voice their concern or discontent. Have you ever done this in any way?

- a. How did you voice your concern or discontent?
- b. Who were involved in this action?
- c. Was this an action by individual(s) or by a movement or organisation?
- d. Do you feel like you are part of a larger movement or organisation? If yes, which movement(s) or organisation(s)?
- e. Can you provide other examples of when / how you have tried to make your voice heard?

ONLY in case people say they really never made their voice heard in any way, even after some further stimulation from your side: Why not? Are you aware of ways in which others have voiced their concern or discontent?

- a. How did they voice their concern or discontent?

- b. Who were involved in this action?
- c. Was this an action by individual(s) or by a movement or organisation?
- d. Do you feel like these people are speaking also on your behalf / helping your cause?
Why (not)?
- e. Can you provide other examples of when / how others around you have tried to make their voice heard?

3. Functions of humour

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

- a. Can you think of a time when you had fun or made fun in any way around your fight against unfair treatment? 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.
- b. Can you walk me through what exactly was fun about this instance?
 - i. What kind of humour was used? For example, conversational jokes, funny signs, "ludic" actions, laughing or having fun together enjoying a street protest, etc.
 - ii. Who made the fun / jokes? To whom was it funny?
 - iii. If applicable: What was the topic of the humour? For example, were the jokes/memes/signs about yourself, others (whom), the unfairness, et cetera?
 - iv. If applicable: Who were addressed by the humour? For example, were the jokes / memes / signs directed to a small group being present, to victims or perpetrators of unfair treatment more broadly, to inactive bystanders, et cetera?
- c. Can you tell me something about the effects of humour in this situation?
 - i. Were you trying to achieve something by having/making fun? What?
 - ii. Did anything happen or change while/because you were having or making fun?
What? How?

- d. Do you think being a human rights activist says something about someone's sense of humour? What / why not?
- e. ONLY 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 who are fighting for the same cause. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or they present something as "just a joke" to avoid others' disapproval.
- f. 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.
- g. If no occasions, why not?

4. Appropriateness of humour

How do you feel about the use of humour around protests against unfair treatment of groups in society?

- a. Do you think it is always okay to use humour around this cause? Why (not)? If no:
When not?

5. Shifting the boundaries of the acceptable

Is there a tipping point where protest goes too far? Have you experienced such a tipping point? Can you walk me through it? (Provide example of escalation).

- 5.1 - Why do you think this tipping point has been reached? Does humour or having fun play a role in this? Can you elaborate? What are your thoughts on this?

6. Closing

Is there anything else you would like to mention about humour and fun around protests against unfair treatment of groups in society?

What are your hopes for the future?

Appendix B

Interview checklist

Probe about specific functions of humour, based on literature/our interests

- a. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in shifting the boundaries of the acceptable/radicalisation/acceptance of violence?
- b. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in increasing awareness/mobilization of the wider public?
 - i. Probe/examples if necessary: For instance, if people use funny memers or signs during a demonstration to attract the general public's attention.
- c. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in coping with psychological pressure from activism/stigmatized identity/activist burnout?
 - i. 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.
- d. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in strengthening ties among activists/strengthening social identity?
 - i. Probe/examples if necessary: For instance, joking among each other and laughing together.
- e. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in self-presentation of activists to the outside world/non-activists?
 - i. Probe/examples if necessary: For instance, making a joke about your involvement in activism to make an interaction with someone less awkward.
- f. Can you think of situations in which fun around the fight for this cause would be inappropriate?
 - i. Probe/examples if necessary: For instance, joking about a certain topic as taboo because the topic is a serious real-life problem.