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Online Satirical News as Instances of Liquid Racism: Evidence from Greek

Abstract: When discussing the relationship between humour and racism, research usually concentrates on ethnic or racist jokes or on other humorous texts which expressly target migrants or other minorities. Relevant studies more or less explicitly ascribe to *critical humour studies* investigating topics such as how and why humour targeting the linguistic, cultural, or religious Other reproduces and maintains social discrimination and inequality, as well as how and why the generic conventions of humorous genres do not incite the audience to think critically of their content but instead enhance their tolerance for discriminatory and racist standpoints. In this context, the present study explores humorous texts that at first sight appear to have antiracist intentions. More specifically, I analyse a corpus of satirical news coming from popular Greek websites and targeting majority people for their racist views and practices towards migrants. The analysis is based on the concepts of *script opposition* and *target* as defined in the framework of the *General Theory of Verbal Humour*. The findings suggest that distinguishing between antiracist and racist interpretations is not an easy or straightforward matter: humour seems to blur the boundary between racism and antiracism. In order to account for this dimension of humour, I exploit the concept of *liquid racism* put forward by Weaver (*The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*) to account for the ambiguities of humorous discourse when it involves racist and antiracist meanings and interpretations.

Keywords: *humour; satirical news; racism; antiracism; liquid racism; General Theory of Verbal Humour.*



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Introduction

When discussing the relationship between humour and racism, research usually concentrates on ethnic or racist jokes or other humorous texts which expressly target migrants¹ or other minorities. Relevant studies more or less explicitly ascribe to *critical humour studies* investigating topics such as how and why humour targeting the linguistic, cultural, or religious Other reproduces and maintains social discrimination and inequality; how and why the generic conventions of humorous genres do not incite the audience to think critically of their content but instead enhance their tolerance for discriminatory and racist standpoints; what kind of rhetorical strategies (e.g. disclaimers, denials) are employed by the (re)producers of racist jokes to mitigate their hostility and to exonerate themselves from the accusation of being racists; and how discriminatory humour may force the targeted groups to assimilate to prevalent social norms so as to avoid being ridiculed due to their differences (see among others Archakis and Tsakona, “Racism in Recent Greek Migrant Jokes”; “Greek Migrant Jokes Online”; Archakis et al.; Billig; Hill; Lockyer and Pickering; Malmquist; Santa Ana; Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*).

In this context, I will attempt a different approach by exploring humorous texts that at first sight appear to have antiracist intentions: I will analyse satirical news coming from popular Greek websites and targeting majority people for their racist views and practices towards migrants. My analysis will reveal that distinguishing between antiracist and racist interpretations is not an easy or straightforward matter: humour seems to blur the boundary between racism and antiracism. In order to account for this dimension of humour, I exploit the concept of *liquid racism* put forward by Weaver (*The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*) to account for the ambiguities of humorous discourse when it involves racist and antiracist meanings.

In what follows, I first discuss the concepts of *racism*, *new racism*, and *liquid racism* and then I provide a brief overview of the literature about satirical news. The description of the corpus examined and the analytical methodology follow and an indicative example of the data is analysed to show that humour in seemingly antiracist satirical news may reproduce racist stereotypes. The final section contains the conclusions of the study.²

Racism, antiracism, new racism, and liquid racism³

Modern nation-states, at least in the western world, are based on the “one state-one nation norm” (Irvin and Gal 63): monoculturalism and monolingualism constitute dominant values within them. Nation-states are more often than not perceived and

¹ The term *migrant* is here used as a hypernym of *immigrants*, *refugees*, and *asylum seekers*, unless the Greek translation equivalent of one of the hyponyms is attested in the data under scrutiny.

² This study is further developed and presented in more detail in Tsakona (2024).

³ This section draws on extracts from Archakis and Tsakona (“A Migrant’s Public Apology”; “Antiracist and Racist Discourse”) with appropriate modifications so as to suit the purposes of the present article.

represented as pure entities with internal linguistic and cultural coherence and well-defined geographical borders. Such coherence, however, is never easy or even feasible, but is met with resistance by people who may not align with the dominant sociocultural ideals (i.e. endogenous and exogenous minorities). In such cases, nationalism as the founding ideology of nation-states takes the form of racism exercising pressure on resisting minorities and forcing them either to align with national ideals or to abandon the nation-state (see also Archakis, "The Representations of Racism" 35; "Tracing Racism" 1262-63).

Racism appears to be the most efficient means for achieving homogeneity within nation-state borders through giving privileges and advantages, i.e. economic and political power as well as access to recourses, only to those who consent to its directives while excluding the Others (Golash-Boza 133). So, racism is "constituted by social practices of discrimination ... and relationships of power abuse by dominant groups, organisations, and institutions" (van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* 103; see also van Dijk, "Discourse and the Denial of Racism"). Such discriminatory practices and relations of power abuse are premised on "socially shared and negatively oriented mental representations of Us about Them" (van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* 103), that is, on negative stereotypes and prejudice which "result in the problematisation, marginalisation and exclusion" of the Others (van Dijk, *Racism and Discourse* 3, 7; see also Trepagnier 1).

Despite this oppressive and discriminatory function of racio-national discourse, we should not overlook the fact that humanitarian and antiracist values promoting the acceptance of the Others are in wide circulation, especially after the racist crimes of World War II (van Dijk, "Discourse and the Denial of Racism" 95-97). Many liberal democracies in the western world adopt laws promoting tolerance, the acceptance of the Others, and equality between majority and minority populations (van Dijk, "Discourse and the Denial of Racism" 95-96; see also van Dijk, *Antiracist Discourse*).

Given that racism in its violent and explicit versions is denounced in the western world, a more subtle form of racism emerges, that is, *new racism*, which "wants to be democratic and respectable, and hence *first off denies that it is racism*" (van Dijk, "New(s) Racism" 34, my emphasis). In order to highlight the pervasiveness of new racism, van Dijk ("New(s) Racism") observes that

[e]specially because of their often subtle and symbolic nature, many forms of the 'new' racism are discursive: they are expressed, enacted and confirmed by text and talk, such as everyday conversations, board meetings, job interviews, policies, laws, parliamentary debates, political propaganda, textbooks, scholarly articles, movies, TV programmes and news reports in the press, among hundreds of other genres. They appear mere talk, and far removed from the open violence and forceful segregation of the old racism. Yet, they may be just as effective to marginalise and exclude minorities (34).

This discursive nature of new racism is nowadays attested in mitigated verbal racist attacks, since national majority speakers attempt to denounce racism, to engage in charity actions

(i.e. through offering occasional help to migrants with the expectation of their assimilation), to use ambiguous disclaimers such as *I'm not a racist, but..., I have nothing against blacks, but..., not all migrants are criminals, but...* (van Dijk "Discourse and the Denial of Racism"; also Gavins and Simpson; Goodman and Rowe) as well as to use humour to disguise racism as a kind of socially acceptable entertainment (see among others Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*; Irvine; Pérez). All these contribute to covering up and (unwillingly) perpetuating racist stereotypes and to effectively but covertly (re)producing inequality between minority and majority members (Trepagnier; van Dijk, "Discourse and the Denial of Racism" 88, 95, 96; "New(s) Racism" 49).

This oscillation between antiracist claims and racist views, practices, or attacks results in what Weaver (*The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*) calls *liquid racism* (see also Weaver, "Liquid Racism"; Weaver and Bradley). Through the concept of liquid racism, Weaver attempts to capture the emergence of both racist and antiracist/non-racist meanings from texts or extracts which are usually intended as non-racist, subversive of racism, or even clearly antiracist, but turn out to be polysemous and potentially racist:

Liquid racism confronts us as a different form of racism with which to deal. It is fluid, difficult to collect and identify because it may escape or dissolve before it can be contained, and is explicitly encouraged or given coverage in mass media forms. This is a racism that requires reflexivity in the reader when questions are asked on its meaning, social impact or implications for the self. ... Despite its elusiveness, liquid racism can appear as a structural form of racism that reproduces either embodied or culturally racist sign-systems. ... It is a hidden or furtive racism ... [and] requires the grouping or layering of signs that produces multiple racist and non-racist meanings (Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour* 153, 154).

As a result, the boundaries between racist and antiracist discourse are often blurred and multiple interpretations emerge from the same utterance or text. Such liquid meanings and ambiguities lead to "immunity to criticism" (Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour* 63), which in turn renders liquid racism an equally if not perhaps more serious and dangerous form of racism than the 'old', 'easily recognisable' racism.

It is exactly in this context that the present study sets out to investigate how liquid racism emerges from satirical news referring to migrants and targeting majority people for the racist ways they treat or perceive migrants. The texts examined here could be described not only as intended to produce humour but also as antiracist in the sense that they attempt to defend migrants and to denigrate racist values and practices prevailing among majority members (see among others Archakis and Tsakona, "Antiracist and Racist Discourse"; van Dijk, *Antiracist Discourse*). Yet, as I intend to show in the analysis, they do not manage to refrain from reproducing racist values and views – and humour plays a pivotal role in this.

On satirical news

Satirical news constitutes a prototypical humorous genre in the sense that it cannot exist without the presence of some kind of humour or related phenomena such as parody, irony, exaggeration, and the absurd. Two main forms of satirical news are usually investigated in the relevant literature: TV shows mimicking ‘serious’ TV news and written articles mimicking ‘serious’ newspaper articles and usually published in specialised websites. In both cases, satirical news parody ‘serious’ journalistic discourse and mock its (alleged) objectivity, factuality, and professionalism. Satirical news is more often than not perceived as a hybrid genre combining comedy and political opinion or news discourse and fiction. Through establishing intertextual links to a variety of genres, satirical news aims to criticise sociopolitical affairs, politicians’ statements and actions, journalists’ ways of representing current events, celebrities’ public speech and life-style, as well as citizens’ views and practices concerning sociopolitical issues. Its authors are more often than not inspired and motivated by real-life events reported by mainstream media to create exaggerated, parodying, or fictionalised versions of them in an effort to entertain the audience (Brugman et al.; Droog et al.; Ermida; Schwartz; Shilikhina).

Satirical news, especially in its written form, which is the focus of the present study, is often investigated in parallel with (and/or in comparison with) *fake news* not only due to their common fictional core, but also because the audience may at times mistake satirical news for fake news; in other words, they may interpret the former as accurate reports of real-life events and thus they may be deceived by their content (see among others Frank; Wasserman; Zhang et al.). De Sarkar et al. provide a definition of *satirical news* clearly distinguishing it from *fake news*:

News satire is a genre of deceptive news that is found on the web, with the intent of dispensing satire in the form of legitimate news articles. These articles differ from ‘fake’ news, in the sense that fake news intends to mislead people by providing untrue facts, while satirical news intends to ridicule and criticise something by providing satirical comments or through fictionalised stories. Satire is the intention of the author to be discovered as ‘fake’, unlike fake news, in which the intention is to make ... the readers believe in the news as true (3371).

As already mentioned in the Introduction, the present study has a critical orientation, which, at least to the best of my knowledge, does not seem to be common. In a critical analysis of satirical news, Anderson and Kincaid observe that the humorous representations of sociopolitical affairs offered in such texts may convey criticism, yet they exhibit a rather conservative orientation through

- supporting militarised world views;
- frequently displaying ethnocentrism and promoting nationalist/patriotic propaganda;

- drawing on ethnic and national stereotypes to elicit automatic laughter from the audience;
- frequently using demeaning stereotypes to legitimise ‘normativity’;
- offering instances of ideological Othering;
- promoting feelings of political inefficacy, alienation, and cynicism;
- only partially deconstructing hegemonic discourses;
- reaffirming authority, power structures, neo-conservative orthodoxies, and conformism discourses among viewers;
- diverting audience attention from legitimate grievances at democracy’s expense (174-178).

In other words, they argue that the criticism included in satirical news cannot be considered threatening for the political status quo, as it usually stays within “the implicit institutional bounds” (Anderson and Kincaid 183).

Studies in satirical news specifically referring to sociopolitical aspects of migration also seem to be scarce. Feldman and Borum Chattoo examine satirical news as a means for increasing audience engagement with the Syrian refugees’ issue and for changing the former’s negative views and attitudes towards Syrian refugees. Even though these authors acknowledge the possibility that the use of humour may lead the audience to discard or ignore the content of satirical news as non-serious or trivial, they underline the potential of satire for social change through critique, for sensitising the audience to specific sociopolitical issues, and for inciting them to reflect on such issues. When it comes to satirical news referring to refugees, satirical news could, in Feldman and Borum Chattoo’s view, “humanise refugees and challenge fear-laden assertions that connect them with terrorism” (295) and perhaps other racist stereotypes.

Contrary to Anderson and Kincaid’s critical views concerning the sociopolitical effects and functions of satirical news (see above), Feldman and Borum Chattoo’s study offers a positive/positivist look on the potential of satirical news and antiracist humour by highlighting the persuasive function of humour: satirical news could, in their view, reduce the impact of negative stereotypes and promote antiracist values. It is exactly at this point where their study meets the present one: the authors of the satirical news examined here seem to attempt to defend migrants and, in general, adopt an antiracist perspective as they humorously attack those politicians, celebrities, citizens, etc. who support racist views and perform racist acts. Nevertheless, in what follows, I intend to show that, despite their antiracist intentions, these authors do not manage to avoid reproducing racist values and stereotypes: satirical news may support conservative and racist standpoints, a point also made by Anderson and Kincaid.

Data and methodology

The data under scrutiny come from two popular Greek websites, namely *To Κουλούρι*/*To Koulouri* (‘the bagel’) and *To Βατράχι*/*To Vatrahi* (‘the frog’), which publish

exclusively pieces of satirical news. Both include extensive disclaimers reminding the readers of the fictional quality of their articles, since many articles draw on real-life events reported in the media and fictionalise or parody them. Moreover, in both cases, the authors of satirical news maintain their anonymity. For the purposes of the present study, the key words *μετανάστης/τρια* '(im)migrant', *πρόσφυγας* 'refugee', and related terms were used in the search engines of the two satirical news websites. The search provided us with 63 texts referring to migrants and published from September 2012 until September 2021.

The data were analysed with the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (Attardo, *Humorous Texts; The Linguistics of Humour*), in particular with the knowledge resources of *script opposition* and *target*. Script opposition accounts for the incongruity emerging from two incompatible scripts included in a single text and causing a violation of readers' expectations and hence humour.⁴ The target involves the person, group, idea, institution, etc. responsible for the violated expectations; in other words, the entity ridiculed through the humorous incongruity/script opposition. From the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* I also employ the analytical tools called *punch lines* and *jab lines*, which involve text extracts including a script opposition: punch lines are identified at the end of a text, while jab lines before the end of a text (see Attardo, *Humorous Texts* 82-83; Tsakona, "Towards a Revised Typology").

The analysis of the data reveals that all the texts seem to be pro-migrant and antiracist, in the sense that they target majority members for their racist views and/or practices. None of the articles examined employs humour to denigrate migrants. More specifically, the articles ridicule various Greek governments (both Left and Right), Prime Ministers, politicians, the Greek media, journalists, celebrities, and Greek citizens. Less often, international institutions supporting migrants, foreign politicians, and tourists visiting Greece are also targeted for the same reasons. The intended as antiracist humour attempted by the authors of these texts does not manage to avoid stereotyping at migrants' expense or trivialising their lives and living conditions. Even in articles expressly defending migrants, the authors have not managed to refrain from evoking racist discourse, even in an indirect or superficially subversive manner. In this sense, the data examined here constitute instances of liquid racism, as will be shown in the piece of satirical news analysed in the following section.

Data analysis

A significant number of the texts included in the corpus examined here reproduces well known negative stereotypes about migrants: for example, migrants are dirty, dark-skinned people, they talk 'inferior' languages and 'bad' Greek, they are hostile, illegal criminals, and (hence) unwanted individuals (see also Archakis and Tsakona, "Racism in Recent Greek Migrant Jokes"; "Greek Migrant Jokes Online"; Tsakona *Exploring the Sociopragmatics of Online Humour*; "Liquid Racism in Greek Online Satirical News", and

⁴ The terms *incongruity* and *script opposition* are used interchangeably.

references therein). Even though these texts do not seem to intend to ridicule migrants (in fact, their humour targets majority members), they end up representing them in a stereotypical manner. Due to space limitations only one indicative example will be analysed here.⁵

Γονιός που δεν πιστεύει στα εμβόλια ιδιαίτερα ανήσυχος ότι τα παιδιά των προσφύγων θα κολλήσουν το γιο του αρρώστιες

20 Οκτωβρίου 2016

Σε «αναμμένα κάρβουνα» κάθετι τις τελευταίες ημέρες ο Γιώργος Σ., πατέρας ενός πεντάχρονου παιδιού το οποίο πήγε για πρώτη φορά στο σχολείο τον περασμένο μήνα.

Ο μικρός Σοφοκλής, παρακολουθεί τα μαθήματα της πρώτης δημοτικού παρέα με αρκετά προσφυγόπουλα, με αποτέλεσμα ο 37χρονος πατέρας να αισθάνεται ιδιαίτερα ανήσυχος, αφού δεν έχει εμβολιάσει τον μικρό για καμία αρρώστια. Αντίθετα, ο άνδρας δηλώνει κατηγορηματικά αντίθετος στον εμβολιασμό, θεωρώντας πως τα εμβόλια δεν είναι τίποτα παραπάνω από φτηνά κόλπα των φαρμακευτικών εταιρειών ώστε να δημιουργήσουν στα μικρά παιδιά ευαισθησία, ωθώντας τα προς τα φάρμακα.

«Σιγά μην πάρω κι εγώ μέρος στο πάρτι εκατομμυρίων που στήνεται με θύματα τα παιδιά μας. Το ανοσοποιητικό τους σύστημα δουλεύει μια χαρά, χωρίς να χρειάζεται τις πανάκριβες σύριγγες. Για το μόνο που ανησυχώ, είναι για τις αρρώστιες που φέρνουν τα παιδιά των προσφύγων, οι οποίες είναι άγνωστες στους ελληνικούς οργανισμούς. Δεν πιστεύω κάτι παραμύθια ότι δήθεν όλα τα παιδιά κολλάνε τις ίδιες αρρώστιες. Σιγά μην κολλάει τα ίδια ο Σοφοκλάκος με τον κάθε ξένο», εξανίσταται ο Γιώργος, ο οποίος σε ερώτηση δημοσιογράφου μας για το ενδεχόμενο να ευθύνεται η απουσία εμβολίων για τις πιθανές αρρώστιες του παιδιού του ξεσπά:

«Είστε κι εσείς, τα βρωμερά ΜΜΕ, μέρος του συστήματος, για να εξυπηρετήσετε τα συμφέροντα του κεφαλαίου. Αν αρρωστήσει ο μικρός δεν θα φταίει ότι δεν έβαλε στο σώμα του τα βλαβερά εμβόλια, αλλά ότι έκατσε στο ίδιο θρανίο με έναν πρόσφυγα. Ίσως τα μικρόβια του πρόσφυγα μιλάνε άλλη γλώσσα, δεν ξέρω. Πάντως είναι επικίνδυνα».

Σε ότι αφορά τους γιατρούς, συστήνουν στα παιδιά των προσφύγων να μένουν μακριά από όσα Ελληνόπουλα δεν έχουν εμβολιαστεί, για λόγους προστασίας της πνευματικής υγείας και της κοινής λογικής των προσφυγόπουλων, ενώ διαψεύδεται η φήμη πως διάφοροι Σύλλογοι Γονέων και Κηδεμόνων ανά τη χώρα ψάχνουν εξονυχιστικά τα τάπερ των προσφύγων για να ελέγξουν αν οι γονείς τους τα βάζουν να κουβαλάνε με το ζόρι στο σχολείο ιούς για να πλήξουν την υγεία των συμπατριωτών μας (Anonymous).

Parent who does not believe in vaccination is particularly concerned that refugee children will contaminate his son with diseases

October 20th, 2016

⁵ The articles were translated into English by the author for the purposes of the present study. Punch and jab lines are marked in italics. The spelling of the original Greek texts is maintained. The photo accompanying this piece of satirical news has been removed for copyright reasons.

George S., father of a 5-year-old child who went to school for the first time last month, is on pins and needles during the past few days.

Little Sophocles [i.e. George's son] attends the courses of the first grade together with several refugee children, *hence his 37-year-old father feels particularly concerned, because he has not had his son vaccinated for any disease. On the contrary, the man is firmly opposed to vaccination, claiming that vaccines are nothing more than cheap tricks of pharmaceutical companies to render children sensitive and to force them to take medication.*

"Of course, I am not going to participate in this million-euro party [i.e. lucrative fraud] at the expense of our children. Their immunity system works just fine without the need for extremely expensive needles. The only thing that worries me is the diseases refugee children carry, which are unknown to Greek organisms. I don't believe in the fairy tales that supposedly all children are infected by the same diseases. There is no way little Sophocles is infected with the same disease as foreigners", fiercely protests George, who lashes out when our journalist asks him whether the fact that his son is not vaccinated could be the reason for potential infections:

"You, filthy media, are also part of the system, you aim to serve the interests of capitalism. If my kid becomes sick, it won't be because he did not put the harmful vaccines in his body, but because he sat next to a refugee [in the classroom]. Maybe the refugee's germs speak another language, I don't know. They are dangerous anyway".

As far as the doctors are concerned, they recommend that refugee children stay away from unvaccinated Greek children to protect their mental health and common sense, while the rumour that [members of] various Parent Teacher Associations throughout the country search refugee children's lunch boxes thoroughly to check whether their parents force them to carry viruses at school to harm the health of our compatriots, is refuted.

In this piece of satirical news, humour is, first, based on the incongruous fact that the father who worries about his son's health has kept him unvaccinated against various diseases. Often, in countries hosting migrants (including Greece), majority parents worry and publicly complain about migrant children (supposedly) being unvaccinated, thus portraying them as responsible for the potential transmission of infectious diseases to majority children through their socialisation in the same schools (Temperekidou). Humour is also produced by George's incongruous claims that migrants carry different germs/diseases than Greeks, that the vaccines are harmful for children and beneficial only for pharmaceutical companies who make money out them, and that the media in turn promote solely the financial interests of pharmaceutical companies, not public health. Finally, humour emerges from doctors' unconventional recommendations towards refugee children and from Greek majority parents' exaggerated practices to prevent refugee children from supposedly infecting majority ones with 'their' diseases. The jab/punch lines attested in this article are based on script oppositions such as the following ones:

- Majority parents who worry about their children's health vaccinate them/refuse to vaccinate them.
- Majority children suffer from the same diseases as refugee ones/different diseases from refugee ones.
- Majority children become sick because they are unvaccinated/because they socialise with refugee children.
- Vaccines are meant to protect people from diseases/only to make profit for the pharmaceutical companies at the expense of people's health.
- The media promote vaccines to protect public health/only for the benefit of pharmaceutical companies.
- Majority parents believe that their children should stay away from refugee children to remain physically healthy/Majority doctors recommend that refugee children stay away from majority children to maintain their mental health and common sense.
- Majority parents wish to protect their children from infectious diseases/believe that refugee parents deliberately infect majority people.

Such humour ridicules Greek majority people and parents like George S. in particular, who hold racist beliefs to the effect that refugees do not take adequate care of their own and their children's health and thus become responsible for the transmission of contagious, dangerous, and even unknown to the Greek context, diseases. Hence, according to the same racist stereotype, refugee children should not attend Greek schools and socialise with majority children (on the widespread circulation of such views, see Athanasopoulou; Panagaki et al.; Temperekidou, and references therein). Simultaneously, through humour this article defends migrants and their children by suggesting that they would rather stay away from majority members. In this sense, it targets Greek racist people and exhibits antiracist intentions by defending migrants against racist practices and views.

However, it should be not be overlooked that, in order to produce such humour, the anonymous author relies on and recycles widely held racist stereotypes, which represent migrants in a negative manner as filthy, unhealthy, and dangerous for public health individuals who deliberately harm majority people. Such representations are very often used as excuses by racists for mistreating migrants and using physical or verbal violence against them, or even for stigmatising, marginalising, or even excluding them from the host communities. The lack of hygiene stereotypically attributed to migrants implies a lack of moral values as well, and eventually justifies violent or other actions for 'protecting' oneself against the Other. After all, there is a strong metaphorical connection between dirtiness and immorality, especially when attempts are made to portray specific people or groups as unwanted outcasts (Douglas; Kövecses). Consequently, there seems to be a clash between the antiracist intentions of the humourist author and his/her public reproduction of racist views intimidating and marginalising migrants.

This contradiction in meanings and readings emerging from the same text renders it an instance of liquid racism. Readers may focus on the fact that, as a piece of satirical news, the article ridicules Greek racist parents and may eventually (more or less) overlook the

extensive reproduction of the racist stereotypes humour is premised on. In other words, humour could draw readers' attention to its entertaining dimension, thus not encouraging them to critically scrutinise the racist stereotypes embedded therein. It could also be the case that readers who oppose to vaccination and/or hold racist beliefs do not grasp the humorous ridiculing of racist stereotypes against migrants and thus confirm the 'accuracy' and popularity of their beliefs.

Conclusion

The present study has tried to demonstrate that distinguishing between racism and antiracism in written satirical news is not a straightforward matter. The data examined here appear to have antiracist intentions since they employ humour to ridicule Greek majority members for their racist perspectives and practices; yet they do not refrain from reproducing racist values and views. The indicative example analysed above reveals that this may be achieved by evoking racist stereotypes even when expressly defending migrants.

The fact that both racist and antiracist meanings and interpretations can emerge from satirical news articles renders them instances of liquid racism. In this sense, new racism is reinforced and further disseminated: mitigated forms of racism denying their racist quality through seemingly antiracist humour may eventually pass as antiracism. Humour thus becomes a means of perpetuating liquid and new racism. At the same time, humour may distract readers from concentrating on the reproduction of racist values and views and, consequently, they may perceive these texts as exclusively antiracist ones. When racism is missed or overlooked, it becomes normalised and the distinction between racism and antiracism becomes blurred (see among others Archakis and Tsakona, "Antiracist and Racist Discourse"; Archakis et al.; Trepagnier; Tsakona, "Talking about Humour").

More research is required to further scrutinise the subtle but effective workings of racism in satirical news and other online satirical genres, since critical approaches to such texts so far appear to be scarce. This seems to be particularly important in a "world of fast-moving sharing and likes, [where] most social media users do not take time to critically analyse articles before reacting and moving on" (Bedard and Schoenthaler 614). By adopting a critical perspective on humour and not perceiving it as 'mere fun' or 'just joking', I have tried to demonstrate that humour may be a socially acceptable and superficially innocuous way of representing minority lives and living conditions in a negative manner, thus further contributing to their marginalisation (see also Pérez, and references therein). Undervaluing the presence of Others in our communities and neglecting their needs constitute forms of racism and, as such, reproduce social inequality and injustice.

Finally, Weaver admits that humorous/satirical texts which are instances of liquid racism cannot be restrained or censored: "Censoring satire would likely prove self-defeating and encourage increasingly coded forms of racist expression, and where racism is debated or ambiguous, might lead to subtle authoritarianism" (*The Rhetoric of Racist*

Humour, 180-1). Instead, he suggests that

we might see the analysis [of liquid racism] as a substitute for censoring it, as its rhetorical effects *can* be combatted if they can be understood, providing arguments on *how* it works and *what* it does, rather than emotively charged, serious proclamations calling for its removal (Weaver, *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*, 191, emphasis in the original).

In other words, liquid (or any other form of) racism cannot be eliminated through censoring humour, but it can be critically analysed and brought to the limelight through relevant research projects and critical literacy activities (see among others Archakis and Tsakona, “Antiracist and Racist Discourse”; Tsakona, “Talking about Humour”; *Recontextualising Humour*, 181-188). Sensitising readers to its presence and enabling them to detect it may be the most effective weapon we have against it.

Disclosure statement

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