

Rea Kakampoura & Aphrodite-Lidia Nounanaki, *Ta Mimidia (memes) tis Pandemias COVID-19. Psiphiaki Laographia kai Humor sta Ellinika Mesa Kinonikis Diktiosis* [Memes of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Digital Folklore and Humor in Greek Social Media]

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The book “*Ta Mimidia (memes) tis Pandemias COVID-19. Psiphiaki Laographia kai Humor sta Ellinika Mesa Kinonikis Diktiosis*” [Memes of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Digital Folklore and Humor in Greek Social Media] written in Greek language by Dr. Rea Kakampoura, Associate Professor of Folklore Studies and Director of the Laboratory of Social Sciences at the Department of Pedagogy and Primary Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in collaboration with Dr. Aphrodite-Lidia Nounanaki, adjunct Lecturer of Folklore Studies in the Department of Philology of the same University.¹ The book is one more significant edition of the Laboratory of Social Sciences, NKUA concerning crucial sociocultural issues of contemporary era. It is a case study on memes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an accessible text because it contains a multitude of examples, i.e. everything described is accompanied by at least one typical example to make everything mentioned understandable. Also, since its subject are memes, various such were used in the titles of every chapter, giving the central meaning of each one of them. So, it is a book both accessible, and concise on a topic of current interest, not only because the pandemic has not quite died out yet, but also because memes are a legitimate topic for research in the digital folklore. Thus, it is an important contribution to the digital folklore research, a field of folklore studies rapidly evolving.

¹ http://www.primedu.uoa.gr/fileadmin/primedu.uoa.gr/uploads/Egrastiria/Ergastirio_koinonikon_episthmon/Ta_Mimidia_tis_Pandimias_COVID_19.pdf

The book splits easily into two sections. The first presents the theoretical aspects prevailing in the research, and the second focuses on its actual subject: the memes about the experience of the pandemic.

So, after the brief introduction in digital folklore and the way it occurs on social media, the presentation of the genre, and the description of the methodological issues of the presented research, the book's basic upshot appears to be: Memes are a type of multimedia digital vernacular genre characterized by its humorous and indicative style. In this case popular humor is being studied. Thus, a thorough discussion on humor and its interdisciplinary approaches follows. Humor however expressed through memes functions both as a means of criticizing the hegemonic discourse, attitudes, and behaviors, but also as a means of expressing and alleviating fears and concerns that were particularly intense due to the unprecedented experience of the pandemic. Dealing with the frightful situation of the global pandemic, the function of humor to distance oneself from negative emotions such as fear, sadness or shame is shown by focusing on its 'dark' version, the black humor.

The book's second section starts with the chapter "The themes of the memes about the coronavirus pandemic". The authors point out that the flurry of information and developments during the pandemic was great, but not all of it was commented on through memes. The choice has to do rather with the impact of each event and the 'impression' it caused on the internet users so that they feel the need to satirize it. Thus, the research questions about the themes of the memes are posted were related to what internet users wanted to satirize from the events associated with the pandemic and what ultimately caused laughter during this period. The writers mention that the way the thematics are listed in the book, generally follows the course of the evolution of the pandemic, however, having moved somewhat away from it, a more relaxed relationship with the temporal presumption is followed. So, the analysis of memes and the categories they are grouped in are presented in the next chapters. Of course, the first issue commented on through memes were the periods of the lockdowns, the most shocking and novel experience connected with this pandemic that change radically people's lives, and where boredom and loneliness prevailed. Going back to 'normal' living was a peculiar passage, where the various attempts to reconcile everyday life with protection from the virus, brought about a variety of practices and reactions to them, that were commented on by internet users. Mostly commented subjects have been the protective masks, the tests and, of course, the vaccines.

By analyzing these themes, some morphological aspects of the genre were located and presented as well. The textual rendering of memes prevailed over the visual. That is, the majority of the memes located in this research were written texts, or texts followed by a picture, but with the text being the main way to communicate the message.

Another main thematic axis in the commentary of all the events emerged was human cunning, while it seems that prevailing norms and social standards were criticized. However, it became apparent that the function of memes varies among the social networks of internet users. They often seem to be misinterpreted or given different interpretations depending on the worldview that characterizes the respective online group.

To wrap things up, the book shows that the humor of memes functioned as a means of criticizing the hegemonic discourse, attitudes, and behaviors, but also as a means of expressing and alleviating fears and concerns that were particularly intense due to the unprecedented experience of the pandemic. The themes of memes about the pandemic span the spectrum of experience, including experiences, perceptions, practices, and policies implemented during its duration. Through the thorough study of this contemporary polytropic genre of folk narratives it has been shown that humor and satire continue to be a creative way of managing difficult situations, while at the same time representing a lively way of popular expression and communication. This research is yet another example of internet and social media being an aspect of everyday life and expression and a 'place' where folklore thrives.

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