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Geopolitics of Humour and Development in Nepal and Afghanistan

Rupak Shrestha and Jennifer Fluri

10.1 Introduction

At times of adversity, humour becomes a medium through which to live alternative realities. Borrowing from Sara Ahmed (2010), humour is contagious insofar as “affects are contingent”. If memories are sorrowful, humour brings to realization that life is more-than-misery. The chapter illustrates humour in the everyday through the authors’ respective research in Afghanistan and Nepal. Humour makes it possible to realize that people can share a sense of place even though their subjectivities might differ and, in doing so, they can creatively resist/oppose mechanisms of power. Humour can be a method of what de Certeau (1984) identified as “making do” in places and situations of precarity. Humour becomes a tactic for countering hegemonic power, coping, and resisting geopolitical conflict, structural violence, and identity-based marginalization. It creates a space in which vulnerable populations interact with state territorialization—at times resisting and at other times creating friction. Yet, humour is more than resistance. When uncertainty is met through humour and humorous actions, it creates moments of solidarity among the actors. For Fluri, shared laughter during her fieldwork became a way to bridge unevenness. Humour and laughter gave rise to a form of embodied “jocular geopolitics” (Fluri, 2019, 123). In Shrestha’s fieldwork,

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humour in the everyday is present acutely at the time-space of departure from the community. In an effort to counter moments of sorrowful departure, communities organize events filled with dance and shared happiness. This chapter will examine the authors' field sites in Nepal and Afghanistan to examine common and disparate uses of humour during times of precarity, violence, and displacement.

10.2 Humour and Geopolitics

Humour and laughter have both positive and negative associations with adversity, trauma, and tragedy. Laughter has been discussed by scholars as a cathartic release of stress, an embodied response to tragedy, or as a method of resistance to adversity or oppression (Billig, 2005). This includes dark or “gal-lows” humour, which can be a survival technique during situations of precarity and perilous political power (Davies, 2001; Obrdlik, 1942). For example, research on political prisoners and prisoners of war identify humour as a common coping strategy and a method of defiance to ongoing oppression (Henman, 2001; Horn, 2011; Mehta, 2012; Ostrower, 2015). Cameron (2015) identifies self-deprecating humor as both a persuasive and ethical method for calling attention to serious issues such as abusive power and inequality.

Humour as a method of resistance or challenge to persecution is temporally limited, can occur in moments and through relations with those experiencing similar forms of oppression (Mayo, 2010). Individuals sharing a similar experience with humour further create connection through momentary spaces of exclusive understanding (Swart, 2009). The temporality and spatial situatedness of humour during adversity highlight one's precarity while refusing defeat through a particular personification of political persistence. The temporality of humour is not necessarily limited to one moment in time or space, but rather can manifest into a collective cache that may be called upon in the future (Dittmer, 2013). Therefore, while humour can be temporally limited and understood within a particular location, neither time nor space necessarily limit the reoccurrence of humour at different times and the ability of humour to resonate across multiple spaces.

The geopolitical uses of humour by the dominant or powerful along with using humour to oppose or challenge individuals or groups in power has been discussed by several political geographers. This research includes analyses of cartoons used to challenge beliefs systems, which in some instances led to violent retaliation (Ridanpää, 2014a, 2014b). Comedic media programs,

such as talk shows, or stand-up comedy routines, offer poignant critiques of governmental practices or political processes (Dodds, 2010; Dodds & Kirby, 2013). Additionally, comedies that are well recognized within a particular cultural framework can “offer a lens through which we can think about agency at the margins of society without romanticizing their weak position” (Kuus, 2008, 259). This does not mean that humour is only a tactical form of resistance by the oppressed, because it is also used as a tool of the powerful to humiliate, marginalize, and torment the undesirable other (Billig, 2005; Flint, 2001).

While expressions of humour, such as laughter, may be easily recognized, humour remains elusive to comprehension (Ekman, 2003) because it is contingent on social, cultural, and spatial recognizability, which can also produce new forms of knowledge or understanding (Wood & Smith, 2004). Scholars have argued that humour is a method for humanizing oneself and others. For example, Clark (2019) examines humorous expressions of grief as a way of rendering visible, and grievable (as argued by Butler, 2009) the lives and deaths of marginalized and oppressed individuals. Thus, humour can be a mechanism for calling attention to unjust actions and attitudes (Boykoff & Osnes, 2019) and mobilizing collective action and solidarity through both responsive and shared catharsis (Routledge, 2012). Additionally, marginalized and non-normative groups have used humour to cope with and subvert harmful stereotypes (Macpherson, 2008).

10.3 Methodology

We expand on the literature from the earlier section to discuss case studies from our respective fieldwork in Nepal and Afghanistan to illustrate the different ways in which humour has been used (1) to expose abuse, marginalization, conflict, tragedy, and trauma; (2) to ridicule certain forms of security and surveillance; and (3) as a coping strategy. Shrestha draws on his ethnographic fieldwork in Boudha, Kathmandu, and Phale in the Walung region of north-eastern Nepal, which he conducted in 2018. His qualitative research, conducted in Nepali and Tibetan, incorporates interviews and conversations with Tibetan refugees and people from Ghunsa and Walung in Nepal. Fluri's contributions draw from a larger research project on gender, geopolitics, and development in Afghanistan (2006–2019). While neither author intended to study humour as part of their respective research, during our advisor (Fluri) and advisee (Shrestha) meetings it became clear that humour resonated as

endemic to rather than separate from situations of adversity and precarity in each of our field-sites.

Therefore, our examinations of humour stem from our field notes and experiences in each location, and as part of our qualitative data analyses. Through our examinations of Nepal and Afghanistan we seek to illustrate the similar forms, purposes, and uses of humour in these two dramatically different socio-political contexts. Our respective examples were chosen based on their associations with our larger research projects on geopolitics, violence, marginalization, displacement, and corporeal insecurity and precarity.

10.4 Phale Tibetans in Nepal

10.4.1 Humour at the Time-Space of Departure

Refugees live a life in waiting. In the temporal and spatial continuum of waiting, it is considered good when waiting is met with motion. In the Tibetan refugee community in Phale, North-eastern Nepal, it is especially so, since the village is increasingly left with more and more deserted houses of stone walls and tin roofs. Similar to Himalayan ethnic peoples, Tibetan refugees here used to leave the village in the harsh winter months to go to Kathmandu or to sacred Buddhist sites in Nepal and India for pilgrimage. They would however return once spring overcame the inhospitality of winter in the mountains.

Almost all research participants who are Tibetan refugees in Phale are second-generation refugees. Even though they conceive of Tibet as a conceptual homeland, their sense of belonging and community lies in Phale, Nepal. They grew up in Phale and recognize the village and the region as their home. Initially, leaving the village in winter and for other arrangements like education were temporary. However, new forms of motion and mobility are now in play in these mountain spaces. Now, Tibetans from Phale are permanently resettling in Kathmandu and as far as Queens, New York. Shrestha met many Phale Tibetans in Kathmandu who have not returned to Phale for several years. At a tea shop in Boudha, Kathmandu, three middle-aged Phale Tibetans joke: “We do not have the stamina to take the journey and walk all those hills again ... if you know of a helicopter that is going up [there], let us know and we will go happily”. In the past decade, the journey to Phale from Kathmandu has been reduced by a day but it still takes four to five days to reach Phale—two days on a van/jeep and a two to three days hike along the Ghunsa river.

Refugee mobilities are full of hope. They would not move if there was not a splinter of hope. For Phale Tibetans, hope comes in many shades of dreaming—to open a restaurant in Kathmandu; to visit sacred places and obtain teachings; to trade goods from Nepali lowlands to the borders in the north; to find an international migrant contractor that can help them reach New York through informal corridors; to live a life in the city; to marry, settle, and dream of new hopes. As more and more Tibetans leave the village, there are now only seven to eight permanent households in Phale. Tashi's case, which will be elaborated upon below, is interesting because he is a member of one of the remaining permanent houses, and is aware of these changes and the impacts these mobilities have created for the village. However, he does not have aspirations of leaving the village permanently. And although he is a refugee in the eyes of the Nepali state, he has intimate ties with this place. Phale used to have a decent and well-funded school for young children up until the early 2010s. However, many Tibetans in the village prefer that their children receive their education in one of the Tibetan Children's Village or Central School for Tibetans in India. This out-migration for education was so stark that in 2017 (and onwards), there was only one child (three years old) left in the school and one official teacher, who was the child's mother, Pema. Since the school is *de facto* closed, the regional education administration is in the process of transferring Pema to Ghunsa, a neighbouring village an hour walk north from Phale.

Of the remaining permanent households in Phale, four are Gelug monks of the local monastery, one is a yak herding family, the other family diversified their yak herding by opening a guest house and eatery for trekkers and passers-by, three other families operate their own hand-spun carpet weaving productions to sell across the border in Ri'og, Tibet. Besides these families, many houses here remain desolate. Tashi shows me where the first house was built in the village, by the Tibetan refugees in the area who had first moved across the border in the early 1950s after Chinese suppression in Tibet became unbearable. What remains now is a vacant land surrounded by a derelict stone wall with markings on the ground that faintly remind people that there used to be a structure there at a distant point in time.

The memory of refuge for Tibetans is one of sorrow—as many reiterate their or their parents and grandparents' journey across the Himalayas. Many scholars have outlined these stories and journeys in countless volumes. Yet Tibetan refugee lives are “more-than-misery”. As Fluri (2019) points out people make do through humour in conditions of protracted uncertainty in which futurities are ruptured. Through humour, Tibetans cynically compare their lives with their fellow villagers (Ghunsali and Walungnga) who are

Nepali citizens, with whom they share intimate connections. And this is true the other way around as well when Ghunsali villagers complain that they did not receive a solar panel or a new blue tin roof over their homes—all of which the Tibetans received as forms of refugee aid.

With every new permanent resettlement outside of Phale, the remaining villagers are affected by sorrow. Up until 2019, Phale was cut off from the rest of the world as there was no cell phone reception or a satellite phone in the village. Departures meant that they would not see or hear from the other villagers for an extended period. The villagers that chose to stay recognize that the ones who are moving have imagined a hopeful, yet uncertain, future elsewhere. Although these departures are sorrowful, they are simultaneously filled with laughter, dance, and merrymaking. In this recognition of uncertainty, laughter becomes a mode of expression and solidarity, which all converge in the form of *dhunchyaang* as they call it in the local Tibetan dialect that involves collectively eating and merrymaking.

Dhunchyaang, a celebration before departure, displaces the sorrow of leaving with erratic humour, patterned shoulder-to-shoulder dances, unintelligible body movements, and partaking of tremendous quantities of local alcoholic spirits. As the evening fades into darkness, body movements and language become increasingly more undecipherable. Laughter bleeds into the thin mountain air of the village. The night before departure becomes a way in which to understand and recognize that the village is no longer what it used to be; the “borderlands” have become more bordered because of Chinese intensification of securitization and new forms of trade, mobility, and economic geographies at the borders (Gurung, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2020). The Tibetan refugees concede to these changing social and political dynamics at these borderlands through laughter.

10.4.2 Playful with the Police

If Phale Tibetans meet uncertainty and departure with laughter, humour is also a cynical way in which they might resist or refuse state mechanisms of power. Scholars (Mayo, 2010; Routledge, 2012) have noted that humour creates a space in which vulnerable populations interact with state territorialization—at times resisting and others creating friction. This is acutely distinct because of linear power mechanisms in Himalayan spaces compared to circular/overreaching power volumes of urban spaces. Power assemblages (of state sovereignty) in mountain spaces are linear. Bureaucracy starts from the power-centre of Kathmandu, reaches the plains (Biratnagar), then to the hill-centres

(Taplejung), and finally outstretching to the mountains (Ghunsa-Phale). All forms of state proceedings, communications, and directives follow this exact route of power dissemination.

Because of this hierarchical and linear form of state power, especially in the mountain regions of Nepal, state power is localized by the time it reaches Phale. It becomes easier for Phale Tibetans to negotiate with the police who represent the Nepali state. The police post at Ghunsa stations four to five police constables, who are transferred every six months to a year. So, at most times, the police constables who are stationed in Ghunsa are new to the area and really are at the behest of the local village leaders.

If the police initially restricted any celebration, Phale Tibetans' political action vis-a-vis Ghunsali, who are Nepali citizens, forced the local police to retract their restrictions. Since there were only four to five police constables at the village, and that they had to live in the village for a few more months, they had to "live by the rules" of the village. The villagers from both the villages later invited the police constables to attend the Dalai Lama celebration dinners, which they were in no position to decline.

Tashi retells the above story—he is proud of this particular vignette and has told it to me a number of times with equal amusement—of an instance when he mocked the local police during a celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday. The Nepali state has increasingly restricted Tibetan cultural and political practices—especially so after 2008, when Tibetan political protests against Chinese repression were heightened in China and elsewhere including Kathmandu. Since then, the Nepali state is in what I call a *visual war* with Tibetan iconography and visuality, which might be politically coded as anti-Chinese by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Kathmandu. One such popular visual is the portrait of the Dalai Lama, the most revered living figure for Tibetan Buddhists. The Nepali state—vis-à-vis directive from the Chinese Embassy—works to eliminate such Tibetan imageries since the Nepali state relies on Chinese aid and support for the nation's development and to escape from an absolute dependence with India to the south on matters of trade and transportation.

The top-down directive from the regional administration to the local police in Ghunsa was the same—limit or restrict Tibetan imagery such as that of the Dalai Lama during the Holiness' birthday or other celebrations. This becomes a problem as the Nepali state continuously misunderstands and disregards the cultural practices and everyday politics of Himalayan indigenous peoples (for instance, of the Walungga and Ghunsali from the same region as Phale), who also revere the Dalai Lama and share cultural and social practices with Tibetans. In the larger realm of security politics, limiting Tibetan imagery

that is deemed anti-Chinese is an easy task for the Nepali state. The Nepali state is secular by law but is de facto Hindu—its security divisions of police and military practice Hindu rites and rituals of purity before beginning any task and is guided by Hindu cosmology, although Nepal by law is a multi-religious state.

In Boudha, Kathmandu, these forms of interactions with the police are remarkably different since it is the site of securitization. Here, Tibetan events are acutely policed and are rendered illegal and illegible by the Nepali state. However, Tibetans find these acts of policing amusingly redundant. In my research when talking to young Tibetans in Boudha, they note that important Tibetan days are now easy to remember. Since these events are heavily policed, they wittily note that heavy policing itself becomes a reminder for Tibetans of days of political and social importance. Nyima, a young Tibetan participant noted, with sparkles of joy in his eyes:

You really know if there is a Tibetan event if the police are out in big numbers. We hardly remember the smaller events. But, when the police are out roaming in the kora and sitting next to the entrances to Boudha and the monasteries and alleyways, we realize that we have forgotten something and that there is something we need to celebrate.

While policing tries to restrict Tibetans from organizing to erase particular forms of Tibetan political and cultural practices, what it inadvertently does is remind Tibetans of these events rather than make them forget these dates that hold significance in the social and political lives of exiled Tibetans. Mocking the securitization and policing, Tibetans use humour to narrate that security actually does the opposite of what it intends to do.

The following section outlines everyday uses of humour in Afghanistan. This is followed by the chapter's conclusions, which includes an overview of the commonalities of humour amid adversity in these disparate spaces by focusing on the use and importance of humour for making-do and coping with adversity and profound precarity.

10.5 Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been embroiled in geopolitical conflicts since the late 1970s. The country and its citizens have experienced multiple and successive political conflicts, invasions, regime changes along with resource scarcity, endemic poverty, displacement, and land dispossession. Violence is embedded into

everyday life in much of Afghanistan. Humour exemplifies one way in which some individuals cope with protracted violence and political uncertainty. Laughter is an everyday method of releasing tension and stress caused by the profound uncertainty that mars daily life in a location beset by protracted political turmoil and continual violence. Humorously challenging the state and its governance is a method for pointing out the state's inability to provide security for civilians, while releasing corporeal tension endemic to living with continuous insecurity.

Humour in Afghanistan has taken many forms. With the rise of various media outlets and television programs, satire and humour became regular features of various shows. For example, *Shabkhand* (evening laughter) was a popular program hosted by the late Asif Jalali. Jalali became a household name in Afghanistan for his comedic approach to politics and humourous roles in various programs. The use of humour to challenge political leaders was of central importance to Jalali, who in a BBC interview in 2011 stated, "The aim of my comedy is to challenge the wrongs in my society" (Qadiry, 2011).

Prior to media-generated humour, telling jokes was a method used by many Afghans to keep their spirits up particularly during the difficult years of Taliban rule (1996–2001) because this regime banned all forms of entertainment (i.e., television, movies, music, and art). While today, comedy can be seen on nearly all television channels in Afghanistan, some programs have pushed the limits of acceptance by some in society. This has resulted in censorship at best and threats by conservative and extremist groups at worst. While some politicians find political humour offensive, others welcome humour as a way to heal society. One politician, Ramzan Bashardost, a former planning minister and presidential candidate, identifies humour as a method for challenging fear towards a progressive future (Qadiry, 2011).

Aman Mojadidi, an Afghan-American, who identifies himself as an "Afghan-bred, American-born artist", incorporates humour to disrupt conventional understanding about Afghanistan and calls attention to the spoils and absurdity of war and reconstruction. His humour takes an ethnographic approach through his own experiences as an expat-Afghan who travelled to Afghanistan to fight as part of the mujahideen resistance against the communist regime and Soviet occupiers in the 1980s and his contemporary analysis of Afghanistan and international military, aid, and development. His photography incorporates trans-spatial symbols in an effort to transgress typical representations. For example, in one photograph, entitled "A Day in the Life of a Jihadi Gangster" he is the subject of the photograph. He stands and stares directly at the camera, in an Afghan-style Turban (coloured black, similar to Taliban headgear), a white tank-top, and a large gold-chain necklace complete

with a gold handgun “bling” around his neck. His bare arms are tattooed, and a real-looking handgun is stuffed into the waist of his belted jeans. Mojadidi’s art generates humour through absurdity that incorporates incongruent sartorial tropes that challenge conventional representations of Islamic extremists.

In another example, he uses humour to address police corruption in Kabul city. He impersonates a police officer and directs cars to pull over. Rather than requesting a bribe (which is a common police practice), he gives the driver a small amount of money and apologizes for corruption on behalf of the Kabul police department. This use of humour calls attention to police officers, while simultaneously challenging their power and effectiveness, and highlighting the endemic problem of corruption. Mojadidi’s humour is both subversive and resonates with other forms of everyday humour in Afghanistan as a method for calling attention to the spoils of war and associated problems such as governmental corruption, death, displacement, and dubitation.

Other examples of humorous expression call attention to vast differences in security provided to international workers, offices, and compounds as compared to local civilians. International offices are located within compounds that are buttressed by several layers of barricaded security, armed guards, video surveillance, and strict entry/exit protocols for workers and visitors to these locations. Some Afghans have quipped “what are they afraid of” in reference to the body armour worn by foreign soldiers. This use of humour illustrates the stark contrast between bodies with and without armour, while also suggesting a lack of courage among international soldiers and simultaneously identifying civilian bodies as precarious to rather than the cause of harm to international troops.

The differential treatment of bodies particularly in the capital city, Kabul, remains another way in which humour poignantly illustrates unequal treatment of individuals based on their geographic association. For example, when attempting to enter a secured section of the city to conduct an interview with Afghan film makers, Fluri’s research team was barred entry to this area. When negotiating with the guard at the checkpoint, the driver provided the guard with information about our meeting and after several minutes stated that the women sitting in the backseat are Americans. After we (myself, a female European-American, and my colleague, a female Afghan-American) provided our passports as evidence of our international status, the guard allowed us to move through the checkpoint. Once we passed the checkpoint, the driver said jokingly, “your famous passports got us through!” The entire car began to laugh and joke about the security signalled by our passports. The guard was shocked to see the Afghan-American woman’s passport, as she spoke Dari-Persian without an American accent. He also scolded her for wearing a loose

headscarf, while mine was secured with pins. We laughed at the confusion our appearances and paperwork caused the guard, who allowed us to enter, despite his disbelief.

Our laughter helped to release the palatable tension that filled our car at the checkpoint. We would often joke at checkpoints or wait to be allowed entry to a secure facility because the point of entry is the most vulnerable to attack. For example, while entering a fortified compound of international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), known as Green Village, our car was allowed to enter the main gate into an area enclosed by four metal and concrete-reinforced walls with no roof. A guard waited and watched our car from a small tower built into the top of the wall. “Why do we have to wait here?” I naively asked. “They’re waiting to see if we explode”, the driver quipped coyly. The others and I laughed quietly, while the realization of this reality resonated.

Joking about differential forms of security remains a useful method for both calling attention to these inequalities and laughing in the face of profound precarity. Temporal uncertainty reverberates through everyday encounters, as a common experience of insecurity. There remains an expectation of daily violence in Kabul, without knowledge of when or where it will occur. Therefore, simple activities such as walking, riding in a car, visiting a friend, or meeting a colleague are imbued with risk. Laughter provides an everyday method for coping with these risks and uncertainties.

While some forms of humour resonate across spaces and in different cultural contexts, others are specific to a particular time and space. The jokes among my colleagues while traversing Kabul city were specific to our collective experiences of the city. Thus, drawing on Massey’s (2005) conceptualization of time-spaces, the humour we shared rested within the particularities of our temporal and spatial interactions. They were funny within a particular time and specific place, which may not resonate with individuals who were situated within or cannot relate to that precise time-space. Therefore, humour can create temporally limited time-spaces of inclusive exclusion. Meaning, humour can bring individuals together to create spaces of solidarity and social inclusion while purposefully excluding others (Fluri, 2019). These time-spaces are integral to tactical forms of “making-do” as part of the process of everyday life in situations of profound precarity (de Certeau, de Certeau, 1984; Swart, 2009).

Humour further operates as a form of corporeal release, to ease tension and experience momentarily relief from stress or suffering. We argue that political jokes and the laughter that accompanies them exemplify a form of embodied geopolitics. In these cases, the body’s expression of laughter highlights the

object of ire, that is, politics, while simultaneously expressing joy and corporeal release. Additionally, laughter is an embodied form of catharsis and an affective interaction within a specific time-space that draws upon collective experiences to tactically challenge actions that are beyond one's immediate control.

10.6 Conclusions

In this chapter we argue that humour operates alongside adversity, as a mechanism for “making-do” and creating time-spaces of connection and interaction that challenge (if only momentarily) situations of oppression, precarity, and uncertainty. While the situation and examples from Nepal and Afghanistan are significantly different, the uses of humour in these time-spaces address three interrelated uses: (1) exposing abuse, inequalities, and the incongruences associated with oppression, (2) the use of ridicule against acts of surveillance or governmental control, and (3) as a coping strategy.

Humour is often used to expose abusive behaviour by states and other powerful organizations (such as international NGOs). Jokes can expose abuse and, in many cases, become a coping strategy for dealing with that abuse. Tibetans in Nepal and Afghan citizens use humour to expose or highlight surveillance, corruption, and oppression from their respective governments. Exposure through humour can also be done by way of ridicule.

Ridicule is a method for “making fun” of one's oppressor or oppressive situation (such as conflict, displacement, and uncertainty). For example, ridiculing the use of surveillance by illustrating its lack of effectiveness. In Kathmandu, in neighbourhoods with large exile Tibetan populations—Boudha, Swayambhu, and Ekantakuna—surveillance and policing are heightened during Tibetan days of celebrations and commemorations. Rather than curtailing Tibetan cultural, religious, and political activities, what policing inadvertently does is it reconfirms Tibetan-ness. Police presence on important days for Tibetans—for example, Tibetan Uprising Day or the Dalai Lama's birthday—becomes a marker of memory and remembrance as it reminds them that they need to celebrate those days even more so. As Tibetan lives are increasingly securitized with the widening of Chinese funding and political influence in Nepal, humour becomes a medium through which Tibetans *make-do* in their everyday lives.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, poking fun at armoured soldiers among the civilian population was a method of pointing out inequalities while also ridiculing the lack of courage and strength among the occupying coalition of

international militaries. Additionally, Aman Mojadidi through trans-spatial imagery invokes the ridiculous. These images further challenge existing visual tropes and stereotypes. While other forms of humour become methods of coping with adversity.

The condition of being a refugee already signifies disruption, dispossession, and departure. Departures are particularly sad affairs. However, Tibetan refugees in the Phale settlement find that leaving the village for re-settlement in Kathmandu or outside of Nepal is the only way to secure a future with possibilities for themselves and their children. The night before they depart the village, villagers come together and celebrate the prospects of this mobility with humour, laughter, and dance. Similarly, in Afghanistan humour is part of everyday life and laughter helps to cope with the profound losses, displacements, and uncertainties of protracted geopolitical conflict.

The effectiveness of humour discussed in this chapter remains contingent on time-spaces. In other words, understanding the humour of a joke remains contextual and is often situated within a particular location at a specific time. While jokes may be humorous outside of that context through explanation, the corporeal stress released through laughter tends to be situational and shared among people with similar experiences of adversity within a particular time and space. While the time-spaces of humour are specific they can be reused at other times and in other locations to reconfirm the sense of connection or belonging among individuals based on a shared experience of precarity. In closing, we argue that generating humour from adversity is a common, rather than exceptional, practice. The elusiveness of humour and the context and temporality associated with understanding a joke as “funny” (or not) allow humour to remain a useful resistance tactic and coping strategy during time-spaces of adversity. Humour is a way of “making-do” and finding joy in the face of protracted precariousness.

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