



**University of Zurich**  
**Department of Psychology, Personality and Assessment**

**Invitation to a guest-lecture by**



**Prof. Dr. Christie Davies**, University of Reading

Title: The Comparative study of Jokes between Societies: Why Psychology must be kept out

Day: Thursday, December 4, 2008

Time: 10-12 am

Room: BIN-1-D.22, Binzmühlestrasse 14/7, 8050 Zürich

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**Abstract**

The most interesting jokes are those that stop at the boundaries of two cultures or else get transformed: the political jokes of socialism that do not spread to democratic societies, the American jokes about lawyers that do not flourish in Europe, jokes about "dirty" minorities, disaster jokes, mother in law jokes, French jokes about the SWISS. Likewise some jokes get subtly changed as they move from America to Britain notably blonde jokes. Their absence in some societies and failure or changes when introduced into others tell us how and why they work in the societies with they flourish and also: help to undermine "theories" about them that imply they are universal. The talk will draw on Durkheim and be critical of so-called dynamic psychology.

**Relevant references**

Davies, Ch. (1998). The dog that didn't bark in the night: A new sociological approach to the cross cultural study of humor in Willibald Ruch (ed) *The Sense of Humor*, Berlin and New York, Mouton de Gruyter, pp 293-306.

Davies, Ch. (2002). *The Mirth of Nations: a Comparative and Historical Study*, New Brunswick, NJ USA, Transaction.

Davies, Ch. (1998). *Jokes and their Relation to Society*, Berlin and New York, Mouton de

**Short bio**

Christie Davies M.A. PhD (Cantab) was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge where he was a senior scholar of the college and Wrenbury scholar. He obtained first class honours in both parts of the Tripos, was president of the Union, acted in the annual humorous Footlights Review with Eric Idle and Germaine Greer and was a member of the British debating team that toured the United States. He was a lecturer in Sociology at the University of Leeds and later at Reading where he was in turn (full) Professor and Professor Emeritus. He is now a regular lecturer at summer schools (Universities of Aberdeen, Belfast, Bologna, Cork, Edinburgh, Fribourg/Freiburg, IES and the Liberalni Institute) and has recently given papers at universities and institutes in Brazil Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Malaysia and Norway. His main research and lecturing interests continue to be in the comparative and historical study of morality and of humour. His fourth book on the sociology of humour *The Mirth of Nations* was published by Transaction Publishers of New Brunswick, N.J. (at Rutgers University) 2002 who also published his book *The Strange Death of Moral Britain* about social change. [transactionpublishers.storefront/48578e2e0040bcfaea6dc0a80aa50716/Cartridge/ss1257027b/AdvSearch/Run/MASK989](http://transactionpublishers.storefront/48578e2e0040bcfaea6dc0a80aa50716/Cartridge/ss1257027b/AdvSearch/Run/MASK989). He has also published a work of humorous magical science fiction, *Dewi the Dragon* and is art critic for the Social Affairs Unit; <http://www.yllofa.com/dangos.php?ISBN=0862437709>