

IDENTITY AND STEREOTYPES: HUMOR MANIFESTATIONS

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Abstract: The traditional understanding of humor as being tolerant, full of non-aggressive life curiosities, funny situations, mocking national or human vices, and related to an optimistic and contemplative attitude towards reality, has changed its main supportive points: the optimistic view of reality has been altered into a pessimistic and destructive one, forbearing ridicule has turned into severe offence, strangeness into stupidity, funny situations into futile misunderstanding. Everything is regarded as a dramatic possibility to survive or an endless situational tragedy where the most strict evaluation criteria, censorship, and dogmatism are empowered, meaning that, in the current times of widely propagated tolerance and overwhelming comprehension, it is extremely dangerous to offend somebody with an innocent joke or light mockery, to evoke an urge to contradict or negate when ideological aspirations are beyond “decency” limits. One of the most advocated rules in the Lithuanian press is: “Joke carefully with foreign nationals” from an interview with Barry Tomelin, London “International house” consultant and teaching director, the author of the book “World’s Business Cultures: And How to Unlock Them” (with Michael Nicks)¹. Identity is to be saved and nourished as the highest sanctity but its formation, meaningfulness and spread are not always attuned to the official approach.

Our life is full of stereotypes and our neighboring countries are not to be excluded – we have a preconceived notion of them. Using the national stereotype term we characterize relatively stable generalized opinions, in an open or hidden form, containing one or another assessment of a nation.

Our attitude towards neighbors is revealed in nicknames given to them – non-official ethnonyms usually bearing a negative connotation. Some monikers have already lasted for centuries while others have been coined during the last decades. Anecdotes with the most popular foreign-born Russians and Estonians are discussed.

Key words: folklore, humor, identity, nicknames, stereotype

It should perhaps be mentioned at the outset that the concept of national character is itself somewhat suspect. Is there in fact such a thing as national character? Or is it simply a figment of individual imaginations?

Alan Dundes

EUROPEAN EVERYDAY LIFE OR RECONCILIATION (CONFORMATION) POLICY

The installation, by the Czech artist David Černý, “Entropa” hanging over the entrance into the European Union (EU) building in Brussels, became one of the biggest misunderstandings of 2009. The installation, dedicated to the begin-



Figure 1. David Černý, “Entropa”. (Source: <http://www.davidcerny.cz/start.html>)

ning of Czech presidency in the EU, was a symbolic European map presenting stereotypes related to the 27 bloc members. The artwork occupied 16 sq. meters and depicted Netherlands as being flooded, with protruding minarets of mosques, France was shown as caught in strikes, Italy as a large football field, Germany’s shape resembled the swastika, Romania – as a Dracula park full of ghastly sounds, Luxembourg was for sale, Polish priests were flying a gay flag. United Kingdom – as a Euro-skeptical country was missing there at all².

There were Euro-skeptical statements by Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic where he was asking his people to “renounce openly” the installation because he could not agree with its content and found an offensive and disputable meaning in it. A part of the controversial installation, where Bulgaria was portrayed as the land of squat toilets, was covered with black cloth at night.

The artist D. Černý himself rendered his apologies to Bulgaria saying he was just wondering if Europe was able to laugh at itself: “If I had meant to offend somebody it was Vaclav Klaus. Because Klaus is offending Czechs”³ – he said. By using irony on notional clichés the artist sought turning serious things into playful ones.

Once we admit that one of the 20th century art goals is to shock the audience and to provoke discussion it must be recognized that the Czech artist’s installation has done its job. Generally, this installation triggered endless stories and their interpretations received the most diverse evaluations. After getting the order Černý intended to invite an artist from every EU country but finally fulfilled the task with two of his friends – that was another part of the scandal. Assumingly, Lithuania was represented by Vilma Stasiulyte whose installation shows five men in military uniform urinating on the Lithuanian – Byelorussian border. Allusions to the pissing Brussels boy “Manneken Pis” are related to interest in the fate of totalitarian monuments and their substitution by new generation monuments whereas the symbol has been adapted to the situation

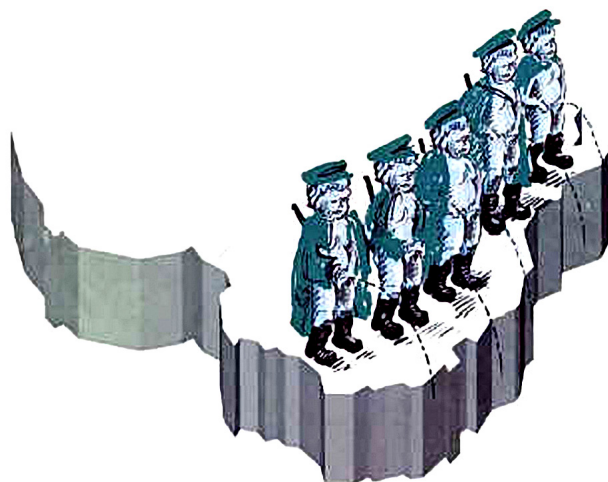


Figure 2. *Entropa Lithuania.* (Source: www.eu2009.cz)

in Lithuania. “The project can be perceived as an alternative monument to the Independence of Lithuania and as a way to get rid of the injustice experienced in the past” – says, supposedly, the artist herself in her fictitious website (*Entorpos booklet: fictitious authors and their creation*⁴).

The installation gained serious assessments among politicians and the press. EU representatives even considered an option to deconstruct the installation but gave up avoiding accusations about art censorship. In the Lithuanian press a popular reviewer, taking everything for granted, compared Lithuanian and Estonian (supposedly of Sirje Sukmit) visions:

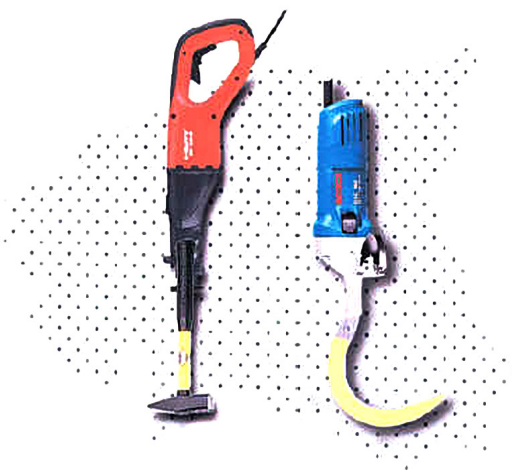


Figure 3. *Entropa Estonia.* (Source: www.eu2009.cz)

“Of course, I am not an artist but I was not delighted with the view. As a matter of fact I understand the allusion to the Brussels boy but I can’t get why Lithuanians look like “pissing” soldiers with guns... You might disagree but it seems to me that one should know how to laugh at himself. Besides, I also suppose that a smile or irony should differ from contempt and self-humiliation.”⁵

The Estonian vision was noticed to be a perfect one: “It seems so simple – “modern Soviet”. There’s such a lot of information at the same time and... it is very beautiful. Yes, a stereotype, yes a mocking one, but the message

transferred by this creation is absolutely different from the Lithuanian case. Because it is not a conjuncture, because it does not seek to please somebody, does not seek political correctness as in some works by the authors from other states. In addition, its persistent value is much higher. Brilliantly simple... Oh, these Estonians..."⁶

Thus, the traps of ideological clichés can catch everyone who is not aware of the context and disregards conditionality of the genre.

Should art be assessed as a means to become cured of national complexes? The subtitle of "Entropa" installation ran as: "Stereotypes are barriers to be demolished". This art creation ridiculing banalities with no scruples, according to the author, made a parody of the notion of "EU without borders". It is an ironical approach towards the EU integration and stereotypes tagged to every country.

On the other hand, this installation received considerable support. "I don't see any provocation – it is rather a mirror hanging in front of us," thinks Karin Resetarits from Austria (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe). "Maybe we need a direction to see complicated things in a simpler manner. And our predispositions are the most elementary simplification." EU Culture Committee Chairwoman Katerina Batzeli (Socialist group, Greece) says she does not like stereotypes since they are the old way to convey a message. But in the later phase, she changed her opinion: "After seeing the creation I realized that art has to provoke, to shake the system."⁷

"It is hard to accept manipulations by the Czech artist – by pretending to work in the project along with artists from all EU countries and stereotypically depicting some member states he seems to be crossing the limits of good form," reflects Tadeusz Zwiefka, member of the Polish group of the European People's Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament, noting that the artistic element of the piece outweighed the controversial one: "I appreciate the artistic freedom of expression and thus I accept the large liberties taken by artists."⁸

"After the economic crisis humor must be a priority of daily life," said Ms Batzeli.

Generally, an interesting idea was raised: "In times of economic crisis it is a healthy thing to develop a cynical sense of humor. If Europe is not able to accept cynical humor its future seems to be bleak,"⁹ – said Resetarits. Is humor accepted in the contemporary world? Is it tolerated? Does it help to get rid of stereotypes?

STEREOTYPES: TRADITIONAL LEGACY

Folklore is also a reflection of life and at the same time of culture, mentality and life style values. Attitudes towards representatives of other nations in folklore often turn out to be ironic, mocking or even offensive and scornful ones. In unofficial language neighboring nations are often called not by their official ethnonyms but nicknamed. Some monikers for neighboring countries (Anglickienė 2005: 7–17) have already lasted for several centuries while others are only coined during recent decades. These unofficial nicknames have negative connotations and are used for mockery or even to humiliate and to scorn. According to philologist Alvydas Butkus, “language phonetics of a certain ethnos, a more popular word or transformation of an official ethnonym can be used for identification” (Butkus 2009: 13). Let us make a review of the nicknames given by Lithuanians to their neighbors.

One of the oldest living ethnonyms surviving for several centuries already is *Gudas*. Both in Lithuanian spoken language and in folklore people of the Slavonic nation are called *Gudas* (pl. *Gudai*). Linguists have raised a number of hypotheses concerning the origin of the word (Karaliūnas 1999). By *Gudai* Lithuanians refer to Byelorussians, but sometimes also to the Polish or Russians, or even people talking another dialect from a different area of Lithuania are given the same name. Simas Karaliūnas argues that *Gudas* is not geographically related to any territory or nation, by the same token that no nation calls itself by this name, i.e. it is not a real ethnonym or an ethnic self-name, but rather a quasi-ethnonym, heteronym, used by Lithuanians to refer to other Lithuanians speaking other dialects, and to other nations. This usage tendency spreads to the East (Karaliūnas 1999: 25–26). During the inter-war period, the official Lithuanian language adopted the tradition of calling Byelorussians and Byelorussia as *Gudai* and *Gudija*. Sometimes they were called *Baltgudzhiai* (*Baltgudija*). After 1990 the old name came back into use again and this is why we can find *Gudas*/*Gudija* in today’s press.

Nowadays Byelorussians are nicknamed *bulbasai*/*bulbashai*. Butkus’s guess is that the nickname got its origin in the frequent mentioning of potato (*bulvė* – potato) in Byelorussian folk songs (Butkus 2009: 14). The *Bulbash* nickname is also used by Russians. Their explanation is that it is because of Byelorussians liking potatoes very much (in Byelorussian *bulba*). Still, in the Soviet times Byelorussia was famous as the biggest potato growing republic. Also, we should mention that when trying to humiliate somebody the names of animals (such as gander, goat, cock, swine etc.) or plants (such as beetroot, cabbage head etc.) are being frequently used.

During several centuries of common living or being neighbors there were plenty of nicknames created for Russians. It is obvious that Lithuanians' relations with Russians were tense due to geographical, historical, political reasons and hostile relations are always reflected in a sharper manner than when living side by side with friendly neighbors. Different names have always been used to describe Russian confessions – *burliokai* (in Byelorussian – *бурлак*), *sentikiai* – Old Believers, *maskolis* (in Byelorussian – *москаль*) (women – *maskaukos*) – Orthodox Russians. These nicknames have by now turned into archaisms. The nicknames of *kacap* and *kazak* have been known since long ago. Today Russians are mostly nicknamed as *ruskiai*, *kacapai*¹⁰, and more rarely as – *Ivan*.

Poles are nicknamed as *paliokai* or *pshekai*, and this is the way in which Polish phonetics is mimicked (Zavjalova & Anglickienė 2005: 149; Butkus 2009: 14). Such a difference in phonetics was noticed by Russians as well and they also call the Poles *psheki*. There is one more archaic Polish nickname – *shlekta* which means 'nobleman' but this word is used in a pejorative sense.

The best known Latvian nickname nowadays is *zhirgo galva* ('horse's head'). Butkus argues that *zhirgo galva* stresses the affinity of our Baltic languages (common lexis) and the peculiarity of Latvian phonetics (*z* instead of Lithuanian *zh* – *ž*). This nickname has already survived for a second century but its origin is not clear. One of the versions claims that in the 19th century, after the abolition of serfdom, commercial ties between Latvians and Lithuanians intensified and Lithuanians started visiting Latvian markets more frequently. Latvian horses used to be larger and better-looking, so Lithuanians started nicknaming their owners out of envy. But a contrary assumption is more likely that Latvians themselves gave this name to Lithuanians thus stressing their foolishness. Often hearing this phrase Lithuanians re-addressed it to Latvians (Butkus 2009: 14–15).

In recent years Latvians are entitled *braliukas* – a word bearing a positive meaning (*braliukas* means 'brother' and it is a diminutive form of this word). The origin of this name goes back to the Eurovision song festival of 2007 when a Latvian announcer of the results addressed Lithuanians in such a positive manner. The phrase, dropped casually by the announcer, seemingly unexpectedly, but really sincerely, "achieved more than a year's work of all Latvian diplomats in their attempts to create a positive image of their country in Lithuania" (Butkus 2007). Lithuanians readily accepted this word, with a perfectly nice Lithuanian resonance, and started using it for Latvians themselves. To show their gratitude for this flattering address and the given high score several cafés in Kaunas raised Latvian national flags and gave noticeable discounts for Latvian customers when they were ordering their meals. Thus, *braliukas* is used in a positive context and *zhirgo galva* in a negative one.

The most popular nickname for Estonians now is *kuliamaje/kulemaje*. It appeared, comparatively, not so long ago and originated from the Estonian basketball player Gert Kullamäe – the first foreign legionnaire playing in “Žalgiris” in 1993–1994. This nickname sneers at the phonetics of the Estonian language (the same as in anecdotes) and besides that it fits in for a contemptuous moniker because of its links to obscene Lithuanian lexis (Butkus 2009: 15). The Estonian character “Duujuokaukee Kiiuuulemiaja” (Gas-Mask Kulemmaje) was made up in the black humor radio show and thus became popular.¹¹ We can find *Kulemaje* used today to characterize Estonians in Internet forums, articles related to basketball, commentaries.

The case with the popularized Estonian name demonstrates that media today helps to create new, and to strengthen already existing, stereotypes. Currently a popular humor show in Lithuania “Dviračio šou” (Bike show) features Estonian and Polish characters (to tell the truth there is mostly a Lithuanian Pole presented there) that usually appear whenever there are some problems or misunderstandings between the countries or nations. It is a live process – humiliating or offensive nicknames are brought back to the scene with an escalation of mutual relations between neighboring countries.

Scornful nicknames can be abundantly found in Internet forums and portals with commentaries on articles in one or another way depicting neighboring nations. Even when a theme or a title is more or less neutral, commentaries of internauts are nicknaming and mocking with regard to the depicted country. Nicknames “help”, with the least effort, to degrade representatives of these countries.

NOWADAYS’ ANOMALIES: “LAUGHTER” THERAPY

Traditional things in today’s world have become hostages of time. One of the best investigated phenomena in these days is gelotophobia – fear to joke, to trick, and to quip. An exhaustive research has been carried out in 73 countries and the results were published in February 2009 in the international journal of humor research, *Humor*¹². Despite cultural differences the problem is obvious for the whole world. After questioning more than 22 thousand respondents it turned out that “laughter invokes fear”. People with no sense of humor consider laughing as a threat or assault. Does laughter help one to take a socially active position or are we able to laugh only at one another?

The culture of laughter is inseparable from traditional historical phenomena: carnival time understanding, original opposition, self-sufficiency and freedom. Laughter obeys the logic of imagination which is not identical to the logic of

reason and this is why it is so hard to define – it is just live, pulsating energy creating world vision of its own (Bergson 1900). The liberating power of laughter, and a survival skill of (auto) ironic attitude have become a deficit, yet people would sometimes simply want to laugh.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, laughter is not only socially but also culturally purposeful: comicality (especially satire) determines renewal of genres and literary language – liberates people from stiff canons, adds modernity and live actuality to any literary genre (Bakhtin 1990: 12).

It is important to preserve a healthy sense and positive sense of humor while assessing ourselves and judging others. In Gerard Delanty's words, the eccentric European identity spurs widening of outlook and emancipation from stiff stereotypical evaluations.

NEW IMAGES – HOSTAGES OF STENCILS, SCHEMES AND CLICHÉS

In 2008, efforts were made to create a new and attractive image of Lithuania; the concept of Lithuania as “a brave country” was proposed. It provoked numerous discussions and ironical reactions truly uncharacteristic of Lithuanians: “No, but we are seriously a brave country!” (Zemkauskas 2008) or “Maybe, according to the current fashion in Lithuania we will decide to establish a Braveness Monitoring Institute which would observe and watch very closely how much we gained in braveness in one year in comparison to Latvians and how much cowardly we look when comparing our courage to Estonians?” (Bončkutė 2008)

In addition, a courageous proposition was made to change the name of Lithuania in English since the actual “Lithuania” is too long and hard to pronounce for many foreigners. In 2009, the Lithuanian State Auditor Rasa Budbergytė stated an obvious truth that the image creation campaign had no clear landmarks (Image of country 2009).

Historical imagination has vanished from the national world-view and it is rather sad. Being national is becoming a privilege of favorites while the majority of the nation lives with illusions about the majestic past, stereotyped thinking is programmed by way of stories about heroes, paladins and their feats. Compatriots with stereotyped thinking do not necessarily need to live in Lithuania, instead, they can also reside somewhere in foggy Albion. It changes nothing. On the other hand, a stereotyped attitude towards the agricultural nation, so pleasing to Lithuanian hearts long ago, has by now lost its basic elements.

It is extremely hard to get rid of stereotypes. In January 2007, a public campaign “Let's be modern and defeat stereotypes” was launched. 500 posters



Figure 4. Poster “Let’s Be Modern and Defeat Stereotypes”.
Photo by Karolis Pocius (2007).

were displayed and their goal was to attract society’s attention to gender stereotypes and to encourage change. There were photos of a man with a vacuum cleaner tattoo on his hands, a woman with automobile keys hanging on her neck, or another one wearing an apron with the coat of arms of the Lithuanian Republic, a man in a suit surrounded by babies. Every photo had captions like: “Women can take part in politics”, “Women can do hard work”, “Men can do house-cleaning” and “Men can be baby-sitters”. But the chosen way of impact was rather traditional, conservative and very stereotyped.

Similarly to any other public social action this initiative was also aimed at mass consciousness. Collective stereotypes are passed from generation to generation, ideologized and they are hardly susceptible to transformations, but their evaluation horizons can be broadened by forming and changing the direction of thinking. Simultaneously, the campaign urged people to try “to overcome failure by collective efforts” (Smith 1994: 60). Solidarity, sociality, sense of collective identity unfolds multiple positive suggestions, nurture important skills of social community. Despite the utopian expectations of nationalism, the emphasis was on optimism and practical ability to seek national maturity and unity.

NATIONAL TRAITS IN ANECDOTES

Many Internet websites contain sections with anecdotes about representatives of various nations. Some websites group anecdotes from different nations which contain jokes about people of other nationalities. The Delfi website is useful because they have anecdotes about all nations and we can try to differentiate them by the way Lithuanians joke about them. The table presents the ten most popular nations of the past several years.

Table. The most popular nations in Lithuanian anecdotes (Delfi website 2007 data)

Nationality	Number of anecdotes	%
Russians / New Russians	105	13
Lithuanians / Representatives from ethnographical regions of Lithuania	86	10
Chukchi	68	8
Jews	62	7
Estonians	52	7
Americans	37	4
Georgians	36	4
Chinese	22	3
Armenians / Armenian radio	18	2
Arabs	16	2
2–5 nationalities	187	22
Other nations	164	18
Total	835	100

In addition, similar tendencies in ethnic anecdotes – the same nationalities, identical anecdotic situations – can be found in Estonian (Laineste 2008: 135), Russian (Krikmann 2009: 75) and Polish (Brzozowska 2009) folklore. This article presents descriptive characteristics of two popular nations: Russians are interesting because of their long lasting tradition of having been depicted in Lithuanian folklore and Estonians gaining popularity therein only after 1990.

Contemporary folklore and popular anecdotes disclose stereotypic character traits of every nation, their inter-relations and differences between countries. Today's anecdotes and folklore genres are international, migrating and lively reacting to actualities. Plots and stereotypes migrate between nations. Stereotyped characteristics of one or another country are often related to their constant artistic image in folklore rather than to reality. This is why anecdotes tend to exploit some particular nationality traits for many years.

RUSSIANS

Several reasons can be outlined why a Russian is popular in contemporary Lithuanian anecdotes and other folklore genres:

1. Anecdotes about Russians used to be popular in Soviet times.
2. The majority of Lithuanians understand Russian. Part of anecdotes are told or forwarded by e-mail in the Russian language, even until now.
3. Russian TV and radio broadcasts with humorous content are popular among Lithuanians, according to statistics, and this kind of culture is being widely cultivated. Russian humor is easily understood because just 20 years ago we shared, with Russians, the same state.
4. It is customary to have a lot of anecdotes about large countries as smaller states cannot escape dealing with their big neighbors, either directly or indirectly. Power states make their impact on the economic and political life of other minor countries.

One of the most popular anecdotic plots is showing the Russian as an alcoholic. The image of a Russian being alcoholic is very old. Russians themselves are very quick to mock this example of their supposed vice. The stereotype is very vivid all over the world and there is a real super-abundance of anecdotes told about Russian boozing:

What is a Russian booze up?

– A box of vodka, a couple of beer bottles, a piece of smoked pork fat and a dog...

– And the dog what for?

– Well, someone has to eat the pork fat...¹³

Bearing in mind the Russians' inclination towards alcoholism, anecdotes were created such as:

“Kodak” firm launched into Russian market a special new camera removing not only “red-eye” but also “red-nose” effect.¹⁴

Russian citizens practice a very simple health criterion – one is either capable of drinking or is not.¹⁵

Sometimes there are really weird things in Russia – like vodka advertising.¹⁶

Another frequent subject of anecdotes is about bad roads in Russia, indicating that these anecdotes are mostly created and told by traveling people:

As it is known 20% of Russian roads are impenetrable. The remaining 80% are called roads only by Russians themselves.¹⁷

Russian road constructors proposed to introduce a new sign “Road” to persuade foreigners.¹⁸

Where asphalt ends – Russia starts.¹⁹

In the course of the last two years Russian roads improved significantly – it is a rare case now for a tank to get stuck.²⁰

It is interesting that we failed to find similar anecdotes about Polish roads disappointing Lithuanian travelers on their way to Western Europe. It might be an indication that anecdotes about Russian roads are created not by Lithuanians. The anecdotes must be created by other West European drivers and then just adopted by Lithuanians.

The last anecdote cited demonstrates one more feature – Russia being famous for militarism and fond of showing off its military force proving it to be the most powerful country in this area.

“Volkswagen” concern promised to create a winged automobile applied specially for the Russian market. It is going to be a tank.²¹

Comparatively, there are not many political and social anecdotes being told now, however, these anecdotes used to be very popular in the Soviet times. Several reasons might be given for that. The peculiarities of the socialist order and the relevant political guidelines are not comprehensible enough for the younger generation grown up now in an independent Lithuania. At the same time it possibly demonstrates that despite the escalated threat from Russia the majority of Lithuanians do not follow what is taking place in this neighboring country and only the most important Russian events, shaking the entire world, attract the attention of Lithuanians. Old political anecdotes are remembered and being told only in connection with more critical political situations in current times.

More often stories with a new content, revealing the actual political situation, are being created:

A real Russian President must build the Duma, grow a ruling party and seat (put behind bars) an oligarch.²² (C.f. – “A real man must build a house, grow a son and plant a tree”).

Russian/Russia’s stereotype is best expressed by short wordplays:

The United States of America fight for peace and Russia fights for State Security.²³

Russia is like Amur: naked, armed and importuning everybody with love.²⁴

Nearly half of the anecdotes are about New Russians, but it is not even a name of a new nationality. This is rather a phenomenon of Post-Soviet countries. “New Russians” refers to the Nouveau Riche – those who have acquired considerable wealth recently; they are a bit foolish but manage to get quick and possibly dirty money, wondering how to impress others with their fortunes and exceptionality. These genre-wise examples do not even need to be made up – anecdotic situations with members of the Nouveau Riche in the world overwhelm tabloids, journals and internet portals. Anecdotes about them are migrating and every country can substitute their heroes by the New Lithuanian, Latvian or Polish. But due to their peculiarity New Russians are unbeatable: their scale in anecdotes is much larger than that of small Lithuania.

ESTONIANS

The nation which became well-known in recent decades is depicted very stereotypically not only in anecdotes but also in other folklore genres. Their slow and phlegmatic temper is nearly always mocked in anecdotes:

Who is standing over there for half of an hour? Oh, these are Estonians on the run...²⁵

Which nation is the richest in the world?

Estonians.

Why?

They are always short of time to spend their salary!²⁶

Today’s anecdotes often mention new technologies:

Estonians have created a brand new computer and started exporting it abroad. 400 people have died waiting until it starts. (VDU ER 1246)

“Estonian Telecom” is the richest organization in Estonia because it is the only one providing 1 kb/s internet. (VDU ER 1246)

The Estonian name is often substituted by already mentioned Kuullemajja:

The Estonian marathon is 42 meters. Janis Kuullemajja is all times record-holder – 2 h 35 min. 3 sec. (VDU ER 1246)

Besides this character trait the phonetic and morphological peculiarities of the Estonian language are imitated and mimicked not only in live spoken language

but in virtual space as well by way of using doubled or even tripled letters, changing the media style with surds.

Estonian casino. Croupier at roulette is announcing:

– Mooost hoonoooureeed laadieeeee and gentlemeen, we aaareeee staaarting petttsss foor tomooorroow...²⁷

Estonian Director says to his Lithuanian secretary:

– Tyyyppe sloower, because I faaall beehind to tiiictaaate.²⁸

Analogous anecdotes about sluggish, phlegmatic Estonians are also told by Latvians and Russians. As the Estonians have a similar image among the population of the larger area, the number of such anecdotes is even more abundant. (see Krikmann 2009). Besides, the image of the slow Estonian in folklore for Lithuanians serves as a compensation for the live actual stereotype fixated after 1990 about Estonians as living better, nicer and richer, being more rational than Lithuanians.

Another point is that these anecdotes are often short, consisting of one sentence only. Obviously, it is because of the very monotonous style of an Estonian in anecdote – once a teller mentions there is going to be an anecdote about Estonians, listeners associate it with other anecdotes. As noticed by Liisi Laineste: “Serial jokes present the listener with a “chewed” pair of oppositions ready for “instant digestion”. It does not take much time and energy to understand the joke” (Laineste 2008: 139).

CULTURE OF INNOVATIONS OR THE MYTHICAL CONTENT OF NATIONALITY

Nationality in the 21st century is rather distant from the romantic definitions of the 19th century: deductive thinking introduced by the Enlightenment was replaced with intuition, imagination, sensuality, and even irrationality as part of Romanticism. Today there is a return to the origins of rationality. Ideas of national awakening, having lost their sweeping energy characteristic of liberating movements, found themselves in a deadlock, because the nationality notion still remains in the 19th century robes although contemporary times dictate completely new programs, myths and realities (Hobsbawm 1990).

Central and Eastern European “liberation fantasies” in search of opportunities to substitute undefined, misty, rising anxiety and distorted realities with something more rational, related to the need to bring meaning into existence,

in a similar way as with the help of myths it is possible to explain transition from principles to actions (Tismaneanu 2003).

With concentrated forces to form and spread nationality as actual contemporary power we would reveal new identity layers. That would help to expand, train or at least to awaken national consciousness. Sunk in historic and self-made patterns, imprisoned in their schemes, lost in complex labyrinths we cannot be open to a different opinion or other truth quests. Worshipping of heroes raised by ideology, praising unseen gods or fake heroes resembles fables about an ideal country, fictitious land of dreams. “Magical thinking enables the human being not to feel responsibility, to sacrifice independent will to cranks and adventurers. While a legal state is still in its birth process and corruption is spread everywhere, magical thinking opens the easiest way to embody guilt, demonize strangers and to create an unreal but freshening community feeling.” (Tismaneanu 2003: 96)

New narratives do not appear by themselves, they need to be based on substantial insights or openly approbated rules: “When traditional political identities are ruined an alternative of collective identity not contradicting national identity is needed” (Delanty 2002: 214). Freedom of choice can also become a millstone around our necks if we are oriented towards one day inspirations...

Concurrently with the start of the 21st century and the economic depression followed by hard times, a new need for identity emerged, and nationality is currently regaining its lost position. The world is as if creating itself – a security mechanism in the conditions of globalization, cosmopolitanism and unification, in times of universal indifference and total disorientation when values are being lost and identity leveled. Naturally, the nationality dimension has changed; it became not only communal but also a personal landmark, modern meaningful position, integrating factor or illusion, so that even in pragmatic times of spiritual decline it is possible to revive “lost” traditions, exceptional rights or at least romantic sentiments. The objective of nationality is modeled as if in a classical situational comedy and reveals important aspects of values, arouses various insinuations and stimulates personal expression, identity quests avoiding its aggressive or even dangerous forms.

Historical memory, as a common axiom, cannot be eliminated from the everyday field. It is not merely a personal matter what hierarchy has been set, regarding the values of the past. It is important for all of us to watch constantly to where our chosen road is leading.

NOTES

- ¹ Interview with Barry Tomelin: Rūta Sturonaitė “Su kitataučiais juokaukite atsargiai”. Published on 18/09/2008. www.projekona.lt/get_file.php?id=112, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ² Entropa: Czech artist David Černý speaks out, in EUX.TV. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXzEMAET8k>, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ³ Entropa Installation, published on 14/01/2009. <http://www.origin.ie/blog/?p=150>, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ⁴ “Entropa”: Europos atvaizdas ar meninė provokacija? [Entropa: European Image or Artistic Provocation?] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/037-48734-040-02-07-906-20090206STO48713-2009-09-02-2009/default_lt.htm, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ⁵ Račas Artūras. Lietuva versus Estija: pasijuokti iš savęs irgi reikia mokėti. Published on 13/01/2009. <http://racas.lt/lietuva-versus-estija-pasijuokti-is-saves-irgi-reikia-moketi/>, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ⁶ Račas Artūras. Lietuva versus Estija: pasijuokti iš savęs irgi reikia mokėti. Published on 13/01/2009. <http://racas.lt/lietuva-versus-estija-pasijuokti-is-saves-irgi-reikia-moketi/>, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ⁷ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/037-48734-040-02-07-906-20090206STO48713-2009-09-02-2009/default_lt.htm, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ⁸ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/037-48734-040-02-07-906-20090206STO48713-2009-09-02-2009/default_lt.htm, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ⁹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/037-48734-040-02-07-906-20090206STO48713-2009-09-02-2009/default_lt.htm, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ¹⁰ The nickname *kacap* is international. Its origin is explained in double way: more popular is opinion that in old times the Ukrainians in such way named bearded Russians (for example they have expression *kak cap* – ‘as goat’). The other etymology word *kacap* derives from Tartarian *kasab* ‘butcher, flayer’, that in a figurative sense means ‘murderer’– such a nickname was used by Muscovite Russians with regard to Tartars, but because of the frequent use of this nickname, the Russians themselves were later named in such way by the Tartars (Butkus 2009: 14).
- ¹¹ “Prie arbatos su Algiu Greitai: šaipymasis iš tradicinių vertybių nemaišo būti konservatoriumi” [Interview with Algis Greitai], published on 09/04/2004. http://www.mountainrock.lt/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1081489540&archive=&start_from=&ucat=2&, last accessed on 2 March 2012. In addition, see TV broadcasting “Radijo šou moko tarti Žalgirio žaidėjo vardą” [Radio show gives lesson to pronounce the name of a player in “Žalgiris”] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=To4YulNhyUc&feature=related>, last accessed on 2 March 2012.
- ¹² <http://www.hnu.edu/ishs/JournalCenter.htm>

- ¹³ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=685>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ¹⁴ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=290>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ¹⁵ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=410>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=480>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=245>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ¹⁸ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=395>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ¹⁹ <http://linksmai.lt/index2.php?id=jokes&jokeid=national&page=20>, last accessed on 2 March 2012
- ²⁰ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=290>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²¹ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=60>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²² <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=300>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²³ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=335>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²⁴ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=460>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²⁵ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=45>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²⁶ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=50>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²⁷ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=220>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.
- ²⁸ <http://www.delfi.lt/jokes/index.php?sdate=&category=20653&top=&search=&no=305>, last accessed on 26 March 2010.

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