

The Frighteningly Funny Foreigner: Caricatures of the Other in Estonian Interwar Public Discourse¹

Liisi Laineste

Introduction

Ethnic relations in Estonia have long been a sensitive issue. Partly due to the small size of the nation, reactions to foreigners, above all “big“ nations like Germany and Russian, have been sharp and disturbed in many genres of folklore (sayings, jokes, tales, etc.). Negative folklore that is said to foster ethnic or other hatred carries the function of defining the borders between us and them, negotiating identity on all levels and at all times. It is possible to give a good account of the identity strategies of a nation through describing these (sometimes stigmatised as politically incorrect) expressions of opinion.

The aim of this research is to list the main targets of ethnic caricatures and describe the representation of these characters and, then, to focus on the narrower theme, the motive of cannibalism in the material. The research deals with the primary targets for ethnic fear and ridicule—the Germans and the Russians—but also with the image of a largely harmless ethnic group—the Jews. Issues of censorship and repression are introduced by the fact that the frightening and funny “Other” was the holder of totalitarian power.

Identity and subversion in the context of social instability

Humor has a history of being regarded as anti-discourse. Every joke can perform a “tiny revolution” (Orwell 1945). This is also why jokes have been outlawed in some and carefully monitored by all political and ideological systems. The Western world has now claimed ethnic and political jokes to be potentially harmful and banned ethnic jokes as hate speech (e.g., the cartoon controversy that followed the publication of Mohammad caricatures by a minor Danish newspaper, lawsuits launched in the United States after the screening of the movie *Borat*:

¹ This research was supported by the ESF grant No 8149.

Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan). But subversive laughter is always and especially in place when a society is going through crises that accompanies any change—this accounts for present day as well as for the period under surveillance, the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

In the context of increasing migration caused by the two world wars and consequent closer contacts between Estonia and a number of nations and ethnic groups, ethnic conflicts arose more easily than before. This is apparent in the formation of ethnocentric attitudes. Global political conflicts in the beginning of the twentieth century are reflected in different areas of culture—in unofficial (e.g., oral folklore) and official sources (e.g., journalism) alike. The research conducted after the Eastern European countries joined the European Union shows that the quest for national identity in Eastern Europe often takes the form of extreme nationalism, bringing about intolerance and interethnic conflicts (Žagar 2002: 37–5, Gurin 2004: 1–4, Kuzmanic 2002: 17–37, Školkay 2002). The same was the case with the interwar period in the early twentieth century. Thus, studying the expression of ethnocentrism in various periods and in various forms can help to define, manage, or even forestall intercultural value conflicts inherent in multicultural contexts.

The complicated political climate from the 1920s until the beginning of the 1940s produced humor in different genres. Censorship in published sources—journals, newspapers, and the like—was not yet fully established and norms were rather loose. There existed also parallel “underground” humor mills that produced humorous material too aggressive or distasteful in the eyes of the majority. This can be seen in practically all eras throughout history. The inherent ambiguity of the humorous genres balances between the definitions of *funny* and *blasphemous* and forces some jokes to be accepted and some to be frowned on. This does not, however, stop humor from existing. As a result, researchers are presented a true gold mine of public opinion in the form of folkloric, underground humor. In the 1960s, for example, the Soviet totalitarian regime tried to control the jokes and even turn them to its own good, an effort that proved rather futile as the amount and direction of criticism cannot be forced to follow ideological orders because of the ontological conflicts inherent in such an action.

The presence of an ethical tightrope is most clearly felt in ethnic humor. In the old joke tales, ethnic humor is especially prevalent. When comparing the share of ethnic jokes throughout

the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ethnic jokes are being replaced by other categories, as the proportion of ethnic jokes is constantly falling (Laineste 2008). But in the 1920s through the 1940s, the period that forms the context of this study, ethnic labelling was still one of the primary components of a successful joke. The issue of subversion rises at the moment when this category is complemented with a political dimension. The ethno-political joke born from this interaction targets the stupidity of the unrightful holder of the power (see also Davies 1990). It is the ethno-political cartoon that dominates the comic press of interwar Estonia where those two dimensions intertwine and make it, thus, quite impossible to discuss the issue of ethnicity without referring to existing power relations of that time. The same has been noted also about the humor of the Soviet period (Krikmann 2009).

In the context of globalization forced upon the relatively unprepared Estonian countryfolk of the early twentieth century, ethnic stereotypes bred and spread fast. There was a need to find representations to all the groups that had become visible in the arena of international politics. This gives rise to an additional question about the effects of globalizing culture and value systems on the relatively secluded set of Eastern European humorous material. It has been maintained that humor from the former Soviet bloc (or jokelore from totalitarian regimes) is different from that created in a more stable democratic society. But different in what way? And is this difference also visible in the caricatures that at least artistically bear a great resemblance to such well-known sources as *Simplicissimus*, *Punch*, and other comic publications of the West? Loodus (1963) has argued that the Estonian cartoon grew out of both western and Eastern European traditions, but as his further analysis shows, many artists who lived between the world wars were especially influenced by Western artistic styles. He claims that the artistic Westernness is paired with thematic leaning towards the ideals inherited from the East: standing up against the injustice of the capitalists, social inequality, and so on. But we must keep in mind that his doctoral thesis was written and defended at a time of greatest stagnation (the 1960s), which also meant that engaging the Russian caricature as the true carrier of the working class mentality was not only recommended, but strictly required. In the satirical weekly newspaper section *Kratt* between 1926 and 1938, translated humorous novels as well as some foreign cartoons were published in line with the works of original Estonian caricatures. We could use a systematic comparison of caricature motives and themes (both artistically as well as

contentwise) in Eastern Europe in order to find out whether, instead of borrowing their content only from the Russian caricature tradition, the cartoons of the former Soviet bloc display a creative mix of western European and Russian ways of visualising the Other. This however is beyond the scope of this paper and remains a target for future research.

Cannibalism in gallows humor

Human mutilation as a source of humor is a well-described issue: the comedification of horror has presented an intellectually challenging problem to several researchers (e.g. Mundorf & Mundorf 2003, Miron 2003). It is a subject still popular in so-called gallows humor, alluding to the fears of its tellers. Cannibalism in humor is particularly often associated with cultural difference and sometimes used as a pretext for xenophobic feelings towards the accused or, even, for justification of the extermination of a group (e.g., in the case of the Roma, the Jews, etc.). The image of violence can be instrumental in establishing a fault line, not only between “us” and “other,” but between civilization and savagery as well. This perspective clearly underlines the imaginary quality of violence, which may serve the same purpose of social in- and exclusion, no matter if its discursive representation reflects any real acts of physical hurt or not (Schmidt 2006: 14).

Cannibalism in real life is mostly an act born out of a chaos. Cannibalism in comic discourse can also be seen as evolving from the chaos in society, symbolically brought on by the unjust action of the Other, the intruder. Therefore, it is only logical that the holder of the military power (i.e., power acquired by means other than intellectual superiority) is the one who is accused of such uncivilized action as cannibalism. The comparison of uncivilised behaviour to cannibalism may sometimes also lend itself to other, milder expressions of social conflict or, even, to elementary ethnic labelling (e.g., stereotypes about the peculiarities of ethnic diet present a vivid way of defining “us” and “them“; see jokes about food habits in Davies 1990: 277–283; Davies 2002: 120) but is still most often encountered in contexts that involve extreme physical or mental violence.

There are many discussions about the possible functions of humor that have broadly been classified as cognitive (coping), social (group mechanisms), and personality-related (humor as a trait). Death humor is seen to function both as a defense mechanism as well as a social

lubricant; it also helps people gain some sense of control over the uncontrollable (Thorson 1985). Tamborini (2003: 419) argues that one of the reasons why we might be drawn to excessive aggression, including sick humor, is evolutionary: violence attracts our attention because for the primitive man it was necessary to spot danger immediately. Discussing the popularity of horror in contemporary popular culture, he also claims that these visualisations are a primary source for confronting our fears in a clearly exaggerated and non-bona-fide manner. It is made clear in most cases of horror display that we are dealing with a play-frame and that there is no real threat involved. The folklorist Alan Dundes has offered a Freudian approach to sick joke cycles in his often-cited book “Cracking Jokes” (1987). Besides regarding target of the dead baby joke cycle as a symbol for Blacks as well as sibling rivalry at times of demographic explosion, he notes in a more grounded way that sick humor is prone to arise at times of real violence (claiming, for example, that the visual reporting of the Vietnam war influenced the popularity of the dead baby joke cycle in the 1960s through the 1980s (1987: 10). All in all, he views sick humor as a legitimate outlet for illegitimate ideas, feelings, and actions (though he also discusses the exception of Jewish humor, in which, in fact, the victim laughs at himself; *ibid*: 19). Oring (2003: 41–57), in his essay about the humor of hate, aptly says that the interconnection between humor and aggression is clearly overstated. One does not grow out of the other and, as he states, “it would be dangerous to assume that the presence of humor always betrays some hidden or unrecognized hostility” (*ibid*: 57). But they do often coexist.

There is a recognizable difference in the effect of non-visualised and visualised images of horror. Sick jokes transmitted orally (or in writing) take a longer time to comprehend, whereas, caricatures are meant to be striking and even shocking at first glance. In many cases, caricatures make use of aggressive stereotypes in order to be blunter and get to their viewers immediately. Through this, they justify and reinforce the existence of violent images even though this is not their primary aim. As Oring argues, the relation of pictures and words affirms the old saying about their interrelation, that is, a picture is worth a thousand words, as cartoons are deliberately shocking pieces of communication (Oring 2003: 56). So why are caricatures especially eager to use exaggerated aggression in the visualisation of the Other? Oring argues that the humor in hate cartoons gives added value of creating a community, alluding to the existence of shared ideas

and values. Although pictures, as well as words, can convey the border between us and them equally effectively, it is the humorous pictures that do it in a most pleasurable way.

Material

The material used for this study was published or otherwise exposed to the public between the world wars: from the 1920s to the early 1940s. The period was chosen to gain an overview of the fears of the people in an economically and socially uncertain period. This will bring out the biggest amount and variation of images of the Other for several reasons. Some of these can be mentioned here: (1) it is a time of great economic upheavals; (2) these insecurities are paired up with emotional reactions—the pleasures of independence, economic success, the pains of economic depression, social stratification, and the consequent inequality, rising nationalist feelings of a young nation state, instability in domestic politics, and so on; (3) contact with the rest of the world—with familiar countries as well as exotic countries—was becoming more frequent and knowledge as well as superstitions flourished; and (4) last but not least, opening up to the rest of the world provided a myriad of examples in the art of drawing caricatures, the global influences are felt in the local cartoonists work.

The published sources included the weekly satirical section “Kratt” of the daily newspaper *Päevaleht* from 1926 to 1938 (altogether 543 instances of portraying the foreigner), and some independently published humor collections (Gori 1920; 1928). Secondary sources of cartoons are the half-underground issues of the journal *Juudid* (Jews) issued in 1922 and 1923, some pre-war flyers and placards (EAM archive), and unpublished cartoons from various other archives (e.g., F. Randel’s cartoons in the Mart Lepa art collection, TÜR HK; E. Obermann’s cartoons in TKM).

The cartoons from this period were chosen according to two complementary aims: first of all, to cover the majority of the ethnic groups featuring in the pre-war cartoons, giving an idea of the major targets and their representation and, secondly, to address the issue of using the motive of cannibalism for portraying the Other.

Results

First of all, I will present an overview of different Others in pre–World War II cartoons, describing the symbols, attributes, and motives used in their visualization. In generalizing the results, certain patterns of characters and motives evolve. Even though the years between the two world wars witness excessive social changes in the entire world, and the same can be said about aesthetic developments in art movements, symbols used in caricatures remain similar (some even carrying on to present day).

Russian

The most frequent ethnic character in the material is the Russian. The images of the Russian fall into at least two distinctive categories: a (military) man and the Russian bear. In the first case, the Russian is visualized in the form of a peasant or a man in a military uniform (only once in the material as a woman), usually marked with a communist star on his hat or clothes. This person often has small eyes hidden by exaggeratedly high cheekbones. His peasant shirt, if one is worn, is gathered on his waist by a belt or string and he is wearing high boots. Some images are more neutral, making fun of the Russian habits (one cartoon, for example, depicts the Russians completely unaware of the real use of a toilet seat and using it as a hand washing bowl). In another illustration, the very corpulent Russian madam is smoking at a table, with a Russian samovar beside her, and a Stalin-look-alike (man) behind her. She is drinking tea from a saucer, which is another Russian habit (Kratt 1928).

A typical Russian man, with comically exaggerated facial features (Kratt No 44, pp 352, 1926), is presented in a caricature where he is marking Russia's (prospective) territories. The signs around him state "Estonian Soviet Republic," "Finnish Soviet Republic," and so on. He is wearing a dotted shirt (textile decoration motive not familiar among Estonians) with a big red communist star on his chest. He has baggy trousers with tall boots and is clearly representing the working class (no military attire, hands large, and rough from hard work). The comic effect stems primarily from his facial features: the face is repulsively ugly and exaggerated to the extreme. One (fake?) eye is bulging from the head; the remaining one is small and weary-looking. A moustache above the ridiculously big lips and the bestubbed chin suggest the neglect of hygiene.

The other frequently used motive is the Russian bear (see example below, illustration nr 4). This is usually an aggressive-looking beast much bigger than the other characters in the cartoon, and quite often his deeds bear an allusion to attack/cannibalism. The motive is further discussed below.

German

Most probably because of the geographical proximity to Russia and the emotional background of the times, Estonian cartoons do not pay so much attention to the German ambitions and violence, though this changes towards the end of the period. A look at the three volumes of *Estonian Life Histories* (2000 I–II, 2003 III) shows that at that time the Estonians perceived the West including the Germans as a savior (waiting for the mythological White Ship is often mentioned in life stories), and the East was perceived as a source of trouble. Most of the caricatures picturing Germans carry a wider, even global, message and are not targeted against Germany as a nation, unlike caricatures about the Russians. Representatives of other nations (Polish, Turkish, Spanish, Italian, etc.) are playing a side-role to the Germans in the pictures.

The German is depicted either as a man with stereotypical Hitler-like features (moustache, Nazi salutation, etc.) or as the black German eagle. Usually the Germanness of the image is underlined by the swastika on either the clothing of the man or the wing or head of the bird. In this respect, there is a noticeable similarity to the use of the Russian communist star to symbolize Russianness in caricatures: in both cases, the viewer is directed towards an ethno-political understanding of the figure, and the ethnic group cannot usually be parted from its political connotations. The swastika is not reserved exclusively for the Germans. It is also used with the intention of bringing out the Fascist ideologies of the Other. A great example of the use of swastika (both as a general symbol as well as one of Germanness) is a morbid, almost resigned cartoon (see illustration ???, Kratt, nr 36, pp 141, 1938). Noteworthy is the blended character of the war god, sporting Hitler's moustache, Scandinavian horns, Hungarian brush helmet, and so forth. The caption reads: "Please, allow me another dance," referring to the presence of the threat of World War II.

Spanish

The Spanish bull is an image introduced in Estonian cartoons during the Spanish Civil war in the mid-1930s. It is usually depicted as a victim of other European nations. The onlooking Others are accused of using the country as a testing ground for their military advancements and new technology, in a prelude to World War II. A usual motive is the scene of “modern bullfighting,” where Spain, depicted as a red bull, is attacked from all sides.

Exotic

The exotic Other is almost never the main addressee of caricature humor: it usually plays an assisting role. Nevertheless, during the invasion of Abyssinia in the late 1930s, the image of the African tribal man is more frequent. The visual cues are in this case very stereotypical and show little imagination (wide lips, dark skin, half-nakedness, and so on; see also illustration nr 5). One comparatively imaginative caricature claims in its heading, “Coming in contact with the European culture, the black race becomes white with fright” (“The end of the black race”, Kratt nr 34, pp 136, 1935).

Jew

The Jewish man with sidelocks, a black skullcap, and a big nose is also a rare protagonist in the caricatures of the time. Although the Jew has been a familiar character in Estonian folklore, which is also evident from the section dealing with accusations of cannibalism, he is not a relevant target for political caricatures between the two World Wars.

Other Characters

Other episodically relevant characters are represented by the French rooster, the British lion, the Polish hussar with a long moustache/the white eagle, the Lithuanian peasant, the Latvian man with a high (military) hat, and the Finnish man with a cocked hat and a knife on the belt (see illustrations below, e.g. Kratt, No. 41, pp 326, 1926, Kratt, No. 12 pp 96, 1929, Kratt, No. 34, pp. 265, 1927, Kratt, No. 47 pp 183, 1938). An example of a variety of less relevant Others is the first of these examples, where the happy Russian is in line with the stoic Lithuanian and an obviously angry Pole. The caption states, “After the Russian-Lithuanian treaty”.

The Estonian himself can be shown in two different ways. He can be depicted as an old peasant smoking a pipe and wearing a non-military black hat, simple clothing, and high boots. Estonia can also be a young, slim, and quite fragile-looking girl with a simple long shirt/skirt, brooch on the chest, a ribbon in the hair, and either barefooted or wearing the traditional leather shoes (for example, see the illustration in Kratt, No. 4, pp 13, 1938).

Cannibalism in Estonian interwar caricature

As the next step, I will turn to those cartoons that depict cannibalism and address the use of this particular motive in Estonian caricature.

Russians

The interwar caricatures about Russia are mostly inspired by the perceived threat against Estonia as an independent state. In these, the Russians ferociously keep an eye on the much smaller Estonia (represented by a girl or an old man), accompanied with actions that in many cases can be described as cannibalistic. Straightforward images of the Russian bear in the middle of eating their victim are rare. A cannibalistic motive is visualized in one of the examples (Kratt No. 7, pp 28, 1938) . The bear shows off his jaws and sharp nails while leaning over a striped border fence, ready to attack the worried (or at least disturbed) little bearded old man with a pipe and a rifle in his hand. The caption reads: “Well, dear neighbour, it seems you have forgotten that besides country borders there exists a border of decency.” It seems also in this case that the Estonian public firmly believed in their ability of keeping their independence with the help of sensible talk and wise politics. Until the last moment, people did not believe in the most negative scenario; this is also supported by the memories in life stories (Hinrikus 2000).

The man-eating motive is strong in Russia’s case even when we are not dealing with animal metaphors. The ideas were further fuelled by the repressive politics that were adopted by Russia after the formal end of World War II, changing the lives of thousands of Estonians. The acute fear of being deported from the homeland, after having your hard-earned land taken away from you, created a general atmosphere of quiet, suppressed anger. Even if it was forbidden for Estonians to express political views that departed from the official pan-Soviet politics after Estonia was annexed to Russia, rebellious thoughts existed and were sometimes even written

down (for example in personal diaries and commonplace books—present-day blogs—e.g., EFA AKK 667: 121).

Dietary habits can become stereotyped in folklore—in images as well as in ideas. Christie Davies (1990) has written that besides differences in economic status, abilities, and physical appearance, eating presents a widely used motive in ethnic ridiculing. In this vein, the French have long been known as frog eaters and the Chinese as dog-eaters, and so on.

A double twist on the accusation of cannibalism is evident in a caricature depicting a Russian and a Black (Kratt Nr 40, lk 313, 1927). The typical representative of the black race is portrayed in a rather neutral but stereotypical way: curly hair, big lips, white teeth, shallow forehead, loincloth around the otherwise naked body, some military attire, and bangles. He is shaking hands with Russia in quite a civilized and friendly way and saying: “We salute you on the occasion of 10-year anniversary of activity. But we wonder—why haven’t you yet eaten the corpses?” His words are received in a grumpy manner by the somewhat taller man in Russian military uniform, with the communist star on the visor of the hat. In the background, the ruined buildings and a number of gallows poles complement the deserted landscape. The motives and habits of communists and cannibals are being juxtaposed: the cartoon hints that killing the victims and then letting them rot in the gallows can be even more uncivilized than eating them.

Jews

Even though Jews are not frequent characters in officially published cartoons (and by that time, they had not yet become the forcefully attacked group on the international arena), they are present in the Estonian underground and small print-run fiction literature. These portray Jews from a negative perspective, relying on folktales and myths of blood libel and the like. Most of these express anti-Semitic accusations of the Jews satisfying their cannibalistic urges on the local babies (or cats, for that matter). The two items from the publications studied here were from rather different worlds: one is a children’s book “WorstiWalmistaja Haim” (Sausage-maker Haim), and the other is a short-lived journal *Juudid* (Jews). The latter depicts the nation under discussion as disgusting monsters with eight legs, long claws, a hairy body, and a recognizably Jewish head eating away a helpless man (see below, *Juudid* (Jews), 1922 No. 1 pp 1.). The same forcefulness of visual language characterizes the other source (Gori 1920), where the vile-

looking old Jew catches cats with live rats in a trap or with fish on a hook and, then, drives them through the mincer.

Germans

The Germans are only moderately associated with cannibalistic urges. For an exceptional example (see figure 16), one cartoon from 1933 states that the German eagle does not eat corpses, so the Baltic states should pretend they are dead in order to escape unwanted attention (Kratt nr 48, pp 193, 1933). At the same time, Germany is present in several cartoons that deal with the aggressive ambitions of its allies (for example, helping to build a throne-base made of skulls for General Franco in Spain [Kratt nr 12, pp 46, 1937]). The familiar symbols (Hitler's moustache and the swastika) refer to the Germans presence, either physical or mental. In a rare case (but presented here as a good example of the people's attitudes of the times), the German is the positive hero who saves Estonians from the blood-thirsty Russia. A post-war (1942-1943) billposter shows a man symbolizing Russia with a bloody knife in his hand, stretching out to annex the Baltic states (see below in the annex of illustrations). The caption reads "Abolish Bolshevism!" The red star on Russia's helmet unmistakably identifies the attacker, while the firm hand of the savior is marked with a swastika. These billposters were printed in Germany and distributed to the Baltic region (analogous posters were known in Latvian and Lithuanian).

Another case is with the local Germans in Estonia, or the Baltic Germans. The Baltic German landlords were perceived as negative heroes. The idea arose from the fact that for centuries they ruled over Estonians, using the local natives as slaves in their mansions. In the caricatures, they do not eat their victims themselves. It is quite logical that stemming from their long-standing practice of subjugating Estonians, they would find somebody to "do it for them" even when it comes to eating people, in this case a bogey (see below, Kratt No. 14, pp 109, 1926). Besides the obvious allusion to Baltic German interests in the land they owned in Estonia and were about to lose after World War II, the cartoon refers to the centuries of injustice against the exploited Estonian peasants who had to do all the work for their German-born masters.

In the context of the situation Estonia was facing during the period at the start of World War II, it is no surprise that in many cartoons, the threat to Estonia's independence does not come from a single source. Three different "blood-thirsty countries" are portrayed as offenders

in the following cartoon (see below, Kratt, No. 4, pp 13, 1938). Estonia (this time, a man with a pipe and Mulk's hat typical of rather wealthy Southern Estonians from Mulgimaa) has surrounded himself with a fence in order to avoid Baltic cooperation. The caption states, "If Estonia should isolate itself [from the Baltic to unite with Scandinavia] ... it is no wonder that 'admirers' will come from all around the world." The Others include the Russian bear (sticking out his disproportionately long tongue and displaying a spectacular set of nails) with the communist star on his hat, the German eagle with its beak wide open, and the Polish white eagle (with an additional detail of the military hat drawn to the eyes). The bystanders, the Finn (with the obligatory knife on the belt and the cocked hat) and the Swede (a civilized-looking gentleman) are small in comparison to the "threatening global forces," while Latvia and Lithuania have apparently entered into a deal to protect each other's backs. The scene resembles a reversed zoo, where the animals are loose and eyeing the human exponents behind the fence.

Besides the foreigners who are perceived as cannibals, the accusation of cannibalism is at times targeted towards fellow Estonians, especially those who entertain either communist or fascist ideas. The Estonian party politics was often referred to as aggressively self-centered and profit oriented. In many cartoons, the party representatives (marked by specific recognizable attributes like the lacy hat of the woman representing the People's Party or the tall round hat of the Socialist Party) are quarrelling for their self-interest, forgetting those of the people. In some instances, the hyperbole is stretched as far as in the following example, where the worn out Estonia (portrayed as a peasant girl in traditional leather footwear and headband) is held tightly by the ferocious big-toothed and probably blood-thirsty crocodile holding a sign that reads, "For MY best future." (Võitlus [Fight] 1933, nr 13 (58), pp 4).

During the relatively short time of independence, both communists and fascists tried to find followers for their ideas. A group calling themselves "freedom fighters" (also known as "bludgeon men") in Estonia leaned, for example, towards German fascism. Their association to Nazis is visualized in caricatures through salutation (hand up) or the swastika on their clothes. Their "local" symbol, a bludgeon, is also often present. In one cartoon, Estonia is depicted as a (wise) old peasant who states that he cannot eat the porridge—it contains no vitamins, only mines (pun in Estonian: *vitamiinid pro miinid*). In another cartoon, the postman carries parcels

containing human remains to the doors of freedom fighters, the caption stating that the bludgeon men were extended a helping hand from a cannibal tribe).

Some of the described images have carried on to present times and are still actively used among cartoonists. The image of the aggressive Russian bear, for example, is a frequent character in the present-day Estonian editorial cartoons (and has extended to foreign ones, e.g., in Britain and the USA). In one example, the Russian bear has just eaten a hearty meal of Georgians and is stressed out by the consequent accusations against him. Also, the blood libel motives are still alive and occasionally presented in caricatures. Oring (2003) analyzes a set of cartoons published in a right-wing movement journal in the United States. Among his examples is a caricature strikingly similar to the cartoon about the cannibalist Jew (see below), where a Jew is drawn resembling an insect and attacking a human being (ibid: 52).

Analysis

Even though a more thorough quantitative analysis could be needed at this point, this preliminary study shows that the most frequent ethnic targets of the pre-war cartoons are Russians and Germans (with Finns, Latvians, and several others as occasional bystanders in the pictures). In response to topical political events, other ethnic groups like Spanish, Italian, or Chinese, present themselves. The Russians are the most often depicted source of aggression and fear. This sometimes extends to the image of cannibalism—a constant fear logically surmounts to this exaggeration. Other more powerful nations feature as global (not necessarily personally experienced) sources of evil. In contrast to the powerful Others, the Estonian is quite a resigned figure in the caricatures, pushed and pulled around by the global forces. Its fragility is especially well visualized in the image of the Estonian girl, an innocent victim of its influential political partners or local power struggle. A similar visualization of its political status and position on the global arena is present in Finnish caricatures of the same period (Ylönen 2001).

A survey of the material shows that besides the all-powerful Russia (and to a smaller degree the fascist Germany), the Jewish people constitute the third frightening foreigner in the minds of the Estonian public. But there is a remarkable difference with respect to where the material about Russians/Germans or about the Jews was published. Although more sources could be involved (e.g., different newspapers with various political orientation and more

underground sources) and deeper analysis could be used at this point, it can be assumed that the choice of ethnic characters varies depending on the source. In the officially published sources—state newspapers and other newspapers—the Jews are rarely present. In comparison, the underground sources use the Jew as their main target and depictions of Jewish cannibalism are frequent.

In generalizing the results, one can see certain patterns of motives evolve. Both humans and animals are used in symbolizing states and nations: men with stereotypic attire or features and state symbols represent the ethnic Other. One difference in the way particular Others are depicted relates to the “familiarness” of the nation. If depicting a rather unfamiliar nation, the character might be the political leader of the country (e.g., Franco, Mussolini) instead of an archetype (a peasant, a soldier) with recognizable ethnic qualities. Equally often the symbol of the Other is an animal associated with the region in some way (e.g., the Spanish bull). Between the two world wars, the attention of Estonian cartoonists turned more and more towards foreign countries: the wars in Spain, Abyssinia, and Palestine elicit this. This is accompanied by the need to find suitable visual images for the “new” nations, many of which are discovered in animal figures (e.g., the Japanese tiger).

When we are dealing with the visualization of a more familiar nation, the symbols are more varied and the figures are recognizably “ethnic.” For example, in the case of Russians, the Russian man is often dressed in rather old-fashioned ethnic clothing (long shirt tied with a string) or in a military uniform. This requires that the audience be familiar with the ethnic attributes and artefacts connected with the nation. In the case of the more distant Other, the symbols have to be more obvious. For example, the image of Spain is recognizable in the stereotype of the bullfighting nation or by the presence of the figure of Franco (if this is not mentioned, Spanish can easily be perceived as any other Mediterranean nation and no more specific categorization is possible).

Addressing cannibalism as a subtheme of portraying the ethnic Other brought an informative angle on the issue to the table. A person eating their fellow human is a multifaceted symbol that has different allusions in every society. Because of dietary taboos, humans have consumed the flesh of fellow humans in rituals and out of insanity, hatred, or overriding hunger, but never as a common part of their diet. Cannibalism is tied to emotions (fear, hatred),

antisocial behavior (wars and other aggression), identity issues (defining the borders of us versus them), and so on. In the Estonian caricatures of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the motive of man-eating is often used in portraying local politics: economic crises, election battles, and other local issues are in the foreground. The way of addressing the situation is rather playful, without much aggression or fear. This changes after 1936, when the conflicts grow sharper and the imminence of World War II is sensed. The war-god Mars is appearing more and more often in cartoons. Fear begins to dominate the spectrum of emotions also in humorous discourse. This produces humorous texts that are tragicomic or “black”/“sick” in essence; they make use of more morbid symbols and, at times, can cease to be funny for the contemporaneous audience. The thin line between humor and tastelessness is hard to balance on.

Accusations of cannibalism have also been referred to as the *blood libel legend*, especially in the case of the Jews. There is a considerable amount of literature on the subject (for an overview, see Po-Chia Hsia 1990: 2). The accusations of man-eating first spread across Western Europe during the late Middle Ages and invaded Eastern Europe later, peaking there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and remaining widespread (though less believed) during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the legends echo into the twentieth (and, in fact, also the twenty-first century). The Estonian stories of cannibalism target mainly Jews, Russians, and Estonians themselves (Kalmre 2007: 77–92). The hyperbole of cannibalism was also popular in children’s literature, and it was widely used as a child-scaring measure—in Estonian folklore, the Jew and, especially, the Gypsy playing the role of the monster who is going to carry off and/or eat the misbehaving child.

In the Estonian material, we encounter the attempt to re-animate the myth in a short-lived periodical publication *Jews* (1923), in an article titled “Jewish Blood Mystery: The Secret Science of the Rabbis,” which presented a “scientific” overview of the Jewish ritual child-murder (referred to in Ariste 1932: 10–11). The pictorial images of cannibalism in Estonian caricatures have been supported by the legend (e.g., in Gori 1920), but, all in all, it has not resulted in exclusive linking of the Jews with cannibalism—also a number of other nations perform this act in ethnic caricatures. Researchers note that stories of ritual murder and man-eating should not be classified as specifically anti-ethnic fabrications, but merely as manifestations of urban legends which have been given another life and a particularly nasty twist

(Baron 1994). The frequency of the motive and its connections to a particular nation or group seem to be affected by other phenomena—most of all, the socio-political or economical situation (wars, famine, aggressive elections, or other events, etc.). Allport and Postman (1947), studying war-time legends and rumors, discovered that hatred was often canalized as racial and religious prejudice. These suppressed emotions were given a legitimate expression through the use of old crystallized genres of folklore. Thus the legends became a popular mirror of the social situation and interethnic relations, gaining a new life in a process fed by fear and insecurity.

Linking military attack (and the subsequent economic downfall, scarcity or even downright hunger) with eating human flesh is derived from the relevance of corporal horrors like dismembering and slaughtering, brought about in the context of war. The foreign soldiers are the intruders who are the advocates of and importers of violent habits like cannibalism. Thus the cannibalistic Russians and Germans in Estonian cartoons are explained within this framework. Jews are not the military attackers. Associating them with cannibalism has to do with the memory of the blood libel legend and perhaps enforced also by their alluded interest in taking profit without having mercy on their “victims.” In their case, it is a metaphor for extreme exploitation (Douglas 2002: 158).

As already mentioned, the blood libel legend does not deal exclusively with Jews. It has been associated with the Roma, the communists, Christians, Mormons in religious rituals, neo-pagans, Native Americans, South Pacific and African tribes and other Others. For example, the prime minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, has been reproached several times for his extreme anti-communist statements, which include “Go and read the black book on communism and you’ll find that under Mao’s China they didn’t eat babies but they boiled them to fertilise the fields.” (Sydney Morning Herald 2006). But what this expressively shows is the symbols involved in the notion of cannibalism per se. Man-eating is a motive that has to do with some of the most primary phenomena in human life: corporality, death, eating, and ritual behaviour (Kalmre 2007: 75). While coming into contact with the Other, the superficial qualities (physical appearance: bodies, clothes, and eating) catch our attention first and the ethnocentric human mind classifies the stranger’s habits concerning these areas as uncivilized and frightening. Mysterious instances of death are followed by numerous speculations. In this process, the fear constructs the threat and not vice versa (Lotman 1998: 63 - 64), because the true sources of

misery and degradation are unknown, and the human mind is constructed to know, to label, to categorize, even if the data it uses is fabricated. In any case, it is better to know the horrid “truth” than not to know at all. Through this process, the image of the cannibal is produced, symbolizing the maximum evil. The man-eater is not only the Other with respect to the group who creates the opposition of the civilized and the uncivilized, the cannibal is so marginal and so distant from the definition of a human being that it remains Other to the whole of humankind. It is the image of the ultimate Other.

Satire reduces social issues to ones that can be measured in the toll it takes on the human body. Corporality was highlighted by the war, from the bodies of the dead and wounded to the alimentary restrictions on civilians (Douglas 2002: 258). Also, in the case of cannibalism, the otherwise large-scale social issues are “brought to flesh” or materialized by linking them to our material body. It is anyone of us and even our children (the future generation) who may be threatened by the “man-eating foreigner.” The conversion of abstract ideas into tangible concepts connected to the human body is not only used in cartoons but is a general practice of metaphorization. Lakoff and Turner state in their seminal book “More than Cool Reason” that the ancient model of the Great Chain of Being establishes a certain hierarchy that, in turn, determines the directionality of proverbial metaphors: metaphors for more abstract concepts are chosen from a lower, more corporal, or everyday level (Lakoff & Turner 1989). Properties of unfamiliar phenomena are better understood by “translating” them into concepts taken from around us, most familiar to us, at our corporal level. Caricatures often make use of this principle, using the human body in creating symbols and metaphors. The main idea of drawing cartoons is to bring the issue closer to the viewer by visualizing the intangible/unvisualizable, and, thus, also the representations themselves aim at materializing the fears into concrete and preferably corporal objects.

Cannibalism is met in rumors and urban legends that use the macabre motive in order to spice up the storyline. Responsible for missing persons during peace time and for unnatural death during the war, man-eating monsters are seen at all times as a threat to “our” way of living. There have been many (unofficial) reports about people being lured to secluded places and then disappearing, or even parents eating their children in hunger (e.g., from Tartu between world wars or from the time of collectivization and famine in Ukraine in the 1930s). Cannibalism in

folklore is often presented in an earnest manner, for segregating the strange, the Other from ourselves. But at the same time, cannibalism is clearly an overstatement—at least in most cases. In this way, it is funny as an exaggeration. The issue here is twofold: first of all, connecting a nation with the idea of cannibalism in a *bona fide* mode and, second, making the same allusion in a jocular context. There are plenty of wartime rumors that muse about the supposed anti-humanistic habits of the strangers. But in addition to that, the humor of the time uses this stereotype in portraying the villain. We can assume that the reasons for this lie in the quality of the society surrounding the myth, since grave exaggerations like this can only grow out of social chaos.

Conclusion

It is a customary practice that the Other is accused of cannibalism and the depiction of the Other as cannibalistic has been, in fact, one of the most frequent motives in the Western world throughout the centuries. It can be seen among the Estonians as well as about the Estonians (the Estonian as a non-Christian savage violating eagerly the Ten Commandments is a common motive in describing the Estonians in pre-1900 and even after that in Western Europe [Hennoste 2005]).

In the pre-war stories, the actual facts of the societal crisis are mixed with the personal experiences and memories of people. These were, in turn, twisted into frighteningly funny images representing our fears and perceptions of the Other. They were allegedly eating us—both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. Cannibalism proved to present ample hyperbole for depicting the threats of daily life, especially as we came close to the breakout of World War II. Already in the beginning of the economic depression in the 1930s and during the civil war in Spain in the mid-1930s, the emotions became more macabre, as seen also in the Estonian material. The frequency of the motive of cannibalism grew accordingly and addressed the foreigner as the principal Other rather than focusing on the political battles among ourselves. The caricaturists became worried about the general fate of the world, showing in the late 1930s the blood-thirsty war-god Mars as the cannibal (e.g., a cartoon in *Kratt* No 34, pp 133, 1938) most probably because the individual crimes of different dictators (Franco, Hitler) had to be summoned under one hard-hitting symbol. Still, why is it then that it is particularly the quite

innocent figure of the Jew who is most forcefully associated with accusations of cannibalism? The reasons for that lie deep in the folklore that has for ages given rise to legends of eating human flesh and attributing it to Jews. The legends do not cease to exist, though they may at times take cover. At a suitable moment they will reappear or even extend to other ethnic groups as well. Folkloric motives display flexible adjustment to social reality. Topical associations are superficial and temporary. At the same time, the permanent links embedded in folklore and tradition are at times hidden, but always there.

The legend of cannibalism draws on our fears in a very corporal manner—it is our body that is attacked—becoming the embodiment of our fears. It generates an immediate interaction with our most primal level of emotions. The image of the cannibal is a powerful symbol for defining the border between “us” and “them” for many reasons. The visualization allows for forceful allusions of the target with the uncivilized and inhuman. Likewise, the content has mostly to do with the fears and tensions in the society, centering on norms and values, which are in opposition to those of the Other. The group identity is then based, not only on who we are and what we believe in, but, even more importantly on who we are not. The symbol is especially relevant in the case of small nation states (like Estonia) that have been continuously threatened by more powerful countries, being geographically situated at the juncture of power lines. That has resulted in Estonians being “eaten” by the Other on many occasions, which once again justifies the use of such a metaphor.

References:

Davies C. 2007, *Humour and Protest: Jokes Under Communism*. International Review of Social History, Cambridge, pp. 203 – 228.

Douglas A. 2002, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I*, University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.

Dundes A. 1987, *Cracking Jokes. Studies of Sick Humour Cycles and Stereotypes*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press.

EFA AKK 667: 121, Estonian Folklore Archive

Estonian Life Stories (2000 I - II, 2003 III), (ed.) Rutt Hinrikus, Tallinn: Tänapäev
20

Freud S. (1905 / 1989). Jokes and its Relations to the Unconscious. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co.

Gori V. 1920, Vorstivalmistaja Haim. Hirmus ja õudne naljakas lugu kõvade närvidega lastele. (Sausage maker Haim. Scary and terribly funny story for children), Pärnu.

Gori V. 1928, Knock-out : karrikatuurid ja vested (Knock-out: Caricatures and short stories), Tallinn : Ringraadio.

Gurin C. 2004, Russian Media Mulls Growing Ethnic Intolerance, Eurasia Daily Monitor , No 114, pp 1 – 4,
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=3121&article_id=23687

Hennoste T. 2005, Postkolonialism ja Eesti. (Post-colonialism and Estonia) Kirikiri, 03/14/2005;
http://www.kirikiri.ee/article.php3?id_article=201

Thorson J. A. 1985, A funny thing happened on the way to the morgue: Some thoughts on humor and death, and a taxonomy of the humor associated with death, Death Studies, Vol. 9, Issue 3 & 4, pp. 201 - 216.

Kalmre E. 2007, Hirm ja võõraviha sõjajärgses Tartus (Fear and hatred of the “other” in post-war Tartu). Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.

Krikmann A. 2009, Jokes in Soviet Estonia, Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore, No 43, pp. 43 - 66

Kuzmanic T. A. 2002, Xenophobia in former Yugoslavia and Post-Socialist Slovenia), [in:] Mojca Pajnik, Xenophobia and Post-socialism. Ljubljana: Mirovni Institut, 17 – 37;
http://www.mirovniinstitut.si/eng_html/publications/pdf/MI_politike_symposion_xenophobia.pdf

Laineste L. 2008, The Politics of Joking: Ethnic Jokes and Their Targets in Estonia (1880s – 2007). Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore, Vol. 40, pp. 110 – 132.

Lakoff G., M. Turner 1989, *More than Cool Reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago

Loodus R. 1963, Jooni Eesti karikatuurist XX sajandi algul, *Eesti NSV teaduste Akadeemia toimetised*, Vol 12, No 3

Lotman J. 1998, *Theses on the semiotic study of cultures*, Pärli, Ülle [ed.] University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics

Miron D. 2003, *Enjoyment of Violence*. In Jennings Bryant, David R. Roskos-Ewoldsen, Joanne Cantor (Eds). *Communication and Emotion: Essays in Honour of Dolf Zillmann*. Mahwah: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 445 - 473

Mundorf N., J. Mundorf 2003, *Gender Socialization of Horror*. In Jennings Bryant, David R. Roskos-Ewoldsen, Joanne Cantor (Eds). *Communication and Emotion: Essays in Honour of Dolf Zillmann*. Mahwah: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 155 – 179.

Oring E. 2003, *Engaging Humor*. Urbana, Chicago: Illinois University Press.

Oring E. 2004, *Risky Business: Political Jokes Under Repressive Regimes*, *Western Folklore*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pp.209–236.

Orwell G. 1945, *Funny but not Vulgar*, www.orwell.ru/library/articles/funny/english/e_funny

Po-Chia Hsia R. 1990, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*. Yale University Press

Sydney Morning Herald, 2006, March 27

Školkay A. 2002, *Xenophobia: A Catalyst of Hate Speech in Slovakia and Slovenia*, (paper) *Understanding Xenophobia in Eastern Europe: Workshop of the Humanities Center and the Center for Policy Studies, Central European University (Budapest)*, June 21-22, 2002.
http://www.ceu.hu/cps/eve/eve_xenophobia_skolkay.pdf

Žagar I. 2002, *Xenophobia and Slovenian Media: How the Image of the Other is Constructed (And What it Looks Like)*, [in:] Mojca Pajnik (ed), *Xenophobia and Post-socialism*. Ljubljana:

Mirovni Institut, 37 – 45,

http://www.mirovni.institut.si/eng_html/publications/pdf/MI_politike_symposion_xenophobia.pdf

Tamborini R. 2003, Enjoyment and Social Functions of Horror. [in:] Jennings Bryant, David R. Roskos-Ewoldsen, Joanne Cantor (Eds). *Communication and Emotion: Essays in Honour of Dolf Zillmann*. Mahwah: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 417 – 445.

Ylönen M. 2001, *Pilahistoria: Suomi poliittisissa pilapiirroksissa 1800-luvulta 2000-luvulle* (Joke history: Finland in political caricatures from 1880s to 2000), Helsinki: SKS