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“Aren’t you Jewish by any chance?” Auto-stereotypes and “balancing” the minority-existence in the Hungarian Jewish humor

One of the most important sociological aspects of Jewish humor is the presence of stereotypes of “Jewish traits” in jokes. Jewish in-group jokes continually feature motifs that can be discovered in non-Jewish anti-Semitic humor as well (Saper 1993:82).

This phenomenon is also prevalent in Hungarian Jewish culture, where members of the Jewish minority continue to feel tensions over the survival of the tragedies and traumas of World War II. The appearance of anti-Semitic remarks in public speeches and the political aspirations that feed them further contribute to this (Kovács–Vajda 2002: 46-57, Karády 2002: 241-258, Papp 2018)

With this in mind, the question arises how the aforementioned aspect of Jewish humor manifests itself in a social environment where such traumas and tensions are still inseparable from Jewish cultural memory and identity strategies. Focusing on the humor of a Budapest synagogue community, my study analyzes the meaning of auto- and hetero-stereotypes from the perspective of the jokes and related narratives told within that community.

Introduction

The largest Jewish community in Central Europe lives in Hungary, and within Hungary, in Budapest. Their number is estimated at 64,000-118,000 (Stark 2002: 119). The application of demographic data is problematic and, in the case of contemporary Hungarian Jewry, empirical analysis is likewise equally difficult. The Holocaust, the decades of communism, emigration, followed by the Hungarian Jewish ethnic and cultural revival as well as the anti-Semitic demonstrations occurring after the political changeover of 1989, have shaped, and continue to shape the basis of the diversity of the ways in which the Jews identify themselves as such (Kovács 2002).

A British anthropologist, Leonard Mars has identified three factors that have played a part in the revival of Jewish identity in post-Communist Hungary, namely: ethnic, socio-cultural and religious (Mars 1999: 24). Each of the three options are bolstered by

various institutions and communities in Budapest and so neither is in any way is an unrealistic or untimely choice. So circumstances seem ideal for the revival and constancy of Budapest's Jewish culture, which has, through the years, has played an appreciable influence on the life and culture of the capital (Komoróczy 1995).

The synagogue on Bethlen Square belonging to the Jewish community of Budapest, is one of those communities in the city where, in addition to the Sabbath and other festive religious occasions, morning prayers are held every day. The circle of those who pray regularly is around twenty-five to thirty people. Members of every generation are present in the community, and more than ten are under the age of thirty. Fifty to sixty people belong to the "outer circle" of the community, who visit the synagogue regularly on the occasion of the Kiddush ceremony on Friday evening, as well as for the minor festive events. On major festive days, several hundred people attend the synagogue.

I conducted my research among those who are regular participants in everyday ritual life and visit the synagogue regularly. An attempt is made to find answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper by analysing a concrete cultural phenomenon, humor. The jokes, witty stories, and the humour in the conversations and situations are examined in depth. This research indicates that the Bethlen Square community is such a tightly integrative cultural system that through analysing it we can become acquainted with the lifestyle and identity of the congregation in depth (Papp 2009). In general, we can conclude that Jewish humour continuously reflects and interprets the cultural practices, the changes in lifestyle and the contemporary situation of Jewry (Oring 1992: 112-122; Raj, 2006: 50-51). The "Jewish" minority and "non-Jewish" majority, as members of the community distinguish themselves, their system of relationships and the multiple levels of meanings relating to this dual system are also continuously reflected by the jokes and funny remarks.

Stereotypes in the "inner" jokes

"Why did Moses cross the Red Sea with the Jews? Because he didn't want to be seen with them on the beach".

This joke is one of the most popular among my conversational partners. However, as they interpreted it for me, there are two reads of this joke.

One is considered an "inner punchline" that is more of a "self-stereotyping" in a humorous form. The other possible reading is when some "outsider" tells this joke with an offensive intent.

In the "inner" synagogue context, the joke refers to the "discord", "constant dissatisfaction", "stubbornness" of the Jews, well-known in the Bethlen Square from the stories in the Torah, describing how their ancestors grumbled, complained, quarreled after their liberation from Egypt, during their desert migration. The background to understanding the joke is the shared knowledge of Bible stories. Thus, humorous self-irony gains mythical legitimacy as the Torah stories, inspiring self-reflection, speak openly about their ancestral character, and their attitude to God and their religion.

My conversational partners also confirmed, they laugh hard at the joke because – as they said – *"this is a precise description of how we are", "you see, nothing has changed since then", "I think it'll still be the same today, so I don't envy Moses... this is my favorite joke."*

During our conversations about the joke, the members of the community also added that *"this is a very good description of us, but you can only really understand it if you are a true Hungarian-Jew."*

Members of different cultural groups with the help of stereotypes, maintain and re-create the sense of the mutual understanding. The emergence of stereotypes in the jokes can further strengthen and deepen the shared knowledge and the realization of common identity and intimacy associated with it.

The stereotypes found in the Bethlen Square jokes also create a sense of group identity for the members of the synagogue community. These stereotypes, however, are not "outwardly", that is projecting stereotypes for others, but to their own group. In the focus of the jokes there are either the "typical figures" of auto-stereotype, or their own group, or it is the exposition of the "typical" characteristics of Jews.

This is how it was clear to the members of the community that the *"Why did Moses cross ..."* joke projects the auto-stereotyped the *"way we are even today"*, the *"truth"* that only those could understand, who are living participants of this reality.

One of the key components of the *"way we are"* auto-stereotype is the stereotyped and generalized "discord", as the featured characteristic of Jewry in the joke.

For a deeper understanding of this, it is worth bearing in mind that Judaism is not a centralized religion. From Jewish history and from the diversity of Jewish cultures of today, it can be seen that the structure of Judaism allows for the diversity and coexistence of ritual regulations, theological-religious views, attitudes and relations.

This diversity, however, has in many cases led to sharp conflicts in the past, as is the case today among the different Jewish trends, primarily among those who regard themselves as the *"single-authentic"* representatives of Judaism. There are among the groups identifying themselves as authentic Jewish community some Orthodox-Hassid congregations. On occasion, there are sharp contrasts between these Hassid groups as well, and thus provide opportunities for Jewish ironic "discord" jokes in Bethlen Square: The topic of discussion during one Sabbath was the "discord" between Jewish trends and communities. When the conversation came to the discussion that some of the Hassid communities don't even accept each other's shohet (the person officially licensed by rabbinic authority as slaughterer of animals and poultry for use as food in accordance with Jewish laws) or mohel (the specialist of circumcision), the man who started the conversation had the following joke:

"The daughter of the rebbe (rabbi) of Satmar, and the son of Hasid rebbe of Gur are getting married. During the wedding feast everyone is having a good time, eating, drinking, the bridegroom, however, does not touch the food. His bride asks him:

" - Why don't you touch the food?

- Because we don't accept your shohet. Your food therefore is not kosher (ritually proper) -- says the groom.

Well, the wedding night comes. They get ready for bed. In bed, the new husband begins to undress his wife... when suddenly she turns away, facing the wall.

In surprise, her husband asks:

- Nu, what's the matter?

- What's the matter?! Well, it's just that we don't accept your mohel!"

The auto-stereotype of "discord" shows up in jokes not only about Jewish groups, but about interpersonal relationships as well:

"Grün immigrates to America. He has nothing and no one there, but he knows his childhood friend, Kohn has been selling ice-cream in New York and he's doing well. Once there, he looks him up in New York and tells him:

- Do you remember Kohn growing up together and always helping each other? Do you remember how many times I have pulled you out of the hole? Please lend me a thousand dollars, for I have no money and here I am, in America, with empty pockets.

Kohn spreads his hands and shrugs his shoulders:

-You see this bank behind me, Grün? The deal is that I made with them, they won't sell ice cream, and I won't lend money ..."

Kohn and Grün are characters of the "typical Hungarian Jewish" stereotype. Thus, their conversations, experiences or conflicts in jokes demonstrate the "typical Hungarian Jewish life situations and traits".

The joke quoted above is a thought-provoking example of it all. Kohn's witty response in the punchline contains critical irony about the "typical Hungarian Jewish".

– The features criticized in the joke as "lack of solidarity" and the "refusal to help others" are also part of the "way we are" auto-stereotype and another counterpole to the ethos of the Torah, of which the pronounced expectation is to practice solidarity and help one another (Wolff 2001: 235-250)

In addition to criticism of "discord", Jewish auto-stereotypes also cover some behavioral issues. For example, if someone talks a lot, or interrupts someone when they are talking, to him they often pose the question: "*Aren't you Jewish by any chance?*"

– One of the funniest examples of this was given at Bethlen Square when a member of the minyan digressed from his initial subject and forgot what he wanted to say to begin with. They laughed and said to him:

"You are the most genuine Jew, because you cut even into your own words."

On another occasion, a non-Jewish man, a landscape gardener of the synagogue, interrupted one of the members of the community during a conversation. "*You're not even Jewish,*" said the man coming to a halt. "*Yeah, slowly I'm turning into one*", the landscaper replied, and everyone laughed, indicating among others, that understanding and taking part in "inner" humor is not limited to members of the kehilla, everyone who participates and understands humor becomes an "insider".

In addition to self-stereotyping, there is example of joking about stereotyped "physical attributes" in Bethlen Square. Accordingly, I have heard several variations of the following joke in the synagogue:

"UFOs land on Earth. People are afraid to walk up to them, until Kohn bravely goes to the spaceship and asks the UFOs:

- *Are you all this green?*
- *Yes, we all are this green color – the UFOs respond.*
- *And does everyone have three heads?*
- *Yes, everyone has three heads.*
- *And does everyone have twenty eyes?*
- *Yes, everyone has twenty eyes.*
- *And do you all have such big nose?*
- *Nah, only the Jews do!"*

In this joke, offensive-anti-Semitic, "coming from the outside" patterns of stereotypes appear in humor. The anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jewry emphasize physical signs, such as the "big nose" of the Jews (Oring 2003: 46). In this joke, however, this was the subject of "insider" laughter, not to mention the positive interpretation of the joke that my conversational partners pointed out:

"You see, there are Jews everywhere, the universe is full of us." "You do not have to be afraid on the plane, because if the UFOs take you away, there is no doubt there will be a synagogue there too."

The anti-Semitic content coming from the outside, as we could see, did not generate negative feelings in members of the community. In connection, the question may arise as how the "internal" Jewish humor handles and adapts to humor that originates from or includes prejudices against Jews?

At the beginning of this study we could see that the *"Why did Moses cross..."* joke has been characterized by members of the community as a joke with two readings, "internal" self-irony, and "external" that can be offensive. Reflecting on this, the following remark was made by one of my conversational partners:

"A joke may be ours or anti-Semitic if it comes from the outside."

My other conversational partner added: *"It's only funny when a Jew tells it to another Jew. Otherwise, it can easily be anti-Semitic."*

This does not mean that jokes with such content will all be external or thought of them as such in the community. For example, this joke was described by members of the community as *"it definitely had to be made up by Jews."* At the same time, a joke like this is defined either as "internal" or anti-Semitic depends on who, under what circumstances or how he tells it. *"Its decoding – as they said at Bethlen Square – is very simple".*

Racist, anti-Semitic political speeches, media manifestations or prejudicial writings and jokes appearing in the public or on the Internet in today's Hungary, can now be easily identify those groups and scenes that are applying the "humor of hatred" (Oring 2003: 41-57).

The most common component of hate humor, in addition to the stereotyped display of "physical signs", is that Jews are "greedy", and "money-hungry" (Oring 2003: 47).

It is very difficult to understand, among other things, to the members of the Bethlen Square synagogue that a typical figure of prejudice is the "rich Jew", even though in most cases they reflect with humor:

"Kohn reads an anti-Semitic newspaper in the park. Grün sees this and walks up to him with indignation,

- Kohn, how can you read this newspaper?!

Kohn looks up at Grün and with his hands spread says,

- You know, Grün, it is tsores (trouble, hardship) all over. Besides, I got not a penny left. I tried to borrow money in the synagogue, but everyone is broke as a joke, they barely get by, hardly can make ends meet, so I'm stuck in tsores and don't know what to do... then I open this paper and read that the Jews are full of money and they rule the world, and I feel better already! "

A member of the synagogue, with a help of humor, summed up the prejudices that refer to the "richness" of the Jews this way:

"Anti-Semites think that every Jew is rich, while we wish that they're right."

However, the stereotype of "materialism" also appears in the "insider" examples of the community's humor:

"A yeshiva bocher (Talmud school's pupil) of goes to study at the rebbe (rabbi). He stays to live there too. Each and every day he studies hard, while he eats and drinks just as hard. He eats up all the rebbe has. Once, when there is nothing more to eat he says to the rebbe:

- Well, I cannot learn more, I'll go.

The rebbe is very happy to hear that. At dawn, then he sees the bocher is really getting ready.

The rebbe tells him urgently:

-Nu, hurry up my son, morning is here already, even the rooster crowed!

When the bocher:

- What rooster? I changed my mind, I still stay a little longer ..."

This joke, as we can see, does not use the motif of "materialism" self-servingly, but instead it self-ironically points to the criticism of religious life, learning attitudes and thereby the biblical expectations of solidarity with each other.

The next joke compares a rabbi" and a Catholic priest from this perspective:

"The rabbi and the Catholic priest talk about the proceeds, what they do with the donations.

The priest says:

- I keep forty percent of the donations for myself and for my parish, and I must give sixty percent of it to the Church. How about you, rabbi, what do you do with the donations?

-Well, I throw the money into the air and tell the Eternal One, Lord, take the money you want for yourself, then what you want to give back to me, let to fall on me."

In the joke, the rabbit's fondness of money associated with the emergence of a positive auto-stereotype of the freedom of Judaism, also with the clever and brilliant attitude of the rabbi.

The next joke is also related to this auto-stereotype:

"Grün goes to the bazaar in Jerusalem. He goes to a trader. He chooses a carpet and starts a hard bargaining. The seller gets into the bargaining, but after a while he has enough of Grün and says:

-I have only known one person who could bargain like you; the Grün from Dob Street. We went to school together, but I have not seen him for eighteen years.

Grün replies:

- Hold on, I'm that Grün!

- Well, are you?! Do you recognize me? I'm Móric Kohn! I am so happy to see you! You know what, I give you a watch as a gift for the pleasure of meeting you again! - Kohn enthuses.

While Grün:

-I'm very happy to see you, too, and thank you for the watch, but why only one?"

In addition to the "greed" of Grün, the joke also senses the intimacy of the Hungarian Jewish world. Kohn and Grün, whichever way they are, are still members of the same community. That belonging supplies the joke the serenity of intimacy.

Much like the following joke:

"Grün invites Kohn to come and visit him.

-And how do I get to your place? - Kohn asks.

- *Well, you will come down on Wesselényi Street, and you will come to number twenty-three, then you will come up three floors then turn left and then right, then when you come to the fourth door, you knock with your feet.*

- *And why should I knock with my feet?*

- *You don't just come empty handed!?"*

This joke was told in the synagogue at one of the many occasions when, in conjunction with my research, we discussed the "essence" of Jewish humor. My conversational partners told me this joke, because for them it was the one that summed up with the utmost plasticity – as one of them phrased it – *"this is how we are a community"*. In light of this, the joke deepens the community-identity with the self-ironic representation of the "typical" Jewish characters.

We can also encounter the specific representation of family scene of togetherness in the humor:

"Kohn is dying. He is surrounded by his loved ones.

- *Are you here with me, my dear wife, Sarah? -- Kohn is asking in a halting voice.*

- *I'm here.*

- *And you are also here with me, my dear daughter, Rebecca?*

- *I am here, too.*

- *And my beloved son, Jacob?*

- *My father, I'm here, too.*

Suddenly Kohn sits up and yells:

- *Then who's tending the store?!"*

In addition to making fun of the stereotype of business and material goods above all, the positive values of family unity and commitment to family business are also present in the joke. Therefore, similarly to the other jokes quoted, "greed" was not the sole subject of the humor. Those jokes have reversed the stereotypes attributed to Jews in such manner, that they "lifted" them back into the world of Jewish humor. Stereotypic characters, therefore, adapted to the Jewish culture's self-reflective self-irony, pointing to the human nature of "materialism" that belongs to our imperfections, and are in opposition to the sacred ethos of the Torah. At the same time, as the other human imperfections, "materialism" can be "handled" and "corrected" by the usage of Jewish humor, by the mobilization of self-reflection produced by self-irony.

However, all the jokes quoted included some of the positively depicted characteristics of Jewish culture (the freedom of Judaism, "skilful" adaptation, sense of belonging, the importance of the family).

The offense of negative stereotypes was "offset" in light of the examples presented. The humor of hatred has thus dissolved in the adaptive system of Jewish humor. We may, however, hear a joke in the synagogue the subject matter of which specifically focuses on the narrative of prejudice, negative-anti-Semitic stereotypes:

"Kohn gets baptized, then goes home. At home he happily reports to his wife:

- Imagine, I'm just coming from the Catholic Church! I was baptized!

His wife nods:

- All right, all right, just give me 100.000 Forints because I want to buy new clothes.

Kohn gives her the money.

Then he goes to his son:

- Imagine what happened -- he says -- I'm just coming from the church. I was baptized!

- Okay, okay -- his son answers -- just give me 100.000 Forints because I want to get my car fixed.

Kohn gives him the money.

He then goes to his daughter:

- Imagine, I'm coming from the church now. I was baptized!

- Fine, fine – his daughter says -- just give me a 100.000 Forints, because my girlfriend and I are going to party.

Kohn gives her the money, then he mumbles to himself:

- I've been a goy (non-Jewish) for half an hour only, and I hate the Jews already!"

This joke does not speak of any positive characteristic and / or religious edification of Jews. With the hardness of narratives existing in prejudices, it rather speaks of their stereotyped negativities. Yet it is part of the "inner" repertoire of Jewish humor.

The question of how they can laugh about this at synagogue may arise. The reason - I think - is the "double twist" in the joke with which the joke reverses anti-Semitic stereotypes. The joke achieves this by clearly exposing the narratives of the "greed" of Jews and the "legitimate" anti-Semitism based on that stereotype. However, by placing all this in a Jewish context, using the "inner" terms ("convert out", "goy"), the situation presented in the joke reveals the absurdity of prejudices. In addition to revealing the

absurdity, placing it into Jewish contexts also tries to alleviate the aggression of anti-Semitic views. By falling into the repertoire of Jewish humor, the joke ceases to be merely "from the outside" and thus the tension of the vulnerability coming from the majority's direction can be solved. At the same time, the joke keeps some of this tension, as in its sentences the predominant narrative of prejudice is conserved.

To relieve the tension, the next two jokes feed on this tension.

The first one points to the absurdity of the prejudices, as it is told by a member of the Bethlen Square community, whose long-time best friend was Scottish. The joke was told by his friend during a dinner together:

"Two friends, a Scottish and a Jewish, go to the best restaurant in town. They eat and drink as much as they can. When they finish, they just sit and look at each other. The waiter comes with the bill. He waits and waits. Finally he hears:

- Today I, the Scottish, pay the whole bill!

Next day the news comes in the daily paper:

Last night they found a Jewish ventriloquist dead."

The joke teller mentions every time, at this particular dinner, he and his friend were talking about the stereotype "*nonsense*" affecting both of their cultures, when his friend told this joke...

The recurring theme of the conversation after the joke, as is the observation of my conversational partners, that the absurdity of humor with negative stereotypes gets further enhanced by the experience – as one of them mentioned – "*although they are outrageous, yet we retell them.*"

"Balancing" the minority-existence

From the vulnerable and traumatized minority existence, the experience of the absurdity of prejudices, we can also find jokes in the Hungarian Jewish humor that show positive auto-stereotypes of "appreciative" minority-Jewish identity.

One of these positive auto-stereotypes is the ability of clever and "*skilful*" (adjective used frequently by the community) adaptation to all difficult situations, the tsores, resulting from the minority existence:

"God summons the pope, the wisest imam of the Muslims, and the most revered rabbi of the Jews, and declares:

- I had enough of the people. You have ten days and then I'm going to flood the Earth again, then it's over.

The Pope goes home and tells the faithful:

- We have ten days to pray to God for forgiving and He may not flood the Earth again.

The Imam goes home and tells the Muslims:

- Let's do our best at the last Ramadan, we then may go to heaven, for the world is over in ten days.

The Rabbi goes home and tells the Jews:

- Nu, people we have ten days to figure out how to live underwater."

We can see that the joke emphasizes the positive auto-stereotype of "skilful adaptability" of the Jews. Connected to this are the comments of my conversational partners who interpreted this joke:

"It's been like this for six thousand years, this is a six-thousand-year-old joke."

"This is how it always has been, we always had to learn to live underwater. This is typical."

Presented in the joke, therefore is the "typical" attribute which has "always" characterized the Jews, and has been for "six thousand years" a decisive factor in the Jewish history.

The next story also refers to this "typical" ability, which has been told as a joke in the synagogue, but other variations of it can be found in the Hungarian Jewish folklore as an anecdote of an incident:

"Uncle Kohn cannot read and write, yet he is the shamash (the synagogue's custodian) in the kehilla. It is very embarrassing in the kehilla that there can be a shamash in Hungary, who is illiterate and, moreover, that he is in their kehilla. He is, therefore let go from the synagogue. Uncle Kohn is very disappointed and does not know what to do. He goes to America. He disembarks the ship and wants to have a cigarette, but nowhere can he find a tobacco shop in the harbor. He then thinks of what a good business it would be to open up a tobacco shop here in the harbor. He saves up some money and opens one. The shop is a big hit. He then opens one more and one more, and then another whole bunch of it. He is now a millionaire. The president of the American National Bank pays him a visit and tells him to put his money in a bank. Uncle Kohn agrees. At the bank they bring him the papers to sign and say that your signature is here and here. Uncle Kohn replies:

- Yeah, if I could write, I could still be a shamash in Hungary." (Raj 2006:13-14)

This joke binds the positive auto-stereotype to the resourcefulness of the Hungarian Jewry. Thus it not only links the general, "it's true for all Jews" attribute to its own culture, but also emphasizes its decisive and prominent presence in the Hungarian Jewry. This is how the positive self-image gains an added reinforcement in the joke.

In this context, the skilful adaptation to tsores is coupled with solidarity. Against the negative stereotype of "discord", the positive characteristic of togetherness in trouble also appears in the following joke:

"Kohn is on the train, but he has no ticket. The ticket inspector comes. When Kohn sees it, he starts huddling under the seat. When the inspector sees that, he asks Kohn what he is doing.

Kohn says:

- You know, Mister Inspector, I'm very poor and I need to get to my poor brother who is very sick. Please do not get me off the train.

- All right - the inspector says pitifully.

Kohn thanks him sincerely. At this point, the inspector hears some noise from under the seat. He bends down to see what that is, and he sees Grün crouching under the seat.

- Who is this? The inspector asks.

Kohn say:

- Oh, forgive me, this is my guest!"

In this joke (although implicitly) appears the complexity of power relations: Kohn (and Grün) is in a vulnerable position on the train, and must find a clever way to handle their predicament. As we have seen before, the "skill", the outstanding adaptability enhanced by the injuries and experiences of minority life and the history of humankind is being exposed in humor. Minority-vulnerable and majority-power relations appear in several jokes. In these cases, the emphasis of adaptive, Jewish-minority character attributes become even more intensified and magnified, as it is being seen in another joke where Kohn travels once again on a train:

"Kohn is traveling on the train and eating fried potatoes. A gendarme sits across from him. They are sitting in silence until the gendarme turns to Kohn and asks him:

- How come you Jews are the smartest people? Teach me to be as smart as you are.

Kohn thinks about it, then answers:

- You know Sir, we're the smartest people because we eat fried potatoes, and if you want it, I'll give you these for a hundred pengoe.

The gendarme quickly pays the money and begins to eat the potatoes. He is eating, he is eating, but he does not feel anything. He is getting to be suspicious. Finally he says:

- Hey you, Jew, didn't you rip me off?

To which Kohn replies:

- You see, it's beginning to work..."

Various versions of this joke can be read in joke collections. In these jokes, the basic situation is the same, only the names of the characters are different ("Jewish and non-Jewish" or "Kohn and a military officer").

In the version I cited, the meaning of the joke is emphasized by the characters and the style:

The gendarme who sits across from Kohn, the symbolic figure of the power before and during the Second World War, is a portrayal of the complete tragic vulnerability. The character of the gendarme nowadays brings this feeling back to life, as traumas of the twentieth century have not yet been solved in the Hungarian socio-political-public discourse.

It refers to vulnerability and power subordination that the gendarme does not ask, but orders Kohn to teach him "to be smart". Their conversation points to the same: the gendarme uses the informal ("*Hey, you*"), while Kohn the formal ("*Sir*") terms when addressing each other. Here Kohn has to deal with the situation quickly, given his position, he has no other choice. Ultimately, in the joke, the magnified ability of "skilful" adaptation, as a stereotyped Jewish virtue "equates" this difference of power.

Thus the joke is able to alleviate the feeling of vulnerability and tension caused by the traumas and the unequal, minority-majority, relation. Humor thus provides an opportunity to "balance" the minority existence.

The adept "balancing" of differences in power is also projected in jokes where the context and the baseline scenario seem "less tense" than it is in the previously quoted one. One of them is about the conflict between Móricka (the stereotypical "Hungarian Jewish school student" character) and his teacher:

"Móricka is in the classroom where there are twenty students. Suddenly the teacher asks:

How many dummies are there in the classroom?

Móricka raises his hand:

- Twenty-one!

The teacher is terribly angry and yells at Móricka:

*- It's bad enough that you're good-for-nothing, on top of it you cannot even count?! Try again.
So, how many dummies are there in the classroom?*

- Well, twenty-one! - replies Móricka.

The teacher turns red and orders Móricka out of the room.

Móricka walks out, but stops and turns back from the door:

- Well, now you're right, Sir!"

My conversational partners have again regarded this joke as the expression of the "typical Jewish way of thinking." Accordingly, the "Jewish way of thinking", associated with the character of Móricka, affirms the positive auto-stereotype of the "skilful" adaptive ability we saw previously. Balancing disadvantages resulted by the minority existence then can be achieved by mobilizing "intelligence", and "common sense". "Intelligence" and "common sense" and the ability of "skilful" adaptation together thus become the symbol and expression of positive self-expression in humor.

All this does not imply that in their humor the Jews present their culture superior to that of the non-Jews. The exaggerated characteristics did not suggest that the Jews would be better than the non-Jews, not to mention the self-critical jokes mentioned earlier. I believe, the essence of Jewish humor is precisely its "inwardness". Focus of the Jewish humor is always the self-reflection.

It is not surprising that in connection with the positive auto-stereotypes associated with the exaggerated stereotyped properties of self-image, in the Jewish humor we can also find the self-ironic representation of these.

"Balancing" the minority vulnerability and minority existence, as well as the exaggeration of the related self-imagery may occasionally cause – as they phrased it at Bethlen Square – "excessive" reactions from certain members of the Hungarian Jewry. Exposing and magnifying "typical" positive characters can also lead to "over-compensation" of their own abilities and identity. At least this can be seen from the jokes that make self-irony and self-reflection the subject of humor:

At the introduction of my book, titled "Why does Uncle Kohn need four refrigerators?" held at Bálint Ház in the Jewish Center in Budapest, the organizers came up with a game for the audience. The participants wrote jokes on a sheet of paper, which then was juried by three of us, a member of Bethlen Square, myself and the evening-organizer. The winning joke was a variation of the joke they like a lot in Bethlen Square, too:

"Itzik and Majse meet on their way home on one of Buenos Aires's streets.

- Well, Majse, how have you been lately?

- I-I-I wa-wa-was at a jo-jo-job in-in-inter-vi-vi-view at th-the ra-ra-radio, Majse stutters.

- And how did it go?

- Th-th-they di-di-didn't hire me.

- You don't say, and why not?

- 'Cuz I-I-I'm a Je-Je-Jew. "

Later, when I told them this "winner", they laughed at this joke at Bethlen Square; they, too like a version of it with Kohn and Grün in Budapest. The joke also demonstrated that humor used at Bethlen Square representing a more general, Jewish-related experience is a characteristic of Jewry from *"Budapest to Buenos Aires"*.

We also find the irony of "overcompensation" of minority identity and values in the following joke:

"The three disciples of three rabbis, the rabbi of Szeged, Kolozsvár and Beregszász (three cities in the Carpathian Basin) argue about which one of them is the greatest rabbi.

The one from Szeged says:

- Imagine, our rabbi is so well respected that everybody in the city when they meet, salutes him on the street.

The one from Kolozsvár says:

- That's nothing. Our rabbi, when he goes out into town, everyone stands at attention.

Then comes the one from Beregszász:

- That's nothing. Recently the Pope invited our rabbi for a visit. As they walked around in the Vatican, there came two cardinals. One of the cardinals asked the other:

- Would you know who that goy is next to the rabbi of Beregszász?"

We can see that the joke is clearly referring to the stereotypical figure of the "big-talker", "overcompensating" yeshiva bocher. Belittlement of the pope next to the rabbi of Beregszász clearly reveals and ironically criticizes the "valorization" of one's own culture. Another rabbi-joke expresses just as clearly the self-ironic reflection of the "exaggerated" emphasis of one's own identity:

"Kohn is dying at the isolation-hospital (for patients with contagious diseases) and calls on the Catholic priest. Kohn whispers helplessly:

- Reverend, I want to make my last will. I leave the shop for my wife, my apartment for my daughter...

The reverend cuts him off,

- Good, good Uncle Kohn, but why did you call me and not the rabbi?

At that Kohn cries out with indignation,

- Are you out of your mind?! Rabbi to the isolation-hospital?!"

Undoubtedly, the joke is related to those jokes that show the positive self-stereotype of "skilful" adaptation ability, even if the clever way to handle a predicament is manifested in a very specific context. It is also true that the situation is similar to that of those jokes: dying in an isolation-hospital is a big enough tsores. Obviously, the joke includes the meaning of "skill", and many of the ones who hear it, will surely decode it that way.

However, if we look at the fact that the tsores is not the situation created or controlled by the majority, and that the non-Jewish character in the joke is a nice, not at all negative figure, then we can understand that the target of the joke is Kohn, the one who "excessively" values his own community.

My conversational partners also interpreted the joke in this light:

"Well, that's a typical 'tight' joke. You know, there are these tight jokes that can be absolutely misunderstood by those who do not understand them."

"Whoever says a, should say b, too. If we criticize those who criticize us, then we criticize ourselves, too. This isolation-hospital joke tells we are not better than others. But why would we be? We are also human beings!"

The following joke cleverly points out and summarizes all this, using self-irony – as one of my conversational partner described – to make the subject of humor the "overcompensation" of "Jewish insiderness" linked to world history:

"Kohn is being trained to be a spy. They teach him how to send secret messages to other spies so that the enemy does not even suspect that they spy on them. Kohn learns everything, so he gets the first job. They say to him:

- Kohn, there is a very secret task awaiting for you. You have to go to Berlin, you need to find the Berliner Street. Then you go to house #15, find Grün, you ring the bell, and when he opens the door, you say 'red rose', then the Grün tells you 'oriole' then you give him this secret letter. Do not forget the password 'red rose'! And do not forget your mission is super-secret!

Kohn goes in secret to Berlin. He finds Berliner Street #15, looks around for no one to follow him, then go cautiously into the house, finds Grün's door, rings the bell, and the door opens...

- Who are you? -- asks the man standing in the doorway.

Kohn quietly replies:

- *Red rose...*

The man in the doorway is thinking, thinking... then suddenly realizes:

- *Oh yeah, you are looking for that spy, Grün! He lives on the third floor."*

In conjunction with self-irony, however, the joy of belonging does not lose its value as the cited joke preserves and expresses the gaiety resulting from the common laughter, the understanding and appreciation of self-irony, and the shared complacency. The importance of positive auto-stereotypes does not lessen with the self-critical irony of overcompensation. The positive attributes were not the subject of the jokes just quoted, those only pointed out the humor in "overcompensation". At the same time, the use and common understanding of this humor also deepens and promotes the values of positive auto-stereotypes: the resourceful attitude towards the situation in all circumstances, the feeling of belonging and the reflexive attitudes towards Jewishness, each other and toward oneself.

The "overstatement" of own values, the "balancing", and the self-irony of "overcompensation" of minority being ensures the continuity of coexistence with the majority, alleviates tensions and injuries.

As we have seen before, the main cause of these tensions and injuries is the perceived and insufficiently processed pains and traumas of the Hungarian Jewish history.

Conclusion

In the analyzed jokes we could observe how auto-stereotypes have been re-created by using the language of self-irony, while applying irony. In light of this, we can also see that routine knowledge of Jewish humor is associated with the belonging to the minority micro-community of those who are familiar with this humor. It also refers to self-reflection, sharply honest self-irony, which does not neglect the joy (since it is precisely the common sense of such jokes that creates this common joy) but simply complements it with self-irony, that is, with that basic humor-component that we could continually see in this study, as well as with the occasion of the appearance of all forms of Jewish humor. We have seen that self-irony is also connects to the religious tradition. The use of self-irony, therefore, allows the inviolability of the ethos of sacred tradition in the spiritual life,

in spite of, or rather along with human imperfections and differences in worldview and life-style.

The emergence of auto-stereotypes in the humor also creates a sociological reading of this. Adaptation strategies developed through interaction with majority societies and their evaluation, continuous interpretation through self-irony, ensure the continuity of Jewish culture and the possibility of coexistence with the majority communities.

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