

THE JEWS AS “THE OTHER” IN FOLKLORE: THE SLOVENE CASE IN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to portray the image of the Jews as attested in Slovene folklore from the point of view of their otherness in the context of a wider European imagery of “the Jew”. For centuries, Jews have been labeled as Europe’s Other. Their otherness was based on the ethnic, religious and economic differences from the rest of the population. Their presence in the territory of Slovenia was not continuous and when they did live here, their numbers were not very large; we may thus also speak of the existence of an “anti-Semitism without Jews”. Slovene folklore about the Jews is sparse and it seems to demonstrate only vague knowledge about the Jews, their customs and way of life; it also features religious anti-Semitism.

Key words: *the Jews, folklore, otherness, Slovenia, stereotypes, history*

Introduction

Historically speaking, Jews were one of the most influential as well as the most oppressed European minorities; they were the European *homo alienus par excellence* (Oişteanu, 2009, p. 310). Throughout history they were the focal point of much prejudice and looked upon with distrust. They were the victims of persecutions and pogroms culminating in the Holocaust during the 2nd World War. Slovene lands were no exception as far as anti-Jewish mentality is concerned, though when researching folklore that speaks about the Jews, it does need to be taken into account that the number of Jewish settlers in this part of Europe

throughout the centuries was quite low. Regardless of that fact, their presence did leave some trace in the folklore of Slovenia, which has to be interpreted considering the historical frame of their presence here, as well as the wider imagery of “the Jew” that was heavily submerged in prejudice and stereotypization all over Europe. The aim of this paper is to present the image of “the Jew” in Slovene folklore and contextualize it within a wider (mostly) European (I could also say Christian) perspective of the Jewish “otherness” all along having in mind the history of the Jewish presence in the territory of Slovenia. The method of this research is thus mostly comparative by nature and there is an emphasis on the diachronic and historic aspect of the image of “the Jew”.

A brief history of Jewish presence in the territory of Slovenia and its influence on the folklore about the Jews

Jews were not settled in Slovene lands continuously. Their presence has been confirmed by some archaeological finds from the time of the Roman Empire, but otherwise Jews have only been present in Slovene territory from the 12th century onwards (Marolt, 2002, p. 315). Their economic influence (and also their presence in numbers) was the highest in Maribor, Celje, Ptuj, Ljubljana, Gorizia, Trieste and in some other Carinthian towns (Marolt, 2002, p. 315). Their main economic activities included trade and monetary business (Hudelja, 2004, p. 194). Hostilities toward Jews, including calumny and pogroms, started in the 14th century, during the plague (Marolt, 2002, p. 317). However, the religious-based intolerance toward Jews in Austrian lands that also stemmed in the economic and social circumstances of that era was mostly starting to increase from the middle of the 15th century (Toš, 2012, p. 23). There is no direct evidence about anti-Semitic sentiments in the Christian population, though in the sources there are some indications about Jews living in fear and isolation. From around the 15th century onwards they had to wear a special identification mark and between the years 1496 and 1515, during the reign of Emperor Maximilian I., Jews were banished from Slovene lands (with the exception of Istria and Gorizia) (Marolt, 2002, p. 320; also Jelinčič Boeta, 2009, p. 55–57). From the middle of the 18th century onwards, the Jews once again started to settle in the region of Prekmurje that belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary, where there was no restriction about Jewish settlement¹ (Pančur, 2011, p. 19). The Letters Patent of

¹ After the end of “the Turkish peril” in Prekmurje in the first decades of the 18th century the economy started to improve once again. This attracted the first Jewish settlers. The Jews are first mentioned in Prekmurje in the year 1700 (Pančur, 2011, p. 19). The official population counting

Tolerance issued by the Emperor Joseph II. at the end of the 18th century granted freedom of worship and also brought an end to the restrictions concerning the economic and political participation of the Jews. But regardless, they were still not allowed to settle in the Austrian Hereditary Provinces (Marolt, 2002, p. 321). They once again settled in Lower Carniola during the time of Napoleon. With the constitution of 1848, the Jews and Christians were given equality before the law and a year later, the Jews were granted equal political rights as the others inhabitants of Austria (Marolt, 2002, p. 322). Yet their numbers in the territory of Slovenia remained low² (Starman, 2004, p. 153). During the 2nd World War the Jews were mostly sent to concentration camps. Due to the genocide, emigration and growing atheism, the Jewry in Slovenia never recovered (Hudelja, 2004, p. 195; Marolt, 2002, p. 324) and was pushed to the edge of historic memory (Toš, 2006, p. 209–210). The latest statistical counting of the population in Slovenia in 2002 showed 99 people declaring themselves as being of Jewish faith³ (source: Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia).

Stereotypical images about the Jew that have existed all over Europe also existed in Slovene lands. However, because the Jews were not present here in large numbers and were not permanently settled over longer periods, this imagery was mostly fictional by nature or was brought from elsewhere (Hudelja, 1996, p. 50–52) and was not really based on real, continuous contact with the Jews. We can actually speak of “an anti-Semitism without Jews” (see Toš, 2006, p. 217). Klemen Jelinčič Boeta (2009, p. 76–77) claims that the form of anti-Semitism that started to appear in Central Europe and in Slovene lands in the second half of the 19th century was no longer a Christian anti-Semitism that was based on religious opposition, but rather that Judaism was now seen as “culturally and spiritually inferior”. Within the new national ideology “the Jew” started to present “an ideal and eternal Other” (Jelinčič Boeta, 2009, p. 77). Up to the 2nd World War, the principal accusation toward the Jews was their assumed economic domination in the society, and after the war, their memory was almost wiped out (Toš, 2006, p. 215–217; Toš, 2012, p. 190–191).

in the year 1778 shows 14 Jews living in the territory of Prekmurje, 211 in the year 1836, 1027 in 1890, 976 in 1910, 417 in 1937 (Pančur, 2011, p. 21–22).

² The exact number of Jews in the territory of Slovenia is hard to determine. In the year 1869 22 Jews were counted in the hereditary land of Kranjska, 22 in Koroška and 734 in Štajerska. In 1931 the official counting for the Slovene territory in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia gave the number of 820 inhabitants of the Jewish faith. Yet other information differs slightly, so we can calculate that in the 1930s there was a Jewish population of around 800 people in this territory (Pančur, 2011, p. 5, 29). Klemen Jelinčič Boeta (2009, p. 96) claims that the number is around 1500.

³ The majority of today's Slovene Jews were born in Slovenia, their mother language is Slovene and define themselves as Ashkenazi (Jelinčič Boeta, 2010, p. 621).

All of these facts, along with the small numbers of Jews actually present in Slovene territory and the imagery that has been “imported” from elsewhere, have to be taken into consideration when researching Slovene folklore featuring Jews. It is quite hard to discern to what extent the majority of the population perceived them as “the Other”, as different, as foreigners. In addition, it is difficult to note in what respects the folklore that we have refers to the actual rapport with them and to what extent “imported anti-Semitism”, or whether different or older motives may have interfered in some places influenced it.

The otherness of “the Jew” through history

Creating “the Other” is one of the most universal practices and is part of human nature. Through the process of othering, the mold of the identity of one’s own community is formed through which reality is then perceived. This type of categorization (of the different aspects of our world – humans tend to categorize plants, animals, people ...) enables us to retain a sense of control and order in the form of a limited number of categories in an otherwise extremely diverse and complex world (Olweean, 2002, p. 100; see also Beller, 2007, p. 430). At the same time, this differentiation in relation to other communities enables cohesion within one’s own community (Albrecht, 2007, p. 326). To place individuals, foreigners and Others into familiar categories creates a feeling that we may know what to expect from them (Jenkins, 2008, p. 105, 155). For the self-identification of the community, it is essential to establish a relation towards those that are not members of the community – an identity is only established through *what it is not* (Eriksen, 2002, p. 10) – so it is a type of self-identification through negation. And in this process one’s own community becomes the measure for all that is “correct” and “the Other” embodies all that is “incorrect”. Within this logical framework, “the Other” represents the other side of the same coin – an inverted reflection of one’s own community, and as such it can embody, or in other words, be a projection of emotions, fears or values of the community. All of this has been manifested in the image of “the Jew”.

The Jews may have been the most important “inner Other” in Europe. Their entire imagery in folklore is in itself a very broad topic, so only a few important traits can be presented here. This imagery has a long history; it is partly based on Christian beliefs and partly comes because of coexistence with the Jews as well as their *differentness* in a religious and cultural sense.

For centuries, the Jews were seen as “the Other” by the Christians. These long-lasting interactions between the Jews and the rest of the population in different cultural surroundings and eras add to the complexity of the subject of Jewish

otherness. This complexity is further intensified by the fact that Christianity itself appropriated many of the Jewish traditions and their Holy Scripture. The Jews were perceived as those who stubbornly resisted the teachings of Christ. As such, in the minds of the Christians, they were an obstacle to the Second Coming of Jesus and thus the Christians had a mission to convert them (Gangs, Leerssen, 2007, p. 202–203). At the same time, the hatred and aversion toward the Jews was based on their perceived guilt for Christ's very crucifixion – such a conviction became a part of religious rituals and social norms and was carried on from generation to generation resulting in pushing the Jews to the very edges of society. The Jews were branded as Christ's murderers and were expelled from public life (Toš, 2012, p. 183).

In the Middle Ages the Christian readings of personalities and events described in the New Testament were becoming increasingly anti-Jewish. Judas Iscariot became the main character to represent all Jews – attributes of greed-driven treason and duplicity came to be known as a standard part of “the Jewish character” (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203). Later, the anti-Semitic stereotypes escalated further. Christians portrayed Jews as being bloodthirsty and demonic; they were accused of horrific crimes like the ritual killings of children in order to obtain blood required for ritual purposes. They were said to have mystical powers: by using Christians' blood they were said to be practicing acts of magic – an activity that was in disharmony with the Christian values (Bronner, 2007, p. 383; Matteoni, 2008, p. 182; also Cała, 1995, p. 128–130; Anglickienė, 2004, p. 85). There were also widely spread accusations that the Jews desecrated the Host (Anglickienė, 2004, p. 86; Erb, 1993, p. 680; Toš, 2012, p. 184). The Jews were accused of performing secret rituals that included ceremonial killings of Christian children and even cannibalism (a trait traditionally attributed to the Other; see Beller, 2007b, p. 266)⁴. They were seen as the Devil's helpers, if not his offspring or they were linked with the Antichrist or seen as the offspring of a Jewish woman and the Devil. Even their financial success was attributed to the Devil (Cała, 1995, p. 120; Solms, 1998, p. 92; also Erb, 1993, p. 678–679). They were also frequently accused of poisoning wells (Oişteanu, 2009, p. 182)⁵, causing the plague (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203–204) or contaminating food for Christians (see Anglickienė, 2004, p. 86; about food contamination see

⁴ The Jews were seen as collectively responsible for Christ's murder – this is but a step away from the idea of Jews as murderers of Christians – the killing of a Christian child in this sense presented a perverse reenactment of the original persecution and execution of Jesus (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203).

⁵ In Ljubljana historical records show that in 1337 Jews were accused of poisoning wells (Valenčič, 1992, p. 16).

Tangherlini, 1995, p. 50). Stereotypical assumptions similar to these were also known in Slovene lands (Toš, 2012, p. 184). Jews were, in a sense, transformed into enemies of humankind (Trachtenberg, 2001, p. 11–13).

While the ancient Greeks and Romans defined their Other based on the criteria of physical and cultural differences, the Jews and the Christians mostly focused on perceiving the differences between themselves in a moral and metaphysical sense (White, 1972, p. 10). Despite certain (theological and other) similarities between Christians and Jews, a very distinct and historically continuous relationship of otherness was formed between them. After the crusades and the Iberian Reconquista, Islam was the one to become Europe's "external Other" and the Jews started to represent the "inner otherness" within the territory of Christendom (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203)⁶. But Jews in the Middle Ages were not "the Other" solely due to the fact that they had a different religion and culture – they were not only non-Christians, they deliberately rejected Christianity, and they did so with authority. Because of their long history, a direct connection to the very basics of the Christian faith and an alternative interpretation of the same God, they presented a threat to the Church authorities and to the whole Christian community. There were also purely secular reasons for hatred and rejection of the Jews. Their role as financiers (the exclusion of the Jews from the fabric of Christian society led them to a marginal position involving pursuits such as money-lending, which only reinforced a sense of Jewish otherness (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203). They were protected by the rulers, as well as the privileges that they were given, were in certain moments of history causes for rejection and violent outbursts against them. However, much as they were despised, the Jews formed an important part of medieval society – they came to be used as a convenient scapegoat for various social and economic problems, and they were a lucrative source of revenue for the ruling class. All this makes it more understandable why the Church invested so much into discrediting them (by oral communication, in the written records, in art)⁷. Christian believers often got information about the Jews from Church authorities in the form of

⁶ It is difficult to say whether the negative attitude toward Jews in the Middle Ages and the early modern period was based on Jewish religion or on their ethnicity – because, despite some Jews converted to Christianity they continued to encounter hostility and mistrust from the side of the Christians (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203).

⁷ It does, though, need to be said that the "official" Christian attitude towards the Jews was complex and ambiguous and varied in accordance with the shifting political and social circumstances. The attitude was not always negative, it could also be favorable, or even both at the same time. Especially the personalities from the Old Testament were portrayed as positive, for example, King David who was seen as a typological model for Christ as well as contemporary kings (Strickland, 2003, p. 97).

sermons, liturgical dramas and pictorial imagery, which tried to convince them that the Jews were dangerous, barbaric or not even completely human or that they were followers of Satan (Strickland, 2003, p. 96–97, 104, 154). According to the medieval Christian interpretation, the Jews emerged as Christ's enemies in the New Testament, because they failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah due to wrong interpretations of the Jewish prophecies. "Jewish stubbornness" and "hard-heartedness" were also said to be among the causes for the enmity. But they did not just reject Christ – they also murdered him – which is why they were often given the epithet of "Christ-killers". This dual Christian imagery of the Jews as "the chosen people" and "Christ's murderers" was manifested as both respectfulness and contempt (Strickland, 2003, p. 98–101). Even after they were expelled from certain parts of Europe, they still appeared in collective consciousness as Jesus' executioners (Strickland, 2003, p. 105). This religious (pre-modern) Anti-Semitism⁸ was based on the idea that the Jews were, as mentioned earlier, collectively responsible for Christ's death; it was only in 1965, after the II. Vatican Council, that some subtle points about the Jews as "Christ-killers" were removed from theology. It was declared, that Christ died not because Jews had crucified him, but because of the sins of men and out of boundless love so that all may reach salvation (Anglickienė, 2004, p. 84).

The medieval Christian perception of the world was based on the dichotomy between barbarity (which had at the time a different meaning than in antiquity – the "barbarian" was now equal to a "pagan") and Christianity (Jones, 1971, p. 378 – 381, 387) and in a sense we can see that "the Jew" would represent the former (see Strickland, 2003, p. 133). Beside the decisive religious factor, there was also the fact that Jews often lived in physical separation from the majority of the Christian population – they had to live in ghettos. Their attire was also different and they were made to wear physical signs of their identity (special clothing, for example) (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203). They had a different diet (for example, they were prohibited from eating pork), they spoke a different language (i. e. Hebrew) and they were ascribed morally unacceptable sexual practices⁹, which is a common characteristic ascribed to "the Other" (see Mróz,

⁸ From the historical viewpoint, hostility towards Jews can be divided into four categories (Strauss, 1998, p. 82):

- anti-Semitism in the Greco-Roman world,
- Christian anti-Semitism focused on accusations about murdering Christ,
- political anti-Semitism that started in the 1870s, and
- racially motivated anti-Semitism.

⁹ For example, in the Middle Ages "the Other" could be accused of homosexuality – this was ascribed to heretics (for example the Cathars). Particularly the Muslims were often times subjects of these allegations – ascribing homosexual tendencies to them, especially accusing

1984, p. 116). They were also physically deformed by circumcision, were said to exude a foul odor and were imagined to be hiding horns and tails under their clothes. The Jewish men were said to suffer from bloody flux (Strickland, 2003, p. 133). In (more recent) Czech folklore, for example, they are described as being ugly and having big noses, are supposed to be dirty and have a foul smell (Uhlíková, 2009, p. 16–17). Some of these characteristics, ascribed to the Jews in the Middle Ages, remained part of the folklore practically until the modern times (see Uhlíková, 2009). But the prescribed characteristics of otherness could get even more fundamental – the Jews were considered to lack a soul (a trait often ascribed to “the Other”; see Belova, 2007) or even not to be “real people”, but some kind of speaking animal or a supernatural being (Anglickienė, 2004, p. 84–85).

As Jews from the 6th to the 16th century served as mediators for knowledge about medicine, astrology and alchemy of the Arabs. With that, the knowledge of ancient civilizations, they were also seen as sorcerers and were being attributed magical capabilities as late as the 19th century (Erb, 1993, p. 678; also Cała, 1995, p. 136; Oișteanu, 2009, p. 324).

Jews were also marked by characteristics of monstrosity that were based on the alleged abhorrent acts of which they were accused – murdering Christ, ritual torture and killings of Christian children and the desecration of sacred hosts (Strickland, 2003, p. 133–134; Dundes, 2007; also Hurvitz, 1974, p. 311; Erb, 1993, p. 680).

Very early in the Christian tradition, Jews were identified as Antichrists and were placed within the frame of apocalyptic imagery (Strickland, 2003, p. 212; Leshock, 2002, p. 220). The ultimate rejection of the Jews was also manifested in accusations of Jewish conspiracies against the Christians along with the other enemy of Christendom – the Muslims – or even in the alliance with the Devil himself (Hoppenbrouwers, 2007, p. 55, 58).

Besides being a physical being, “the Other” is also *an idea*. The Jew of reality was transformed into an imaginary Jew that came to represent everything the medieval Christians feared or doubted about their own religion. The stories about Jewish idol worshipping, perhaps, therefore reflected Christian anxieties that their veneration of Christian images might be tantamount to idolatry. Similarly, stories about the Jews desecrating the sacred hosts may reflect the doubt that the Christians had about the efficacy of transubstantiation, and the usage of Christian blood and hosts for Jewish ritual purposes may refer to magical practices

them of raping Christian boys, helped in the process of the demonization of Muslims (even though Islam, just as Christianity, officially didn’t approve of homosexuality). The Jews were similarly implicated to have the same tendencies (Mazo Karras, 2005, p. 132–134).

performed by Christians themselves and the guilt they may have felt. What is more, the images of Jews ridiculing Jesus may have reflected the fear of the Jews ridiculing Christian beliefs themselves (Strickland, 2003, p. 155; see also Matteoni, 2008, p. 189; Erb, 1993, p. 680–681).

The Jews were placed in the role of “the Other” by the dominant, Christian community. Due to the marginality of the Jews’ own community, facts about them were conveyed with a certain degree of mystery (Bronner, 2007, p. 383), which often led to false interpretation and unjustified accusations (see Dundes, 2007; Matteoni, 2008). Folklore often deals with these “unusual” traits of Jewish religion and ways of life and tries to explain them (see Anglickienė, 2004, p. 87–88; tudi Hurvitz, 1974, p. 319). In the process of constructing otherness, the Jews, accused of cruel acts against the Christians, were despised and unwanted in society. This also had consequences in a theological sense: as it was said, the Christians in the Middle Ages believed that the universal acceptance of Christianity was the essential prerequisite for the second coming of Christ. Due to the demonization of the Jews it was believed that they were inconvertible and incorrigible, and therefore the Christians were absolved of the duty to ensure that the Jews did convert. Even the fact that Christianity is based on Judaism didn’t stop the violence towards the Jews (Bronner, 2007, p. 383).

However, this aversion towards the Jews was not based solely on the aforementioned supernatural and religious assumptions (though often misunderstood and incorrectly interpreted) about them. Also, as claimed by Matteoni (2008, p. 190), on secular matters: the marginalization and being pushed towards the edge of the predominantly Christian society forced the Jews into practicing occupations that strengthened their otherness even further and consolidated the previously ascribed characteristics of greed, cruelty and their supposed scheming nature (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203–204). What consolidated “the Jew” into the role of the European Other was therefore a combination of at least three aspects of his differentness: the ethnic, the religious and the economic aspect (Matteoni, 2008, p. 190).

Slovene folklore about the Jews

In comparison with Slovene lands, folklore about Jews has been significantly richer and more diverse in regions where Jewish habitation was longer lasting and permanent (see Erb, 1993, p. 676–679; Krekovičová, 1997; Anglickienė, 2004; Belova, 2004; Uhlíková, 2009). This is understandable, as folklore always has to be interpreted in correlation with the particular historical reality, which it reflects (Krekovičová, 1997, p. 168).

Some minor research about the Jews in Slovene folklore has been done before. Zmaga Kumer (1997) concludes that the Palestinian Jews appear quite often in Slovene folk songs, but only in legendary songs that are based on the Holy Bible, particularly on the gospels, while the medieval Jews (as she calls them) appear in only two songs. The reason for that, in her opinion, is that Slovene people did not have enough contact with the Jews for their memory to be imprinted into Slovene folk tradition better (Kumer, 1997, p. 91). Both of the two before mentioned songs express religious intolerance towards Jews.

In the first song that was written down in 1845 “the young black man” (orig. “mladi zamorčič¹⁰”) desecrates the sacred host. This song could be interpreted within the historical frame of medieval Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula. During the Arabic conquest of Spain the Christians sometimes perceived the Spanish Jews as being in alliance with the conquerors and persecuted them several times on the charges of desecrating the sacred host. When pilgrims from the modern Slovene territory went on pilgrimage to St. James in Santiago de Compostela, they came in contact with Muslims and also with Jews and also heard about the accusations against the latter. At the same time, since they both were non-Christians, the Christians themselves simply perceived them as if they were the same people. So “zamorčič” could actually be referring to a Saracen (as interpreted by Ivan Grafenauer (1939)), or, as Zmaga Kumer (1997) claims, it could in fact refer to a Spanish Jew.

The second folk song (one version of it was written down in 1838 and the second in 1919) also mentions the desecration of the sacred host by the Jews (Kumer, 1997, p. 93–94).

Mihela Hudelja (1996) focuses on a legend about the Eternal (or Wandering) Jew Ahasverus¹¹. It has been written down in various versions and it was mostly

¹⁰ In modern Slovene, the word »zamorec« carries a negative connotation, referring to the black race. It literally means, “the one who comes from the lands beyond the sea” (“za morjem”) and only acquired its negative connotation later; in the original sense it also has no reference to ethnicity. This expression was often used for the Saracens or Muslim Moors who visited the territory of northern Adriatic and the Slovene ethnic territory as pirates or slave traders (Golež Kaučič, 2007, p. 7).

¹¹ In the Bible, Cain kills Abel and for this he is condemned to wander the Earth forever. In the Christian tradition his fate became synonymous with the fate of all the Jews. In time, with the gradual addition of other motifs (see Cohen, 2005, p. 753–755), the Christian tale about the Wandering Jew who wanders the world until the second coming of Christ was formed (Cohen 2005: 753–754). Folklore about him started to spread in Europe in the 13th century. At the beginning, different names for the Wandering Jew were used (for example Bottadeus, Botadeo, Juan de Vota Dios ...; see. Schnitzler, 1984, p. 578) and the name Ahasverus was first written down in the beginning of the 17th century (Daube, 1955, p. 243). In Europe the tale was known

found on the marginal parts of Slovene territory (Hudelja, 1996, p. 52). This legend is supposed to have older roots and has spread throughout Christian territory in various forms. The narrative is about the eternal Jew Ahasverus, who was – on account of his sin (he scolded Jesus and didn't allow him to rest in front of his house on the way to Calvary) – condemned to roam the world eternally until the second coming of Jesus. Ahasverus was also said to be wise and have supernatural abilities. In his wanderings around the world, he reminded people to avoid sin (Hudelja, 1996, p. 52–54). Through this legend, the Church tried to instill the fear of God's wrath into people and encourage piousness, and with that, control its own followers. This legend spread to Slovene territory from German lands (Hudelja, 1996, p. 54–55).

I have conducted my own research on legends¹² that talk about Jews. I have limited myself to this genre, as Zmaga Kumer (1997) has already studied folk songs and because of the characteristics of legends as ecotypified and historicized narratives that act as symbolic representations of collective beliefs, experience and values of their bearers, as well as their fears and desires (Tangherlini, 1990, p. 381, 385). I found only six folklore examples in the published collections of folklore, which refer to Jews, published from 1988 to 2013. The geographical distribution, in my opinion, does not express any important historical significance concerning the Jews (except for the region of Prekmurje) in a significant way. It is more or less a reflection of other circumstances (for example the approach and methods of the collectors and their decision where to collect folklore) – three legends were collected in the region of Upper Carniola (one closer to the Austrian border, one in the vicinity of Maribor and the other in the region of Posavje). For the two examples collected in Prekmurje the historical connection is clear. I usually either write the whole legend or just a part of it in order to portray certain characteristics attested to Jews in them. If I find it necessary I also give examples from newspapers from the first half of the 20th century (kept in the

in different variations. In the 19th century the image of the Wandering Jew started to appear in different literary and artistic works. In that time, the imagery of the Eternal Jew also started to be linked with anti-Semitic elements (Cohen, 2005, p. 754–755).

¹² I searched for these legends primarily in the published collections of Slovene folklore (I took the examples found here as the main source for this paper), folklore published in some scientific journals (*Traditiones*, *Studia mythologica Slavica*, *Etnolog*) and in folklore material held by the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at the Scientific Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. I have also encountered some folklore in other publications, such as diploma theses and newspapers. I have limited myself to materials published on the territory of Slovenia. The timeline of the writing of the legends ranges from the second half of the 19th century up to the 21st century.

Archive of The Institute of Slovene Ethnology) to shed even more light onto a certain attribute ascribed to the Jews.

In one of the legends, the story is contextualized within the Biblical frame, which gives it an appearance of being connected with actual historical events as described in the Bible.

“The Bible says that Jews had a golden calf. Our father told us that once he saw that calf with his own eyes.

One evening he went to the mill. Then he suddenly saw something glowing in the distance. He took a closer look. It was light and gold, he said. He stood there a while. He looked at the gold calf, thinking how great it would be if he took it with him. But then, suddenly, it disappeared.” (Gričnik, 1995, p. 204, no. 421)

Besides the reference to a familiar motif from the Bible about the Jews worshipping the golden calf, there is also another element of this story that needs to be emphasized – the golden calf in this story appears in the form of a treasure that might potentially benefit the one who finds it. The treasure is often connected with the (“mythical”) Other – in Slovene folklore, for example. Treasures often appear in legends about the Ottoman Turks¹³ and the Napoleon’s French (see Mlakar, 2016), in Croatian folklore in legends about the Greeks (see Dronjić, 2008) and in Romanian folklore in stories about the Jews (see Oișteanu, 2009, p. 357). It is not unusual that the treasure in this legend is connected with the Jews, themselves being able to take different role in the folklore – for example, in Romanian they appear in the role of the mythical ancestors, the giants (Oișteanu, 2009, p. 356–360), much like the mythical giants Ajdi appear in Slovene folklore (see Hrobat, 2005). The legends about treasures often contain descriptions of people looking for them; however, these attempts usually end in failure, or else a supernatural force stops the seekers. This is because the treasures are a part of the world beyond (see Hrobat, 2010, p. 54; Hrobat, 2012, p. 43; see also Champion, Cooney, 1999, p. 198) and therefore practically unreachable. All of this helps to establish a connection between the Jews and the otherness of the world beyond.

As was mentioned earlier, there was a common belief among Christians that the Jews were to blame for Christ’s death. This conviction is also evident in the following legend:

¹³ The treasure in the legends about “the Turks” often appears in the form of a golden calf, which shows how different imagery (in this case biblical) can intermix in stories that borrow a completely different historical frame.

“Today is a Holy evening, a Holy Tuesday evening, when the Jews hunted Jesus. They tied him up with ropes and chains. They forced him to walk on a trail where knives, nails and razors had been scattered. They drove him to the mountain of Calvary. Every step that Jesus made became filled with blood. Then, they measured him out for the holy cross. The cross was much too large and Jesus too short. The wicked Jews gathered and discussed whether it would be better to stretch out Jesus three times or to saw off the cross once. A Jewish girl then said: ‘It would be better to stretch out Jesus three times then to saw off the cross.’

They stretched him out for the first time, stretching his muscles; they stretched him out for the second time, tearing his veins; they stretched him out for the third time; now the sun can shine through his body. They then nailed him to the cross with three nails. They put a crown of thorns upon his head.” (Glasenčnik, 1998, p. 118, no. 176)

The story then focuses on three drops of blood from Jesus’ body and how they contribute to the growth of wheat, of vineyards for making wine, and of flowers – all symbols that are used at mass in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice. The story then ends with a moral emphasis on the importance of regular prayer for the salvation of the soul. But what is evident in this legend is that there are imaginative elements which were later added to the biblical story of Jesus’ crucifixion in order to portray the “wicked Jews” as heartless “Christ killers” which can be contextualized as part of religious anti-Semitism.

As is common in folklore, other religions and their religious practices are perceived as mockable and incomprehensible (Anglickienė, 2004, p. 83). It is also evident in one Slovene legend describing a (Christian) man mocking a Jew conducting his religious practices (see Vidmar Mandič, 2013, p. 145, št. 266) or in this next example, where mocking Jewish ceremonial objects is very direct:

““This calf has some kind of legs!’

‘Those aren’t legs.’

‘What is it then?’

‘They’re Jewish candles!’

‘This calf also has ribs.’

‘Those are not ribs!’

‘What are they then?’

‘That’s a Jewish organ.’”

... (Kühar, 1988, p. 202–203)

We can recognize and acknowledge a certain degree of knowledge about the Jewish religious practices, but there is a mocking tone, which gives them a negative connotation: the Jewish religion is not considered equal to “Our” Christian religion. This mockery is based on lack of knowledge and the ethnocentric perception of one’s own religion as the only correct one. This type of categorization is an essential part of otherness, idealizing “Our” community, its beliefs, its way of life and its values. It makes “Us” a reference point for the evaluation and judgment of other communities that are often perceived as inferior. Their way of life as wrong, and their beliefs as false, even though these interpretations from the point of view of Our community do not necessarily correspond with actual facts about “the Other” (what is more –they are sometimes the complete opposite of reality). Perceiving the religion of “the Other” as inferior or wrong is common in folklore (see Tuisk, 2014, p. 97; also Belova, 2007, p. 336–337). Sometimes “the Other” is even denied a soul (see Belova, 2007, p. 339–340; also Anglickienė, 2004, p. 84). Religion also seems to be the most defining attribute of otherness of “the Jew” in Slovene folklore expressed by the mockery of Jewish religion and its practices (see also Krekovičová, 1997, p. 178; Anglickienė, 2004, p. 83).

This often scarce knowledge about the reality of “the Other” enables various ideological manipulations to emerge (see Tangherlini, 1995, p. 60; Todorova-Pirgova, 1999, p. 166–168; Heit, 2005, p. 727; Parafita, 2006, p. 129). It is especially problematic in a black-and-white perception of the world, in which “the Other” gets the role of “the bad guy”, and “the Self” the role of the victim. Certain individuals or groups for the purpose of self-gain (Olweean, 2002, p. 98) can exploit this type of perception. Jews throughout history often fell victim to these kinds of manipulations and scapegoating.

One of the more typical themes about Jews in folklore is found in the form of etiological legends explaining the Jews’ abstinence from eating pork. The following legend comes from the eastern part of Slovenia, where the number of Jewish inhabitants was larger and people were in contact with the Jews every day:

“One day the Jews were arguing with our priest, expressing great contempt for our faith. The priest was very knowledgeable, successfully proving them wrong. The Jews became frustrated and did not know what to ask him anymore, so they hid a woman with a child under a sink and asked the priest: ‘What do you think is under this sink?’ The priest answered: ‘A sow with a piglet.’ The Jews lifted up the sink and there was now an actual sow with a piglet. Ever since, the Jews no longer eat pork.” (Kühar, 1988, p. 194)

A similar story was published in 1905 in the Dolenjske novice newspaper:

“When Christ was still traveling the world and teaching, the Jews who did not believe in him tried testing him to see whether he really is the all-knowing son of God. They hid a Jew under a tub. When Jesus went by, they asked him, if he really was the son of God and if he is, he should answer what is under the tub. After a moment of silence, he responded: ‘A sow!’ The Jews started to laugh, because Jesus was wrong. But how scared they got when they lifted the tub. A sow jumped up from under it, ran off and mixed with the other swine. Because they could not tell it apart, they decided not to butcher any more pigs or eat them.” (Dolenjske novice, 1905, no. 7, p. 71; kept in the Archive of The Institute of Slovene Ethnology)

Ethological legends that explain reasons for the Jewish abstinence of pork are international¹⁴ (Krekovičová, 1997, p. 178; see also Yelenevskaya, Fialkova, 2007, p. 92). For the Christians, the Jewish prohibition of eating pork was odd and unnatural, so they tried explaining it – and, as we have seen, at the same time emphasizing the superiority of Christianity by portraying the Jews who were taunting Christian religious authority as less wise and less cunning.

There is another aspect to consider in connection with the pig that often emerges in such ethological legends. The fact is that in Slavic folklore the Jews and the Muslims are often connected with swine¹⁵, which is especially humiliating for both, as both in Judaism and Islam the pig is considered to be an “unclean” animal (Yelenevskaya, Fialkova, 2004, p. 79). Generally speaking

¹⁴ A similar motif can be found in a Slovak etiological legend: “A Jew fattened a pig, when it perished, he shouted to heaven asking God to take him too. He was punished by being changed into a pig and he was carted around all over the world. He ate twelve breads and drank a high tub of water a day.” (Krekovičová, 1997, p. 178) A Romanian legend tells us how, upon hearing that Jesus has been crucified by the Jews, the Virgin Mary sets out in search of him, but when she reaches the place of the crucifixion, a Jewish woman with two children hides under a trough out of fear. “If, as you say, thou be / The Virgin Mary /,” say the Jews, “Guess what might be under yonder trough?” “A sow with sucking pigs,” answers the Virgin Mary, and the Jews make fun of her mistake; yet when they lift the trough, they indeed find a sow with two sucklings. The message of this legend is: “And since then the Jews won’t eat pork!” (Oişteanu, 2009, p. 343–344) A Polish legend gives an opposite explanation: “They /the Jews / are not allowed to eat pork, because they think that it is their aunt. For in Christ’s time the Jews wanted to ridicule Him, and so they covered a sow and piglets with a trough and asked Jesus: ‘What is this?’ And He answered: ‘A woman with a child.’ They laughed, but when they looked they saw a woman with a child emerge from under the trough; and so they think that people are descended from swine, and that is why they don’t eat pork.” (Cała, 1995, p. 114)

¹⁵ In Slavic folklore, the Jews are also identified with other animals, such as wolves and horses, and with birds, for example magpies and hoopoes (Yelenevskaya, Fialkova, 2007, p. 92).

equating the Other with an animal is the most extreme form of otherness which allows for the highest form of emotional distance. Expressing contempt towards the “Other” by associating him with an animal reaches as far back as ancient Mesopotamia and China; see Poo, 2005, p. 50–51; 97) and consequently, his annihilation is also not considered to be morally wrong. In the time of European discoveries of the Americas, the Europeans attributed animal characteristics to Indians (Hoppenbrouwers, 2007, p. 55). In the Middle Ages, Muslims and pagans were often called “dogs” and the association of Jews with pigs from that era is also evident (Hoppenbrouwers, 2007, p. 58).

There are also a few examples of folklore, which attempt to portray the Jewish character.

“A landowner, whose house stood next to the market place, was looking through the window, watching a Gypsy and a Jew negotiating for a nag. Finally they reached a deal and shook hands. The man was curious which of them was more cunning, so he called the Gypsy and asked him:

‘How much did you get for that worn-out horse?’

‘A hundred dinars.’

‘A hundred dinars? You fool, why did you sell him for so little?’

‘It’s not worth more than that; it has a limp in his right back leg. The Jew won’t be able to take him further than half a kilometer.’

The landowner then called the Jew.

‘Izak, how could you have bought such a limping worn-out horse? You won’t even get it home.’

The Jew laughed:

‘You’re wrong! The horse isn’t limping. It’s just that its horseshoe is attached the wrong way. When I set it straight, the limping will stop.’

The landowner shook his head and turned to the Gypsy:

‘Well, it turns out you, indeed, are the fool! Do you know why the horse is limping? It hasn’t been shod correctly. Izak says that when he fixes his horseshoe, the horse will no longer be limping.’

The Gypsy smiled smugly.

‘Sir, I deliberately shod the horse incorrectly in order for everyone to think that is the reason for its limp. Izak can try setting it straight it till judgment day, but the horse will still be limping.’

‘Hm, hm!’ mumbled the landowner. ‘So the Gypsy is the most cunning one!’

Then he called again the Jew.

‘Izak, you know what is new? The Gypsy said that he deliberately shod the horse incorrectly to cheat the buyer.’

Izak turned red and angrily smashed his foot to the ground.

‘I knew the Gypsy would try to cheat me, so I paid for the horse with a counterfeit bill.’” (Slovenski gospodar, 1940, no. 42, p. 14; kept in the Archive of The Institute of Slovene Ethnology; see also Krajczar, 1996, p. 194–196, no. 21)

In this narrative both the Jew and the Gypsy are portrayed as frauds trying to out cheat one another. This characteristic is very often ascribed to “the Gypsy” (see Mlakar, 2016, p. 204–218), yet attributing negative characteristics of treachery and fraudulence is also common for “the Jew” (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 203–204). Again, we encounter negative portrayal of “the Other”, based on stereotypical assumptions.

Conclusion

Otherness is one of the most fundamental parts of human interaction and is a reflection of humankind’s need for classification into categories, which allows for an illusion of order. Whatever is different, threatens this order, and these anxieties are then embodied in “the Other”. The otherness is directly linked with the concept of identity, as the latter is constructed through negation or, in other words, through what it is not. As we have seen, Jews have been marked with several characteristics of difference, the most prominent of which are: religion, physical difference, spatial separation, attire, unusual diet, incomprehensible language, different sexual practices, the lack of a soul and supernatural abilities. Some of these ascribed traits, of course, varied in different parts of Europe and also underwent transformation during the centuries according to the social, religious, or political circumstances and the frequency of their interaction with the dominant populations, and were adjusted to world-views and identity needs of the period. Yet despite all of these changes, their role as “the Other” remained remarkably stable. The Jews always seem to have filled a society’s needs for a scapegoat (for all sorts of misfortune, ranging from disease or a bad economic status to current societies’ fears that manifest themselves in Jewish conspiracy theories). It is clear from the various examples mentioned earlier in the paper that actual knowledge about the Jews and their religion was low – the absence of a close-knit group ideology and the efforts to cope with this problem often led the medieval European man into brutal marginalization and violence against Jews (and also, in no lesser manner, Muslims). However, this was not an actual religious conflict, as most Christians knew very little about the Torah (or the Koran) (Classen, 2002, p. xxiii). Despite this profound scarcity of knowledge about their religion, the idea of their religious difference was intensified to extremes, because establishing such a distinction from the Jews (and Muslims)

enabled the Christians to see themselves as a unified community. The notion of “wrong” and “deviant” strengthens the borders of Our community and at the same time ensures an explanation for things and events that would otherwise be seen as senseless, coincidental or unsolvable (Conrad, 1998, p. 57).

Folklore expresses the social mindset of the time of its circulation. As for the Slovene cases, the extent to which the folklore about the Jews is actually a result of having contact with them is questionable, as the Jewish population in these parts was low, and their presence was not continuous due to political reasons. This is evident from the small number of folklore examples that talk about or mention Jews. The cases that I have presented show a distinct lack of actual knowledge about them, their customs and way of life. The most prominent sign of their difference and otherness is their religion, which is considered to be distinct from Christianity and is mocked, which shows a basic misunderstanding of Judaism (we might even call it religious anti-Semitism) and an ethnocentrically based assumption of the superiority of One’s own religion. They are also portrayed as Christ’s killers and seen as fraudulent and treacherous. These two characteristics have been ascribed to Jews for centuries and are common in the imagery of “the Other” – his nature is bad, Ours is good. This can be seen as a projection of the negative attributes of society into “the Other”. We can conclude that the Slovene imagery of “the Jew” as expressed by folklore (despite the non-continuous Jewish historical presence in the territory of Slovenia and small Jewish population) corresponds with the wider European imagery of the Jews.

As it has been said, this folklore could be considered part of the appropriation of stereotypical imagery of “the Jew” from elsewhere. At the same time the influence of the Church or Christianity in general which, as we have seen, was a contributor to the formation of the negative imagery of “the Jew” that sometimes escalated into political actions against them, needs to be taken into consideration.

As it is very clear from all the examples, such folklore is not concerned with depicting the empirical reality of the Jews, or, generally speaking, of “the Other”. The point is to strengthen the self-identity of One’s own community. Neglecting the undeniable diversity of “the Other” is a characteristic part of the process of otherness – “They” only make up a coherent, uniform community through the eyes of Our community, as the identity of “the Other” is based on stereotypes and simplifications (Staszak, 2008, p. 2) – “the Other” is therefore an object. As we have seen, the Jews were subjected to this type of generalization and simplification throughout history – not only in folklore. The continuous emphasis on Jewish otherness, all the stereotypes and accusations against them contributed to a growing anti-Semitism that led to persecutions, pogroms and exile of Jews from European territories (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 204). However, it did not end in the Middle Ages – the stereotypes about the Jews and their discrimination

continued throughout the next centuries and peaked tragically during the Nazi era. Even today, the extreme right (for example the American Ku-Klux-Klan in the USA) still cultivates racial anti-Semitism and genocide rhetoric. There is also an interesting phenomenon of the aforementioned “Jewish conspiracies” (and the idea of Jewish world domination) that has entered into media, popular entertainment and art (Gans, Leerssen, 2007, p. 204).

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