Ethnicity in Israeli Folklore and Ethnic Humor.

Funny folk tales, anecdotes, short stories, ethnic jokes, short electronic messages, and electronic visual messages all use ethnic humor. This course will address the transition from oral narratives to electronically transmitted folklore.

Q: How does every ethnic joke start?
A: With a look over your shoulder.

Notes:
1. According to an annual survey conducted since 1993 in Hungary, 73% of the students between the age of 18-25 have anti-Semitic and racist views. Out of this number, 38% can be considered openly anti-Semitic and racist while the rest are "just" using anti-Semitic and racist stereotypes and stereotypical language. At the same time, in the last year several murders took place against Roma people in an act that was declared a racist pogrom. About 25% of my students ask me questions using anti-Semitic stereotypes, and some them take my courses about East European Jewry to find out more about this feared group of people.
2. However, Hungary has a vibrant cultural, intellectual and religious Jewish life. There are more than 30 synagogues, as well as rabbinical seminars, Judaic and Jewish studies programs at several universities, Jewish publishing houses, newspapers, magazines, theatres, and hundreds of websites, blogs and Jewish forums.
3. Relations between Hungarian Jews and Israel exist, but they are not very strong. For Hungarian Jews, Zionism was never really popular, and making aliya has never been a strong trend.
4. So far I have not done very much research on the topic below, so any suggestions are welcomed.

Course description: The main questions of the course

By taking a cultural, anthropological, and ethnological approach to Israeli society and culture, this course focuses on Israeli ethnic folk narratives, including stories/folk tales, short stories, anecdotes, jokes, circle text messages, emails, and transmitted "You Tube" messages. We must take into consideration that in many cases these oral and electronic narratives transmit sensitive ethnic content, play with ethnic stereotypes, and verbalize the content of the ethnic conflict, sometimes showing the specific elements of xenophobic hatred.

1. What is the social significance of ethnic folklore today? Is humor in urban and rural folklore an important strategy that can express in a legitimate way political incorrectness and can play on ethnic stereotypes?

2. Is the use of ethnic symbols in a highly aesthetic and entertaining way sometimes the only way to justify the presence of certain stigmatized ethnicities to the outside world? Is aesthetic representation with a clear purpose to entertain a way to domesticate latent xenophobia?
3. How do we treat/preserve/use these folkloristic texts such as classic folktales (from the collections or the archives), the short "You Tube" films/spams, the short cell phone text messages, and the political or academic ethnic anecdotes?

4. Why do we value printed and electronic folklore differently? Does the new electronic text fit the classic ethnographic typology? Do they have similar structures, value systems, morality, or types of punch lines?

5. Can folklore be considered some sort of a level of communication between cultures in conflict or even, in some cases, the product of basic, everyday interethnic relations?

The Scope of the Course:

- To acquaint students with the role and the diversity of current Israeli folklore by focusing on short narratives, stories, and jokes.
- To illustrate the fact that obviously ethnic folklore does not have clear borders between cultures, languages and ethnic groups, but is rather a process of continuous migration, fusion, and change, especially in a multiethnic environment like Israel.
- To understand how present-day folklore is everything that we send out, laugh at, don’t laugh at, download, say, use, wear, watch, and understand.
- To question what has been selected to play the role of (our own and others) ethnic folkloristic main motifs, stereotypes, and clichés and to see what is used and understood.
- To compare and contrast the sources and strategies of ethnic humor in different folkloristic genres.
- To recognize the role and importance of the different coexisting and conflicting traditions, beliefs, religions, social structures, and political systems, as well as the different rhetorical elements of identity constructing strategies through short narratives.
- To analyze the content, components, historical roots, and present day role of reflected, recognized ethnic stereotypes as a main source of humor.
- To form an idea by the end of the semester about the diversity of Israeli society and Israeli cultural language through the dynamics of sarcastic folklore among the Ashkenazim, Sephardim and Mizrahim, the Russian Jews, the Christians, the Palestinians, and, within these larger groups, also the specific Polish, Romanian, Ukrainian, Indian, Ethiopian, Georgian, Moroccan and other communities.
- To develop academic criticism/relativism of our own academic theories, beliefs, and conclusions.
- To encourage students to collect, download and translate these texts so that by the end of the semester we will have a collection of humorous electronic folklore.

Pedagogical methodology:
Each class will consist of a 60 minute lecture, a 20 minute discussion, and the presentation of visual illustrations (caricatures, cartoons, short "You Tube" movies, and short segments of movies). In every class, we will analyze several short stories, anecdotes, and jokes as examples and relate them to the relevant scholarly works on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts.

Applying academic criticism and analysis to our own engagement with Israeli folkloristic productions, we will go through a process of learning (self) academic criticism, skepticism in theoretical frames, academic terminology used without reflections and some constructive methods to question our own academic superstitions.

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Students will write one analytical research paper analyzing any folkloristic text, or performance within a cultural anthropological framework by interpreting the texts from four perspectives 1. Ethnological translation. 2. Ethnographical description and contextualization. 3. Critical hermeneutical analysis. 4. Reflecting back on their own paper and showing the weaknesses of their analysis.

2. Students will have to 1. Collect from an archive five unpublished funny short stories, anecdotes, folk tales or ethnic jokes based on their own fieldwork, or 2. Download 15 electronically transmitted primary texts or visual messages.

Class schedule

Introduction in the context of the living folklore

The Israeli society: immigration culture; Ethnic, religious, lingual, cultural diversity. Traditionalism and modernity in the Israeli culture. Nation building narratives and narratives of the homeland.

Required readings:


We will use the following books through the semester:

- Dov Sadan, A Bowl of Raisins, Tel Aviv, 1950 (H); A Bowl of Nuts, Tel Aviv, 1953.

- Sonia Nimr, Ghaddar the Ghoul: And Other Palestinian Folk-tales.
- MacDonald, Margaret Read: Tunjur! Tunjur! Tunjur!: A Palestinian Folktale.

The relation between the „classic” idealistic, esthetical folklore and the pop culture in Israel
The use classic folklore in constructing nationalism or ethnicity: folklorizm: the „authentic”, „pure”, „aboriginal”, „ancient” folklore on a stage as a form to preserve the „original” ethnicity.
The use of folklore: symbolic ethnicity on ethnic festivals. (Recited Kidus as a hiphopp song.)
Esthetical and symbolic representations as legitimization of certain stigmatized ethnic groups.
The parody of the classic folklore.

Required readings:
- Dov Sadan, A Bowl of Raisins, Tel Aviv, 1950 (H); A Bowl of Nuts, Tel Aviv, 1953 (H).
- Golden Deborah, „Now, like real Israelis, lets stand up and sing.” Teaching the national language to Russian newcomers in Israel., Anthropology And Education Quarterly 2001.
- Shmuel Zanvel Pipe, Yiddish Folksongs from Galicia, The Folklorization of David Edelstadt's song "der arbeter" cider arbeter". letters Edited by Dov Noy & Meir Noy, jerusalem 1971. Folklore Research Center Studies: Volume II.

Recommended:
- Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, Popular Music and National Culture in Israel (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), Chapter 2 161-162.

Ethnicity and (the lack of?) politically correctness in some Israeli folk narratives
Twisted ethnic stereotypes. Positive stereotypes.
„Innocent” stereotypes. Unconscious stereotypes.
Clichés which help us orientate. Unmasking our own prejudices. Parody, humor, sarcasm, self criticism.

**Required readings:**

**The sources of ethnic humor: the concept of ethnographic “normality”**
Stereotypes, common knowledge, accent, dialect, body language, different fashion. Main motives of ethnic jokes: stupidity, sexual behavior, greediness, stinginess, the physical appearance etc.

The roots, the history and the consequences of the stereotypes in every day context.

The stylistic tools of ethnic humor

The textual models and leitmotifs of sarcastic ethnic short narratives.

**Required readings:**

**Inter-textuality between folk tales, short stories**
The complicated relationships between „elite“ and folk culture, oral and written literature, historical reality, and narrative fiction.

The (inter-textual) relation between the folk/pop culture and the „higher“ culture.

Differences, similarities, style, constructing strategies, different reception, the obvious but masked hierarchy etc.

Borrowed elements, strategies, style, mutual terminology,

The folklore: a source for literature, and the sacred texts as source for the current electronic folklore.

Switching hierarchy: popularization of the literal text and the „upgrade“ of the folk

**Required readings:**
- El Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale History, Genre, Meaning*.
- Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as oral writ. The bible as Folklore*. 
Humor and religious traditions
Religion as an aspect of ethnicity.
From the Hasidic comic tales to the sexist jokes about orthodox, or Muslim or other religious people. The limits of verbal aggressively: offence and taboo.

Required readings:
- Funny hasidic stories on chabad.org.
- Offensive politically incorrect religious jokes (online).

Transition from oral culture to electronic transmission
The impact of the electronic media on the revival of the folklore. Folklore is usually anonym, but electronic folklore has no face either: the consequences of faceless anonymity.

Required readings:

To domesticate, or to tame down the unknown feared foreigner through humor
Can the verbal openness of the ethnic humor contribute to the understanding of ethnic conflicts?
Or does the semi-legitimacy of the use of ethnic stereotypes generate further conflicts, prejudgments?
The common cultural spaces, parodistic mixed language: the Palestinian and Israeli folklore in coexistence.

Required readings:
• Zerubavel, Yael, The Mythological sabra” and Jewish past trauma, memory and contested identities, Israel Studies 7.(2) 2002.

Recommended
• Oz, Where the Jackals Howl, in Oz Where the Jackals Howl and OtherStories.
• Yehoshua, A.B. Facing the Forests. [short story]

Original manuscripts & supplemental online material especially from Israel Folktale Archives, Haifa Folklore Research Center will be sent out.

Extended bibliography

Ethnic Humor Extended Bibliography

Simon, John. Paradigms Lost: Reflections on Literacy and Its Decline. New York:
Additional bibliography on humor


Raskin, Victor.


Extended bibliography on short stories, folklore

AaTh—Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson
1967 The Types of the Folktale. Second revision. FF Communications 184. Helsinki:
Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
Basset, Rene
Chauvin, Victor
El-Shamy—see Shamy
Fadel, Ayten
Holbek, Bengt
Jason, Heda
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folktales types of the arab world 303
Nowak, Ursula

Noy, Dov and Otto Schnitzler


Thompson, Stith


Thompson, Stith and Warren E. Roberts
