

# **Folk Imagology: Georgian Ethnic Stereotype in Russian Mass Culture**

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The process of Globalization leads us to de-level of National characteristics in many spheres of public life. This is why many researches became more and more interested by the issues of ethnic stereotypes, national features. When we say “Typical Russian”, “Typical Armenian”, “Typical English”, etc. we have in mind the complexion of features that are characteristic to this or that ethnic stereotype; the latter represents a consolidated look, which represents the specificity of this or that nation's ethnic or cultural characteristics, the national psychology and the tradition of both nations - on the one hand, those who are stereotyped object of evaluation, and on the other hand, those who established these stereotypes in the nation's mentality.

The process of researching the problem of ethnic stereotype/national characteristic leads to the issues of how individuals/groups of individuals perceive themselves as ‘our’, and draw a line between ‘others’, in most cases the ‘others’ have such traits that are perceived as negative from the other group labeling them as ‘others’. It should be noted that the union of individuals (‘ours’) is base not only on collective memory or myths, but also during common sense, while categorizing or stereotyping the image of ‘other’. Imagology, derived from the English word ‘image’, is a discipline dedicate to fully understanding the problems outlined above. It includes theoretical basis as well as practical, which tries to understand how social, cultural and ethnic unions aid in the process of creating the image of ‘others’ [Anderson,1991; Hechter, 2000; Geary, 2003; Сванидзе, 2003 etc.].

While discussing the evaluative nature of national/ethnic stereotypes Endo (Inner) and Egzo (Outer) ethnic stereotypes are differentiated. Endo Ethno Stereotype is an image that a nation has about itself (for example what Georgians think about Georgians); as for Egzo Ethno Stereotype, it means how an image is being created about one nation from the side of another nation (for example how are Georgians perceived in the mentality of Russians, Armenians, Baltic States, etc). The ethno stereotype created in the collective memory may date not only several years but many centuries. Endo Ethno Stereotype in most cases has a positive connotation but there may be cases when some negative aspects of the nation can be shown. Differently from this Egzo Ethno Stereotype can be either radically positive or radically negative. This depends on many different aspects such as the historical memory of the nation, the political, social and cultural relations between the two nations. As an example an extract from a XVII century Polish Chronicle can be brought: “We do not boast as much as the Germans do; we are not as bloodthirsty as Moskals; we do not use as much poison and in every case as the Swedes; We do not steal like the Hungarians; We are not as Snobs as the English; We do not seek Revenge as the Scots do” – such was the idea of the Polish two centuries ago about their European Neighbours; Although it should be noted that after several centuries their attitude changed that can be clearly seen throughout a number of Imagological material [Stereotypes and Nations, 1995:15-54].

It is unarguable that due to its discourse nature the basis for the creation and spreading of National Stereotype/National Myth Folklore and Fiction is widely being used. Literature is a means to create national stereotype as well as afterwards plays a great role in its development. Literature can be used on the one hand to create ethno stereotypes in the memory of a nation and on the other make a difference in these believes. Folklore and Literature depict the attitudes of a nation towards other nations and cultures. This can be either said from the side of the narrator, or foreign characters or by the ideas other characters express.

Scholars differentiate Fictional and Folk Imagology. The creator of Fiction and a foreign character is the author of the book, who has his/her own conception, point of view, attitude and therefore his/her ideas are dominant when he/she is writing about the ethno stereotype of another Nation. As for Folk Imagology (Sayings, Puzzles, Jokes) we deal not with an individual creation but with a one; it is widely known that in the establishment of a negative ethno stereotype of “other” nation Mass culture plays an important role, which includes Anecdotes, which is a genre deviation of Folk Imagology. Nowadays nobody argues that Anecdote is the most productive form of Folklore; its reaction about the actual problems in the society is fast and includes practically all spheres of social life: Politics, Business, Religious Institutions, Family, etc. Anecdotes show the point of view of a particular social class, their reality and their relations towards it; therefore an Anecdote is a mirror of civil consciousness which in the prism of “laughing culture” [Bakhtin, 1990] shows the social realities and civil attitudes.

The famous scholar of Folklore V. Khimik notes that only in Russian Culture do we come across to the term Anecdote<sup>1</sup>; The English call Anecdote a joke, a canned joke, or a funny story; The French refer to such a case as “histoire”; As for the Germans they use the word “witz” to describe a witty remark or saying [Khimik, 2002:23].

In the respect of how the text is organized the Anecdote has a stereotypical structure; it consists of two parts: Introduction and Resolution. The first part deals with the plot, and the second with the witty or unusual outcome of the situation, which may be even paradoxical in some cases and which creates the comical effect in the Anecdote. Generally, the comical effect can be attained by two ways:

- So-called “referential” Anecdotes deal with the irrelevance of the behavior of a character or situation with our mentality;
- So-called “linguistic” Anecdotes attention is paid on the word play and features of speech [Rudnev, 2007].

As we see in both cases a dichotomy of rivalry between “our”/”other” is present. Generally, people have a tendency of giving some features to this or that ethnic groups (aggression, stupidity, evilness, naivety, etc.), which serves as a basis for the foundation of ethno-cultural stereotypes. Nearly all National Folklore has narratives about their neighbours: Russian tell jokes about the Jews, the Ukrainians, the Armenians, the Georgians, the Chukchas; Ukrainians tell

about the Polish or the Russians; The Latvians about the Estonians; the Georgians about the Armenians, etc. The image of “the foreigner”/”the other” in an Anecdote is simple (even primitive) and static (unlike literature, where the character is individualized, diverse and dynamic). In an Anecdote we have one or several national characteristics that become a subject of mockery or critique.

It needs no highlighting that due to the its national ethnic conscious do individuals/groups of individuals form their views about the others; In other words what is characteristic to the nation is seen as a *Norm*, and what is the feature of other Nations is understood as a deviation from the standard, the norm. The same situation applies not only to behaviour, but to speech as well. Due to the fact that the thinking and behavior of different nations differ from each other, they are perceived as funny, stupid, not-adequate from the view point of one nation, because it does not fall into the norm of “their” behavior. Therefore the narrator (in our case, the teller of a joke) makes fun of all the issues that is perceived as deviation from the norm.

To illustrate this point of view we will present the material by Russian researchers in the collection of "Logical analysis of language. Human Image in culture and language", according to which in modern Russian folk Jokes about Jews, Ukrainians, Armenians, Georgians and others predominate [Logical Analysis..., 1999]. Based on the material in the book we can talk about the ethno stereotype of Georgian in Russian Mass Culture.

It should be noted that in the Russian mass culture in the second half of the last century in the 1960s, the face of the Georgian market character "Givi" established itself (with different variations, reseller of flowers, citrus, fruit and vegetables). This national stereotype replaced the Romantic modal structure of the Caucasian Man/Knight established in Russian literature and the mentality in the 19th century. If we look at the Georgian ethnic stereotypes in Russian Anecdotes, we will note that Georgians are portrayed as hospitable; they love feasting, drinking wine, restaurants, wasting money, society of women... these features of national character becomes the theme of the actual Russian joke, and how the Soviet government suppresses the Georgian will to enjoy life; we have in mind the famous anecdote about how a Georgian person is being made a member of Communist Party; The Admission committee warns that from now on he, as a communist, should reject feasts, restaurants, wine, women and is finally asked: "Are you ready to die for the ideals of communism?" "Of course! Why do I need such a life after all?!" is his reply.

According to the Russian jokes, Georgians like to advertise that they have a lot of money; that they are generous. For example, there is an anecdote about how Givi bought a "Zaporozhets" car, he put it in the yard at night, the next morning found that the car was stolen. Givi bought

"Zaporozhets" again, left it in the yard and put a letter on the windscreen: "If you want ride a car, ride, but then in the morning bring it back." Givi in the morning sees that the "Zaporozhets" is gone again; But there is a "Mercedes" instead, with a letter attached on the windscreen: "If you want ride a car, ride, but do not shame your nation with a "Zaporozhets"!". Another anecdote concerns Givi and his friends, who after a feast in the restaurant want to present the staff working in the wardrobe; One gives ten Maneti to the worker, takes his coat and says: "I do not want change"; The second gives Twenty-five Maneti, takes his coat and says: "I do not want change"; Givi gives Hundred Maneti says: "I do not want the coat".

The Georgian men in the Russian Anecdotes are presented as typical carriers of "oriental mentality", who perceive women inferior to men; this shows that the chivalrous attitude of Georgian men towards women is just a myth from the past. That's what is shown in an anecdote on Givi, who gave away thousands of compliments towards the woman who accompanied his friend; However, when she decided to engage in a conversation with men, Givi rudely interrupted her: "Be silent, woman, when the Jigits are speaking".

As we noted above, in Anecotes (especially in so-called linguistic Anecdotes) a special attention is drawn towards the deconstruction of speech stereotypes in the foreign character. Neither of the characters (Ukrainians, Jew, Armenians, Georgians) speak fluent Russian but try to imitate it and there are individual features to their speech. For example the Georgians often repeat the word "yes"; also the Georgians try to speak as properly as possible but make a lot of mistakes that lead to the comic situations and comic outcomes.

Based on the book we can once again state that the national stereotype is a rich, diverse cognitive structure, which requires an important case study, because each generation has to deal with the national stereotypes and national myths that have emerged and became firmly established in literature, publicist and mass culture for decades. The recent scientific researches show and many scholars outline that ethno stereotype of "other" is settled in the individual consciousness, which is influenced by the traditional beliefs (usually negative), and creates an undesirable emotional-psychological background before the real meeting of the representatives of these two different ethnic groups [Obolenskaia, 2000: 9]. This raises a number of questions; for example on the one hand, how despite the stability of archetypes sometimes in one a day, face of "the other" is transformed in the image of an "enemy" "and on the other hand, how to carry out the reverse process to determine what aids in the formation of the actual characteristics of both ethno stereotypes; How does it actually fit with the reality; For what time span were these understandings relevant (and whether it still continues to exist) [Kopelev, 2002: 100].

Obviously, this article does not aim to criticize the stereotypes highlighted above, or to demonstrate whether the ethno stereotypes of the Georgians in Russian society fit with reality. Our desire was, to outline a few typical traits of ethno stereotypes that have established in the

consciousness of the masses and to note that, unfortunately, for decades it has been performing the role of a kind of coordinates for both sides.

1 Georgian Term “Anecdote” comes from Russian.

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