

original scientific article
received: 2012-02-23

UDC 316.347:316.647.5

URBAN LEGENDS BETWEEN MULTICULTURALISM AND ASSIMILATION

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ABSTRACT

As a form of folklore, urban legends contain prejudice and ethnic stereotypes very often. It is because of contents like these, noted in legends dating as far back as ancient Rome, that the emergence of legends in which xenophobic characters are mocked, attracts attention. It poses the question to what extent contemporary multiculturalism and the insistence on political correctness have influenced modern folklore. An analysis of three such legends recorded across Europe and two legends recorded in Serbia should answer the question of whether there is tolerance within these urban legends and if there is what it pertains to.

Key words: urban legends, preaching tolerance, Serbia, 'Others', Chinese, Romanies, restaurant, acculturation

LEGGENDE METROPOLITANE TRA MULTICULTURALISMO E ASSIMILAZIONE

SINTESI

Le leggende metropolitane, come forma di folclore, molto spesso contengono pregiudizi e stereotipi etnici. È proprio a causa di tali contenuti, notati già in leggende risalenti ai tempi dell'antica Roma, che la comparsa di storie nelle quali i personaggi xenofobi vengono derisi, attrae tanta attenzione. Ci si pone la domanda in quale misura il multiculturalismo contemporaneo e l'insistenza sulla correttezza politica abbiano influenzato il folclore moderno. Un'analisi di tre leggende di questo tipo registrate in tutta Europa e due leggende registrate in Serbia dovrebbe rispondere alla domanda se esiste la tolleranza in queste leggende metropolitane e, se sì, riguardo a che cosa.

Parole chiave: leggende metropolitane, predicare la tolleranza, Serbia, 'Altri', Cinesi, i Roma, ristorante, acculturazione

INTRODUCTION

The xenophobic components of urban legends are widely known. In many folk forms, the stranger is shown as being a dangerous and contaminating entity. In most cases, this type of stranger is a person who differs from the norm in terms of racial or ethno-constructs, i.e. the components which make up these constructs: skin colour, facial features, the language they speak or the religion they practice. Urban legends can also ascribe "otherness" to people with different lifestyles, a prime example of this is the punk rocker described as the "nonconformist deviant". The foreign enemy can also be disguised in the form of spiders crawling out of exotic plants (Klintberg, 1985, 281-285), which the Westerner brought home from the holidays, or as snakes slithering out of a carpet the protagonist bought at a store which sells "eastern" goods (Brunvand, 1981; Miller, 1992). Or it can turn out that the "little dogs" brought from Mexico or Malaysia are actually bloodthirsty rats. (Brunvand, 1986)

Urban legends dealing with evil and dangerous "others" have existed as far back as ancient Rome, where Christians were accused of kidnapping and ritually sacrificing children (Ellis, 1983). These stories still exist in the modern age in the form of new legends about children being abducted in shopping malls only to be found severely injured later on (Brunvand, 1986; Carroll, 1987) or legends about abductions for the purpose of organ theft or forced prostitution. (Campion-Vincent, 1995, 21; Antonijević, 2007)

However, the last decades of the 20th century, marked by political correctness which bridged the gap between the assassination of Martin Luther King and the election of Barrack Obama as president of the USA, gave rise to stories which the French folklorist Veronique Campion-Vincent, in an article titled 'Preaching Tolerance?', claims have a completely different message. These stories ironically present characters who get into funny or inconvenient situations because of their prejudices. "These exemplary stories appear to reflect educated critical judgments, when hostile gut feelings are overcome and the stranger is no longer perceived as a devil or a monster." (Campion-Vincent, 1995, 21-22)

The aim of this paper is to explore the hidden meanings of two urban legends recorded in Serbia, the contents of which correspond with those of certain legends which are thought to preach tolerance. When considering three such legends told in Europe, Campion-Vincent uses the title of her article to point out the dilemma of whether these legends actually do preach tolerance, as it would seem at first glance (Campion-Vincent, 1995, 22). Having in mind that Campion-Vincent leaves the issue open, this paper is an attempt to determine to what extent these urban legends, as a representation of the worldview of the population which creates and tells them, belong to the wider idea of tolerance which has for decades been

the basis of the ideology of political correctness. Comparison with three European legends referred to as "The Elevator Incident", "Sharing by Error" and "The Eaten Ticket" should demonstrate the relationship between tolerance of "others" and "otherness" and the extent to which tolerance displayed in urban legends depends on how much the "others" are willing to change and diminish their "otherness".

The wider theoretical context of studying urban legends which describe and evaluate "others" is widely familiar within folkloristics, the anthropology of ethnicity and other similar disciplines that deal with ethnic prejudice and stereotypes. Various narrative forms, from rumours, attitudes (prejudice and stereotypes) to forms of folklore such as ethnic jokes or urban legends, display a relationship with "others"; the relationship can be anything from xenophobia to assimilating tendencies to tolerance of "otherness". Research into specific phenomena that function as the bearers of meaning shows how the studied environment perceives and experiences various "others" and attempts to isolate the characteristics of these "others", which serves to position them on the scale between desirable or undesirable.

The interpretation of the legends themselves will be accomplished through the use of an analytical procedure inspired by the formal analysis of fairy tales (Prop, 1968), the structural analysis of myth by Claude Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, 1958; 1973) and transformations of this type of analysis (Kovačević, 1985; 2001, Kovačević, 2007a; 2009). This method can be described as social semantics and purports to the analysis of parts that constitute the narrative e.g. urban legend, the forming of units of meaning, the placing of these units into a wider social and cultural context and a determination of the meaning the studied phenomenon carries.

EUROPEAN LEGENDS

"The elevator incident"

"The Elevator Incident" tells the story of provincial women lost in the city who are extremely frightened by the presence of a big black man and his dog in a lift. They misunderstand the command "Sit" that has been addressed to the dog and sit down on the floor of the lift expecting to be robbed. The black man, who is often a renowned figure in sports or pop music, laughs and subsequently pays their hotel bill or sends them flowers. His good humour and generosity shows the women's fear to be foolish and the menace imaginary." (Smith, 1975).

"Sharing by error"

"A British traveller – often a woman – sits at the same table as an immigrant – generally a Pakistani man – at

a station buffet or in a dining car. The traveler is astonished when the immigrant helps himself to a biscuit from a packet she thinks she has just put on the table. She says nothing, but helps herself to a biscuit too. Silence is kept on both sides, and the packet is shared till the last piece, which is cut in two by the immigrant, who offers her half. The embarrassed traveler later discovers her own unopened packet – in her purse or under his newspaper.”

“The eaten ticket”

“An elderly lady and a punk are sitting opposite each other in an S-train. The dress and hairdo of the punk are conspicuous, to say the least. He is sitting inclined towards a large “ghetto-blaster” listening to rock music. The elderly lady does not like punks and she isn’t reluctant to say so. She tells the other passengers what she thinks about the awful youth of today. The punk silently puts up with her grumbling.

Then a ticket controller enters into the train wagon and the lady takes her ticket from her handbag in good time and holds it up in the air. Suddenly the punk grabs her ticket, puts it in his mouth, chews and swallows it. The lady is sitting there speechless. When the controller asks her to show her ticket, she can only point at the punk, saying: “He ate it!”

The controller shakes his head. That is too fanciful an excuse to be believed. The other passengers have followed the drama fascinated; nobody says anything. In spite of her loud protests, the lady has to pay a fine of 200 crowns.

When the controller has left the wagon, the punk can no longer keep a straight face. He draws out his wallet, gives the lady 200 crowns and says with a broad smile that the fun has been worth it.” (Campion-Vincent, 1995, 24)

After analysing these legends and comparing them with animal stories, jokes and short newspaper articles, including literary and film variations, Campion-Vincent concludes that the messages are more ambiguous than it may seem at first glance. According to her hermeneutic interpretation, the “saintly” character of the immigrant is caused by his acknowledgment of the hostile world he lives in. Still, the description of the environment as “intolerant” towards “others”, a world filled with prejudice, latent hostility, hatred, contempt etc. does not mean that the legend doesn’t preach tolerance. The messages aren’t mixed up because the legends contain descriptions of an intolerant environment as Campion-Vincent believes, because it is precisely an environment like that which is needed in order for the legend to stultify and make fun of it against the backdrop of the tolerance which is being preached (Campion-Vincent, 1995, 28).

However, ambiguity exists in these stories and the messages *are* mixed – it’s just that this occurs in a completely different place in the story.

TWO LEGENDS FROM SERBIA

The Gypsy’s tavern in Banatsko Novo Selo

Banatsko Novo Selo is a village with a population of 7,000 in the Banat region, situated in the northeast of Serbia. The ethnic make up of the village is such that the majority of the population is made up of Serbs and Romanians, but also Roma who mostly declare themselves to be Romanians, although there are those who declare themselves to be Roma who speak the Romanian language. The Roma who work abroad have built themselves huge houses, some of which are regular villas, richly decorated with a lot of details and plaster ornaments. The owners of these houses come back to the village whenever they can, or the houses are inhabited by their children and older members of the family.

Banatsko Novo Selo, which is mostly an agrarian community, has only got its first small catering businesses over the last twenty years – a sandwich shop and a small grill. Both of these facilities are too small to accommodate tables, which means that people can’t sit down and order food. During the 1990’s one of the migrant Roma workers opens a spacious restaurant on the ground floor of the house in which he lives. This causes quite a stir and not long after people start gossiping. When the restaurant officially opens for business the guests are mostly local Roma. The rest of the population of different ethnicities have mixed feelings about the restaurant but their attention is kept up by frequent inspections which come to “the Gypsy’s”. The inspections mostly come due to reports of irregularities pertaining to the operation of the restaurant. Sanitary inspections are the most frequent. It is an open secret that the reports leading to the inspections have come from competitors. The talk is mostly about poor hygiene in the restaurant in the vein of “what else would you expect from Gypsies?” as well as about poor upkeep and bad conditions for the storing and preparation of food. It is said that the dishes used for the preparation of the food are washed only with water – and cold water at that – that one dishrag has multiple functions – that it is used to wipe tables and ashtrays, which inevitably “someone saw”. Then there are stories about the meat of dead (i.e. not slaughtered for that purpose) chickens being used as additions to salads in sandwiches, about how bread is kept in boxes under the food preparation surfaces, where all manner of bugs are crawling around, and how, every now and then, one can see mice running around in the corners. There is also talk about how pre-prepared and half-cooked meat is kept for days and only fully prepared when there is an order, and that people have found hairs, pieces of glass and even nails from somebody’s finger

which still cling to pieces of meat in their hamburgers. Because it is a family business, there are objections because “everyone does everything”, so that the same person who tidies up and cleans the toilets without using gloves and taking other necessary precautions, also prepares the food so that someone else can have a day off. Aside from the rumours about food preparation, there are stories about suspicious patrons, mostly Roma, who are said to be engaged in illegal activities.

The inspections which frequently visit “the Gypsy” never find anything which would confirm either the village gossip or the claims made in the reports. There are some minor irregularities but nothing that would in any way endanger the patrons. Today, the local police unit can often be seen there – as patrons – and many young people wrap up their weekend’s partying by “going for a burger at the Gypsies”. In the meantime, the business flourishes and the gossip dies out completely. Nowadays people often order food from home, which is a new option introduced by the restaurant. Because of the high standards maintained – which have been verified by the regular inspections – the credibility of the restaurant and the trust of ever more numerous patrons only increases. In the end, it was precisely the numerous inspections that assured people that they were choosing the right place from which to order food.

The Chinese restaurant in Novi Beograd

Two girlfriends decide to have a Chinese dinner. One of them, who is financially well off and mostly frequents upscale restaurants in town – those she calls “verified” – suggests a Chinese restaurant in Novi Beograd. When they arrive, the other girl, who doesn’t frequent elite restaurants but is familiar with her friend’s habits, is completely confounded. From the outside, the restaurant seems a bit dodgy – nestled between buildings, it’s almost unnoticeable and it certainly doesn’t fit the profile of the places that her friend usually goes to. The inside of the restaurant is snug and has a nice atmosphere, but again it’s completely unlike the other places that the girl has been to with her friend. The restaurant itself is quite small, but it doesn’t lack hygiene: everything is tidy and seems – at least at first glance – to be clean. There are four tables with cotton tablecloths on each side, metal chairs and a printed menu on each table. The interior is otherwise simple – two mirrors and a picture, which might be a detail from Chinese tradition. Across from the door there is a counter where food is delivered from the kitchen, which is situated in the back. When they have ordered their meals, the girl asks her well-off friend how she even knew about this place and how come this modest restaurant was her place of choice for Chinese cuisine.

Her friend gives her an unexpected explanation: seeing as the Chinese man who owns the restaurant is new to the catering business and new in this part of town,

some unexpected things happened, which, inadvertently provided him with great publicity. Namely, the other caterers and owners of similar small fast food joints in the neighborhood saw the Chinese man as threatening competition because his restaurant offered something new and interesting to the population at an affordable price. Before the Chinese restaurant opened, the other caterers had often reported each other to different state inspections and there were frequent altercations aimed at eliminating the competition. But, in light of recent events in the neighborhood, the caterers had united with the intention of eliminating the new competition, by focusing their reports to the state inspections on one caterer – the Chinese man. Since he opened for business, the Chinese man always had different inspections nosing around – financial inspections, market inspections and, most frequently, sanitary inspections, which are the subject of the largest number of reports. These reports – which again is an open secret – mostly came from the other local caterers. Most of the reports to the inspection referred to the poor hygiene in the restaurant which certainly affects the quality of the food on offer. There are stories about how the restaurant gets its meat from sick and underdeveloped animals, which the Chinese man gets at a minimum price or that the meat doesn’t have the necessary veterinary health certificate. The stories usually went like this: “... I know the guy that he gets the meat from, you don’t want to know what he feeds those animals... and how he keeps them... the last thing you want to do is eat that.” The contents of the malicious rumours that attracted the inspections get more imaginative over time. People were saying that a patron once found hairs in his meal as well as bits of raw meat which might not actually be meat, which had a specific rotten and rancid smell, which they try to cover up with strong spices for which Chinese cuisine is renowned anyway – strong spices being the only way to hide, at least to some extent, the fact that the ingredients in the food were dodgy. There was also talk about how someone got food poisoning at the restaurant and that they “barely made it” and people “personally saw” where and what kind of vegetables the Chinese man buys and that these are stale and of the lowest quality, which saves him a lot of money. Stories were also circulated about the personal (un)hygiene of the employees who live in crowded rooms with no running water, because they can’t afford better accommodation. Ultimately there were stories about how the food in the restaurant isn’t kept in cooling facilities – which makes it spoil easily – and that the restaurant recycled leftovers by serving them to new guests. This was especially said about rice and vegetables which are a staple of Chinese cuisine and which aren’t extensively altered by preparation so this can “pass unnoticed”.

These stories circulated around town. It was always someone else who “heard” about the incidents, and the Chinese caterer had a lot of problems because of this.

However, the numerous and frequent inspections were never able to confirm any of the reports and malicious rumours. The operation of the restaurant was up to all standards which were confirmed by numerous certificates issued by the state inspections. This way the Chinese man inadvertently got good publicity despite the stories. The certificates issued by the inspections made the restaurant safe for the increasing number of patrons. The Chinese man not only succeeded in his business, but news of his specific circumstances traveled fast and earned him the reputation of one of the best Chinese restaurants in the city.

BASIC FORMULA AND MESSAGE CARRIERS

The basic formula of the story is made up of actions performed by four different actors. These actors are:

- The Gypsy, the Chinese man – the stranger, the other
- Proprietors of other shops – competition
- The inspection service – organs/emissaries of the state
- Serbs, Romanians – us, our people

They perform these actions:

- Opening a tavern, a burger joint – a shop with food
- Making reports to the inspection because of poor hygiene, bad quality of food etc. – reporting to the inspection
- Frequent inspections – positive reports by the inspection service
- Many young people wind up “at the Gypsy’s”, more patrons come to the Chinese restaurant – a large number of patrons (business is booming)

The two key relations that characterise the legend are:
 1. opposition: US (Serbs, Romanians) - OTHERS (Gypsies, Chinese)

2. a cause-effect sequence of undefined direction:
 CONTROL - QUALITY

The message carriers are usual and widespread; they consist of made up of stories about food preparation and stories about success.

1. Food stores, grocery shops, diners, restaurants, taverns, food stands, burger joints, solitary fast food shops or franchises like “McDonald’s” always garner attention and become the focus of folk forms, which is in the nature of things. People have to eat but they can get food poisoning, they can get ill or even die from eating the wrong thing. Because of this, stories that have food as their basic theme are always listened to carefully and in turn used to send messages not pertaining to food.

The transformation of the process of producing food for consumption that occurred over time was followed by a transformation of the legends that speak of food contamination. Legends from the 19th century (or earlier) considered all food prepared outside the home or the kitchen, and food not prepared by a familiar cook, a family member or other member of the community to be suspect. Because of this, taverns and bakeries were considered places where food was contaminated by adding the meat of cats and dogs. In the modern age, the local bakery or the local tavern have become a part of the Us-group, and a familiar baker, butcher or cook or restaurant owner, who have been part of the local community for generations, warrant that the chicken meat actually comes from chickens and isn’t part rat. On the other hand, the depersonalised fast food chain, as a far off and unfamiliar producer of food, became someone who can contaminate it. “Anxiety and guilt arise from the change from eating personally prepared food to eating what profit-making enterprises serve; these emotions have been projected onto the commercial establishment, and transformed into fear.” (Fine, 1980, 232)

	Us-group	Far-off, depersonalized, others
19th century Pickwick’s Wellerism (Charles Dickens)	Home	Bakery, butcher shop, tavern
20th century Kentucky fried rat (G.A. Fine)	local bakery/butcher shop/ tavern	Fast food chain

Pickwick’s Wellerisms are, actually, urban legends of the time, included by Charles Dickens in his books (Bear, 1983, 173-183; Simpson, 1983, 462-470), and are an example of 19th century stories about contaminated food. These stories can often be told in a xenophobic framework and thus become the carriers of xenophobic messages,

because it is explicitly stated that the proprietor of the tavern or bakery that produces the contaminated food is either a complete newcomer and stranger, or the member of an ethnic minority.

The legend of the Chinese restaurant in Novi Beograd is a bricolage of the classical urban legend about the Chi-

nese restaurant known all over the planet, combined with the legend of the immigrants from the Far East who eat cats and dogs (Brunvand, 1984). The new legend quotes old legends, putting the contents of oral storytelling into a written document. The superficiality of such bricolage is evident in shifting into another genre without accommodating for narration, because something which is in the domain of rumours and which is told as a rumour becomes the written text of a "report to the inspection". When the legend states that "people talk" or "people spread rumours", or even when the legend uses the qualifier "malicious rumours", it shows that the old legend is being used to qualify the attempts of the competition to undermine the Chinese restaurant in accordance with the intentions of the new legend on the narrative level.

2. The second usual message carriers are stories about success. Because they enable comparison, imitation or can act as a warning to each listener, they are also listened to eagerly. They can carry a message about success itself through the ways in which it is achieved, but also to other messages not directly pertaining to success. (Kovačević, 2007)

Stories about success are popular with audiences and have a high potential for diffusion since they represent regular ethno-manuals for succeeding in life. These stories can carry a message in two basic ways: firstly, the story "provides" patterns, ways, paths and recipes for success that one should learn and then apply. Secondly, the story about success can carry other messages that don't have much to do with the ways of achieving success represented in the story.

TOLERANCE OR ASSIMILATION?

Does the legend speak about tolerance as recognition of the Other, with all the properties that constitute its otherness, or about assimilation as recognition of others once they are not different anymore?

The relationship between the actors in the legend (Us : Others) can't be interpreted without clarifying the nature of the empirical relationship inspection – good food, which is here generalized as CONTROL : QUALITY. The relationship between control and quality is not defined in the narratives except stochastically in the sense that they always occur in connection with one another. However, in the narratives this relationship isn't one of causality. Because of this it is possible to isolate two possible sequences:

CONTROL causes QUALITY and
QUALITY causes THE RESULTS OF THE CONTROL

Some sort of quantitative approach would, through the use of a sociological or socio-psychological questionnaire, probably be able to determine the percentage of those who interpret the relationship between quality and

control in either of the two ways, including both audiences and storytellers. The estimated result of such "research" would be that, for instance, 56% of the listeners understood the legend one way and 44% understood it the other way, as well as that the percentages don't vary too much among the storytellers. But, these kinds of results wouldn't help the interpretation nor would they explain the ambiguity of the legend in any way. Instead, we need to scrutinise the meaningful aspects of both proposed relationships between Control and Quality.

The first option consists of the idea that frequent control (with bigger or lesser objections) leads to the removal of the causes of the objections and through this process lead to the prime quality of the food sold by the establishment in question.

The second option is that the inspection never finds anything to be wrong with the food in the first place, and that the initial high quality of the food caused the positive findings of the inspection crew.

These two possible relations between Control and Quality determine the two possible attitudes pertaining to the Us : Others relation. The first attitude toward the Other implies that it is necessary to direct Others and make them accept Our rules (rules about hygiene, standards of food production and preparation) and that it is only when we manage to articulate (assimilate) them that we can allow them to engage in a business as important as the preparation and selling of food. The second attitude implies that Others' rules are the same as our own and that our attempt to catch them red-handed at not knowing or not obeying our rules is just the result of the wrong assumptions We have about Others.

These two attitudes have their roots in two sets of ideas that stem from two different social theories.

The first attitude has its roots in the thesis that social (state) intervention in the market is necessary and that the market itself isn't a safe or timely mechanism of regulating vital issues like the consumption of food. Through a system of control, the state oversees and directs the blind market race and proscribes the rules that keep the race from harming citizens. Its influence is a double blessing, since, through quality control, it enables the participant in the market race to succeed in his endeavor.

The second attitude also includes the motivation for the control, since the results of the testing of Others' behaviour were positive for the Others. The motivation for "sending" an inspection to establishments owned by Others is on the side of the market race in which the Other, as a new participant, can alter the income of Us. Therefore those who report being indigenous, domestic Us rely on the assumption that Others are different, of a lower class, not familiar with Our rules, and hence worthy of suspicion; so they try to eliminate them from the market race. In social theory, this kind of attitude has an explanation in xenophobia, nationalism and violence towards minorities in an attempt to push the better, more

skilled or just new contender out of the game.

The first message of these stories is assimilating and, basically, implies that Others are different and that they can live with us only if they learn our rules. The other message is anti-xenophobic on the surface, in the sense that it denounces those who fear that the Others will put Us in peril through their quality or their mere existence which, in turn, makes it necessary to qualify them as Others and bar them from relevant areas of life.

Only now is it possible to answer the question of why the legend remains somewhat incomplete and allows for ambiguous interpretations. And all that without a statistical analysis of the audience and the storytellers! The legend is being told in a society in which both ideological and political concepts are present and hence it remains the same, containing within itself heterogeneous and incompatible ideas, while these contents themselves independently make up other legends and public discourses.

However, these legends do not preach tolerance of the Otherness of Others. They just show that Others can become Us through a form of training which We will impose, organise and oversee, ultimately making Them, completely and voluntarily, introject all the relevant rules. But, these legends do exclude essentialist ideas about identity, considering it to be susceptible to socialisation (acculturation, assimilation). Identity is not acquired through birth, blood, skin colour, mother's milk or any of the other essentialist transmitters; rather it is a relatively stable construct, something which can be imitated, adopted, learned... Hence, the first characteristic of these legends is that they are antiessentialist.

As far as preaching tolerance is concerned, the legend about the Chinese restaurant in Novi Beograd does not speak about meals made up of inedible or tabooed animals, or those that the majority of the population consider grossly inedible finding their way onto the menu. The legend of the Chinese restaurant doesn't speak about a "new dish" like that attracting a lot of customers to the restaurant in Novi Beograd. A legend like that would firstly be a legend of tolerance and secondly even a legend about the reception of the Otherness of Others. Neither

does the legend of the "Gypsy's tavern" in Banatsko Novo Selo speak of an element of the ascribed identity which would primarily disturb the majority of the population, but would, through a legendary turn of events, become acceptable or even favoured, which would lead to an onslaught of new customers. On the contrary, the Chinese menu in Novi Beograd and the entirety of the "Gypsy's Tavern" in Banatsko Novo Selo in the legends are made up of elements that are basically "acceptable" and which are the result of the proprietors of these establishments striving to provide exactly what the environment determines as the norm.

The same can be said of the legends described by Campion-Vincent. Gentlemanly behaviour (payment of a hotel bill or sending flowers), sharing selflessly (the last biscuit) or the responsible compensation for damage that was done are traits and behaviours which we ascribe to Us: therefore, anyone acting in that manner has the chance to stop being an Other and should be treated like one of Us. Someone who has become rich in accordance with Our rules must become a part of Us. The same goes for reputations acquired in accordance with the rules that We make and which enable someone who was originally an Other to occupy any and even the highest place in the social hierarchy. Legends recorded in Serbia leave both options open: that the transformation occurred voluntarily as the result of the newcomers striving to adapt to their new surroundings, as well as the possibility that the environment forced the Others to adapt to the social norm through repression and the strict enforcement of rules.

Based on all this, it is possible to reformulate what these legends are actually about. They are not about the tolerance of the Otherness of Others. Also, they do not essentialise identities nor do they petrify those which were already constructed; rather they speak of the possibility of overcoming them. To use an older anthropological terminology, these legends speak about acculturation and assimilation. They are stories about the reconstruction of ethno-constructs, which occurs in spite of various identity petrifiers and various types of re-exoticising.

URBANE LEGENDE MED VEČKULTURNOSTJO IN ASIMILACIJO

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POVZETEK

Med preučevanjem urbanih legend si je francoska folkloristka Véronique Campion-Vincent zastavila vprašanje, ali se nekatere novejšje legende zavzemajo za strpnost. Legendi »Dogodek v dvigalu« ali »pogoltnjena vstopnica« odražata drugačen odnos do Drugih, kot ga lahko zasledimo v klasičnih ksenofobnih urbanih legendah. Tak, nov odnos lahko opazimo tudi v dveh legendah, zabeleženih v Srbiji, in sicer v legendi o ciganovi gostilni in legendi o kitajski restavraciji. Po analizi sodeč, dvoumnost teh dveh »strpnostnih legend« ne izhaja iz dejstva, da govorita o ksenofobičnem okolju, hkrati pa je njun razplet »pridiga« o strpnosti, ampak bolj iz dejstva, da se »pridiganje« bolj nanaša na tiste Druge, ki so prestali proces akulturacije, se asimilirali in sprejeli pravila »naše« kulture. Take legende se ne zavzemajo za strpnost do Drugačnosti Drugih, ampak za strpnost do Drugih, ki se trudijo ali pa jim je že uspelo postati »Mi«.

Ključne besede: urbane legende, zagovarjanje strpnosti, Srbija, 'Drugi', Kitajci, Romi, restavracija, akulturacija

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