

“WHO RULES THE WORLD?” – CASE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN AND LATVIAN PRESS ARTICLES

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Introduction

Formation of civil society is a long process. It is quite easy to reestablish institutions (or create new ones) according to democratic standards and requirements, sometimes legislative work is quite successful, but obedience to the law not very much. But it is much more difficult to change mentality, attitudes and values rooted in the society. It is long and complex process in which a lot of actors and factors are taking part. It is universally agreed that all kinds of media contribute a lot and to identity formation (Anderson 1994, Gellner 1996) and to shaping of public space, common values etc. (Baudrillard 2009, McLuhan 2003). And in Lithuania and in Latvia mass media is highly trusted (more than 50 % of population) so and impact on societies mood, values and attitudes is very significant as well.

In society is common to believe, that plenty of information and access to ways of its spread is direct source of individual socialization, and the less media is accessible the less socialized individual is. We relate information to communication and because of that, in words of Baudrillard, “we all are the participators of this myth” (Baudrillard 2009: 96), it is – the process of simulation, creating hyper reality, illusion. Society trust on information it

is getting, according to Baudrillard, the process is double-barrelled as the archaic community's beliefs on myths: it is believed and not believed at the same time. Because of this ambiguity society escape from doom of the eternal misunderstandings and that's why, in author words, there is always some trap for the critic, who treats society as naïve and silly" (Baudrillard 2009: 97–98).

Media, all kind of its spread ways, creates impression of individual acting in participation of social processes. But, appealing to Baudrillard, we could say, that sometimes this kind of participation stays only as an impression. When we read about some facts in the press, we subconsciously transfer ourselves to the epicenter of this, but we do not become actors. Our reactions often stay only as the reaction for ourselves. This is interplay, which John Thomson calls indirect supposed interplay. It is monological and unidirectional, that's why it does not connect people directly and is called only as "supposed" (Giddens 2005: 433). Nevertheless, Baudrillard's mentioned hyper reality conditions us and society takes the world structured by media as a real.

McLuhan maintains, that "media itself is a message" (McLuhan 2003: 201), so society is impacted with media existence. Analyzing press as one of the information spread ways, McLuhan compares newspapers and book influence on society and its member's relations: "The book is a form of private confession, which gives us "opinion". The press is a group confession letting community participation. The press could "colorize" facts informing or not about them [...] book page from the inside reveals authors story of his spiritual adventures while newspaper page reveals society actions and interactions story" (McLuhan 2003: 201). So, press not only assure participation for society, but also creates facts, creates news. We get filtrated, selected information and only to this information we could react. According to McLuhan: *press has created image, that society is consecution of solid actions, connected to time and place line <...> just after press has realized, that presentation of news is not rehearsal of facts or messages, but direct cause of it, everything has changed <...> publicist <...> could force newspaper to say what he wants* (McLuhan 2003: 209).

So in this place Baudrillard and McLuhan point of views synchronize: society, despite real or assumed participation in the process of information spread, depends on mass media instrumentality, on selection criteria and/or aims of mass media interest. Often information we get could create just illusory image of reliability and reality.

Latvian case

Latvian monthly magazine *Kapitals (Capital)* August issue in 2000 had main theme *Jews rule the world* (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 31), in Lithuania daily *Respublika (The Republic)* in 2004 February a number of articles entitled *Who rules the world?* was published (Respublika, 2004) in the text giving the answer that Jews and gays rule the world. For one part of the societies these publications were scandalous, other part took it for granted, saying that main statements are correct and we do live in a world like that.

Litvak history is very rich, interesting but and very dramatic and tragic as well. When modern Lithuania and Latvia were creating from second half of XIXth century ethnic identity and languages – Lithuanian and Latvian – were more and more favored, so in general so called national minorities found them in a different, sometime difficult situation. Plurality of national minorities in Lithuania and Latvia supported the idea of creation of independent Lithuanian and Latvian states, Jewish minorities as well. Members of Jewish communities participated in battles for independence on Lithuanian and Latvian side, representatives of them took part in Parliamentary activities, were members of Governments (for example Max Soloveitschik in Lithuania, Paul Mintz in Latvia) and municipalities as well. On the other hand in interwar press and public sphere as well, quite strong debates took place how in general national minorities should be treated on one hand, and Jewish society on the other. Because and in Lithuania and in Latvia Jewish society was presented with a lot of negative stereotypes, prejudices etc. In both cases when Lithuanian or Latvian languages began to be used as permanent printing languages (at the end of XVIIIth – beginning of XIXth century and on), Jews usually were presented negatively (for example, in Lithuania S. Kušėliauskas *Talmudas žydy*, 1906, in Latvia *ABC book*, 1787 etc.). Short description would look like that: Jews are greedy, they control markets and trades, they are concentrated in cities, they are not Christians, they do not have any sentiments to Lithuania or Latvia. Generally speaking they are more threatening than helping. Of course in daily life situation was a little bit different, sometimes there were conflicts, but there are a lot of testimonies and memoirs remembering friendly atmosphere and good relationship among different national groups (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 15). Generally speaking the picture is much more complex that we can imagine now and still more researches should be done on minorities and dominant groups relationship in Baltic region. On the other hand already now

it is seen that there were certain tensions between Jewish and Lithuanian, Latvian communities from the very beginning of national revivals of these groups till the beginning of WW II.

In this chronological period and in Lithuanian and in Latvian literature Jews did not become more visible characters, but at the same time they were quite significant part of Lithuania's and Latvia's societies. Usually Jews are portrayed as different, aliens. For example in Anna Brigadere's novel *Dievs, Daba, Darbs* (*God, Nature, Work*) a mother brought to her daughters fresh bread on Easter morning, they are happy with such a delivery but than mother says you won't eat if you'll knew where from the bread is. One of the daughters says "You brought it from a Jew" and she does not know whether to eat, or to throw the bread away (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 15). In Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius novel *Silkės* (*Herings*) old vagabond Jew is portrayed. He is traveling from village to village selling some goods and earning some money. But whenever he appears young girls and especially boys are trying to play some jokes on him, but again older people, parents usually, try to stop them and protect this old man. This negative or neutral image of Jews has a little bit changed into more positive in Lithuania and Latvia in 1930, but till WW II Jews did not become popular characters in literature of these two countries.

First Soviet occupation and than Nazi occupation totally changed the situation. Already during first Soviet occupation part of Lithuanian and Latvian societies believed that Jews contributed a lot to the states occupation by Bolsheviks. Of course it was not so and Jews suffer from the occupation as well as the other national groups (Levin 1994) but one more additional and emotionally very strong aspect of Jews being aliens emerged in Lithuanian and Latvian mentality. Jews were already seen not only as competitors in social sphere but and as a group disloyal to the state and traitors to the Lithuanians and Latvians. Nazi propaganda very quickly grasped this new sentiment and turned it into powerful tool of hatred. That's why after WW II there were almost no Jews left in Lithuania and Latvia but ignorant or even intolerant sentiments and attitudes towards Jewish community remained.

When Lithuania and Latvia regain their independence in 1990 Jewish population in both countries was very small. It perished not only in Holocaust but and during soviet occupation Jews from USSR tried flee the country. In daily life there were no conflicts between Jews and Lithuanian or Latvians. Of course some kind of vandal anti-Semitic actions took place

(and still are) in one or another place in Lithuania or Latvia. At the same time after 1990 both Lithuanian and Latvian societies had to face the recent past which in collective memory was not presented as it really was. And Lithuanians and Latvians first of all tend to feel themselves as victims of WW II in general, or both Soviet and Nazis occupations in particular. Question of Lithuanians and Latvians participation in Jewish killings was raised. Common believe would be that Jews helped Soviets in 1940 with the occupation and if some Lithuanians or Latvians participated in mass killings during Nazi occupation so they were criminals, unsocial persons etc. Recent researches suggest different information and in social composition and in numbers of participants in the Holocaust in Lithuanian and Latvia. Of course such new interpretation had shocked some part of Lithuanian and Latvian societies; some were saying that these researches are just part of Jewish propaganda. Other tiger, especially in Lithuania is the question of Jewish property restitution – the question is still unsolved and from time to time is adding additional tensions in Lithuanian society. Generally speaking Jewish – Lithuanian and Jewish – Latvian relationships still are under the construction and clarification as much as it is possible and in historical and in nowadays perspectives. Sometimes tensions between these two communities have not historical background but simply are result of manipulation as it happened in Latvia in 2000 and in Lithuania in 2004.

Mentioned Latvian magazine *Kapitals* published 9 pages article by Normunds Lisovskis “explaining” actions taken by Jews. At the very beginning of the publication author notices that this story is “without prejudice, hatred or flattery” (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 32). So the reader should believe that author is sincere and his assumptions and conclusions are well grounded, based on facts and research. But at the same time he is advocating for Latvian word *žids*, claiming that it is old Latvian word and it should be put back to use. Because historically this word gained negative, pejorative connotation and is used trying to insult Jews. In modern Latvian language the neutral word for Jews is *ebrejs* (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 33). The same happened and in Russian language old word *zid* became pejorative one and instead of it *evrej* is used, but nothing like that is in Lithuanian language – the term remained the same for all the time – *žydas*.

So this first encouragement already suggests some kind of revisionism – why shouldn't we use old Latvian word, and the fact that this word is already an insult for Latvian Jewish community is not taken into consideration at all. More than that author tries to say that in whole modern époque

and world Jews were seen as alien (so again, why not to use proper name to call them). N. Lisovskis quotes:

Although Jews are disseminated they form a united nation, alien for their country of residence – wrote Thomas Jefferson, an American statesman of the 18th century. George Washington, as well as many other world famous people, has said even sharper words (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 32).

Such a manipulation in this case is important for two reasons. First of all the reader is shown that ideas suggested in the article are not new – a lot of famous persons had shared such a position that means that it is in a way legitimized. Second, Jews are presented living all over the world but at the same time having common sense and some kind of feeling of mysterious unity. At this point one should not forget what was briefly presented in this paper – still disputable interpretations about WW II and occupations, questions of war crimes, Jewish property restoration etc. Author again is suggesting for his readers not to be naïve – if they are dealing with Latvian Jews that means that they are dealing with worldwide Jewish population. One should predict, let's say in case of Jewish property restitution, since the question is solved and the property restored that doesn't not necessarily mean that Latvian Jews will be owners of that property – maybe they will give it to Jews from Africa, united States of America, Russia etc. So protective logic would say it is better to do nothing otherwise we could not be sure about final result. But N. Lisovkis does not stop at this point carrying on his message – all our daily life and surroundings are already dominated by Jews:

It is morning. You wear “Levi's” jeans, produced by the Hass family company, “Reebok” sports shoes, produced by the Paul Fairman company. You get into your “Citroen” car, produced by the Adam Citroen concern. You switch on the radio, where you hear the voice of Paula Abdul, but maybe you prefer Billy Joel, Lenny Kravitz, Leonard Cohen, Eric Clapton and Marilyn Manson? (...) It is an everyday story, which might be continued and continued, and only few people know that all the above mentioned names are the names of well known Jews (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 32).

So according to articles logic Jews not only form alien units in different countries at the same time having mysterious relationships between themselves but also they have merged in our daily, cozy and comfortable life so deeply that we are already not able to distinguish them. That's why awareness should be raised and author feels doing so. Historically looking his argumentation is not new at all – ideas of worldwide Jewish plot, their efforts to dominate the world via daily life, economics etc. were, and unfortunately

are, circulating from Middle ages. So the main thing for author is to pass the message that even unwillingly we are somehow supporting Jews and their capital. So hidden message could be – stop consuming these goods produced by Jews, instead support national – Latvian market whenever it is possible. Again historically looking such rhetoric – using and open addresses – was popular and widely used in Latvia and in Lithuania (Poland as well) from second half of XIXth century till the soviet occupation. Then it is quite popular to use slogans – buy from Latvians, or buy from Lithuanians, do not support strangers etc. In some hidden form this kind of propaganda can be seen and in quotation given above.

But the article does not only repeat old stereotypes and prejudices it suggests and some kind of revisionism trying to show that Jews are granted too much attention and too many rights:

The Holocaust has given the Jews the status of "holy cows": either you only speak well of them, or you don't speak of them at all (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 32).

As if Jews are abusing Holocaust or trying to present it in unreal too boosted numbers is one of the most popular Holocaust denial narratives. Again here should be kept in mind still uncertain situation in public space and discussions about Holocaust in Latvia and in Lithuania as well. Some parts of Latvian and Lithuanian societies still keep to the position that if some locals participated in Holocaust so they were criminals, Jews actively collaborated with soviets and red army in 1940, but no one is speaking about that. Briefly speaking such statement again encouraged tensions in Latvian society putting Jews in unfavorable position – as if they are not willing to any kind of argumentation, they all the time are demanding something and simultaneously are trying to dominate as many spheres as possible. Needless to say that such a publication provoked a discussion in Latvia and encouraged anti Jewish expressions and sentiments.

Lithuanian case

In Lithuanian daily *Respublika* a number of articles by Vytas Tomkus entitled *Who rules the world?* was published. This time the title is not so clear as in *Kapitals* case, on the other hand this title is more intriguing – the answer is not given, but right under the title a caricature is placed. There the globe is hold by two persons. By their clothes and general image for

the reader it is not difficult to guess that one of them represents a Jew the other – a homosexual. So in this case the reader is already intrigued by the presented picture. Ambivalent attitude towards Jewish – Lithuanian relationship was already a little bit explained. Attitude towards sexual minorities was (and still is) quite negative in Lithuanian society. Sexual minorities are usually presented as those who are trying to destroy moral, family life, try to encourage young generation to get involved in homosexual relationship instead of heterosexual. What is the link according to the articles between Jews and homosexuals? First of all it is conspiracy theories and Jews and homosexuals are very powerful, they have their closed circles and are able to manipulate public opinion, other people etc. And of course those who are trying to unmask them are attacked very severely. Vytas Tomkus in these articles is presenting himself as such a fighter; he is trying, as well as in Latvian case, to persuade his readers about conspiracy and plot, just in this case Jews and homosexuals are dominating not in daily life but trying to manipulate public opinion, are very powerful in media world and if they are not controlling the media themselves so they are making tremendous influence to the media by bribing it, funding etc.

Two main strategic partners for Lithuania – European Union and United States of America in the article also are negatively presented, because Brussels is referred as “nest of pedophiles” (Respublika 2004). USA is described as follows:

We have to be very careful with Americans. Because USA is ruled by Jews. They are very very clever. We Lithuanian have to learn from them a lot. Tolerance, for example, for each other. Protection first of all for Lithuanians, not for foreigners. (Respublika, 2004). (Here and forth translations into English done by the author – L. V.)

V. Tomkus construction is well grounded. Of course it is based on anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudices. But at the same time in the discussion he could say that I am not spreading anti-Semitic views, on the contrary I am setting Jews as an example for Lithuanians. So the text is not only full of anti-Semitic and homophobic stereotypes, but and well organized – leaving space for further manipulations and self defense. That it was well prepared campaign shows and the fact that under the same title V. Tomkus had published three articles one after another. Besides he openly says:

Now I'll have to write very carefully, to pick up every word, to stay vigilant, to speak only half of my lips, because several times I have already suffered because of my long tongue (Respublika 2004).

And he suggests some kind of double conspiracy theory. Jews are controlling politics and economic, together with homosexuals they control mass media and public sphere, and homosexuals try to control sphere of morality trying to destroy old moral values and propose the new one. They too often appear in public, TV is giving too much attention to them etc. V. Tomkus argues:

Whatever program on TV you turn on everywhere the same. If it won't stop immediately our children soon will be asking their parents: is it true that babies are coming to this world through ass? <...> How should we protect our children from bad people if society is not able to recognize them? (Respublika 2004).

As it was mentioned and in this case and in Latvian publication case authors are trying to raise knowledge in the societies using old but still effective scheme of scape goat. Main causes of some difficulties in the societies is attributed to two vulnerable groups with quite a lot of negative features, the groups who tend to manipulate others, have some unclear and immoral goals, so instead of integration or mutual understanding Lithuanian and Latvian societies were once more presented by negative images of Jews and in Lithuania homosexuals.

Part of Latvian and Lithuanian societies supported the publications, some thought that these statements are true and something should be done. Some part raised the voice against these publications. In Lithuanian it was only civil societies voice – some persons and organizations published open letter saying that V. Tomkus publications are propagating anti-Semitism and homophobia and author should take responsibility, union of Lithuanian journalists also published it's position saying that V. Tomkus publications are mismatching with journalist ethics and only after continuous demands V. Tomkus case was given to the trial and he received some financial punishment. Because he was able to prove that he is using constitutional right of freedom of the word and self expression, his given examples were just illustration to his statements and he was not willing to encourage anti - Semitism and homophobia. Briefly speaking and this time V. Tomkus did not received proper sanctions and once more was able to present himself as a persons who dears to speak truth and receives punishment for that. Till this day V. Tomkus is main owner and editor of *Respublika* and still maintains his line and no one really knows when new publications of such a kind will appear.

In Latvia society also was divided, but some activists as well addressed and society, and various institutions. Latvian Prime Minister and Minister

of Foreign Affairs condemned the article. And editor in chief of *Kapitals* Guntis Rozenbergs recognized his moral responsibility and chose to resign (Reinsch Campbell 2004: 33–34).

Conclusion

Latvian and Lithuania societies still have negative stereotypes about Jewish minority. Some of them are part of world wide anti-Semitic ideas; some have local roots coming from second half of XIXth century, first republics of Latvia and Lithuania, Soviet and Nazi occupations. These different memories and stereotypes of course do not contribute to mutual understanding and sometimes are used for manipulative goals as it happened in *Kapitals* and *Respublika* cases.

Stereotypes used in these articles are old and well known but still effective. In *Kapitals* case Jews were presented through daily life as if people even do not think about the goods they are using and to whom money for these goods are given. In *Respublika* case Jews were presented as those who dominate economic and politic and together with homosexuals are dominating in mass media and shaping public opinion. In both cases authors of the articles present themselves as those who have valuable and important information and are willingly sharing it with their readers.

Having in mind possible effects of mass media these stereotypes negatively influenced relationship between Latvian and Lithuanian societies and so called minorities. Some part of societies in Latvia and Lithuania do believe that expressed ideas are true and some measures should be taken against Jews and homosexuals domination.

In Lithuanian case V. Tomkus received financial punishment for his publications but still is practicing journalist and owner of the daily *Respublika*. No Lithuanian politician took these articles into account and expressed critical attitude to such anti – Semitic and homophobic position. Critical position was formulated and maintained by civil society activists. In Latvian case local politicians – Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed their critical position towards *Kapitals* publications and chief editor of the journal left his position sharing his moral responsibility of the contents of the journal.

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Abstract

In the article two cases in Latvian and Lithuanian press are analyzed. First publication appeared in year 2000 Latvian magazine *Kapitals*, second in year 2004 in Lithuanian daily *Respublika*. Both articles claim that Jews rule the world. In *Kapitals* case publication is straightly entitled – “Jews rule the world”, *Respublika* case leaves some space for interpretation “Who rules the world?” from the texts it is clear that two groups are involved in the process, not only Jews, as in Latvian case, but also homosexuals. Because of negative stereotypes image of Jewish community in Latvia and in Lithuania has a lot of negative aspects and usage of negative stereotypes could provoke anti-Semitic attitudes. Homosexuals in Lithuania are one of the most stigmatized groups also usually referred only in negative connotations. Both publications are based on conspiracy theories that relatively small and in society unpopular groups in fact are very powerful and can strongly affect life of society. To publication in Latvia reacted not only civil society, foreign diplomats but Latvia’s Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign affairs condemning such a position, editor of the magazine resigned from his position. In Lithuania only civil society and foreign diplomats reacted, local politicians did not pay attention to the issues. Author of the articles (and owner of the newspaper as well) received some financial punishment without any adequate sanctions further.

„KAS VALDO PASAULĮ?“ – LIETUVOS IR LATVIJOS PERIODINIŲ STRAIPSNIŲ ANALIZĖ

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojami du antisemitizmą ir homofobiją skleidžiantys atvejai Latvijos ir Lietuvos periodikoje. Pirmoji publikacija pasirodė 2000 metų rugpjūčio mėnesio Latvijos žurnale „Kapitals“, antroji – 2004 metų keliuose vasario mėnesio laikraščio „Respublika“

numeriuose. Abiejose publikacijose kalbama apie tai, kad žydai valdo pasaulį. „Kapitals“ publikacija taip ir vadinasi – „Žydai valdo pasaulį“, o „Respublikos“ pasirinktas pavadinimas suteikia interpretacijos galimybę – „Kas valdo pasaulį?“ Iš teksto aiškėja atsakymas, kad tai daro dvi grupės – ne tik žydai, kaip latviškos publikacijos atveju, bet ir homoseksualūs žmonės. Dėl išsišaknijusių stereotipų žydų tautinės grupės įvaizdis ir Latvijoje, ir Lietuvoje turi daug neigiamų atspalvių, ir bet koks stereotipų kartojimas gali sustiprinti ar išprovokuoti antisemitizmo proveržį. Homoseksualūs žmonės Lietuvoje yra viena labiausiai stigmatizuojamų grupių, taip pat dažnai apibūdinamų tik neigiamais stereotipais. Abi publikacijos grįstos sąmokslų teorijomis, kad sąlyginai mažos ir visuomenėje nepopuliarios grupės iš tiesų yra labai galingos ir įtakingos, slapčia veikiančios visuomenės gyvenimą.

Publikacija Latvijoje sulaukė ne tik visuomenininkų, užsienio diplomatų, bet ir Latvijos ministro pirmininko bei užsienio reikalų ministro viešo pasmerkimo, o žurnalo redaktoriui atsistatydino. Lietuvoje pasipiktinimą pareiškė tik visuomenininkai ir užsienio diplomatai, tačiau jokios rimtesnės vietinių politikų reakcijos nesulaukta. Straipsnių autorius (jis ir laikraščio leidėjas) buvo nubaustas pinigine bauda, tačiau nesulaukė adekvačių sankcijų.