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Humour in German media coverage of Poland and Poles¹

Media play a significant role in perceiving the world and constructing our conception of reality since the samples of social discourses exposed in the media have a strong influence on the shaping of the image of nations, opinions, attitudes, and hierarchies of values. The present article discusses humorous content in German press, television, and Internet coverage from recent years, which has reinforced a negative image of Poland and Poles in German minds. In the introductory part, the attention is focused on presenting the essence and functions of humor in the light of contemporary humor research, with a special emphasis placed on the interdependencies between humor, language, and discourse on the one hand, and ethnic cultures on the other, which differ in terms of preferred norms and values.

Keywords: humour, media, Poles, Germans, stereotypes

Humor w niemieckich przekazach medialnych o Polsce i Polakach

Media odgrywają znaczącą rolę w postrzeganiu świata i konstruowaniu naszego wyobrażenia o rzeczywistości, gdyż wyeksponowane przez nie wycinki dyskursów społecznych wpływają silnie na kształtowanie obrazu narodu, opinie, postawy i hierarchie wartości. W niniejszym artykule omówione zostaną treści humorystyczne w niemieckich przekazach prasowych, telewizyjnych i internetowych z ostatnich lat, które utrwały i nadal utrwalają negatywny wizerunek Polski i Polaków w świadomości Niemców. Na wstępie uwaga skoncentruje się na przedstawieniu istoty i funkcji humoru w świetle współczesnych badań humorologicznych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem zależności pomiędzy humorem, językiem i dyskursem a kulturami etnicznymi, które różnią się między sobą ze względu na preferowane przez nie wartości i normy.

Słowa kluczowe: humor, media, Polacy, Niemcy, stereotypy

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Humor in deutschen medialen Berichten über Polen und die Polen

Medien spielen eine bedeutende Rolle bei der Wahrnehmung der Welt und beim Aufbau unserer Vorstellungen über die Realität, da die von ihnen präsentierten Abschnitte sozialer Diskurse das Bild der Nation, die Meinungen, Einstellungen und Wertehierarchien stark beeinflussen. In diesem Beitrag werden humoristische Inhalte anhand deutscher Presse-, Fernseh- und Internetberichte aus den letzten Jahren behandelt, die das negative Image von Polen und den Polen im deutschen Bewusstsein gefestigt haben und weiterhin determinieren. Zu Beginn werden das Wesen und die Funktion des Humors im Lichte zeitgenössischer Humorforschung dargestellt, wobei der Beziehung zwischen Humor, Sprache sowie Diskurs und ethnischen Kulturen, die sich aufgrund ihrer Werte und Normen voneinander unterscheiden, besondere Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet wird.

Schlüsselwörter: Humor, Medien, Polen, Deutsche, Stereotype

1. Introduction

Humour is a multidimensional phenomenon and the research subject of the representatives of various academic fields, such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, linguistics, or literary studies (Kucharski 2009: 7; Rusek 2012: 117; Brzozowska, Laineste 2014: 358–359; Chłopicki 2014: 629–630; Chłopicki, Brzozowska 2017: 1–2; Wowro 2014: 197; Ochwat 2015: 34). Generally, it is claimed that humour constitutes an integral and ubiquitous part of everyday communication, while its sense derives from a system of values and beliefs that holds in a given cultural or ethnic group (Chłopicki 1995: 3–4; Bergson 2000: 11; Rusek 2012: 118). In order to understand the humorous subject-matter, one should attempt to consider it “against the background of our own time, our own epoch, and in relation to other dimensions of man” (Gajda 2000: 9).

The aim of the present article is to discuss the essence of humour in the context of ethnic humour (comic) discourse illustrated with the examples of German press, television and internet coverage about Poland which reinforce the negative and stereotypical image of Poles in German consciousness. They have aroused extreme emotions and provoked violent reactions of Polish readers as the pieces of information about Poland spread by German media do not have a purely informational character, but rather are mainly one-sided in nature, as they focus on negative phenomena. A considerable portion of texts published in media contains commentaries and opinions, “sometimes explicitly heating up public mood” (Bartmiński 2008: 27), whereas there is no rational analysis of the events which would be the outcome of the thorough and reliable checking of the sources of information (Ociepka 2000: 114; Krasnodębski 2003: 33; Szymańska 2011: 411).

2. On the essence of humour

Humour, which seems a commonplace and everyday phenomenon, is very difficult to define. Despite many attempts and research aiming at the explanation of the essence of humour, it is still impossible to provide an unambiguous and precise definition of this phenomenon, as the “extent of the phenomena that could lay claims to being comic is practically unlimited, as «comicality» is not a stable, immanent feature of objects, but rather it actualizes itself in a certain temporary situational pattern and happens to be the resultant of the activity of multifarious factors” (Buttler 2001: 8). According to Pałuszyńska (2009: 60) and Ochwat (2015: 35), humour can be regarded as a relativized value, which is dependent both upon the properties of the utterance as such, the perceptual and linguistic abilities of the sender, as well as upon the humour competence of the receiver. In consequence, the participants of an act of communication may differently perceive comic qualities and they do not necessarily have to share the sense of comicality.

In contemporary humour research, there can be indicated two most frequent ways of perceiving humour. On the one hand, humour is considered to be “a short-term emotional state of an individual associated with physiological and emotional reactions to a given situation, [...] it may concern a specific stimulus (as, e.g. in the case of jokes or comedy films), [...] and the reactions of amusement manifested in joy and laughter” (Ochwat 2015: 34). On the other hand, humour is interpreted as a constant personality trait, a benevolent attitude and the ability of discerning funny sides of the surrounding world, which is referred to as a sense of humour (Ochwat 2015: 34; Wowro 2017: 296).

Humour as a manifestation of a certain philosophy of life, a philosophy of cheerful optimism, helps not only to enhance interpersonal relations, gain acceptance more quickly and easily, and create a friendly atmosphere in a given social group, but it also may serve as mocking discreditation and thus function as a tool for ridiculing, criticizing, belittling and manipulating other people (Chłopicki 1995: 53–54; Pałuszyńska 2009: 66; Wowro 2014: 200; Wowro 2017: 296). This style of humour, referred to as aggressive humour, stems from the need to reinforce one’s own self, and is used at the expense of other people and relationships with them in order to enhance one’s self-esteem and to emphasize one’s independence (Rusek 2012: 121; Ochwat 2015: 36). The aggressive function of humour is manifested in miscellaneous forms, to which Ochwat (2015: 37–38) includes the following:

- exaggeration, i.e. the hyperbolization of some features of a phenomenon, which may concern the appearance, behaviour, situation, and personality traits;
- exaggerated caricaturing, i.e. overemphasizing some, frequently negative, physical characteristics or the nature of a phenomenon (satirical caricature)

- parody, i.e. imitation of the original with emphasising its characteristic features together with their hyperbolization, sometimes verging on the absurd;
- belittlement, i.e. transforming a given object into a phenomenon that departs from the norm;
- traversing, i.e. humiliating, degrading, and vulgarizing some qualities of phenomena which are perceived as worthwhile, respectable, or even sublime and sacred;
- depreciating caricaturing, i.e. using wide-ranging simplifications, distorting the essence of the matter by putting at the forefront secondary and insignificant traits, while disregarding the essential ones;
- irony, i.e. covert mockery, in which the hidden meaning is the negation of the literal sense;
- sarcasm, i.e. very malicious irony;
- derision, i.e. remarkably malicious mockery.

Davies (1990) and Gajda (2007) pay attention to the correlation between humour, language, discourse, and ethnic culture, pointing out to the existence of national (vernacular) comic discourses, which differ in terms of the mentality of individual nations and the values and norms preferred by them: “There is Russian laughter – laughter through tears, there is French laughter – a sophisticated sense of humour and a sparkling wit, there is English laughter – absurd humour, and also German one – coarse comicality” (Gajda 2007: 16–17). There are also differences concerning the role and the degree of the presence of humour in various spheres of life, e.g. in the case of Americans, the contribution of comic discourse to public speaking is substantial and significant, while in the case of Finns, comic elements in public discourse are regarded as undesirable (Gajda 2007: 16).

The most recent research into the sense of humour of the Europeans, conducted by a German sociologist, Benedikt Porzelt, indicates that among the European nations perceived as the most humorous are Italians, the British and the Spanish.² Poles, by contrast, alongside the Swedish and Greeks, are regarded as a nation characterized by a rather poor sense of humour. As regards the evaluation of the Polish sense of humour, there is a considerable disparity in our neighbours’ opinions: 17% of the Czechs claim that Polish people are characterized by a good sense of humour, while Germans do not vote for us at all. The majority of the respondents do not state their opinions, which suggests that they consider themselves as the most humorous. According to Polish respondents, the funniest nations are the inhabitants of the Czech Republic, Spain, and Great Britain. On

² <http://wiadomosci.com/polacy-maja-poczucia-humoru-zaskakujace-wyniki-badan-niemieckiego-socjologa/> (20.02.2018)

Table 1. The results of the questionnaire: which European country has a good sense of humour?³

	The Czech Republic	France	Greece	Spain	Holland	Germany	Poland	Sweden	Great Britain	Italy	No opinion
The Czech Republic		12	0	16	8	7	17	0	11	12	17
France	8		3	21	21	9	1	3	5	18	11
Greece	10	12		24	0	4	4	0	14	20	12
Spain	10	6	12		0	0	2	0	10	31	29
Holland	8	17	1	0		3	1	27	21	6	26
Germany	15	5	1	6	11		0	9	28	5	20
Poland	25	0	0	21	0	0		0	20	15	19
Sweden	5	4	3	12	21	16	2		8	9	20
Great Britain	14	16	0	10	0	14	5	0		18	23
Italy	11	3	10	19	0	2	6	0	10		14
	106	75	30	129	61	55	38	39	127	134	

Note for the reader: 12% of Czech people think that the French have a sense of humour

³ <http://wiadomosci.com/polacy-maja-poczucia-humoru-zaskakujace-wyniki-badan-niemieckiego-socjologa/> (20.02.2018)

the other hand, Poles do not discern any sense of humour whatsoever in Greeks, Swedes, the Dutch, and the French.⁴

Germans readily laugh at other nations, especially at their neighbours: Austrians, the Swiss, the Dutch, Belgians, Danes, the French, and, most of all, at Poles. Such a mockery is frequent also in other countries, however, according to Denard (2016), the German cultural phenomenon, exposes such subject matter in the most widely-read newspapers, in TV programmes and during occasional festivals. It is worth emphasizing at this point that Germans have an essentially different sense of humour than Poles:

The German sense of humour is “classical”: a logical, hereditary course of thinking experiences a sudden turn or an unexpected punch line. Using this kind of humour requires mental and linguistic discipline. The Polish sense of humour is similar to the British one, however, it is even more extreme, even more absurd. Logical and hereditary courses of thinking become more and more imperfect until they get lost in absurd, almost nonsensical combinations of words and associations. This kind of humour is difficult to grasp for Germans. “There is nothing funny in it”, they think, and they get the impression that the satirist or the cabaret artist is simply dumb. Poles wonder why Germans are not laughing, and later they say that Germans do not have any sense of humour.⁵

Humour therefore enables us to explore and interpret the surrounding world, to orientate ourselves in it and evaluate its individual elements. In the same way, comicality allows to discover the world, directing the attention of the subject towards ways of perceiving, comprehending, and categorizing the reality that are preserved in tradition and interiorized (Główczewski 2006: 164).

3. Characteristics of ethnic value judgements

In order to understand and describe the relations between nations, it is necessary to take into account the ethnic judgements functioning in each community. They significantly determine attitudes and behavior towards other national groups, influence group interactions, induce social tensions, and sometimes also decide about the national policy of the state. According to Quasthoff (1973: 28), it can be assumed that an ethnic judgement is a verbal expression of beliefs relating

⁴ <http://wiadomosci.com/polacy-maja-poczucia-humoru-zaskakujace-wyniki-badan-niemieckiego-socjologa/> (20.02.2018)

⁵ <http://poloniaviva.eu/index.php/pl/21-artykuly/startowa/675-polak-i-niemiec-dwa-bratanki> (20.02.2018)

to social groups or individuals as representatives of a given group, and is therefore stereotypical. This view is also represented by Kapiszewski (1978: 27 and 154), according to whom ethnic judgements are “images of a given ethnic group existing in the consciousness of members of another group in the form of a set of interrelated belief judgements”, which “reflect the social structure and existing arrangements”. For Quasthoff (1973: 28), an inherent component of ethnic stereotypical judgments is evaluation, because other people are usually not described without emotional evaluation:

It [stereotype - M.J.] has the logical form of a judgment which, in an unverified, emotionally prone manner, assigns certain properties or behavioural patterns to a certain class of people, or alternatively denies them certain characteristics (Quasthoff 1998: 13).

For this reason, ethnic judgements cannot be neutral. In addition to positive values, there are also negative ones: disdainful, contemptuous or even hostile and hateful. Negative emotions are not only used to describe the other person or group, but also to emphasize the advantage and dominance of the self group. Schaff (1981: 115–116) also states that ethnic judgements are either completely contradictory to reality or partly in line with it, which gives the impression that their content is completely true. They are based on erroneous generalisations, are simplified and rigid, they do not change easily and influence the behaviour of one group in relation to another. Moreover, according to Heckmann (1992: 121) and Hahn (2002: 22), ethnic judgements do not arise from the systematic gaining of experience with a particular group subjected to evaluation. They are usually uncritically taken over as an expression of public opinion from other people and groups with whom no contact is maintained at all. As a result, the evaluation group has a limited mental horizon and only a superficial knowledge of the other culture, and consequently ignores and rejects it. Such simplified judgements mean that individual ethnic groups do not even try to verify them, as a result of which they often become a source of irrational thinking and behaviour in various life situations. This leads to the consolidation of nationalistic ways of behaviour, phobias and prejudices against the other ethnic group, and less frequently to the cultivation of the idea of mutual closeness and sympathy (Wrzesiński 1994: 63; Dąbrowska 1999: 86).

The contemporary German image of Poland and Poles has been created over the course of several hundred years as a result of many events: armed conflicts, population migration, mutual prejudice, and also as a result of the behaviour of Poles themselves (Niemiec 1995: 268; Ruchniewicz 2005: 133; Szymański 2006: 153; Krzemiński 2011: 2). In the literature on the subject, there is an opinion

that the closer and more burdened historical contacts are, the more distinct and lasting are the stereotypical ethnic judgements (Klein 1994: 130). The proximity of nations frequently influences the formation of mental images, especially those coloured with reluctance and negative prejudices. This is the case with German-Polish relations, which are referred to as "difficult neighbourhood". Cyrus (2004: 208) states categorically: "There is probably no description of neighborly relations between Poles and Germans in which the historical burden and the mutually negative stereotypical images associated with it would not be noticeable". In creating the image of Poland and Poles, not only historical and political events, which create a background for mutual perception, play an important role, but also the media, which stimulate anti-Polish moods leading to tensions.

4. An analysis of selected German media coverage about Poland

In order to help understand the specificity and distinctness of German humour, the analytical part of the present article contains the discussion of selected humorous content concerning Poland and Poles which appeared in the years 2006–2017 in German media.⁶ It needs to be stressed that media play a significant role in our perceiving of the world and construing our conception of reality, "they to a large extent influence collective consciousness, public opinion, cultural and social memory, and hence the entirety of a recipient-participant attitude" (Czachur 2011: 84). Wojtak (2010: 18) claims that media function as "ordinary transmitters, ideologically marked institutions that organize social life, and thus as the co-creators of human activities, ways of thinking and evaluating the world".

The "Nachgetreten" broadcast (2006)

The German satirists Mike Krüger and Ingolf Lück in the TV programme entitled "Nachgetreten" broadcast by the state television channel ZDF frequently and in a tendentious manner have referred to anti-Polish prejudice. For instance, while commenting on the events connected with football World Cup taking place in Germany, the satirists talked about Poles in terms of notorious car thieves and hooligans devastating everything around them. Among the jokes there were the following:

Many Polish football fans have arrived (to Gelsenkirchen) by cars. It has its advantages. Many inhabitants of the Ruhr area could see their long-lost cars.

⁶ See Jakosz (2016).

Poles rather find something, usually things that no one has lost.

The Polish team have played in Gelsenkirchen, because there are few things there that Polish hooligans could devastate.⁷

Contents of this kind refer to the style of joking used by the German comedian Harald Schmidt presented in the programme *Die Harald Schmidt Show* broadcast by Sat 1 in the years 1995–2003. Schmidt portrayed Poles there chiefly as car thieves, alcoholics, and people who are extraordinarily religious.

A joke war/Witzkrieg (“Die Welt” 2006)

“Die Welt” has published an index of satirical advice which reputedly could help Germans to make peace with Poland and improve the relations between the two nations. In reality, these pieces of advice have referred to long-standing, well-established negative stereotypes. As an example, Germans should have no fears to leave their new cars unlocked, legalize black economy or carry a new vodka pipeline from Russia through the territory of Poland.⁸

Anticipating negative reactions from Poland, “Die Welt” has also prepared a list of 20 ironic suggestions that Poles could have for Germans, pursuing mutual agreement: giving Erica Steinbach a beautiful, new uniform as a present, offering Angela Merkel the position of a cleaner in Poland, or building a pipeline with sauerkraut to Germany.⁹

“The potato affair” (“Die Tageszeitung” 2006)

The title of the satirical article *Polens neue Kartoffel. Schurken, die die Welt beherrschen wollen. Heute: Lech “Katsche” Kaczyński (Poland’s new potatoes. Rogues who want to rule the world. Today: Lech „Katsche” Kaczyński)*¹⁰, published in the daily paper “Die Tageszeitung“ (TAZ), has initiated a heated discussion in Polish society. On the one hand, the president of Poland has been described, on account of his appearance, as a potato, on the other hand, he has appeared as a rogue, rascal, a mean, wicked person who acts unethically and therefore deserves to be condemned. According to Bonacchi (2013: 362), the expression *Polens neue Kartoffel (a young Polish potato)* may also aim to

⁷ <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/arttykul/oburzajace-dowcipy-o-polakach-w-stacji-zdf> (15.02.2018)

⁸ <http://www.welt.de/satire/article91574/So-haben-uns-die-Polen-garantiert-wieder-lieb.html> (19.03.2018)

⁹ <http://www.welt.de/satire/article91574/So-haben-uns-die-Polen-garantiert-wieder-lieb.html> (19.03.2018)

¹⁰ <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/?dig=2006/06/26/a0248> (13.04.2018)

present the Polish head of state as a boorish person inexperienced in conducting politics.

The daily has ridiculed Kaczyński's anti-German prejudice. He has been portrayed as a short-statured politician from beyond the Odra river, who, when greeting German chancellor, extends his leg and prides himself on the fact that he has never shaken even a finger with any German politician. His whole knowledge about Germany, according to the author of the text, is limited to the familiarity with the conditions existing in German toilets. The article also fiercely criticizes Lech Kaczyński's attitude towards political problems.¹¹

Some both Polish and German media have expressed the opinion that Lech Kaczyński, a day before the meeting of Weimar Triangle with Chancellor Angela Merkel and the president of France Jacques Chirac in Weimar (initially scheduled for 03.07.2006), refused to take part in it as a result of this offensive satire. Officially, the reason given was the illness of the head of the state – some kind of alimentary canal disorder. However, it has been speculated that after reading the TAZ text, the president was so upset that he fell into a depression that affected the functioning of the stomach. German media have wondered what the real reason of the cancellation of the trip to Weimar was. According to "Süddeutsche Zeitung", the president's denial to arrive to Weimar was scandalous.¹² Kaczyński's unfavourable utterances about the European Union resulted in the fact that nobody believed in his illness. Thomas Rautenberg, a Warsaw correspondent for Channel One of the public television ARD, speculated that the Polish president had fallen victim to "a malicious virus of German freedom of the press"¹³. The Polish government called for appropriate explanation, however, Ulrich Wilhelm, the head of the federal press agency, replied that the German government would not comment on press coverage, as a consequence of which the Polish prosecutor's office launched an investigation (Bonacchi 2013: 353). President Lech Kaczyński himself said that this publication "exceeded all limits and breached all standards, while the article was disgraceful and roguish".¹⁴ The author of the article, Peter Köhler, did not see the need to apologize, but instead he claimed that "the text did not contain anything that would not be the plain truth. If I had an opportunity, I would eagerly add something"¹⁵. He seemed rather pleased that the so-called "potato satire" became so popular.

¹¹ <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2006/06/26/a0248> (13.04.2018)

¹² <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/chory-prezydent-afery-kartoflowa/> (02.04.2018)

¹³ <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/chory-prezydent-afery-kartoflowa/> (02.04.2018)

¹⁴ <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/93221/Sledztwo-w-sprawie-kartofla.html> (15.04.2018)

¹⁵ <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/die-tageszeitung-znow-porownuje-kaczynskich-do-kartofli-6037079024051329a> (12.03.2018)

The day before the meeting of Weimar Triangle, on the title page of the daily paper “Die Tageszeitung” (2006), another picture was published, in which the Kaczyński brothers were compared to two potatoes, with a telling caption: *Wer von euch kommt denn jetzt schon wieder? (Which of you will arrive this time?)*.¹⁶

In the year 2006, after the Weimar Triangle meeting, the daily paper “Die Tageszeitung” (TAZ) published another article, this time entitled *Kartoffel bleibt hart*¹⁷ (*The potato remains hard*), together with the photograph of Angela Merkel, the president of France Jacques Chirac and the president of Poland Lech Kaczyński, who had a potato instead of the head.¹⁸ The reason for this was the fact that the president of Poland was against a new trade contract between the European Union and Russia. In his opinion, Russia should have abolished the embargo on Polish agricultural products. At a press conference Lech Kaczyński said: “I know that we will withdraw when we are given a guarantee that the embargo will be withdrawn”¹⁹. Maciej Łopiński, the Secretary of State in the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, commented on the whole incident in the following way: “We will not descend to the level of this tabloid and will ignore this issue. Moreover, we have noticed that the more we comment on the pseudo-jokes with potatoes, the more popularity the newspaper gains”²⁰.

Anti-papal satire (“Die Welt” 2007)

In their online satirical column, “Die Welt” published an offensive article with photographs provided with comments in which they mocked the beatification process of the pope John Paul II and ridiculed the miracles attributed to him. The author attempted to prove that the Polish pope had performed more miracles than just the one which healed the French nun from Parkinson’s disease and which was selected for his beatification.²¹

One of the photographs depicts the pope passing alongside a big golden ball. The caption says that during his visit to Germany in 1982, John Paul II scored a goal in the ZDF sports studio. In plain view of millions of spectators the ball turned gold, and after a couple of days the fractured foot of the Polish pope healed.

¹⁶ <http://www.spiegel.de/jahreschronik/grossbild-453246-751783.html> (16.04.2018)

¹⁷ <http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2006/12/06/a0054> (26.04.2018)

¹⁸ <http://muzeum4rp.iq.pl/wiki/index.php?title=Plik:Tageszeitung2.jpg> (26.04.2018)

¹⁹ <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/104208/zastrzeleni-policjanci-rozpracowywali-gang-zlodziei-naczep.html> (26.04.2018)

²⁰ <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/194797,lech-kaczynski-zamiast-glowy-ma-kartofel.html> (26.04.2018)

²¹ <http://www.welt.de/satire/article1458069/Johannes-Paul-II-wirkte-noch-mehr-Wunder.html> (06.04.2018)

In another photograph, the newspaper sneers at Parkinson's disease that the pope suffers from and compares John Paul II, who is raising the host, to a DJ. The author of the article suggests that this is actually a CD, which, when played, makes many invalid people get up from their wheelchairs on their own.

Still another photograph depicts the pope travelling in the popemobile at a running track of a sports stadium. The caption says that this is the moment of winning the gold medal in Paralympics in Port Parkingzone.

Polish people were very upset by this satire, which sparked off numerous immediate reactions, especially among the internet users. The first comments appeared as early as around 3.00–4.00 a.m. and were extremely critical: "No wonder – a true German nature reveals itself. Typical Germans who criticize everything"²². Such critical voices were expressed not only by internet users, but also by people who participated in politics. The president Lech Kaczyński maintained that he was "a politician with firm pro-western views, but some features of that culture, which within the last year have, as it were, presented themselves, are to a great extent disturbing"²³. Also, Schewach Weiss, the ex-chairman of Knesset and the ambassador of Israel to Poland, voiced his resentment. According to him, the satire published in "Die Welt" was a wickedness on the part of the Germans, because making fun of religion and illness is unacceptable in every culture. It is irrelevant whether the subject of the jokes is the pope or an ordinary man. In this case, according to Weiss, the freedom of criticism was abused by the German press.²⁴ Journalists are allowed to criticize the surrounding reality, even fiercely, but they are not allowed to offend anybody. In the jokes published by "Die Welt", Weiss discerns the intention of offending not John Paul II himself, but rather Polish people, which, according to him, is the evidence of the fact that Germans still look down on them.

The editorial staff of "Die Welt" announced that they did not understand the whole confusion, as they assumed that the satire was not to be taken seriously, and they added that they had not intended to mock the Pope, but rather "the absurdity of the catholic belief in miracles and the bureaucracy of the beatification procedure"²⁵. The German journalists accused Poles of not having any sense of humour. On this occasion, they referred to the Polish demonstrations of 2006 triggered by the satirical publication in TAZ, in which the president Lech Kaczyński was called "Polish potato". German journalists also referred to the fact

²² <http://fakty.interia.pl/swiat/news-die-welt-szydzi-z-jana-pawla-ii,nId,818102> (29.02.2018)

²³ <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/206737,niemiecka-gazeta-przywrocila-obrazliwy-tekst-o-papiezu.html> (11.04.2018)

²⁴ <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/206736,z-choroby-i-religii-nie-zartuje-sie-w-zadnej-kulturze.html> (30.03.2018)

²⁵ <http://www.dobre-teksty.pl/co-zrobic/440-demokratyczne-szyderstwo.html> (03.03.2018)

that Poles too had made use of biting satire, depicting Chancellor Angela Merkel with Hitler's moustache or the President of the Federation of Expellees, Erika Steinbach, in the SS uniform sitting on the back of the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. According to "Die Welt-Online", this particular satire did not trigger any negative reaction from Germans.²⁶

The "Der Popolski Show" series (2008)

In the year 2008, the WDR channel started to broadcast a TV series entitled "Der Popolski Show", which in a satirical way presented a Polish family living in a block of flats in Zabrze, all cooped up in one small room with vodka bottles strewn around all over the floor.²⁷ For German viewers, the protagonists' name alone triggered associations with Polishness as otherness, because the image of Poles that emerged from this programme was full of stereotypes and generalizations. The members of the family were sloppily dressed, they wore old jumpers, kept drinking vodka, hurled empty glasses around and had trivial conversations. The most frequently heard expression was a loud and cheerful "Cheers! Your good health!".

Such a way of presenting a Polish family as the people who are ordinary, not very intelligent, old-fashioned and addicted to alcohol aroused indignation among people in Poland.²⁸ Achim Hagemann, the comedian and author of "Der Popolski Show", did not, however, understand the critical opinions, because, in his view, the programme did not feature Poles as car thieves, but reputedly tried to present them in a favourable light instead. He then added that while some stereotypes could not be abandoned, their use had a solely entertaining function. A totally different opinion was expressed by Krzysztof Skiba, a Polish satirist, publicist, and musician, who stated the following:

Germans have an embarrassing sense of humour [...]. If they still think that a Pole has a moustache, an old jumper, and drinks vodka all day long, then we should reckon that a German is a cabbage-stinking guy with a big belly, clad in Wehrmacht uniform, with a helmet on his head and a beer in his hand.²⁹

²⁶ <http://www.kosciol.pl/article.php/20070405114901609> (28.03.2018)

²⁷ <http://www.polska-niemcy-interakcje.pl/articles/show/62> (22.03.2018)

²⁸ <https://dziennikzachodni.pl/niemcy-znow-sie-z-nas-smieja/ar/80186> (22.03.2018)

²⁹ <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/niemcy-sie-z-nas-smieja-der-popolski-show-6036783230899329a> (22.03.2018)

The sketches of Marek Fis (2011/2012)

Marek Fis (properly: Wojciech Oleszczak) is a comedian of Polish ancestry, who in his programmes broadcast on a private German television channel RTL 2 uses a whole range of German stereotypes about Poles. Clad in characteristic grey sweat pants and a red T-shirt with the Polish emblem, Mark introduces himself as “Ostblocklatino. Ein Pole legal in Deutschland” (A macho from the Eastern Block. A Pole legally in Germany), and uses Polish swear-words in his utterances.

In the sketch entitled “Pole sucht Frau” (“Pole is looking for a wife”) (2011), Marek, assisted by the TV crew, is looking for a life partner. He lives in a muddy barnyard with his she-goat called Żubrówka, with which he even shares his plate. Marek is a slob, he sleeps on hay, drinks a lot of beer, and uses foul language all the time. Still, a potential candidate for a wife, Ewa, a bankrupt from the city, has to compete for Marek’s affection with his favourite she-goat.³⁰

Another sketch, entitled “Polen sucht den Superstar” (“Poland Seeks the Superstar”) (2011), is a parody of a popular talent show. Marek takes part in the show, because, with the money he wins, he wants to buy a liver on the black market for his brother called Mirek, who in childhood fell into the barrel with moonshine liquor made by their grandfather. Because of this, Mirek permanently has three to five per mils of alcohol in his blood, which reputedly is the object of envy of the whole of Poland. Moreover, Marek’s skill involves the ability to simultaneously break into a car and drink vodka.³¹

In the sketch entitled “Die Polen-Nanny” (“The Polish Nanny”) (2012), Marek as a Polish super-nanny helps the Ostrowski family in the upbringing of their son, Piotr. The son’s parents are very concerned, because Piotr spends all his days studying and is not interested in stealing. Therefore, Marek replaces the boy’s course-books with a TV set and a games console, he also teaches Piotr to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes, and explains the advantages of stealing over going to school.³²

Euro 2012 as a threat to Germans

In the year 2011, the channel ZDF broadcast a programme concerning the European Football Championship organized by Poland and the Ukraine. Poles were portrayed there as anti-Semites, homophobes and soccer yobs who hate everybody. The programme set off with the following words: “Next year, football fans from all over Europe will arrive to Poland. Among them, soccer yobs will occupy the stands, who for Euro in their country feel solely hatred and

³⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Cff-1h-C4Q&feature=relmfu> (15.01.2018)

³¹ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BdlUzA-F9U&feature=relmfu (15.01.2018)

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie2mapxzJp0&feature=relmfu> (15.01.2018)

disgust”³³. German journalists confirm that in Poland nobody can feel safe, as the perpetrators disappear in the crowd without facing any consequences, and the police are helpless. The programme ends with a conclusion which at the same time is a warning: “Germans! Don’t go to Euro!”³⁴.

Anti-PiS government caricatures (2015)

Among the caricatures that provoked a highly critical overtone were three pictures by Marian Kaminsky, a Slovak artist working for German-speaking media, which were published in social media from 23rd to 25th December 2015. These drawings aroused considerable controversies among internet users, due to the fact that the pictures not only fiercely attacked the newly elected ruling party, but most of all deeply insulted the Polish national symbols and traditions.³⁵

One of those caricatures depicts the leader of the Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, dressed in an ancient Roman robe with the word “PISS” inscribed on it, with the double S letters resembling the logo of the SS – the Nazi infamous organization. What is more, the English word “piss” is a vulgar synonym of the lexeme “urinate”. The politician is standing on the Polish flag, urinating on it and making the winner gesture. In one hand, he is holding a sword, and in the other a truncated head of Themis, the Greek goddess of justice. Presumably, in this manner the caricaturist alluded to the changes in the Constitutional Tribunal, which in German media were referred to as *coup d’état*.³⁶

In another caricature, Kamensky combined a Christmas motif with Nazi symbolism. Jarosław Kaczyński and the Prime Minister Beata Szydło were presented dancing around a decorated Christmas tree with a swastika-shaped stand and a red-and-white flag on the top of it.³⁷

The third drawing suggests that the Polish society does not express gratitude to Germans for their financial support. The caricature depicts a group of Polish men with the flags of Poland and the European Union fluttering above them. The men are warming up by the bonfire in which bills, delivered by Angela Merkel in a wheelbarrow with the word “Solidarity” inscribed on it, are burning. As soon

³³ <http://24.pl/niemcy-skandalicznie-o-polakach-i-polsce-tam-nikt-nie-jest-bezpieczny/> (04.03.2018)

³⁴ <http://24.pl/niemcy-skandalicznie-o-polakach-i-polsce-tam-nikt-nie-jest-bezpieczny/> (04.03.2018)

³⁵ <http://krzysztofruchniewicz.eu/mniej-niz-tysiac-slow-obraz-polski-w-aktualnych-niemieckich-karykaturach/> (20.01.2018)

³⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/humorkamensky/photos/a.390878934331468.93491.351823091570386/927359970683359/?type=3&theater> (20.01.2018)

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/humorkamensky/photos/a.390878934331468.93491.351823091570386/928083753944314/?type=3> (20.01.2018)

as the chancellor walks away with the emptied wheelbarrow, one of the men sets fire to the EU flag.³⁸

Carnival parade in Düsseldorf (2016)

In a carnival march that took place in Düsseldorf on 8th February 2016, a controversial figure appeared, which depicted the leader of the Law and Justice party in a uniform, wearing dark glasses, with a pistol by the belt and a cross hanging on his neck. Jarosław Kaczyński was presented as a dictator who was holding his foot on the head of a crying, battered woman symbolizing Poland, dressed in a white shirt and red trousers.

Anticipating negative reactions, the author of the installation, Jacques Lilly, explained his idea in the following way: “We established that we would portray Jarosław Kaczyński as a dictator, and we would put him into the context that was reminiscent of Pinochet. I hope that this will be taken humorously. I didn’t mean to offend anybody [...]. This is carnival and that’s how it should be treated”³⁹.

The “Po-po-po-Polen” video clip (“Bum-Poland”) (2016)

The video clip about contemporary Poland broadcast by Channel One of the public television ARD is a manifestation of a critical attitude towards Poland. In this clip, the authors ridicule the Polish government, they make fun at the Christian identity of our country, at media reforms, and the dispute over the Constitutional Tribunal.⁴⁰

In the video, Poland is termed “Po-po-po-Polen”. On the surface, it can be understood as a mere repetition, however, the German word “Popo” means “bum”; therefore, on TV they have sung about “bum-Poland”, which is confirmed by the photographs of the bums of stone statues that are being featured in the film while this phrase is being uttered. The performer of the song is singing, for example, that in Poland the EU flags disappear because they make better fuel than coal. Also, it is suggested that the only person that rules this country is Jarosław Kaczyński, who deals with everything as he wants, and whoever is against him will be turned into a Nazi. In the video clip, one can hear such words: “The right wing takes over everything that it criticizes. He’s the only ruler. The myrmidons bring luck to Poland, bum-Poland. The little gnome gets whatever he wants”⁴¹. At the end, the satirists conclude that Poland intends to outrun Viktor Orban in introducing reforms. This is portrayed as a race in which the ex-Prime Minister

³⁸ https://www.toonpool.com/cartoons/SOLIDARNOSC_261461 (10.02.2018)

³⁹ <http://www.em.kielce.pl/publicystyka/humor-po-niemiecku> (10.02.2018)

⁴⁰ <https://daserste.ndr.de/extra3/sendungen/Ein-Lied-fuer-Polen,extra10714.html> (05.03.2018)

⁴¹ <https://daserste.ndr.de/extra3/sendungen/Ein-Lied-fuer-Polen,extra10714.html> (05.03.2018)

and the leader of the Law and Justice party are falling down from their bikes into a ditch, thanks to which Orban wins the race. Under the video clip, which was uploaded by the editorial staff on their website, such a caption appeared: “The relations between Poland and the rest of the European Union, which used to be based on partnership, have cooled. The governing party does not accept any criticism from Germany. Maybe they will swallow some if it is in a song”⁴².

The parody of the Polish government caused considerable indignation and reverberated in Polish social media. The reactions of German viewers were rather marginal. Andreas Lange, the editor in chief, stated that this was the first time that they received so many negative reactions from Poland after emitting a satire on a country. To explain himself, he said that the recording was not aimed at Polish people, but rather it laughed at specific ideas of the Polish government. In his opinion, the satire, whose chief function is to criticize various phenomena and to demonstrate absurdities, helps to look at some problems with humour, which in turn facilitates to accept absurd ideas and situations.⁴³

The series “Magda macht das schon!” (RTL 2017)

Since January 2017, the German television channel RTL has been broadcasting a comedy series entitled “Magda macht das schon!” (“Magda will make it!”), which perpetuates stereotypes about Polish women who more and more frequently are hired as senior care assistants.

The eponymous protagonist, played by an Austrian actress, is a 29-year old Polish woman, Magda Woźniak. Magda always wears make-up, she likes colourful, flamboyant clothes, high-heeled shoes, and although she wears a plunging neckline there is always a cross hanging on her neck, which is the symbol of her devotion to Catholic religion. Magda works for a German family, taking care of an elderly, ailing woman, once expelled from Silesia as a result of post-WWII relocations. The elderly lady hides all her valuables under a pillow, because she suspects the Polish caregiver of stealing. What is interesting, German press has severely criticized the series, drawing attention both to the artificiality of the pseudo-Polish accent of the main character, and to the unrefined sense of humour: “Watching this series, nobody needs to worry that they will skip a gag, because each one approaches with a great uproar. After a quarter, basically all stereotypes about Poland have been dealt with”⁴⁴.

⁴² <https://daserste.ndr.de/extra3/sendungen/Ein-Lied-fuer-Polen,extra10714.html> (05.03.2018)

⁴³ <http://www.dw.com/pl/szef-redakcji-niemieckiej-tv-nasza-satyra-nie-jest-wymierzona-w-polak%C3%B3w/a-19014743> (05.03.2018)

⁴⁴ <http://www.dw.com/pl/nowy-serial-w-rtl-polka-magda-superopiekunka/a-37027083> (25.03.2018)

5. Conclusions

To sum up, it needs to be stated that the German humour discourse is still dominated by long-standing, historically shaped stereotypes and prejudice, which make for a positive autocategorization of Germans and result in the discrimination of Poland and Poles.

Emphasizing and ridiculing the negative features of the Polish nation and showing the surrounding reality in a distorting mirror has become the domain of German press, TV, and internet coverage about Poland. Media do not limit themselves to a mere reporting of events, providing information about a given country or nation, but they also shape the image of a nation, opinions, attitudes, hierarchies of values and the ways of recipients' behaviour. In the case of the German-Polish relations, one can notice an evaluating and emotional representation of events. It is confirmed by the observations made by Czachur and Wóycicki (2009: 66–67), whereby the events from Poland and about Poland are presented in a non-constructive and non-emphatic manner. The growing criticism of German media towards Poles and Poland is manifested in, among others, caricatures, TV series, and programmes. Poles as a nation are frequently portrayed as people who are out-dated, who lead a hectic, irrational lifestyle, and who have perfectly acquired the skill of drinking vodka and stealing. Also, since the Law and Justice party came to power, an intensification of jokes about our country and its anti-European politics can be noticed. The subject of the criticism is most of all Jarosław Kaczyński, who is presented as the sole ruler of Poland, and who on the one hand worships the national colours, and on the other dishonours national holy things. By means of drawing analogies to the German symbols of the Third Reich, it is suggested that the basic ideas of his party are rooted in Nazi ideology, which reinforces the negative and emotionally marked visions of Poland and Poles.

The jokes which are presented in various media frequently go beyond decency and political correctness, and often spark waves of formal and social protests. However, it has to be emphasized that the German authorities employ the rule of “double morality” in their evaluation of national leaders. For example, while Chancellor Angela Merkel on 11th April 2016 apologized to the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, for an offensive spot emitted on public television, no similar action was undertaken in the case of the politician from Poland, because it was assumed that the political interests were not threatened. Moreover, German satirists think that in Germany people tell jokes about various nations, and it is only the Polish nation and government that is so sensitive about them.

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