BORING SOVIET HUMOR: THE ARTIFICIALITY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY AND AN IMITATION OF CRITICISM

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SUMMARY. The aim of this paper is to reveal the role of official humor during the Soviet period through an analysis of how International Women’s Day, usually refereed to as March 8 in the Soviet Union, was depicted in Lithuanian satirical press. This is done by analyzing Lithuanian and Russian satirical periodicals of the late Soviet period, namely, Šluota (Broom) and Krokodil (Crocodile), respectively. In addition, in order to analyze the holiday which was meant to glorify the Soviet woman, several propaganda documentaries of the late Soviet period, filmed for the occasion, are discussed. The focus is the imposed artificial holiday of March 8 and the boring humor used in the Soviet texts to criticize it. Thus the boredom of the Soviet period is examined in a separate section. An analysis of March 8 is also inextricable from a discussion of women’s roles and gender relationships during the late Soviet period, which are reflected in both the satirical and the regular press of the period. The humor of the Soviet period is often considered a form of protest and of real criticism, a way of talking about forbidden issues, but this paper looks at why the humor in the March 8 issues of the periodicals is boring, monotonous, and repetitive.

KEYWORDS: Soviet humor, boredom, March 8, satirical magazine Šluota, Soviet woman, propaganda.

INTRODUCTION

Humor in the late Soviet period is often considered to be either a form of resistance, used to criticize and mock the unacceptable system, or a mechanism of adjusting to the regime (Davies 2007, Grigaliūnas 2013, Hart 2007, Klumbytė 2011, Oring 2004, Oushankine 2011, Zlobin 1996). However, could satirical publications have, in fact, been part of this mechanism? What was the role of satire and how was it reconciled with the propagandistic content, obligatory in any government-approved publications? This paper analyzes several issues of satirical periodicals in the late Soviet period, from 1964 to 1982, and compares the March 8 issues of the Lithuanian Šluota (Broom) and the Russian Krokodil (Crocodile), mostly focusing on caricatures dedicated to the festivities of International Women’s
Day. The research is relevant in the sense of disclosing another layer of life in Soviet society and of the topic of humor as possible criticism of governing officials or the system itself, thus making it a form of resistance. The crux of this research reveals itself in the intersection of humor displayed in satirical periodicals and focusing on International Women’s Day, on the one hand, and Soviet power and boredom, which encapsulates the whole period of the late Soviet period and becomes the background for communication, on the other. The first problem discussed in this paper is locating the significance of the famous celebration of International Women’s Day in Soviet society through the lens of humor in official periodicals. The second problem is trying to assess how official humor was articulated in official periodicals (analyzing those associated with the March 8 celebration), which humor was a tool for propaganda and also could potentially be used as a tool for resistance. Therefore it is interesting if and/or how both of these aspects of humor coexist together in satirical periodicals.

The topic of humor in Lithuanian research has not been widely analyzed. There is a notable book *Juoko kultūra* (Culture of Laughter) by I. Vidugirytė (2012), comprehensively reviewing the history and concepts of the cultural functioning of laughter. Soviet humor in the periodicals has been researched by several researchers, although not extensively. One of the researchers, N. Klumbytė (2011), described the *Šluota* (Broom) magazine as grassroots media in comparison with the official stream of publications, and she distinguished two codes of power, one reaffirming official ideologies and the other negotiating them. Another researcher, M. Grigaliūnas (2013), analyzed the images of freedom and liberation created in the Lithuanian periodical satirical magazine *Šluota* (Broom) in the context of three social theories of laughter. M. Grigaliūnas analyzed the issues of *Šluota* (Broom) from the year 1989. T. Vaiseta in his doctoral dissertation *Society of Boredom: Lithuania in the Late Soviet Period (1964–1984)* analyzed, as he himself put it, a narrow field of Soviet satire in periodical magazines in order to grasp more generally programmed relationships among people in the public sphere (2012: 137). Also his research, as well as that on boredom esthetics by A. Narušytė (2008), is focused on the boredom and repetition in Soviet society which resonates with the theme of this paper. T. Vaiseta’s research also provides valuable insights into some backdoor methods of propaganda and communication, as revealed by the minutes of *Šluota* (Broom) editorial staff meetings. This paper can open a new section of analysis of late Soviet period through the lens of official Soviet humor and also complement the researches mentioned above. It also provides a concise comparison between Lithuanian and Russian satirical magazines, namely, *Šluota* (Broom) and *Krokodil* (Crocodile), analyzing mainly caricatures depicting International Women’s Day celebrations and presentations.
The topic of humor analysis of International Women’s Day also requires an approach to Soviet gender relationships. Since March 8 was meant to glorify the Soviet woman, several propaganda documentaries dedicated to the topic and filmed during Leonid Brezhnev’s rule will be briefly discussed.

The research was made analyzing the satirical periodicals and propaganda movies from the era of late socialism that were published in celebration of International Women’s Day. The issues of periodicals were chosen randomly mostly focusing on the period of the 1970s, the decade at the heart of the late socialism period, and consisting of eight satire magazines and one newspaper in total. During that period the cracks in the social and political fabric should have become more visible. In order to do a concise comparison of peripheral and main stream satire in the Soviet Union, a similar section of Krokodil (Crocodile) issues was analyzed. To understand and analyze the gender relationships in the context of late socialist propaganda, several Soviet propaganda movies and a non-satire newspaper issue, dedicated to March 8, were analyzed. It was an integral part of the research helping to understand and read the humor of the era and locating gender issues and the perception of women in an oppressed society. The research was qualitative content analysis, focusing on interpretation in caricatures and searching for meanings and repetitions. Knowing that satire periodicals were censored and also that satire as a genre had the goal to mock or protest, I looked for signs of these two coexisting purposes and how (or if) they confronted each other. In reading humor, which itself is a complicated task because of endless interpretation possibilities and the power of unsaid insinuations or meanings, it was important to look for connections and anchors in the social, political, and cultural context. The society of the late Soviet period is often labeled a society of boredom, when representations of the dying ideology turned into boring, monotonous symbols, and when rituals, such as public holidays and meetings, lost their former meaning (Yurchak 2003, Vaiseta 2012). This paper analyzes the boring and repetitive humor prevalent in the publications and the caricatures dedicated to the holiday of March 8 and considers the reasons for and implications of this.

HUMOR DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

Humor in the late Soviet period is usually described as a form of social resistance used to mock political leaders, ideology, and the hierarchical structure of the nomenclature. The humor of the Soviet period can be classified into two types, official and unofficial. Official humor includes jokes by political leaders and forms of humor employed in propagandistic publications, where it was used as a tool to
shape opinions and values as well as to transmit particular messages. Unofficial humor is traditionally considered to be a manifestation of resistance. It can be recognized in various *kitchen talks*, anecdote jokes, and relatively secret personal communication. Some writers’ political satire can also be attributed to forms of resistance because laughter at politics provoked by their witticisms, which could spread all over the country in a split second, is a social mechanism which can become a deadly weapon against the politics in question (Zlobin 1996: 223). Jokes told in secret and various unofficial *anecdote readings* worked to decrease the authority of political leaders in the eyes of the narrators and were also a form of emotional glue which kept communities and like-minded persons together. This, however, cannot be said about official satire. First, it has to be said that satirical periodicals were not underground publications; they were officially published by the powers that be, massively subscribed to, and censored. Thus, particularly harsh criticism of the ideology, political figures, or the system could not be expected in such publications unless coded and hidden between the lines. A. Yurchak discusses clear-cut distinctions and rigid boundary lines which imply that the meaning of a discourse is formed in the speaker’s thoughts before they are even uttered; that all that is said and written means only what the author had in mind; and also that in the Soviet period, a dichotomy existed between the official and unofficial spheres, between the wrong official press and the correct underground press (Yurchak, 2003: 483-484).

It was a regular practice in the Soviet period to look for opinions and propositions different from those supported by the official powers, but not in the official press, including satirical, particularly if one was searching for straightforward criticism.

Since hardly anyone expected to find at least a hint at difference in opinions in official publications, people searched for them in such texts in which it could “slip through.” An informant has noted that everyone knew, unofficially, that it was worth reading *Murzilka*, a magazine for children, or such official magazines as *Chemistry and Life*, aimed at highly specialized audiences. *Murzilka*, for instance, could offer allusions to such forbidden areas of life as sex; the informant gives an example of a riddle about children riding on a swing, which the youth of the time understood as an uncensored erotic poem: “Туда – сюда – обратно, тебе и мне приятно” (“to and fro and back again, both you and me in a pleasing vein”). According to the informant, who was an adolescent during the late Soviet period and a member of the hippie movement, erotic magazines would later, and for quite a long period of time, be referred to as “Murzilkas.” It is easy to deduce that both Lithuanian and generally Soviet satirical publications had hardly any space for any form of criticism of the system, despite the fact that, in the popular press, satirical publications were often labeled as almost underground resistance.
The place and role of humor in the context of repressive regimes have already been analyzed, and Soviet humour is considered to be one of the most famous mechanisms of either resistance or adjustment to totalitarian regimes. However, even if some scholars treat unofficial humor, such as anecdote jokes or secret interpersonal communication, in the same was as they do satire, these genres need to be distinguished. First of all, it is important to note that anecdote jokes, differently from publications in the press, were anonymous and thereby could be more harshly critical not only about certain segments of the nomenclature, but also about its leaders or the system itself. Anecdotes were extremely widespread during the late Soviet period because the threat of repressions, which marked Stalin’s rule, had decreased; however, what was published by the official press had to be censored, and thus, for instance, even though writers for Šluota often used pseudonyms, they could nonetheless be easily traced if a text caused any controversy. By contrast, a person who tells a joke is but a transitional stage in its authorship. Ch. Davies aptly summarizes the main differences between the official humor and the unofficial joke:

The official humour was planned with a particular purpose in mind. It was intentional and tendentious, its authors more concerned to try to arouse scorn and indignation through ridicule than be funny. Jokes are not like that. They have no authors and it is impossible to infer tone, purposes and feelings from the text; these are a product of the telling and this can be highly varied (Davies, 2007: 299).

It is worth noting that, even though a joke is highly dependent on the teller and the circumstances of the telling, i.e. on one’s ability to tell it in a funny way and at an appropriate time, it nonetheless is prepared in advance and thereby somewhat similar to official humor. The narrative of the joke is not flexible; frequently, the same joke would be used in different contexts – regimes – merely by changing the leader’s name.

As pointed out by Elliott Oring, who analyzes the significance of humor in the countries ruled by totalitarian regimes (Oring, 2004), political humor is to be distinguished from other forms. Oring examines why jokes and humor were and still are used during times of repressions, in dangerous conditions, and why people would put themselves at risk by telling political jokes or writing biting satirical articles under totalitarian regimes. He proposes six hypotheses to explain why political jokes are told, drawing mostly on the experience of the Soviet Union (Oring, 2004: 216–225):

1. political humor is no different from other topics and is merely information communicated in a funny form;
2. political humor is a way to communicate what is forbidden;
3. political humor allows the individual to release pent up frustrations under a political regime;
4. political humor, particularly in the form of jokes told in secret, is a revolutionary activity;
5. political humor (this draws on Yurchak’s analysis) reveals the double life of the Soviet period, revealing both the lies which were lived and the pretense that they were not lies;
6. political jokes offer an opportunity to escape the regime, albeit temporarily, and to judge the system critically.

However, it needs to be said these hypotheses do not focus on the official humor published in satirical periodicals. Since satirical periodicals were heavily censored during the late Soviet period, it is difficult to see them as a revolutionary activity because the Soviet censorship specifically tried to make sure that no revolutionary joke or criticism would slip through into papers and magazines that were so popular and so widely read. Moreover, one can draw on Yurchak’s insights regarding propagandistic speeches, which were full of repetitive hackneyed phrases, even entire paragraphs, which were copied from one text to another and then adapted to the official Soviet satire.

The monotonous style of the satire in Šluota as well as the invariable targets of its criticism did not allow any revolutionary or critical idea to sprout, the more so that, according to Oring, people massively subscribed to satirical magazines approved by the power structures (Oring, 2004: 216). The risk of exposing an audience of such size to a criticism of the areas which were beyond judgment and critique would have been unforgivable, particularly keeping in mind the omnipresent monitoring on the part of power structures. That was most probably the reason why readers did not really expect to find any sharp ideological criticism in such periodicals. Instead, Soviet satirical magazines were full of caricatures and satire about the West and their leaders or about mediocre Soviet functionaries of the nomenclature and the bureaucracy (ibid.). The criticism of the nomenclature, which was part of the apparatus of the regime, can be considered as jeering at the regime, but, as already mentioned, if no one was looking for this kind of criticism in satirical magazines, it is difficult to consider such satire of the late Soviet period as a revolutionary action, even a minor one. It is equally difficult to apply the hypothesis that political humor is a way of speaking about what is forbidden because satirical magazines themselves were forbidden to speak about such things, and, even though the boundary line between what is allowed and what is not allowed in satire is rather vague, it is, nonetheless, almost impossible to find any statement more or less openly critical about political leaders or the official ideology.

The hypotheses about political humor can be used, if slightly adapted, to examine not only unofficial jokes, but also those in the official press. The first hypothesis proves to be useful. At this point, it is necessary to note that the information which
was transmitted in a humorous form in Soviet satirical magazines was propagandistic in content. Humor as an effective weapon in the hands of the authorities was another form of propaganda, veiled as an accessible satire. However, while analyzing different magazines, it is easy to notice certain differences in how the propagandistic content is presented. Thus, for instance, in the Lithuanian Šluota, the image of a woman as a fighter/patriot/social activist, which was promoted to shape the Soviet woman, is absent; meanwhile in the Russian Krokodil the portrait of the Soviet woman is filled with ideological elements.

Many critics consider humor as a mechanism for decreasing tension. However, read directly, this statement can only be applied to unofficial humor, when, by secretly joking and jeering at a political leader or the ideology, it was possible to diminish the omnipotence of the regime, to find like-minded individuals, and to join in a unifying experience. S. A. Oushakine calls this process the “laughter of fellowship,” which binds those who laugh and joke together, distancing and separating those being laughed at (Oushakine, 2011: 252). State-supported satirical magazines could also be seen as a mechanism of decreasing and redirecting tensions; in a country in which dissatisfaction with the ruling powers officially did not exist, was not described or expressed, criticism was focused on issues which did not endanger the status of the authorities, issues such as the anonymous nomenclature, alcoholism, parasitism, etc. Such humor was encouraged and used for propaganda by the authorities; it allowed maintaining the monotonous process of releasing tensions and disallowing them from reaching a critical point. Just like participating in the propagandistic parades and boring meetings was considered by many in the late Soviet period to be an imitation of participation, the humor offered by Šluota was, indeed, an imitation of criticism.

Oushakine notes that Soviet satire, long unrecognized by the authorities, managed to secure a space for itself only when it was presented in the form of a favorable feuilleton or delivered in an apologetic tone (Oushakine, 2011: 248–249). Thus, there was little space for real sharp criticism in Soviet satire; the criticism had to be veiled, and the humour, innocent. In any case, all genres of Soviet humor, according to Oushakine, underscored the fact that the Soviet regime did not have any really existent form of cultural criticism as it allowed neither for favorable and gentle criticism nor for harsh judgment or simple identifying of drawbacks, which precisely is the purpose of the satire genre (Oushakine, 2011: 249). Therefore, there was enough space only for favorable feuilletons or very intricately veiled criticism, which could slip through censorship.

Not all scholars consider such unofficial humor a form of resistance to repressive regimes; often jokes and mockery are seen as safety devices, used to release pent up social tensions. Thus, even if we refuse to consider humor, particularly that available in censored periodicals, to be a form of resistance to and criticism of the
regime, it nonetheless allows identifying the boundaries that are set and the tensions present in a society.

THE SOVIET WOMAN AND THE ARTIFICIAL HOLIDAY OF MARCH 8

The Soviet woman was ideologically constructed as the most efficient element of the Soviet society. Theoretically, the woman had to be freed from household duties; the time she dedicated to childcare had to be minimized; and she had to be made equal to the man on the job market. After the regime had secured its positions, gender as well as “the basis on which the duties of citizens to the new polity were defined: men and women had distinctive roles to play in the building of communism” (Ashwin, 2000: 12). Women’s emancipation had to be one of the stages in the building of a Soviet society, and the “fact that the regime had now created the conditions which would enable women to enter the urban work force was hailed as evidence of its commitment to women’s emancipation” (Attwood, 1999: 87). The portrait of the woman-worker adorned numerous propagandistic placards; very often the woman in them was wielding modern machinery, stereotypically considered masculine. Such images achieved two goals: they showed an emancipated woman doing a masculine job, and, simultaneously, celebrated mechanized work and modern technology. Since employment in the Soviet Union was obligatory for everyone, the woman could not remain a housewife and had to reconcile this status with the role of a worker. Many duties hitherto attributed to women had to be taken over by the state. A most striking example of this was the state taking over motherly duties and responsibilities, and thereby turning into the great mother-state, which created superior conditions for raising and educating new Soviet citizens. The birth of a child, as well as the sexual act, was depicted as a secret, unclean process, which could not be publicized. In a propaganda film from 1976, titled Name-Day, which presents new fashions in naming children, a journalist is interviewing couples who are leaving maternity wards with newborns in their arms. The journalist asks one such mother:

“I wanted to ask the happy parents, who did you just buy?”
“We bought a son.”
“Is this your first one?”
“No, there is also a daughter at home. We are very happy.”

This is not a humorous sketch, but it very clearly reveals how any reference to physiological processes involved in childbirth is avoided. The childbirth itself is
paralleled to purchasing an object. The woman was considered to be a transitional link between a new Soviet citizen and the state that the citizen serves. In the 57th issue of *Tiesa*, dated March 8, 1978, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union greets the “Soviet women”: “Not only does a woman give life to children, but is also their first caretaker; she implants in them self-consciousness and diligence, high moral values, and social ideals.” The woman is identified as the first caretaker of the children (the children of the state) because later the children are delivered into the care of the state: the same greeting celebrates the rise of women’s emancipation, stating that “more and more kindergartens and health care institutions are being opened for our citizens.”

In the late Soviet period, a perfect woman had to be in control of several spheres and perform several roles: those of a woman-mother, woman-worker, and woman-patriot. During Stalin’s rule, the latter role was reserved for a woman-fighter, who fought in the battlefield and helped restore the country after the war; when the war was over, the woman-fighter turned into a woman-patriot. During the peaceful period, a woman-patriot encompassed several spheres. For instance, in the film chronicle *Soviet Lithuania* (1957), dedicated to the International Women’s Day, a celebratory sequence shows exemplary women: “On March 8, one is even more impressed with how great our women – industrial workers and social activists – are.” The portrait of the exemplary woman is developed further, when the camera closes up on one of them, an embodiment of the ideal: “A deputy at Vilnius City Council, a pioneer at work, whose daily efficiency is that of 140 percent.” Another worker is also set as an example, but this time she is also shown at home, where her perfectly-groomed children are helping her with household duties. Such a situation is shown as an example that it is possible to balance household duties and social activities, something frequently criticized in the non-Soviet world as an impossible task and a burden for a woman. The third example is of a woman-worker in her private home space, where she finds time both for embroidery and for instructing her daughter. An exemplary situation is constructed, but presented as if it is just another festive moment of March 8, when the husband comes back from work with a gift to the woman. At the time, celebrations of the Woman’s Day were a newly implemented tradition, decorated with representations of a perfect Soviet woman. This holiday has survived during Lithuania’s independence period, but has never been fully naturalized and tends to be filled with empty greeting rituals, characteristic mostly of some state-sponsored institutions and the work atmosphere. March 8 has not entered the home space; only some empty forms of greetings and celebrations at work have survived. In other words, a holiday which was meant to celebrate a working woman has remained limited to the work space.
Yurchak describes the hegemony of representations, when during the Soviet period people shared similar experiences and acted in reaction to them (Yurchak, 1997: 167). This analogy can be applied to a study of the woman’s role, using the celebrations of March 8 as a point of departure. A Socialist state fragmented society with the help of a number of authoritarian mechanisms and thereby weakened the social ties in the private and public spheres of life (Romanienko, 2007: 138). Instead of former social ties, the new state set new goals and created new traditions, and one such tradition was March 8. In propagandistic texts and films, the woman was shown as a member of the community of Soviet women; there was no place for any other woman in the Soviet state. What was being created was an “imagined community” as described by Benedict Anderson (1983), one that was unavoidable, all-encompassing, and thus all-inclusive, either on a voluntary basis or as an obligatory principle. Women could be different, but they had to correspond to the requirements; i.e., as long as they conformed to them, they could vary in other spheres. A woman had to work, give birth, raise and educate children for the state, and be a good wife; while an ideal woman had to be involved in social activities as well. However, it needs to be noted that a woman’s career options in the public, particularly political, sphere were limited. C. Humphrey notes that there were very few women among politicians-bureaucrats who entered the public sphere and occupied a “winning position” (Humphrey, 2008: 10).

Greeting women on the occasion of March 8 was a major topic of caricatures and satires targeting the International Women’s Day. For instance, Šluota published such caricatures every year, and they were not very imaginative, frequently adding the figure of a drunken husband, the main target of mockery. Below I provide typical examples of such caricatures, repeated annually.

Figure 1. Caricature by S. Kelmatis published in Šluota, 5th issue, March 1980, LKP CK
Figure 1, just like many other caricatures focusing on March 8, shows a woman as a worker in the home space. Men in such caricatures, as well as in humor publications, are totally incompetent to deal with household duties, usually reserved for women, but find themselves in such a situation once a year, when celebrating the Women’s Day. It is important to note that in the second caricature (Figure 2), which shows a woman with ten arms to emphasize the woman’s burden, she is holding such items which are traditionally attributed to women (a ladle, a pot, a broom), whereas ideologically the woman was considered to be the man’s equal, active in the social sphere, even militant (though the larger part of the home space was the woman’s, not the man’s responsibility).

Figure 2. Caricature by P. Kalnaitis published in Šluota, 5th issue, March 1974, LKP CK

Thus such a caricature does not offer covert or subtle criticism; rather, it simply pokes fun at the woman and its humor targets safe topics that do not provoke any resistance: traditional gender relationships, household issues. However, in the issues of Krokodil dedicated to March 8, the representation of the woman is respectful; here, she is both a woman (as long as this is acceptable to Soviet ideology) and a mother to future Soviet citizens. For instance, in a caricature/illustration dating back to 1979, a woman pushing a pram in the shape of the
globe, in which a child is seated (Figure 3), is shown as responsible for the new generation. In Šluota, a woman’s role as a mother is not as highlighted; instead, she is responsible for the household and its everyday well-being. The role of a mother is but one among many, while that of a worker and a social activist have disappeared completely.

Figure 3. Caricature by Y. Cherepanov published in Krokodil, 7th issue, 1979, Rabochaya Gazeta, Pravda

As a public holiday, International Women’s Day was meant to celebrate the many aspects of the woman, an equal participant in the construction of Communism; however, analyzing satirical magazines, it is possible to trace a single critical motif: March 8 and the accompanying celebrations are a burden both to humor and to society. Because the holiday was boring and largely imposed, because it or its ideological attributes did not become popular in society, what was left, as aptly pointed out by Yurchak in his discussion of parades and meetings, was to endow the holiday with other meanings and activities. Reading or knitting were popular means of killing boredom during dull obligatory meetings, where one would have to intermittently and automatically raise a hand to vote. March 8, too, became a burden both to men and women. It was a holiday celebrated by everyone in an obligatory fashion, but hardly anyone accepted it as a tradition. It seemed as a burden to men as they were expected to serve women, freeing them from their household duties for a day; it was also a burden to women because, paradoxically, they had to fight men’s drinking on a day dedicated to women. In the caricatures provided below, women are depicted as serving the drinking men, who are toasting them on the occasion of a women’s
holiday. Thus, in these caricatures, the women’s day is shown as a burden to the woman herself, mocking, simultaneously, men’s drinking and carelessness. Notably, the caricature dedicated to March 8 in Šluota of 1973 (Figure 4) is not original: the March issue of Krokodil from 1963 contains a very similar caricature, albeit done in a different style (Figure 5); the only difference is that the Russian version gives men and women individual faces, and the women suffering from indifferent alcoholic men represent several clearly identified generations.

The Soviet Union’s orientation towards becoming an industrial empire, declarations of imminent total mechanization and modernization, and proud announcements of new technological achievements rejected individuality. Women became daughters of the state; children were the business of the state rather than of the family; and the individual was useful inasmuch as s/he could, diligently and efficiently, collaborate in building Socialism.

Lars Svendsen, in his analysis of David Cronenberg’s film Crash (1996), highlights the links between technology and boredom. According to him, technologies, which occupy an intermediate space between the individual and the world around him, undo the antithesis between the two, and this enables the homogeneity, immutability, and indifference (Svendsen, 2005: 87). In the Soviet Union, where functionality, expansion, and socialist emulation became the main driving forces, depersonalization and suppression of difference, combined with a decrease.
in the meaningfulness of ideology, resulted in boredom without boredom. On the one hand, both ideological expectations placed on Soviet citizens and the fashion for clichés and repetitions were creating a society of boredom, for they were suppressing most forms of resistance. On the other, even though the suppression of resistance and censorship during the late Soviet period could not compare to the repressions practiced during Stalin’s rule, boredom and monotony prevailed in most spheres of everyday life and did so even in the very forms of resistance to the system. Technologies, the processes of mechanization and industrialization, and planning and statistical measurements, which formed the basis of the mechanism of distribution in the Soviet Union, aimed at making the Soviet citizens work like a well-functioning machine to build Socialism, become predictable and easy to govern. This is typically expected of factory machinery, but such expectations are now projected onto the people operating it. For instance, the film *Vaivorykštės spalvomis* (In the Colors of a Rainbow, 1976) by V. Gruodis about the competition between two factories, “Verpstas” in Šiauliai and “Progress” in Minsk foregrounds the importance of work and production results. The film is dedicated to March 8 and celebrates women as workers. Several particularly distinguished ones are presented as exemplary workers, who have made significant achievements and who are further improving their work results. The women are filmed against the background of factory machinery and shown as capable of wielding this modern equipment, voluntarily competing with one another, and setting ever new goals. The film tries to bridge the gap between the human being and the machine, simultaneously foregrounding the woman’s role. It is not surprising that the film is focused on the importance of work, keeping in mind that the Soviet Union was known for the cult of work and of the working class. The cold and intimidating machinery in the film is softened by the presence of the women, each of whom wears colorful clothes and boasts different hair styles; the machines themselves are livened up with colored spools of yarn. Obviously new and noisy steel machinery obeys the women’s fingers, and the factory itself comes out looking lively and colorful.

However, despite the filmmakers’ attempts to enliven the factory environment with colors and images of women at work, the women merge with the machines and become part of the production-line: boredom sets in, barely masked by the festive mood, the colors, and the only creative aspect of the work in the factory, manufacturing new designs. Similarly to what Yurchak and Vaiseta note, socialist emulation, i.e., trying to achieve fictitious goals and competing with one another, when records are registered with a stopwatch (Figure 6) or when the activity is spinning or hemming details of clothing, is reminiscent of attempts to escape boredom while standing at a production-line, when events are artificially created, and when
one finds enthusiasm in personal competition and achieving small goals. According to Svendsen, when technologies take over the world, objects are dematerialized and everything turns into simple functions (Svendsen, 2005: 88). He discusses the evolution of boredom, which is only strengthened by technocentrism: “Anthropocentrism gave rise to boredom, and when anthropomorphism was replaced by technocentrism, boredom became even more profound. Technology involves the dematerialization of the world, where things disappear into pure functionality.” (Ibid: 88) In a similar way, Soviet attention to mechanization, boasting about technological achievements, and seeking to turn the work of the individual into predictable statistics and numbers, have significantly contributed to the development of a society of boredom. A still from Gruodis’s film (Figure 6) illustrates the process of competition and socialist emulation, when a stopwatch is used to register results, which are shown as undeniable proof. Similarly to the double life described by Yurchak, where reports/accounts played only a formal role, where people mechanically filled in a required form to satisfy the expectations of the authorities, and real information was not included, work training sessions aimed at improving efficiency and production results in the spinning factory as shown in the film, in which all women workers participate and thoroughly register all details of the process, reflect a parallel formal life at work, expected to satisfy the set expectations.

Figure 6. Screenshot of a movie Vaivorykštės spalvomis (In the Colors of a Rainbow, 1976) by V. Gruodis, LCVA

The juxtaposition between man and nature, the rigid boundary line between them, was becoming less and less visible as technologies sought to govern both nature and man. Therefore, slogans used in propaganda films about how man had conquered nature with the help of new and powerful technology, about how
proud the country was of the new achievements in agriculture, expose a transition towards mechanical time, repetitions, homogeneity, and boredom. The boredom is not about having nothing to do or having to wait too long; it is about situative repetition, satiety, and existential boredom coming together when the individual cannot find the meaning in repetitive representations of ideological symbols that was promised by the creators of the ideology.

BORING LAUGHTER OF THE SOVIET PERIOD

SOVIET BOREDOM

The issue and problematics of boredom is not new. Most frequently, scholars distinguish between two types of boredom: existential and situative; different terms can be used to refer to them, but when generalizing, it is almost always possible to place a phenomenon in question into either one or another category. Svendsen describes boredom as a phenomenon typical of modernity, particularly if it is of the existential kind (Svendsen, 2005: 11, 20). Svendsen explains this by referring to the prevalence of the phenomenon: earlier, signs of boredom were privileges of the aristocracy and the clergy, while in modernity boredom affects a much larger number of people, eventually almost everyone (Ibid: 11). Svendsen makes use of Martin Doehlemann’s typology of boredom, which “distinguishes between four types of boredom: situative boredom, as when one is waiting for someone, is listening to a lecture or taking the train; the boredom of satiety, when one gets too much of the same thing and everything becomes banal; existential boredom, where the soul is without content and the world is in neutral; and creative boredom, which is not so much characterized by its content as by its result: that one is forced to do something new.” (Svendsen, 2005: 41) He also notes that these types of boredom hardly ever exist in isolation; instead, they overlap, transform into one another, and act in a composite manner.

As will be discussed further and has already been examined by Vaiseta and A. Narušytė, the Soviet period was boring; boredom had infused almost all spheres of life and manifested quite a few characteristics described in the typologies of boredom. However, as Narušytė argues in her book Nuobodulio estetika Lietuvos fotografijoje (The Aesthetics of Boredom in Lithuanian Photography), the most frequent object of studies is permanent boredom, which is more mysterious and more damaging to human existence than any other type (Narušytė, 2008: 43). According to O. Toohey, the most basic form of boredom is “the result of predictable circumstances that are very hard to escape” (Toohey, 2011: 13). Such situative
boredom, according to Narušytė, is marked by the “everyday routine,” composed of various actions which are performed automatically; it dulls feelings and mental processes, slows actions, and numbs the body; Toohey describes an accompanying feeling when time seems to slow down to the point that you feel as though you stand outside of these experiences (Narušytė, 2008: 43-44; Toohey, 2011: 13). In this case, the situative boredom as described by Narušytė is similar to what Svendsen refers to as the boredom of satiety, caused by meaningless repetition. The “everyday routine” identified by Narušytė, which numbs feelings and thinking, is reminiscent of the life of Soviet society, as analysed by Yurchak or C. Humphrey. A monotonous and dull environment, which, consequently, is also boring, only occasionally brightened up by artificial rituals, such as meetings, parades, or festive holiday ceremonies, at times completely suppresses any critical thought and does not allow any space or time for disagreement. Still, critics predominantly tend to focus on permanent or existential boredom, leaving situative boredom or the boredom of satiety aside because they are seen as temporary conditions, influenced by external factors and circumstances. However, existential boredom rarely exists in isolation as a separate category; it is more frequently manifest in disparate fragments.

A concept inextricable from that of boredom is time; like boredom, the apparent permanence of the Soviet period, its omnipresent ideology, had come to prevail in the life of every Soviet person. The Soviet Union was marked by various mechanisms aimed at appropriating time; they are well discussed by C. Humphrey in her analysis of the Soviet queue, which, according to her, “was not simply a social presence, but was also a social principle, one that regulated social entitlements in time. It enshrined the social and psychological idea of consumption through state distribution.” (Humphrey, 2002: 46) Notably, within the time which was fully governed by the state, people would create small niches, which they filled with meaningful communication; the queue in a shop increased the social value of the products and thereby acquired another meaning. People learned to adjust to the ways in which the state regulated time and to adapt the time that was stopped to their needs, endowing it with meaning. R. Levine notes that the slowing down of time, a factor which causes boredom, depends on whether an individual is in control of the situation; when time slows down independently of an individual’s desires, s/he is overtaken by helplessness (qtd. in Narušytė 2008: 49). The boredom of the Soviet period was practically impossible for the individual to manage or control because omnipresent representations of the ideology controlled basically every aspect of human life, though not necessarily in an aggressive manner.

Vaiseta notes that boredom is reinstated not only by the condition of boredom, but also by an attempt, a priori, to avoid it (Vaiseta, 2012: 80). In the Soviet period,
such attempts to avoid boredom or creative adjustments to it were well illustrated by new acquaintances and communication initiated while queueing to make the time spent in a queue meaningful; or, as described by Yurchak, by secretly reading or knitting during obligatory meetings.

Meaninglessness is very much related to boredom, particularly to permanent or existential boredom, whose prevalence is conditioned by the disappearance of meaning in society (Ibid: 53). When an action or experience is constantly repeated, the individual is over-satiated, and the boredom of satiety becomes even more acute when the circumstances are not worth it, when there is no point in suffering from boredom; this is the so-called pointless boredom (Toohey, 2011: 14). When it comes to their features, the boredom of satiety and existential boredom, even if distinct, are related and frequently overlap, as noted by Svendsen. Still, it would seem that the link is the absence of meaning. For instance, Toohey describes a boundary line, difficult to trace, between the boredom of satiety (he does not call it the boredom of satiety, but the condition which he describes, characterized by repetitions, clichés, and unvarying predictable situations, is close to Svendsen’s concept of satiety). According to Toohey, such boredom turns into disgust, and “[i]f disgust protects humans from infection, boredom may protect them from ‘infectious’ social situations: those that are confined, predictable, too samey for one’s sanity” (Plutchik, qtd. in Toohey 2011: 26). It would seem that during the late Soviet period, people fought against omnipresent boredom by sculpting, from the time which was artificially stopped and from imposed artificial rituals, parallel events which they would endow with meaning. This kind of behavior is well illustrated by Yurchak with the example of parades, which their participants frequently used as a rare chance to publicly drink alcohol and enjoy themselves rather than to sincerely celebrate a particular date (Yurchak, 1997: 164). Such daily practices functioned as a mechanism of self-protection.

Svendsen argues that omnipresent boredom means that a culture and a society lack the significance of meaning, and meaning in this case is to be understood as a totality in which one discovers or creates an individual meaning (Svendsen, 2008: 22). Vaiseta explains the phenomenon of boredom during the Soviet period in a similar way, noting that with the meaning and significance of the ideology, which used to control each individual life, waning, existential boredom could set in (Vaiseta 2012: 79). Brezhnev’s rule in the Soviet Union was the epoch of stasis, clichés, and repetitions; the ideology had already begun to evaporate. When ideas become hackneyed and turn into clichés, thereby losing meaning and influence, they become boring; a culture which erases differences and does not offer content and meaning is doomed to boredom (Narušytė 2008: 55, 56).
Repetitions are noted as an important source of boredom; and the late Soviet period, which perfected the system of precise repetition and copying of ideological representations, when exactly replicating their forms became more important in the daily life than the meanings implicit in those representations (Yurchak, 2003: 481), inevitably led to the prevalence of boredom. Obligatory rituals, such as parades, celebrating the major state holidays, or meetings, complete with long boring speeches, were devoid of meaning; the ideology itself waned and lost its former significance in the late Soviet period. Omnipresent and interconnected symbols and representations of ideology turned into a solid meaningless system, which is what marks the boredom of the Soviet period. Vaiseta uses the term “boredom” as a critical instrument to explore the Soviet society, calling boredom a “culturological master-key which helps interpret (‘unlock’) historical situations” (Vaiseta, 2012: 14). Narušytė notes that it is difficult to distinguish between situative and permanent or existential boredom, and Vaiseta, too, maintains that Soviet boredom occupies the space in between (Narušytė 2008: 52; Vaiseta 2012: 78). In this context, Soviet boredom is a composite phenomenon, which is both existential and situative, and has features of the boredom of satiety since, as was mentioned before, boredom most frequently is complex and multidimensional.

THE FORMAL HUMOR OF ŠLUOTA

Satirical periodicals, such as the Lithuanian Šluota, the Russian Krokodil, the Polish Szpilki, and others, are often considered to be mocking publications which mock in which one can look between the lines and find hidden critical jibes. However, even a superficial glance at the magazines Šluota and Krokodil reveals differences both when it comes to the humor itself and to the range of the topics that are covered in them.

Michel de Certeau’s theory of strategies and tactics proves helpful when analyzing the satire and caricatures in Šluota. De Certeau explores the culture and practices of the everyday; he distinguishes between two types of practices: strategies and tactics. By strategies he means such power relations and actions which an object possessing power (e.g., an owner, an institution, a city, or an educational institution) can undertake and which are distinct from the environment; by tactics he means actions undertaken by an individual, which are not separate from the environment, not isolated, when the environment in which they happen does not belong to him/her (Certeau 1984: 17). In the former case, strategies allow conquering space and time, while tactics depend on time since they do not have a defined place and need to look for possibilities to use a chance (Ibid.). If one
applies this theory, the magazine Šluota corresponds to the definition of tactics since it was strictly censored and did not have the liberty to criticize satirically the issues and problems that really mattered at the time. It could be said that Šluota played on the foreign territory; and a possibility to criticize ideological targets or political leaders would emerge only by resorting to allegories and metaphors. Notably, the accuracy and aptness of such criticism depended on the authors of the magazine, and keeping in mind how large the circulation of the satirical magazines was in the Soviet period, it would have been difficult to expect the censors to let the criticism slip through and reach such a wide audience. Vaiseta, drawing on the behind-the-scenes communication of Šluota’s editorial staff (the minutes of staff meetings, various reports and accounts), reveals how negotiations about what can (not) be criticized via satire or caricatures would develop (Vaiseta, 2012: 150–151). He also labels the relationship of the staff with the LCP CC, which directly monitored Šluota’s activities, as “schizophrenic”: critical publications were blocked, but what was simultaneously required of the staff was not to “skim the surface” (Ibid.: 151). One can only imagine how difficult it was under such conditions to do what satire and caricatures aim to do: to criticize in order to improve. Šluota’s playing on the foreign territory was made even more difficult due to two obstacles: obvious critical taboos and the ways the staff members interpreted them. Such double restrictions narrowed the playing ground even more and deadened the harshness of the criticism.

Another hypothesis could be made as to why Šluota was less bold than the Russian Krokodil. One reason could be the double censorship: first, by the general all-inclusive prohibition to address certain topics and second, by local censorship activists who only made the already strict suppression even stricter. A second reason could be Lithuania’s status as a periphery. In the Soviet period, many state-approved satirical periodicals were published, such as the Czech Dikobraz, the Romanian Urzica, the Russian Krokodil, the Lithuanian Šluota, the Polish Szpilki, etc. Still, Krokodil was an exemplary satirical magazine, and many Lithuanians would subscribe to it along with Šluota. F. S. Nielsen analyzes the Soviet Union as “an archipelago of Islands”:

> each institution, each group, even the state itself, is a self-defense Center, an Island inhabited by people who simultaneously insist on its Barriers and controvert them. Soviet society is an archipelago of Islands rising from the sea of Limbo, and constantly threatened or even submerged by its unpredictable tides and gales. (Nielsen, 1999)¹

¹ See: <http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/N/Nielsen_F_S_03.htm#ref40>.
A similar model can be used to discuss the “archipelago” of satirical magazines, whose centre is symbolized by *Krokodil*, whereas *Šluota* and other peripheral magazines are islands. In *Šluota’s* case, the magazine was completely overwhelmed by the influence of the center, which was further intensified by internal censorship.

However, in the examples from the late Soviet period which are analyzed in this paper – both the Lithuanian *Šluota* and the Russian *Krokodil* – political leaders and the Socialist ideology are not ridiculed; the magazines target only anonymous bureaucracy and such aspects of life which do not threaten or jeopardize the ideology. K. Shilikhina describes the ways *canned jokes* are used in contemporary Russian political discourse, noting the fuzzy line between the serious and the unserious, and points out that in the Soviet epoch such jokes were an unwanted genre of the political discourse and existed only in interpersonal communication (Shilikhina, 2013: 88).

However, the humor in *Šluota* or *Krokodil*, particularly their depiction of March 8, cannot be seen as a form of social protest; humor can be a weapon of the weak (Hart 2007: 8), which is relevant only if humor criticizes instead of being boring or constantly missing the mark. Even more so, if satirical publications approved by state censorship cannot be considered to be offering unofficial and critical humour, then it is difficult to find caricatures or satirical texts which would ridicule forbidden topics and which would also abstain from disseminating propaganda or pursuing the goals which the ideology encourages to pursue. Private political jokes shared in the kitchens would act as emotional glue within a social group as well as a certain psychological safety device, when, within the safety of their private space, people discussed incongruities between the official ideology and the reality (Shilikhina 2013: 88). And even though the power of such humor is debatable, some critics suggest that in the late Soviet period such jokes did damage the legitimacy of the regime and thereby contributed to the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union (Hart 2007: 17). C. Davies and P. Merzinger, who propose such a conclusion, argue that the silent jokes, attributed to unofficial humor, were in fact supported by the regime because they encouraged “laughing together” and did not necessarily mean resistance to oppression (Ibid: 17).

This paper analyzes the March issues of *Šluota* and *Krokodil* which are dedicated to or depict the festivities of International Women’s Day; *Šluota’s* issues of 1973, 1974, 1975, and 1980, and *Krokodil’s* issues of 1964, 1976, 1977, and 1979 have been selected. First of all, the March issues of *Šluota* which deal with the holiday introduce the motif as early as on the cover. All four issues of *Šluota* feature a caricature on the cover; at the centre of the caricature are gender relationships, explored in the context of March 8. Three most characteristic covers are provided below.
Figure 7. Cover of a periodical by A. Šiekštelė, Šluota, 5th issue, March 1973, LKP CK

Figure 8. Cover of a periodical by J. Griušys, Šluota, 5th issue, March 1975, LKP CK

Figure 9. Cover of a periodical by K. Šiaulys, Šluota, 5th issue, March 1980, LKP CK
In the 1973 issue (Figure 7), the stylized number 8 marks the dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine worlds; in this dichotomy, any work related to the home space, as is usual according to the Soviet principles of distribution of labor, is the woman’s responsibility (childcare, household duties), whereas when it comes to the man, home is a place to relax. And even though women’s emancipation was encouraged ideologically and many household duties had been taken over by the state (kindergartens, public laundries, etc.) and even though the woman had been turned into a woman-worker, she had not been liberated from the burdens of the domestic space (Ashwin, 2000: 9). On the one hand, one could note that the representation of the male-female relationship on the cover of Šluota gently ridicules the disbalance it is fraught with. On the other hand, though, the humiliation of the woman in the issues depicting March 8 by repetitively restricting her to the domestic space, which stands in juxtaposition with the public one dominated by the man, reveals that such a male-female dichotomy is taken for granted; it is not ridiculed but reinstated. Shilikhina maintains that jokes mirror the political situation by reflecting a critical view on a given set of issues (Shilikhina, 2013: 94); however, what Šluota lacks is precisely the critical aspect to its humor as the humor in the magazine is limited to identifying a prevalent situation and accepting it as a norm, leaving hardly any space for critical consideration. The March 1975 issue of Šluota (Figure 8) shows a group of men standing on the globe and holding a pile of gifts for women bought to give them on their holiday; however, symbolic giftboxes decorated with festive bows contain items which, again, restrict the woman to the domestic sphere, such as an iron, a sewing machine, dishware, or a rolling pin. On the cover of the 1980 issue (Figure 9), a male figure, hand-drawn in black and white, is trying to decide which of the ten women, presented in photos surrounding him, to congratulate on the occasion of March 8. Despite the quantitative disbalance, it is the balding and old-fashioned man who is choosing between ten colorful, modern women. Keeping in mind that the man’s superiority is not questioned or ridiculed in the caricature, the conclusion may be drawn that such representation works to construct and reinstate the norm rather than to criticize or ridicule it. One of the functions of humor, as discussed in scholarly literature, is that of the carnivalesque, when, during a limited period of time, ridiculing is not reprehended and punished but encouraged as a way of releasing tensions and dissatisfactions, accumulated in society; thus it serves as a disciplinary measure from below (Hart, 2007: 4), which unsettles, albeit temporarily, the set social hierarchy; after the carnival is over, the hierarchy is rearranged to its previous structure and social statuses and symbolical meanings are reinstated. However, when it comes to the caricatures in Šluota, the carnivalesque is hardly possible to discern as the
March 8 humour here is not creative but boring; it does not unsettle, nor does it ridicule, albeit gently, the problems caused by women’s emancipation. Instead, it fills up the pages of the magazine with another topic, reprinting funny superficial articles from the magazine Tarybinė moteris (The Soviet Woman) and foreign caricatures about male-female relationships.

In comparison to Šluota, in Krokodil, the topic of March 8 is dealt with in a different way. First of all, only the cover of the 1979 issue (Figure 10) is indirectly related to the holiday as it features a groom carrying the bride in his arms against the backdrop of a construction site, a future residential district made of blocks of flats.

Figure 10. Cover of a periodical by Y. Cherepanov, Krokodil, 7th issue, 1979, Rabochaya Gazeta, Pravda

In this issue, the first five pages of the magazine are dedicated to the Women’s Day; however, it is unusual for an entire magazine to be focused on this theme, and this is another difference from Šluota. In the 1979 issue of Krokodil, the male-female relationship is not depicted in such a straightforward and monodimensional manner as in Šluota and is more within the vein of the Soviet ideology of redistribution of gender roles. For instance, a poem-ode to women, written by V. Mas and titled “The Amazon,” celebrates women as warriors, who are, undeservedly, restricted to the household and child-care duties and have forgotten their real powers and goals.
The poem contains a number of ideological elements, such as militarist rhetoric, exaltation of women’s emancipation and their liberation from the home space, criticism of capitalist consumerism, and foregrounding of women’s goals, though highly unrealistic, which push domestic duties into the background. This issue of *Krokodil* does not feature as many caricatures and texts which ridicule women as does Šluota. If the obvious ideological impulse of *Krokodil* is to inspire women by ingeniously praising them and by questioning their restrictive domestic roles, Šluota uses monotonous and unimaginative humor about traditional gender roles without questioning them or inspiring a discussion but only reinstating the status quo. *Krokodil* uses the opportunity to promote the Soviet propaganda by depicting a new family structure and by extolling, through positive humor, new functions the ideology expects the woman to perform. Šluota, in the meantime, is dominated by boring humor which cannot spark communication or discussion and which degrades women in a very primitive way. Below are two caricatures from the March issues of *Krokodil*.

![Figure 11. Caricature by L. Samoilov published in Krokodil, 7th issue, 1964, Rabochaya Gazeta, Pravda](image1)

![Figure 12. Caricature by V. Pergler (Bape) published in Krokodil, 7th issue, 1976, Rabochaya Gazeta, Pravda](image2)

Figure 11 shows a caricature from the March 1964 issue; here, a man, obviously an official or a civil servant, complains to another one that his wife “has recently been lagging behind.” The wife in the meantime metaphorically carries the burden of the domesticity, with a full shopping bag and a child in one hand, and another child holding onto her other hand. In this case, it is the man who is
ridiculed, exposing the unequal burden placed on him and her; furthermore, the woman’s imprisonment in the domestic space is critically presented as a factor which predetermines backwardness in social and professional life. Figure 12 shows a caricature from 1976, in which a woman is clearly a participant in a traditionally masculine world, but still burdened with domesticity, criticized in the picture as an ideologically unacceptable anchor; the caricature does not deride the woman but, rather, reveals that duties are distributed in an unfair way and exposes the unequal possibilities that the two genders have as a result of that.

By contrast, when it comes to the Šluota caricatures, not one of them shows the woman as a man’s partner in social life, at work, or, the more so, in public or political life. And even though the disbalance between the man’s and the woman’s statuses and duties is obvious, the woman’s place is identified rather than criticized. When it comes to the male-female relationship, men are usually ridiculed because of alcohol consumption, which is a safe and harmless object of mockery as it does not doubt or question the ideology or political leaders. It is with such formal humor that the pages of the magazine are filled. Judging form the caricatures on the topic of March 8 in Šluota, drinking on the occasion seems to be the only aspect which is explicitly criticized; this is not new as drunk, idle workers are seen as an unquestionable evil, which harms efficiency, impedes socialist emulation and results, and discredits the male working class. Not in a single caricature in Šluota does the woman cross the boundaries of the domestic and enter the public space; she is never pictured at work, making decisions or participating in social life on equal terms; typically, on the occasion of March 8, the woman is presented at home, waiting for holiday greetings.

The very form of humor and its targets in Šluota are easy to predict; they support the monotonous rhythm of copying and repetition, which characterized public speaking and the propaganda press. It would seem that International Women’s Day was imposed and never became fully naturalized either in society or in the magazine. Šluota’s depiction of the holiday, strictly regulated by censorship, was limited when it comes to what issues could be criticized, and the obligatory depiction of March 8 in the satirical press turned into just another formal ritual to mention in an annual report; thus entire pages of the magazine were filled up with caricatures either similar to one another or else “borrowed” and annually repeated. This could be seen as a consequence of censorship; however, such caricatures did not benefit the propaganda either as they did not celebrate the new roles it prescribed for the woman. Apparently, March 8 was an annual burden to the magazine, just like it was a burden to the Soviet man and society. This is aptly revealed in the following caricatures from Šluota (Figures 13–15):
In the caricatures from March 1975 (Figures 13–15), the holiday is depicted as a repetitive burden; since the year 1975 was announced to be the International Women’s Year, this impression is even stronger. In the second caricature (Figure 14), the husband’s gift to the wife, a flower, looks spiky because of the holiday
is repetitive and meaningless, whereas the flower carried by the child is not yet as “sharp.” In another caricature (Figure 15), the man is pictured as troubled and frustrated by the celebrations of March 8. The attitude of both men and the magazine is aptly revealed in the first caricature (Figure 13), in which the man is literally buried under the date of March 8. The holiday does not seem a natural or traditional event but rather an empty ritual, and it is very difficult to find meaning in it or, following Yurchak, to sculpt a space for other topics or ideas.

Predictably, to find harsh criticism against political leaders or power structures in a periodical which is constantly censored is close to impossible; therefore, criticism is focused on innocent and unambiguous features of the holiday. In the March 1977 issue of *Krokodil*, a caricature mocks how formal the festival has become: here, the father is reading greetings to the three generations of the family women from a sheet of paper at an improvised family meeting (Figure 16). A bureaucratic approach to the holiday, whereby the latter is formalized and fully appropriated by the state, seeps into family life and celebrations; as a result, a formal greeting to a woman is constructed as a ceremonial meeting, which would typically be long, boring, monotonous, and imposed. Along with the artificiality of the holiday, the caricature ridicules the bureaucratic apparatus for its stasis, predictability, and rigidity, perfectly embodied in unnecessarily formalized meetings, which caused boredom and sleepiness to their participants. At this point, the exact repetition of the form as described by Yurchak is demonstrated, manifest not only in ideological texts, but also in ideological discourses, such as placards, ritual meetings, and festivals. Such copying of the form decontextualized it and turned it into a pattern, applied in various spheres of life in the same way that the formal atmosphere of a meeting is recreated in the context of family life in the caricature (Yurchak 2003: 481). The caricature perfectly reveals the boredom prevalent in the late Soviet period; the reader can try to identify several types of people, based on how each is adjusted to the system as described by Yurchak: dissidents, activists, and the normal subjects. If the young generation, the little girl, still believes the speech and the words of gratitude read by her father and tries to silence her brother, who is disturbing the ritual, then her mother and grandmother embody Soviet boredom as they, drowsy and numb, are sitting at the meeting called in their honor without expecting to hear anything new or exciting. The time overtaken and stopped by the meeting is symbolized by the grandfather’s watch, placed in front of him on the table, while he is drowsing away. The father, with typical gestures and without any enthusiasm, is reading a long text, which occupies several pages. This March 8 caricature is devoid of propaganda statements; it also does not draw on hackneyed and safe topics, such as the male-female relationship or alcohol abuse and freeloading.
S. A. Oushakine, in his analysis of Arkady Raikin’s comedies, argues that Soviet humour placed a lot of importance on the compatibility of text and image; this is well used in this caricature from *Krokodil* to reveal the multilayered Soviet boredom by joining multiple elements that constitute boredom and meaninglessness and by gently ridiculing them.

Figure 16. Caricature by E. Shcheglov published in *Krokodil*, 7th issue, 1977, Rabochaya Gazeta, Pravda
CONCLUSION

Even though humor is often considered to be a tool in resistance against the regime or a mechanism which allows one to identify like-minded individuals and which acts as emotional glue in a group, it is very important to distinguish between official and unofficial humor to avoid confusing satire in the official press with the famous jokes of the Soviet period, which were shared in the privacy of the kitchen. Since satirical magazines were strictly censored and used as a tool for disseminating propaganda, the humor in such publications has to be considered as legitimated and supported by censorship, and as avoiding, even in-between the lines, to criticize things which were not allowed to be publicly criticized. Thinking why the humor in Šluota is different from that in Krokodil, it is possible to hypothesize that, first, Šluota had strict internal censorship; and second, the differences between the center and the periphery mattered, when the press in Lithuania, a periphery, was further removed from the control of the center and required more careful monitoring than Krokodil, which was always in the field of vision.

An analysis of caricatures in Šluota can be based on Yurchak’s analysis of propagandistic texts and official speeches, when hackneyed phrases or even entire paragraphs are copied and republished. The humour in Šluota’s issues dedicated to March 8 is exactly like that: monotonous, repetitive, and devoid of any criticism of forbidden issues, but also rather inadequate when it comes to fulfilling its ideological mission of constructing the Soviet woman. A perfect woman in the Soviet Union of the late Soviet period had to encompass several spheres and to be, simultaneously, a woman-mother, a woman-worker, and a woman-patriot-activist, whereas in Šluota she is limited to the domestic sphere. Krokodil, on the other hand, diligently responds to the ideological mission and exalts the multi-tasking woman.

State-supported satirical periodicals can be seen as a mechanism of releasing and displacing tension. If they avoided voicing dissatisfaction with and criticism or ridicule of the authorities, criticism had to be re-directed and target topics that did not threaten the power structures; such targets included the anonymous nomenclature, alcoholism, freeloading, etc. Such humor, which was encouraged by the authorities and used for propaganda purposes, allowed maintaining the monotonous process of releasing tension, to prevent it from reaching a critical high point. Šluota, dependent on external censorship and the ways it was interpreted by its own editorial staff, played on a very small foreign ground, with few opportunities to deviate from the expected form. An assumption can be made that this is one of the reasons why Šluota’s humor became similar to a boring bureaucratic account, which meant filling in the same form with very limited content every year.
Judging by the content of the satirical press chosen in this research, it may be concluded that March 8 was neither passionately naturalized and significantly celebrated by the citizens, nor a fruitful source for humor. Caricatures on the topic of March 8 were repetitive, very similar to one another (in the same issue and with other magazines), limited in different approaches and failing to deliver the criticism promised by the genre as well as to fulfill the propaganda mission. The holiday of International Women’s Day seems imposed both to women and men, and to magazines which had to depict and comment on it.

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**NUOBODUS SOVIETINIS HUMORAS: TARPTAUTINĖS MOTERS DIENOS DIRBTINUMAS IR KRITIKOS IMITACIJA**


**RAKTĄŽODZIAI:** sovietmetis, humoras, nuoboduly, Kovo 8-oji, žurnalas „Šluota“, sovietinė moteris, propaganda.