

REFLECTION ON NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN LITERATURE: EMIGRANTS' NARRATIVES

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Abstract

In modern Latvian society, economic emigration to the countries of Western Europe is a significant external phenomenon which affects both the development of the whole country and the consciousness of an individual. These processes have been studied in various fields of science, as well as reflected on in literature. Since 2002 when the first most comprehensive work about the life of Latvian economic migrants, Laima Muktupavels's novel "The Mushroom Testament", was published and gained wide popularity, Latvian authors have regularly addressed this topic. The works of Vilis Lacitis, Otto Ozols, and Andra Manfelde, which have addressed mainly the experiences of the first economic emigrants and their attempts to build their lives in a new socio-cultural environment, have become popular.

Alongside practical survival challenges, one of the most urgent issues is the search for self-identity in the new cultural environment, which mainly refers to the sphere of national identity. The aim of the research is to analyse how modern Latvian literature depicts the search for national identity in the emigration cultural environment. The issue of identity has been thoroughly studied by modern liberal sciences (e.g. Fukuyama, Burke, Erikson, Ricoeur, Leary, Tangney, Thompson, Weinreich, Saunderson, Woodward, etc.) However, there are a lot of questions which still remain unclear. The dynamics of the world around cause permanent changes in the identity structure. The issue of preservation or transformation of national identity acquires unprecedented relevance in this situation. The research considers the economic emigrants' subjective view of the world, which is revealed in the narratives in the modern Latvian literature, as one of the ways to analyse the processes of transformation of national identity in the situation of cultural interaction.

Keywords: national identity, emigration, culture, Latvian literature, narratives

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity issues are activated by a human's inner need to understand one's essence, individual peculiarities, or form a group identity. Identity appears in human's perception along with self-consciousness and is considered to be one of the major elements of consciousness. It interacts with the human's worldview and system of values. Identity has been repeatedly studied in modern humanities (e.g. Fukuyama, Burke, Erikson, Ricoeur, Leary, Tangney, Thompson, Weinreich, Saunderson, Woodward), yet a lot of issues still remain unclear. Major elements of group identity are considered to be gender, age, social stratum, national, ethnic, denominational belonging, sexual orientation, etc.

National identity is one of the deepest layers of personality structure. It forms human consciousness both in a synchronic and diachronic aspect, i.e., it unites an individual with a particular social group (nation) and secures a bond with past providing for preservation and transmission of culture legacy. Latvian linguist Ina Druviete writes:

'Identity is recognised as the central element in the consciousness of every person, about oneself and about one's place in the community (society). This allows an individual to recognise him/herself as being different, at the same time as finding a common bond with others in the creation of group identity.' (Druviete 2010, 151)

National identity is important not only for a particular individual but for the whole nation that, by setting off the idea of national identity, gains an opportunity of preserving specific cultural values and traditions. Hence, preservation of national identity is always one of the priorities of state culture policy. In Latvia, national identity on the official level is closely related to the idea of statehood and is

treated also as a state security element. This idea is declared in major long-term and middle-term political documents, e.g. *Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030*, *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020*. *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020* states:

‘Latvia is the only place in the world for full-fledged existence and development of the Latvian people, language, and culture, but outside Latvia there is still a wide scope of people with the sense of belonging to Latvia, that altogether form a global network. The Latvian language and culture serve as the common basis of Latvian society, therefore the society, as well as state, sets the goal of cultivating the language and provides for the values of national identity, civic society, and social integration in long term.’ (Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs 2013)

Under the conditions of contemporary globalization, the idea of national identity presents opposition to the general unification and grows into a chance to preserve the unique features of national culture and national spirit. However, the dynamics of the surrounding world creates constant shifts in the national identity structure. Open information space, great opportunities for mobility, growth of the Internet have transformed the human’s notion of oneself and one’s place in the world. Latvian literary scholar Alina Romanovska indicates:

‘Dynamism is an important feature of an identity; it (identity) is in the stage of development and variability, it is subject to a conscious will to the construction of the individual and factors of external influence. In the modern volatile world, in which everything is very dynamic, the construction of an identity and its awareness becomes a problem, as the natural desire of an individual is to feel something stable and unchanging, at least for a moment.’ (Romanovska 2019, 42)

Thus, the issue of identity becomes especially significant for migrants, as they sense the dynamism and volatility of the world especially strongly.

Migrants’ experience, when preserving or transforming their national identity in an alien culture environment, suggests various opinions on the way national identity components can hold under the conditions of globalization, which of them are solid and which are changeable. The aim of the present research is analyzing the depiction in contemporary Latvian literature of search for national identity in the emigration culture environment. The subjective worldview of emigrants revealed in contemporary Latvian literary narratives is regarded in the present study as one of the ways of analyzing national identity transformation processes in a situation of cross-culture interaction. National identity as represented in text is a major component of an individual world model that reveals not only the ideological and aesthetic essence of the artistic world but also the ethic and religious value system and world view in general.

2. SOURCES AND METHODS

Fiction is both an indicator and forming factor of national, culture, and ethnic identity searches. Writers, by depicting the events of their heroes’ lives at the time of culture clashes, reveal the conception of national identity at the depicted time period but simultaneously they also create their own understanding of the problem of identity, thus a work of fiction becomes an important source of building the collective self-reference.

In contemporary Latvian society, economic emigration to West European countries is an especially urgent phenomenon. Works of fiction offer a certain perspective on this situation. Taking into consideration the urgency of the social processes of migration in Latvian society, works of fiction on this topic gain great popularity. The first Latvian literary work that reflects the experience of the new wave (21st century) economic emigration is a novel by Laima Muktupāvela *Šampinjonu Derība* (*The Mushroom Testament*, 2002). It aroused a wide public acclaim and brought great popularity for the author who was yet unknown. For a long time it remained the only and unparalleled work of the kind. After some years, more authors joined L. Muktupāvela with their vision of an economic migrant’s life in literary text, e.g. Otto Ozols’ *Latvieši ir visur* (*Latvians are Everywhere*, 2010), Vilis Lāčītis’ *Stroika ar skatu uz Londonu* (*Stroika with a View of London*, 2010), *Pamodināt Lāčplēsi* (*To Awaken*

the Bearslayer, 2011), Andra Manfelde's *Dzimtenīte* (*Motherland*, 2012). The present research provides analysis of national identity perception, formation, and preservation peculiarities from emigrants' viewpoint on the basis of the above-mentioned texts.

Latvian fiction mainly regards the phenomenon of economic migration revealing the experiences of the first-wave economic emigrants and their attempts to live in the new socio-cultural space. Along with practical survival issues, one of the most topical problems of their life is defining self-identity in the new culture space. Self-identity in this case is mostly related to the sphere of national identity.

Analyzing the texts of contemporary fiction it is regarded how various national identity-forming components are manifested and transformed in emigrants' consciousness. Special attention is paid to collective memory segments (memorial place, ethnonyms, toponyms, national culture symbols, etc.), use of the Latvian language, perception of Latvian national symbols in emigrants' consciousness, individual memories and subjective experiences related to Latvia as well as direct reflection on the essence and structure of Latvian national identity.

The research is unique by its interdisciplinary dimension regarding texts of Latvian fiction through the prism of the theoretical base of various humanities and social sciences. Text analysis applies fundamentals of semiotic, structural, new historicist, hermeneutic, etc. methodologies as well as theoretical ideas of identity and Latvian scholars' studies of migration processes in contemporary society and diverse aspects of Latvian national identity (language, history, social processes).

The theoretical base of the analysis concerns both the ideas of globally recognized identity theoreticians and contemporary Latvian scholars' publications. Significant contribution to studying the theoretical aspects of national identity was made by Homi C. Bhabha's, Edward Said's, Peter Burke's, Imre Szeman's etc. studies. In Latvia national identity has been much investigated by Inta Mieriņa, Mārtiņš Kaprāns, Evija Kļave, Deniss Hanovs, etc. As identity is constructed on the basis of collective and individual memories, references are made to memory studies represented by Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Aleida and Jan Assmann, etc. It proved to be useful to apply for the analysis of Latvian emigration texts theoretical ideas of New Historicism, as they reflect a certain part of recent Latvian history as well as memory research. S. Greenblatt's and C. Gallagher's ideas were used in this respect. In systematizing the reflection of emigrant's consciousness William Boelhower's "The Immigration Novel as Genre" was used. (Boelhower 1981, 3-13)

3. ECONOMIC EMIGRATION STUDIES IN LATVIA FROM THE POSITION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

As noted by scholars, every country has a reason to be concerned with a mass outflow of its residents (Baltiņš et al. 2012, 11), as emigration has a negative impact both on the state economy and socio-cultural situation. Latvia has faced this problem especially sharply since joining the European Union in 2004, yet the economic emigration from the country had started much earlier, already in the late 20th century. Hence, from 2000 till 2012, the number of Latvian residents had decreased for 16%, and 10% of these are accountable exactly by emigration (Hazans 2016). The countries most popular with economic migrants are UK, Ireland, Germany, etc. The greatest number of emigrants seem to have left for UK. According to various studies (e.g. Hazans 2011, Apsīte-Beriņa 2013), in UK the number of Latvian nationals may be around 100 thousand people. It is an alarming trend that the majority of emigrants are aged 15–34; besides many leave Latvia with their families with no plans for return. Scholars point out that

‘the loss of young people and young families as a result of emigration enhances the negative natural growth, speeding up the ageing of the society and increasing the demographical load. Especially in the period of crisis and post-crisis in 2009–2012, emigration reached so high level that it endangers the regeneration of the society, sustainability of social insurance system, economic growth and competitiveness.’ (*Latvijas emigrantu kopienas; cerību diaspora* 2015, 8)

Thus, one may conclude that economic emigration creates serious threats to successful development of the Latvian state.

Hazards to the development of Latvian society conditioned by economic emigration determined the rise of studies on this topic in recent years. It is analyzed in scientific research of various spheres – sociology, politology, economy, etc. One of the widest studies of this kind has been produced by a group of scholars of the University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in 2013–2015 among Latvian nationals living in the UK. The results of the research are collected in the monograph *Latvijas emigrantu kopienas: cerību diaspora* (Latvian emigrant communities: diaspora of hope, 2015). The scholars have addressed not only the political, economic, and social aspects of the economic emigration but also tend to study issues of culture and national identity. Within ESF project, methodology was elaborated and the largest survey of Latvians and Latvian nationals living outside Latvia was made. In addition in-depth interviews with target group representatives and experts were made as well as observations, discussions, and policy document analysis. This comprehensive study provides and insight also into the issues of economic emigrant identity. According to the emigrant survey data, the majority (57%) of respondents feel closely related to Latvia and belonging with (52%) Latvian population. The research data lead to a conclusion that closer bonds with the country of origin more often occur in the group of typical economic emigrants while more seldom among those emigrants who regard Latvia primarily as a socially insecure and unpredictable country. Respondents admit that life outside Latvia makes them more interested in Latvian culture because, when living abroad, Latvian culture artefacts and peculiarities seem more important than they seemed when living in Latvia. Besides, emigrants often perceive Latvian culture not only as an important foundation of national identity or bond with Latvia but also as a source of self-awareness and positive identity. This positive identity is formed with respect to certain personalities important for Latvia and Latvian people as such. (*Latvijas emigrantu kopienas: cerību diaspora* 2015, 108-127)

One of the components of national identity and state belonging is language. Results of the survey of 2014 reveal that Latvian is spoken at home by only half of the UK respondents. This not only throws light on transnational conditions Latvian emigrants live in but also reveals the high potential of assimilation. On the whole the Latvian language is preserved as a strong symbolical bond of Latvian emigrants with Latvia and its culture space. However, it is important that only 6.8% of the surveyed Latvian parents send their children to Latvian schools where Latvian is used as a language of instruction. Much more often Latvian is learned at home. (*Latvijas emigrantu kopienas: cerību diaspora* 2015, 108-127)

Hence, one may conclude that, for Latvian nationals living in a foreign land, their national identity is subject to opposite processes: on the one hand, there is culture assimilation that is especially expressed in the personalities of emigrants' children, on the other, there is a growing desire to build a solid bond with Latvian culture, cultivating Latvian culture traditions in the foreign lands of settlement, commemorating personalities, events, etc. Desire to build a solid bond with Latvia and Latvian culture depends on various individual factors, e.g. living conditions in the land of settlement and before emigrating from Latvia, relations with the surrounding people, family ties, personality traits, etc.

4. MECHANISMS OF REPRESENTING AND SUSTAINING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN TEXTS OF FICTION

According to scholars, identity formation is significantly affected by a human's place of living. A place is usually constructed by a person; and a person attributes it with a certain specific, emotional, and symbolic meaning. In turn, places form people and their characters, and, therefore, we can state that a local identity can be perceived as a result of interaction between the place and the person. This interaction also generates the sense of belonging. The described process proves that a local identity is created figuratively, and it identifies who we are. (Torkington 2012) Migrants, when moving to another place of living for a longer time, undergo transformation of national identity, both highlighting in their consciousness their national culture peculiarities and experiencing the impact of the culture of their land of settlement. Taking into consideration the fact that migration nowadays is one of the major factors that change the structure of the society and individuals' worldview, it is important to study migrants' subjective experience to be able to predict and influence the further development of the

society on the whole. Focusing on the nuances depicted in texts of fiction is one of the ways to study the subjective experience of migrants.

Texts of fiction provide a notion of the world of migrants' ideas and major identity forming components that comprise mostly culture resources – traditions and phenomena related to Latvia and Latvians. These identity-forming components are a part of human's mundane consciousness that is not reflected and analyzed in ordinary circumstances. David Morely points out that national culture is strongly rooted into what seems to be trivial but at the same time it is recreated through the everyday life culture practices (Morely 2000, 39). Yet these "components of Latvianness" within mundane consciousness gain very special significance for emigrants who in alien environment lose their natural ties with Latvian culture. Therefore they pay attention to national identity issues trying to define it and describe identity components they see as important.

On the symbolical level, various identity-forming components reflect adherence to the set of nation's values, recognition of nation's unity. These components are traditionally epitomized by the official state symbols (flag, emblem, anthem), most important historical and contemporary life events, culture and nature symbols, etc. Alien environment makes it possible to reassess symbols that have become an intrinsic part of individual's consciousness as components of national identity. Some symbols that are well-known and important for all residents of Latvia lose their significance in a migrant's consciousness, whereas other, seemingly unimportant components unnoticed by those who live in Latvia are mythologized and become a solid part of emigrant's consciousness that forms a bond with the body of the nation.

Language is one of the essential identity indicators. Scholars hold that globalization and its consequences of migration, cosmopolitanism, border expansion, etc. are closely related to shifts of language and identity. Nowadays, under the impact of migration, language contacts grow more and more dynamic and versatile. The problem of migration and language link in the modern world, with the growing rate of migration becomes more and more pressing. It concerns both the language requirements set for immigrants and their attitude towards the national language of their land of settlement as well as opportunities of preserving native language for immigrants in their new lands of settlement, etc. (Apinis et al. 2009, 143) Peter L. Berger and Thomas Lukmann indicate that language has a decisive role in the process of socialization – if a person does not understand a language s/he cannot understand the reality of everyday life, language urges people to typify their experience and construct models. By speaking a person makes the phenomena of the external world a part of his/her consciousness and thus constructs identity. (Berger & Luckman, 1991, 150-175)

Contemporary Latvian fiction texts show that language provides a sense of commonness and security. Hence, characters of Vilis Lācītis' novel *Stroika ar skatu uz Londonu* (*Stroika with a London View*) in various situations demonstrate their sense of unity with speakers of some language based on the category of understanding this language. Proficiency of a certain language testifies not only to belonging to a particular nationality but also link with a whole culture layer that is shared by the users of the language. Depicting the labour routine of a post-soviet person in Britain, the Russian language is shown as the initial base providing opportunities of getting to the dreamland of labourers and finding a job there, getting lodgings and possibly friends. One of the characters in the novel calls post-soviet people who speak Russian and are encountered all around the world 'our own people' (Lācītis 2010, 13), opposing them to the rest of the world. It is important that the similarity of the situation, in his opinion, does not provide a sense of community because, for instance, Polish who are also guest workers are not regarded as "our own people". The rest of foreigners – Germans, French, English – are treated as absolute strangers with whom there is nothing in common. Apart from their well-being, the main criterion for their huge difference from post-soviet people is language. A character who speaks only Latvian and Russian says about European super power nationals, 'there is nothing to talk about with them' (Lācītis 2010, 14). This statement, taking into consideration the situation of the character conditioned by not knowing foreign languages, testifies not only to the lack of mental closeness but also to impossibility of formal communication. Therefore this character cannot achieve unity of identity or similarity with European super power nationals. This character in V. Lācītis' novel is generalized and typified. It presents views and identity of a certain group of people.

In many cases it is shown that guest workers in Britain gradually learn English and it slowly and unawares grows into a part of their consciousness bringing along a certain culture layer. In this way identity is transformed. This process is epitomized by hybrid word forming when a word that is not international is not translated but phonetically adjusted to the sounding of the native language. The author of the novel states in the introduction, 'Anglicisms and Russicisms in text are used intentionally, without much selection, as a peculiarity of Latvian construction workers' language' (Lācītis 2010, 5). Taking into account that these phonetically adapted words may not be familiar for a wider scope of readers, the author has added a thesaurus of guest workers' slang with explanations of the meaning of most widely used words. It must be noted that these are borrowings from Russian and English but also from German, French, and Polish. Slang words in the novel are regularly used in communication of guest worker characters, thus exemplifying the gradual transformation of their culture awareness.

Emigrant characters in novels often tend to create a positive image of Latvia and Latvian culture, thus trying to raise their own self-esteem. For instance, the protagonist of Otto Ozols' novel *Latvieši ir visur* (*Latvians are Everywhere*) reveals his opinion of the great significance of Latvian people in the world history and culture. He makes a point that Latvians are not a small and insignificant nation but take an active part in many culture processes and direct the course of history. He gives the example of Russian empress Catherine I who came from Latvia, the legendary mountaineer Ed Viesturs whose mother was Latvian, golf player Natalya Gulbe, renowned American painter Mark Rothko who was born in Daugavpils, Latvia, and others. Having lived abroad for a longer time, the protagonist fluently speaks Latvian, Russian, German, and English and never expresses a wish to go to Latvia. His bond with his native land is ultimately broken, he even does not call himself Latvian but defines himself as 'a world rover who escaped from Latvia' (Ozols 2009, 59), 'global vagrant' (Ozols 2009, 122). This position reveals the impact of globalization on human consciousness when the protagonist in search for freedom, well-being, and stability has left his homeland, is aware of the trends of globalization in the world and accepts this. The protagonist experiences the impact of the multi-cultural world on his consciousness already in the first week being abroad for the first time, when a black artist in Sweden, enraptured by Martin Luther King, quotes him aloud. This scene delighted the protagonist of the novel and overwhelmed his consciousness.

At the end of the novel the protagonist with his friend decide to go home, to Latvia, as that is the place where they may feel secure and harmonious. Despite the fact that they perceive themselves as citizens of the world, they are still aware of their Latvian roots. Such an ending of the novel seems slightly pathetic, yet it epitomizes the understanding of national identity. Namely, ethnic roots and national adherence are not always obvious, rather often they are shaded by multiple other identities in a multi-cultural environment, yet they unobtrusively determine a human's personality, motivation, and action, thus forming human consciousness.

However, Latvia and Latvians are not always perceived as positive, rather often a totally opposite image is present. Bright examples to this are found in Laima Muktupāvela's novel '*Šampinjonu Derība*' (*The Mushroom Testament*) and Andra Manfelde's novel *Dzimtenīte* (*Motherland*). The protagonist of L. Muktupāvela's novel, Eve, observes people in the airport and describes their mentality on the basis of their conduct peculiarities bringing out national stereotypes. She can determine the nationality of the people by their conduct, without hearing what language they speak. Latvians, according to her observations, behave differently as compared to foreigners. She concludes: 'A typical Latvian – slightly grim, leering as if from a corner', reserved, iffy, pessimistic; when greeting, Latvians never smile and reply reluctantly. (Muktupāvela 2002, 10-11)

Significant place in sustaining emigrant's national identity is occupied by both the collective and individual memory that is often related not only to the specific life experience of residents of various regions of Latvia but also to the impact of the Soviet culture. Post-soviet person in the late 20th – early 21st century, with the appearance of more opportunities for travel and directly learning about European culture, perceives the space of Europe through positive memories associated with particular time, space, and culture legacy.

The protagonist of V. Lācītis' novel 'Stroika with a London View' is a vivid example of the fact that post-soviet person at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century, when it became possible to travel and gain direct experience of the European culture, perceives the space of Europe through Russian and Soviet culture prism, that is through the prism of positive memories. The protagonist's thoughts about Sherlock Holmes illustrate these ideas very distinctly. First time arriving to London and standing by Charing Cross station, the protagonist recalls an episode from a Soviet screening of Conan Doyle's works about Sherlock Holmes. He not only knows the names of starring actors – Vassily Livanov and Vitaliy Solomin – but also can cite their remarks by heart. The screening mentioned is an intrinsic part of Soviet TV culture as it was repeatedly broadcast on TV, therefore many people knew the text spoken by their beloved heroes by heart. It must be noted that Livanov's interpretation of Holmes was recognized as the most authentic and aristocratic one ever and the actor was awarded Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II. Igor Maslennikov's movie series about Sherlock Holmes were shot in Riga, the place where the protagonist of the novel lives. He is well familiar with the streets of Old Riga shown in the movie. Hence, recalling an episode from the movie the protagonist actualizes a whole set of culture realia that have formed his personality. Being in London at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the protagonist reflects on the values of his own Latvian identity formed in the Soviet years in comparison with his present life situation. Memories from the Soviet time constitute an important layer of his identity that has grown during many years and unites him with other residents of Latvia of a particular generation.

Memories provide an opportunity to find a secure psychological shelter remaining in the well familiar and close culture world. The well-known movie becomes a bridge linking two worlds – the Latvian culture of the past with specific features of the Soviet period and present British culture with widely represented other culture realia. The protagonist gradually grows accustomed to the foreign world familiarizing with a new culture layer.

Rather often components of Latvianness comprise material signs related to a whole culture layer. One of such signs is mentioned in L. Muktupāvela's novel 'The Mushroom Testament'. That is Namejs ring – a traditional Latvian ring with a characteristic threefold braided twine, representing three Latvian regions – Vidzeme, Latgale, and Kurzeme – in unity. This ring functions as a sign of recognition of Latvians for the female protagonist of the novel, even without hearing the Latvian language and disregarding other traits of appearance. She emphasizes that golden Namejs rings are worn basically by Latvians born outside Latvia or Latvian nouveaux riches, while the rest of Latvians usually wear silver rings. (Muktupāvela 2002, 10) Namejs ring enhances for Latvians living abroad a symbolical invisible bond with Latvia and Latvian culture.

The novels contain also contradictory symbols and metaphors of Latvianness that indicate both the complicated situation of Latvian residents and Latvian culture and the individual life tragedy of characters of the novels. One of the most expressive contradictory metaphors of this kind appears in the title of A. Manfelde's novel *Dzimtenīte*. The word *dzimtenīte* in Latvian has varied semantics. Firstly, it is a diminutive form of the word *dzimtene* 'motherland'. Traditionally in the Latvian language the diminutive form connotes kindness, pity, tenderness. However, in colloquial speech this form may sometimes gain an opposite semantics, denoting something insignificant, trifling, small. It must be noted that a diminutive form for the word *dzimtene* is not widespread, therefore the connotative meaning in this case is not clearly definable, it remains ambiguous. Yet, no less significant is the second meaning of the word *dzimtenīte*, 'moonshine' that is popular among Latvians. However, the novel is not about drinking or producing alcoholic beverages. This title entails both expectations and hopes, love for Latvia and the sense of dead end and despair characteristic of people in Latvia facing huge material problems in their everyday life, due to which many are forced to leave motherland, family, children and go abroad. (Manfelde 2012) The years spent abroad transform one's personality, change national identity of the people. A. Manfelde's narrative is pessimistic; it describes the situation of people when they lose their natural bond with motherland and close people. The varied semantics of the word *dzimtenīte* thus expresses both the love for motherland and its culture and despair about the situation of economic emigrants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Texts of fiction provide a notion of the life of economic emigrants abroad and the world of their thoughts and ideas. National identity in the regarded works of fiction is an important component of emigrant's consciousness that helps survive in a complex situation by forming a positive image of Latvia and Latvian culture and, vice versa, finding negative features in the everyday life of Latvia. Yet, irrespective of how positively or negatively Latvian culture is perceived, all characters are aware of their bond with it. They directly or indirectly point out that national adherence determines human's conduct and character.

Fiction characters recall different components of Latvianness that are culture resources and signs, traditions and phenomena associated with Latvia and Latvians. These identity-forming components are part of people's everyday consciousness that under ordinary conditions are not reflected on or analyzed. However, when living abroad, where one's national identity is subjected to powerful influence of other cultures and its preservation is endangered, emigrants tend to realize what they are like, what characterizes their national belonging, what Latvian culture peculiarities they consider most important. Rather often the most important Latvian culture components are very commonplace things that people living in Latvia never pay attention to. Works of fiction scarcely mention traditional Latvian culture symbols that are taught at school and recognized as major state symbols. This peculiarity may be conditioned by the rules and paradigms of aesthetic composition, as a hero of a novel must be expressive, distinct to attract readers' attention.

Language, both on the official state level and in works of fiction is acknowledged to be one of the most essential national identity indicators and components. It provides a sense of unity and security. Certain language proficiency not only testifies to belonging to a particular nationality but also to a whole culture layer that is shared by the users of a particular language. The language significance is emphasized in almost all the works under analysis. Familiarization with another culture begins with familiarization with its language. The texts under analysis depict the way characters' Latvian consciousness speedily assumes knowledge and experience of the phenomena of other national cultures and how these phenomena unobtrusively change a human's identity. Texts admit that national identity may change under the impact of other cultures, yet its foundation remains unchanged, it is ever-present and imperceptibly forms a human personality.

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