

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY: LITERARY AND JOURNALISTIC TEXTS OF RUSSIANS AUTHORS IN LATVIA IN THE 1920S

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Abstract

The collapse of the Russian Empire during the First World War led first to the proclamation and then to the creation of new independent states. The bloody events that followed after October 1917 provoked a wave of Russian emigration from Soviet Russia mainly to European countries. The part of the population that fled from the power of the Bolsheviks found themselves in the new proclaimed states, including Latvia. Traditionally, for decades, Russian emigration has meant anti-Soviet, anti-Bolshevik education. Everything that is not Red can be only White. However, a more complicated situation took shape outside of Soviet Russia. Outside the borders of the new metropolis were those who had not moved from anywhere and nevertheless turned out to be strangers, for example, residents of the Livonia, Courland, western parts of the former Vitebsk and Pskov provinces. In total, in the early 1920s, the Russian population in Latvia reached 200,000 people. The composition of this Russian population was quite varied. In the first years of the existence of the Republic of Latvia, for the Russian population the question of identity turned out to be one of the most burning (relevant) and complex one. On the one hand, Latvia was perceived as a new home in which the rights and freedoms of national minorities were guaranteed (at least declared), but on the other hand, a significant part of the population considered isolation from Russia as something unnatural. Sociopolitical journalism and artistic works published on the pages of Russian newspapers in Latvia reflect complex political, social, national, religious and cultural contradictions, at the same time allowing to observe the emerging strategies for the formation of a new identity.

Keywords: *the establishment of the Republic of Latvia, Russian emigration, fiction, journalism, national identity, propaganda, patriotism*

1. INTRODUCTION

The celebratory proclamation of Latvian Act of Independence, which was held on November 18, 1918, became a main stage in formation of the Latvian nation. A couple of years ago Ineta Lipša wrote that “[...] up to the autumn of 1917 people had not been offered an independent state of Latvia at all. Yes, they had heard of that abstract idea about Latvia before, but did not know what it meant, thus, they could not know whether they wanted it and whether they would like to fight for it. [...] Therefore it is logical that before November 18, 1918 the idea of an independent state of Latvia was only a concern of the intelligentsia. As soon as communication was possible everything happened. After less than a year – in October 1919 – Latvia was already supported by the nation.” [1]

If Latvians themselves had an ambiguous attitude towards the status of Latvia, then views of the minorities of emerging Latvia – Germans, Russians, Jews, Poles – were also quite contradictory and could not be called the agreed ones. Different politicians offered different strategies for the Russians. To choose an appropriate strategy answers on a number of questions should have been found, for example, ‘Which political power to support?’ ‘What kind of future to fight for?’ etc. The life of the Russian minority during the newly proclaimed Republic of Latvia was studied and described both in monographs (Apine & Volkovs *Latvijas krievu identitāte: vēsturisks un socioloģisks apcerējums* (‘Identity of Latvian Russians: Historical and Sociological Essay’), 2007; Feigmane *Russkie v dovoennoj Latvii* (‘Russians in Pre-War Latvia’), 2000; Podmazovs *Vecticība Latvijā* (‘Old-Believers in Latvia’), 2001) and in other publications about free-state period of Latvia. The novelty of the present study is determined by the fact that the research object comprises not only historical processes but also their reflection in journalistic and literary texts of that time. Fiction has always been and is a

powerful tool of designing and maintaining a diasporic identity, especially it is characteristic for the Russian culture with its traditional focusing on literature (so-called literary centrism).

2. METHODS

Topicality of the identity issue is defined by both epistemological and social processes. Identity is a result of interaction between space-and-time continuum of culture and an individual with ability to self-reflection and self-differentiation. The problem of human self-identification in the crucially changing world has been put forward among the important scientific themes nowadays. The concept of 'identity' is necessary for explaining transformations of correlation between the public and the personal, the biological and the social, the non-typical and the standard, the dissimilar and the monotonous, the global and the local. Undoubtedly transformations of social processes and institutes cause a crisis of identity.

In the works of K. Popper, A. Giddens, V. Solovyov, N. Lossky and some others identity and the problem of crisis of identity are considered as a result of the late Art Nouveau culture. Study of the phenomenon of identity reveals two levels of individual identity: personal and social. Social identity is characterized by focusing on the aspect of 'identicality', in its turn, personal identity focuses on differences. Awareness of one's own 'identicality' with ethnos, gender, professional group, in-state community forms an essence of, respectively, ethnical, gender, professional or civil identity.

The paper deals with literary and journalistic texts written in Russian during the collapse of the Russian Empire and the beginning of the Latvian state. In the paper transformational influence of socio-cultural realia on identification processes of Russians living in Latvia in the first quarter of the 20th century is presented. Knowledge of mechanisms of cultural identification is especially necessary when organizing teaching work as loss of cultural identity destroys ethical base of educational process, decreases the quality of obtained knowledge, leads to destroying processes in personality's spiritual life provoking social misbehaving. Socio-cultural identity defines motivation of social behavior and is a significant factor in development of civil society.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Russians in Latvia before the Proclamation of Independence of 1918

Proclaimed in 1918 and officially recognised in the beginning of the 1920s the independent Latvian state emerged on the territory of the Courland and Livonia Governorate and in the north-eastern part of Vitebsk Governorate, that is, Latgale. All these territories were transferred to the Russian Empire in the 18th century. For the imperial Russia the territories compactly inhabited by Estonians and Latvians were defined by the term 'the Ostsee area'. And it should be mentioned that the Ostsee area was perceived by many politicians, writers and publicists as Germans' patrimonial estate. For a long time period the German language was a dominating language in the region. The German name for the Baltic Sea and German-Russian name for the region – 'Ostsee area' were paradoxical for the locals. The western parts of the Russian Empire with their official names demonstrated their spiritual belonging to the German East. During the long-term historical opposition 'Germans – Non-Germans', in Riga as well as in the whole region both for Latvians and Russians common interests and possibilities for closeness appeared. In Riga, only in the 1860s Russian public organisations were being formed. Different Russian gymnasiums were opened - The Alexander High School for Men (1868) and The Lomonosov High School for Women (1868). After a year the first Russian newspaper of Riga "Rizhsky Vestnik" was established. The foundation of Riga Russian theatre in 1883 was of a great and lasting historical significance. In Riga and in other places of the Governorates mostly inhabited by Latvians a peculiar Russian environment started to develop - it was formed by teachers, school headmasters, doctors, publishers and journalists, thus, a layer of the Russian intelligentsia clearly began to develop. [2]

In addition, this environment has never been homogeneous. Quite diverse views were circulating in it. One of the most noticeable strategical vectors of development of the Russian culture in the Baltics was Slavophiles' position (Y. Samarin, M. Pogodin, I. Aksakov). In these authors' opinion, the Baltic Russians represented the imperial ethnos and their interests did not differ from the interests of the Russians of entire Russia. They should view the Baltic states as a conquered territory that belonged to Russia. A specific task of the Baltic Russians should be to overcome a dominating role of Pan-Germanism.

In this respect the play "The Man without Shadow" by Vsevolod Cheshihin, an inhabitant of Riga, is significant. In his work the author reflects a problem of how a person feels – an essential one for those who were living in the Baltic states in the beginning of the 20th century. The main character – Ivan Nikolayevich Petrov – calls himself "the man without shadow" and in the context of the play it means a person without nationality, without ethnic belonging. Being a Russian by his origin, but brought up in the German way, Petrov cannot find his place either in the Russian or German society. Being unable to make his choice and take one or the other part, he turns out to be unnecessary and unwanted. „Neither German nor Russian" [3] – this is how one of the heroines with condemnation characterises Petrov. He sees his tragedy in the fact that he has been ahead of his time, but in our time to become a respectable and significant person in society, you have to belong to the nation, to the state [...], not to any other society. In her novel "The Ships of the Old City", I. Saburova constructs the scene of Riga in the beginning of the 20th century and gives a following description for one of her heroines: "Nadezhda von Grott is a Russian, of course. From her grandfather Swede – eyes and the surname, from her grandmother, Tatar noble, - diminutive name, lullaby melody: "Jan, Janum"... Is there left anything else – one did not have to think for now [...]" [4]

Demands for more unification of the Baltic region and other western provinces (of Finland, Poland) were more distinctly pronounced after the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905 (M. Katkov, A. Suvorin). In its turn among the Russians of the area a liberal perspective was also becoming stronger; its supporters spoke against the policy of violent russification; for the most daring plans they spoke about a possibility of autonomy for national minorities. In the Russian Empire, the most remarkable elements of self-identification for Russians were language and religion. Self-identification is also straightforwardly connected to communicative model of multinational society. In the literary and journalistic texts of the beginning of the 20th century quite positive opinions about the Latvian nation appear (Apollon Korinfskiy). In the Russian Empire, the regions that were mainly inhabited by Latvians were not administratively united. Thus, Latvians formed the majority of the Courland and Livonia Governorates, as well as a significant part (Latgale) in the Vitebsk Governorate. One of the most significant peculiarities of the Russian literature's "Latvia's text" is that the "Latvia's text" is formed in a considerably wider sense in the Russian public and cultural awareness. Thus the "Latvia's text" is incorporated in the joint paradigm of the "Baltic text". In the early 20th century, the public awareness in Russia became more and more interested in the proceedings in the region. In this context, one must note the special significance of the Courland – Livland text in Russian literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The territories included into the Russian Empire de jure were an intrinsic part of the multinational state formation where ethnic Russians constituted a minority and the Russian language had a secondary status until the implementation of the Russification policy. Hence, the topos of Courland – Livonia must be regarded not only as a variant of Russian provincial text but as a specific structure that was territorially perceived as one's own but mentally it continued existing as other – distant, at times obscure; this is proved by the majority of texts created at that time. This topos makes an organic entity of the opposition 'Russia – abroad' (Russia – West). The administrative border (inside the Russian Empire) becomes a mental border in the consciousness of authors (Vasily Rozanov, Ivan Konevskoy, Valery Bryusov, Leonid Andreyev, and Maxim Gorky) who were going to Riga.

Each topos has an individual original structure and semantics, therefore spatial texts are based on not only highlighting the common dominants of sense but on the sets of their own internal structure elements that determine the specificity and autonomy of the topos. In the early 20th century, the Baltic provinces of Courland, Livonia, Estland formed the western border of the Russian Empire, in Russian perception being associated with a German area. Riga was the most significant topos of the Baltic at

the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. As to its exterior, architecture, lifestyle, public relations, Riga differed from other province capitals of the Russian Empire. Riga surprised by its European qualities, whereas Old Riga had an air of the Middle Ages. In this period Russian writers and journalists were not interested in Latvian cultural environment but in the life of local Old Believers, the development and existence of other religious confessions in a foreign cultural space. The specificity of a 'spatial text' is first and foremost determined by the existence of another, often foreign component that attributes certain colour to a particular cultural space. The existence of this component complicates the structure of a particular locus. It is diversified by another language, different history, often by another religious confession, creating, as a result, a completely different world picture.

Speaking about the Baltic states practically nowhere the name "Latvia" appears. As Y. Abizov, who examined Latvian culture of that period, justifiably remarks: "There was no such notion as Latvia. It was not known even by the Russians who lived in Riga. They used the term 'latishchina' as a counterbalance to 'nemetchina' and 'nemechestvo'. So how was it possible for people from faraway Vitebsk Governorate to say: "In your Latvia?!" For an inhabitant from Russian Governorates Riga and everything around it seemed representing the German spirit. To see this it is enough if only you would plunge into the set of newspapers of that time, let us say "Rizhsky Vestnik" [5]. The local Russian sociopolitical journalism and literature did not turn against Latvians as a nation, but they also did not support Latvians' efforts to become something more important than just a kind of ethnographic formation.

3.2. Russians in Latvia after the year of 1918

In the course of the World War One, the February Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution a significant part of the Russian population left Latvia. From those who stayed there were mostly peasants of Latgale, also the middle class of Riga and other towns.

At the end of 1919 and up to the beginning of 1920 a political situation of Latvia was complicated by the presence of the very different military formations on the territory. For example, according to professor Eric Yekabsons' calculations, in 1919 on the territory of Latvia there were 14 army groups and also 8 other national formations [6]. On the territory of Latvia the attempts were made to implement several strategic plans for future development of Latvia: 1) The imperial plan was being carried out in the frame of two paradigms – the German and Russian ones. This plan excluded the establishment of the state of Latvia and at best Latvians would have an opportunity for cultural autonomy. 2) The Bolshevik plan envisaged absolutism of social democratic ideas, that is, an active participation of the Latvian proletariat in the worldwide struggle for the ideals of internationalism. In "The Declaration on Self-Determination of Latvia" the Central Committee of Latvian Social Democrats and the Executive Committee of the Soviet Workers, Soldiers and the Landless in Latvia (Iskolat) straightforwardly stated that the Latvian proletariat could not wish and demand the compressing of their small homeland in the borders of an independent state [7]. 3) The third strategy envisaged an establishment of the independent Latvian state. It is far from being clear which strategy seemed more attractive for the Russians living on the territory of the proclaimed Republic of Latvia in 1918 – 1919.

In this context the 'national' and 'pro-German' concepts are of a peculiar interest. An Ussuri Cossack and warlord Pavel Rafalovich Bermond-Avalov (1877-1974) became an ideologist and performer of the 'pro-German' strategy. In 1925 in Hamburg his memoirs "The Struggle against Bolshevism" ("Im Kampf gegen den Bolschewismus") were published (in total 540 pages). In his work, Bermond in detail analyses the history of relations between Russia and Germany, the reasons for the out-break of the World War One, its course, the stages of formation of the Russian Volunteer Army and also describes an apolitical situation in the Baltic states. In Bermond's memoirs, the peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was signed on March 3, 1919, becomes a specific turning point in the description of the situation in the Baltics. The treaty formally ended Russia's participation in World War I. According to the treaty Soviet Russia waived the rights on the territories of present Belarus (partly), Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, and Ukraine. In his memoirs, Pavel Bermond-Avalov dedicates 11 chapters directly to those events that took place on the territory of Latvia. In the first lines he formulates his attitude to Mitau (Jelgava): "We all, officers and soldiers, got off here in Latvia as in

our homeland because each of us knew that sooner or later all these small newly established 'states' would be reunited with the Great Russia" [8]. In this part of his memoirs, Bermondts creates a single-sided picture: in his consciousness the scenes of idyllic everyday life - interwoven with episodes of fraternizing Russians and Germans who do not know the language of each other but still communicate with miming and gestures - are retained or formed. The town itself is full of women's laugh, brass band music, festive receptions and parades; the situation in Mitau contrasts with other towns seized by the Civil war horrors. According to the author's strategy "The Struggle against Bolshevism" is a real panegyric on the German-Russian union in the Baltic states. In this part of the memoirs criticism of Bolshevism clearly fades against a background of negative statements about Latvians, allies (mainly, Englishmen), who having supported Latvians against Bermondts's army turned into accomplices of Bolshevism. Bermondts-Avalov simplifies a quite complicated political situation that was developing in the final years of the World War I in Europe and, especially, in Russia to a straightforward paradigm: Bolsheviks – Anti-Bolsheviks. There is no any third way that could be taken into account. Accordingly attitude towards Latvia and Latvians, as well as Russians was directly influenced by their point of view on 'Bolshevism matter'. In the summer of 1919, Bermondts-Avalov found it necessary to address to Latvians several times. In his first address he assured the people that "gathering in Latvia the Russian troops are on their way to their homeland" [9]. Besides Bermondts's army corps of 50,000 men comprised 40,000 Germans and 10,000 Russians. And, of course, neither the Baltic states nor representatives of the Triple Entente and, most probably, the German government as well could perceive this military formation exclusively as the 'Russian' one. On the territory of Latvia Bermondts-Avalov's army did not make a single shot at the Bolsheviks; among numerous orders by the warlord of West Russian Volunteer Army one can find, for example, the order to ban the newspaper "Utro" ('Morning') issued in Riga in the Russian language. This newspaper reflected the position of those Russians who supported the independence of the Republic of Latvia.

Examining crystallization of the idea of national identity in the diasporas of the first Wave of Russian Emigration Lora Manchester notes that despite of expectations this idea did not base on any of two pre-revolution criteria of 'Russianness' - either on mastering the Russian language or belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church. The fundamental myth of a new national identity was represented by collective trauma of the Civil War. Precisely this circumstance made it possible for the following factors to step forward: political convictions (criticism of Tsarism was equated with supporting the Bolsheviks), citizenship (retaining the imperial citizenship), ethnic and racial affiliation (refusal of 'Russianness' for Jewish emigrants and other 'aliens' because of them being potentially sympathetic to the Bolsheviks), social class origin, way of life and 'collective spirit'. [10]

In the very first publications, both in the journalistic and literary texts, Latvia is represented as a native topos for local Russians, without having any negative connotation. In one of the poems the author's "I" is equated with the Latvian nation, a part of which he considers himself. M. Rodionov's poem "The 18th of November" poetically highlights the history of the political regimes being present in the last two years in Latvia: Germans – Stuchka – Niedra – Ulmanis – von der Goltz and Avalov [11]. These spirits are still present in the Latvian Russian press of the beginning of the 1920s; the newspaper "Segodnya" ('Today') becomes the main ideological mouthpiece. Already in 1919 at the first Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia the newspaper "Segodnya" publishes two articles: N. Berezhanskis' "Common Festival" and E. Bramanov's "A Year of Fight". Russians more and more clearly began to comprehend themselves as a part of the new Latvian political nation, but with retaining their own national singularity. Not by an accident Bermondts-Avalov's army becomes the main enemy. N. Berezhanskis names it "so-called Russian-German troop, a black danger, Courland's conspirators supported just by a small heap of Russian reactionaries" [12]. For N. Berezhanskis the main thesis is the declaration of continuing struggle to protect democratic achievements against "the enemies from the right and left". Notably that the day of the 18th November is considered by Bramanov not as a birthday but as a christening day of the Latvian state (in the Russian pre-revolutionary tradition christening was a far more significant festival than birthday) [13]. It is important to note that the both authors consider the Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia not as an elemental, but as a historically conditioned action. For a starting point N. Berezhanskis takes the events that happened almost fifty years ago when among the commandments of the Russian

democratism a 19th-century revolutionary political organization “Narodnaya Volya” proclaimed the rights for nationalities comprising Russia to have a free system of their political life.

On November 4, 1920, in the town of Rezekne the first congress of the representatives of the Old Believers’ communities in Latvia took place. In his report, a member of Constitutional Assembly of Latvia (parliament of the Republic of Latvia) F. Pavlov assured the participants that the present politics of Latvia give a complete freedom in teachings. The present democratic system is for the Old Believers a fulfilment of their long-cherished dream as in their former homeland Russia they were persecuted not because they prayed making the sign of the cross with two fingers but because of the fact that they “instinctively tended to democratic system, resisting the appointments of the officials by the government in administrating their matters” [14]. A thank-you telegram to the chairman of Constitutional Assembly of Latvia was sent expressing convictions that justice, law and order put into the basis of the Latvian state would always be the key to prosperity of the country and to welfare of nationalities living here. Besides already at the second meeting of the Congress the main problems of Russian Old Believers’ population were discussed the most important ones being not knowing the Latvian language and establishment of Old Believers’ schools at which the main subject would be “God’s Law”.

The situation of Latvian Russian minority changed in the beginning of the 1920s when escaping from the Bolsheviks’ terror in Russia quite a big number of Russian emigrants arrived in Latvia. The teacher and public figure V. Preobrazhensky provided the following extended metaphor: “Despite of all the diversity of circumstances in which Russian people are living now, three basic types of “Russia”, three-way representation of a national way of life can be stated. They are: 1) Russia of emigration, of being foreign, [...], white; 2) Russia of minorities, of borderland, stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, blue, so to say, and finally 3) Russia under-the-yoke, soviet, flooded by its own blood, red” [15]. In the 1920s Riga became an important centre of the Russian emigration. In Riga a big number of newspapers, magazines, and periodical issues were published, besides some of the most famous writers and poets of the Russian emigration (Bunin, Teffi, Nabokov, Lukash) cooperated with the most important ones. In Riga collections of poetry and novels by the authors who had decided to connect their lives with Riga and Latvia were quite regularly published. The theme of memory, addressing to the past – these are the mainstream topics of the Russian emigration, and not only the Russian one. In general Emigration loves remembering. In the middle of the 1920s the future sometimes seemed illusory, the present – not quite definite (many authors became real wanderers forced to travel all around the world) and there was a feeling that precisely in the past something important, a feeling of the true reality was left.

However, on the pages of Riga periodical issues, feature stories, short stories, satirical articles and humorous sketches of urban life started to appear more and more often. The present of Riga (Riga of the 1920s) – it is a carefree world of entertainment: world of theaters, cafes, world of game. The world of urban entertainment – it is one of the favourite themes of Riga’s essayists and writers of the 1920s that is more deeply exposed in the novels by P. Chunchin (real name: L. Korol-Purashevich) “Diamonds in the Heel” and “Riga’s Bar-Lady”. In his creative work, struggle for Latvian independence lacks any heroism. A kaleidoscopic change of events takes place and everything starts to resemble a historical anecdote. It is no accident that in his debut novel “Riga’s Bar-Lady” one of the main characters is an adventurer Bermond-Avalov according to whom: “all these at command of the Triple Entente and England in particular newly established small Baltic states are, in fact, territories illegally taken away from the Great Russian Empire.” [16] The main hero is the average man who has experienced difficulties of German occupation regime and the Red Terror. Like any other person Riga’s dweller, who during the years of hardship has been suffering from the lack of material benefits, tends to compensate all his adversity at most. “That is why after the Bolsheviks the average man was touched by white small loaves, opened-up shops, cafes and restaurants, and was extremely pleased that penal labour – a whip, especially painful without any oats – won’t be cracking over humble downcast backs any more.” [16]. P. Chunchin offers to Russians of Latvia to view the recent deadliest historical events ironically.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The period of formation of the Latvian state is one of the most complicated and contradictive periods in the history of Latvia. The time period before the official recognition of the Republic of Latvia can rightly be called the period of the troubled times when the very different political forces offered, but sometimes violently pressed the population of Latvia to accept certain strategies of behaviour. One can say that on the territory of Latvia attempts to implement several strategic plans were carried out. The Latvian Russians have quite quickly grown aware of themselves as a clearly national minority whose task was to protect, defend and develop their own culture, their national identity and retain their own language. Regardless of their nationality and religious belief all former citizens of the Russian Empire were recognised as citizens of the Republic of Latvia having a complete set of all the rights and obligations if they had chosen Latvia as a place of their permanent residence. Publicistic and artistic works published on the pages of Russian newspapers in Latvia reflect complex political, social, national, religious and cultural contradictions, at the same time allowing to observe the emerging strategies for the formation of a new identity. For the intellectuals of the Russian emigration a national self-identification was directly connected with retaining pre-revolutionary cultural heritage and creating a new culture without censorship.

In the periodicals numerous texts are published which demonstrate the development of Russian-Latvian mentality. Historically stable value dominants are consolidated to provide the retaining and reproduction of spiritual and moral and socio-cultural bases of existence; significant personalities are activated representing a value regulatory core of developing Russian-Latvian picture of the world.

Undoubtedly, introduction of parodic and satirical segment in depiction of Russian inhabitants of Latvia (especially, Latgale) is important. It is connected with a general tendency in the development of Russian Emigration culture. Everything that caused local (Riga's) and foreign authors' delight and tenderness in the beginning and in the middle of the 1920s gradually starts to change. And it demonstrates a decrease of nostalgic suffering and an overcoming of tragedy of Emigration. Satirical depiction also represents an internal transformation of culture of Russian population in Latvia, especially among the young generation who try to get over patriarchal traditions and lifestyle

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