

Representation of Hybrid Identities in Contemporary Latvian Literature

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Abstract Latvian literature, by revealing the most significant tendencies of the state development, contributes to the discourse of cultural diversity, simultaneously boosting the idea of national unity. The aim of the paper is to investigate the expressions of hybrid identities in Latvian contemporary literature. In the research, cultural-historical aspects that determine the representation of intercultural dialogue in literature are outlined. Contemporary Latvian literature reflects processes related to existence of people among different cultures. Such interaction results in the development of dialogic relations, which characterize individual's simultaneous belonging to different cultures, and contributes to the creation of a new, namely, hybrid identity.

Key words dialogue; local; global; hybrid identity; Latvian contemporary prose

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Introduction

Under the contemporary world globalization conditions, characterized by the formation of trans-national economy and an international law system, by the development of information systems, open state borders, as well as a tendency towards uniform social and ethical standards, the problem of personality's identity becomes especially acute. The extension of national and cultural borders as well as their ambiguity

make people contemplate their self-identification and stimulate them to search for the answer to the question — Who am I? The answer to this question is not simple to find. The researchers define the contemporary situation as the time of the loss and the search for identification strategies and universal collective values (Ēriksens). Therefore, the problem of identity becomes the object of theoretical reflection of philosophers, psychologists, culturologists, sociologists and other scientists (Huntington, Fukuyama, Wallerstein, Burke a. o.). The search for one's identity is an attempt to find the system of values and culture suitable for oneself, it is a protective reaction against the tendencies of world globalization. Scientists point out that the identity of an individual is “dynamic and [...] open to potential changes during the whole life” (Mieriņa, Koroleva 355). Based on individual's life experience and his / her search for inner balance in a constantly changing world, identity cannot be fixed and doesn't lie in one's genealogical line only, but is more referred as the subjective practice and involvement. Thus, one's individual and transforming “I” is juxtaposed to a rather rigid group's “we” Accordingly, the identity is related not only to the notion of belonging (relationships between the self and the society; one's identification within the society), but also to that of being (existence), “to the ways in which individuals make up an image of themselves” (Mieriņa, Koroleva 355).

Processes, characterized by intensified national feelings and the growth of ideas of fundamentalism and purification, are observed as a reaction to the threats of globalization and homogenization. Therefore, both in a theoretical discourse and everyday life, the categories of national, ethnic and cultural identity grow ever more essential. National identity is a universal concept of the humanities nowadays, which is topical in cultural studies, history, ethnology, art, and literary theory, in political science, sociology and elsewhere. Personality's national identification involves ethnicity, since ethnos is a stable human community that develops naturally in the process of ethno-genesis. National identity is a historically latest formation, which has developed in the result of ethnization, accentuating social-political aspects and unity of national goals.

In the research of recent decades, a frequent notion used in scientific literature is the concept of cultural identity (Terrence, Fishman, Ennaji), which is quite broad and elusive. According to the researchers, cultural identity is interpreted as a wholeness consisting of different aspects — identifiers, e. g. history, language, religion, nationality, place of residence, race, gender etc. Hence, the aspects forming the cultural identity become the basis of personality's contradictoriness, which may have both positive and negative consequences (James 175). These cultural identity forming identifiers are being discussed, changed and supplemented, some

of them are emphasized, whereas others are considered unimportant. In relation to the theme of this research, important seems the opinion expressed by Joshua A. Fishman stating that cultural identity is a dynamic relationship between the ancestral heritage, with all its components (oral tradition, literature, beliefs etc.), and the language(s). The researcher stresses the changeable aspects of cultural identity and the importance of language for it (Fishman).

The Impact of Globalization on Contemporary Latvia

The impact of globalization on culture and human, due to the implications of the dislocation or de-territorialization of culture, as noted by Imre Szeman, “inaugurates a new era of cultural relations” and “constitutes a historical rupture” (Szeman 96).

Globalization processes always unfold in the relationship with the local that enhances the establishment of a new and complex system of relations between the local and the global, as observed also in Latvia. Thus, in contemporary Latvia and its cultural space, a clash of two opposite tendencies is being noted: (1) the number of people with hybrid identity grows, (2) the manifestations of radical national expressions standing for the purity of Latvian culture and national identity are more frequently observed. Taking into consideration a constant relationship between the local and the global, the people of Latvia meet a new form of national identity, where pure nationally-oriented characteristics cease to exist, and face a new concept of a hybrid identity that continues to present itself with an ever growing expression.

A person’s affinity with a nation and mutual unity of his / her belonging to a nation are based on and maintained via common values — language, cultural space, and social memory. Dismissing the idea that nationalism can be based on ethnic purity, *Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018)* offer the description of national identity in Latvia as a phenomenon including the idea of each nation’s uniqueness but not its superiority; it is a denomination for a mutual community of the people having similar national cultural features and striving for the nation’s continuity:

The Latvian constituent nation is inclusive. It has an obligation to strengthen its identity and at the same time to be open to those who wish to join it. It means that one cannot only be born a Latvian but also consciously become one. Each person’s choice determines whether alongside his or her Latvian identity, which is the common one, he or she wishes to maintain also his or her national uniqueness and minority identity. (Guidelines on National Identity)

Although it is the priority of the State of Latvia to strengthen Latvian state national identity, its cultural space is open to various cultural and ethnic phenomena leading to “Open Latvianness” including openness for local national minorities and immigrants.

Currently, national identity is widely discussed and supported by Latvian official power and is seen in the national policy as a consolidating factor under the current circumstances of globalization. The Latvian cultural canon [Latvijas kultūras kanons] comprising the most outstanding Latvian cultural values has been established (www.kulturaskanons.lv/en). National research programmes *National Identity — Language, Latvian History, Culture and Human Security* [Nacionālā identitāte (valoda, Latvijas vēsture, kultūra un cilvēkdrošība)] and *Letonika* [Latvian Studies], as well as the pilot programme *Promotion of National Identity* [Nacionālās identitātes veicināšana] supported by the National Culture Capital foundation [VKKF] approve the state’s orientation towards the maintenance of the national and collective ethnic identity. The majority of the support within the framework of the latter project in the field of literature has been allotted to the re-evaluation of the twentieth century history of Latvia via publishing the series of novels *We. Latvia, the 20th Century* [Mēs. Latvija, XX gadsimts] by 13 Latvian contemporary writers as initiated by Latvian writer Gundega Repše and originally the collection of short stories *We. The 20th Century* [Mēs. XX gadsimts] by 12 female writers in 2011. The novels of this series address problems of the role of collective historical memory for the formation of cultural and national identity of the individual. This is a striking attempt to understand Latvian identity by bringing into different periods of Latvian history and discussing questions about the impact of other cultures upon Latvian identity, about the interaction between cultures, the existence of multicultural society and the rights for the idea of cultural purism to develop.

Hybrid Identities: Theoretical Overview

Transformations of the contemporary ideological landscape, dissolution of culture’s boundaries, and global mobility mark a human’s existence outside a single identity frame, thus the term of hybridity as a designation for cultural fusion is naturally linked to the conception of identity for multicultural or “in-between” individuals — people of multiple or transnational identities and mixed origins, migrants and diaspora communities. The universal designation emphasizing the synthesis of at least two components, has provoked a multiplicity of terms (“hybrid identity” “double identity” “multiple identity” “hyphenated identity / communities” “shared identity” “glocal identity”) with specifically nuanced connotations to denote the

in-betweenness of a modern human. (Kacane, Kovzele, Laha 15–17) The reasons for the emergence of identity of a multiple nature are determined by the modern human's involvement into two, three or more cultures and his / her quest for social mobility, including immigration and emigration, short- and long-term business travels, international marriages, living in multiple countries, etc. Among the reasons behind the hybrid identity is the general contemporary tendency of cultures towards drawing nearer, activated and made topical by the latest technologies, which are able at an incredible speed "to transfer" from one part of the world to another both ideas and people. Consequently, as a complementary and non-exclusionary phenomenon a hybrid identity may consist of but is not limited to (1) a national identity, (2) a national minority identity existing and developing alongside the national one, (3) European, and (4) global / globalized identity, the latter being often seen as "identification with all of humanity" (McFarland, Webb, Brown 830–53).

The term "hybrid" borrowed from the discourse of biology and botany referring to cross-pollination, has extended far beyond the framework of natural sciences and is most often used in postcolonial and cultural studies as "an entity that challenges and subverts hegemonic identities" (Sandest). Nowadays, the concept of hybridity is basically used in connection with post-colonial theories, but is not limited to them. It involves also a wide scope of phenomena in culture and literature as well. Mikhail Bakhtin was one of the first to apply the concept of hybridity to cultural phenomena, distinguished between intentional and unintentional hybridity, and associated the idea about a hybrid text with concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia, where polyphony means the use of different voices in the text, for instance, in novels, but heteroglossia denotes the diversity of language within the limits of an individual text (Bakhtin). In linguistics, hybridity, contrary to hybridization as a dynamic on-going process, is seen as the end result that "entails the combination of two languages and undermines the notion of a monological authoritative discourse" (Guignery 2).

The widely employed but disputable notion of hybridity, has been discussed by historians, philosophers, cultural critics, postcolonial and communication theorists initiating a debate in the last few decades on the (in)adequacy of the term in cultural studies, for instance, it has been observed in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Homi C. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995), Robert Young's *Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (2005), Anjali Prabhu's *Hybridity. Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (2007), Marwan M. Kraidy's *Hybridity, OR the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (2005 (2007)), a. o. Although the concept of hybridity has

gained visibility in the Baltic countries, it is basically analyzed in the context of hybridization of literary genres. In the English speaking and postcolonial world, though, taking into consideration the contemporary globalization circumstances, it is broadly attributed to cultures, peoples, and communities as such, as well as to ethnic and individual identities.

Hybridity, often characterized by such key words as “coalescence and antagonism” “fusion and separation” “dissolution and division” “disruptiveness and productiveness” “doubleness” etc., implies antithetical action where the combination of elimination (standardization) and creativity (heterogeneity) opens up new perspectives and generates appearance of a new trans-cultural form located in the contact zone, third or in-between space:

Hybridity stands in opposition to the myth of purity and racial and cultural authenticity, of fixed and essentialist identity, embraces blending, combining, syncretism and encourages the composite, the impure, the heterogeneous and the eclectic. (Guignery 3)

Having been seen as the entity that creates alternative discourse, hybridity subverts the idea of one dominant culture and its uniqueness and raises a question on power shifts and authority. If nations are traditionally seen as historic occurrences characterized by cultural and ethnic homogeneity, then alternative discourse re-examines the existence of purities and dwells upon, as Edward Said notes, filiation and affiliation (Said 17), i.e., being or becoming a representative of a concrete nation. Influenced by such a large scale process as globalization, hybridity is seen as “a by-product of the transcultural dynamics between the tradition and modernity sometimes conceptualized as the local and the global” (Kraidy 319). Viewed in the context of multiculturalism, hybridity is seen as “a strategy of cooptation used by the power holders to neutralize difference” (Kraidy 321) and is included in the context of inter-contextual theory of hybridity that “explicates transnational cultural dynamics by articulating hybridity and hegemony in a global context” (Kraidy 329); it assists in understanding local and global cultural complexity and various actions in transnational cultural dynamics influenced by the dominating power.

The concept of hybrid identity seems to be the most appropriate one for the characterization of the above described situation of cultural interaction in the era of globalization when new conditions for culture are constantly being produced. By using the terms “hybridity” and “hybrid identity” in this research, we rely on the approach taken by Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture*,

offering to perceive hybridity as a mutual interaction between cultures which results in withdrawing binary oppositions and unequivocal juxtaposition of cultures. The outcome of the culture shift and “clash of civilizations” (Huntington) is the emergence of the so called “Third Space” — a space where a new position is not only the sum of two cultures, but something more (Bhabha):

It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this ‘Third Space’, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (Bhabha 209)

A hybrid identity develops in the place where processes of cultural transfer and interaction as well as processes of repulsing a different (alien) culture take place simultaneously. A hybrid identity is not a stable form, it constantly develops and changes. In a local place, where codes of different cultures are present and processes of cultural clashes and interactions in a diachronic and synchronic perspective take place, there emerge culture hybridization tendencies, later resulting in the appearance of a hybrid cultural identity.

Thus, being aware of the diversity of terms used to denote interactions of cultures, and of the phenomena of transfer and fusion, as well as recognizing the ambiguous and controversial character of the term “hybrid identity” created by the scientists nowadays, e. g. Tony Sandset, Patricia Leavy, Keri E. Iyall Smith a. o., the term “hybrid identities” seems to us the most appropriate one for conceptualizing global and local expressions and for displaying the processes of transformation and expansion of Latvian national identity in the contemporary society. These processes take place due to both the cultural situation of the past and contemporary tendencies of globalization and contra-globalization. The contemporary Latvian literature tries to reveal the processes of Latvian cultural hybridization and the existence of different identities in many and various ways, and it also makes attempts to discover the causes of these processes in the past.

Hybridization Processes of Latvian Culture

Within the theory of post-colonialism, cultural hybridization is frequently looked at as a comprehensive phenomenon, thus, for instance, Jonathan Rutherford points out that all *forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity* (Rutherford 211). Referring to Edward Said’s quote, Latvian literary scholar and translator of Peter Burke’s *Cultural Hybridity* (2009) (Bērks), Pauls Daija, dwells upon the non-

existence of the so called “uncontaminated” purities (Gilroy 250):

Therefore we may say that **culture does not exist in the singular and the roots of any culture involve borrowing and adopting.** Or as in his book Peter Burke quotes Edward Said: ‘Any history of culture is the history of the culture of borrowing.’ (Kļavis)

The issue of hybrid identity relates to the problem of national identity which in Latvia has always been extremely topical. Though Latvian culture constitutes a part of Europe’s cultural space, looked at from the aspect of the historical development of statehood, Latvia has been an independent country for a very short period of time. During several centuries, historical events have been among the most important identity forging factors which influence the development of the country and its culture until today, determining people’s abilities of thinking and behaviour, their feeling of inner freedom, their desire to take responsibility not only for one’s own individual life, but also for that of the nation in general.

The history of the Latvian state is a striking example of constant interacting with different cultures. In various epochs of the formation and development of Latvian culture it has been influenced by the cultures of bigger nations (German, Swedish, Polish and Russian), which eventually has led to the emergence of its specific hybrid identity. The impacts have been determined by the long periods of dependence, namely, Latvia has been subjected to other countries since the thirteenth century and up to 1918, and then, after a very short period of independence, it was occupied again, regaining its independence only in 1990.

In addition, the issue of national identity is currently brought into focus by the fact that due to various historical developments the proportion of representatives of other nationalities in Latvia now is quite considerable, and this situation is being constantly aggravated both socially and politically (one of the examples of such moments of aggravation is conducting a referendum on the second official language in 2012). Consequently, the contemporary Latvia is faced with the problem of redefining its national, ethnic and cultural identity manifested on political, social and cultural level.

The approach of the centenary of Latvia’s statehood makes the issues about Latvia’s past and future, about the Latvian language, culture and Latvian identity especially topical. The Internet site *National Identity*, considered to be a mouth-piece of the official viewpoint and independent information, writes that “a united national identity and cultural heritage of Latvian nation existed only in the period

until the thirteenth century, before Latvia was overrun by the German culture and affected by further historical events. At the present moment, we can speak only about the Latvians' and foreigners' territorial belonging to Latvia" (Kas ir nacionālā identitāte?).

In the history of Latvia, the search for identity, including issues of hybrid identity, has been topical since already the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and also in the early and pre-national period of Latvian culture hybrid identity has remained in the focus of attention and is to be most directly ascribed to the Baltic Germans and to the clergymen-writers of that time:

In Latvia, to separate the history of the Baltic Germans from the history of the Latvians is impossible, since those were not only the Latvians that were influenced by the Germans, but to the same extent the Baltic Germans, too, were influenced by the Latvians. (Kļavis)

The most striking examples of the hybridization of Latvian culture have been observed since the twentieth century, one of them being the deliberate Russification policy implemented by the Soviet Union and "undertaken in the context of the global power race between two mutually conflicting economic systems — capitalism and socialism" (Kalnačs 22). The twenty-first century brings new challenges not only for the policy of the national identity, but also for a social and cultural integration. Nowadays, due to the expanding cultural contacts at a global level, the hybridity of Latvian culture is much more evident than ever before and requires interdisciplinary approach from the global studies perspective (Steger).

Taking into consideration the fact that Latvia is a very ethnically diverse country (Latvians compose about 62% of the population, while 27% consider themselves Russian, and 11% belong to other ethnic minorities), ethnic tensions related to differences in the perception of history from time to time escalate between the two main groups (Mierina, Koroleva 359). The descendants of immigrants, who arrived in Latvia within the framework of the biggest immigration wave (from the 1950s to 1980s), contrary to their predecessors who lived / live in their "parallel worlds," have successfully integrated into the society. They are not simply the bearers of cultural values, their hybrid identities have led to the creation of hybrid culture and hybrid texts (e.g. NGO "Orbīta" (www.orbita.lv), uniting Russian poets, photographers, musicians and multi-media artists in Latvia, has actively participated in Latvian cultural life since 1999). Under the multi-cultural conditions, when Latvian families and kin consist of representatives

belonging to different cultures, the Latvian language and its active use become the determinant objective indicator of national identity. The spatial belonging, namely, the space which an individual considers his / her native place, home, where one always wishes to return, may be considered a subjective criterion of determining a specific national identity.

Attempts of Defining National, Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latvian Literature

Fiction is the indicator and the former of the search for both national culture and ethnic identity. At depicting their heroes' life during the clash of cultures, writers reveal the understanding about the national identity in the period described and simultaneously give also their own interpretation of the identity problem, thereby, a fiction work becomes an important source for the formation of a collective self-reference. Viewed from this aspect, contemporary fiction is a particularly important research object. On the one hand, it identifies the historical experience gained at defining Latvian national identity and solving problems created by the clash of cultures, and on the other hand, it shows the specificity of a contemporary situation.

The analysis comprises works of contemporary Latvian fiction with a different thematic specificity (the contemporary position is present in all novels, which is determined by the time when the novel has been written). All works can relatively be divided into two blocks:

— the works that view the Latvian identity from the historical aspect (These works emphasize the situation when a hybrid identity was being formed due to the appearance of other ethnicities in Latvia as a result of colonization, and, consequently, the interaction between the local culture and that of colonizers took place. In works under the analysis, the Germans and the Russians are depicted as nations which historically have affected the features of Latvian culture most of all.);

— the works that accentuate the issue of national identity under the contemporary globalization circumstances (These works show the situations when a contemporary Latvian inhabitant, who thinks about himself as a Latvian, gets to a foreign country and, staying there for a longer time, experiences the impact of other cultures upon his identity. Thus, the problem of the loss of Latvian identity gets emphasized. The Latvians, who due to the multicultural situation experience the impact of other cultures upon their identity in Latvia, staying abroad for a long time come under ever stronger influence of other cultures and in the result gradually become hybrids of many cultures. This situation brings into sharp focus the question about the possibility of maintaining Latvian identity in the multicultural world under the globaliza-

tion circumstances.).

The novels dealing with the twentieth century history of Latvia emphasize the multicultural situation in Latvia, which, depending on the plot, carries both positive and neutral as well as negative connotations. Pauls Bankovskis' novel *I8* reflects upon the idea that historical events and multi-cultural environment make the impact also on art, culture and everyday life, thus forming and diversifying national identity. The topicality of the issue of multi-cultural situation and identity under the contemporary conditions in Latvia is shown by depicting the narrator's family, where German, Polish, Russian and Latvian roots intersect; the narrator himself was born in Latvian SSR and considers himself a Latvian. The author questions the idea if a human's identity is determined by the roots of his family. His protagonist does not feel himself as a Latvian who has roots either of Krakow Poles or of Riga Germans. He feels himself in the present — as a Latvian. However, though specific ethnic roots are not essential for a contemporary individual, his identity, formed by a collective historical memory, is reflected in both his language and the subtle value system, as well as in social life which a bearer of culture feels as his own. According to Ēriks Eriksons, belonging to some ethnic group cannot be the result of the action deliberately guided and influenced by some family members — it has to be perceived as a component of a human's self-formation process describing identity as a part of one's self-building, personal integrity and continuity (Eriksons). Within such a context, the issue of the importance of national identity is being made topical today, when a large segment of people (Latvian people among them) perceive themselves as “world citizens,” as peculiar ethnic hybrids with a multiple identity.

In a historical aspect, Latvian identity is conceptually brought into focus by Gundega Repše in her novel *Bogene*. The epigraph of the novel is a fragment from St. Augustine's text about memory, which indicates a vector of reading — human's understanding about himself and, respectively the understanding of kin and nation, is linked with the conscious and unconscious information kept by memory, which is passed down from generation to generation. In the novel, this idea is notably vividly expressed in relation to the episodes of torture (also the torture of nation's spirit on a cosmic scale) and protagonist's reflection on them:

Why do they cover up the mouth any time, but never the eyes? I see everything and keep it in mind. My daughters, grand-daughters and grand-grand-daughters will see it, and the God will see it when I annunciate it. (Repše 148)

At ruminating on the darkest twentieth century periods in Latvia's history —

deportations and occupation of 1940 — the author, from a young woman's point of view, reveals not only the nation's tragedy, but also Latvian woman's spiritual strength and the specific Latvian lore, whose representative and witness chthonic Bogene is. When people's foreboding of evil is depicted, references to multicultural environment appear and the hybrid identity of family members is described.

Characters of Gundega Repše's works, whose roots are in Latvia and who recognize themselves as the Latvians, sing the German Christmas song *O, Tannenbaum*. This fact shows that the presence of German culture in Latvia even among the Latvians is natural and accustomed. The song, brilliantly representing the German culture, is performed at a specific moment in a narrow family circle and creates the atmosphere of solemnity and harmony. Further on in the novel, however, a negative attitude is expressed towards Germany and the Germans as the nation linked with Nazism. The historical events of 1940 bring about the situation that Latvia is overcrowded with various peoples: here are the Germans, and then the Russians arrive; there are moments when all the then dominating three cultures (Latvian, German, Russian) intertwine and form one whole — at some official party the Russian waltz *Manchuria Heights* is being played and the NKVD observers, the German secret service agents as well as beautiful Latvian girls are dancing together. In the novel, such a mix of cultures is characterized as the one creating the atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety.

When describing the period of Latvia's occupation, deportations and nation's sufferings, Repše provides a long list of surnames of victim families arranged in the alphabetic order and comprising the names of nations having different roots — Latvian, German, Russian, Jewish, Polish etc. In this way Gundega Repše voices her opinion about Latvia as a multicultural state whose population is characterized by a hybrid identity, revealing also that in times of political tragedies sufferers are not only the representatives of one nation, but rather the whole population of Latvia, who, despite their different ethnic identity, have much in common, the principal thing being — their belonging to the same country.

The basic reason for a negative attitude to different nations of Latvia's population is various historical and political complexities. This idea is topical in many works describing Latvia's development in different periods of time. Thus, World War I and World War II create a negative attitude towards the Germans, while the period of the Soviet occupation forms an unconscious aversion about the Russians. A brilliant example of this fact is the novel *Mother's Milk* written by Nora Ikstena, where the author reveals how within the period of several generations' life the attitude towards the Russians gradually changes (Ikstena). People who have

experienced the beginning of the Soviet occupation openly express their negative opinion about the Russians and Russia, while their children peacefully co-exist with the Russians — they learn in the same school, study and even fall in love with one another. On everyday life level, there develop friendly and harmonious relations with foreigners, and these relations become strained only due to historical and political events.

After the Soviet occupation, Latvia becomes the motherland for the representatives of various nations and a common cultural space where interlace and interact features of many cultures. In the twenty-first century, the boundaries between countries are only relative, and the Latvians take a wider look. The debut novel *Riga — Moscow. The 21st Century Love Story* [Rīga — Maskava. 21. gadsimta mīlas stāsts] by Sabine Košeleva depicts the relationships between two young people — between the so called “latiška” [latishka] [a Russian word for a female-Latvian transcribed in Latvian] and “my Russian”. The fellow from Russia does not perceive the main female character as a simple “latiška”; just like the blood of a Belorussian, Ukrainian and even a Latvian runs in his own veins, the genetics of the girl, too, is to be assessed as hybrid. *The Review on the Book ‘Riga-Moscow. The 21st Century Love Story. We are still attracted to those Russians* [Grāmatas Rīga — Maskava. 21. gadsimta mīlasstāsts recenzija. Velk mūs pie tiem krieviem] stresses the fact that the author of the book does not hesitate to bring to light all deeply prejudiced “kitchen talks” about the national question which any Latvian is well familiar with (Simpson; Petrenko). The author of the book writes:

‘We are still attracted to those Russians, whether we like it or not’. [...] ‘We — so dull, ponderous, too serious, living aloof and grumbling about — admire the open Russian soul, when drunk — we sing Russian ballads and like Russian films. Perhaps we need the Russians — for the sake of balance. [...] Perhaps — enough abusing? The past remains the past. Time to bury the battle-axe. Why do we need to carry hatred with us like such a childhood trauma which makes us angry and does not allow us to live happily?’ (Košeleva 15)

The short period of independence has determined also the specific national character, quite often discussed in novels, namely, sometimes the Latvians are spoken about as a nation which lacks self-confidence, a nation which is unable to make independent decisions:

We are too much accustomed to conciliatorily obey, keep silence, not to

object, suffer. (Bankovskis 67)

We have grown so much accustomed to the idea of having nothing — no property, no freedom, even our own language has not belonged to us for a long time — and therefore we live like animals kept in starvation, always hungry, always harbouring strong suspicion against both aliens and ours. (Bankovskis 110)

In 1918, on the eve of Latvia's independence, the heroes of Bankovskis' novel *18* philosophize:

I am a world citizen. [...] Politics does not interest me. I have to sing where I am paid for to sing. I don't care — whether it is for the Russians, or the Germans, since nothing actually belongs to us, the Latvians, even this land we are now standing on is not ours. The only thing that remains for us to do — to allow other people to fling us about. All our history is not our own, but determined by others. (Bankovskis 33)

While walking from Riga to Valka, the protagonist observes the Latvian landscape and identifies the presence of other cultures in it too, which testify to the violent interference in the destiny of the Latvian nation, namely, on seeing that the German manor houses are being destroyed by the Russian army he does not feel any regret, since he does not consider this estate his own:

The supporters of one power destroy what belongs to the other one. This was only one of many manor houses — the embodiment and symbol of the 700-year long wrong done to our people, the corner-stone and stronghold of alien powers. (Bankovskis 39)

A closer attention to the issue of the hybridization of Latvian culture and individual hybrid identity resulting from processes of globalization and contemporary multicultural situation is devoted in novels depicting the present-day Latvia. Having lived in foreign countries for a longer time, the protagonist of the novel *The Latvians are Everywhere* by Otto Ozols, being fluent in Latvian, Russian, German and English, has never expressed a wish to return to Latvia. His ties with his native country are absolutely cut, he does not call himself a Latvian either, but defines himself as “a world wanderer” (Ozols 122), “a world vagabond who has run away from Latvia” (Ozols 59). Another character of the novel, Rihards Kleinbergs, acts in a similar

way; he emphasizes his Latvian roots, but calls himself an “inhabitant of Berlin” (Ozols 59). This position shows the influence of globalization upon individual’s consciousness. The Latvians are considered to be one of the most mobile European nations. Due to the emigration wave starting with the new millennium, Latvia lost 9.1% of its population (OECD 16). In search for freedom, wellbeing and stability, people have left their native land, are well-aware of the tendencies of world globalization and have become extreme cosmopolitans. Having spent only a week in a foreign country, the protagonist of the novel also experiences the influence of a multicultural world upon his consciousness when in Sweden some black artist, admiring Martin Luther King, quotes the latter:

Words, thoughts and intonations like warm waves were sweeping over my consciousness, soon engulfing it completely. That was unbelievable. (Ozols 42)

Other contemporary writers — Vilis Lācītis, Sabīne Košeleva — contemplate the influence of multi-culturalism upon human identity as well. The plot of Vilis Lācītis’ novel *Stroika with a View on London* [*Stroika ar skatu uz Londonu*] [(stroika — from Russian “a building”; language hybridity in the title) shows the possibility of and necessity for identity transformation when a character of the novel gets into an alien cultural space. In Great Britain, the guest workers, though they can speak English a little, experience the infiltration of the language into their consciousness in everyday life situations. This process is brilliantly illustrated by the emergence of hybrid words — the words are not translated, but only phonetically transformed by adapting them to the pronunciation of the native tongue. In the preface of the novel, the author indicates that “Anglicisms and Russicisms are used in the text intentionally and without a special selection as a peculiarity of Latvian builders’ language” (Lācītis 5). Being aware of the fact that these phonetically adapted words might be unfamiliar to a wide circle of readers, the author offers a glossary of guest workers’ slang at the end of the book, explaining in it the meanings of most frequently used words. Moreover, this glossary includes not only borrowings from Russian and English but also from such languages as German, French and Polish. In the novel, slang words are used during the guest workers’ intercommunication, thus testifying to a gradual transformation of the characters’ consciousness and identity. Though the guest workers from Latvia depicted in the novel are only one social group, it is big enough to affect the transformations of Latvian culture and identity on the whole. Such cosmopolitan people have to be perceived as bearers of cultural transfer, since at visiting their home land again they carry not only novel linguistic

and cultural knowledge with them, but also spiritual and non-material values of foreign countries' reality, which are "absorbed" by the Latvian culture.

Conclusions

The contemporary Latvian prose testifies to the importance of the issue about maintaining national identity under globalization conditions. In the time when it is impossible to speak about the Latvian culture as being "pure" of any admixture of other cultures, the characters who live or have lived in Latvia and whose native tongue is Latvian feel themselves Latvians to a greater or lesser extent. Those characters, whose ethnic and national identity cannot be unequivocally defined, present various possibilities of addressing the contemporary multicultural situation — starting from the homogenization of culture, when the feeling of belonging to some definite culture and nation dies away, and ending with counter-globalization, when national cultural values and belonging to one culture are emphasized. The majority of characters are located in between these two anti-poles, and being aware of their polyphonic cultural identity they still accentuate their belonging to the State of Latvia and Latvian nation. Thus, the contemporary Latvian literature not only identifies the specificity of the present situation, but also provides its peculiar vision of the future in the light of the present, indicating a possible way for the development of culture hybridization.

In the contemporary Latvian prose, the problem of national identity is viewed in a diachronic and synchronic aspects. In a diachronic aspect, the role of a collective memory is highlighted, while in a synchronic aspect — the role of language and belonging to one state. A person of today often knows the specific ethnic roots where the German, Polish, Russian, Jewish etc. cultures intertwine, but is not able to fully realize and feel them; person's identity is formed by a collective memory which is reflected in folklore, language, landscape, everyday life and in a subtle value system as well. In the present situation, the feeling of belonging to Latvian nation involves speaking one language and belonging to one state, which the characters with a hybrid identity consider their home.

The contemporary Latvian prose testifies to a cultural transformation and the birth of a new human awareness — the characters, who live in the multicultural situation of the present and are aware of themselves as individuals with different ethnic roots inherited from the past interacting in them, are not samples of a mechanical combination of cultures, but they form a new hybrid cultural type of a human.

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