INNER CONFLICTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITIES IN DIASPORA: A CASE STUDY OF LATVIA'S DIASPORA IN SWEDEN

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Abstract

Hybrid identity seems to be a nowadays phenomenon, even though it has always been present within diasporic communities in different historical times. It has been in a spotlight more recently because of the growing numbers of transnational and diasporic communities around the world, which leaves the impact on the formation of people's identities. This research looks into the theoretical grounds of diasporic identities, recognizing hybrid and fluid aspects within and inner conflicts which are brought along while finding the stable ground for one's identity. There is a broad empirical part, where Latvia's diaspora in Sweden is studied, searching for answers about changes in their identities and belonging issues when living abroad. This study found that formation of the diasporic identity is an on-going process with different and individual stages of being and attitudes towards own identity, home and belonging. The complexity of individual adjustment to diasporic identity is observed, which often can be characterized as a hybrid *in-betweenness* – the state between two or more identities.

Keywords: *Diaspora, identity, hybridity, Latvia, Sweden*.

Introduction

Experience of living abroad takes and gives; one encounters personal losses and gains [Cho 2018]. It is retrospective as one is somewhat forced sooner or later to investigate oneself and find new grounds for existence. There are struggles outside, adjusting to the different surroundings and inside, searching for ways to fit in and make sense of the outer world. There are realizations and searches for belonging, inner and outer peace. The research regarding shifts in diasporic identities has been topical as many people in the world live transnationally, often belonging to one of

the diaspora communities, which in turn raises questions for researchers about the specifics of constructing these people's identities.

This article is looking into the development of discourse of diaspora, identity, and hybridity, tying it together with experience of different personal accounts from the most recent of Latvia's diaspora community in Sweden. The recent or modern diaspora is considered to be the one, which has formed after regaining the independence of Latvia in 1991. Latvia's population has decreased drastically by nearly 10% between 2010 and 2019 [United Nations 2019]. In the light of the creation of different diasporic communities abroad and emigration patterns from Latvia, it is crucial to continue to explore diasporas, their formation, and diasporic identities. The main focus in this research is to explore personal and sometimes deeply intimate experiences in Latvia's diaspora in Sweden and to observe dynamics of creation of a diasporic identity as it could be the indicator for future research on Latvia's diaspora in general, which is specific because of its diversity[1].

The research questions to discover complexity of diasporic identities are the following: do members of Latvia's diasporic community in Sweden form hybrid or fluid identities; do they adjust their identities to the host country or remain with an untouched core identity; what kind of factors influence inner conflicts in diasporic identities; does this agree or contradict with the current state of the art in academic knowledge? In order to answer these research questions, the article has a theoretical frame in the section *Conceptual problems defining diaspora, identity and hybridity*, looking into works of such authors as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Marwan Kraidy, Martin Ehala, Dibyesh Anand and others to create the overview on discourse about identity issues in general and diasporic identity together with hybrid identities. There is a section of the methodology, explaining the design of the empirical part, which follows afterwards with the title *Belonging and home in Latvia's diasporic community in Sweden.* In the section *Discussion* analysis of the empirical data in relation to the existing diaspora studies scholarship is presented and research questions are answered. The last section is the *Conclusions.*

Conceptual problems defining diaspora, identity and hybridity

There is a lot of uncertainty in a post-modern world view which represents itself in a crisis of the previously created scientific frameworks. Fluidity and inability to agree upon definitions of different terms is just one of the examples of the contemporary agenda of social and cultural studies.

The term *diaspora* initially derives from Greek, meaning dispersal or scattering of seeds [Carment, Sadjed 2017: 2], and referring to Jewish experience. *Diaspora* as an

[1] Latvia's diaspora is not homogenous; there is a division between people who come from the ethnic Latvian and Russian speaking communities.

old Greek word was rarely used in other languages before the 19th century. The term developed drastically in the second part of the 20th century. Until the 1950s *diaspora* had no possible meaning except religious, and until the 1960s *diaspora* as concept was almost absent from the social sciences lexicon [Dufoix 2003: 15–16, 19]. Now the term *diaspora* itself has been somewhat *scattered* due to multiple definitions and fluid nature. Robert Cohen thinks that term *diaspora* has become contested because of its popularity:

> *For Soysal, term has become 'venerated', for Anthias it has become a 'mantra', for Chariandy it is 'fashionable' and 'highly-favoured', for Sökefeld the term is 'hip' and 'in'. One scholar, Donald Akeson, is so annoyed at its popularity that he complains that 'diaspora' has become a 'massive linguistic weed'* [Cohen 2018: 18].

Fluidity has affected the term *identity* as well. Martin Ehala puts it in this way:

> *Research on identity is like a tale of the five blind men describing an elephant: from one perspective it seems like pillar, from another perspective a rug, and from another perspective like a basket. Even worse, the five men describing this identity don't even listen much to each other* [Ehala 2018: 2].

The ambiguity of identity has led some scholars to reject the term altogether as too imprecise for scholarly analysis [Ehala 2018: 2]. Some post-modern authors celebrate the crush of certainty and with them the cultural base of identities, allowing self-identification to occur. Ehala thinks that, as beautiful as this may sound, this principle of self-identification is in contradiction with the very basics of how collective identities function. To claim an identity, or to have an identity, one has to have a valid authenticity relationship to the sign of the identity [Ehala 2018: 115]. Ehala has some doubts about an ability to perform authentically in two or more identities. He suggests that one can have strong attachment to the particular identity, but it does not automatically mean that the person can perform authentically in it and be fully accepted as a group member by others in the group. At the same time Ehala admits that there are thousands of collective identities in any society at any time, and every person belongs to many overlapping in-groups simultaneously [Ehala 2018: 159]. Johan Fornäs formulates identities as *meanings attached to human individuals or collectives, in interaction among themselves and with surrounding others* and formed by *signification process* [Fornäs 2012: 43]. The process includes defining oneself or the group in relation to outsiders or *others*. Thomas Hylland Eriksen [1995] suggests that the compass of the group with which they identify is the subject to the potential change. He talks about *we-hood* and *us-hood* as two modes of social identification – *we-as-subject* and *we-as-object* or *us-hood*. *We-hood* is characterized by interdependence and internal cohesion. *Us-hood* is brought alive where the *other* is imagined as a threat [Eriksen 1995: 427].

Stuart Hall's research leads into uncertain ground. He talks [1994] about *decentred* identities or *postmodern subject*, which lacks fixed, essential or permanent identity. It is being formed and transformed continuously in relations to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically, not biologically, defined, suggests Hall [1994]. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent *self*. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. Hall writes that if we feel we have a united identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or *narrative* of the self about ourselves, because fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy [Hall 1994: 277].

From the discourse about fluid identities arises a new term – *hybridity*. Hybridity particularly is one of the most dynamic concepts to have emerged within postcolonial and diaspora studies as post-structuralist was used to reformulate and reconceptualize the term [Stierstorfer, Wilson 2018: 126]. Hybridity, as it is put by Marwan M. Kraidy [2005], is one of the emblematic notions of our era. It captures the spirit of the times with its obligatory celebration of cultural difference and fusion. At more prosaic level, its initial use in Latin was describe the offspring of *a tame sow and wild boar*. Hybridity has proven a useful concept to describe multipurpose electronic gadgets, designer agricultural seeds, environment-friendly cars with dual combustion and electrical engines, companies that blend American and Japanese management practices, multiracial people, dual citizens and postcolonial cultures [Kraidy 2005: 1]. Like other nowadays concepts, hybridity is a risky notion. Kraidy writes, that rather than a single idea or unitary concept, hybridity is an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that simultaneously reinforce and contradict each other. Still, Kraidy thinks, even though having a *foggy* boundaries and semantic openness, hybridity remains an appealing concept [Kraidy 2005: 65–66].

Hybridity, being a relatively new term academically, is not new as a concept at all, and as claimed by some authors, it has been present always. Edward Said [1994] says, for example, that all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic. Jerry Bentley [1993] points out that cross-cultural encounters are historically pervasive. Encounters between cultures have been always prevalent. He claims that cultural hybridity is a historical reality in many historical case studies that range from South America to China. For instance, Islam spread rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa because local elites converted voluntarily to enhance trade with Muslim merchants and because Islam was the dominant mode of sociopolitical organization of the world that surrounded sub-Saharan Africa. Bentley thinks that self-enclosed culture is in

fact a historical aberration [Bentley 1993]. Jay L. Lemke suggests that multiplicity and hybridity of postmodern identities is not new or exceptional, but it is rather the contemporary realization of the more general principle that in identity development, we learn how to perform diverse relational identities in interaction with diverse others [Lemke 2008: 18].

Dibyesh Anand [2018] ties together diaspora experience with a hybridity. He thinks that diaspora is an entity whose very existence is a product of interaction across cultures. There is also a constant reminder that there is always more than one culture. At the very least – there are two cultures – one in the host country and another in the home country. Anand puts forward culture as a site of debate and contestation as culture is about contestations and conversations within it. He agrees that there are subjects who would not act open-minded towards those not belonging to their culture. They would see such an inter-cultural dialogue or inter-mixing as an impurity and an attack on culture [Anand 2018: 115–117].

Anand is proposing that those people who have lost emotional connections with their homeland, but have only ethnic ties left, are not diasporic anymore. From another hand, if somebody lives in the hosting land, but have complete loyalty to their homeland, they are not diasporic either but temporary migrants [Anand 2018: 114]. Lily Cho [2018] gives another perspective. She thinks that there is a vital difference between the transnational and the diasporic, even though many discussions of diaspora emphasize the ways in which diasporas challenge national borders and national identities. Cho does not think that diasporas are constituted by transnational movement. To be diasporic is to be marked by loss, according to Cho. The difference between the transnational and the diasporic lies in the difference between those whose subjectivities emerge out of the security of moving through the world with the knowledge of a return and those whose subjectivities are conditioned by the knowledge of loss [Cho 2018: 112].

To be diasporic does not always mean to feel comfortable about one's identity. Some in diaspora find it hard to reconcile their *original* beliefs and values in a different context. *Original* is often a product of nostalgic imagination and mythmaking [Anand 2018: 116]. Kraidy thinks that hybrid identity might be in effect a refusal, or perhaps an inability, to make definitive identity choices. Hybridity is not a negation of identity; rather, it is an inevitable condition [Kraidy 2005: 146–147]. Homi K. Bhabha puts it in this way from his personal experience:

> *I never imagined that I would live elsewhere. Years later, I ask myself what it would be like to live without the unresolved tensions between cultures and countries that have become the narrative of my life, and the defining characteristic of my work* [Bhabha 2007: x].

Bhabha [2007] characterizes this state of being as a *third space*, a somewhat hybrid and borderline state of being. It is not the identity itself, but the continuous and fluid process of identification, as Bhabha puts it himself when being interviewed in 1990 [Rutherford 2018]. He speaks as well about *unhomely* experience and being *beyond*, which is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past:

> *We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': and exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-delá – here and there, on all sides* [Bhabha 2007: 1–2].

Cho is agreeing with Bhabha, saying that *unhoming* or to be *unhomely* and feeling of a loss, is a state of diasporic consciousness and it always remains that way if one is diasporic [Cho 2018: 112].

There are some critical voices about hybridity as well. Lemke [2008] thinks that we often celebrate *hybridity* as an opportunity for people to escape from the prescribed role identities of particular cultures or institutions, though we should also recognize that hybridity represents a compromise by the individual among the pressures and forces of multiple cultures and institutions which are seeking to control our identities. He adds that increasingly in the modern world, people are under pressure to conform to the identity stereotypes of more than one traditional community, ethnic or national culture. Lemke suggests that we hybridize merely to reconcile the conflicting pressures [Lemke 2008: 19–20; 32–33]. As well Bhabha has been pointing out some negative aspects of the notion of hybridity. In the interview Bhabha [Rutherford 2018] says that commitment to *cultural diversity* is not necessarily positive since it can be located within the grid of the dominant culture. Bhabha thinks that the difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework as it is nearly impossible and counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily coexist. Lemke [2008], from another hand, addresses the issue of the diversity in a personality, claiming that many people appear to be *ideal-types* of one or another culture, but it is never possible in all the aspects, and appearance can be misleading as it can be the projected identity, which one wishes to seem to be to others. Our identities are product of life in a community, and we learn how to interact with many sorts of people very different from ourselves, in this process building up a cumulative repertoire of roles we can play, and with them identities we can assume [Lemke 2008: 20].

Performing in a hybrid identity can reveal the absence of the identity, suggests Kraidy [2005]. He mentions Jean Baudrillard and his theory of simulations. Baudrillard [1983] writes that to simulate is to feign to have what one has not, and

the simulation means concealment of the nonexistence of something. Kraidy [2005] describes young Maronites in Lebanon, who simultaneously identify with Western and Arab cultures and reject parts of both of them. In this way younger generation of Maronites in Lebanon embody hybridity in that they live simultaneously on two sides of a symbolic fault line without full allegiance to either. One of the interview subjects Anton, who criticized young Maronites in the interview told that *they pretend to be what they are not. They look Western, but they have the same old archaic mentality. They imitate rather than live their freedom*. In other words, this is a phenomenon of simulation, concludes Kraidy. Young Maronite's adoption of simulative tactics reflects a lack in their cultural identity wherein simulated action masks the absence of a clearly defined, organic identity [Kraidy 2005: 138].

Hybridity might lead to the fluidity towards attitudes. Nagel and Staeheli [2004] contend that diasporic identity develops ways to balance identity and membership that do not require a choice between homeland and host nation. Carment and Sadjed [2017: 4] suggest that even though people in diasporas develop transnational and flexible identities, they have not completely left their homeland but serve as a bridge between homeland and their host state. The link to the *homeland* does not only have to physical but also includes imagined representation of a time and space, to which an actual return might not be possible. Olivia Sheringham [2017] goes even further with the idea of Carmen and Sadjed [2017] about diasporic identity as a bridge between two places as she is sure that hybrid identities not only co-exist but are more complementary than contradictory. She admits that markers of identity can be conflicting at the first sight, but they seem to coexist in a harmonious way in the diversity [Sheringham 2017: 125].

Methodology of the empirical data

The data gathered from the interviews is built on framework of Schutz's [1967] social phenomenology. That is *descriptive and interpretive theory of social actions that explores subjective experience within the taken-for-granted, "common sense" world of the individuals* [Fereday, Muir-Cochrane 2006: 81]. The empirical part is built on qualitative, semi structured, deep interviews with 14 people from Latvia residing in Sweden shorter or longer term – starting from three years up to 25 years. Two of the subjects are from the Russian speaking community[1] in Latvia. Eight are female and six – male interviewees. There are different age groups represented – from

[1] There is a big Russian speaker community in Latvia – around 30% of inhabitants of Latvia, consisting of Russians and other nationalities from the former Soviet republics. Many members of this community have been living in the separate information space since the renewal of Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. To a large extent it is due to the slow integration process in the society.

27 as the youngest subject up to 58 years old as the oldest. Subjects represent different professions and education levels. Interviews were conducted in Latvian, except one interview, which was conducted in both Latvian and English. Interviewing occurred mostly online in December 2020 and in the beginning of January 2021, using different Internet platforms, due to the Covid-19 situation. Two interviews were conducted in the real-life meetings face to face. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. All names of interviewees have been changed. Latvian or, as it put sometimes because of the Russian speaking community, Latvia's diaspora has been chosen as a reference group to see possible differences or similarities between one group members in the Latvia's diasporic community in Sweden.

Belonging and home in Latvia's diasporic community in Sweden

Who am I?

There is not always a clear answer when one needs do define the identity. Some people immediately make associations with the national identity, language and all cultural aspects together with it. Some interviewees like to think outside of the frame of socialized and learned roles and see themselves as human beings, who are transforming in a different stage of their life. It resonates with Hall's [1994] description of an identity which is always in the process of change. At the same time all interviewees admit their ties with Latvia, either culturally or as being Latvians by their nationality, and one can see that the collective or social identity is playing an important role in constructions of the personal identity. Kārlis, 36 years old, working with chemical injections on concrete structures, has been in Sweden for 10 years, says that he is Latvian in Sweden and always will remain one:

> *I felt at the beginning that I wanted to be one of them* [Swede – M.S.]*, but it is some kind of sell-out, it is not worth that. You have to be who you are. You cannot expect to have many friends either after you learn to speak Swedish. They* [Swedes – M.S.] *are even more reserved than us Latvians.*

Māris, 27 years old construction worker, former policeman in Latvia, has been eight years in Sweden, says that he became more *Latvian* while living in Sweden. He is a participant of Latvian folkdance group *Zibenītis.* Māris never danced before and never felt he would be doing that in the future. Now he thinks that the decision to dance has kept him in Sweden, as he gained friends and social circle. *I cannot trust Swedish friend in the same way I trust Latvian,* says Māris. He mentions problems in communication with Swedish women as well:

> *I do not feel accepted by them* [Swedish women – M.S.]. *There is another side too and it is about me. I do not feel connected to Swedish girls as they are too different.*

Māris feels at home in Sweden, but sometimes considers moving back to Latvia as he thinks it would be easier to find a partner to have a family together.

Oksana, 45 years old project coordinator at university, has been living in Sweden for 23 years, shares her experience as Russian speaker from Latvia:

> *I have been growing up in the Russian-speaking home. My Mum is Russian from Russia, Dad – Jewish from Ukraine. I am married to Swedish man. If somebody in Sweden asks me where I come from, I answer – from Latvia. If I am abroad, the answer is that I am from Sweden. Latvia is the heart, because I was born there. Russia is the head because of my intellectual connection to the language, and Sweden is the bottom as one sits with it and feels comfortable as I feel in Sweden* [laughs – M.S.].

Oksana established contacts with Latvians while studying in Latvia and her study language was Latvian. Before that she was studying in Russian and admits that it was not easy to start to study in Latvian. She had a new experience as Russian speaker from Latvia being between Latvians:

> *I found myself in another world. I got the feeling that I belong. Not that I was a foreigner before, but now it was a feeling that this is my homeland, that I am part of Latvia's culture, language and people. It was interesting.*

Ludmila, another Russian speaker from Latvia, 46 years old nurse, who has been living in Sweden for 3 years, has another background. Her Mum is Russian, but Stepdad was Latvian. She cannot remember how she learned Latvian; it was parallelly around her. Ludmila identifies herself as Russian when in Latvia, even though admits that her mentality is not Russian as she is not an *impulsive person* as she puts it. Her feelings about her identity and belonging changes when in Sweden:

> *When I am in Sweden, I feel like Latvian, when I am in Latvia, I have this fifty-fifty feeling as it is difficult to understand which side I am on – Latvian or Russian. I was trying to communicate with Russian-speaking society here in Sweden, but it did not work out. They are different. We do not have anything in common.*

Ludmila feels she fits better with Latvian community in Sweden and she finds it easy to adjust to the life in Sweden as it reminds her of Latvia. Her son's first language was Latvian, as she knew he would pick up Russian later on.

In the case of Ludmila one can see hybrid identity's development already while growing up in Latvia and adjusting to both Russian and Latvian communities and feeling solidarity with both. When in Sweden it is more apparent that Ludmila identifies her more with Latvian part of herself, even though not being Latvian by birth. The fact that she spoke Latvian to her child since his birth in Latvia, indicates strong attachment to this identity.

Iveta, 49, teacher, who has been away from Latvia for 22 years, first living in Finland, and now for seven years in Sweden, says that she is Latvian and always will be even though accepting a few things from the host country's characteristics:

> *It is something deep inside. Even if I would not take care of it, it still would be there. But I have a little bit of the Scandinavian identity as well. It manifests, for example, in the way I decorate my house.*

Diāna, 45 years old, studying to become a biomedical analytic, has lived in Sweden for 18 years, says her identity is Latvian, even though she is not planning to return back to Latvia. At the same time Diāna feels she belongs more to Sweden as to the state comparing to Latvia. Diāna is a very active member of the Latvian community in Sweden, playing in the folk music group, singing in the Latvian choir. As she puts it herself, *those who are active in the diaspora community, work as Latvians.* She thinks it is related to the inner need, not just a duty, even though it can be quite tiring to be active in different groups. It is still comforting and necessary for each person who *work as Latvian,* to be with likeminded people, to speak Latvian, and to practise the culture of your homeland.

Valdis, 33 years old, tech business owner, has been growing up in Sweden since he was 6 years old, says that he always, even as a child and teenager, has been proud to be Latvian. He acknowledges the Swedish influence in his personality:

> *I am feeling as Latvian in Sweden, but when I am in Latvia, people do not consider me as 100% Latvian. Then I feel somewhat more Swedish. People's mentality is different in Latvia, which makes me feel mixed.*

Valdis tells that in Sweden he looks and speaks as a Swede, so, from outside people do not doubt his *Swedishness*. It is him himself who says that he does not feel 100% Swedish inside. Valdis' story resonates with Ehala's [2018] theory about difficulty to be authentic in a few identities in the equal level as according to Valdis' story he is having a strong attachment to Latvia, but not being able to perform in the *role of a Latvian* authentically enough to be seen as fitting this identity fully by Latvians.

Where is home: home away from home?

Diasporic experience as mentioned earlier is characterized by *unhoming* or to be *unhomely* [Bhabha 2007; Cho 2018]. In interviews and in the autoethnographic research of the author one can clearly see the eagerness to build a microcosmos, an *inner state* in the host country to call home. Even if temporarily, even if believing the home is not just in one place.

Home is where I am living and creating my physical space. It is about people as well with whom I feel at home, says Iveta, 49. Agnese, 35, teacher, has been in Sweden for 13 years, when asked, where she thinks is her home, says:

> *First answer – Latvia. My heart is there. We are playing with an idea to live in Latvia. Now it is like that: when we go to Latvia, I say that we go home and other way around, when coming back to Sweden. So home is in both places now.*

Agnese points out that she started to feel at home in Sweden approximately two years ago or after 11 years in Sweden. She explains that it is related with respect and appreciation she gets at her work now after being a student and starting her work as a teacher:

> *The most horrible thing for me would be to be considered as non-intelligent person. When I moved to Sweden, I was a girl from Eastern Europe, without roots and contacts here, except my husband. Now when I talk to intellectual Swedish people, I feel that they see me as an equal and intellectual person, not as a girl from Eastern Europe who looks for a better life here.*

Some interviewers consider that even though their identity will always remain solely Latvian, their home now is only in Sweden. Kārlis, 36, started to feel as home in Sweden after four years, thinks that there is no point to consider to be a home the place where one does not live anymore:

> *I find it weird when some of my colleagues call Latvia home being away from it for 12 years and spending there maybe one month per year. My home is where my family is.*

Aina, 58 years old, nurse assistant, has been in Sweden for 25 years, says that her home is still in Latvia too. Aina's family has recently bought a house in Latvia. Another interviewee, Didzis, 45 years old construction worker, has lived in Sweden for 11 years, has recently bought a weekend house, still thinks that his home is only in Latvia. He thinks that the purchase might support his children in the future, in case they decide to live in Sweden. His children have been growing up in Latvia with their mother. He is happy for that as he considers himself to be a patriot:

> *I am a very nationalistically minded person. I just do not see it as an option to live in Latvia now because of the work situation there. I do not want my children to feel responsible in the future and support me financially when I am a pensioner. So, I am an economic refugee.*

Edgars, 41 years old, fireman, has been in Sweden for 21 year, says that the feeling of being at home came just after 15 years of his life in Sweden, after he gained

Swedish citizenship. Valdis, 33, who grew up in Sweden, still thinks that his home is not just in Sweden but in Latvia too and it is to a big extent because of the *patriotic minded home* he grew up in.

Facing inner conflicts

Besides identity questions and finding the place to call home, members of diaspora deal with many other issues in their daily life. The dissonance of imagined and expected between the lived and experienced leaves one with a lot of inner conflicts to handle. As mentioned by Anand [2018] the dissatisfaction may arise as one tries to fit the *original* beliefs and values in the new context. Inga, 50 years old artist, has been in Sweden for 14 years, says that she is not having inner conflicts, no matter of difficulties she has been through and rejections regarding her artwork. Seeing a lot of gains as a personality because of her life abroad Inga is repeatedly resentful in the interview about the way she has been treated in the Swedish society in general, and more specifically in the local artist circle. She compares it with Latvia and evaluates the Swedish local artist circle highly negatively. That demonstrates somewhat a dissonance regarding claim that she does not have any inner conflicts. Another case, when an interviewee feels as free of inner conflicts, but they manifest when talking is Didzis, 45, who says he is a patriot and 100% Latvian, but still does not see the chance to return back to live in Latvia. He admits though that *Swedishness* has entered his life, and his social circle consists mostly of Swedish people now. So, there can be some features of the denial observed when one thinks about one's present life situation and identity, which, according to Didzis does not change at all.

Oksana, 45, says that she feels quite well in her different surroundings and is belonging to different cultures and countries, even though she admits she does not like Russian identity in general, but understands it well. In Oksana's case one can observe a possible trial to refuse from an aspect of one's identity. Another interesting remark Oksana makes about her wishes to acquire a folk costume, but here she gets confused and fights inside with the *impossible* choice:

> *What to choose? Grandpa is from St. Petersburg, grandma from village in Urals, father – Jewish from Ukraine, so Ashkenazi Jew.*

Asked why she would not choose one from Latvia, Oksana is saying that it would not be appropriate towards some people's feelings:

> *I am thinking about the cultural appropriations. It is not in my blood; it would not be right. But then again – nothing is right for me.*

Many interviewees witness inner conflicts while visiting Latvia. Iveta, 49, says that it happens that she does not feel as she belongs there 100% anymore. And the belonging is not 100% somewhere else either:

Sometimes we discuss politics with my relatives. And then I come across the feeling that my Scandinavian thinking is different from Latvians. If I express my opinion, it sometimes offends them, and they feel like defending. I think that sometimes they assume I try to teach them and show off as being cleverer if I disagree. So, I better choose not to start such discussions anymore to avoid conflicts.

Agnese, 35, from another side, does not like that people in Sweden are afraid of conflicts and therefore do not always say things directly, using appropriate words for the situation:

I am not afraid of authorities, so I dare to say more than my Swedish colleagues. I like direct talk. I do not know if this is something Latvian or not.

Diāna, 45, still after 18 years in Sweden, admits that she in general has difficulties to fit in Swedish way of life and thinking:

I can rarely understand what is going on. Reference points are different, for example, films we have seen. I do not get the Swedish sense of humour. I do not have conflicts openly but feel as a black sheep sometimes. I am in the room full of people, but we do not have what to talk about because we are talking and not getting each other.

At the same time when Diāna speaks about her children, she does not feel that one needs to force Latvian identity on them. Her children consider themselves to be Swedish:

I do not want to push as it leaves them feeling more negative. They do not like when I try to involve them in Latvian society activities. I talk to them in Latvian, we go to the Latvian school; it might be enough if they do not want more. They have their own paths to take.

Edgars, 41, is openly aware that there are a lot of inner conflicts when it comes to his identity issues. He says that he is both – Latvian and Swedish, even though Swedish way of thinking prevails at the moment. He spends most of the time in Swedish surroundings and has not time because of the shift work for folk dances in *Zibenītis* or Latvian school where he was teaching earlier on. He admits the pain he feels when in Latvia or when spending time together with Latvians intensively:

There are a lot of emotions and it takes a lot of my energy to handle it. Transition is difficult, when I travel to Latvia and when I return to Sweden. It is a heavy load for me to handle emotionally.

Edgars admits that he finds it easier to communicate with Swedish people as he understands them better now and has fewer inner conflicts to deal with when

communicating. He censors himself when speaking with Latvians as it feels that it is impossible to take up all subjects like he feels it is possible with Swedes.

Manifestation of a hybrid identity

Hybridity can be seen either as contradictory identities, pulling in different directions [Hall 1994], product of interaction across cultures [Anand 2018] or an inability, to make definitive identity choices [Kraidy 2005]. Almost all interviewees fit the description of the hybrid identity in one way or another. Oksana, 45, for example, acknowledges herself openly as one having a hybrid identity. She calls her and her family cosmopolitan:

> *I could belong anywhere. Nationality is a social construct that some people came up with.*

At the same time Oksana admits that she has an interest related to the culture and history of Latvia. As well she always somewhat has been involved in the topic about Jewish history and holocaust:

> *Just first time in Sweden I could finally feel that I can freely say that I am half Jewish, and people accept it as an ordinary fact. It used to be problematic to admit it to Russians in Latvia, for example.*

Agnese, 35, thinks that her core being is always going to be the same and she is not going to have a Swedish identity. She admits though that she has learned and taken some values from Sweden, for example, how one sees a person, openness towards different. Agnese mentions though that it might be not something specifically Swedish, just different views which enter in our lives:

> *Friends who are the same age as I, in Latvia have the same view as I do. So, it is not about the country, but about the time we live in. The difference maybe is that those changes started earlier in Sweden.*

Hybrid identity and fluidity manifests directly in the interview with Elita, 31 years old artist and photographer, who lives in Sweden for seven years, but earlier six years spent in the United Kingdom for her studies. Elita says, she is Latvian by her nationality but does not feel as a *real Latvian:*

> *My life experience has changed me. I have become more Swedish, especially, when it comes to relationship. I felt it when I split up with my Swedish boyfriend and soon after met my Latvian boyfriend. Then I felt that I have become a Swedish feminist.*

She says it is about things one expects in relationship. Elita's Latvian boyfriend, who moved to Sweden just couple of years ago, has his own idea about roles assigned

to men and women. Elita finds those views to be too traditional and they remind her of her family she grew up in.

A few interviewees fit Bhabha's [2007] definition of being in the *third space* while identification process is still on-going or, as according to Kraidy [2005], has not made definite identity choices yet. Inga, 50, says that she feels in-between when it comes to her identity:

> *I am not 100% Latvian anymore. I feel it when I am in Latvia. I feel that people perceive me differently. The code of behaviour changes, and I do not recognize that new code of behaviour that is valid now in Latvia. I think I do everything correctly but get involved into conflicts out of blue.*

Inga thinks that in Sweden she belongs better with foreigners as they are at the same *place* as she is. Here it is possible to see the theme about *the third space* emerging as a possible alternative for the safe space while one is in-between state. Inga says that she now understands Russian speakers in Latvia very well, who make this parallel space to live in. Inga feels that Swedish society does not accept her even with her good knowledge of the language. No matter of feeling not quite Latvian anymore, she is certain about her future return back to Latvia:

> *It takes time to get to know people and how things work in one or another country, but nothing gives me as much strength as Latvia's nature. No other landscape resonates with me like nature in Latvia.*

Elita, 31, is finding most friends within foreigners as well, and she admits it is not easy to find Swedish friends, with a difference from those Swedes, who have an experience of living abroad and have more openness towards foreigners. Another case is a Swedish person who is married to a foreigner, and that contributes to more open attitude towards people from other countries.

Jānis, 29 years old PhD student, ornithologist, has been away from Latvia for six years, admits finding himself in the *third space* as well. His circle of friends consists of foreigners, he does not speak Swedish yet, even though considers to study it if he settles down for good in Sweden which might be happening as he feels at home here now and has met a woman, who is not Swedish, he wants to build a family together with. Jānis defines himself as Latvian, but at the same time does not think it matters. He is not planning to talk in Latvian to his future children as they might not need the language in the future anyway. He admits that his Mum in Latvia does not speak English and it will be not possible for her to communicate with a future grandchild. He says that he is having a good relationship with his Mum but asked about problems in communication in the future if his children will not speak Latvian, answers: *There are more important things than to chat with grandparents.* Jānis says that identity does

not matter, even though admits that the first 15 to 20 years in person's life form one as a personality. He is critical about Swedish mentality, saying that he is not clicking with Swedes well:

> *They are odd, I do not quite like them. They lack communicative and cooperative skills. Life has been too good for them and they do not need help from others.*

Loss and gain

Diasporic experience is characterized by loss [Cho 2018], but according to some authors, it can be giving no matter of contradictions seen from the surface [Sheringham 2017].

Both loss and gain are observed in interviews.

Iveta, 49, thinks that she would have had more possibilities for her career in Latvia than in Sweden. She was a principal in a Christian school in Finland, but she does not see possibilities for much growth in Sweden as a possible reason mentioning that it is a big country and more competition, especially in bigger cities:

> *I would most likely be a minister of the government or at least a school principal in Latvia. Specially with the experience I have acquired now in Finland and Sweden.*

At the moment Iveta does not see herself moving back to Latvia as she is used to *orderly life* as she puts it.

Agnese, 35, mentions that she has gained self-confidence in Sweden. She is happy about the possibility to achieve things by herself without support from her Latvian family. Then, she feels, achievements would not feel the same way good as now, when she has done it all by herself. As a loss for a life in Sweden Agnese mentions her longing for Latvia and her family there, which is emotionally painful.

Aina, 58, thinks that gains for her family moving to Sweden are exceeding the loss. She mentions her children and opportunities they had here. She herself has lost her nurse certificate from Latvia when moving here, that is one of the disadvantages she can think of besides losing friendships and not being able to be close to the family.

Elita, 31, thinks that she has gained more freedom and meets more openness when living abroad. People develop their personalities and become more self-sufficient. She mentions negative aspects as well, such as constant struggle to achieve something. It would have been easier in the home country as there is a possibility to receive a support from the family and friends.

Valdis, 33, says that he feels his Latvian share in him as a strength and wants to forward it to his children. He is taking his oldest child, three years old, to the Latvian school, and mentions that he needs to learn to fit in there and to understand how to

behave there as things has changed since he was a child, when it was a community of so-called old diaspora with other ways of doing things and slightly different traditions. Nowadays there are majority of a new, modern diaspora, and they are transferring traditions and way of being directly from Latvia.

Discussion

As has been revealed in the empirical part, members of Latvia's diaspora in Sweden form hybrid and fluid identities. They are not homogeneous. There are subjects with unresolved tensions [Bhabha 2007], inability to make definite identity choices [Kraidy 2005] or residing in-between or in the *third space* [Bhabha 2007]. There are other subjects where difficulties to make a choice between homeland and host country is observed, but still finding ways to create harmonious attitude towards both [Nagel and Staeheli 2004]. In some cases, the balance between homeland and host nation is created in that does not require the choice to be made, so that identities can coexist and be complementary [Sheringham 2018].

Regarding changes in interviewees' identities, it is possible to draw a conclusion that they are adjusted and, in some cases, changed. Some interviewees more than other tend to hold tight to their core identity even with some changes in their identities. It might depend on the upbringing and personal activity to *practise* culture (in a form of choir, folk dance, theatre, for example) and take care of the native language by reading in it, for example. There are still diasporic conciseness present, with strong ties to homeland and at the same time adapted life to host land. They are truly diasporic identities where ties are almost equally strong to both places [Anand 2018]. Just in two cases out of 14 (interview with Jānis, 29, and Elita, 31) it was observed that being in the *third place* creates somewhat indifference towards the core identity. It corelates with an earlier mentioned phenomenon of simulation, when young Maronite's in Lebanon adopted simulative tactics, which, possibly, masks the absence of a clearly defined, organic identity [Kraidy 2005]. Similar act was observed in the earlier mentioned cases with Jānis and Elita.

Inner conflicts emerge clearly in diasporic identities, manifesting in various ways, and the findings in the research agree with the current state of the art in academic knowledge and research. Diasporic identities can find it difficult to fit one's *original* worldview in the new context [Anand 2018] and a difficulty to transfer one's belonging or *signification* from one group in the homeland to another one in the host country [Fornäs 2012], what might create an imagined opposition of the *others* as a hostile force [Eriksen 1995]. The answers acquired in this research do not provide one certain answer how to deal with emerging inner conflicts in diasporic identities as coping mechanisms are different for different interviewees. Some find it essential to be involved in the activities of the Latvian community. Diāna, 45, thinks that is

personally essential, even though one is labelled as somebody whose *job* is to be a Latvian. She means that their serving Latvian community can be sometimes at the expense of their own wishes and people end up doing things they would not be doing if living in Latvia. Some interviewees do not engage in an active participation in the Latvian community and do not feel the necessity to do so, but find it important to take care of their language and transfer it further to their kids.

There are interviewees who are residing in Bhabha's [2007] *third space* as a possible escape place from both – their homeland and host country – building their microcosms consisting of people who are in the same situation. Some interviewees face the problem, described by Ehala [2018], about difficulties to perform authentic in more than one identity. Research done in empirical part of the article inclines that hybrid personalities, first of all, do not feel completely authentic themselves in their homeland anymore, and secondly, they feel that they are not accepted as such by the locals. Another side of the issue is that most of the interviewees understand that they cannot become Swedish either, even though sometimes considered to be Swedish by others, but not feeling Swedish enough by themselves like in the case of Valdis, 33, who grew up in Sweden. One can conclude that diasporic identities, acquiring hybrid identities, lose some authenticity in their initial identity, which can be a painful process of realization, like in the case of Edgars, 41, but there are interviewees who seem to be finding balance and to be content with their hybridity, like in the case of Oksana, 45, and Iveta, 49.

Conclusions

Diasporic experience and hybrid identity, no matter the different definitions, indeed goes hand in hand as it is discovered in this research. It is shown that there is multitude of ways how one adjusts and copes with the new situation in the host country, this is why one can assume that diasporic experience is a very personal and individual one and there is no 'unifying diaspora consciousness' as diversity is an integral feature of a diaspora [Bucholtz, Sūna 2019]. As the recent research on diaspora demonstrates, diasporic identities are not expected to be totally loyal only to their host country, in fact to be diasporic means to be in the constant state of in-between two or more places, in-between two or more identities. There are definite psychological and background reasons why some people would adjust to this *in-betweenness* better than others, like the reasons they left their home country, possibilities to find job etc. The research demonstrates that the diasporic and hybrid identity brings feelings of loss and gain at the same time. There are indications that participation in the social and cultural activities of the diasporic communities helps maintain the core identity, but some individuals feel strongly attached to their homeland even without being a part of a certain social circle. That confirms the point

that diasporic experience is very individual and there are no certain prescriptions and recommendations how to maintain and support one's core identity. The main issue dealt with in diaspora on the individual level is how to maintain the balance between different hybrid identities obtained while living abroad. As it was described in the section Discussion, there are different and individual ways how people deal with this issue, obtaining personally satisfying balance.

Research on Latvian diasporic hybrid identities in Sweden is still on-going as there might be other aspects appearing of construction of diasporic identity and dealing with harmonization of hybrid identities when more people are interviewed. New findings might emerge when looking more into the Russian speaking Latvia's diasporic community in Sweden as well, which has been less explored so far.

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