

Emancipation of the National Identity in Augusts Deglavs' Novel "Rīga"

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Abstract. The article studies the formation of the Latvian national identity as depicted in the cultural and historical novel *Rīga* by the writer Augusts Deglavs. The plot is set in the second half of the 19th century when more and more Latvians from the country started to move to Riga. By applying the context-oriented approach and practices of cultural studies, the New historicism, post-colonialism, separate aspects of the dynamics and context of the relationship between Latvians and Baltic Germans in multicultural Riga have been analysed. In addition, the points where social and national identities contact and cross under the conditions of hermetic and hegemonic German culture, like relations with the German language, acquisition of social practices, emergence of the sense of Latvianness, have also been examined. The article also performs a concise evaluation of the historical importance of the Young Latvians' movement depicted in the novel as the awakener of the national identity. Based on John Austin's concept of performative language, in studying the emancipation of national identity, attention was paid to the ability of language "to do things", which proves that words expressed in certain situations can possibly affect and change the run of historical processes.

Keywords: national identity; Latvians; Baltic Germans; language; novel.

Introduction

The novels and stories by the Latvian writer Augusts Deglavs (1862–1922) are among some of the most important sources of Latvian literary culture, describing the practices behind the birth of the Latvian nation and culture in the 19th century. In the studies of Latvian literature, his works are considered to be important evidence of the literary culture that served as cornerstones of realism in the 19th century. The novel *Rīga (Rīga)* (Part I 1910–1911, Part II 1921, unfinished) is among Deglavs' most remarkable writings and is regarded as an unusual cultural encyclopedia for a good reason. It has been nominated as a text of cultural memory (Cimdiņa, 2013, p. 9), which reveals the perceptibility of the

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notion of "culture". It reflects the creation of culture in both social and national dimensions and emphasises the uniqueness and topicality of the novel both at that time and nowadays.

The aim of this study is to disclose the depiction of the formation of the Latvian nation in the first part of the novel *Riga*. Research of the aspects affecting the formation of national self-confidence in the second half of the 19th century in the light of double colonialism (created by the rule of the Russian Empire and the noble Baltic Germans) was the key purpose put forward and achieved within this study. The article also examines another fact that contributed to the strain on the socialisation of Latvians, namely that the dominating culture in the culturally diverse Riga is actually the German and not the Latvian tradition. The study also looks at the interrelationship of the initial social aims of the Latvians as future city-dwellers and the following national awakening and at the signs of emancipation of the national identity.

The focus centres around a context-oriented view considers the opinions prevailing in the humanities and inter-science disciplines, as well as the interdisciplinary dimension, which is characteristic of modern research practice and has been implemented using the approach used in cultural studies. This practice allows for an interdisciplinary study and is suited for the literary criticism of the Deglavs' novel since one of its outstanding features its close relationship with the cultural and social world.

Application of methods of the New Historicism and literary anthropology interpretation allows us to reveal how Deglavs' works stem from the cultural practices, circulation of ideas, and historical happenings and to look at them as at "discourse of cultural memories, artefacts or social constructs" (Daija, Eglāja-Kristšone, 2013, p. 269). In the opinion of the New Historicism, literature is one of the polyphonic voices of history or an era and, in terms of content, can be heard as powerfully as the voice of history and culture itself since literature is regarded as one of the segments of culture. New Historicism searches for a connection between fictional and non-fictional texts; the meeting point of these texts is a reality which is important as a space from which experience and cultural practices are transferred to literary work. In the course of interpretation, the line between literary and non-literary texts is torn down, and literary work becomes one of many equally important cultural texts or part of the "poetics of culture". Reaching the study aim is supported by Stephen Greenblatt's conclusion, which is underpinned by Clifford Geertz's models for the interpretation of cultures proposing that human nature is not capable of being independent of either the complex models of culture, like customs, habits, traditions, practices, or the entirety of behavioural control mechanisms, i.e. plans, directions, regulations, instructions (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 3). An important role is played by the concepts "social energy" (Greenblatt, 1997, pp. 6–20) and "poetics of culture" (Greenblatt, 1987, pp. 3–15) coined by the New historicism, as they regard literature, as mentioned before, as a point of a single social and cultural process at which the era and multiform manifestations of ideologies join and are represented and create social energy and discourse, and the text itself becomes part of ideological discourse. Literature, as a type of experience, "describes the feelings while existing in certain conditions" (Īgltons, 2008, p. 34).

Some key concepts of postcolonial criticism (Kalnačs, 2011, pp. 9–32), for example, “colonialism” and “historicism”, allow uncovering the transformation of Latvians from an ethnic group into a nation and the emancipation of the national identity under the conditions of double colonialism, as presented in the novel *Rīga*.

The sociological approach offers the possibility of examining the social reality-based Deglavs’ text and the author himself in the context of social spacetime. Sociology, as a science studying human actions and behaviours, has a productive cooperation with the humanities – anthropology, history, and literary theory. Literature can be regarded as a social phenomenon presenting the network of sociopolitical, economic, social structures, social classes, ideological movements, human actions, and behavioural routines as a blend of the author’s imagination and documentary. The question asked by Deglavs is also the question this study is trying to answer: what the Latvian of the 19th century was like, and how did the Latvian nation form?

1. The context of the formation of the Latvian national identity. Dynamics of the relationships between the Baltic Germans and Latvians

In Deglavs’ opinion, the Latvian is quick to learn the new conditions and practices of the cultural, social, and economic network that requires a continuous search for oneself, unceasing assessment of the conditions of one’s life and testing of these conditions against the national and social context. Thus, the Latvian is able to fully declare oneself as belonging to modernity. Part I *Patriots* of the novel, is set during the 1860–1870s, the period which is regarded as the culmination of the national movement launched by the Young Latvians and “partly coinciding with the period of political reforms in the Russian Empire during the reign of Alexander II (1818–1881). This was a significant factor, which, under conditions of relaxed censorship, enabled the movement to exist legally and also fuelled its hopes for the anticipated positive changes in the administration of the Baltic provinces as a result of the reforms implemented. The extension of political and economic rights to Latvians as representatives of the peasant class led to their social emancipation, to which the goal of creating and developing a professional national culture was added” (Mintaurs, 2022, p. 109). From today’s viewpoint, it is clear that the main issue in the development of the Latvian awakening movement was not the fight of the Latvian elite against the privileges of the Baltic Germans but the choice of the Young Latvians between the development of the Latvian nation according to the Russian or the German model (Apals, 2008, p. 68).

Thinking about the period when the novel was written, valuable ideas can be found in conclusion by the exiled in 1940 Latvian historian Andrejs Plakans that “these characteristics of Baltic intellectual life, once established in the 1850s, continued to be a part of nationality relationships during the next four decades” (Plakans, 1981, p. 110). The Deglavs’ novel *Rīga* of the early 20th century, which continues the line of ideas stated by the national literature born in the mid-19th century, functions as a component of national relationships. The novel aligns with the anticolonial discourse by reminding and

entering into the Latvian history register and the modern Latvian national consciousness the narrative of the recent past when Latvians, given the constraints of the colonial power (still existing in the beginning of the 20th century) and hegemony of the Baltic Germans, found themselves in a marginal and difficult-to-cross zone.

During the period covered by the novel, more and more Latvians from the country start to move to Riga, and this stream only increases. According to historical sources, by the end of the century, Latvians accounted for more than 40% of Riga's population and "countrymen formed the modern Latvian urbanism." As the result of economic development and industrialisation, Riga turned into a multinational city, a meeting point of nations where "a fascinating national, cultural and religious diversity formed." (Volfarte, Oberlenders, 2004, pp. 28–32). The need to spotlight the composite picture of the era and the Latvian national self-awareness getting rid of the borders drawn by the German rule urged the author to create a strange and very unusual form of narration. Formed by a plot that is generously complemented with journalistic and rhetoric elements in monologues and dialogues, narrator's indentations, the introduction of sociologic facts and historical persons, and descriptions of local topography in some indents, the novel gives rich additional information about actual happenings and facts of that time.

Having arrived at the city, a Latvian still does not make it farther than the outskirts both literally, as this is where they live, and figuratively, since the German culture is the dominating one and does not accept the newcomers: calls them non-Germans, in a term coined in the 16th century to contemptuously refer to a nation other than the German, and refers to them according to their social class – peasants. This fact becomes the central driving force in the novel and accumulates both the national emancipation and the socialisation of Latvians. Deglavs' novel demonstrates that the Baltic German culture is separate and hermetically distinct, with its own history, traditions and standards of life and culture. The impermeability that has formed over centuries is sealed with several layers. This impermeability is reinforced by political, bureaucratic and control instruments, and the conviction that history and Providence has already allocated the roles between them, as the holders of the power, and the Latvians. And this is security for a stable and peaceful life like it has been for centuries long. To confirm this, the writer has included in several pages of the novel a rich material of the laws of Riga City that regulate and control the economic and private life of German citizens and "non-Germans and servants and maids" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 166): Paragraph 76 bans "the non-Germans from buying and selling merchandise and from undertaking this trade" (p. 167), while Paragraph 77 stipulates that "one shall neither associate with a non-German nor held any gatherings or meetings together with them" (p. 167). Not only does this municipal administrative document draw an inviolable line but it also shows the conservatism of the German elite and nobility, for which the Baltic nobility was already reproved by the enlighteners Heinrich Johann von Jannau (1753–1821) and his follower Garlieb Merkel (1769–1850) in the 18th century. The second layer of the hermetic seal is formed by stable self-identification and local patriotism that has formed over several centuries. The generations born in the Baltics regard themselves as "real Baltic men and Baltic women" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 604); they

find this place “their Baltics”, “the German Baltics”. Looking from the modern viewpoint and knowing respect for Latvians and the diverse activities by many representatives of the German intellectuals and the cultural and public workers, which were supported by Latvians and performed in the interests of the Latvian culture, it has to be pointed out about Augusts Deglavs that he, however, was not under the illusion about the Germans *opening out* in their relations with Latvians and rather marks the key accents of their fight: “(...) we will never support a Latvian, (...) never allow them to grow economically, (...) we will outcompete every Latvian that will show up. Then we will enslave them, use them as an instrument of a higher civilisation” (Deglavs, 1983, p. 605).

The protagonist builds his individual, social and national self, feeling of purport, and striving for pragmatic proof of a useful life after moving away from the rural cultural space, away from the slow pace of time. Opinions of the researchers on the culture and history of European nations underline that “in the process of formation of nations, the most important was the social emancipation” (Mintaus, 2022, p. 109). Among the first important processes was socialisation in a city managed by the German colonial power. The novel shows that the long-dominating German hegemony has created a belief in Latvians that the Germanish is immanent in all the structures of culture, and the knowledge of German and conforming to the German cultural norms is therefore self-evident. For this reason, the Latvians who come to the city are determined to reach their goals because “the one who can write and count and knows some German, can get on well” (Deglavs, 1983, p. 11). Thus, the first determined activities the main character of the novel, the young Krauklītis from the countryside, undertakes to become a city dweller is learning and practising German and the cultural norms in order to become suitable for the German society, which would also mean belonging to the culture of power, social circles, education and culture level. The power of the German language and culture controls everything, and initially, Latvians respect that because it is the only possibility to not only access a higher social group but also get to the centre, both literally and figuratively. During the first stage of socialisation in the unfamiliar urban space, one has to become acquainted with diverse new, interconnected and interrelated cultural and social practices and acquire them. This stage grows into the second: emancipation of the national identity.

As one joins the modern relationship, learning a language initially goes hand in hand with personal advantage, and motivation is about pragmatic usefulness. In the novel, Deglavs reveals an opinion of assimilated Latvians about the ethnic and social conditions and the dramatic choice related to the possibilities of ethnic identification: “(...) the German language links all kinds of privileges of the highest classes, the poor aspire to learn this language to gain access to certain privileges” (Deglavs, 1983, p. 99), and thus a positive social identity. Being a German is a social privilege. The viability of pseudo-Germanism or the voluntary assimilation by Latvians into the German culture can be explained by preferring German. Thus, becoming a member of German society is all guided by pragmatic motives of advantage and social comfort.

However, this is an ambivalent process that causes stress. From the point of view of the ideological mechanism, the marginal, disdained status of the Latvian language and

its confrontation with the German language, which rules in the city, both maintains the tension and serves for navigation in the urban space full of German hegemonic and other social practices. Impulses of tension arise in the German society, where there are now many Latvians, causing feelings of danger to appear amongst the German citizens: "(...) more and more lower citizens gain education and wealth, they squeeze into our class, take our names and become Germans in their looks but not in their hearts and minds" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 130). The author brings the protagonist close to this line but does not make him cross it. Germans, guided by selfish hegemonic motives, start expressing ideas about supporting the Latvian culture, and Pēteris reflect on these ideas starting to doubt the correctness of the chosen life path because he has never forgotten that he is a Latvian. The convenient shell grown during his city life cracks, and the Latvianness that used to step back for the sake of acquiring social identities begin to dominate. The Latvianness starts competing with the feelings of a self-confident city dweller who belongs to the German circles. The German language is no longer able to grant Latvians the feeling of a stable life because the part of "I" that had been put in the farthest corner of one's consciousness and represents all that is Latvian is now threatened. This can be explained by sociologist Anthony Smith's theory, which borders the ideas of Johann Herder, that every nation is special, with its own manner of thinking, communication, and practices. Smith accepts Herder's opinion that if the uniqueness of a nation threatens to fade away, an individual uncompromising way should be chosen (Šmits, 1997, p. 83).

2. Awakening of the national identity

During the first self-identification stage, the language serves as a catalyser and a symbol of a sense of belonging that grows in strength and becomes stronger. When the Young Latvians' movement expanded, which was the driving force of the Latvian national awakening, the sense of belonging became uniting element. The novel *Riga* shows that the Young Latvians, as the first Latvian intellectuals, were emotional about the crisis in the national spirit, self-confidence and social matters approaching the mid-19th century. The novel spotlights the key instruments that were used to awaken national self-esteem.

Modern historians refer to the Young Latvians' movement as "a group of educated and politically active Latvians that, under the influence of Western Europe liberalism and nationalism, actively promoted the formation of the national identity and modernisation of the social and economic system in the Baltics. Narrowly speaking, Young Latvians are the educated nationalists of 1850–1860s that opposed the traditional Baltic system, and more broadly – all the activists of the national movement in the second half of the 19th century" (Apals, 2022). This movement laid the foundations for the Latvian national culture in nearly all branches, but much was borrowed from the German culture, thus creating hybrid models of the national culture. At the same time, the Young Latvians' movement did not introduce any changes in the relationship between Latvians and Germans. According to Germans, the threats posed by the "Young Latvians' crowd" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 604), as it follows the German model and develops and strengthens the national cultural

practices, institutions and language, uncontrollably “grow out of as if nowhere, roll like a snowball and take everything with it: “our old traditions, our administrative system, our peculiarities and the achieved advantages. All of this has become a victim of the plebeian movement that standardises and makes everything alike, it brings down the supreme and the honourable” (p. 604), thus endangering the homogeneity of their hermetic culture. This narration, on the one hand, reveals the inability (refusal) of the leading group to acknowledge the national inhabitants – Latvians as full-fledged members of the culture, and on the other hand, it showcases the unstoppable emancipation of the Latvian culture by transforming from an incomplete and thus a lower-position culture, from the German point of view, into a complete and just-like-German culture. Quite unexpectedly, Latvians turned out to be the force that could disrupt and cross the borders of the limited cultural space as constructed by the Baltic Germans over centuries with all their colonialist rights and disturb the peace and the usual practices.

In the Latvian national awakening era, a writer noticed the critical importance of language as a cultural power. Language is means of navigation that accumulates attitudes and commencements of action. Language is a symbolic phenomenon that gives voice to a man and all structures of culture not only as a national language but also symbolically by conveying important and meaningful messages throughout the culture – history, myths, values, and other segments. In the novel, the author introduces several historical persons he uses to express nationally important ideas. As portrayed by the writer, the well-known Young Latvians Rihards Tomsons and Bernhards Dīriķis address the German society in Riga and lay the ideological foundation for the construction of national identity, as well as illustrate the phenomenon of “national agitation” (Mintaurs, 2022, p. 109) characteristic of the age when national identities emerge. While, this phenomenon was sporadic at the begging of the movement, it was important for the progress of national culture and evidenced asynchronous yet persistent dissemination of the national identity. Usually, this starts one generation after the first stage of farmers’ liberation, namely, after the abolition of serfdom, which is typically followed by school reforms and intensification of market relations in the countryside (p. 109). Interpreted by the author, Rihards Tomsons’ speech in front of representatives of the colonial power develops into a message of a subordinate nation; it rouses feelings of Latvian self-esteem, pride and solidarity. The author himself is a representative of the colonised nation and marks the objective result of the colonisation history – Latvians as the outsiders: “I do not belong here and will express views that you may find strange” (Deglavs, 1983, p. 135). There are also references to the history, contexts, and the presence of colonisation. In the nostalgic narrations of the representative of national romanticism, poet Auseklis, there is a rhetoric raising of the historical myth about the free past, the lost aristocracy of Latvians, “its chiefs and rulers”, he invokes “Latvians” by Garlieb Merkel, accuses the German knights of power and deceit, of making Latvians similar to enslaved people. Diplomatically yet formally, there is some support for the existing subordination to the mighty eagle of Russia, for offering freedom to Latvians, and also praising German intellectuals serving the Latvian culture while there were no such Latvian intellectuals. Still, now the time has come for the young Latvians: “it is not

natural if one individual performs as a guardian of another, and even more if one nation purports to be the other's custodian. (...) Long live the new Latvian intellectuals!" (p. 135).

The word has been said and is understood as a signal for Latvians to stand against the hostile part of society; the Latvian sense of ethnic belonging is born through *another* – through connection (in this case, collision) with another ethnic identity that is predominant thanks to its political powers. Latvians announce themselves with what is said in the cultural space, and this is also where the discourse of Latvian existence and identity is formed. But, as it is known, the culture only keeps that with meaning. This can be analysed using John Langshaw Austin and Pierre Bourdieu's observations about the power inherent in language and constative statements if they are expressed by "agents possessing authority, (...) in front of everyone and on behalf of everyone, publicly and officially, he makes a distinction between them and everything that is arbitrary, he sanctions, dedicates, strengthens them making them exist as worthy, as corresponding to the nature of things, as 'natural'" (Gubenko, 2014). When Tomsons shouts: "Long live the new Latvian intellectuals! (...) I am Latvian!" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 136). These statements become a bridge for the Latvian nation, which enters with its circle of intellectuals, although still low in number at that time, and authorities in the front line. The culmination is reached, which is advanced by the "job done" by language – the idea of active deeds necessary for the national identity is articulated, and the word "Latvia" is pronounced: "Let us establish a Latvian association!... Long live Latvia!... Who else is Latvian, together with us?!..." (p. 138). The author depicts the realisation of the Young Latvians' ideas, confirming that the statement has reached its goal by using the affective reaction and physical description of the protagonist: "(...) Pēteris could not hold it any longer, he did not notice the deadly standstill all around and shouted loudly with his eyes shining in joy: "Me, me!... Me too a Latvian! (...) Let us establish an association, a Latvian association!" (p. 138) The manifestation of national identity "includes both the cognitive awareness and the emotional attachment to a nation" (Grimm, Huddy, Schmidt, Seethaler, 2016). And Latvians quickly develop self-esteem: "Come what may, I will not deny my nationality and will not allow contempt of me!... We have been enslaved for seven centuries... Enough!" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 141) Although the Latvian language does not have any socially important functions of use yet, it becomes important to demonstrate one's belonging to it.

When describing the emancipation of national identity, the author shows that Latvians fill the historically-formed *empty space* or, using the theoretical concept language developed by H. Bhabha (1994, p. 13), the interculture or "third space" between both cultures themselves and move the borders, which used to be untouchable so far, provoke and deconstruct the existing conventional opinions of the colonial power about progress and development, and undermine the dominance of the colonial hegemony. Latvians mobilise, which is manifested as an ability to evaluate the German cultural codes and traditions as advantageous; Latvians re-create to come up with new products of their own culture and historically change the cultural hierarchy. They learn German to perfection but stay Latvians, and they borrow the everyday lifestyle and behavioural patterns, apply forms and models of social organisation by establishing associations, starting businesses, and

organising the Song Celebration. Consequently, Latvians' social and national practices under particular cultural and historical conditions weaken the binary thinking and the identities resulting from the colonial attitudes and knowledge and create new ones. Manifestation of the Latvian self-esteem is most demonstrated in the pages devoted to the first Song Celebration: each Latvian starts to feel oneself as belonging to "a powerful sea of people" that stands behind the leaders of the national awakening, "these are our compatriots, our brothers" (Deglavs, 1983, p. 43). As a segment of collective identity, reflection on national feelings, is characterised by condensation into symbols representing the idea of community and belonging; these symbols "must become the emblems of this idea. The history of Latvian national thought and Deglavs' vision justly put the first generation of Latvian intellectuals – the Young Latvians – in the fund of cultural symbols with folklore, the Latvian language, and the Song Celebration. These people managed to put into words what the nation only tentatively suspected and felt.

In the opinion of the author, the Song Celebration serves as an indicator of the birth of national ideas and self-esteem. Deglavs finds this Celebration as a convenient event offering the possibility to demonstrate that joint emotional experiences are important for the mental growth of a nation "that inspires a nation to express its essence as a spiritual value." From 1873 until nowadays, the Song Celebration has been one of those phenomena of the Latvian culture that manifests the importance of collective emotional experience, which is also emphasised by the corresponding episode in the novel. Interesting that there is not a single line in this episode that would suggest the sense of belonging that the modern Latvian has when thousands of voices sing as one. The profound emotional effect can only be inferred from a short yet ample description of the final: "And, when the final chords of songs were over, there was a moment of deep silence, then agreement and applause started to grow more and more, just like a storm"(Deglavs, 1983, p. 685) Deglavs as a sociological writer is more interested in how this event brings the nation together, and he uses it to shape the vision of community: "All, as if moved by some live spirit, looked at their unity and were happy about their power, that there are so many of them" (p. 677). The author depicts the meaningful and colourful scene with journalistic directness by adding many facts and details, and describing activities by historical persons. The writer's tactics suggest anticipation that with time this event will become archetypal in the discourse of the national identity, that this is where the past, the present and the future meet and where the self-esteem of the national era manifests and where the ideal with the material meets.

Conclusion

The novels and stories by the Latvian writer Augusts Deglavs are among the most important sources of Latvian literary culture, describing the practices behind the birth of the Latvian nation and culture in the 19th century. The novel *Riga* (Part I 1910–1911, Part II 1921, unfinished) is among Deglavs' most remarkable writings and is regarded as an unusual cultural encyclopedia.

Part I of the novel depicts the period of 1860–1870s, which is marked by the emergence of the Young Latvians' movement and the emancipation of the national awakening inspired by it, and the urban development when more and more Latvians from the country move to big cities. By the end of the century, more than 40% of Latvians were in Riga, and the former villagers formed the modern Latvian city dwellers.

Latvians live in the outskirts, and the dominant culture in Riga is German. Latvians or non-Germans are referred to according to their social class – peasants and are not accepted. This fact becomes the main driving force in the novel and accumulates both the national emancipation and the socialisation of the Latvian. In the confrontation of both cultures, the Baltic German culture is presented as hermetically sealed, with stable self-identification and local patriotism, and armed with instruments of power and control.

The long-dominating German hegemony has created a belief in Latvians that the Germanish is immanent in all the structures of culture and the knowledge of German and conforming to the German cultural norms is therefore self-evident, and that acquisition of the German language and the cultural norms secure joining to the culture of a higher level, as evidenced by the group of assimilated citizens or the pseudo-Germans.

Using several ethnical clashes, Deglavs presents how Latvianness starts competing with the self-confident urban dweller feeling as belonging to German circles. The German language can no longer grant Latvians the idea of stable life because the part of "I" that had been put in the farthest corner of one's consciousness and represents all Latvian is now threatened.

In the era of Latvian national awakening, the writer has noticed the critical importance of language in the culture (both as a cultural power and nationally). Language is a symbolic phenomenon; it gives voice to a man, group and all structures of culture not only as a national language but also symbolically by conveying important and meaningful messages through the culture itself – history, myths, values, and other segments. Drawing on the concepts put forth by John Langshaw Austin and Pierre Bourdieu, it can be observed that Latvians swiftly grasped, during the initial stages of their awakening, the significance of "how to do things with words." They recognized the inherent power of language and constative statements, particularly when uttered by authoritative figures who publicly and officially distinguished and affirmed certain ideas or values over others. In doing so, these agents solidified the existence and worthiness of these ideas, aligning them with the perceived nature of reality, as if they were natural and inherent (Gubenko, 2014).

The other part of the importance of a language lies in the national aspect when Latvians start using their language consistently in the social sphere, thus conquering their own place in the space of Riga more convincingly.

Latvians mobilise, manifested as an ability to evaluate the German cultural codes and traditions as advantageous; Latvians re-create to develop new products of their own culture and historically change the cultural hierarchy. They learn German to perfection but stay Latvians; they borrow the everyday lifestyle and behavioural patterns and apply forms and models of social organisation by establishing associations, starting businesses, and organising the Song Celebration. As a result, Latvians, through their social and national

practices within specific cultural and historical contexts, challenge binary thinking and essential identities that have been shaped by colonial attitudes and knowledge. Instead, they pave the way for the emergence of new identities.

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