

Gandzilevska G., Shyriaieva T. The peculiarities of national identity of Australian Ukrainians in the works of L. Bohuslavets. *Problems of Psychology in the 21st Century*. Scientia Socialis Lithuania, 2014. Vol. 8, №1. P. 16–25. URL: <http://oaji.net/articles/444-1403293468.pdf>.

## THE PECULARITIES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY OF AUSTRALIAN UKRAINIANS IN THE WORKS OF L. BOHUSLAVETS

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### Abstract

*After a period of continuous troubles that Ukraine has witnessed over a period of its history, the issue of national identity today appears to be more acute than ever before. It is explained by various reasons that are not under consideration in this particular article. However, the notion of national identity, its factors and modern perspectives are of a great scientific importance. Amid the principles of identity there is one that refers to existential feeling of belonging and the desire to unite in factions with those who share similar interests. Besides, national identity is viewed as the factor that affects preservation and development of Ukrainian nation. In this article, national identity is understood as a collective structure that illustrates how similar or different the elements of society are. In most cases it is realized by means of collaborative work which is a membership of particular groups and committees. Ukrainian immigrants are thought to be those representatives of Ukrainian nation who experience the feeling of belonging while living abroad. Lesia Bohuslavets, whose literary work is under consideration in this article, is an example of those conscientious Ukrainians who feel responsible for cultural and national preservation. Moreover, literary works enable scientists to examine immigrants' subconscious attitude to the surrounding world. It is worth mentioning that humour is a distinctive feature of the language used by the writer in her collection of the novels known under the title 'My Australian Kuma'. The procedure of content analysis as a statistic means of language evaluation made it possible to examine five factors of national identity of Australian immigrants. These are the collective identification realized in religious and cultural beliefs, common history and the feeling of belonging, active social life which is illustrated by one's participation in cultural activities, geographical belonging and national character. It is assumed that national identity and active social life criteria were marked with the highest variables.*

**Key words:** national identity, national character, active social participation, content analysis.

### Introduction

Modern Ukrainian history undergoes considerable transformations. It can be explained by the fact that national beliefs and values are much dependent on social and political aspects of people's life. However, national identity can be perceived as an integral component of the social identity which is in close relation to one's self-understanding, self-evaluation and personal reference to the extended national group. Besides, national group is formed of the representatives of a community who are motivated to reach socially important purpose and influence the way cultural, intellectual and economic aspects of national life. The issue of

national identity appears to be of a great importance concerning Ukraine which is on its way to construct the positive image of the ethnic category 'Ukrainian'. Moreover, one should not neglect the importance of psychological barriers that hamper the process of national identification among Ukrainians.

The factors that influence national identity and their perspectives are widely viewed by the scientists in social and cultural anthropology and psychology (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 2009; Berry, 1992 etc.). Theoretical analysis of various conceptual approaches shows that identity is a result of the process of identification which means resemblance with particular individual or ethnic group. Identity is viewed as the main mechanism of socialisation and ethnic belonging. So, identity in this context appears to be a dynamic structure that can be developed through the life span of an individual; it presupposes the successful dealing with the identity crises and can be either progressive or regressive (Voropaeva, 2009). High level of religiousness and morality of Ukrainians is explained by their long-lasting struggle for prevalence that resulted from the fact that Ukrainians were historically less numerous than the nations that inhabited the territory of their country (Gnatenko, 1997). Later, as one of the former USSR republic Ukraine became characterized with the high level of soviet identity which dominated over ethnic, social, European and human identities (Gnatenko, Pavlenko, 1999). Moreover, there was an idea that no nation is really existing community as it finds its importance only in the minds of its representatives (Anderson, 2001). It goes without saying that all possible difficulties of understanding Ukrainian nation and its peculiarities influenced national separation so that immigration became quite popular.

### *Problem of Research*

The feeling of national belonging and national identity can be observed from the works of Ukrainian immigrant writers. On the one hand, a language analysis of their works enables scientists to conduct their researches and to find out the valid results. On the other hand, the majority of literary works that are done outside Ukraine not only reflects the peculiarities of the life of Ukrainian immigrants but contains the information which is directly connected with the issue of national identity preservation. Literature is a good source to study national identity as it presents the objective and acute information (Kominiarska, 2012). V. Matsko (2010) compares literature to scientific papers and emphasizes that the first has more flexible conceptual apparatus than latter that enables the examination of one's subconscious level and its relation to the objective world using suggestive means and metaphors. Moreover, it makes possible to model possible forthcoming future. I. Kominiarska (2012) believes the literature written by Diaspora is of a great importance, as its writers 'wished to positively influence the formation of Ukrainian national self-consciousness that is characterized by rich history and future' (Kominiarska, 2012, p.206). Thus, hypothetically the selection of the personalities of talented immigrants and psychological analysis of their literary works will provide the possibility to recollect past experience with the aim to develop and preserve national identity in the conditions of nowadays. The examination of this issue is possible with the consideration of the works of the member of Writer's Union in Ukraine, the member of artistic club after V. Symonenko, "Triumph" prized laureate, the daughter of the prominent immigrant activist in Australia and the editor of the almanac "New Horizon" Dmytro Nytchenko (Chub) Lesia Bohuslavets (Tkach), who together with her family in 1943 immigrated to Australia but regularly visits Ukraine. This research comprises many personal facts that were kindly provided by Lesia Bohuslavets in private communication with the authors of the research.

## *Research Focus*

V. Matsko (2010) has analyzed the novels of XX century written by Diaspora authors and claimed that the overwhelming majority of them, including the works of L. Bohuslavets, are left unknown to the majority. However, it is she whose legacy is said to strengthen national confidence as well as to develop its uniqueness and believes in the independence of Ukraine. National ideas are discussed with a view of personal sacrifice, freedom of choice and importance of one's life in the situation of global historical disasters. Analysis of these works will provide the answers for the question, such as how the national identity was preserved in the light of Ukrainian integration into the universal cultural situations.

P. Angeluts (2001) sees literary works of Oleksandra Tkach, which she published under the pseudonym Lesia Bohuslavets, as those that are oriented on the exposition of style of life and psychology of Ukrainians in Australia. I Kominiarska (2012) underlines that the identity of the writer as an organic unity exists exclusively under the condition when "the national identity of the individuality of author and the national identity of the literary work correlate". She continues by saying that "the inner freedom of personality is an integral element of the national identity of the hero of any particular literary work" (Kominiarska, 2012, p.208). Examining "Eneida" and looking for the representations of national identity there, O. Maltseva (2009) emphasizes the therapeutic power of humour and laughing. Thus, Bohuslavets's autobiographic work "*My Australian Kuma*" appears of an exceptional importance. Its scientific interest is explained by the uniqueness of the lines of its heroes. I. Kominiarska (2012) understands exact words of the protagonists as "the way they see their own identity". Moreover, being a researcher of the works of Ulas Samchuk, she pays attention to the fact that writers frequently use folklore in their literature since numerous proverbs and sayings "help to create the image of heroes and to illustrate their real thoughts". In other words, the researcher believes that these are humour, satire and lyrical nature of the literary works that are the exact tools used by writers to give the sense of identity of the heroes. Moreover, it helps to depict the tradition of folk (Matsko, 2010). Irony, grotesque and satiric hyperbole make these works stand out from the rest of the literary works of a particular period. However, humour and satire do not influence the seriousness of the general sense of any of these pieces of writing.

In practice, the purpose of this investigation can be summarised as follows: 1) to investigate the main biographical facts of Lesia Bohuslavets and her relation to the phenomenon of national identity of Ukrainian immigrants; 2) to speculate the factors that are essential for genuine understanding of national identity; 3) to analyse Bohuslavets's literary work '*My Australian Kuma*' by means of content analysis and to define the elements of national identity that are expressed the most in her work.

## **Methodology of Research**

### *General Background of Research*

In line with an objective of a survey, it was decided to consider the life of Oleksandra Tkach and to statistically examine her work '*My Australian Kuma*' considering the vocabulary by means of which the writer explains her thoughts. Both aspects are seen to be influential for the general understanding of national identity preservation of Australian Ukrainians. The contemplation of writer's life provides enough evidence to assume that immigrants mind the term 'national identity' no matter how long they are living abroad. Moreover, her personal ideas and facts of her life can be proved by means of statistics for what the language of her literary work was considered. This provides factual data and can prove the preliminary assumptions.

In her private letters sent on October 31, 2013 Oleksandra Tkach states her personal reasons for becoming a writer. She says, 'I wanted to draw attention to the drawbacks of the modern life. I believed that describing myself as the one who is characterized by the negative features I made my work be understood by the readers in a better way'. Moreover, her father, as it becomes obvious from her letters, was fond of humorous novels, especially those of Stepan Rudanskiy. In one of the issues of *Almanac* (1974) in his article '*Ukrainian humour and its creators*' Dmytro Nytchenko writes, 'When we speak about Ukrainian humour in most cases we mean the most remarkable feature of Ukrainians. Since the ancient times in the most difficult times of our history it is humour that positively influenced the life, joined human souls, strengthened and encouraged in the struggles with enemies' (Chub, 1974). It should be mentioned that at first Lesia wrote to the local Ukrainian newspaper and took the surname of her aunt who at the time lived in Poltava, which Lesia visited twice before World War II. Later, she sent her works to the magazine *New Days* that was published in Canada. In fact, she did not want to be anyhow influenced as a writer by the surname of her famous father. 'My father read the works after they were published,' she says. 'He complained about the fact that I never asked him for any piece of advice, but I was certain in my intentions'. In her interview with the newspaper *Young Ukraine* Lesia Bohuslavets emphasizes the differences between Ukrainian Diaspora of Australia and Canada. She says, 'Ukrainian Diaspora emerged only after World War II. We were to rebuilt the remnants and create Ukrainian centres and schools. We all were poor and worked hard. Our diplomas were not verified. My father who was a teacher had to work manually with a spade. However, so much was done to preserve national identity'. M. Boliukh (1974) says, '*Ukrainian affair*', primarily not known in Australia at the time, soon became popular. It was the presence of Ukrainians in Australia that influenced the situation in general and made them known. In her works L. Bohuslavets writes that 'the foreign land unites people. Australians were astonished at how easy and quickly these foreigners got their aims' (Boliukh, 1974, p.191). She emphasizes the importance of the publicity in the preservation of national identity. From the private communication it became clear that in every city inhabited by Ukrainians there were public groups lead by the main group whose duty was to elect the leader and other members of authority. The activity of Saturday schools that were widely opened by activists was associated with choirs, dancing and theatrical groups, bandurists, plast, sports organization etc. All these people were connected with the public groups, regularly met at Ukrainian House that was either rented or bought. Bohuslavets speaks about the fact that all national and religious holidays were celebrated.

Boliukh (1974) in his work mentions that Ukrainian associations, public meetings of artists and literary activists and private relations positively influenced and emphasized the importance of Ukrainian issues. Moreover, it was a good way 'to keep youth interested in the traditions of their forefathers' (Boliukh, 1974, p.221). To prolong this process in the future 'real Ukrainian marriages' were said to be of a great importance. It is proved statistically as approximately 55 per cent of all Australian immigrants' marriages are formed of Ukrainian spouses. Lesia Bohuslavets demonstrates this theory by the example of her own life. She says she would never get married to the foreigner and she did not. Her husband Viktor Tkach comes from Dnipropetrovsk and it is he whom she owe much of what she has today. He supported her ambitions and backed her up. Moreover, in her impressions after the journey, the writer mentions that once she told her husband about her intention of visiting Ukraine it was followed by his remark that she 'would teach people even there how to live a dissent life'. He continues saying, 'after your visit the whole nation will speak Ukrainian language'.

To have enough time to spend with her two sons and two daughters she was much involved in the house chore and occasionally, six months before Christmas, worked at the plant. In her interview Lesia assumes that it was mostly because of the amount of time spent

with her children that they did not forget Ukrainian language. However, she was a member of Ukrainian organizations (female organization, plast, sisterhood at church etc) that enabled her to experience 'the other side of life'. The writer emphasizes the importance of the church in the preservation of national identity of Ukrainians in Australia. From her personal letters it becomes clear that Ukrainian schools and universities that functioned at the time in Australia played a vital role in national preservation. She mentions University in Sydney, the Ukrainian department of which was ruled by her sister Galyna Kosharska, University named after Monash in Melburn, controlled by Professor Marko Pavlyshyn. In his article, M. Pavlyshyn (2008) speaks about such values as the relation to the ideals of independent Ukraine, the ability to keep Ukrainian self-consciousness among those who form Diaspora, active involvement in Ukrainian social structure. Moreover, he mentions two main problems that were considered in the researches which are the formation of institutions, the main purpose of which is to preserve Ukrainian language, culture and patriotic forms of historical and political self-understanding and to acquaint the world with the problems of Ukrainians.

In the context of national identity preservation the almanac '*New Horizon*' (1960), published by father of Lesia Bohuslaves Dmytro Nytchenko, is a striking example of the collective works of Ukrainian writers and artists the works of who were aimed at the creation and successful running of artistic units and Ukrainian life in general. Thus, taking everything mentioned above into consideration it can be assumed that Ukrainian Australians donated millions of annual profits on the needs of Ukrainians being run by the intention to preserve Ukrainian heritage.

K. Tereshchenko (2009) and M. Boryshevsky (2006) define national identity as the feeling of resemblance to the nation, its history, past and present, responsibility for Motherland and certainty about concrete deeds realization. He mentions about two blocks, which constitute the structure of national identity. These are cognitive and affective blocks. Thus, the first is made of several components among which there are the knowledge of national group existence, the belonging to the national group, the knowledge about the territory, emblem, symbols, institutions, customs and traditions, historic dates, figures, the belief in the relation of the individual to the national group. The elements that make the second of the two above mentioned blocks include subjective importance of national identity, the level of apprehension of the national identity which is the ability to refuse it and the importance of membership in the group, the feeling of belonging to the national group, the feeling of apprehension that relates to the territory, social feelings such as shame, proud, national guilt and national self respect.

### *Sample of Research*

In line with experimental hypotheses a set of identifiers that make national identity were worked out. These were taken from the work of O. Udod (2010) who mentions about five integral factors of the national identity. Each one is observed below with genuine precision. The first factor is human inclinations. As far as O. Udod is concerned, the nation exists as long as its members see each other as people who are joined by their origin, agree on the similarities they share and are certain about their intentions to prolong their staying together. The second element is common past that includes victories and loses, common obligations and common future. Next go common actions which are the solutions and achievements that make activity identification. The fourth element is common territory, motherland and country. This element creates the link between the nation and the state as a political institution that legally acts on certain territory. Finally, there are common characteristics that make a national character, common culture, common political principles such as democracy and lawfulness (Udod, 2010, p.34).

A. Smith (1994) speaks about national identity as the feeling of political unity that unifies all the members of the community by means of obligations, duties and rights. He summarizes the integral parts of national identity, concluding that territory, laws, institutions and system of customs are to unify cultural community (Smith, 1994, p.16). The model that comprises all the elements mentioned above scientist calls *western model*. It presupposes the existence of the other model, opposite to the one described before. It is based on the principle of common origin and culture of the nation. In other words, Smith claims that territory of a particular nation does not influence the membership of its inhabitants, the belonging to which is specified immediately at one's birth.

### *Instrument and Procedures*

Content analysis appears to be the good way to examine the language of the literary work of Lesia Bohuslavets '*My Australian Kuma*'. The decision was justified by the fact that content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). This quantification procedure allows researchers to specify the peculiarities of the way the national identity is revealed in Ukrainian immigrants who live in Australia and enables its integral elements indexation.

In the research, five elements mentioned by Udod (2002) were taken into consideration. Thus, the following blocks according to which the vocabulary units were grouped were selected: the collective identification realized in religious and cultural believes, common history and the feeling of belonging, active social life which is illustrated by one's participation in cultural activities, geographical belonging and national character.

As far as data for the research come from Bohuslavets's work '*My Australian Kuma*', the content was justified by the objectives. It was done with an aim to restore author's attitude towards the issue and her thoughts. The elements that were considered or conceptions of content were formed of lexical units such as words and phrases. According to the logic of content analysis, five above mentioned blocks were taken as research categories. Lexical material appears to be mutually exclusive that means that no variables (words and phrases) violated the conclusions made by researchers. The procedure of the research presupposed the statistics of the general number of lexical units in the text, the number of words and phrases that make certain categories, which demonstrates its average validity, and the average coefficient of the variable that includes the information about the number of units in the category and their use in the text (Averianov, 2007). The conclusion about the validity was done on the basis of variables that were got as a result of mathematical comparison.

### *Results of Research*

To assess the material every category was viewed in details. General number of words in the text '*My Australian Kuma*' is 20,813 words. In the category '*collective identification*' the most frequently used lexical units were 'self-esteem', 'national duty', 'patriotism', 'predecessor' (general number of words = 120) that was marked with the average variable of 0.58, average coefficient of the variable is 6.1. The category '*common history*' comprised 'past', 'Communists', 'decedents' (general number of words = 95), the average variable 0.46, average coefficient 4.9. '*Active social life*' included the units like 'public meeting', 'plast', 'imprensa', 'magazine' (general number of words = 139) the average variable 0.67, average coefficient 5.2. To the category '*geographical belonging*' the following words were put: 'Carpathian', 'Ukraine', 'moskal' (general number of words = 81), the average variable 0.39, average coefficient 5. Finally, category '*national character*' included 190 words and got the

average variable 0.91, average coefficient equals 6.7. Average variables are significant while clearly demonstrating the representativeness of the category. The average coefficients are consistent and can be viewed as an indicator in case the average variables are questioned.

## **Discussion**

The findings reported in this paper suggest a number of interesting hypotheses about the indicators of national identity of Ukrainian immigrants. They were ranked with a view of the variables that they were marked with. Thus '*national character*' occupies the highest position in the list, being followed by '*active social life*', '*collective identification*', '*common history*' and '*geographical belonging*' accordingly. L. Korol (2012) speaks about national character as a component of national psychology content of nation which is represented by the system of attitudes of individuals to the surrounding, which can be seen in mental stereotypes and patterns of behaviour (p.26). On the other hand, active social life that is mentioned by Lesia Bohuslavets in her personal letters to the writers of the article as an integral part of national identity proves to be important. The preservation of religious and moral principles that are typical of Ukrainians appears to be more acute than geographical and historic belonging to one nation.

## **Conclusions**

All findings suggest that national identity is a unity of multiple elements. It is a component of national psychology which is understood as a system of attitudes and beliefs that are influential for the life and activity of an individual that belongs to a certain ethnic group and is represented in the peculiarities of national culture, customs and tradition. Besides, the investigation has illustrated that national identity is less concerned about national history and geography. Such finding can debunk any existing misconception or hypothesis about the difficulties of national identity preservation in immigrants who occasionally visit their motherlands even though being born in Ukraine. This can be assumed from the results taken from the work of Lesia Bohuslavets who was born on the territory of Ukraine and thus experienced its cultural and historic heritage. However, such phenomenon can possibly be not typical of those immigrants who were born in other countries which can be an implication for future research.

The results reported here support the hypothesis that cultural integration which is active participation in meetings and committees is vital as it unites people and provides them with the possibility to discuss the national and ethnic matters.

These conclusions emphasise the importance of national identity preservation as a way to prolong the existence of Ukrainian nation, its culture, moral values and religious devotion. Moreover, it sheds some light on the indicators of national identity that are demonstrated by Ukrainian immigrant who live in Australia. Finally, it acquaints young generation to the works of people whose names are kept less known than it should be, such as Lesia Bohuslavets.

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