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**THE IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
GLOBALIZATION IN THE NOVEL BY OLGA TOKARCZUK  
“FLIGHTS”**

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**Abstract**

This article considers the issue of the identity crisis in the context of globalization, represented in the novel *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk, a Nobel Prize laureate and one of the best-selling Polish writers of our time. The artistic world of the novel reveals key features of globalization such as increasing global mobility, intensifying migrations, the dissipation of national borders, and the deactualization of national memory. O. Tokarczuk portrays an original type of a character acting in such conditions – a modern nomad that can be an emigrant, a refugee, a traveler, or a homeless person.

This paper focuses on the correlation between memory collapse and identity crisis depicted in several stories from the novel. It mainly considers the philosophical aspect of the issue, namely, people's fear of death and desire for immortality expressed through their propensity for perpetual motion and rejection of individual and national memory. The topic of plastination (a method of body preservation), deeply elaborated throughout the novel, is examined in the context of interdependency between human's body and identity.

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Specific attention is dedicated to fragmentariness as essential characteristic of both formal side of the novel (composition, narrative) and its thematic range. Fragmentariness is also intrinsic to the artistic manifestation of memory, presented in the form of a heterogeneous archive. Providing an alternative, polyphonic narrative, O. Tokarczuk opposes it to any kind of a coherent, monolithic historical narrative.

Written in 2007, this novel is particularly interesting to analyze nowadays, when impugning the globalization values is becoming a common tendency. In the new context, *Flights* can be construed as a warning about creating a world devoid of memorial meaning. This article highlights a well-pronounced appeal to recollection and verbalization of the past. In the “narrating” of life, O. Tokarczuk sees the way to salvation and liberation, thus affirming the crucial role of memory in dealing with the identity crisis faced by contemporary societies.

**Keywords:** identity, globalization, memory, Olga Tokarczuk, Polish literature.

Olga Tokarczuk, (born January 29, 1962, Sulechów, Poland) has been one of the best-selling Polish authors for decades. Known for her polyphonic and complex prose, in her novels, O. Tokarczuk intermingles centuries, continents, combines global and local perspectives focusing on the liquid identity of today’s societies. Feminism, eco-activism, and strong distancing from Polish nationalism and Catholicism put her among the most controversial authors in today’s Poland. O. Tokarczuk gained international renown after becoming the first Polish writer to receive the Man Booker International Prize in 2018 for *Flights* (2017), the English translation of her sixth novel, *Bieguni* (2007).

It is noteworthy that O. Tokarczuk was awarded the Nobel Prize “*for a narrative imagination that with encyclopedic passion represents the crossing of boundaries as a form of life*” (The Nobel Prize, 2018). O. Tokarczuk’s Nobel citation obviously referred to her novel *Flights* in the first place – as crossing of boundaries is the crosscutting topic of this piece. *Flights*, the most “globalized” novel by O. Tokarczuk (Дзядевич, 2009), addresses various anthropological, cultural, philosophical, psychological problems in the context of globalization and global mobility.

The Polish title of the novel (*Bieguni*) is taken from a Russian Old Believers’ sect that believed wandering and staying in motion to be the way to salvation.

Members of the sect were obliged to break all ties with society and their homeland, avoid civil duties as well as renounce passports and other identification documents in order to maintain anonymity.

At the same time, the Polish word “biegun” means “pole”, the edge point of the Earth, which indicates the geographical dimension of the modern people’s nomadism. In the globalized world, eternal wanderers seek for salvation in crossing the boundaries, emigration, and abandonment of their national identity.

The structure of *Flights* resembles a notebook containing pieces of various narratives: diary entries and memoirs, letters, quotations, catalogs of collections, lists, travel notes, lectures and short essays on different topics. Diverse elements of the novel are interconnected by two main themes, travel and plastination, in the light of which the problem of human identity arises.

O. Tokarczuk’s writings are being actively investigated by modern scholars, in the light of memory and identity in particular (Sosin, 2002; Żarczyńska, 2004; Ukleja, 2012; Wieliczko, 2012; Рудковская, 2019; Адельгейм, 2019). However, special attention and interest need to be paid to globalization as a central factor of the identity crisis in contemporary societies.

O. Tokarczuk wrote *Flights* in 2007, at the time when globalization seemed to be one of the key tendencies of further civilizational development. This faith in globalization and open borders was shaken by the following financial crisis of 2008, the 2015 migrant crisis and the Covid-2019 global lockdown, which have caused certain anti-migrant sentiment and establishing tighter border controls. This is why it is important to take into account the hype revolving around globalization which was especially prominent in the year of 2007. At the same time, today’s general precept to reconsideration of the globalization values provides new, critical approach towards the ideas introduced in O. Tokarczuk’s “paean on mobility” (Shotter, 2020). Since literary works of high artistic and conceptual value can be reactualized and reveal new, previously hidden meanings over time, there is no doubt that O. Tokarczuk’s Nobel prize-winning novel will obtain new interpretations in the post-globalization context.

Rootlessness and perpetual motion define the characters of *Flights*, who are travelers, emigrants, backpackers, and homeless people. O. Tokarczuk depicts them as people with destroyed or lost identity, devoid of any kind of nostalgia or national sentiment. Taking the link between (national) memory and (national) identity into account, we will focus on the deactualization of personal and collective memory as one of the main factors of the globalized humanity’s identity crisis.

The world depicted in the novel is a globalized world where borders are getting blurred and the existence of separated states seems to be an imposed and useless conditionality. “Anyone who has experience with borders, not only national ones, sees the artificiality of people arbitrarily drawing them,” remarked O. Tokarczuk in one of her interviews (Shotter, 2020). This is particularly true for the Eastern-European region where borders have been repeatedly moving with the tides of history. However, while in the past centuries, unstable borders and mixing cultures were rather empowering and enriching national identities (providing an environment for self-identifying), the background of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s international connections makes national sentiment to some extent redundant.

In *Flights*, the author shapes the world in which new kind of “states” arises while traditional forms of national countries reduce to artificial formalities. The increasing importance of air traffic and mobile telephony is reflected in the images of cities-airports and airport republics, *World Airport Union* and *Network State*. Such “state entities” represent a globalization alternative to traditional states. “*In what possible way could airports be considered inferior to actual cities, nowadays?*” (Tokarczuk: 61) – the narrator asks, hinting at the fact that cities are losing their relevance in comparison to airports – multi-faceted, bustling centers of motion, which have taken their own, crucial place in the global hierarchy: “*...now airports have emancipated themselves, so that today they have a whole identity of their own*” (Tokarczuk: 61).

The significance of connections, transport hubs and airports surpassed the significance of state borders. Therefore, these days, a traveler in Europe may not be even certain what country he/she is in: “*I’m driving on Good Friday, at dusk, from the Netherlands to Belgium – I don’t know which country I’m in now, since the border has vanished; unused, it’s been expunged*” (Tokarczuk: 39).

The narrator calls herself “a citizen of a network state”, giving another parallel to a traditional state, which points out traditional nations’ losing their role under the global mobile coverage. The author refers to individual countries as provinces of the network state, thus leveling their separateness. The process of globalization is compared to the establishment of a new state/world order: “*We didn’t notice the night-time coups, the contents of the capitulation treaties were never released to the public. Of the movements of imperial armies made up of polite, obliging officials the public was not informed*” (Tokarczuk: 315);

that defines new reality: “*At the airport, a big ad on a glass wall all-knowingly asserts: МОБИЛЬНОСТЬ СТАНОВИТСЯ РЕАЛЬНОСТЬЮ. Mobility is reality. Let us stress that it is merely an ad for mobile phones.*” (Tokarczuk: 225).

Describing mobile, accelerated reality in the fundamental work *Sites of Memory*, the French researcher of memory and identity Pierre Nora stated, “The whole world started spinning in this dance, involved in it by the well-known phenomena of globalization, democratization, social homogenization, mediatization” (Hopa et al., 1999: 18). The new reality determined general tendency to disregard such traditional identifying factors as nationality, national borders, and collective memory. According to P. Nora, at the turn of the century, the world experienced the end of memorial societies and memorial ideologies, as well as all those who carried out and guaranteed the preservation and transmission of values. Such institutions as church or school, family or state approached their end as the memory collapse was happening (Hopa et al., 1999). The image of the collapse of recollection occurring in the mobile world emerges through the stories told in *Flights*.

Memory occupies an important place in the conceptual system of the novel and obtains a specific artistic representation. First, it is the form of an archive, i.e. a container of testaments and information about the past: “...*memory is a drawer stuffed with papers – some of them are totally useless, those one-time documents like dry cleaning tickets and the proofs of purchase of winter boots or a toaster long since gone. But then there are other reusable ones, testaments not to events but to whole processes: a child’s vaccination booklet, her student ID like a tiny passport, its pages half-filled with stamps from each term, her school diploma, a certificate of completion from a dressmaking course*” (Tokarczuk: 282). The very structure of the novel resembles a sort of such heterogeneous archive. Documents, photographs, lists, letters, maps, and diary entries, of which *Flights* are composed, record and transmit memories.

Another form of memory representation is the form of film recordings stored in human’s brain: “...*these recordings filmed with whatever camera had been at hand, with faded colours or even black and white, generic scenes, moments, with no logic to them, scattered, out of order...*” (Tokarczuk: 273).

As it can be seen, memory appears in fragments, be it separated pieces of narratives (diaries, letters, catalogues etc.) or scattered images of the past.

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The dispersed elements at first glance do not seem to follow any logic. However, this illogicality makes it possible to recreate a picture of the past in various alternative ways, in all its fullness of life, not corresponding to any imposed stereotypes. As American literary critic Ruth Franklin said in her article *Olga Tokarczuk's Novels Against Nationalism*, "A form based on fragments is particularly suitable for a novel by an author from Poland, where national borders have changed over and over through the centuries, and where multiple ethnic groups – Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Germans, Ruthenians, Jews – have lived side by side in a cacophony of languages and experience" (Franklin, 2019). The form of *Flights* reflects its author's mindset on variety and versatility.

Fragmentariness is present at all levels of the novel: from the heterogeneous composition to the conceptual and thematic diversity and intermingling. It is significant that the memory is presented not as a coherent narrative of official history, but rather as a heterogeneous set of alternative voices: private biographies, recollections, photographs, relics, etc. Such manifestation of memory is pronouncedly opposed to coherent and sequential national grand narratives. As O. Tokarczuk stated, "Constellation, not sequencing, carries the truth" (Franklin, 2019) – from which we can conclude that her decision to introduce the novel in the form of fragments is primarily determined by the pursuit of truth. Her polyphonic, multi-lingual narrative would appear as a counter-narrative to any coherent, long-standing national mythology. It is on such narrative that genuine identity can be constructed.

*Flights* eloquently express an imperative for verbalization of historical experiences as well as futility of the oblivion policy. The miniature *Speak! Speak!* contains a direct call for frank narrating of life and verbalization of the past: "Do not leave any unexplained, unnarrated situations, any closed doors; kick them down with a curse, even the ones that lead to embarrassing and shameful hallways you would prefer to forget. Don't be ashamed of any fall, of any sin. The narrated sin will be forgiven. The narrated life, saved. (...) He who has not mastered the art of speaking shall remain forever caught in a trap" (Tokarczuk: 177). Narration here means primarily recollection and interpretation of the past.

The given message, for all its universality, can be seen as a special message for the Poles related to their perception of their own historical past. In an interview, which was later quoted by numerous Polish media,

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O. Tokarczuk said that “it is necessary to face our own history and try to rewrite it a little bit, without hiding all those terrible things that we did as colonizers, as the national majority that suppressed the minority, as slave holders or murderers of the Jews” (Gądek, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. While *Flights* do not directly reflect on the Holocaust, which is one of the cornerstones of Polish collective identity, it clearly calls for *confession*, which would help an individual and a community attain their true identity.

Yet, in the novel, we see characters who have given up their own past and memory of it. Their images, for all their diversity, make up a general image of a contemporary individual living in the global world. O. Tokarczuk dedicates particular attention to the topic of emigration, primarily, emigration of the Poles, who have been actively involved in global migration processes since Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004. Characters of the novel demonstrate a propensity for unstoppable movement and a desire for breaking ties with their past. When leaving their homeland, they do not bring family albums or other memorabilia with them. In contrast, they try to get rid of memories and erase their personal (hi)story, in particular by destroying personal archive.

One of the characters is an Eastern European emigrant Eryk, who has relocated to a godforsaken northern island from an unnamed country. When started working as a sailor, Eryk decided “*to toss into the ocean the folders of papers, school certificates, diplomas, transcripts from additional studies and records of vaccines*”, that is, to “erase” memory, delete the biographical data that would “*just humiliate the other sailors, whose entire résumés consisted in a few long voyages and some escapades in portside pubs*”. He has also got rid of his own name, “*that dragging corpse that no one knew how to pronounce correctly*” (Tokarczuk: 88), that symbolizes the devaluation of identity in the globalized world.

Despite the proclamation of mobility as a new reality and continuous movement as a form of life, a person, losing identifying connections, eventually loses his/her self; and that is illustrated by Eryk’s story. In the end, he bitterly begins to realize that wandering has brought him nowhere, i.e. to the routine job on a primitive ferry that runs along a straight line, strictly limited by the route: “*Straight lines – how humiliating they were. How they destroyed the mind. What perfidious geometry, how it makes us into idiots – there and back, a parody of travel.*”

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*Going forth merely in order to return again*”, and he himself has to expect the worst of all: “...someday the truth would come out; it would be revealed that he was no one” (Tokarczuk: 88).

Eryk`s path, like that of many other travellers in the world of no boundaries, resonates metaphorically with the image of a maze depicted in the chapter *Wall*: “*At the centre of the labyrinth there’s neither treasure nor a minotaur you’ll have to fight in battle; the road ends suddenly with a wall – white like the whole city, tall, impossible to climb. Supposedly this is the wall of some invisible temple, but facts are facts – we’ve reached the end, there’s nothing past this now*” (Tokarczuk: 354). The image of the wall is one of the most expressive in the novel. It symbolizes the meaninglessness of flight and the emptiness formed in place of the forgotten past and lost connections.

Interestingly, Eryk’s last escape attempt was inspired by his deep, abandoned identity, symbolized by his old name: “...today Eryk answered the call of his old name: *I’m here*” (Tokarczuk: 97). One morning he unexpectedly set out the ferry full of passengers for open sea. The uncontrollable call of his nomadic nature could be seen as a way to protest against the dead end of the labyrinth, appeared to him as the straight line of the ferry’s route. His defense on the trial referred to him as to one of those travelers “...who simply answer the chaotic call of their own unease” (Tokarczuk: 99). Uneasiness and chaos seem to be typical “symptoms” of contemporary nomadism. However, Eryk ended up in prison that was merely another type of a dead end, not so different from the island where his wandering had brought him before.

Another character who has lost her name is an unnamed Polish biologist from the *Godzone* story. We neither know the name of the country she has relocated to, but, from the text, one can assume that it might be situated in South America. Living far away from motherland, the woman does not feel any homesick as her “*nostalgia had seeped into the new land like spilled milk, not leaving any trace*” (Tokarczuk: 282). She has forgotten her Polish past, so that only an unexpected letter from her first boyfriend, who “*she’d known more than thirty years ago, (...) whom she had completely forgotten by now, but whom she had, after all, once loved*” (Tokarczuk: 273), partly brings her memory back.

Memories become a discovery for the woman, as if she recalled the past for the first time in her life.

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Her remembrances are blurry, almost lost – just like her Polish self. On pg.277, the reader gains a glimpse into the character's mind: *"She'd never had time before to really think about those types of things, from days gone by; the past was like a smudged streak"* (Tokarczuk: 277). An interesting detail is that the lady recalls how she once performed the ritual of blood brotherhood with her first love, but now she could not even remember which of her palms was cut on that occasion: *"Time commemorated other kinds of wounds"* (Tokarczuk: 283).

In the globalized world, under the conditions of accelerated history, nostalgia is turning into an atavism. Emigrants and wanderers are free of nostalgia; they are people with "healed wounds" who believe it to be possible to escape from themselves as soon as they erase their memory. However, most often they reach the "white wall" at the end of the labyrinth: they come nowhere and become nobody themselves. Thus, after thirty years spent across the ocean, visiting her native Poland, O. Tokarczuk's heroine discovers that her motherland has become a strange land for her. She feels like a foreigner here – *"like a lone card taken out of its deck and shuffled into some other, strange one"*; *"like a visitor from another dimension, like some higher being"* (Tokarczuk: 295-296).

The heroine's state of alienation and isolation in her hometown is caused by the fact that her memory is unable to set any connections with Polish reality (*"...there's nothing here for her memory to grab onto"*). The woman realizes that she has got no ties with her motherland and its people (*"There is no one who could grab her hand, no one who could detain her"*), no nostalgia. Her native country turns into a kind of a fictional land which could not give one any feeling of affiliation: *"she can't quite shake the feeling that she's ended up on the other side of a mirror in some fictional land, where everything is unreal"* (Tokarczuk: 295-296). That is how a person faces the fact of the identity loss. Lacking connection with her motherland, the woman perceives her condition as unreal and fictional.

The experience of identity loss is reflected in the heroine's feeling of invisibility: *"...she repels the locals, too, who don't so much as look at her, overlooking her as they pass. It is as though her childhood dream of being invisible have all come true"*; *"...people's eyes just sort of float right over her face, her cheeks and her nose, not even skimming the surface. They look straight through her, no doubt looking past her at ads and landscapes and schedules"* (Tokarczuk: 294).

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The sensation of invisibility, obviously correlated with the loss of identity, also contains a feminist aspect. O. Tokarczuk points out that after reaching a certain age, women are no longer of interest to people around them, as their appearance no longer makes them attractive to men and rivals for women. This fact (the “invisibility” of middle-aged women for the surroundings) indicates the “age limitation” of women’s social role defined by the frailty of their bodily form. This emphasizes the hopelessness of attempts to build one’s own identity on the basis of their physical manifestation only.

Despite certain discomfort, it cannot be said that the woman in the story perceives the loss of connection with her compatriots as a tragedy. The devaluation of memory in all its forms (nostalgia, personal biographical data, national sentiment or unhealed wounds) defines the lack of national memory and affiliation as a natural feature of a globalized individual. Life on the go does not let a person put down roots, and every crossing of the borders draws a line between past and present, cleanses one from memories, allows one to become a new person – *“Every flight disinfects us”* (Tokarczuk: 279).

Leaving Poland, the heroine gets once again “cleansed” from memories in a way habitual for travelers: *“When the plane takes off it switches off her mind. She does not give it a further thought. All those memories now disappear”* (Tokarczuk: 299). A figurative parallel to the process of “cleansing” from memory is given in the last episode of the *Godzone*, in which, on the arrival from Europe, the heroine has her shoes disinfected.

O. Tokarczuk draws a metaphorical parallel between absence of memories and sterility. The state of sterility gets its deeper philosophical reflection in the context of plastination – the process of preserving bodies and body parts in sterilizing liquids. This topic is developed in a series of stories called *Dr. Blau’s Travels*, which is about an anatomist obsessed with plastination.

Dr. Blau is collecting photographs of vaginas of his mistresses. His dream is to create a real collection, made up not of pictures, but of preserved organs, because *“Every body part deserves to be remembered. Every human body deserves to last (...) If it were up to Blau, he would make the world differently – the soul could be mortal, what do we need it for, anyway, but the body would be immortal”* (Tokarczuk: 131). Dr. Blau’s fetishism is erotic in the broadest sense of this word – his desire to make vaginas “remembered” is caused by the general strive for life and immortality.

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Thus, plastination is understood as an opportunity to flee from death, at least the one of flesh. In his reflections, the doctor contrasts soul and body assuming that physical form itself is whole and self-sufficient: “...*despite the evidence of death, despite the absence of a soul, the body left to itself is a kind of intensive whole. Of course the dead body is not alive; what I mean is more the fact of it remaining in its form. Form is in its way alive*” (Tokarczuk: 202-203).

Plastination is about resisting decay and confirming life in its most stunning and unusual forms. Yet at the same time, the specimens (preserved body parts) have no story that would fill their form with sense. The “immortalized” bodies exist here and now, frozen in their sterile form. They have no memory and no identification: it is impossible to recognize them, to “tie” them to a certain culture or country.

The anonymity of the specimens is expressively pictured in the episode in which Dr. Blau, having stumbled on stuffed chimpanzees in a museum cellar, at first mistook them for human mummies.

Having found an unusual specimen – a preserved male arm with a tattoo – the doctor expressed strong interest for its shape, but no interest for its story: “*He took care of that arm and its artwork with something that might have been termed love. He wasn’t going to find out now whom it had belonged to, nor who had dispatched this arm with its tattoo on its travels through time*” (Tokarczuk: 140). The destiny of such a specimen could be a metaphor for the destiny of a modern person trying to escape from death. In the face of accelerating progress and their own finiteness, people are looking for different ways to avoid (the fear of) death. All of them are in some way associated with the loss of memory and erasure of the past. While preserving organic tissues requires sterilization, reaching absolute mobility and anonymity requires cutting off any memorial and historical ties, any basis for identification.

O. Tokarczuk looks into people’s fear of their individual and collective past in the miniature *Fear not*. In this story, a young Serb named Nebojša describes the places of the Balkan wars, noticing that those are marked by death. Nebojša emphasizes the connection between memory and death: “*Every stay in any place betrays the quiet ubiquitousness of the dead. (...) You wonder who lived here before you came to this home and this room, whose things these are, who scratched the wall above the bed and what tree the sills were cut from. Whose hands built the elaborately decorated fireplace, paved the courtyard?*”

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*And where are they now? In what form? Whose idea led to these paths around the pond and who had the idea of planting a willow out the window? All the houses, avenues, parks, gardens and streets are permeated with the deaths of others.*” (Tokarczuk: 300). Memory, in the end, is almost always memory about the dead, and therefore – about death. In addition, it might contain traumas, crimes, suffering. People are unwilling to accept this grievous burden in the age of mobility, when the world is open to an endless flight from what is frightening, be it death, guilt for the past or any other source of fear and pain. This lets us comprehend perpetual motion as perpetual flight from death. “...*When we are in motion, there’s no time for such idle meditations. Which is why to people on trips everything seems new and clean, virginal, and, in some sense, immortal*” (Tokarczuk: 301) – unstoppable migrations give people an illusion of immortality and cleanness. Just like plastination, it makes one sterile, even “virginal”, free of any historical burden, thus, anonymous and free of identity.

The author’s message here is hidden in the name of the Serb – “Nebojša”, which sounds exactly like the Polish “Nie bój się” (that means, “do not be afraid”). It is also stated in the name of the story – *Fear not*. Here we read an appeal not to be afraid of memory and not to escape from the places “permeated with the death of others” – those “sites of memory” (*les lieux de mémoire*) that P. Nora called “shelters of the sense of continuity” in the reality of accelerating history and “memory collapse” (Nora, 1999: 17). Identifying oneself with such places requires tight connection with the land and collective memory, i.e. sedentariness.

However, globalization offers an opportunity of a different path – the path of a nomad: free from memory, sterile, invisible, and nameless. The space of the world is also undergoing changes that contribute to the multiplication and expansion of the so-called “non-places” (term coined by Marc Augé): airports, stations, hotels, highways, vehicles or other places where people become anonymous. “Non-places” are in some way opposed to the notion of “sites of memory”. While “sites of memory”, filled with historical and memorial content, empower people’s identity, “the space of a non-place does not create either a separate identity or relationship” (Оже, 1992: 46). While staying in “non-places”, a person gets a specific identity of a “passenger”, determined by his/her temporary role at each stage of the journey. Moreover, M. Augé refers to the “passive joy of losing identity” (Оже, 1992: 46), provided by the “non-places”.

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There are various examples of “non-places” given in *Flights*: most characters are acting in planes, vehicles, on trains, ferries, in hotels and airports. O. Tokarczuk describes how in a hostel, which can come as a perfect illustration of a “non-place”, backpackers identify each other by *Three Travel Questions*: “*Where are you from? Where are you coming in from? Where are you going?*”(Tokarczuk: 63). These questions place a person on a certain stage of his/her rout, as his/her relevant coordinates, while letting him/her stay, in fact, anonymous.

O. Tokarczuk emphasizes the “spatial” dimension of the *Travel Questions*: “*The first question determines the vertical axis, while the next two establish two horizontal axes. Thus these backpackers are able to create something like a coordinates system; when they have all situated one another on that map, they drift peaceably off to sleep*” (Tokarczuk: 63). In a “non-place”, people`s identity is based on their departure point, destination and actual location on the map. Just like the members of the Russian sect of *Bieguns* (“Runners”), which gave the Polish name to the novel, they are constantly moving as if they also believed that “*Whoever pauses will be petrified, whoever stops, pinned like an insect, his heart pierced by a wooden needle, his hands and feet drilled through and pinned into the threshold and the ceiling*” (Tokarczuk: 256).

As already noted, in the globalized world, the role of “non-places” is rapidly increasing, thus deepening the identity crisis in contemporary societies. Furthermore, a person of liquid or lost identity might percept the world in general as a global “non-place” – just like the character of the story *Godzone*, who felt strange and invisible in her native town.

Having looked into *Flights* from the perspective of memory and identity issues, we can make several conclusions. First, memory in the novel is understood as an essential constructive factor of identity. The main form of its artistic representation is an archive of heterogeneous elements.

Heterogeneity and fragmentariness define the formal side of the text: its “constellation” composition and narrative diversity that includes scattered elements of different genres. Also, they shape the novel’s conceptual mission – to create an alternative, polyphonic narrative which would disrupt the pattern of a coherent grand narrative.

The characters of the novel exemplify a specific type of a nomadic character – stranger to national sentiment and nostalgia.



Constantly in motion, they create a new reality; the reality of mobility that excludes any possibility of settling down. National memory and nostalgia are being deactualized: scars are healing, names are changing, and people feel alien to their native land. They are escaping from the “sites of memory” to the expanding “non-places” where their identity is determined by nothing, but the temporary role of a passenger. This tendency for escape might be related to the fear of death, which gets especially evident in the conditions of accelerating progress and uncertainty of the future.

Freedom from memories is associated with purity, sterility and immortality. Every journey is perceived as disinfection as long as it removes one’s memories; motion provides renewal, a sense of virginity and even immortality. Yet the price of such “immortality” is the loss of identity. Thus, “mobile people” (emigrants, passengers, backpackers, homeless people etc.) experience alienation and, after all, reach the dead end of being nobody. The metaphor of the sterile form, deprived of content, but endowed with physical immortality, is given in the theme of plastination, widely elaborated throughout the novel.

Nowadays, when the global community is developing certain skepticism regarding globalization values, we can construe the novel by O. Tokarczuk as a warning about creating a faceless, sterile world, which would become a global “non-place”.

While didacticism is not characteristic for O. Tokarczuk’s narrative manner, the novel contains a well-pronounced appeal to the verbalization of the past, shedding fear, shame and guilt. In the “narrating” of life, the author sees the way to salvation and liberation. In this way, she affirms the crucial role of memory in dealing with the identity crisis experienced by contemporary societies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This statement caused a storm of outrage and criticism, but in 2019, O. Tokarczuk confirmed that she was ready to repeat her words again (Czermisnki, 2019).

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## **КРИЗА ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ В УМОВАХ ГЛОБАЛІЗАЦІЇ У РОМАНІ ОЛЬГИ ТОКАРЧУК «БІГУНИ»**

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### **Анотація**

У статті розглянуто питання кризи ідентичності в умовах глобалізації, представлене у

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романі «Бігуни» Ольги Токарчук, нобелівської лауреатки й однієї з найпопулярніших польських письменниць сучасності.

У художньому світі роману розкриваються такі ключові ознаки глобалізації, як глобальна мобільність, посилення міграції, зникання національних кордонів і деактуалізація національної пам'яті. О. Токарчук подає специфічний тип персонажа, що діє у таких умовах – сучасного номада: емігранта, біженця, мандрівника, безхатка і т.д.

Стаття зосереджена на кореляції занепаду пам'яті та кризи ідентичності, репрезентованій у низці історій, викладених у романі. Увага головним чином присвячується філософському аспекту проблеми, а саме людському страху перед смертю та прагненню до безсмертя, що виявляються у постійному русі та відкиданні індивідуальної та національної пам'яті. Тема пластинації, детально розроблена у романі, розглядається в контексті взаємовідношення людського тіла й ідентичності.

Особливу увагу присвячено фрагментарності як визначальній характеристиці як форми (композиції, наративної структури) роману, так і його тематичного діапазону. Фрагментарність властива художній репрезентації пам'яті у «Бігунах», представлений у формі гетерогенного архіву. Представляючи фрагментарний, поліфонічний наратив, О. Токарчук протиставляє його зв'язному й монолітному наративу національної міфології.

Написаний у 2007 році, роман О. Токарчук представляє особливий інтерес для сьогоднішніх дослідників, коли переоцінка цінностей глобалізації стає все більш поширеною тенденцією. В новому контексті «Бігуни» можуть бути осмислені як застереження від формування реальності, позбавленої меморіальних змістів. У статті наголошується на промовистому заклик до пригадування та вербалізації минулого. У «переповіданні» життя О. Токарчук бачить шлях до спасіння та визволення, таким чином утверджуючи вирішальну роль пам'яті у подоланні кризи ідентичності, з якою стикаються сучасні спільноти.

**Ключові слова:** ідентичність, глобалізація, пам'ять, Ольга Токарчук, польська література.

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