

MANIFESTATION OF LATVIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN FASHION



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Contents

1	Acknowledgements
2	Summary
3	Introduction
8	Chapter One
	<i>Short History of Latvian Dress and Fashion</i>
26	Chapter Two
	<i>Latvian Fashion Today</i>
30	Chapter Three
	<i>Theoretical Framework</i>
39	Chapter Four
	<i>Manifestation of Latvian national identity through contemporary Latvian Fashion: Case Studies</i>
71	Conclusion
76	Bibliography
85	Image Credits

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In 2013, as I completed my Bachelor's degree, I had no idea that another year of intense studies was ahead of me. Nor did I know I would study in a MA program in the Netherlands. However, here I am, at the end of this memorable journey wishing to acknowledge some of the people I am grateful for supporting me in one or another way throughout this adventure.

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Summary

The aim of this Master's thesis is to investigate methods and approaches of how contemporary Latvian fashion designers manifest Latvian national identity through their fashion collections.

The first chapter of the thesis presents a short Latvian dress and fashion history by placing it within the context of overall Latvian history. The historical background outlines how specific fashion traditions have formed in Latvia and reveals values, attitudes, and customs embedded in Latvian culture that largely have an impact on contemporary Latvian fashion and style.

The second chapter concerns the contemporary Latvian fashion scene by focusing on fashion organisations that promote Latvian fashion. The following chapter is devoted to the theoretical framework: several concepts and theories related to fashion and national identity are extracted from academic articles and explained in order to provide a deeper immersion in the case studies presented in the last chapter.

In the fourth chapter, five case studies of Latvian fashion labels - Linda Leen, Recycled.lv, ANNA LED, ZIB* and QooQoo - have been selected and analysed as examples of fashion where modern clothing meets Latvianness, not only from the past (cultural heritage) but also from the present time (subcultures). The research undertakes an analysis of how Latvian national identity has been represented in these brands' collections and their websites by applying concepts and theories related to fashion and national identity.

The results show that 'quoting' national identity within fashion is a dominant trend in Latvia. The results also reveal that the designers manifest Latvian identity mostly by implementing references to Latvian cultural heritage within their collections. Next to references to ethnography, mythology, national costumes, architecture and literature, some labels also incorporate symbols of contemporary Latvian culture. All these references are rooted in 'cosmopolitan nationalism' as they are not replicas but rather modernised versions of cultural heritage.

Introduction

Traditionally, French, and particularly Parisian fashion, has been celebrated as the fashion with the strongest and oldest tradition. As Segre Reinach explains ‘it is well-known that until the mid-twentieth century in Europe, the USA, and in countries colonially linked to the West, fashion mainly arose as an “emancipation” from Paris. French fashion, with the production and cultural system of Parisian *haute couture* and the couturiers, was affirmed as a benchmark for any other fashion attempting to emerge.’ (2011: 268).

Today, almost every nation strives to be known as a place of creativity and aesthetics. Segre Reinach proposes to call this desire for ‘dressed power’ (2011: 270). Indeed, in recent years, several small countries that traditionally are not regarded as fashion centres, aim at developing their fashion identities. This phenomenon is what Skov (2011) calls ‘fashion dream of small nations’. According to Gilbert and Breward (2006), this phenomenon is the result of fashion’s global polycentric system and a desire to change the 19th century ranking of cities. Teunissen also stresses these factors as conditions that promoted designers and industries of small nations to participate in a national debate since the 1980s (2011: 160). Segre Reinach underlines the importance of interconnections and chances for countries to take part in the global exchange (2011: 270). According to her, governments tend to use fashion as one of the branding tools for cities and countries, therefore she calls fashion the ‘ambassador of a country’ (Segre Reinach, 2011: 270). As an ambassador fashion plays a crucial role not only in creating the image of a person but also of a country.

Among the countries that aim to cultivate their fashion image are the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, Sweden and Norway. Lately, also Latvia is no exception. Although Latvian fashion has not conquered its place on the world’s fashion map yet, in recent years one can notice a sort of renaissance of Latvian fashion following a wave of nationalism. Even though Latvia is a fairly new state (founded in 1918, then occupied by Soviet Russia and regained its independence in 1991), it has a strong tradition of its rich culture, values and customs. Today, there are several Latvian fashion brands that use transformed and modernised elements of Latvian cultural heritage, as well contemporary references to Latvianness

in their fashion collections. In this regard, the present Master's thesis strives to answer the research question:

How does Latvian national identity manifest itself through fashion?

Method and approach

As Ribeiro (1998) claims, the dress historian should *never* look at only one aspect of the subject - whether art object, surviving garments, documentary sources or theory - in isolation, rather a wide-ranging and comprehensive approach is much more desirable. In order to answer the posed research question, there are several different methods used in this study. This research has a qualitative character. The narrative research methodology has been used to identify and analyse narrative materials such as essays, newspaper or magazine articles, interviews and biographies. The found narratives vary in length from eight pages to two hundred pages. The texts have been read repeatedly for complete immersion. Both web and academic sources are used to augment the studies on Latvian national identity in relation to fashion and Latvian fashion in general.

The first chapter of the thesis presents a historical description of Latvian dress and fashion history by placing it within the context of overall Latvian history. It should be noted that regarding Latvian dress and fashion history, there are several books and studies on the theme of traditional costumes of ancient Latvians. Nevertheless, there is little information available about Latvian fashion during the Soviet times, and almost no academic information about Latvian fashion from the 1990's till today. The lack of research on Latvian dress and fashion, on one hand may be a challenging task for this Master's thesis, but on the other hand this is where the opportunity for new insights and discoveries lays.

A crucial medium in order to examine fashion in Latvia from 1948 till 1992 is Latvian fashion magazine *Rīga Fashions* (*Rīgas modes*) that can be assessed as a very interesting witness of its time. It demonstrates the development of fashion tendencies as well as the effect on the development of fashion and its character caused by political and social changes.

The second chapter of this Master's thesis concerns the contemporary Latvian fashion scene by focusing on fashion organisations and approaches of promoting Latvian fashion. Today, Latvian fashion and design are mainly discussed in (fashion)

magazines such as *Pastaiga* and *Santa*. Fashion blogs and websites are also following the fashion events and new tendencies. Amongst the others, I would like to point out whimsicalagnesiga.com which is the most notable and professional Latvian fashion blog. Some articles from these magazines and websites will be used in order to better comprehend the situation of today's Latvian fashion, while organisations' websites will help to sense what is being done in order to support and improve Latvian fashion industry today.

There is no published research that has investigated how Latvian national identity is reflected in the contemporary Latvian fashion. However, there have been studies in diverse fields that are substantial for this Master's thesis: research on Latvian dress and fashion history and textile industry; studies on identity; and studies on national identity within fashion in such countries as the Great Britain (Goodrum, 2005), the Netherlands and Belgium (Teunissen, 2011), Denmark (Melchior, 2010; 2011), Sweden, Norway and Finland (Skov, 2011). The third chapter is devoted to the theoretical framework that has been applied to this Master's thesis. The above mentioned articles and other secondary academic articles provide several key concepts and theories related to fashion and national identity, such as globalisation, glocalization, 'cosmopolitan nationalism', 'meta goods', trickle up theory and 'written clothing'. The articles will be studied in order to provide a deeper immersion in the case studies presented in the last chapter. The extracted theories will be applied to five case studies of different Latvian fashion labels in order to examine the contemporary Latvian fashion domain, and to deepen the understanding about processes that take place in the contemporary Latvian fashion scene.

In the fourth chapter I will use the case study method in order to examine Latvian fashion brands Linda Leen, Recycled.lv, ANNA LED, ZIB* and QooQoo, as striking examples of fashion where modern clothing meets Latvianness, not only from the past (cultural heritage) but also from the present time (subcultures). The research undertakes an analysis of how Latvian national identity has been represented in above mentioned brands' collections, their official websites as well as in other sites, fashion blogs and (fashion) magazines. The official websites of fashion brands are substantial as they include the basic information about the labels, their vision and ideas behind fashion collections. This information can be helpful in order to identify which elements of the clothing can be considered as an attempt to reflect Latvian national identity.

The case studies represent designers who play with the past by implementing references to it into modern designs: Latvian ethnographic signs, considered to be endowed with magical power, are not only knitted into scarves and mittens as it was hundreds of years ago, but also printed on modern clothing items like T-shirts and leggings, as the collections of QooQoo and Linda Leen demonstrates. Furthermore, Linda Leen has transformed simple Latvian leather shoes - *pastalas* - into a chic fashion item by changing their traditional naturally brown leather colour into different juicy colours like red, blue, white and green.

Latvian brand QooQoo collaborated with the Latvian Museum of Decorative Arts and Design to create a fashion collection *Timeless* in 2014, where motifs of Latvian art figures in the prints. Moreover, QooQoo launched a collection where references to Latvian subcultures are present.

Another Latvian fashion label Recycled.lv created a collection Ethnography (*Etnogrāfija*) made of recycled materials by transforming trousers into skirts and jackets into shawls, while bicycle parts and coins of former Latvian currency were incorporated in accessories. Above all, this collection is based on Latvian national costume, its colours and proportions.

The label ANNA LED is well known for its sophisticated fabrics and classic designs. The label claims to be deeply inspired by Latvian nature and the capital city of Latvia - Riga. Not only do they use references of Riga's architecture in the garments, but also create a narrative of the label's connection with Riga as a place of inspiration and production.

Latvian fashion brand ZIB* created a collection *Pasakas par ziediem* (*Flower Stories*), inspired by fairy tales composed by the Latvian writer Anna Sakse. Motifs, characters and colours of rose, tulip, daffodil, orchid and other flowers mentioned in Sakse's fairy tales are included in the collection.

The pursuit of this Master's thesis is interdisciplinary, drawing on approaches from various academic areas including history, fashion history, fashion theory, anthropology and sociology. There is a practical limitation to this investigation, since Latvian fashion is chosen as an examination subject, national identity and the reuse of Latvian cultural heritage in fashion is investigated in the framework of Latvia. This research, thus, does not claim to be inclusive on the subject of national identity into fashion, but rather it claims to be a beginning of identification of Latvianness within it, with scope for research beyond this Master's thesis.

The present Master's thesis offers chapters that examine fashion culture in a country that is currently emerging with its own fashion and design and is undergoing a process of reinventing and reusing its own traditions in order to produce its own vision of fashion. This examination will contribute to the studies related to Latvian fashion identity. It will introduce ideas on how and why Latvia could become one of the countries with its distinct fashion identity and how it could be used in Latvia's branding.

1. Short history of Latvian dress and fashion

In order to do a proper research on fashion itself, it is important to examine the antecedents to fashion. According to Welters and Lillethun, ‘studying the history of dress before ‘fashion’ provides explanations for values, attitudes, and traditions embedded in culture’ (2011: 4). Therefore, in the context of this Master’s thesis, a short overview not only of Latvian fashion history but also of Latvian dress history will be provided. Both of these aspects are placed within the context of the history of Latvia. It provides a solid background of how fashion has developed in Latvia and how it became the expression of modernity that it is today, as well as helps to answer the posed research question. This chapter is of a great importance also because there still is no published complete summary of Latvian dress and fashion history. The chapter focuses on Latvian dress and fashion history while also outlining events in Latvian history and placing Latvia in a wider context of global history.

Dress historians claim that fashion began in Europe in the middle of the 14th century (Welters & Lillethun 2011: 3), but the concept ‘fashion’ has only existed since the 17th century (Meinhold, 2013: 19). According to Roland Barthes, most probably fashion in our civilisation arose with the birth of capitalism and modernisation in the 19th century (1983 [1967]: 300). Several decades later Meinhold also argues that ‘according to how broadly or narrowly the concept is defined, fashion as a phenomenon always existed or was first conceived and born as a child of industrialisation, commercialisation and the democratisation of consumption and luxury’ (2013: 19-20). Fashion is therefore a phenomenon that can be dated to the time prior to the first industrial revolution in the 17th century and progressed more rapidly starting from the 19th century.

Latvia is a fairly new state and its fashion, as many other domains, is still developing. Nonetheless, Latvian fashion has its own tradition since the beginning of the 20th century, and there are numerous testimonies about its importance in Riga, the capital city of Latvia. Moreover, several preconditions like the development of the national costume and textile industry have been crucial for the formation of Latvian fashion, as I will demonstrate in the following section.

Some events mentioned in this chapter and in this Master’s thesis in general, have been ascribed particularly to the capital city of Latvia, namely Riga, as it has historically been the dominant and most progressive Latvian city, where fashion

manifests the strongest. Also today when talking about Latvian fashion, most probably the actual fashion centre is Riga, as this is where nearly all fashion labels and fashion stores are based.

Latvian national costume and urban dress before the 20th century

Although, as mentioned above, fashion in Europe began in the mid-14th century, elements of fashionable behaviour existed already before (Welters & Lillethun, 2011: 3). This section deals with two different aspects that both can be related to the development of fashion in Latvia. The first one is the Latvian national costume, formed by indigenous people that inhabited present-day Latvian territory from the first centuries A.D. The second aspect is the urban dress that for a while was a collateral phenomenon to the Latvian traditional dress, but later on outcompeted it and became a way of dressing not only for townsmen but also for peasants. The chapter deals with the history and traditions of Latvian national costume and demonstrates how the development of it interblends with the development of urban dress in later years. These elements are important for illustrating the pastoral ideals within Latvian culture and the significant role attached to the national and urban dress.

The development of the national costume can be assessed as a substantial historical evidence as it may largely reflect the history of the nation. According to Meinhold (2013), the costume can be regarded as a vestimentary precursor of fashion. As he puts it, ‘although the concept of fashion - changing styles of dress - only existed since the 17th century, costumes already changed and stylistic elements varied before the appearance in history of changing fashions in clothes’ (2013: 25). Also Vischer agrees that ‘fashion is merely the younger, more relaxed, mercurial, boundlessly vain sister of the costume - a sister who imperiously lumps all ranks and nations together yet who is hounded by all the dogs sniffing for novelty.’ (in Meinhold, 2013: 25-26). Accordingly, national costume is an essential antecedent within Latvian fashion history that implies cultural values, traditions and aesthetics.

Although within Latvian history, especially in the 13th and the 14th centuries, there have been several Latvian landlords, according to Rozenberga, Latvians have traditionally been peasants, downtrodden by other nations, mainly Russians and Germans (Rozenberga et al, 1995). The Latvian national costume is of great importance, as the national costume is the most specific component of material

culture where the differences between various nations manifest the strongest. Apart from ethnic features the costume also shows the age, social and marital status, and wealth of the wearer, as well as the centuries-old traditions, aesthetic ideals and the creative spirit of the people. Furthermore, the national costume reflects 'international cultural links, the influence of professional art, urban culture and even fashion' (Rozenberga et al, 1995: 281).

It would not be adequate to speak of national Latvian fashion before the 20th century, since Latvia was formed as an independent state only in 1918. Nonetheless, Latvian people had existed for many centuries and they established strict traditions of national costumes. The emergence of the national Latvian costume is attributed to the Baltic and Finno-Ugric tribes - Curonians, Semigallians, Latgallians, Selonians and Livs - that formed in the present-day territory of Latvia during the first centuries A.D. The Latvian population was formed during the 13th - 17th centuries due to the ethnic consolidation of the four Balt tribes: Curonians, Semigallians, Latgallians and Selonians (Plakans, 1995: 42). Livs or Livonians, that also inhabited the territory of the present-day Latvia, were excluded of integration in Latvian population as their language was more similar to Finnish and Estonian, therefore they remained as a subpopulation (Ibid.). All of these five tribes had their own traditional costumes which form what today is known as Latvian national costume.

Both the Latvian and Liv national costumes (examples: figures 1 and 2) developed as the clothing of country people: peasants, fishermen and artisans. They were adapted to the wearer's occupation, daily life, festivities, climate and season. Rozenberga maintains that in the feudal society national costume also symbolised the peasant class resistance against the ruling German class (Rozenberga et al, 1995). Therefore, one could argue that national costume was an expression of the material and spiritual culture of the peasants, as well as a symbol of their desire to be independent and autonomous.



Figure 1



Figure 2

As we have seen, according to Roland Barthes (1967) and Meinhold (2013), fashion in our civilisation arose with the birth of capitalism, thus fashion cannot exist in pre-industrial society. However, one can speak about dress in pre-industrial society, and this is what Fernand Braudel does in his book *The Structures of Everyday Life* (1982). Braudel examines the material life of pre-industrial peoples around the world. Among other topics, he describes the dress of pre-industrial people. He maintains that for poor people there is no freedom of choice and no changes are possible. As he puts it ‘to be ignorant of fashion was the lot of the poor the world over’ (Braudel, 1982: 313). He continues this idea by saying that for poor people and peasants clothing is not a luxury, but rather a necessity of protection from cold (Ibid.). In this context I would like to argue that for ancient Latvians clothing was not merely a means to cover their bodies. There are, for example, several traditions related to clothing, where one can notice that clothing has not only a physical, but also social and ritual functions. For example, there is a tradition according to which a large number of self-made mittens are given as gifts to all guests at a Latvian wedding (Kursīte, 2012: 430). A garment, in this case mittens, therefore can be used as a gift as well as it may reflect one’s diligence and skill of handicrafts.

Furthermore, while studying Latvian national costumes, one can notice that not only feast-day, but also everyday costumes were sumptuous. Even the simplest dresses were embroidered and decorated because it was indicative of its creator’s diligence, which has always been a highly evaluated characteristic for Latvian people. Also Eicher and Bartlett stress the importance of decoration and ornaments within Latvian culture. They draw parallels between the decorativeness of Latvian national costume and the fact that the first Christmas tree is believed to be decorated in Riga at the beginning of the 16th century (Eicher & Barlett, 2010: 200). Perhaps this kind of

juxtaposition may seem odd at first, but it serves as a great example for showing that adornment has a strong tradition within Latvian culture.

Regarding the typical colour scheme, Latvian as well as Lithuanian favourite colours were white and light grey, but in some regions blue was prevailing. Not only women but also men wore white or grey, and in this way they contrasted greatly with their neighbours - the Russians who preferred bright colours and the Estonians who dressed in black (Rozenberga et al, 1995: 283; Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 200). Traditionally, clothing dyes like red, blue, green and yellow were obtained from plants. The ornament became more diverse in colour in the late 19th century when due to market and migration chemical dyes were introduced (Rozenberga et al, 1995: 283).

According to Braudel, '[peasant] costumes, whether beautiful or homespun, remained the same.' (1982: 313). Since feast dress is often handed down from parent to child, it remained identical for centuries, while everyday costumes that were made of less expensive materials changed even less (Braudel, 1982: 313). Also Snowden argues that the dress of the working people was uniform in colour and style for centuries (1979: 7). Although to a large extent Braudel's and Snowden's observations are correct, there have been several changes in both feast and everyday Latvian national costumes. For instance, Grasmane maintains that in the course of time Rigans started to buy clothes (not make them themselves) and thus kerchief replaced the white hand-made woollen scarf that used to be part of Riga's regional costume (2000: 38). In the same manner, in the region of Southern Kurzeme the traditional white woollen scarf disappeared and was replaced by a large checkered kerchief. Moreover, women in Eastern Kurzeme initially used to wear striped skirts that later on were replaced by checkered ones (Grasmane, 2000: 67).

Rozenberga also maintains that throughout its long development under changing economic and social conditions and improving techniques, the clothes making diversified (Rozenberga et al, 1995: 281). In the course of time, new cuts and decorations appeared, the colour scheme grew, new materials, new adornments and whole garments came into being. Although these changes are not as rapid and of a large scale as transformations within today's fashion that occur every season (or even more frequently), they show that Latvian national costume was not completely stationary, but experienced some developments.

Some essential shifts within the dress appeared at the end of the 15th century when German control of Riga caused class formation. At this time, a special sumptuary law governing the dress codes for different social classes was issued (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 201). According to this law, lower classes were prohibited to wear velvet hats or use imported cloth that would resemble the style of the highest social classes. Eicher and Bartlett argue that artisans' wives tried to make linen dresses that would resemble the velvet or silk dresses from traders' wives, which also helps to explain the relevance of linen cloth in Latvian culture (2010: 201). This dynamic of styles that were introduced by higher classes and only later adopted by lower classes was captured in Simmel's (1904) 'trickle-down theory': the lower class striving to adopt styles of the higher class. Importantly, this sumptuary law not only promoted the development of handicrafts in Latvia, but also ensured the preservation of national dress, which in later times appeared to be a significant influence on everyday clothes (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010).

There are also some ornaments and pieces of clothing that Latvians borrowed from other cultures. For example, *vamzis* - a thick knitted sweater - comes from Medieval Western Europe. At first it served as a corslet as it was produced of a very solid and resistant fabric. Later, when it lost its function as an armament, it became an everyday garment (Latvju raksti, 1990: 35). Likewise, Grasmane points out that the flower ornament that has been used for hair bands of Northern Vidzeme, most probably comes from Estonian traditional ornaments (2000: 35). Also *vīzes* - a type of footwear made of bark that is regarded to be a part of Latvian national costume - actually comes from the Ural region (Latvians Abroad - museum and research centre, n.d.). It is interesting how all these abovementioned items that are now associated with Latvian national culture and identity, actually originated elsewhere, but over time got integrated in Latvian national costume. It shows how a great deal of what is commonly regarded as traditional, is actually a 'cultural authentication' - a process of assimilation through which a garment or an accessory from one culture is adopted and changed by another one. In this case, we see how the 'cultural authentication' functions within the context of Latvian national costume which actually has absorbed several elements originated elsewhere

Moreover, Latvia is not the only country where this paradox takes place. Also Smelik notes that 'the designs of 'Dutch' traditional costume have been greatly influenced by Indian chintz from colonial times (...) There are more icons of

‘Dutchness’ dating from the Golden Age with roots in foreign countries: Delft Blue earthenware was adapted from Chinese porcelain, while the tulips flourishing in the sandy grounds of the Dutch dunes were imported from Turkey’ (Smelik et al, in press). While Dutch traditional costume has been influenced by a huge variety of far foreign countries, the influences of ‘otherness’ within the Latvian national dress come mostly from the neighbouring countries or from the countries that conquered the territory of present-day Latvia.

Unlike the Netherlands, Latvia has never colonized other parts of the world. An exception is the Duchy of Courland (which took place in present-day Latvian territory in the 16th and the 17th centuries) that experienced notable economic development in the 1600’s and became a significant regional power, with colonies in Africa and on the Tobago island (Baister & Patrick, 2007: 163). As a result of these conquests that led to mixing of cultures, dress in Riga included different cultural styles: Polish dress, dress of the so-called Moscovian and Hungarian horseman, as well as features from the Spanish Court and Dutch traders (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 201).

However, there is also a common claim that as early as before the 12th century, some accessory trends in North Europe originated in the territory of Latvia. For example, the Horseshoe brooch (figure 3) was first developed in Latvia in the 8th century and only later was adopted by Northern populations (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010). Another feature originated in the territory of Latvia in the 7th century is the use of iron rings interwoven through cloth to create particular ornament (Ibid.) (figure 4).



Figure 3

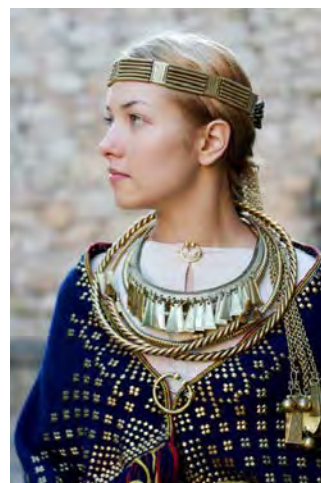


Figure 4

The Duchy of Courland, and particularly its Duke Jacob, had a massive impact on Rigan fashion also in the second half of the 17th century, when Rigan fashion was highly influenced by elements from a wide range of cultures. Under Jacob's rule, the Duchy traded extensively with the Netherlands, Portugal, England and France, and engaged in colonization, therefore, dress changes in the Duchy went conjointly with European trends (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 202).

Soon, another important precondition for the development of fashion industry appeared in Latvia: the establishment of the textile industry. According to the Light Industry Association's (*Vieglās rūpniecības uzņēmumu asociācija*) data, textile industry is the oldest industry in Latvia. Already in 1794 the first textile factory was established, where woollen greatcoat fabric for the Russian Empire army was produced (Strazds, n.d.). It was followed by other textile factories where mainly woollen and linen fabrics were produced. Although at that time the territory of the present-day Latvia was annexed to the Russian Empire, these developments mark the evolution of Latvian fashion industry. The development of textile industry had an important role, as it promoted production of different fabrics that could be used for clothing.

In the mid-19th century some great changes emerged, when ethnic Latvians experienced a great awakening of national identity. At this time, culture became the means of expressing this identity and Riga became the cultural centre, where *Jaunlatvieši* (New Latvians, a movement of national awakening) demanded the same rights enjoyed by other nations. Also serfdom in the country was gradually abolished during this period. Eicher and Bartlett argue that at this time together with national identity came the rebirth of national dress code which promoted the use of national romanticism within Rigan dress (2010: 202). Moreover, the interest turned to national traditions and Latvian aesthetics in national dress. As rural people moved to the city, they brought their pastoral ideals with them, and the use of traditional hand-made peasant garments became increasingly common. At the same time peasants adopted the urban fashion, thus dress codes for social groups no longer existed (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 202).

By the end of the 19th century the authentic national costume as everyday wear had almost been lost. Town influence grew and town clothing gradually ousted the national costume, which ceased to be people's daily wear. But in some remote districts like Alsunga, Rucava and Nīca the national costume actually continued as

festive clothing up to 1940's (Rozenberga et al, 1995: 281). From the actual festive clothing of old it had been transformed into an attire for representative purposes and stylized versions appeared. 'It was common to wear folk dress for festivities, as it was considered important to affirm one's national identity' (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 202). The mixing of national and urban styles was a characteristic that continued till the beginning of the 20th century (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 203).

Fashion in Latvia during the first half of the 20th century

During the first half of the 20th century, fashions broke with past conventions, and production, marketing, distribution and consumption of fashion expanded (Webber, 2011: 84). Due to both world wars and the Great Depression, the supremacy of French couture was interrupted and British, Italian and American designers started to promote their identities within international fashion (Ibid). At this time, acceptance and strengthening of fashion appeared to be one of the occurrences also within Latvian cultural scene.

At the beginning of the 20th century, formation of Latvian national consciousness took place: 'Latvian intellectuals searched for novelty and they looked to other cultures for something that might enrich Latvian culture, at the same time not forgetting Latvian mentality and uniqueness' (Avotiņa et al, 2003: 167; my translation).

As Braudel (1982) notes, fashion develops in a prosperous society. This is also the case of Riga's wealthy and intellectual part of the community that strived to approach the developed countries by following current fashion trends. Probably it would not be proper to argue that Latvia had national fashion as early as the beginning of the 20th century, since it was more a following and probably even an imitation of Western fashion. During this period, general trends focused mainly on Parisian fashion novelties. For instance, the bright and intense colours of fauvism partly replaced the ethereal tones that had dominated since the development of national costume until the urban dress during art nouveau times (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 203).

Numerous changes took place after 1918 when Latvia was established as a democratic parliamentary republic. Next to the changes within politics and economy, also modifications in cultural life took place, for instance, first Latvian universities

and typographies were established. The 1920s were characterized as post-war years of poverty. At the same time these years were defined as the period of a celebration of life as the World War I was concluded and for the first time Latvians had their own independent country. It was also the time of new state-building, and already in the 1930s achievements in economy, education and culture took place (Diena.lv 19 Mar, 2012).

The development of the country occurred rapidly and already the 1930s were characterized as a period of 'blooming Riga' and 'free Latvia' (Avotiņa et al, 2003: 220 - 221). Due to its vibrant cultural life, European-like lifestyle and fashion, Riga was called 'the little Paris' (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 203) or 'the little northern Paris' (Greetings from Latvia, 2011). Although it is unspecified whether those were foreigners or inhabitants of Riga themselves who invented this denomination, Riga was known as 'the little Paris' not only in Latvia but also in the Soviet Union and Western Europe. This title shows the prevailing spirit of Riga during the 1930s.

In the 1920s and 1930s the industrialization of fashion in Latvia was highly developed. As Aušeiks (2013) maintains, during this period clothing manufacturing was the largest manufacturing sector in Latvia. Moreover, at the end of the 1920s, Latvia had its own shoemaker Rūdolfs Eglītis. Among his clients there was also Emīlija Benjamiņa - the Latvian press magnate and one of the wealthiest women of this time. Soon, next to the shoe workshop of Eglītis, other footwear manufactures were established. By 1939 there were no less than 84 footwear producing companies in Latvia (Diena.lv 19 Mar, 2012).

In the 1930s traditional realism with nationalistic content developed: 'contemporary national style was again in fashion, as the focus revolved around closeness to nature, mythology, and themes from ethnic dress' (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 203). A crucial figure of this time was the Latvian artist Ansis Cīrulis, who introduced his new national style by translating Latvian folk art traditions into individual stylizations. In clothing he revived the technique of printing decorative designs on fabric. As a result, local fashion in the 1930s was marked by attempts to establish a national style (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 203).

Fashion in Latvia during the Soviet times (1940 - 1990)

In 1940, due to a secret agreement between USSR and Germany, Latvia was annexed to the USSR (Avotiņa et al, 2003: 270). During this time, Latvia experienced several

deportations and mass murder, losing more than 30% of its population (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 204). A great part of Latvians went into exile to many different countries, like USA, Germany, and Australia, where they strived to maintain their national traditions. One way to do so was through applied arts activities: ‘the need for gloves, scarves and socks, and a desire to bring Latvian identity into the dreary environment of exile, promoted handicrafts among deportees’ (Avotiņa et al, 2003: 291-292; my translation). Also several exhibitions of Latvian applied art were organised in the exile camps. Nevertheless, Avotiņa notes that these exhibitions were subject to criticism and art critiques considered them as a display of tasteless, pseudo-national objects (Avotiņa et al, 2003: 292).

According to Gurova, it is common to consider fashion a phenomenon of capitalist societies and to question the existence of fashion in socialist societies (2009: 73). However, in many ways Soviet fashion can be compared with Western fashion, although it had its own peculiarities, with state control over appearance being one of them (Ibid.). Meaningful activities in the Soviet Union were sewing, knitting and embroidering (Crowely & Reid, 2000: 14). As demonstrated in previous sections, handicrafts have been crucial for Latvian people already during ancient times when hand-made clothing was the only option. In the Soviet era, this activity most likely became popular due to structural conditions such as shortages and lack of appropriate things to wear (Gurova, 2009: 74). Eicher and Bartlett contend that due to the ability to make their own clothes, Rigan women were famous within the Soviet Union for being exceedingly fashionable (2010: 204).

However, in Latvia, as in other Soviet countries at that time, not only home-sewn clothing was available. As Gurova (2009) states, if in the 1920s fashion was under harsh governmental criticism, and was excluded from the lifestyle of working-class people, in the 1930s the attitude towards fashion changed to a more positive one. The change of attitude was proven by the opening of the House of Fashion (*Dom modelei*) in Moscow and, after that, in several other cities (Gurova, 2009: 75) with Riga being one of them.

The foundation of the Riga Fashion House (*Rīgas modeļu nams*) took place in 1949. Its task was to work out patterns of clothes and footwear to introduce them into the serial production at Latvian enterprises. While creating industrial and long-term collections Riga fashion designers were closely connected to the adjacent branches of industry such as textile, knitwear, footwear and haberdashery. For all of them the Riga

Fashion House was the coordinating and guiding centre that set fashion in the country (Rīgas modeļu nams brochure, 1972). Moreover, collections of the Riga Fashion House were exhibited in several foreign countries. They were warmly received at the World Exhibitions in Tokyo and Montreal, at the Soviet Exhibitions in Genoa, London, Paris, Milan, and at the international fairs in Leipzig (Rīgas modeļu nams brochure, 1972). As the informative brochure of the Riga Fashion House (1972) puts it: ‘every visit abroad is not only a fashion show. It also tells a story about festive and everyday life of the Riga people’. The Riga Fashion House, therefore can be seen not merely as the main fashion producer of Soviet Latvia, but also as an indicator of Rigans’ lifestyle of that time.

The Riga Fashion House developed methodological guidelines for the current trends and colours. They were published once a year and were distributed among clothing production designers and others interested (‘Parunāsim par modi’, 2014). The Riga Fashion House also held large-scale yearly fashion shows, where new leading collections of clothes and new long-term suggestions for the Latvian light industry were demonstrated (Rīgas modeļu nams brochure, 1972). Another powerful force next to the Fashion House was the Artistic Council of the Ministry of Light Industry (*Vieglās rūpniecības ministrijas Mākslinieciskā padome*) that was the authority to decide on which garments allow to produce and which not to (‘Parunāsim par modi’, 2014).

As Webber notes, during the first half of the 20th century, ‘popular magazines, radio, movies, and, finally, television quickly disseminated fashion information [...]’ (2011: 84). In this context, in 1949 also the Riga Fashion House started publishing its own fashion magazine *Riga Fashions* (*Rīgas Modes*). The magazine was published until 1992 and it was the only Latvian fashion magazine for more than 40 years. *Riga Fashions*, as well as periodical press in general, is a crucial witness of its time, which demonstrates the development of fashion tendencies and how they influence or are influenced by social and political changes. *Riga Fashions*, like other Soviet media and women’s magazines, were under the control of state institutions. According to Gurova, ‘women’s magazines were the medium by which the State wrote its ideology as text on the surface of women’s bodies’ (2009: 78). Magazines were also a medium for reaching wide audiences, thus Soviet ideologies and fashion would spread quickly. This aspect coincides with Barthes’ idea that first and foremost people access fashion through media (Barthes, 1990: xi), which leaves the clothing per se of a secondary

importance. During Soviet times it might have been truly the case since people did not have access to fashion in any other way than through magazines and in a very limited number in a few shops.

While studying several *Riga Fashions* issues, one can notice that initially, illustrations of clothing rather than photographs of actual models featured the magazine (figure 5). According to the informative brochure of the travelling exhibition *Let's Talk About Fashion. Latvia and Fashion from the '50s until Now* (*Parunāsim par modi. Latvija un mode no 20.gadsimta 50.gadiem līdz mūsdienām*), it was so not because of the lack of technologies but rather due to 'drawings' ability to create a dream-like vision: drawings allowed to visualise the progress that the socialist regime promised but was not able to give for the citizens yet' ('Parunāsim par modi', 2014; my translation). Nevertheless, starting from the second half of the 1960s, *Riga Fashions* also included photographs of models wearing the Riga Fashion House production (figure 6).



Figure 5



Figure 6

Riga Fashions magazine not only promoted 'good taste' and spread fashion tendencies within Soviet Latvia, but also offered the readers to sew their own clothes by adding patterns for different garments. In this way, fashion was democratized as basically everyone who possessed sewing skills, could make the garments seen in magazines.

During the Soviet times, the national costume still played a particular role. At the end of the 20th century ethnographic symbols were widely used in everyday fashion as a political protest against foreign power, namely USSR. For the Soviet ideology Latvian folk elements were attractive as they could be interpreted as a tool

for class division rather than a way of ethnic expression. For example, during the Soviet period Latvian anniversary festival *Jāņi*, which celebrates the summer solstice, was prohibited but at the same time national costumes were used in official events as a symbol of national culture ('Parunāsim par modi', 2014; my translation). During the period from 1948 – 1985, the ruling power (USSR) also tried to convert the Song and Dance Celebration (than I will elaborate on in the case study of Recycled.lv) into an instrument of communist propaganda, but the Latvian people demonstrated power of self-confidence and unbreakable spirit (*Dziesmu svētki*, n.d.).

During the Latvian National Awakening in the 1980s and the 1990s, a desire to explore the national identity was blooming. As mentioned in the informative brochure of the exhibition of Latvian fashion history ('Parunāsim par modi', 2014), probably the most popular garment in Latvian history is the 'sweater with a symbol of Auseklis'. Within Latvian mythology Auseklis is a god and it is one of the most used Latvian mythological symbols. In 1990 Dainis Īvāns, one of the National Awakening activists, gave his speech while wearing the abovementioned sweater (figure 7). It stood out from the crowd of Soviet functionaries' suits and was considered a symbolic gesture of expressing Latvianness and the strength of Latvian people and their identity (*Ibid.*).



Figure 7

Fashion in Latvia after the Restoration of Independence

The map of Europe changed dramatically at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. At this time, a new period in Latvian history started, as the Soviet Union collapsed and Latvia regained its independence in 1990. Among other relevant events, it was a period of privatization. At first it was a massive shock, as the transition from a highly 'top down' model to a market model took place (Sprūde, 18 Dec, 2013).

Nevertheless, in the 1990s first private enterprises were established and among them there were also some fashion houses.

As noted in the informative brochure *Let's Talk About Fashion* (Parunāsim par modi, 2014), if in the 1980s everyone who wanted to look fashionable bought the same trendy clothes that everybody else had, then in the 1990s people strived to look unique. During this time, second hand shops were popular as they enabled people to find unique designs for low prices. This tendency was present in other parts of the world as well: as Blanco argues, designers and stylists promoted vintage fashion, turning second hand stores into 'hot shopping venues' (Blanco, 2011: 109).

The first Latvian designer who established his fashion house in 1990, was Gints Bude. He was also the first one to start tutoring young models (Gints Bude Facebook page, n.d.). Another pioneer of Latvian fashion is Asnāte Smeltere, who used to work for the Riga Fashion house, but in 1990 founded her own fashion salon *Salons A*. At first it was run by the staff of the former Riga Fashion House in collaboration with the Artists' Union of Latvia (*LR Mākslinieku savienība*), but in 1991 *Salons A* became an independent establishment (*Salons A*, n.d.).

Gints Bude and Asnāte Smeltere gained fashion design experience in Soviet times and took it with them to independent Latvia. These fashion veterans among others founded the traditions of Latvian fashion that pretty much rooted in the Soviet school. Bude and Smeltere are also examples of how several fashion designers in the independent Latvia brought Latvia's name abroad thanks to their participation in several fashion events also outside national borders. Both fashion houses still exist today and participate in different fashion events.

In the 1990s also a significant event called *Untamed Fashion Assembly* (*Nepieradinātās Modes Asambleja*) took place in Riga. It was a creative form of protest against the regulated and standardized treatment of fashion within the Soviet Union. Participants from the former USSR and other European and non-European countries took part in the *Untamed Fashion Assembly* fashion shows. Not only young designers but also experienced ones participated (among them also the French fashion designer Paco Rabanne), and several European channels like BBC, RAI, MTV and FTV broadcasted events from this fashion show abroad (Timofejevs, 2013; 'Parunāsim par modi', 2014).

A decisive moment in Latvian fashion history was the introduction of fashion design studies. According to the art historian Skaidra Deksnē (2003), fashion design in

Latvia started as one of the crafts as early as in 1928, when Ministry of Education of Latvia launched preparatory courses for teachers of Handicrafts. In the 1930's these courses obtained status of Vocational Arts school that was divided in several departments, one of which was Costume Modelling and Design Department (*Tērpu modelēšanas un konstruēšanas nodaļa*) (Deksne, 2003).

Since 1960 Art Academy of Latvia hosted the Department of Textile Art, but fashion still was not considered a form of art, therefore there was no department dedicated to fashion studies. As a consequence, people who wanted to get a university degree in Fashion Design in the 1950s and the 1960s, were forced to go to Moscow State Textile Institute and Tallinn State Applied Art Institute (Deksne, 2003).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991 students from Tallinn continued their studies at Art Academy of Latvia, where since 1990 the Department of Textile Art organised Fashion Design workshops. However, the most relevant turn was the foundation of the Department of Fashion Design in 1993. This department was established in Art Academy of Latvia (*Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija*) due to the necessity to have specialists with an university degree for fashion and clothing sector (Art Academy of Latvia, n.d.). Mainly it was essential for the Riga Fashion House and several clothing factories. Within the Department of Fashion Design, two different strands or styles could be observed: on one hand unique, artistic and not always wearable fashion, on the other hand simple and sober designs were created. According to Deksne (2003), this bilateral view might be the strength of the department. Most importantly, with the foundation of the Fashion Design department, new forces within national fashion were ensured, as prospective fashion designers could learn the necessary skills within the country.

It can be concluded that the ancient Latvians had a very rich tradition of national costumes, slightly inspired by costumes of other cultures but also becoming an inspiration for others. In fact, the national costume, is a very complex thing as this notion includes costumes of different periods, different regions and different functions. The national costume in its various forms has become a substantial element of Latvian national identity and one of the most evident components of cultural heritage. It bears witness of age-old traditions, ethical and aesthetic values and demonstrates the variety and splendour of folk art (Rozenberga et al, 1995: 284). Initially, cloth and clothing were hand-made but starting from the end of the 18th century, textile industry was

formed in the territory of Latvia. It allowed to produce a larger quantity of fabrics and therefore also clothing.

In the first half of the 20th century, Latvian fashion was slowly forming, but it still lacked specific fashion traditions. Latvia was finally an independent country, nevertheless it strived to integrate into Western European lifestyle and adopted its fashion traditions instead of creating its own. Presumably it is due to the fact that it took quite some time to organise the political system in the country, thus other activities were of a secondary importance. Furthermore, as soon as the situation in Latvia seemed to be stabilized, its order was interrupted by the World War II and the following Soviet occupation.

When Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union, the inspiration from the East took over the inspiration from the West. At this time present-day Latvian fashion veterans, such as Gints Bude and Asnāte Smeltere, gained their professional experience. Furthermore, the Riga Fashion House with its participation in fashion events abroad, put Latvia's name on the fashion map. Nevertheless, it would not be adequate to call it a national fashion, as it was closely related to the USSR, its conditions, traditions and even used to promote the Soviet ideology.

The restoration of independence of Latvia at the very beginning of the 1990s, opened a way to new autonomous fashion. Fashion designers who gained their professional skills during the Soviet era, could establish their own fashion houses and ateliers. A crucial aspect was also the foundation of the Fashion Design department at the Art Academy of Latvia, promoting the formation of a truly national Latvian fashion and a new generation of fashion designers.

Throughout the history, Latvia's fashion industry lacks stability. This can be largely explained by the fact that Latvian territory was continuously subject to invaders. Obviously, this condition renders it difficult to achieve the same level of development as the one in Western countries. It is essential to keep in mind (not just an excuse but also as a fact) that the developed Western countries formed their business traditions for centuries, while in Latvia this development was interrupted several times. Indeed, it is quite an arduous task to build everything over and over again after each interruption.

The insight into Latvian dress and fashion history demonstrates clothing traditions that historically had a crucial role as the way of dressing differed Latvians from other cultures. This chapter has provided an insight into the national costume

which is a substantial part of Latvian cultural heritage, as well as shown how the urban dress gradually took over it and became the principal way of dressing. The historical background outlines how fashion traditions have formed in Latvia and reveals the specific features of Latvian way of dressing throughout history. These findings will help to answer the research question as the history of dress provides insight in values, attitudes, and traditions embedded in Latvian culture. The traditions of contemporary Latvian fashion have been partially based on these historical traditions, mostly by treating them as a source of inspiration. The historical clothing traditions can be therefore considered a precursor of contemporary Latvian style and fashion.

2. Latvian fashion today

Since the 1980s there has been a proliferation of new fashion centres. As Lise Skov puts it ‘fashion production has been split between a globalized clothing industry, which tends towards extreme centralization, and localized designer fashion sectors, acting as intermediaries between international suppliers and national events, media, and public’ (Skov, 2011: 137). According to her, fashion has become a commercially driven mass phenomenon, addressing personal needs and desires (Ibid.).

Looking at the world map of the fashion industry, Latvia rarely comes to mind as a key destination, except for those who know something more about the fashion industry. Such a person would perhaps know Latvia as the home country of Ieva Lagūna (figure 8), a Latvian model who has participated in *Victoria's Secret* fashion shows and has featured *Vogue's* cover four times; as the native country of Mareunrol's label which is internationally known for its surrealistic collections and fashion shows during the Paris fashion weeks (example: figures 9 and 10); or as the place where, according to Vasiljevs (2012) the most extravagant hats could be found during the Soviet times.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

In the context of fashion design, Latvia is still elaborating its specific style. In recent years, one can notice a renaissance of Latvianness in different domains: traditional yet upgraded Latvian cuisine has been promoted in TV shows, and integrated in local restaurants' menus; Latvian youngsters get tattoos of Latvian ethnographic ornaments; and also Latvian fashion has reborn on a wave of nationalism. Several Latvian fashion designers and brands have started using

references to Latvian culture, history and heritage in their fashion collections. As the Dutch fashion researcher José Teunissen (2011) argues, the correlation of global fashion and local tradition is a new tendency within fashion. As I will demonstrate later on, this tendency appears in Latvian fashion quite explicitly.

Fashion organisations

The creative industries along with the fashion industry, are not only about products as they include also different organisations and policies that administer and foster the industries. A significant aspect within contemporary Latvian fashion scene is the foundation of different local fashion organisations. The need for such organisations appeared along with the necessity to arrange the established fashion system. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a truly national Latvian fashion emerged together with the second independence of Latvia in 1990. During this period, several fashion organisations were established. Mostly these organisations were created after the French fashion organisations' models. Since Latvian fashion industry is fairly new, its system is not very rigid yet and new organisations still keep emerging. In this section I will identify and describe the most notable Latvian fashion organisations, their relevance and tasks.

The most overarching organisation is the Baltic Fashion Federation (*Baltijas modes federācija*). It is a non-profit organization, founded in 1999, whose mission is to develop the fashion industry in the Baltic States. Among other activities related to promotion of Baltic fashion and designers, this federation is responsible for organising the biggest fashion event in Latvia: the Riga Fashion Week. The Riga Fashion Week has been organised since 2004. During this event, the Baltic Fashion Federation presents the best collections of Latvian designers to international press and buyers. Also several workshops and presentations with industry stakeholders take place within the framework of the Fashion Week (Acksteiner & Lorenzen, 2014: 87). Bočkis (2013) argues that Baltic Fashion Federation stands out among other organisations by the fact that they employ both a media and marketing expert and a multimedia project manager. The Baltic Fashion Federation bears resemblance to the *Chambre Syndicale du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode* in France, although the Latvian organisation is not as effectual as the French one, which

is rather obvious taking into account the massive historical differences between both countries and their fashion histories.

Another organisation, the Latvian Fashion Chamber (*Latvijas modes palāta*), , was created in 2010 by expanding the former Latvian Fashion Foundation (*Latvijas Modes fonds*). The Latvian Fashion Chamber promotes Latvian fashion designers and seeks for opportunities to offer their collections to business clients, as well as boosts public awareness and interest in fashion and related activities in Latvia. Since 2011, the chamber's activities include the organisation of the annual fashion festival *Riga Fashion Mood* (Bočkis, 2013). Furthermore, this organisation is the creator of the Latvian fashion concept store *Taste Latvia*, that I will represent further in this section.

Next to these organisations linked to fashion design, there is also an organisation that is mostly concerned with the industrial side of fashion: the Light Industry Association (*Vieglās rūpniecības uzņēmumu asociācija*). This association was founded in 1994. It is a non-profit organization whose aim is to boost the development of the light industry in Latvia by promoting new markets, participating in exhibitions, training professionals and helping to establish contacts with enterprises from other countries. Moreover, the Light Industry Association defends interests of operators in the sector at national and international institutions (Light Industry Association website).

A highly important role has been assigned to different stores that sell Latvian fashion design. One of them is the Latvian fashion Boutique *Klase*, founded in 2010. Apart from the boutique, it functions as a representative of fashion designers and artists who created a sales and information platform of fashion, art and perfumery products by promoting them inside and outside Latvia (*Klase, Fashion Boutique*).

Another Latvian fashion concept store *Taste Latvia* was founded in 2010 (*Taste Latvia* website). *Taste Latvia* branches are situated in several department stores in Riga, thus it renders Latvian fashion design widely accessible for a wide audience. Furthermore, there is also a Latvian fashion designers' online store www.creativelatvia.com. It is the first and biggest Latvian fashion designers' online shop, which gathers 'the most influential Latvian designers and most demanded *Riga Fashion Week* fashion participants' (Creative Latvia, n.d., *About Us*). This kind of digital shopping platform makes it possible to purchase Latvian fashion production not only while being in Latvia, but also from other places with an internet connection.

One of the most recent establishments for promotion of Latvian fashion industry and the creative industries in general, is the internet platform *FOLD* which stands for: Forum of Latvian Design. *FOLD* was launched in April 2013 as a result of merging three projects: *DesignBlog*, *Plikums* and *Fine Young Urbanists* (*FOLD*, n.d.). The aim of this platform is to tell the society about the different sectors of the creative industries and to raise the level of Latvian creative industries. The platform focuses on design as it is considered 'the industry with the highest cultural and economic potential' (Arterritory, 11 March 2013). Contrary to the above mentioned organisations, *FOLD* is supported by the Government, as it is financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia and the State Culture Capital Foundation (*FOLD*, n.d.). The governmental support is quite obvious as this internet platform was an initiative of Latvian Ministry of Culture.

All the described organisations are crucial for the promotion of Latvian fashion not only at a national, but also at an international level. Although they still lack real power and influence, these organisations help fashion designers to establish their names inside and outside of Latvia. This kind of assistance is helpful since Latvian brands are small and most of the time do not possess the necessary knowledge to promote their production. Several fashion stores that have been established in 2010 render Latvian fashion available to a bigger audience and it becomes more customer-friendly. What is missing, is definitely a support at a political level. For now only *FOLD* seems to be enjoying this kind of buttressing. Although in 2005 a new Cultural Policy was elaborated and the Creative Industries were announced to be essential for Latvia, the progress of supporting art, culture and the Creative Industries does not appear to be evident yet. However, it is quite impressive that so many organisations have been established by fashion enthusiasts and professionals themselves without the governmental buttressing.

Latvian government should realise that with such a rich cultural heritage and innovative approaches that Latvia possesses, it has a lot to offer in the context of the Creative Industries that according to Hartley 'are not seminal forces of material economic growth, but they are germinal in their role in coordinating the individual and social structure of novelty and is resetting the definition of the normal.' (Hartley et al, 2013: 61). The Creative Industries have helped in branding of Latvia already, but their potential has not been used to the fullest.

3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will elaborate the theoretical framework of my Master's thesis. I will shortly describe the main theories and concepts that I will apply and develop further in the case studies examined in the fourth chapter. The framework is essential for analysing the case studies as it offers a deeper insight into the processes taking place in contemporary Latvian fashion.

Latvianness or (Latvian) national identity

Probably, almost all nations can claim to have a rich culture full of customs and traditions, but not all of them can assert that these traditions are being used also in contemporary fashion, design, architecture and lifestyle in general. Latvia is the one state where this phenomenon manifests very strongly.

The task of defining Latvianness or (Latvian) national identity is essential, as a specific identity may be regarded the value-adding factor in the merchandising of clothes and it may differ Latvian fashion from others. As de la Haye puts it, 'national identity offers a route to product differentiation and makes good business sense' (1996: 11-12). Difference is a crucial aspect today, as Goodrum argues, it is 'the watchword of the postmodern marketplace' (2005: 21).

Decades ago, identity was considered to be a fixed entity, while today it is accepted as fluid, flexible, fragmented and ongoing (Jenß, 2004; Barker, 2012). The notion of identity demonstrates a paradoxical combination of sameness and difference: on one hand identity is about sharing common identities as humans, men, women, Latvian and others; on the other hand, it suggests people's uniqueness and their difference from others (Lawler, 2008: 2). As Lawler puts it, 'western notions of identity rely on these two modes of understanding, so that people are understood as being simultaneously the same and different' (2008: 2). Alison Goodrum, defines national identity as follows: '(n)ational identity may be conceived as a confection of selective memories, generating traditions and rituals in order to reinforce ideas of permanence and longevity and also supplying the plebeian masses with a collection of codified emblems through which to foster national belonging and a sense of identification' (2005: 62). In her book *The National Fabric* (2005), Goodrum examines how Paul Smith and Mulberry spread a British style all around the world as

what Teunissen calls a ‘form of cultural imperialism of taste’ (Teunissen, 2011: 160). However, as Teunissen argues, defining Britishness is relatively effortless, since the English have had an important role in fashion history. A more challenging task is to research fashion in countries that have not been that influential in the history of fashion, with Latvia being one of them.

Latvian national identity has traditionally been built around pagan ethic which celebrates nature, different gods and mythology. Tension emerges when these visions of more modest design that strongly refers to Latvian traditional costume and cultural heritage are juxtaposed against aspirational images associated with modern Latvian fashion design.

Latvian identity, as many other identities, is a difficult concept to define and most probably, Latvianness remains elusive. In this Master’s thesis, I use terms of Latvianness and national (Latvian) identity simultaneously. I avoid defining them in a strict and rigid way in order to avoid discussions about their possible political implications, and in order to consent to the view of identity as fluid and flexible entity which can change over time. Instead, I use the notion of Latvianness as a construction that stands for the state or quality of being Latvian: Latvianness implies one’s awareness of his/ her Latvian roots, cultural heritage and historical as well as contemporary cultural specificity. Furthermore, Latvianness stands for qualities that may be known as Latvian not exclusively in the territory of Latvia also abroad. This aspect goes hand in hand with Goodrum’s idea that national identity in fashion is ‘a confection of selective memories’ being recognizable not only for the local inhabitants but also for the international consumer market (2005: 62), thus often this aspect might lead to Latvianness as stereotypes of the country.

Although there is no single Latvian identity per se, certain looks have been nominated as embodying a sense of Latvianness and of authenticity more than others. As Goodrum argues, fashion offers a very explicit visual representation of nation’s identity (2005: 19). Within the context of this Master’s thesis Latvianness includes elements of Latvian national costumes, mythology and ethnography, Latvian literature, art, architecture and modern subcultures. All these elements will be demonstrated in the five case studies at the end of this Master’s thesis.

Globalisation, glocalization

Globalisation is a term developed by social theorists, such as Robert Robertson and Anthony Giddens. Giddens defines globalisation as ‘the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’ (1990: 64). The term of globalisation was therefore meant to capture the increasing interrelation of different parts of the world (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 273). Hesmondhalgh argues that ‘it was probably never wise to think of culture as being linked to territory in a simple, one-to-one way, but more and more the culture of a particular place is comprised of inputs from many other places (2013: 277). Along with the ‘weakening of traditional ties between cultural experience and geographical territory that the global circulation of cultural commodities entails’ (Hartley et al., 2012: 103-104), a reactionary emergence of local nostalgia takes place (Robins, 1991).

According to Paulicelli and Clark, ‘[t]ied to a “national fabric”, but also aiming to widen its remit, fashion is always travelling and ultimately aims at a global market’ (2009: 2), the focus on the global is thus essential to fashion. Due to globalisation ‘diverse and remote cultures have become accessible, as signs and commodities’ (Barker, 2012: 159). Although often globalisation has been seen almost as a synonym for cultural imperialism where one nation’s values are imposed to others, Hesmondhalgh claims that globalisation generates heterogeneity rather than universal sameness (2013: 275). Melchior (2011: 58) points out that ‘in order to increase market share and sales figures in a highly competitive international market, the articulation of cultural distinctiveness has become a pivotal business strategy for many fashion brands and local fashion industries’, and the Latvian fashion industry is no exception.

Due to globalisation, the contemporary Latvian fashion designers’ interest in their own localness, is also connected to a fascination for foreign local traditions that have become part of Latvian culture. This is what Roland Robertson calls ‘glocalization’: a process that involves ‘the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local’ (1995: 30).

Glocalization is fundamental to the formation of local identities as the idea of the local, is produced within and by globalizing discourses (Barker, 2012: 164). Also assimilating the global ‘other’ into the local is a crucial aspect for national identity as,

according to Barker, it is ‘unifying cultural diversity’ (2012: 164; 260). Fashion partakes in the creation of this unifying process.

Of special significance is Latvian fashion’s positioning in the global marketplace and how the globalisation of fashion creates new perspectives on Latvian national identity. Goodrum argues that ‘the apparently straightforward and economically driven process to do with the globalization of fashion is, in fact, a far more culturally nuanced and locally embedded encounter than has previously been suggested’ (2005: 12). Furthermore, according to her, due to globalisation the national characteristics of fashion become increasingly questionable and questioned.

Banal nationalism and cosmopolitan nationalism

Banal nationalism is a term introduced by Michael Billig (1995) in his book of the same title. Billig defines banal nationalism as follows: ‘the term banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. It is argued that these habits are not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed. Daily, the nation is indicated, or “flagged”, in the lives of its citizenry.’ (1995: 6). Thus, according to Billig, there is a continual ‘flagging’, or reminding, of one’s nationhood by means of everyday representations of the nation, and this reminding constructs an imagined sense of national solidarity. Referring to this idea, Latvianness is a ‘habitualized form of national belonging, one that is brought home daily on the familiar tides of a national habitus’ (Goodrum, 2005: 70).

The reminding of one’s nationhood can take place in different forms, such as clothing, discourses in magazines or mythologies surrounding production techniques and producers. Goodrum argues that the creative industries themselves are active producers of national identity (2005: 70). In relation to this point of view, we will see in the following chapters how these ‘banal’ mechanisms of national identification (clothing with clear references to Latvianness; discourses about Latvianness within fashion magazines; the mythologies surrounding production techniques and producers) operate in almost reciprocal way. According to Goodrum (2005), these ‘banal’ mechanisms not only mobilize versions of nationhood (Latvian fashion designs sold through Latvianness) but are also invested with the power to actually shape these identifications (Latvianness is sold through Latvian fashion). All of these

are largely unacknowledged as significant forces or as daily reminders of what and to who the nation is and to whom it belongs. Billig notes that although today globalisation has taken over nationalism, a reminder is still necessary and the nationhood is still being reproduced by different means (1995: 8-9).

In case of Latvian fashion design, a similar, yet different term might be more adapted instead of 'banal nationalism', namely 'cosmopolitan nationalism' (Melchior, Skov & Csaba, 2011). This concept suggests that 'the nation is more like a renewable resource which can be reinvented in interaction with global society' (Melchior, Skov & Csaba, 2011: 224) and it 'enables fashion designers to use their awareness of cultural heritage for creative inspiration, enabling openness towards others and the negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences' (Melchior, 2011: 59). Thus 'cosmopolitan nationalism' involves an interpretation and transformation of cultural heritage rather than the use of it in its original form.

Fashion myths and meta goods

As several authors (Lillethun, 2011: 189-191; Meinhold, 2013: 28) argue, people do not buy fashion only due to the classical dress motives, such as protection, propriety, adornment, but also to symbolise attitudes, identities, intentions, social affiliation or non-affiliation. The production of fashion is therefore closely connected to the process of branding and rebranding of the products that become icons and symbols of a desirable lifestyle and look (Paulicelli & Clark, 2009: 2). Furthermore, fashion contributes not only to the shaping of personal identities but also to the shaping of the perception of a country or culture (Ibid.), thus fashion may be regarded as one of the branding tools of a city or country.

Several cities have been highly successful by advertising themselves as fashion capitals of Europe, like Paris, Milan and London. Indeed, they have a reason to do so, as fashion industry in these cities is truly advanced. Nevertheless, by branding themselves each of these cities have gained a widespread reputation for a specific style they represent. Paris is the capital of sophisticated luxury high fashion, Milan is the city of seductive and glamorous fashion, while London has even two fashion identities that Shilling (in Bruzzi & Gibson, 2013: 40) calls 'monarchy' which stands for the classic and sartorial British look, and 'anarchy' that stands for the experimental street-look.

In order to promote or brand a city as a city of distinctive fashion, several tools can be used. Probably the most substantial one is advertising. Frequently fashion advertisements include the so called ‘fashion myths’ that ‘are close to the meaning of myth as an ‘untrue tale’, but one that at least stands in a certain relation to the truth, even if only pretending to be true’ (Meinhold, 2013: 30). Meinhold’s notion of ‘fashion myth’ is based on Barthes’ (1973) idea that media frames fashion in a certain way and most often it occurs via different myths that in reality have nothing to do with the particular dress itself.

According to Faurschou (in Meinhold, 2013: 31), the symbolic content of the myth is ‘imported’ into fashion or other commodities, into the economic process, and it is not to be found there *a priori*. ‘It is ultimately a question of financial quantities in this process, i.e. maximising profits.’ (Faurschou in Meinhold, 2013: 31). Faurschou’s idea appears to be highly similar to Marx’s concept of ‘commodity fetishism’, where, according to Marx, a magical value is added to a product, and it is where the desire of a buyer is hooked (1990 [1867]: 163). Although Meinhold does not reference to Marx, his influence can clearly be seen.

The fashion myths include the so called ‘meta goods’: all the symbols or values that lie behind the consumer goods (in this case fashion), which are linked with them by advertising strategies and which transcend the material or economic value of the consumer goods (Meinhold, 2013: 32).

Latvian fashion brands rarely have as impressive fashion advertisement campaigns as the big global brands do. The most important medium for advertising their fashion production, are print and digital articles as well as brands’ own home pages. Fashion myths are created by all these advertising platforms as I will demonstrate later on by applying the notions of ‘fashion myths’ and ‘meta goods’ to a case study that shows how some garments are branded by using fashion myth, and how this process promotes and commodifies the national identity.

Trickle-up or bubble up

The oldest theory of distribution of fashion is the trickle-down theory described by Veblen in 1899. In this model, a style is initiated by people of the high society and gradually becomes accepted by lower classes or high fashion styles become mainstream (DeLong, n.d.). The key of this model is a social hierarchy in which

people seek to identify with the wealthy and those at the top strive to keep distance from those socially below them. Furthermore, once the fashion is adopted by those below, the 'top strata' reject the look and seek another one.

Today, however, next to the 'trickle-down' model, also an opposite movement can be observed. It is called the 'trickle-up' or 'bubble-up' theory - the newest of the fashion movement theories (DeLong, n.d.). This process so evident today, is a bottom-up movement, where the innovation is initiated from the street, so to speak, and adopted from lower income groups and eventually flows to upper-income groups (Polhemus, 2011: 454). Polhemus offers an iconic example of bubble-up process: the Perfecto black leather jacket based on a Second World War design, made by the Schott Brothers Company. Once produced in the first half of the 20th century, it became a symbol of rebellious youth culture (Polhemus, 2011: 453). Later, in the 1980s, the black leather jacket became accepted as everyday apparel and even appeared on the catwalks, thus it lost its connotation of being an antifashion garment.

Another garment that today is an integral part of our wardrobes, namely the T-shirt, has travelled from the lower to the upper classes. Initially T-shirts were worn by labourers as a functional and practical undergarment, but eventually it became adopted universally as a casual outer garment all over the world (DeLong, n.d.). One can spot that this bubble-up tendency goes against to what Flügel (1930) argued. According to him, an individual strives to be like others when they seem superior but unlike them when they seem inferior. In this regard, fashion labels who use subcultural references within their collection, go beyond Flügel's presumption by equalising 'the superior' and 'the inferior'.

According to Polhemus, the authenticity which streetstyle is deemed to represent, is a precious and demanded commodity (2011: 451). He argues that it is the context that determines the transformation of an emblem of subcultural identity into a desirable commodity that everybody with enough money could acquire and wear with pride.

Written clothing

According to Roland Barthes, we mostly access fashion through media, and we commonly know fashion images complemented with texts. As he puts it, 'the magazine is a machine that makes Fashion' (Barthes, 1990 [1967]: 51). However,

today not only magazines but also brands' websites include the advertising element of fashion.

When we see a photograph of clothing in a magazine or on a website, it is usually complemented with a descriptive text. The photographed clothing is what Barthes calls 'image-clothing' while the text that describes the particular clothing is 'written clothing'. Barthes argues that both these garments refer to the same reality but they do not have the same structure as they are made of different substances: in one substances are colours, lines, forms and surfaces; in the other, the substance is words. Moreover, also these substances do not have the same relations to each other: the first relation is spatial, while the second one is logical or syntactic (Barthes in Welters & Lillethun, 2011: 132).

In media we often see not merely a description of garment's real qualities (such as its material and colour), but also several 'mythological meanings' that have nothing to do with the garment itself. An example of this is offered by Latvian magazine *Santa* (November 2014), where eight pages are devoted to what Billig calls 'banal nationalism'. The issue includes several photographs of models wearing colourful traditional Latvian mittens, and next to one of them it says: 'Warm hands - warm heart. And the whole life has been knitted into a mitten.' (Dumbere, Nov 2014: 49; my translation). Here we see that it does not mean that the mitten literally hides someone's life between its stitches or that wearing mittens will keep the temperature of your heart warm. Rather it plays with a Latvian expression that people use when someone has cold hands by claiming that instead of warm hands the person has a good (warm) heart, and signals the importance of mittens within Latvian life and culture. By 'written clothing' it is possible to make the context wider and endow a garment with mythological meaning and narratives. These are not merely garments that we see but rather garments with an idea or ideology behind them that have been described in words. In accordance with Barthes, the image implies endless possibilities while words 'determine a single certainty' and add knowledge to the image (1990 [1967]: 13-14; 17). Often 'written clothing' offers information that most probably one would not notice in the photograph of garment itself, such as the source of inspiration or the occasions or mood that the garment is meant for.

The concepts and theories described above are fruitful in order to analyse the selected case studies in the next chapter, as they explain processes taking place within the

selected fashion labels' collections that manifest Latvianness. They also contribute to answering the research question by explaining what methods Latvian fashion designers use in order to manifest Latvianness through their collections, and what messages these collections convey.

4. Manifestation of Latvian National Identity Through Contemporary Latvian Fashion: Five Case Studies

Doubtless, the past continues to fascinate scholars, students, and designers. Historical silhouettes, details and patterns provide an opportunity for reinterpretation, innovation and modernisation of somewhat forgotten national treasures. As designer Yohji Yamamoto once said ‘going to the future means you have to use your past’ (Fashion Institute of Technology, n.d.).

Blanco mentions the fact that at the very beginning of the 21st century, American consumers demonstrated patriotism by incorporating the American flag into their wardrobes (2011: 109). In Latvia this kind of patriotism manifestation has been present already several decades before. National elements that can be regarded as banal nationalism or more often cosmopolitan nationalism, have been implemented in Latvian fashion occasionally yet constantly. As mentioned in the previous chapters, during the 19th century, national romanticism dominated within Rigan dress and the interest turned to national traditions and Latvian aesthetics in national dress (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 202). Later, in the 1930s traditional realism with nationalistic content developed and contemporary national style returned into fashion, getting inspiration from ethnic dress (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 203).

As can be seen in several issues of *Riga Fashions* magazine, during the Soviet times, the Riga Fashion house continually used elements of national costumes and Latvian mythology in their collections. During this period, national elements in fashion were blooming. Particularly numerous national elements were used for the collections that were produced for participating in exhibitions abroad. The Riga Fashion House designers strived to show the world that under the Soviet monotony there are actually several different countries with their own culture, heritage, stories and traditions.

Contemporary fashion does not seem to be an exception. Quite the opposite: both the young and also the more experienced Latvian fashion designers delve into Latvian traditions, cultural heritage and contemporary cultural scene in order to adopt them for their fashion collections.

The 21st century in Latvia started with a rapid economic growth and fashion began to play a crucial role as it was considered a symbol of prosperity. Due to the

large period of foreign occupation within Latvian history, at the very beginning of the 21st century, products from abroad were demanded more than local production (Parute, April 2015). Today the situation has changed and Latvians choose more and more the local production such as food and design. Also fashion with references to Latvian national identity and cultural heritage represents a rather large proportion of contemporary Latvian fashion design.

The aim of the five case studies provided in this chapter, is to explore the ways in which Latvian fashion design is a site central to the branding of Latvia and to debates about Latvian identity. The chapter focuses on the elements of Latvianness that manifest the strongest within contemporary Latvian fashion. It demonstrates where Latvian fashion designers get the inspiration from and how their designs can be related to the national identity. This chapter strives to demonstrate the means by which Latvian fashion designers negotiate the problematic discourses surrounding Latvian fashion, which on one hand is seen as an industry pretty much disregarded by the government, yet on the other hand is being hailed as one of the domains that Latvians should support by buying Latvian fashion production. Furthermore, fashion is seen as the means of proving the creative spirit and potential of Latvians and Riga as the city of cool.

LINDA LEEN

All over the world singers, actors, sportsmen and other celebrities take part in fashion not only by wearing designer clothes, but also by creating their own collections. In recent years Latvia also has followed this example: basketball player Kaspars Kambala made a clothing collection in collaboration with his wife and even opened his own shop; ‘singing twins’ Ana and Katrīne Drozdoviča made a fashion collection for young girls for very democratic prices; and singer Linda Leen, whose collections will be the focus of this section, created designs inspired by Latvian cultural heritage.

In 2011 Latvian singer Linda Leen created the collection *PASTALA* which, as the name implies, consists of *pastalas* - a type of leather laced up footwear worn by ancient Latvians. The only details Linda Leen has changed in this ancient Latvian footwear’s design (figure 11), is that she added the colour and a small metallic logo with her initials ‘LL’ (figure 12). They are hand-made products, created by two craftsmen, a father and son, from a family that has been making this type of shoes for

generations (Whimsical Agnesiga, 20 Jul 2011). *Pastalas* are available in seven different colours. They have been fabricated as ‘heritage’, but at the same time are imbued with a feeling of modernity regarding the colour and the metallic logo. This ‘modern twist’ is what Melchior, Skov and Csaba (2011) have termed ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’: Linda Leen does not use *pastalas* in their original form but rather transform and modernise them.



Figure 11



Figure 12

When starting the project, Linda Leen had an idea to build this product on the principle of contrast by presenting *pastalas* as (Cinderella’s) glass shoes in a box upholstered with velvet and with a silk ribbon attached on top of it. Later on, she decided to change this idea because also men could purchase and wear the product, thus an austere cardboard box was considered more appropriate (Zalāne, 11 Apr 2012). Notwithstanding, the collection of *pastalas* is very much marketed as a product for a female audience, as the advertisement photographs feature exclusively women (example: figures 13, 14 and 15).



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

Smelik argues that the authenticity in fashion is mostly found in cultural heritage (2011: 79). Also Linda Leen constructs authenticity of her collection by this means: *pastalas* are authentic although or rather because they are reproduced from ancient Latvian models. She does not change a lot about these ancient shoes, just adds some colour and her initials. However, modern products based on cultural heritage offer more an illusion of authenticity not a real, genuine thing. Smelik (2011) refers to this phenomenon as ‘performance of authenticity’. Most probably, customers are aware of authenticity being mediated but they still are keen on buying such products because of ubiquitous globalisation and mass production (Smelik, 2011). People often get tired of all the foreign products they are compelled to purchase, therefore they search for something unique and ‘authentic’, even more so if this authenticity comes from their own cultural heritage. One could argue that authenticity has become a trend today - elusive, yet highly desired.

Although *pastalas* is part of the Latvian national costume, Linda Leen promotes them as daily footwear. As her website claims ‘[J]ust like the Australian boots UGG or Greek sandals, the Latvian *pastala* also has a place in everyday wear’ (‘Footwear collection *PASTALA* by Linda Leen’, 2011). Linda Leen advertises *pastalas* as a comfortable and practical footwear: ‘they can be worn as house shoes or office footwear and travel well for trips to sunnier climates’ (‘Footwear collection *PASTALA* by Linda Leen’, 2011). Nevertheless, since *pastalas* do not have a solid sole, there are some limitations to their functionality. In ancient times when *pastalas* were the footwear not having a solid sole was the norm or probably the only possibility, but today the lack of a substantial sole renders the product only appropriate for people who travel by car or walk short distances. In this regard, Riga Fashion House had a more practical approach to this type of footwear. In its magazine *Rīgas modes (Riga Fashions)* of summer 1984, we see in photographs that there is a solid sole attached to the bottom of the Riga Fashion House’s interpretation of *pastalas* (‘*Narodnaya pesnya*’, 1984). This aspect renders the footwear appropriate for everyday use as it is more resistant and more comfortable for walking long distances.

The Linda Leen footwear collection *PASTALA* was followed by a clothing collection *Etnografizēts (Ethnographed; my translation)* in 2012. This collection is based on Latvian ethnographic symbols and their energetic meanings. The collection has been created in collaboration with semiotics researcher Valdis Celms who claims that it is not an easy task to borrow something from the past and adapt to modern

times. But, according to him, this collection proves that ‘Latvianness can be Vanguard’ (‘Lindas Leen apģērbu kolekcija Etnografizēts’, 21 June 2011). By stressing Celms’ involvement in the creation of *Etnografizēts*, Linda Leen renders her collection more trustworthy and authentic as it gives a guarantee that the usage of ethnographic symbols is accurate, and thus customers regard it as ‘the real thing’.

The collection *Etnografizēts* is meant for both men and women, and consists of t-shirts and dresses with Latvian ethnographic ornaments printed on them. According to Latvian ethnography, each symbol contains a specific energetic information, thus it renders the collection not only visually appealing but also offers to complement one’s wardrobe with garments that provide their wearer with a sort of magical power and energy. A description in Latvian and English of the source and energetic code of the symbol is attached to the box of each garment. The author of the collection clarifies that the explanation has been added because she believes ‘thoughts are of a great importance, therefore if the wearer realises the meaning of the symbol, it works with a double power’ (Diena.lv, 21 Jun 2012; my translation).

Among other garments there are, for example, dresses and t-shirts with the Ancient Latvian version of the Tree of the Earth called Austras Tree (*Austras koks*) (Figure 16). According to Latvian mythology, Austras is the dawn and the light woven by the Sun and her daughters have created the earth. Austras Tree symbolises harmony and organisation (Linda Leen, n.d., Austras Tree) and these characteristics have been promised for the wearer as well. Apart from symbol of Austras Tree, another reference to Latvianness appears within this T-shirt: on the Linda Leen homepage it says that the colour of the print is ‘linen gray’. Linen and its gray colour has traditionally been associated with Latvia, as linen is the traditional Latvian fabric, next to wool.

Another example of reuse of Latvian ethnography, is men’s and women’s t-shirts and tank tops with the print of Laimas Spruce that inherits joviality and wealth (figure 17). This symbol is composed of spruce trees growing up and down, while the centre symbolizes a bridge - the natural balance and threshold between the crest and trough of the waves of time. The bridge is where darkness meets light and passing over it symbolises becoming virtuous (Linda Leen, n.d., Laimas Spruce).



Figure 16



Figure 17

The collection *Etnografizēts* not only includes prints that represent mythological symbols, but also Ancient dress details that from a three-dimensional object have become one-dimensional print. One example is the Liv Turtle brooch that Līva used in order to fix their heavy chain necklaces to clothing. These brooches symbolise good and prosperous life and increases wearer's confidence (Linda Leen, n.d., Liv Turtle brooch). This example is interesting because, as explained in the first chapter, Līvas were a subpopulation within Ancient Latvian territory, not one of the populations that formed Ancient Latvian population per se. The Turtle brooch is an example of what Erekosima and Eicher (1981) call 'cultural authentication'. In terms of 'cultural authentication', the Turtle brooch originally comes from Scandinavia and in territory of Latvia its production started only later, from the 1000 A.C. (Spirģis, 4 March 2009). Nevertheless, this element, the Turtle brooch, has been regarded part of Latvian national costume and cultural heritage, and thus also incorporated within the prints of the *Etnografizēts* collection.

An intriguing aspect is also that the Turtle brooch was traditionally worn by women, while in Linda Leen's fashion collection the Turtle brooch print decorates both men and women clothing (figures 18 and 19). This deconstruction of gender boundaries echoes with Judith Butler's ideas about gender. Butler (1988) makes a distinction between sex as biological facticity, and gender as a cultural interpretation. For her gender is not a fact, rather the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all (Butler, 1988: 522). Those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished.



Figure 18



Figure 19

Butler argues that body is only known through its gendered appearance (1988: 523). In contemporary fashion play with gender is nothing new. Since Coco Chanel dressed women in pants, the androgynous look is a widespread phenomenon (see for example *Paul Smith* and *Tommy Hilfiger* Fall/ Winter collections 2011). Next to that, we see also feminine male figures in contemporary fashion. Often not only their clothing is what we call feminine, but also their bodies, hair and body language (for example *JW Anderson's* Spring/ Summer 2014; *Prada's* Fall/ Winter 2008). These examples show that gender differences are not that evident today. Also Linda Leen partakes in blending gender differences by transforming once exclusively women's piece of jewelry into a unisex print. She does it to a lesser extent than the above-mentioned designers since she does not transform man's image from masculine to feminine. She merely transforms an element that was once associated with females into a print that she puts not only on women's clothing but also on top of man's T-shirt. Linda Leen, therefore, demolishes the gender boundaries that were topical for ancient Latvians (the Turtle brooch as exclusively women's jewelry), but the gender boundary in the modern look where the brooch has been adopted, has remained unchanged (Linda Leen men's T-shirt differs from women's T-shirt and dress).

Linda Leen has borrowed symbols and their meanings from Latvian ethnography and mythology and used them within a modern clothing in modern times. She creates a 'fashion myth' by emphasising the Latvianness of her collections: if one strives to demonstrate his/ her Latvian identity, it is enough to wear Linda Leen fashion production. Linda Leen garments are not merely clothing, they symbolise Latvian identity and traditions. As Niessen (1998) explains, 'tradition, by definition, is unchanging, immutable and faithful to some authentic past time, even though the

needs of the times are always changing, and similarly the content of 'tradition' is also changing' (1998: 129). Thus, the emotions invested in traditions because they are 'from the past' instead attach to a constantly mutating reality, even without the understanding of the person using the 'tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). To avoid misuse of the tradition and to emphasize the presence of 'meta goods' - the magical power or source of energy that comes along with the clothing that Linda Leen promises her buyers - an explanation of each symbol has been attached to the garments.

As Linda Leen maintains, she finds it important to keep alive the essential values that form Latvian cultural heritage for centuries (Diena.lv, 21 Jun 2012). However, for most of today's consumers it is important to show their taste and status by clothing they wear. Failure to meet the norms may result in consideration of a person being old-fashioned, poor or outsider (Lillethun, 2011: 167), therefore it is crucial to 'upgrade' the cultural heritage and adopt it to the modern lifestyle. The clothing that was in vogue hundreds of years ago, is not capable to satisfy modern people's needs and whims not only aesthetically but also functionally, as I showed in the example of the thin soles of Linda Leen's *pastalas*.

The emphasis on local roots in Linda Leen collections is mobilised through notions of tradition and heritage. This discourse of localism and history is different from the dominant narratives of the global fashion that promote international fashion aesthetics and ideology where no specific local fashions and traditions are highlighted. Linda Leen promotes nostalgia of localness and energetic power of mythological symbols as the added value of the product. Latvian national identity within Linda Leen collections is therefore linked to the cultural heritage, and more specifically to the mythological symbols and elements of national costumes. The wearer has been promised the so called 'meta goods' - a positive energy and power that comes along with the garment which at the same time demonstrates the wearer's Latvian identity and cultural affiliation.

PASTALA and *Etnografizēts* are rooted in 'cosmopolitan nationalism' as in these collections modernity has been skilfully combined with tradition thereby offering new and modern clothing while bearing a feeling of the familiar at the same time. Although Linda Leen has transformed some features within the original ancient Latvian design (such as colour or target gender), she strives to make her collections as

authentic as possible within today's society. In favour of modernity and present-day demands, Linda Leen uses mythological symbols from hundreds of years ago and put them on top on modern everyday clothing like T-shirts and simple dresses thereby commodifying Latvian cultural heritage and Latvian national identity. By doing so, she promotes Latvian cultural heritage as something with a long, deeply rooted history albeit possessing a potential to be applied to modern lifestyle and the contemporary fashion whims. As Jenß puts it, '[t]he appropriation of history and the familiar may generate a feeling of stability in otherwise unstable conditions', and objects with historic references combine actual presence with historic distance (2004: 398). Feeling of the familiar appears to be a desired aspect during the times of globalisation when a lot of new foreign products have been imposed upon us every day.

RECYCLED.LV

Another example of Latvian identity within fashion, is the label Recycled.lv that was founded in 2008. Its artistic director is Anna Aizsilniece (real name: Ingrīda Zābere) who possesses a Master's degree in fashion design from the Design University in Naples. Her accessories and clothing collections are distinct from other Latvian designers' works as they are made of shirts, jackets and other recycled objects, creating a new conceptual design.

As said on the Recycled.lv homepage, 'the philosophy of Recycled.lv is recycling in order to restore feelings, the spirit of time and the atmosphere. Not only existing quality clothing is returned to life, but also the feeling of femininity, elegance, grace and the sense of aristocracy which can be enjoyed by every woman who puts on any of these garments' (Recycled.lv, n.d.). Indeed, most of the Recycled.lv dresses are made of jackets and men's shirts without completely cutting or unpicking them. While in other countries this pretentious goal to create graceful, aristocratic and elegant dresses from second-hand clothes is nothing new, within Latvian fashion it is an unique concept. At first glance it is almost impossible to tell that each Recycled.lv dress hides several ready-made garments with all their traditional details: buttons, collars and seams (example: figures 20, 21 and 22). Recycled.lv designs look like genuine evening gowns. The new appearance gives the discarded items of everyday-wear a new context and character that is emphasised by a

new brand name, and by the play of memories and histories. The value of the used garments is enhanced by their incorporation into a cool, sustainable brand concept.



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

In Riga Fashion Week Spring/ Summer 2015, the brand demonstrated the collection *Ethnography*, visibly inspired by Latvian national costumes. This collection will be the main focus of the presented case study. In order to better comprehend the collection, it is first essential to clarify what role do Latvian traditional costumes play today out of the fashion scene.

Preservation of the tradition to wear traditional Latvian costumes is commonly related to probably the most significant element of Latvian cultural heritage - the Latvian Song and Dance Celebration (*Vispārējie latviešu Dziesmu un Deju svētki*). It is one of the largest amateur choral events in the world and a remarkable phenomenon that has taken place in Latvia since 1873 ('Parunāsim par modi', 2014). The Baltic states - Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania - are the only countries in Europe that have maintained their song and dance festival traditions. Its importance and uniqueness has been stressed by the fact that the tradition of Song and Dance Celebration is recognised as a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO Latvijas Nacionālā komisija, n.d.). Once in five years, the Latvian Song and Dance Festival gathers 14 000 singers singing a cappella (figure 23), and 15 000 dancers who form patterns inspired by ancient Latvian ornaments, at the same time executing traditional dance steps (figure 24). Latvian Song and Dance Celebration is an event that already for 140 years is a kind of a callout for the nation to develop and strengthen its identity (Dziesmu svētki, n.d.). The Latvian Song and Dance has a crucial role in formation of Latvian national identity

and cultural heritage. Not only it strengthens unity of Latvians, but also partakes in branding of Latvia as this event has been recognised outside Latvia and foreign visitors come to partake in the celebration.



Figure 23



Figure 24

The Song and Dance Celebration is a tradition that keeps Latvian national costumes alive today, as the participants (and some visitors) wear them during this event. Today, many of the national costumes have been modified in order to adapt to the stage. In the 1970's, the skirt became shorter and artificial hair braids were weaved in hair. During this period, particular costumes for children were developed: mini-skirt for girls and short pants for boys. It often happened that a person was not dressed in costume of just one region, instead it was a combination of several different regions, sometimes even complemented by a modern twist like a lipstick or artificial braids ('Parunāsim par modi', 2014).

Fashion is not exclusively recursive (Baudillard in Meinhold, 2013: 25-26), but it contains elements from the past and the present or future. National costume's colour, shape and ornament is a source of inspiration for contemporary artists, artisans and, above all, fashion designers. Several Latvian fashion designers and labels use elements of Latvian national costumes in their collections. Mostly these elements are used in a playful way by combining details that fifteen years ago would have been received with a critique and regarded as inappropriate.

One of fashion labels that interpret Latvian national costume, is Recycled.lv and their collection *Etnography (Etnogrāfija)*. Within the collection there are several garments that reflect proportions and colours of national Latvian costumes (example: figures 25 and 26). And again, the secret of this collection is the fact that each garment is made of classical second-hand linen and woollen clothes. Due to this transformation, the identity of clothes has been changed: trousers have become skirts or shirts, jackets have transformed into shawls, and belts into crowns. The collection is complemented by details from bicycles and Soviet time electric appliances as well

as santim coins of recently changed Latvian currency. All these objects that we commonly do not relate to fashion, have been used to create accessories and adornments that bear resemblance to the ones used by ancient Latvians.



Figure 25



Figure 26

The goal of *Ethnography* collection is to emphasise Latvianness and to promote patriotic feeling, as described on the Recycled.lv website: ‘The aim behind the creation of the collection ‘Ethnography’ is to inspire the society to become aware of the existing resources, to utilise them in a creative way and to integrate them, at the same time retaining our national identity and raising our self-confidence’ (Recycled.lv, n.d., *News*). In this regard ‘existing resources’ is a twofold notion, as it refers not only to the reuse of recycled clothing but also to the reuse of Latvian cultural heritage as a source of inspiration. According to Jenß, a complete immersion into the style of the past ‘opens up an imaginary time travel, technically realized through the interconnection of dress and space’ (2004: 390-391). This aspect is present also in *Ethnography* collection as it shows a double twofold play with the past. The first play with the past is evident in the fact that the inspiration of collection comes from ancient times, while the recycled materials are from a more recent but however past time. The second play can be clarified by Meinhold’s words that from the present-day point of view, costume refers to the past, while fashion - despite occasional borrowings from the past - refers to the present and the future (2013: 25). In this manner, the costume is associated with the past as an ancient source of inspiration and something bygone a long time ago; recycled garments used in the collection are from a more recent past; and Recycled.lv collection per se refers to the present and future at the same time.

Apart from the use of recycled materials, Recycled.lv differs from the other Latvian brands also because it claims it does not strive for a high degree recognition (Krastiņš, 1 Nov 2014). The only means used for popularisation of the brand is their Facebook page and participation in the Riga Fashion Week. The creative director Anna Aizsilniece also goes against another fashion industry's whim or rule: designers have to create a new collection for each season, but Aizsilniece argues that this kind of pace is against her will and resources (Ibid.).

However, there is a paradox appearing here: no matter how much the label claims to be unpretentious and even rebellious, it is involved in selling a particular image. Recycled.lv clothes are distinctive and the recycling philosophy behind them steps outside of 'normal' indeed. Nevertheless, the label is interested in showing their sustainable approach and innovative design within Latvian fashion context, therefore it is essential to promote the collections.

Recycled.lv with its particular philosophy and sustainable approach is a unique label in the Latvian fashion scene. Recycled.lv collection *Ethnography* offers a highly complex relationship with past, as not only it's source of inspiration comes from a bygone time but also the used materials (recycled second-hand clothing and several objects). The collection promotes nostalgia for national Latvian treasure - the national costume - that has been accepted as one of the most crucial elements of Latvian identity and the tradition of wearing it has been kept alive by the Song and Dance Celebration. The collection *Ethnography* recognises the world that, if not entirely lost, is rapidly disappearing. Thus, it is here that we mourn the loss of ancient Latvian traditions and national costume. We look back to ancient Latvian traditions for a sense of security and stability in a fast-moving world.

Although silhouettes and proportions of the *Ethnography* collection are highly similar to the Latvian national costume, it would not be accurate to consider the collection a manifestation of 'banal nationalism'. Rather, this collection stands closer to 'cosmopolitan nationalism' as in order to remind the nation of its nationhood, Recycled.lv interprets and transforms Latvian national costumes instead of replicating the folk costume. *Ethnography* is quite a nostalgic collection as it fosters nostalgia for the Latvian national costumes that today can be mostly seen during the Song and Dance Celebration.

Next to the national costume, Recycled.lv implements also objects from more recent past that foster nostalgia for almost every Latvian - coins from the former

Latvian currency that was changed to euro in 2014. They provoke nostalgic feeling and are attractive for the fact that each garment consists of several other garments, but it is hard to imagine Latvian, or even more so, foreign customers wearing them on daily basis. *Ethnography* is a rather artistic collection, visually very close to authentic national costumes, therefore most probably it will not be seen on streets as Linda Leen's T-shirts and dresses. However, this collection demonstrates the desire of Latvian designers to delve into the cultural heritage and reinterpret it. Practicability is yet another story.

ZIB*

The fashion brand ZIB* (which in Latvian means 'to flash') was founded in 2011 by eight young ladies. The idea behind this brand is to 'add a little bit of art to everyday apparel' (ZIB, n.d., *About ZIB*). ZIB* offers comfortable and original jersey clothing as well as bright accessories. Every garment is hand-made in their workshop in Riga and all ZIB* prints are based on locally-made drawings and paintings (Ibid.).

On their website, ZIB* designers explain their designing and producing methods. It offers a brief insight behind the scenes of the brand. They also stress the relevance of the Art Academy of Latvia which, according to the website, was the place where ZIB* designers learned how to use screenprint technique which is crucial for designing their clothing. The website also describes the location of the ZIB* workshop: it is situated in one of the busiest streets of Riga and the designers feel inspired by this location. The most significant feature of the label is the use of vivid colours. According to the website, bright colours inspire both the interior of the workshop as well as their clothing designs (ZIB, n.d., *About ZIB*). Indeed, all label's collections are very rich and bright in colour while the silhouettes are quite simple.

The expression of Latvianness within ZIB* collection *Flower Stories* (Spring/Summer 2014) differs from other brands' national identity promoting collections, as the source of inspiration is a literary work. For this collection ZIB* designers were inspired by the book *Pasakas par ziediem* (*Flower Stories*) written by Latvian writer Anna Sakse (1905 - 1981). The trendwatching website trendhunter.com spots this trend of literary-inspired collections present in several countries. It says that fashion designers and editors are inspired by several different elements, but lately, one of the most popular inspiration sources is literature. According to the website, this trend

offers 'stylish translations of classic tomes such as *The Great Gatsby* and *Wuthering Heights*, and even the modern-day cult favorite *50 Shades of Grey*, these literary interpretations allow consumers to experience a piece of romantic fantasy while looking chic and stylish at the same time' (Trendhunter, n.d., *Novel Style*).

The book of Anna Sakse consists of 33 stories, each dedicated to a particular flower. These stories tell about love, the diversity of feelings and show the character and the many facets of person's inner world. The story behind the origins of *Flower Stories* book is interesting: the Latvian painter Kārlis Sūniņš (1907 - 1979) made paintings of different flowers for a book that after all did not get published. In order to save these paintings from becoming a waste, Anna Sakse composed a fairytale about each depicted flower (Zvaigzne ABC, n.d., *Pasakas par ziediem*). When the book was published, each fairytale was complemented with the illustrations painted by Kārlis Sūniņš.

Concerning the ZIB* collection *Flower Stories*, for now it is the largest brand's collection consisting of more garments than any other collection (Apollo, 7 May 2014). It includes long and short dresses, tops, shorts, skirts, vests, sweaters and leggings. Obviously, the main elements of this ZIB* collection are flowers: each garment is decorated with floral prints that stand for flower characters within the Sakse's book. The collection includes motifs, colours and characters of seven selected flowers: daffodil, rose, tulip, violet, hydrangea, orchid and jasmine.

This kind of adaption from another form of art Boodro calls 'quoting' (in Welters & Lillethun, 2011: 370). In this case, fashion designers have borrowed elements from literature and have translated them into fashion. In the present case, ZIB* has not replicated paintings made by Sūniņš that are included in Sakse's book. Instead, the designers have found inspiration within the narrative and interpreted it in their print designs.

The most interesting thing that happens when a motif from a book gets made into a garment, is that it gets a completely different context. The context is highly important for any text, because it determines how texts become part of other activities, and how they get integrated into the world. In short, context determines the ability to understand texts. Context is essential in understanding any utterance (Blommaert, 2005: 8), including both literary works and clothing.

In order to distinguish their collection from other designers' collections that use flowers as the main motif, ZIB* made a photo shoot where several clear

references to Sakse's fairy tales are included. For instance, the model that wears the dress of Orchid, sits in a tree as it is described in Sakse's *Flower Stories* (figure 27). Also the model in Violet's dress has an element that is described in Sakse's fairy tale dedicated to viola flower, namely a violin (figure 28).



Figure 27



Figure 28

Importantly, next to these photographs posted on the ZIB* website, there is also a text that explains what has been depicted. Roland Barthes would call this 'written clothing' (Barthes, 1990 [1967]). The texts that complement ZIB* garment photographs on the website, are inspired by Anna Sakse's fairy tales but at the same time they have been shortened and modified in order to put emphasis not so much on the events described in the book as on the main flower characteristics that personifies different women. By doing so, the garments acquire a sort of mythological meaning: these are not merely clothes that we see but rather garments with an idea or ideology behind them that have been described in words. In this case, 'written clothing' offers information that most probably one would not notice in the photograph of garment itself: the source of inspiration. When viewing the photographs of models wearing *Flower Stories* garments, they might appear to be just another dresses with floral prints, with no particular source of inspiration and no 'magic' around it. It is the 'written clothing' that helps us to comprehend *Flower Stories* by emphasising garment's deeper meaning and source of inspiration.

ZIB* is marketed for a big audience. The collections are highly wearable and practical, especially the collection of reflective knittings that merge functionality with design. The idea behind this collection is to make wearable reflective clothes and accessories that are a must-have during dark Latvian winters (ZIB, n.d., *Reflective Knittings*). ZIB* is also the first Latvian brand to launch a sportswear collection which gained a wide recognition. ZIB*, therefore, might be seen as a commercial

brand that spots empty niches within Latvian fashion and tries to refill them with their functional and colourful designs.

To sum up, Latvianness within the collection *Flower Stories* identifies with a particular Latvian literary work of the same title. In the respect of the *Flower Stories* collection, ZIB* does not duplicate the prints from the Anna Sakse's book illustrations. Instead, the label gets inspired by her stories and uses literary reference more as a creative impulse, and interprets the stories by changing the context from literature to fashion. For interpretation the label uses its personal signature style: simple and wearable clothing as well as vivid colours and prints.

Since the designs do not contain clear references to Anna Sakse's fairytales, at first glance the collection might seem to be just a casual floral print collection. The relation to Sakse's stories is more visible in the photo shoot for the collection's advertising campaign: here several elements (violin, bird, tree) that feature Sakse's stories, have been placed next to models wearing ZIB* garments. However, it is mostly the 'written clothing' on the label's homepage that clearly helps to understand what the collection stands for and what its source of inspiration is, thus rendering the collection more than just clothing. As Barthes suggests, words determine a single certainty and add knowledge to the image (1990 [1967]: 13-14; 17). The 'written clothing' creates the narrative of the collection, and this narrative refers to a Latvian literary work than is known as a part of cultural heritage. This kind of reuse of Sakse's fairytales not only adds deeper meaning to the collection but also gives 'a second chance' to the literary work, that many Latvians keep in their bookshelves covered with dust. Also foreign customers may find interesting this added value that enables them to purchase clothing with a deeper meaning and story behind it, than just another pretty garment mostly intended to cover one's naked body and protect from cold.

ANNA LED

The fashion label ANNA LED was established in 2002, and has today developed into one of the most recognised contemporary Latvian fashion labels known for its refined, sensual and elegant collections. The designer and founder of the brand Anna

Ledskalniņa was born in a creative and artistic family in Riga. She graduated from the Academy of Textile and Design in Saint Petersburg and has worked in the Riga Fashion House.

Since the label's foundation, ANNA LED presents four ready-to-wear collections per year: two seasonal and two semi-seasonal collections, City and Leisure lines (Creative Latvia, n.d., *ANNA LED*). The collections include skirts, dresses, trousers, sweaters, jackets and overcoats. In 2014 ANNA LED also started to design men's clothing. The brand presented first designs of men's fashion in the Spring/Summer 2014 collection, showcasing *Men's Weekend* line that featured linen shirts, cardigans and pants (ANNA LED, n.d., *Collections*).

The official ANNA LED website emphasises the importance of Latvianness as a source of inspiration. Among elements of inspiration like theatre plays, books, trips and street fashion in different parts of the world, one can find also walks on the seaside of Latvian city Jūrmala and pine forests. However, the most crucial source of the creative energy for the designer, according to the homepage, is her home town Riga, its narrow old streets and Art Nouveau architecture (ANNA LED, n.d., *About*).

The ANNA LED website does what Goodrum (2009: 465) calls 'spin 'authenticating' narratives' around the production: it emphasises the role that Riga plays as a location of ANNA LED style and fashion. The website claims that 'Riga is sometimes called the capital of Northern Europe, and has always been known for rich traditions of fashion ateliers, elegant style and creative spark. The city (sic) individuality was shaped by renowned architects that have embellished the streets of Riga with pearls of Art Nouveau architecture, as well as its people – elegantly dressed ladies sipping coffee with pastry in numerous old town cafes, or the artists and musicians that have always infused a vibrant ambiance in the city life with their bohemian chic' (ANNA LED, n.d., *Mood and Inspiration*).

Style of the brand intertwines the traditions and ethnic elements of the Baltic region, as well as contemporary fashion trends and high-tech fabrics: 'the designs of the brand blend traditions and nature of the Baltics that are reflected in combinations of different textures, soft shapes, toned down colors with bright accents, and last, but not the least – Baltic chic.' As ANNA LED homepage mentions, the colour palette of ANNA LED collections includes the shades of the Baltic sea, soft tones of Latvian seasons and indefinite shades of grey and hot azure that stand for the fast-changing

Latvian nature (ANNA LED, n.d., *About*). The label's designs are frequently described as elegant and subtle chic.

We see the emphasis of ANNA LED as a genuinely Latvian company, not merely being born and located in Riga but also asserting that the inspiration for designs has been found within Latvia and the Baltics. Furthermore, the website includes a personal designer's story of how during childhood she spent time with her grandmother 'who used to trust her wardrobe only to the best tailors in town' (ANNA LED, n.d., *About*). Because she followed her grandmother to fitting sessions, Anna Ledskalniņa decided to become a fashion designer. This kind of story renders the label more authentic and somewhat extends its history to the times when the label was not even yet established.

Authenticity is crucial today and it relates to modernisation and rise of mass production of consumer goods (Smelik, 2011: 77). Also Jenß insists that authenticity must not 'be expunged from the postmodern vocabulary', as David Muggleton has suggested (2004: 395). She proposes to rather try to understand how it is invested with meanings in the different social and cultural contexts. The feeling of authenticity underscores the ANNA LED label and philosophy behind it as being 'the real thing'. Another aspect that supports the authenticity of the label is the ANNA LED shop-studio. It is one of the rare fashion workshops in Latvia where under one roof the three core elements of the brand are situated - clothing store, design studio as well as production unit. The all-in-one workshop guarantees that the customer purchases locally designed, created and sold production. These three local aspects might even let a customer forget that most of the fabrics used for the production, are imported from abroad.

ANNA LED has a quite definite target audience: 'ballet dancers and architects, lawyers and high society clientele' (ANNA LED, n.d., *Customers*). The website claims that all these different women have something in common: '[i]t is their self-sufficiency, vitality and thirst for something new. They travel a lot around the world, are at front rows of all trendy theatre and movie premieres, and certainly are well informed about recent literature novelties' (ANNA LED, n.d., *Customers*). The slogan adds to this by saying 'Nice clothes for wise people'. Also the location of ANNA LED shop-studio partakes in the marketing of ANNA LED as a label for sophisticated and intelligent people. The studio is located in one of Riga's premier retail, business and residential locations, namely Berga Bazaar (Berga Bazārs), known

as a place of refined shops and restaurants, mostly visited by affluent Latvians and foreign guests.

In her collections Anna Ledskalniņa combines a vast variety of sometimes seemingly opposite elements. She uses silk threads in combination with rough linen, embeds straws within handmade cloth and adorns these garments with modern prints. The label is known for the use of natural materials and high-quality processing. Each garment is unique but thanks to the simple silhouette, it is easy to combine it with other garments (Live Riga, n.d., *ANNA LED*). Each collection is enriched with handmade laces, designer prints, batiks, and original accessories. The brand is famous for its experiments with knitwear, and one of its signature materials is linen (Creative Latvia, n.d., *ANNA LED*).

The Spring/ Summer 2015 ANNA LED collection is devoted to Riga and its architecture that embodies many different styles, of which Art Nouveau is the most notable one. The appearance of Art Nouveau dated back to the end of the 19th century when it displaced Eclecticism (Grosa, 1999: 202). It coincided with a period of rapid development in Latvia, particularly in Riga, which experienced a construction boom. As a result, over 800 Art Nouveau buildings were constructed (example: figures 29 and 30), so that Riga gained such titles as ‘the metropolis of Art Nouveau’ and ‘the European Art Nouveau capital’ (Eicher & Bartlett, 2010: 202). Apart from its inspiration from natural forms and structures expressed in architecture, Art Nouveau was translated also in dress and accessories and this movement became deeply embedded in Latvian culture (Ibid.).



Figure 29

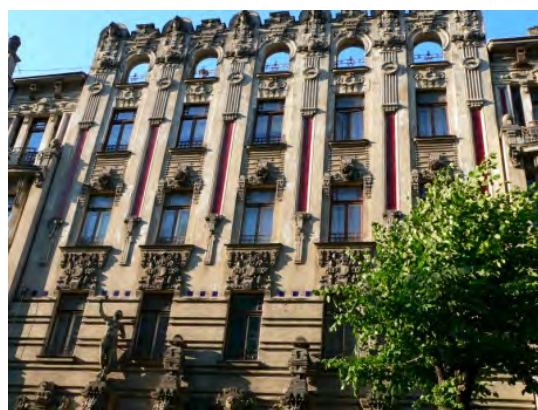


Figure 30

The ANNA LED website states: ‘being rich in its history does not prevent Latvian capital to be a modern city’ (ANNA LED, n.d., *Spring/ Summer 2015*). The

mix of history and modernity is also the approach of the designer for the Art Nouveau inspired collection, where innovative high-tech materials are combined with the historical and cultural values. The traditional materials of the brand - linen, cotton, mohair and silk - are blended with more modern materials like neoprene, elastane and synthesis of cotton and polyethylene.

Within the collection there are numerous designs whose source of inspiration, namely architecture, is not clearly visible as they look like ordinary, classic garments (figure 31). However, their silhouettes have architectural forms: A-silhouette and pencil skirts, asymmetric cuts, quite sharp edges, sheath and hourglass dresses. Notwithstanding, the collection also includes models where the vibe of architecture can be clearly seen because of the use of prints. These prints, designed by the young artist Mark Rozencov, are inspired by the architectural elements of Riga's Art Nouveau style (ANNA LED, n.d., *Spring/ Summer 2015*) (figures 32 and 33). The designs of the collection have sleek silhouettes that, according to the ANNA LED homepage, also bear resemblance with 'the eternal truth [of architecture]: all genius is simple, and the shape is what matters the most' (ANNA LED, n.d., *Spring/ Summer 2015*). In the collection's photo shoot for the look book, the presence of architecture has been stressed by white architectonic cubes placed next to the models.



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

Indeed, Art Nouveau buildings of Riga are regarded as national pride and one of the core elements of Latvianness. Art Nouveau is a substantial element for branding of Riga, as visitors from abroad are strongly advised to do not miss Alberta street which is *the* Art Nouveau street. With the Spring/ Summer 2015 collection ANNA LED participates in the so called self-exoticisation which 'involves an

acknowledgment of the exotic in the familiar' (Theodossopoulos, n.d.). Here we see that ANNA LED uses Art Nouveau not merely as a reference to Latvian cultural heritage that might be glorifying for Latvians as potential customers, but also as an exotic element interesting for foreign buyers.

If ZIB* is regarded as young, flashy and colourful day-to-day label and Recycled.lv as conceptual and more art-like brand, ANNA LED is a highly sophisticated one. ANNA LED simple and down-to-earth collections have been inspired by Latvian nature, architecture and Rigans' lifestyle. The label uses refined materials, simple and classic silhouettes, and subtle tones. The label's audience is intelligent, with a cultivated taste and lifestyle. The Spring/ Summer 2015 collection which is inspired by the architecture of Riga is not blatant. It includes only a few dresses with more striking architectural references such as prints. The other designs with their clean forms and colours barely manifest their specificity as architectural interpretations. ANNA LED - a brand that describes itself as being highly inspired by Latvianness - does it in an elegant and down-to-earth way.

Furthermore, not only ANNA LED fashion collections reflect their Latvian identity. The label also 'spins 'authenticating' narratives' around its Latvian identity on its website by describing the role that Latvianness plays in the artistic director's life and her collections. Here Latvia and Riga are mentioned as main sources of inspiration. Riga is also the city where the creative director of ANNA LED first decided to become a fashion designer, thus the label's connection to Riga is rendered more ancient than starting from its year of foundation. Another crucial aspect that renders ANNA LED clothing an authentic Latvian product, is its in-house design, production and sells. All these manufacturing facets are located on the premises of the fashion house, thus promoting the production as 'the real thing', not only inspired by Latvia but also locally designed and produced. Latvia has been endowed with almost a magical vibe as a place of 'where it all began' and as a country of endless inspiration.

QOOQOO

Probably the most miscellaneous elements of Latvianness have been adopted and transformed within QooQoo fashion collections. The founder of the fashion brand QooQoo is Alyona Bauska, a designer who was born in Riga in the 1980s. Bauska used to work as a graphic designer for the major Latvian advertising and design companies, but in 2009 she launched her fashion brand QooQoo and created a clothing collection for Riga Fashion Week's afterparty in March 2010. Shortly afterwards Bauska designed a series of colourful printed leggings, which was unique at the time. Her vision of fashion gained genuine fashion lover recognition mainly in Latvia but also in other countries, rendering QooQoo an established fashion brand.

Presenting ready-to-wear fashion collections twice a year, QooQoo encompasses simple shapes and playful mood of the pieces. The label offers some unisex garments as well as colourful womenswear: dresses, tops, skirts, leggings, socks and swimwear. QooQoo strives to keep a simple silhouette of garments while at the same time having an ironic and fun attitude. Significant designs to the QooQoo collections are the colourful leggings, long-sleeved sweatshirts, simple silhouette dresses and printed T-shirts. They all are characterised as colourful and optimistic, adorned with bold and witty prints. The image of the label is stressed also by the mascot of the brand - the QooQoo bird (figure 34) - that defines the playful and humorous approach and style of the brand (QooQoo, n.d., *Celebrating contemporary fashion*).

Probably the most humorous and ironic collection is *Crimson Decay*, launched in 2014. T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats and jackets of the collection are adorned with prints inspired by hip hop and *urla* subcultures. The hip hop subculture with its origins in Afro American culture in late 1960s can be related with the process of globalisation. Hip hop spread to many other countries and it reached Latvia around the 1980s (Kanasta, 2012). Latvian hip hop can be seen as a form of glocalization: the global phenomenon (hip hop) has been adopted in Latvian culture, but at the same time it has been adjusted to local specificity. This specificity manifests in music the most, as the major part of Latvian hip hop and rap music is performed in Latvian and the lyrics touch upon themes mostly topical in Latvia. Also visually the representatives of Latvian hip hop differ from those in the United States, mostly due to the fact that all Latvian hip hop representatives (and Latvian people in general) are white.

The *urla* subculture, on the other hand, has originated in Latvia and has a highly negative connotation within Latvian society (Šlāpnis, 2000). *Urla* refers to the lowest social class in Latvia, mostly associated with Russians from suburbs of Riga. People of this subculture typically wear tracksuits (sometimes complemented with dress shoes) and are regarded as aggressive, unintelligent and keen on smoking and drinking alcohol. *Urla* is somewhat similar to English *chav* and Russian *gopnik* (гопник) subcultures.

Here we see how ‘trickle-up’ or ‘bubble-up’ theory functions: the fashion label has inspired by a low social class subculture and transforms these borrowed elements into clothing presented in fashion magazines and on catwalks. It is this new context that determines the transformation of elements from subcultural identity into a desirable commodity that people who have access to this clothing wear with pride. By adopting this subcultural identity (in a more or less evident way), the negative connotation has been given up and instead an ironic aspect has emerged.

Crimson Decay collection includes quilted jacket with drawings of *urla* and ‘90’s ghetto boys, badass babes and their pets’ (QooQoo, n.d., *Crimson Decay*) (figure 35). Another example of this ‘bubble up play’ is the t-shirt with a lettering ‘Ghetto № 8’ (figure 36). The print is inspired by *Chanel № 5*, and the number 8 was chosen because this is the eight QooQoo’s collection. These examples offer another ironic and seemingly incompatible combination of high and low cultures, where emblems of the subculture have been immersed in another context - fashion - and therefore becomes somewhat chic and desirable.

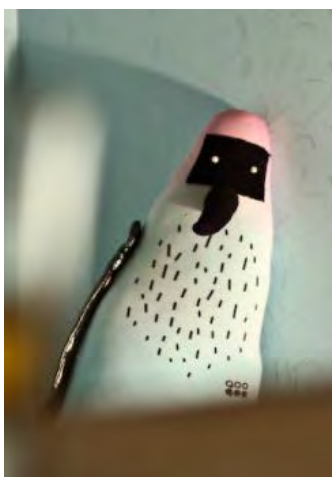


Figure 34



Figure 35

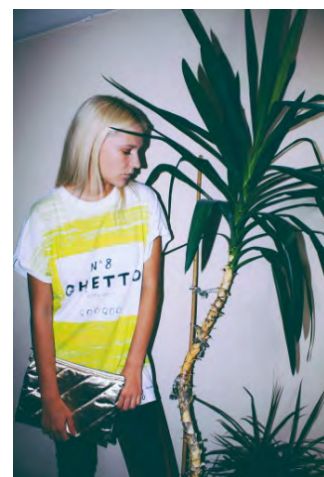


Figure 36

The most popular pieces of the *Crimson Decay* collection are T-shirts and hats with lettering ‘ЯРАДА’ (figures 37 and 38) which is obviously inspired by PRADA replica design from the 90’s (QooQoo, n.d., *Crimson Decay*). Rose notes that for hip hop culture it is common to patch-stitch fake brands’ emblems on clothing (in Welters & Lillethun, 2011: 425). QooQoo goes even beyond this idea and not only replicates the PRADA emblem but also plays with Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. We see that the first two letters from ‘PRADA’ have switched places and ‘R’ has been written the other way. Indeed, it is not without reason: in Russian ‘ЯРАДА’ means ‘I’m happy’ and in Latvian it is close to ‘have to do’ or ‘have to create’. The following word combination ‘Здесь и сейчас’ means ‘right here and now’ in Russian. Therefore, the lettering is appealing and interesting for both Latvians and Russians, as well as for people who like the irony regarding reference to the Italian label PRADA. It is therefore a combination of the local (due to its pronunciation ‘ЯРАДА’ can be understood as ‘have to create’ in Latvian), the ‘other’ local (references to Russian subpopulation in Latvia), and the global traditions (reference to the Italian fashion brand that has been known and purchasable all around the globe). In terms of glocalization, an interesting dialogue has been created between ‘cultural otherness’ and Latvianness within the single garment.



Figure 37



Figure 38

Although QooQoo does not take over style from the subcultures (like sweatpants or super-oversized pants), the collection includes clear references to them. *Crimson Decay* collection plays with this very much unpleasant *urla* and ghetto image and masterly elevates it to the catwalk level. Indeed, it seems insane that people, even more so Latvian people, would purchase and wear clothing with references to *urla*

subculture. However, Bauska asserts that ЯRADA pieces were (and probably still are) the most popular ones among both nationalities - Latvian and Russian (Timofejevs, 3 March 2015). Most probably it can be explained by the fact that QooQoo has a rather specified target audience. On the official homepage, the artistic director of the label says 'bringing out the desire to create clothing for people, who seek individuality in the everyday and are courageous to infuse some irony in their looks' (QooQoo, n.d., *Celebrating contemporary fashion*). QooQoo is marketed for 'bright personalities' and 'individuals with their own personal style' (Creative Latvia, n.d., *QooQoo*), people who are able to look at themselves and others with an irony. The QooQoo website indicates the ethics of label's production: clothes are made with respect to people and the environment; fabrics are made in Europe and garments are sewn in Latvia, under fair working conditions (QooQoo, n.d., *Celebrating contemporary fashion*). Thus the label aims at young, ironic, playful and somewhat 'out of ordinary' customers that at the same time care about fashion ethics and ethical production.

In Latvia QooQoo creations are highly popular, becoming best-sellers in the local fashion scene. In 2011 QooQoo won the Latvian National Style and Fashion Award as Best Designer Debut of the year. QooQoo clothing has been noticed not only in Latvia but also abroad. QooQoo collections have been published in several publications worldwide: *L'Officiel Latvia*, *Pastaiga*, *Lilit*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue China*, *Elle China*, *Vogue.it*, *NYLON blog*, *Stella Magazine* and others (Creative Latvia, n.d., *QooQoo*). In the interview for *Arterritory.com*, Bauska also reveals that in 2014 the proportion of Latvian and foreign buyers was about fifty-fifty (Timofejevs, 3 March 2015).

QooQoo is actively participating in different collaboration projects with other well-known Latvian fashion brands like shoe brand Zofa and bag brand ArtBag. In October 2011 the label created design for cosmetic bags for *Maybelline New York* and later found an inspiration for prints within *Maybelline Baby Lips* lipstick design.

In 2015 the brand launched a collection in collaboration with the Latvian National Museum of Arts, using art objects from the national golden fund of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design. Interestingly, it was the museum that decided to collaborate with Bauska and not vice versa. The reason of this collaboration project is the museum's desire to restore and bring up to date its exposition thereby giving it 'a second chance' (Timofejevs, 3 March 2015). The result

of this collaboration is a QooQoo collection that mostly includes references to porcelain (figure 39), stained glass windows (figure 40) and textile art (figure 41) that compose the museum's golden fund. The collection has been noticed by Museum of Applied Arts in Cologne, Germany (Museum für Angewandte Kunst Köln): the museum requested a dress from this collection for the major fashion exhibition that will take place in 2015. QooQoo's dress with stained glass prints will be displayed next to pieces made by Vivienne Westwood and Yves Saint Laurent (Timofejevs, 3 March 2015).



Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41

Another QooQoo's collaboration partner is Tru Fix Kru - a company owned by three young men, proud to be from Riga, with a passion for fixed gear bikes called 'fixies'. The company promotes the bicycle as an alternative vehicle and also create their clothing collections that reflect Latvian national identity. Tru Fix Kru, just like QooQoo, views the Latvian cultural heritage as fertile ground through which to transplant their ideas on national identity. They tell the story and philosophy of the company not only verbally or through advertising campaigns, but also support it materially as an integrated part of the design of the clothes. Even the logo that features Tru Fix Kru garments makes direct reference to the label's Latvian identity: it consists of a skull with the Latvian mythological symbol of Sun in one of the eyes, and symbol of *Jumis* on the chin. This logo is constantly adopted in several designs by changing some details according to the desired image. For instance, it was adopted for two T-shirts devoted to the Lāčplēsis Day (*Lāčplēša diena*) - the day on which Latvians celebrate the victory over the Western Russian Volunteer Army (Bermont forces) on the 11 November every year. Lāčplēsis is the hero of the Latvian national epos. On the T-shirt we see the Tru Fix Kru skull wearing traditional Lāčplēsis' hat

with bear's ears and mythological symbol of Auseklis on the chin (figure 42). The other T-shirt represents a skull with references to Lāčplēsis' lover Laimdota who looks like a traditional Latvian maiden (although still a skull) with a braid and the traditional crown which says 'RĪGA' on her head (figure 43).



Figure 42



Figure 43

Another Tru Fix Kru garment that reflects Latvianness is a white T-shirt with the traditional Lielvārde Sash (*Lielvārdes josta*) pattern on the pocket (figure 44). The same pattern features also leggings named 'Latvian', made in collaboration with QooQoo (figure 45). On QooQoo homepage it is emphasised that these leggings are locally produced and endowed with 'eternal power and strength' (QooQoo, n.d., *Latvian*). The emphasis on the power of heritage pattern used for the print, is another example of 'meta goods' concept that I already explained in the previous chapter and elaborated in the case study of Linda Leen. The authentic feeling and origins have been stressed even further by listing the 'ingredients' used in the production of these leggings. The website claims that the ingredients of this product include *Lielvārdes josta* (Lielvārde's sash) and 'grandmothers tales' (QooQoo, n.d., *Latvian*). This claim renders the modern garment more authentic and relates it to the past and heritage.



Figure 44



Figure 45

While QooQoo is a Latvian brand that frequently uses references to Latvian national identity in the design, there is also a presence of ‘the other’ in its creative work. The most striking example of the otherness within QooQoo designs, is the collection *Timeless Vol. 1*, where prints with references to the French writer Marcel Proust are present. Several T-shirts and leggings display Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) book cover (figure 46), citations (figure 47) and Proust’s portrait (figure 48). Interestingly, in several photographs on the QooQoo homepage, we see these Proust-inspired garments combined with designs that include references to Latvian art (Figure 49). It creates a play between the Latvian art (stained glass, porcelain painting and textile art) and French art (literature). It generates a blend of Latvianness and Frenchness, where the Latvianness is connected to the label’s location, whereas Frenchness is something exotic and fascinating. This play contributes to the ‘glocalness’ of the collection where ‘the local’ has been used simultaneously with the label’s fascination for ‘the other’ (Smelik et al, in press) in this case a famous French writer.



Figure 46



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49

Similar to ZIB*, also QooQoo is a commercial brand marketed for a big audience. Alyona Bauska admits that she is keen on developing the marketing of her production. She created QooQoo official homepage and is very active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. As she maintains ‘sometimes I am not even sure what I enjoy most: designing and creating things or their promotion. Today my goal is to bring joy to as many people as possible’ (Timofejevs, 3 March 2015; my translation). It shows the commercial character of QooQoo: it is positioned as a democratic and available label for anyone whose life philosophy corresponds the label’s philosophy and who can afford it.

From all the fashion labels analysed within the context of this Master’s thesis, QooQoo offers the greatest diversity of Latvianness in its collections. In collaboration with the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design the label designed several garments that reflect artworks of such notable Latvian artists as Aleksandra Beļcova (1892–1981), Sigismunds Vidbergs (1890–1970), Romāns Suta (1896–1944), Jūlijs Straume (1874–1970) and Jēkabs Šķērstēns (1890–1940). On the official website, QooQoo has complemented this clothing with some garments devoted to the French writer Proust. This combination shows the label’s fascination not only for the local traditions but also for ‘the other’. Another collaboration with the company Tru Fix Kru brought about design appropriated from ancient Latvian pattern that QooQoo has applied for leggings and T-shirts, thus partaking in ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’ by modernising the borrowings from past traditions.

Apart from inspiration that comes from the ‘pleasant Latvianness’, neither has QooQoo ignored Latvian subcultures. Although Latvians most probably would like to keep as distanced as possible from being somehow associated with *urla* subculture, it is a local phenomenon that, even though identified with Russian subpopulation, has become a part of Latvian cultural scene. QooQoo plays with local and global traditions by combining them in a single garment or look. An example of it is the lettering ‘ЯRADA’ which features several QooQoo garments. It is an ironic combination of Latvianness (QooQoo as a Latvian brand and ‘ЯRADA’ due to its pronunciation as ‘have to create’ in Latvian); the lettering’s reference to Russian subpopulation in Latvia (in Russian ‘ЯRADA’ means ‘I’m happy’); and lastly the reference to the iconic Italian fashion label PRADA. The single lettering therefore includes remarks to the local Latvian identity, the ‘local other’ and ‘the other’. It adds

to the label's manifestation of glocalization where QooQoo has an interest in the local Latvian traditions but at the same time it is fascinated by cultural otherness.

QooQoo's *Crimson Decay* collection demonstrates the 'trickle-up' or 'bubble-up' theory according to which the innovation starts on the streets and gets adopted from lower income groups to upper-income groups. The case of QooQoo *Crimson Decay* collection is rather extreme as the references 'from the street' are linked to *urla* subculture which has a highly negative connotation among Latvians. By borrowing elements of this subculture, QooQoo has changed its context from antifashions to a desired ironic fashion commodity.

As I have demonstrated, the design narratives surrounding QooQoo relate both to the Latvian cultural heritage but also to contemporary subcultures and their associated anti-fashions. In another context, outside Latvia, QooQoo's T-shirts, leggings, and simple cuts might become generic of their kind as they have a Western vibe. However, due to the Latvian patterns and cultural references implemented in their prints, some of the garments appear to be differentiated as particularly Latvian. The others, that include references to the cultural otherness, might be ironic and appealing also for customers who do not know a lot about Latvian culture and are not aware of the fact that the garment they are wearing comes from Latvia and manifests Latvianness.

The five case studies of Latvian fashion labels Linda Leen, Recycled.lv, ZIB*, ANNA LED, and QooQoo provide a wide range of different methods of how Latvian designers implement Latvian identity within their collections. All five brands employ references to Latvian cultural heritage may it be literature, national costumes, works of art or architecture. Each label adapts these references to their own particular style and philosophy.

Maeder claims that 'people in each age create a style that is the acceptable and comfortable aesthetic for their day. Accordingly when we try to re-create historical costumes (...) our vision is so influenced by contemporary style that we cannot be objective, and the result is always an interpretation' (in Jenß, 2004: 392). It is also the case of Latvian designers who 'quote' the past and adapt it to modern lifestyle and demands. All these 'quotations' of the cultural heritage have been translated into modern, contemporary fashion designs that stand out among other fashion brand's production due to their specific narratives linked to Latvianness. Although Latvians

seem to be very proud of their cultural heritage, most probably the audience would not accept contemporary fashion that resembles a reproduction of ancient costumes. Instead of duplicates, people strive for something familiar, yet modern and appropriate for today's needs and norms at the same time. Furthermore, Jenß notes that also the shape, posture, and movements of contemporary bodies 'may actually clash with the materiality of historic garments and transform their "original" appearance' (2004: 392). This aspect gives another reason for changing the original design adopted from the cultural heritage.

The examined fashion labels mostly refer to Latvian ethnography and national costumes, as well as architecture, literature, works of art and nature. Another component of Latvianness appearing in these collections is the references to contemporary subcultures. Although up until now QooQoo is the only label embracing this element of contemporary Latvian cultural scene, this kind of ironic touch has brought the brand a wide recognition in Latvia and abroad.

CONCLUSION

A huge increase in fashion cities, as Lise Skov (2011) points out, characterises the contemporary scenario. In our era of globalisation, fashions are popping up all over the place, as is demonstrated by the increasingly numerous fashion weeks all over the world and small nations' desire to promote their distinct fashion identities. Also Latvia, a country ranked as the fifth model-producing nation per capita (PBS, n.d., *The International Model Supply Chain*), tries to enter the global fashion scene not only by delivering models to the fashion industry but also by offering unique design.

Fashion theorists believe that fashion reflects social, economic, cultural and even political changes, but also that fashion expresses modernity and symbolises the spirit of the times (Lehmann, 2000; Welters & Lillethun, 2011). If so, then the times from 2010 till 2015 (and probably the coming years as well) can be characterised as revealing and recreating of Latvian identity and cultural heritage. It seems that mostly two domains are experiencing this phenomenon: Latvian cuisine and Latvian fashion. Changes within Latvian cuisine initiated in 2010 when Latvian top chefs started to revolutionise their restaurants' menus by complementing them with ingredients and dishes that were traditionally associated with food of peasants and poor ('Kāda ir mūsdienu Latvijas garša?', Nov 2014). By adding a modern twist to these traditional (and sometimes even neglected) recipes, they have conquered recognition of both Latvians as well as foreign visitors thereby rendering cuisine an effective branding tool.

We see a similar thing happening also within fashion. The history of Latvia has demonstrated that Latvian people's desire to express their national identity through clothing has been present most of the time. However, the most evident usage of national identity within fashion commenced in 2010, simultaneously with establishment of most Latvian fashion organisations and stores that promote Latvian fashion.

As I have demonstrated, a rather large number of Latvian designers employ references to Latvian identity within their fashion collections in order to differ them from other local and foreign labels' production. By manifesting Latvianness, these collections partake in commodification of Latvian identity as the identity has become a desired good to sell and purchase along with fashion garments.

The main task of this Master's thesis was to answer the research question: 'How does Latvian national identity manifest itself through contemporary Latvian fashion?'. By answering this question, it can be noted that today, centuries old traditions and elements of cultural heritage have been revealed, but instead of replicating and using them in their original form, designers borrow details from past and translate them into modern designs. Melchior, Skov and Csaba (2011) have termed this process 'cosmopolitan nationalism' which stands for 'having 'roots' and 'wings' at the same time' (Beck, 2002: 19). These designs, therefore, combine present with historic distance (Jenß, 2004: 398). Although such 'nationalised' designs still largely remind Latvians of their nationhood, it is a mediated, indirect form of reflecting national identity which is appropriated for modern lifestyle.

In her research on British fashion, Alison Goodrum argues that young British designers are trying not to engage in fashion nostalgia: there is a tension between old imperial Britishness tradition and more forward-thinking and creative designers (Goodrum, 2005). As far as it concerns Latvian fashion designers, the use of Latvianness in fashion design is a truly dominant trend at the moment. Those are particularly the young designers that strive to use the references to cultural heritage within their collections. The five case studies selected and analysed within this Master's thesis - Linda Leen, Recycled.lv, ANNA LED, ZIB*, and QooQoo - are just a part from all Latvian designers who find inspiration within their own local roots for their collections. It seems that there is no embarrassment or disinclination of using Latvian national costume or mythological elements within fashion design, quite the contrary - it truly appears to be a trend interpreted according to each label's signature style.

The creative appropriation of elements of historic styles might have different reasons: to challenge history by encouraging dialogues between past and present, to offer an escape from modern life or to create a fashion identity that is different from other countries' identities. In a time of globalisation, this self-referential tendency to incorporate the Latvian cultural heritage into new design has been a common thread among well-known Latvian brands. When clothing with strong references to the national identity have been exported, signs, symbols and character traits are exported simultaneously (Goodrum, 2005: 97). Along with the export of Latvian fashion, therefore, the export of Latvian signs, symbols and character traits takes place. By helping to promote Latvianness of these fashion garments, references to the national

identity reinforce the respective brands' established place in the nation's cultural scene.

By studying data of Latvian import and export of 2010 (Strazds, 2011), it can be noticed that both import and export are dynamic which shows the interaction between Latvia and other countries. However, it mostly refers to fibres, fabrics, underwear and industrial ready-to-wear garments, but the market analysis of the artistic Latvian fashion design is not included. Therefore, it can be argued that it still takes up a tiny market share.

One of the greatest obstacles for rapid development of Latvian fashion is that fashion lacks political support. It is mostly because the Ministry of Culture considers fashion as a business, but the Ministry of Economy regard it as art (Delfi, 26 May 2009), thus no political force takes proper care of the fashion industry, so it is tossed around constantly. Another complication is that there is no rigid policy of the Creative Industries established yet. A strict policy would be fruitful in order to manage and promote the Creative Industries in the country. Furthermore, Latvia with its less than two million inhabitants is a small market and it cannot provide enough buyers for the fashion industry, therefore designers are actively seeking opportunities for export. For now the Ministry of Culture takes care of cultural industries in Latvia. Dita Danosa argues that as long as the Ministry of Economy does not take it over, no productive export is possible (Zalāne, n.d.).

Creative design should be related to industrial and economical development so that fashion steps out of its image as art and becomes closer to business. Some changes might emerge in the following years as several fashion organisations have been established since 2010. These organisations aim at discussing issues around the fashion industry with ministries and come up with adequate solutions (Zalāne, n.d.).

Although Latvian fashion system lacks stability, Latvians are a few steps ahead of Estonians and Lithuanians, as in these neighbouring countries the local fashion still lacks recognition (Drazdovska, 13 Apr 2012). According to Goodrum, also in the United Kingdom the local British fashion is dead, as mostly elderly tourists buy 'British image' (2005: 111). In Latvia, on the contrary, numerous fashion stores, internet shops, magazines, and Latvian celebrities partake in the promotion of Latvian fashion garments. All these aspects render Latvian fashion locally notable and desired. Not only one can see Latvian fashion design on the red carpet of social events, but also on the streets, worn by youngsters as well as more mature people. Where else can you

see numerous locals wearing T-shirts with the name of their city on top of them? Riga is one of these places (if not the only one) where this form of 'proud to be Rigan' manifests strongly. Indeed, abundant people in the streets of Riga proudly wear T-shirts, produced by Latvian brand Miesai, with lettering 'RĪGA' on top of them (for examples visit miesai.com or rigashirts.com).

However, it would not be correct to see Latvian fashion as merely reuse of local traditions and interpretation of the national identity. Apart from the truly Latvian collections and labels, there are also some who have a completely different approach. The most striking counterexample is the label Mareunrol's and its creative directors Māriņe Mastiņa and Rolands Pēterkops who 'have not backed down from their ambition to change the stereotypes of Latvian fashion and break the general view that Latvian designers work mainly with amber and linen' (Live Riga, n.d., *Mareunrol's*). Mareunrol's is the most notable Latvian brand outside Latvia and the first one to participate in Paris Fashion Week. The label's creative directors claim that their designs are appropriate for daily wear, although they often seem to stand closer to avant-garde than everyday clothing (Unconventional, 26 Sept 2014). Most probably that is the reason of why on streets of Latvia QooQoo leggings or ZIB* dresses are seen way more often than Mareunrol's garments: they are more wearable and comprehensible, withal available for more democratic prices. In such a small market as Latvia, wearability is a crucial aspect for a brand to survive. Wearability of a garment also elevates the utilisation of national identity to a pretty much mass or mainstream phenomenon: more people find it appealing and can afford to buy such designs as everyday clothing costs less than art-like garments.

Another Latvian brand that does not engage in the promotion of Latvian national identity, is Katya Katya Shehurina. This label's design style 'reflects modern vintage inspired aesthetic, impeccable craftsmanship and a lightweight ethereal finish' (Katya Katya Shehurina, n.d., *About Us*). The label opened its first flagship store in London in 2011. The brand is known for its sophisticated dresses made of lace. While its collections are available in many of the world's finest bridal and designer boutiques as well as online, in Latvia it is truly complicated to find Katya Katya Shehurina clothing.

As these two examples of Mareunrol's and Katya Katya Shehurina demonstrate, Latvian fashion design is not homogeneous and is not constantly directed to the manifestation of Latvianness. Notwithstanding, delving into the past

and present traditions have lent an authority and a deeper meaning to the work of many Latvian designers as the case studies of Linda Leen, Recycled.lv, ANNA LED, ZIB*, and QooQoo have shown. These, within the national identity rooted labels and their collections, are interesting for Latvians as they always strive to be visible among other bigger and historically more influential countries. Garments with references to local culture allow the labels to manifest their Latvianness clearly. At the same time, foreign customers also show an increasing interest in this production. Most of the 'explicitly Latvian' designs are universal enough to be wearable and desirable outside Latvia: the references to Latvian national identity are mostly visible in prints, while the garment per se has a simple and universal silhouette. Since Norwegian knitted patterns and Indian symbols have been used in fashion worldwide, why would not Latvian patterns become a global phenomenon?

If the goal of Latvian identity becoming a globally appreciated and admired commodity is too utopian, the fashion produced in and inspired by Latvia may become a great souvenir for foreign visitors. This kind of 'souvenirs' have a much higher added-value than 'I ♥ Latvia' T-shirts or mugs, that are mostly produced in China, and therefore the only link to its Latvianness is the lettering on it. Although most fabrics used for Latvian fashion design have been imported, the garments' design and production are local. It renders the product more authentic as not only its surface reflects Latvianness, but also its origins are Latvian.

This Master's thesis has answered the research question of how does Latvian national identity manifest itself through contemporary Latvian fashion. The thesis has shown the relevance of cultural heritage within contemporary Latvian fashion design as it is the most manifested and commodified element of Latvianness. Next to references to ethnography, mythology, national costumes, architecture and literature, some labels also incorporate symbols of contemporary Latvian culture. Such brands as QooQoo, for instance, are aware of the power of globalisation which has brought about foreign influences that have been integrated within Latvian culture. Globalisation offers a huge diversity but at the same time endangers small cultures to lose their particularity. Maybe that is why 'flagging' with national symbols or rather 'cosmopolitan nationalism' is truly necessary to some extent: to remind us who we are, where we come from and what is so special about us, while at the same time not living in past traditions but embracing them and adapting for modern times.

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