

# Identity Code: Plurality, Binary, Zero

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Članek obravnava koncept identitete v romanu Olge Tokarczuk *Beguni*. Upoštewane so pluralne, binarne in ničelne identitete. Prikazano je, kako se omenjeni koncept odraža v literaturi, obenem pa so izpostavljeni tudi elementi filozofije in kulturologije, saj so prav tako pomembni za razumevanje romana. Prikazana je povezava med binarno in pluralno identiteto ter fizično oz. psihično razcepljenostjo posameznika. Obravnavani so odrazi ničelne identitete in možni vzroki za njen nastanek. Pri tem tipu je eden ključnih dejavnikov občutek brezbrzičnosti. Določen je tudi pomen osnovnih opozicij za oblikovanje lastnega jaza. Predlagana je nova shema oblikovanja identitete, ki temelji na primarni potrebi po samoobrambi. Posebna pozornost je namenjena naslovu romana, njegovim prevodnim možnostim in povezavam. Prikazani so tudi dejavniki, ki vplivajo na identiteto, npr. preusmeritev pozornosti, kriza, želja, sprememba prioritet, prevrednotenje vrednot, težnja po poenostavljanju.

The article studies the identity concept in the novel *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk. Plural, binary, and zero identities are considered. The article shows how the concept of identity is manifested in literature, although it also contains elements of philosophy and cultural studies, as they are important for a better understanding of the novel. The connection between binary and plural identities and the individual's physical or mental "splitting" is shown. Manifestations of zero identity and possible reasons for its formation are discussed. For this type, a feeling of indifference is defined as one of the key factors. The importance of basic oppositions for the forming of one's own "I" was also determined. A new scheme of identity formation, which is based on the primary need for self-defence, is proposed. Special attention is paid to the novel's title, its translation options, and its associated concepts. The impact on identity of factors such as attention shift, crisis, desire, change of priorities, reevaluation of values, and tendency towards simplification is also demonstrated.

**Ključne besede:** identiteta, Olga Tokarczuk, *Beguni*, poljska književnost

**Key words:** identity, Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights*, Polish literature

## 1 Introduction

Identity is an essential component of every person's psyche. Interest in this concept is explained by its value as a determinant of the individual's place and role in society, as well as a basic element of self-knowledge. The universality of identity is caused by its vague understanding. That is why specialists in various fields (linguistics, literature, philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, etc.) are increasingly choosing this concept as the object of their research. However, it still has not been thoroughly studied. The topic's actuality is determined by the individuals' need for self-determination, which is so necessary in the modern world. Our work's novelty lies in analysing the novel's fragments that have not been studied in this aspect before and in a fresh look at the identity formation stages.

The present article attempts to partially fill the gap by considering different types of identity (plural, binary, zero) in literary context, namely on the example of the novel *Flights* by the world-famous Polish writer, Nobel Prize winner Olga Tokarczuk. Although the present article focuses on the literary aspect, it also contains elements of philosophy and cultural studies, as they are necessary for a better understanding of literature.

The novel *Flights* was published in Krakow in 2007. It immediately drew the attention of both readers and critics alike: in 2008, Olga Tokarczuk received the Nike Award, which is the highest literary award in Poland. In 2018, *Flights* won the Man Booker International Prize, and this was the first time a Polish author received it. Olga Tokarczuk shared the prize with Jennifer Croft, who translated the mentioned book into English (The New York Times, 2018).

*Flights* is a fragmentary novel. Its structure is unconventional – it consists of 116 separate and seemingly unrelated fragments.. They differ in length – some stories span over dozens of pages, while others take the form of short, a few lines long, notes.. The action takes place at different times and in different places, and the characters mostly differ among each other. The character that stands out the most in the novel is a nameless heroine, whose story is told in the first person. Olga Tokarczuk presents her as the “author” of the majority of notes included in this book. The unique structure of this work and its popularity make it an interesting research material.

The novel *Flights* has repeatedly been the subject of research by scholars from Poland, Ukraine and other countries. For example, Krzysztof Hoffman studied the peculiarities of this work's structure, the translation of its title into English, the narration and the subject matter. He also compared the approach of O. Tokarczuk and J. Derrida (Hoffman 2019: 113–120). Finding traces of deconstruction in *Flights*, K. Hoffman points out the fact that the reader often gets lost in the numerous fragments of the novel. At the same time, this losing track of the guiding line is not accidental – it becomes a necessary experience for the recipient. In our opinion, the chaotic structure of the book symbolizes the chaos, the variability, characteristic of the modern world. However, this

chaos has a certain harmony to it, due to the ultimate goal. Both the reader and the individual (in the broader sense) are here intended to gain experience and move to a higher stage of development. In the process of acquiring this experience, identity is formed.

Anna Larenta was primarily interested in the peculiar structure of *Flights*, which she compares with a mythical labyrinth (Larenta 2014: 341–342). She considers this labyrinth an instrument with a specific function – it helps the author take the reader to the sacred area. According to A. Larenta, geographical and mythical spaces coexist, and humans need the latter one to organize and understand reality surrounding them. It is our belief that identity can also be used as an instrument. Understanding who one is and where his place is makes the world around us easier to perceive, and vice versa: perception of surroundings facilitates building one’s own personality and finding one’s natural “I”.

Madlen Shulgун draws attention to the fact that the postmodern “traveler” does not have a global goal for his movement. Aesthetic guidelines are more important for him than moral guidelines (Шульгун 2016: 83–89). The ultimate goal of the travels of some characters in the novel *Flights* might not be that evident, however, this goal exists. In contrast to the “traditional” journey, in which the end point is clearly defined and named, the purpose here is not a point but a segment. The goal is the journey itself, as well as the experience and transformation it brings.

Barbara Trygar also speaks of the purpose of the journey, drawing attention to the deep meaning that underlies travel. She draws a parallel between the movement of characters in time and space, which opens up new dimensions and possibilities for interpretations of *Flights* (Trygar 2015: 18–30).

Scientific literature, however, has not yet explored the three types of identity manifested in the novel *Flights*, which is why it will be discussed in this paper, making it a potentially valuable contribution to this topic. In the following, the first type, namely binary identity, will be discussed more in detail.

## **2 Result and discussion**

### ***Binary identity***

The novel consists of 116 essays – it has a ‘multiple’ structure. Accordingly, the binary aspect, expressed through oppositions, constantly reoccurs in the plot. Moreover, there are also signs of multiple and zero identities. This heterogeneity constitutes the basis for our study, prompting us to look at identity from a different perspective. It shifted from a traditional “single” structure into a characteristic that can undergo not only qualitative but also quantitative changes.

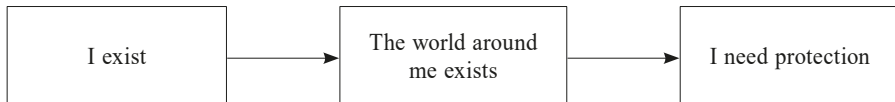
First of all, we will take a closer look at the term *identity*. It means “a person’s name and other facts about who they are”; “the fact of being or feeling the same”; “showing or proving who someone is”; “the reputation, characteristics,

etc. of a person or organization that makes the public think about them in a particular way”; “who a person is, or information that proves who a person is, for example, their name and date of birth”, “who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others”; “the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organization, etc. different from others” (Cambridge Dictionary). *Identity* can be also understood as “an essential feature on which a person or society is based in responding to something other than oneself” (Suminto 2020: 311). As we can see, it is important to contrast “I” – “others”, “own” – “foreign” for this term in its modern scientific vision. Therefore, binary is already embedded in this concept.

The Polish version of the novel’s title – *Bieguni* will also be brought into focus. It is associated with the name of some group of Russian Old Believers who were convinced that they could escape from evil only through constant movement. This sect appeared in Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even though the entire book was named after the sect, it is not its main theme (Jarzyńska 2020). The Old Believers are not described in the novel and they are seldom mentioned. Olga Tokarczuk only uses the sectarian idea of constant movement. She calls the slightly crazy, homeless woman from the story *Bieguni* (one of the many stories included in the novel) the Old Believer. This woman expresses one of the main ideas of the book: “*Kiwaj się, ruszaj się, ruszaj. Tylko tak mu umkniesz. Ten, kto rządzi światem, nie ma władzy nad ruchem i wie, że nasze ciało w ruchu jest święte, tylko wtedy mu uciekasz, kiedy się poruszasz*” (Tokarczuk 2009: 291) – Eng. “*Rock, move, move. That’s the only way you’ll escape him. The one who rules the world has no power over movement and knows that our body in motion is sacred, you only run away from him when you move*” (here and below the titles and quotes are translated into English by this article’s author). Thus, Olga Tokarczuk uses the word *Bieguni* figuratively. For her, this word refers to all the characters in the book, to all who strive for constant movement.

The lexeme *bieguni* is also associated with a similar word *bieguny* – “poles”. The poles oppose each other, and the Earth exists within this opposition. The world lives and develops due to this contrast, and so does human personality. The worldview and identity of the latter are formed and developed in a similar manner. Mieczysław Dąbrowski points out the importance of opposition, too (Dąbrowski 2011). Interestingly, this connotation is lost in the translations of the novel (Ukrainian *Бігуни*, Russian *Бегуны*, English *Flights*). The novel also mentions poles in one of the essay’s title: *Wyprawa na biegun* (Eng. *A Trip to the Pole*). In addition, opposition is observed in the title (as well as in the essay itself) of the essay *Żaba i ptak* (Eng. *A Frog and a Bird*). In it, the main character speaks of two points of view: a frog’s perspective and a bird’s eye view from a height. Accordingly, the choice of one or another point will affect the formation of the human’s identity and the understanding of herself. The heroine chooses the way of maximum simplification, claiming that life does not exist – there are only individual lines and planes, and their changes

over time. Time, in turn, is seen by her as a school ruler with merely three marks: “was”, “is” and “will”. The linear understanding of time corresponds to the modern perception of this category by Europeans (to our knowledge, our ancestors accepted the cyclical, circular model of time, which is at present still preserved in some places, particularly in the east (Trzebuniak 2012)). The narrator’s tendency towards simplification indicates the informational (visual and auditory) overload, which overwhelms the modern world, and the chronic fatigue, which affects the major part of the civilized world. “Czas zaś wydaje się prostym narzędziem do mierzenia drobnych zmian, szkolną linijką z uproszczoną podziałką”, Olga Tokarczuk writes, “to zaledwie trzy punkty: było, jest i będzie” (Tokarczuk 2009: 204) – Eng. “Time seems to be a simple tool for measuring small changes, a school ruler with a simplified scale – there are just three points: it was, it is, and it will be”. From the point of view of self-positioning, the names of the second and third stories are quite interesting: *Świat w głowie* (Eng. *The World in the Head*), *Głowa w świecie* (Eng. *The Head in the World*). In this example, we also observe binarity. One perspective is not enough to fully characterise a personality, and this is what motivates the main heroine to look at herself as an object from two points –from the inside and from the outside. This shift in vision also symbolizes movement – the key motif of the *Flights*: “Zawsze lepsze będzie to, co jest w ruchu, niż to, co w spoczynku” (Tokarczuk 2009: 8) – Eng. “What is in motion will always be better than what is at rest”. The main character openly admits that a sedentary lifestyle is not to her liking and she jokingly explains this through the lack of the appropriate gene. Reflecting on her essence, she finds a certain “defect” in her character – an instability or an interest in unusual, often ugly things. This makes her different from other “normal” people with traditional views of life and their place in the world. The opposition “I” – “others” is clearly manifested here, and it helps to carry out self-identification. The heroine’s university education forms her specific understanding of human nature. She compares people with cities, in which the main role is given to walls, towers, bunkers, shields and weapons. We find that emphasis on the defence function indicates a certain internal vulnerability. As a result, the logical chain according to which identity can be formed is represented as follows:



Here we observe three stages:

- (1) Recognition of one’s existence. This stage is the first step on the way to the formation of personality, because without awareness of the very fact of one’s existence, it is impossible to develop such a deep concept as identity. Violations occurring at this stage can lead to the formation of so-called zero identity, which will be discussed later in this article.

- (2) Recognition of the existence of the world and the people around us. At this stage, a person acquires knowledge about the environment, he studies and investigates it. These data play a key role in the formation of identity because a person acquires detailed knowledge about himself through interaction with external objects and subjects. Such interaction can form internal (independently created) and external (imposed by society) identity. Unfavourable events occurring during communications with the world and other individuals can have a negative impact on personality formation. For example, they can provoke the emergence of zero identity (see below in this article). It should be noted that the sequence of stages 1 and 2 can be changed, since self-awareness can appear not only as a prerequisite but also as a result of interaction with the world.
- (3) Recognition of the need for protection. This stage is not necessary for identity formation, but it influences it. Recognizing the need for protection and ensuring its implementation allows a person to preserve their own integrity, physical and psychological health. In turn, maintaining health contributes to the development of a harmonious personality. Identity may change over time or under the influence of certain circumstances, but adequate protection of the individual will prevent possible traumatic experiences which may be associated with such changes.

In relation to personal identity, Krzysztof Kwapis and Elwira Brygoła emphasize its specificity and uniqueness. They maintain that from the point of view of this personality substructure, each person differs from others, although the mechanisms of identity formation themselves can be similar (Kwapis 2013: 33–49). We can therefore say that not only the main character of *Flights* is unlike the rest and has a “defect” – everyone has one – and in this “defect” lies the uniqueness of each and every one of us.

Mieczysław Dąbrowski, exploring the problem of identity, notes an increasing trend towards biographical and autobiographical narratives in literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These narratives are in a sense a cry for help, dictated by the need to organize a very chaotic world (Dąbrowski 2011). It is our belief that this trend may extend to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (we find it also in *Flights*). Based on the arguments of M. Dąbrowski, we can conclude that the need to talk about oneself is a tool not only for self-identification but also for protection. Awareness of the need for protection appears in the third stage of identity formation (see the scheme above). The main heroine of *Flights*, pointing out the inconsistency of her character with the psychological profession, mentions her inability to listen to others and the constant desire to talk about her own life and experience. In this case, the continuous travel she makes can be seen as a constant search for new listeners and the need to get their feedback. “*Grzech opowiedziany zostaje odpuszczony. Opowiedziane życie – zbawione*” (Tokarczuk 2009: 200), the heroine says (Eng. “The told sin is forgiven. The told life is saved”). The desire to talk about oneself is also a particular spiritual need. In our case, the story is

interpreted as a confession, and its purpose is spiritual, psychological purification. The constant search for a listener or reader emphasizes the opposition “I” – “others”, which underlies both, traditional and binary identity formation.

The binary can also be traced in Philip Verheyen’s story (*Historia Filipa Verheyena, spisana przez jego ucznia i powiernika*). The protagonist lost his leg due to injury and infection. The surgeon divided his body into two parts, separating the infected limb. It was not buried, but instead became a very important factor in the owner’s life. He often took it out, studied it, explored it, and at the end of his life, completely disassembled it into components – muscles, ligaments, nerve fibers, etc. The amputated leg was no longer an object; it became a subject – Philip even wrote letters to it as if it were a living person (*Listy do amputowanej nogi*). This personification indicates that in Verheyen’s imagination, his leg had acquired a kind of identity. He perceived it as a creature. At the same time, it did not cease to be a part of his physical self, and the division of identity now comes as a result of this paradoxical fact. The leg and Philip, originally being one, were separated, and after this, the limb gained some independence. In the owner’s imagination it began to appear as a subject. However, this begs a question: being physically separated, did the leg continue to be a part of Verheyen and his identity, or did it become completely autonomous and receive its own identity (at least the external one mentioned by K. Waszczyńska (Waszczyńska 2014: 48–73))? Various possible answers to this question create an interesting and multifaceted field for scientific discussions.

The story *Serce Szopena* also shows traces of “bifurcation”. It is dedicated to transferring the famous Polish composer’s heart back to his homeland. However, none of the characters in this part of the book personify the organ and refer to it as a living person (unlike P. Verheyen). So, in this case, we can only talk about external (objective) identity.

The story about Kunicki (*Kunicki. Ziemia*) also has an example of binary identity. Due to restless-legs syndrome, the hero’s body seems to be divided into two parts: upper (calm and relaxed) and lower (tense, mobile). “*Widocznie składa się z dwóch osób*” (Eng. “He apparently consists of two people”), the narrator sums up. “*Na górze pragnie spokoju, sprawiedliwości; na dole – jest występny i łamie wszelkie zasady*” (Tokarczuk 2009: 394), (Eng. “Above, he wants peace and justice; below, he is vicious and breaks all the rules”). The disease forcing different parts of this man’s body to behave in different ways divides his identity: the upper and lower parts begin to be perceived separately. They live separate lives, and it seems that their owner “consists of two people”. Accordingly, each of these parts acquires its own character and begins to act independently, which causes a duality of understanding of Kunicki’s personality and the bifurcation of his identity.

## **Multiple identity**

As already determined, identity can be subject to bifurcation. Inherent in its nature, it builds on opposition. However, in some cases, the division begins to progress, which leads to the formation of a new phenomenon – multiple identity.

Plurality can be traced in the words of the main character, who notes that the postulate “one personality – one human” has always seemed too minimalist to her. Since one human can have several personalities, we could conclude that the multiple identity phenomenon is possible. The heroine expresses this opinion without mentioning any mental illness. Thus, multiple identity can be a variant of the norm – for example, if we refer to identity as an internal representation of the person. K. Kwapis and E. Brygoła propose a distinction between these very similar terms (Kwapis, Brygoła 2013: 33–49). They maintain that the internal representation of “I” is a limited, “acting” expression of oneself, created for a certain situation – for instance, “I am a teacher”, “I am a mother of a small child”, and so on. All these interpretations can be parts of identity, which is why it can be not only multiple but also complex.

Exploring the labyrinth as a mythical space in *Flights*, A. Larenta designates this type of labyrinth as a rhizome – a branched structure that is potentially infinite (Larenta 2014: 341–356). Indeed, plurality can be manifested even in space. The researcher notes that the places described by O. Tokarczuk (including the hotel) reflect modern people’s character, needs and existential condition. If the space is branched and infinite, it may indicate that the self-understanding of a human is the same. It is ambiguous and variable, with the possibility of different readings.

Identity formation is impossible without obtaining specific knowledge about oneself and the environment. Respectively, sight plays a most important role in the array of basic organs of human sense perception. O. Tokarczuk formulates very succinctly and aptly the title of one of the essays in *Flights*: “*Widzieć to wiedzieć*” (Eng. “*To see is to know*”). It proves the importance of eyesight for knowledge. The sense of sight helps the heroine to realize how small a person is on the scale of the universe. Examining a part of the relics through a magnifying glass, she reflects on the perishability of human nature and comes to an original conclusion: if this grain of sand is a human being, then the entire sandy beach consists of people. This idea intertwines the individualism of a single “grain of sand” and its insignificance compared to mountains of sand. The reader is confronted with opposition, which motivates him to make his own choice, to define himself and his place in this world. Sand as a material is multiple in structure. However, it forms a single whole. Such an image in the novel emphasizes the plurality concept, which can also be observed within identity limits.

The lectures on travel psychology, offered to the main character at the airport while waiting for the plane, are skilfully woven into the general outline of *Flights*. These lectures help the reader better understand the peculiarities



in the reasoning and self-awareness of travelers. They also allow travelers to understand themselves, to establish their identity. The lecturer thus notes that desire is the leading force in the human personality. It stimulates movement and sets the direction. Understanding this, everyone (both a traveler and an ordinary reader) can reflect on their nature and ask themselves what exactly their personal desires and aspirations are. We argue that awareness of one's own desires is an important stage in the pursuit of self-knowledge. According to the lecturers described by O. Tokarczuk, the journey's goal is really an itinerary – the individual road of a traveler. Considering the widespread identifying life with a road, we can conclude that the essence of existence is precisely in existence, in the own path that each person takes. Thus, identity is formed in the process of these “life journeys”. The lecturers in *Flights* also focus on the variability of individuality. In their opinion, these changes consist of the fact that the human “I” grows, becomes more and more expressive, and the ego “explodes”, moving the gods from the outside to the inside (Tokarczuk 2009: 197). Undoubtedly, such changes affect human identity. The instability of the surrounding world gives rise to the instability of view of oneself, leading to the formation of a multiple or variable identity. For people, who are not psychologically adapted to the lability of the environment, such processes can cause a crisis, which is expressed, in particular, in the formation of a zero identity.

### **Zero identity**

According to Jolanta Kociuba, identity crisis in modern European and American cultures is becoming more and more apparent. The structure of “I” is beginning to disintegrate, and it is related with the crisis of the social system. Identity problems reflect the changes in society and culture (Kociuba 2016: 15). Psychosocial factors and negative events can be a source of personality changes up to the loss of identity, which we call “zero identity”. This process can be both temporary and permanent. The formation of a zero identity may require the consultation of a psychologist, since the long-term stress to which the person was probably exposed has a negative effect not only on his personality but also on his general physical and mental health.

Nikolai Kiyashchenko, considering identity from the point of view of philosophy, cultural studies, and anthropology, with the help of hermeneutic analysis of texts explores the concept of zero identity, which first appeared in postmodern literature. He emphasizes that zero identity has its own content and that both, individual and group identities, need to be studied in full (Киященко 2013: 1747–1756). An example of such identity was found in *Flights*, and will be discussed in more detail below.

“Jestem” (Eng. “I am”) – this important phrase is in the novel repeated several times, because the awareness of one's “I” is the first step on the path

towards one's own identity. It was, for instance, used by one of the novel's heroes, namely the ferryman Eric (*Uczta popielcowa*). His self-understanding is binary: it consists of two opposing views – the extremely negative one and the extremely positive one. Between these radically different positions (“minus” and “plus”), there is another one that can be taken as “zero”, and this “zero” is the most frightful for Eric. It is formulated by the sentence “I am nobody”. In fact, the hero denies his own essence and identity. Eric perceives it as a truth that must be carefully hidden from people, and deep down, he is afraid that everyone will discover it sooner or later. This way of understanding oneself should be distinguished as a separate form – “zero identity”. In the modern world, it is called a crisis of identity. It is linked to globalization, the destruction of traditions and the emergence of an existential wasteland. In addition, the presence of such a phenomenon may indicate the disintegration of individual and group identity, the “multiplicity of identities with a wasteland effect”, and the loss of the need for self-determination (Киященко 2013: 1747–1756). Therefore, zero and plural identities are closely related despite their external dissimilarity (even opposition). In general, indifference to self-determination is one of the features of a “tourist” – a postmodern person in the context of the novel *Flights* (Шульгун 2019: 208–213).

The story of the essay *Jestem* showcases indifference towards locus. The main heroine describes a gradual change in her perception of hotels: at first, after waking up in a new place, she felt like at home, then she became disoriented, attempting to determine her location. It was only over time that she reached the third stage, the stage of indifference to locus: “*Wszystko jedno, gdzie jestem. Jestem*” (Tokarczuk 2009: 443) – Eng. “No matter where I am. I am”. We maintain that this approach can also be applied to identity. Namely, indifference to self-determination might not necessarily only be the result of a deep crisis, the destruction of beliefs, but also the result of reorientation, a change of priorities. For the main character, it is not the partial, the specific that comes to the fore (who exactly she is, where she is, etc.), but the general, the global, or even the cosmogonic (the very fact of existence). In this way, the importance of the phenomenon of existence is affirmed and emphasized. Compared to it, other things and questions lose in significance. Such a shift of attention, leading to the rejection of less important objects and focusing on more important objects, can also signify the tendency to simplify and minimize, which is quite popular in the modern world, overloaded with events, things, and information.

Zero identity is reflected in the image of night. At night, “*gubią się szczegóły, przedmioty tracą swoje twarze, stają się przesadziste i niewyraźne*” (Tokarczuk 2009: 256) – Eng. “*details are lost, objects lose their faces, become squat and indistinct*”. “Czarne nic” (Eng. “black nothing”) – this is how O. Tokarczuk describes this time of day, and this is, apparently, how her heroes who have lost their identity feel. The author also sees the night as something that returns the world into its natural, primary appearance. We can thus conclude that zero

identity is the individual's starting point, the initial stage that appears before one forms one's own full-fledged identity.

Annushka, the heroine of the story *Bieguni*, tries to return to this starting point. This story is probably the key part of the whole work because it has the same title. For this reason, we will consider it in more detail.

Being a married woman and the mother of a sick boy, Annushka cannot bear the burden of duties and responsibilities. She runs away from home and joins a homeless, slightly obsessed woman. Annushka finds this unfamiliar, strange woman to embody a completely different, marginalised world, a world of people who are usually unnoticeable (even if one sees them, one tries to forget them as soon as possible). At the beginning, Annushka does the same – *“mija ją, przyspieszając kroku, boi się, że kobieta mogłaby ją zaczepić”* (Tokarczuk 2009: 263) – Eng. *“she passes the woman, speeding up her step, afraid that the woman might pick her on”*). But what scares Anna at first, now begins to attract her. In this crazy stranger, who is “nobody” to the world, she begins to see the source of freedom. After all, the person of whom nothing is expected, on whom no one places hopes, will certainly not disappoint anyone. Such a person is good at doing what they really want, even though this seems strange. They also do not care about the opinions of others. Thus, zero identity is here understood as a certain degree of freedom, which opens the way to free self-expression.

Annushka tries to escape from the forms of identity, that K. Kwapis and E. Brygoła describe as internal representations of one's own “I” (Kwapis, Brygoła 2013: 33–49). Social roles assigned to her by society become an overwhelming burden for her. Crying as a means of emotional relief, a method of psychological self-help, to which this woman is so used, no longer brings her the expected comfort, and does not allow her to achieve catharsis. This is why she dares to do the desperate act – escape. Feeling the need to disappear, to return to the desired “zero”, Annushka cries and prays in church. Jesus Christ, looking down on her from the painted image, does not seem to support her, does not comfort her, only watches closely: *“To mogłaby być twarz nie zbawiciela, lecz topiciela, który jednak nie umarł, ale schronił się przed wszechobecną śmiercią pod wodą, a teraz za sprawą niepojętych prądów pod pływa pod powierzchnię, przytomny, arcyświadomy i mówi: patrz, oto jestem”* (Tokarczuk 2009: 253) – Eng. *“It could be the face not of a savior, but of a drowner, who, in the end, did not die, but took refuge from the ubiquitous death underwater, and now, thanks to incomprehensible currents, swims beneath the surface, conscious, hyper-aware and says: look, here I am”*. The phrase “Look, here I am,” spoken by God in the heroine's imagination, contrasts sharply with her own desire for zero identity. “To declare yourself” and “to hide from everyone” – here we again come across another opposition skilfully incorporated into the novel's canvas.

### 3 Conclusion

The present research analyses multiple, binary and zero identities. It also proposes a model of identity formation. The results of the analysis of O. Tokarczuk's novel *Flights* showed that primary oppositions form the basis of human existence, as well as the basis of identity. These oppositions are guidelines for individuals. From the point of view of the problem of identity, the following stories in the novel were found most interesting: *Jestem*; *Bieguni*; *Co mówiła zakutana biegunka*; *Kunicki. Ziemia*; *Historia Filipa Verheyena, spisana przez jego ucznia i powiernika*, *Willema van Horssena*; *Listy do amputowanej nogi*; *Uczta popielcowa*. Our research shows that alongside traditional "monoidentity" there are also binary, plural (multiple) and zero identities. The binary one is built on fundamental oppositions (contrasts), and can be associated with the physical and mental separation of personality. The world lives and develops due to this difference, as does the human personality. Plural identity can be seen as a set of internal representations ("I" in different roles) or a set of external identities (variants of perception of a person by other people around it). Zero identity is characterized by indifference to one's person, denial and devaluation of one's individuality. This can be explained by an ideological crisis; the tendency to simplify, caused by the overload of the modern world with information; revaluation of values, shifting of reference points from the specific to the general; new trends in self-determination. Zero identity is also a starting point of the individual, the initial stage that appears before forming one's full-fledged identity. Zero identity can also be understood as a certain form of liberty, which opens the way to free self-expression. Identity is formed in several stages. Understanding one's existence and the existence of other persons around you are the basic stages of this process. During identity formation, the necessity of self-protection can appear. This stage is closely related to the basic survival instinct. Awareness of one's own desires is an essential stage in self-knowledge. All kinds of identities can be considered as variants of the norm, depending on the circumstances. Such polyvariance correlates with the ambiguous, "multiple" world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, full of endless possibilities for each human being.

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## IDENTITETNA KODA: PLURALNOST, BINARNOST, NIČELNOST

Članek obravnava koncept identitete v romanu *Beguni* svetovno znane poljske pisateljice in nobelovke Olge Tokarczuk. Upoštewane so pluralne, binarne in ničelne identitete. Predlagan je model oblikovanja identitete, ki ima tri stopnje: (1) priznavanje lastnega obstoja, (2) priznavanje obstoja sveta in ljudi v okolici ter (3) priznavanje potrebe po zaščiti. Rezultati analize so pokazali, da v osnovi človekovega obstoja, pa tudi v osnovi identitete, ležijo primarna nasprotja, ki predstavljajo smernice. Ne obstaja samo klasična monoidentiteta, ampak tudi binarna, pluralna in ničelna identiteta. Binarno je zgrajeno

na osnovnih opozicijah in je lahko povezano tako s fizično kot tudi psihično delitvijo osebnosti. Svet in človekova osebnost se razvijata zaradi razlik. Pluralno identiteto lahko obravnavamo kot niz notranjih predstavitev (*jaz* v različnih vlogah) ali niz zunanjih identitet (različice dojetja osebe s strani ljudi v okolici). Za ničelno identiteto je značilna brezbržnost do lastne osebnosti, zanikanje in razvrednotenje lastne individualnosti. To je mogoče pojasniti z ideološko krizo, težnjo po poenostavljanju, ki jo povzroča informacijska preobremenjenost sodobnega sveta, prevrednotenjem vrednot, premikom referenčnih točk od posebnega k splošnemu in novimi težnjami samoodločanja. Ničelna identiteta je lahko tudi faza, ki obstaja, preden oseba razvije svojo popolno identiteto. Razumemo jo lahko tudi kot določeno obliko svobode, ki odpira pot do svobodnega samoizražanja. Identiteta se oblikuje v več fazah. Razumevanje lastnega obstoja in obstoja ljudi v okolici sta osnovni fazi tega procesa. Med oblikovanjem osebnosti se lahko pojavi potreba po samoobrambi in ta faza je tesno povezana z osnovnim nagonom za preživetje. Bistvena faza v procesu samospoznavanja je zavedanje lastnih želja. Vse vrste identitet, odvisno od okoliščin, lahko obravnavamo kot variacije norme. Takšna večvariantnost ustreza dvoumnemu, »večkratnemu« svetu 21. stoletja, ki je poln neskončnih možnosti za vsakega človeka.

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