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THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON GROUP BELIEFS AND OUTGROUP ANTIPATHY AMONG LATVIAN YOUTH

Richard C. M. Mole

A study was conducted among young Latvians to test the effects of different conceptualizations of Latvian national identity on group beliefs and on attitudes towards Russians. It was hypothesized that exposure to inclusive discourse presenting Latvia as a multicultural society rather than an ethnic homeland would have a direct negative effect on feelings of vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority and helplessness with regard to the Latvian nation and a positive effect on attitudes towards Russians. The hypothesis was tested in one survey study conducted in Riga among ethnic Latvians ($N = 150$).

Keywords: Discourse; identity construction; youth; inter-ethnic relations

'If I treat you like an enemy, you will become my enemy'. Janis Jurkans

Introduction

In seeking to ensure the peaceful coexistence of communities in ethnically divided societies, international organizations and state institutions tend to focus on the establishment of institutional frameworks, citizenship legislation, language, education and other minority rights, etc., and pay less attention to the psychosocial aspects of inter-ethnic relations. Following the regaining of independence in 1991, for example, the Latvian government, after much debate within parliament and society as a whole, adopted a raft of such laws, setting out the rights and obligations of both the indigenous and non-indigenous populations.[1] On the – not always welcome – recommendations of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), these laws were successively liberalized to the extent that they were felt to meet European standards, and in December 2001 the OSCE decided to close its

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Mission to Latvia. Emphasizing the technical approach adopted by the Latvian government, the Head of Mission, Peter Semneby, justified the closure on the basis of the 'steps taken by Latvia to build a democratic and integrated society', namely the development of 'democratic citizenship legislation' and 'social integration policy, including education policy and language policy'.[2] Nevertheless, despite the liberalization of Latvia's citizenship, language and education laws, 44.7% of Russians in the republic had still not applied for Latvian citizenship by August 2006.[3] In research conducted as part of the 'Towards a Civic Society' project, one in four non-citizens stipulated that the reason for not applying was that they did not 'feel themselves as belonging to Latvia', a feeling that was even higher among respondents under 40 (2001, p. 30).[4] What the findings of the 'Towards a Civic Society' project suggest is that while the technical barriers to social integration have been reduced, psychological barriers remain in the minds of the Russian population. These barriers, I would argue, are in large part the result of political discourse that – intentionally or unintentionally – presents Latvian national identity in ethnic rather than civic terms and represents Russians as the threatening Other. While it is clear that discourse of this kind alienates some of the Russian minority, it is unclear what impact this has on Latvians.

The aim of the article is thus to analyze the impact of different conceptualizations of Latvia (as an ethnic homeland or multicultural society) on young Latvians' attitudes towards the minority and on beliefs about their own group. Building on the considerable research that has been done on ethnic Russians in Latvia (Smith *et al*. 1994; Kolstø 1999; Smith 1999; Zaagman 1999; Aasland & Flotten 2001; Commercio 2004; Pisarenko 2006), this article seeks to shift focus on to ethnic Latvians and examine their attitudes towards questions of identity and inter-ethnic relations. The decision to focus on young people is based on findings by Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) and Phinney (1992) that adolescents and young adults are still in the process of exploring their identities, which are thus less fixed than those of adults. Furthermore, as studies have shown a strong correlation between the strength of ethnic identity and outgroup hostility (Worchel *et al*. 1978; Taylor & Moriarty 1987; Verkuyten & Hagendoorn 1998; Valk 2000), the strength of ethnic identity of the participants will be assessed to identify moderate citizens on the understanding that one-time exposure will have no significant effect on respondents with extreme attitudes towards questions of identity.

The article is divided into two sections. The first theoretical section examines the relationship between discourse and nationhood to demonstrate that discourse is not just 'seen as describing a pre-existing social reality' but is rather 'a medium through which reality is *created* and the material world is given meaning' (Wennerstein 1999, p. 274, original emphasis). Moreover, it seeks to show that national identity is contingent and that specific conceptualizations of identity can have a considerable impact on thought and action. The second section draws on research conducted in Latvia using social psychological methodology to analyze the extent to which exposure to different conceptualizations of national discourse affects young Latvians' feelings about their own group and the attitudes they have towards Russians. In particular, the latter section of the article seeks to test the following hypotheses:

> H_1: Exposure to inclusionary discourse which presents Russians as part of a multicultural society, rather than a threat to Latvia, will reduce feelings of

vulnerability, injustice, helplessness, distrust and superiority among Latvians *vis-à-vis* the in-group.

H_2: Exposure to inclusionary discourse which seeks to include Russians in the Latvian body politic and present multiculturalism as a benefit to Latvia will decrease antipathy towards Russians, while exposure to exclusionary discourse will have the opposite effect. However, it is also hypothesized that inclusive discourse will have a significant effect only on respondents with a moderate ethnic identity and will have no significant effect on respondents with a very high ethnic identity or very high outgroup antipathy.

The Discursive Construction of National Identity

That national identities are a social construct is now accepted by academics as a self-evident truth. The conceptualization of nations as organic, self-contained entities is derided by all but die-hard primordialists.[5] Even theorists who stress the pre-modern roots of contemporary national identities, such as Anthony D. Smith, admit that '[t]here is, at least in the case of historically well-preserved *ethnie*, a choice of motifs and myths from which different interest groups and classes can fashion their own readings of the communal past to which they belong' (1986, p. 179). The reason *why* national identities are constructed by elites is the subject of fierce debate but the fact that they *are* socially constructed is the current orthodoxy in the study of identity (see Mole 2007). Where differences of opinion arise is with regard to (a) the relationship between national identity and the underlying national group, i.e. whether national identity enjoys an existence independent of the nation; and (b) the impact that specific identity constructions have on thought and action. It is with these issues that this section seeks to engage.

But, first, what do we mean by identity? As Brubaker and Cooper have pointed out, the social sciences are suffering from an identity crisis, with different disciplines using the concept to mean a range of different things: from an objective or subjective sense of 'sameness' or a 'fundamental condition of social being' to a product of or basis for social and political action (2000, p. 7). Identity is thus defined and used in different ways, depending on context. At its simplest, however, identity seeks to convey who we are or are perceived to be and the way we, as individuals or groups, locate ourselves and others in the social world. This becomes clear if we examine the psychological processes of identity formation.

Psychologists argue that ascribing identities to ourselves and others is a natural function of the brain (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel & Turner 1986; Turner 1987; Hogg & Abrams 1988; Hogg *et al*. 1995). The world around us has few explicit lines of division and the boundaries between social entities are fluid and blurred, with the result that these 'seemingly chaotic and unstructured stimuli' threaten 'to overwhelm our cognitive apparatus' (Theiler 2003, p. 260). Social Identity Theory argues that, faced with the task of processing this vast amount of data, human beings instinctively categorize the world around them in order to make life more predictable and understandable and, at the same time, make their 'experience of the world

subjectively meaningful' (Hogg *et al*. 1995, p. 261). We categorize people into and identify ourselves and others as distinct races, nations, ethnicities, classes, character types, generations, sexualities, etc., to create order out of chaos and to help us behave in ways that are appropriate to the norms of the categories to which we or others belong. The process of categorization is thus 'fundamental and universal' because it satisfies 'a basic human need for cognitive parsimony' (Hogg & Abrams 1988, p. 72). Identities thus help us make sense of our environment by defining our location and that of others in the social world. However, the construction of identities is not as neutral a process as the 'cognitive parsimony' thesis would suggest.

According to Self-Categorization Theory, the categorization process described above inevitably involves a process of accentuation. In order to create boundaries between social categories, 'like' needs to be grouped with 'like'. We thus perceive entities that we have placed in a specific category to be more similar to each other and more different from entities in other categories than they actually are. As categorization and accentuation perforce promote a perception of uniformity, we tend to regard individuals in other groups in a depersonalized manner, as 'undifferentiated items in a unified social category' (Tajfel 1981, p. 243). This finding becomes significant when we examine what, according to Social Identity Theory, is the second main function of identity: maximizing self-esteem. Individuals seek to maximize their self-esteem by establishing a shared identity with the prestigious in-group and by making flattering comparisons with outgroups. Classifying your group as prestigious entails assigning positive attributes to it, which, in turn, entails choosing to compare your group with other groups in ways that reflect positively on it and, by extension, on yourself. The natural corollary to this process of esteem maximization through alignment with in-group norms is to view outgroups in a less favorable light, which can result in stereotypes and, in extreme cases, in discrimination and prejudice (Verkuyten & Hagendoorn 1998, p. 100).

While Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory thus help us understand the psychological processes behind identity formation and the impact they can have on inter-group relations, they make no assumptions about 'the nature of groups, the signifiers used to demarcate group boundaries or the group norms that prevail at any given time. All these factors are socially constructed and therefore culturally specific and historically contingent' (Theiler 2003, p. 262). While the process of identity formation is instinctive, the boundaries and content of specific identities are not 'given' but 'reflect the perceptions, priorities and aspirations of those people who have the power to both construct categories and promote them as natural or superior' (Penrose & Mole 2007, p. 345). These ideas lie at the heart of the constructivist approach to identity.

Constructivism, the ontological position which posits that 'all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context', emerged to counter the essentialist or primordial understanding of social actors as immutable and constant through time and space (Crotty 2003, p. 42). Contra essentialists, history shows that the identity of nations is not fixed but is continually negotiated and renegotiated. What may be a key aspect of identity in one decade may be far less salient in another,

and such shifts in understandings of identity can only be explained with reference to constructivism. Recently, however, constructivism has come under attack for being 'too obviously right, too familiar, too readily taken for granted, to generate the friction, force and freshness needed to push arguments further and generate new insights' (Brubaker 2004, p. 3). In particular, Brubaker criticizes the propensity of academics – even those working within a constructivist framework – to reify nations, treating them as 'real entities, as communities, as substantial, enduring collectivities' (1996, p. 13). What Brubaker seeks to demonstrate is that the relationship between national identity and the invoked 'national group' is not as deterministic as most theorists believe and that identity 'can be pervasive and influential without being accomplished by discrete, specified persons or institutions' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p. 16).

Rather than viewing nations as 'homogeneous, internally cohesive internal groupings' and national identity as the reflection of such groups, we should pay more attention to national *identification* and to the realm of 'subjective consciousness and perception' (Day & Thompson 2004, pp. 198, 86–7). Here we can draw parallels with psychological theories of identity. To argue that two individuals from different parts of the national homeland and different economic classes, with different interests and educational backgrounds, share a feeling of community simply by virtue of the fact that they possess something called 'national identity' is not credible. What they share is an *identification* with the symbols and collective memory of the nation. They have gone through the national education system, learned of the nation's history and achievements and internalized its symbols. While their interpretations of the nation's symbols, traditions, history and myths will certainly vary – individuals attach different meanings to symbols etc., while still recognizing them as national – the processes of identification and internalization enable them to 'act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of national identity' (Bloom 1993, p. 52). Thinking of 'identity' as 'identification' prevents the reification of identity and moreover 'does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve' (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p. 14). More importantly, this demonstrates that nations 'exist' primarily at the level of subjective perception. National identity is not the reflection of the underlying nation; rather, nations exist as a result of individuals' identification with symbols, traditions, etc., that are presented as 'national'.

So what does this have to do with discourse? The answer lies in the fact that the various national symbols, traditions, myths, institutions, etc. only acquire significance once they have been interpreted and given meaning. And it is through discourse that this meaning is created, maintained and disseminated. As Cooper and Brubaker argue, 'identification does not *require* a specifiable "identifier"; it can be pervasive and influential without being accomplished by discrete, specified persons or institutions. Identification can be carried more or less anonymously by discourses or public narratives' (2000, p. 16). This idea is developed by Michael Billig in his *Banal Nationalism*, in which he emphasizes the role of language and discourse in creating a sense of 'we-ness' via the concept of *deixis*, 'a form of rhetorical pointing' (1995, p. 106). In newspapers, in particular, personal pronouns continually point to the

'national homeland as the land of the reader' (Billig 1995, p. 11). In referring to 'our country', it is clear who 'we' are, with the result that the meaning of 'we' becomes 'shared, taken-for-granted, common-sense' (Craib 1992, p. 100; Berger & Luckmann 1967). What this simple claim reveals is that, in constructing a sense of nationhood, discourse is not just 'seen as describing a pre-existing social reality' but is rather 'a medium through which reality is *created* and the material world is given meaning' (Wennerstein 1999, p. 274, original emphasis). In their research on Austrian identity, de Cillia *et al*. show how 'reifying, figurative discourses continually launched by politicians, intellectuals and media people and disseminated through the systems of education, schooling, mass communication, militarization as well as through sports meetings' construct both national differences and intra-national sameness so as to make the idea of the nation real (1999, p. 153).

If, as constructivists argue, there is no *a priori* reason why one particular definition of identity should be chosen over another, does it matter which configuration of national identity is created? To discourse theorists, the answer is yes. As political legitimacy is derived from shared national identity, the ability to control both the configuration of said identity and the interpretation of national symbols, events, myths, etc. is a major source of power. Identity discourses thus grant specific interpretations of the social world a hegemonic position, validating the organization of specific structures and hierarchies, which eventually come to be seen as the natural order of things. By regulating what can be said, what can be thought and what is true and false and rational and irrational, these essentialized discursive structures condition and constrain political action by legitimizing certain agents and policies and delegitimizing certain others. From the simplistic assertion of 'You're with us or against us' to the complex logics of sovereignty and national self-determination, discourses carve the world into legitimate and illegitimate actors and actions.

Here we can see the influence of Michel Foucault. In various works, he shows how discourses regulate what can be said, what can be thought and what is considered true or false, legitimate or illegitimate. In this sense, the force of discourses 'may depend not on any particular instantiation but on their anonymous, unnoticed permeation of our ways of thinking and talking and making sense of the social world' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 16). Both the particular and anonymous conceptualizations of discourse are evident in different stages of his writing. In *The Order of Things*, he demonstrates how individuals in society are constrained to act in certain ways by discursive practices that are invisible to them (Foucault 2002). During a university lecture, for example, both the students and the professor know how they should behave: the professor is the only one permitted to talk; students must silently take notes; the professor assigns readings, which the students must read. There is no prior discussion of their roles, no written contract between student and professor. The professor did not formulate these rules, nor did any higher authority at the university. The 'discourse of the lecture' exists independently of both the students and the professor but constrains the behavior of both. In his later works Foucault's understanding of discourse shifts to a more subjective and instrumental usage, with discourse relating to 'tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations' (1998, pp. 101–2). In this sense, power and knowledge are fused in

discourse, whereby the latter can be seen as 'an instrument as well as an effect of power' (Foucault 1998, p. 101). While Foucault himself was not interested in determining whether specific 'facts' were true or false, preferring to analyze the processes through which these 'facts' were established, his ideas have been used by others to demonstrate how the construction of knowledge in a particular way has serious implications for social and political action. Edward Said, for example, has shown that the representation of Indians as backward, primitive and lazy compared with the industrial West legitimized European colonization and control of the East (1978).

What the above section has sought to demonstrate is that the boundaries and content of specific identities are not 'given' but rather 'reflect the perceptions, priorities and aspirations of those people who have the power to both construct categories and promote them as natural or superior' (Penrose & Mole 2007, p. 345). Moreover, discursive identities/identity discourses condition and constrain thought and action by legitimizing specific interpretations of the social world and delegitimizing certain others. While evaluating the impact of specific discourses at the level of the state is less problematic in that analyses can be carried out of legislation, policy documents and speeches by political elites (see Kruks 2006), assessing the influence on the individual citizen is less straightforward. It was for this reason that I sought to conduct a study among a group of young Latvians to assess the impact of different conceptualizations of Latvian national identity on their beliefs about their own group and on their attitudes towards Russians in Latvia. The study was based on social psychological methodology. Essentially, I hoped to demonstrate that exposure to inclusive discourse presenting Latvia as a multicultural society rather than an ethnic homeland would have a negative effect on feelings of vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority and helplessness with regard to the Latvian nation and a positive effect on attitudes towards Russians.

Participants and Procedure

An opportunity sample of 150 ethnic Latvians participated in the study.[6] The participants – students from various departments at the University of Latvia – were approached at random and they participated on a voluntary basis. The data from 13 participants were excluded from further analyses because they were not of the required ethnicity or had not fully completed the questionnaires. Of the final 137 participants, 96 were female and 39 male, while two did not indicate their sex. Their ages varied between 18 and 23 ($M = 18.78$; $SD = 0.86$). The participants were assigned randomly to one of three conditions and asked to complete three questionnaires containing measures of the dependent variables of group beliefs and social distance as well as the variable of ethnic identity strength. The three questionnaires (the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement, Group Beliefs Inventory and modified Bogardus Social Distance Scale) were constructed in English and translated into Latvian. The results were back-translated into English.

On the basis of studies which have identified a strong correlation between ethnic identity strength and outgroup hostility (Worchel *et al*. 1978; Taylor & Moriarty 1987;

Valk 2000) and on further research by Verkuyten and Masson (1995) which has shown that that in ethnically divided societies the correlation between in-group preference and outgroup prejudice is higher among members of the majority than the minority group, I hypothesized that inclusive discourse will have no significant effect on respondents with a very high ethnic identity or very high outgroup antipathy and therefore sought to identify respondents in my sample with a moderate ethnic identity. In the hypothetical ethnically divided society portrayed in figure 1, the members of society at the poles of the continuum would have a more fixed and exclusionary idea of what their society should look like: they would see their society as their ethnic homeland and not be interested in according any rights to the outgroup. The members of society around the centre would theoretically have a less extreme understanding of their identity and be more open to the idea of multiculturalism. While this group is theoretically more open to the idea of multiculturalism, it is constantly bombarded with political discourse defining society in different terms: either as an ethnic homeland or a potential multicultural society. While discourse is not always intentionally exclusionary, it seeks to define the statuses and roles upon which people base their claims to exercise power, often resulting in misunderstandings, conflict and prejudice.

The first stage of the experiment was thus to ascertain the strength of the participants' ethnic identity. To that end, all participants were initially administered the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement (MEIM), developed by Phinney for use with different ethnic groups to measure their ethnic identification on a five-point scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* (Phinney 1992). The MEIM is widely used to measure ethnic identity development and is generally regarded to have acceptable construct validity (Kim-Ju & Liem 2003). The 14-item Ethnic Identity Achievement subscale, identified by Ponterotto *et al*. (2003), was used for the purpose of measuring the respondents' behavior and attitudes towards exploring their ethnic identity, their feelings towards being affiliated with their ethnic group and involvement in practices and expressions of their ethnic group.[7] The scale had high reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$). The 14 items are listed in table 1.

Participants in the two experimental conditions were then exposed to political discourse based on real statements by Latvian political actors, one text presenting Latvia as an ethnic homeland and one promoting it as a multicultural society. The third

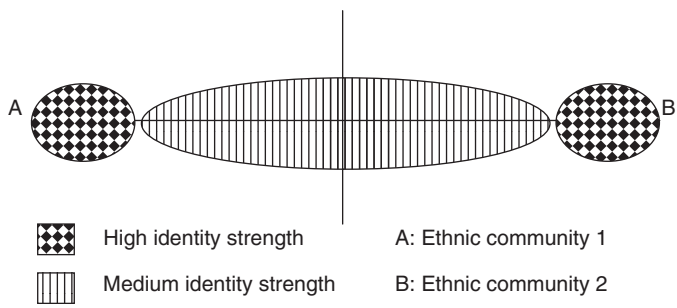

FIGURE 1 Ethnic identity continuum.

control group was not exposed to either discourse. My main initial concern was that it would be impossible to effect any change to people's attitudes in such a short period, as people's opinions about specific issues form over a considerable length of time. However, in the field of Communications Studies there is a large body of research on the effects of political campaign messages, health messages and especially advertising (Bryant & Zillmann 1985; Shrum 2004). For instance, a medical study conducted by Humphris and Field (2003) demonstrated that exposure to an information leaflet had an immediate positive effect on patients' knowledge of oral cancer and willingness to accept an oral cancer screen. In the field of advertising, an experiment conducted by Wilks *et al*. (1992) with Australian college students showed that exposure to beer advertisements increased consumption thereafter. Such experiments demonstrate that, while single messages do not cause revolutionary changes, they do have effects.

The exclusive 'ethnic homeland' discourse emphasized that Latvians have been the masters in their own land for just 30 years out of 800, that 50 years of Soviet rule had pushed the Latvian nation to the brink of extinction and that it was only just beginning to get back on its feet. Latvia was presented as the only place in the world where the Latvian nation, language and culture are protected and it was argued that it is therefore reasonable to grant members of the Latvian nation priority over immigrants who arrived in the wake of the Red Army as a result of Stalin's nationality policy. The inclusive 'multicultural' discourse presented Latvia as a modern European country and stressed that Europe is home to a myriad of cultures and national groups. It argued that the vast majority of states in the world have numerous national groups within their borders and that multiculturalism is more the norm than the exception. Diversity was presented as a national asset in that recent advances in technology have made international communications more important than ever and that citizens who understand many languages and cultures make it easier for Latvia to participate

TABLE 1 Ethnic Identity Achievement items

1.	I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs
2.	I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group
3.	I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me
4.	I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership
5.	I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to
6.	I am not very clear about the role my ethnicity plays in my life. (Reversed)
7.	I really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my ethnic group. (Reversed)
8.	I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group
9.	I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me, in terms of how to relate to my own group and other groups
10.	In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group
11.	I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments
12.	I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music or customs
13.	I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group
14.	I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background

globally in areas of education, trade and diplomacy. Following the exposure to the discourse participants were administered a number of scales to determine whether this had any impact on (a) beliefs about the participants' own group and (b) attitudes towards Russians.

First, the participants were administered a five-item scale created by Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) to measure components of group beliefs about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority and helplessness. In a later article, Eidelson argues that these five beliefs 'operate simultaneously as core beliefs fundamental to the daily and existential experiences of individuals' and 'as collective worldviews pivotal to central concerns and shared narratives of groups'.[8] Each belief was measured with three items, with the exception of helplessness, which was measured with two. The participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each of the statements in table 2 on a five-point Likert-type scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The values of Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.57 for helplessness, 0.65 for injustice, 0.66 for distrust, 0.68 for vulnerability to 0.69 for superiority.[9]

The vulnerability items sought to measure the respondents' beliefs about the liability of their group to existential threats, whereby 'worst-case scenarios may be imagined and nurtured by a real or perceived history of misery and devastation, including traumatic experiences as the targets of hostility by other groups'.[10] The injustice items evaluated their perception that their group had been mistreated by other groups, while the distrust items sought to understand whether they saw other groups harboring 'malevolent intentions towards the ingroup'.[11] Finally, the superiority and helplessness items attempted to assess whether the respondents felt that their group was better than others and whether it was able to influence or control events and outcomes. In cases of conflict between groups, these five beliefs tend to be heightened.

TABLE 2 Group Belief items

Vulnerability
I believe my group's safety and security are uncertain
I believe that my group must be constantly alert for possible danger
I believe that the things most important to my group are at risk
Injustice
I believe other groups are often unfair to my group
I believe my group is criticized by other groups more than it should be
I believe that my group's efforts often go unrewarded
Helplessness
I believe that my group has very little control over its future
I believe that it is hard to be optimistic about my group's future
Distrust
I believe my group should be suspicious of other groups' intentions
I believe that other groups will try to deceive my group if given the chance
I believe my group generally should not trust other groups
Superiority
I believe my group is superior to other groups in many ways
I believe that it is important for my group to do better than other groups
I believe my group's contributions to society are more valuable than those of other groups

Results

Five ANOVAs[12] were conducted to test whether the article manipulation had a significant effect on any of the group beliefs, i.e. whether exposure to discourse promoting Latvia as a multicultural society reduced feelings of vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority and helplessness with regard to the Latvian nation, while exposure to discourse promoting Latvia as an ethnic homeland would have the opposite effect. While the results indicate non-significant effects of the type of discourse on four of the five dependent variables, the effect of discourse manipulation on helplessness approached significance: $F(2, 134) = 3.05$, $p < 0.051$. In this case, exposure to the 'multicultural' discourse led to less perceived helplessness among participants ($M = 1.92$) than to the 'ethnic homeland' discourse ($M = 2.34$) or in the control group ($M = 2.42$). To better understand the relationship between group beliefs and national identification, a multiple regression analysis was performed, predicting identity strength from the five group beliefs simultaneously. The overall R^2 for this analysis was significant ($R^2 = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), as was the beta for helplessness ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that the less the perceived helplessness of the group, the higher the identity strength. As exposure to discourse presenting Latvia as a multiethnic society decreased feelings of helplessness among the respondents, we can thus argue that multiculturalism does not undermine national identification, as opponents might argue. Overall, however, the first hypothesis was only partly confirmed.

To assess the respondents' attitudes towards Russians, a modified Bogardus Social Distance Scale was then administered to participants. Participants were asked to indicate on a scale of 0–7 how much they agreed with the statements in table 3 (0 represented complete antipathy and 7 complete benevolence towards Russians). Its Cronbach's alpha was 0.89.

Bogardus (1925) suggests that the perceived social distance of a person or a group is how close or intimate they feel towards another person or group. This variable is widely used in social psychology to examine interpersonal and inter-group perceptions with the aim of predicting social behavior and attitudes (Chan & Goto 2003). Goto (1996) found that respondents were more likely to trust another person when the other was of a smaller social distance (e.g. friend) than a larger social distance (e.g. stranger). Participants were presented with seven statements concerning degrees of contact with outgroup members. They were asked to indicate how they believe most members of their group feel about or react to Russians. The seven statements are listed in table 3.

TABLE 3 Social Distance Scale items

1.	I would have a Russian as a tenant in my apartment
2.	I would accept a Russian to my family by marriage
3.	I am willing to have a Russian as my supervisor in work
4.	I am willing to have a Russian as a neighbor
5.	I am willing to befriend a Russian
6.	Fair social relations between Latvians and Russians are possible
7.	I am willing to work with a Russian

When the data were analyzed for all participants, regardless of their ethnic identity strength, there was no significant difference in the social distance scores for the three conditions. However, as I argued that inclusive discourse would have no significant effect on respondents with an extreme attitude towards ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations, I excluded from the analyses the results of those participants with an MEIM score in the upper quartile (above 4.14 out of 5) and very high outgroup antipathy (SDS of $\geq$1 out of 7). Following this control, the difference between the conditions became significant ($p = 0.031$). In this 'moderate' group ($N = 91$) the participants who read the multicultural discourse had a mean social distance score of 4.40 out of 7, compared with 3.67 for those who read the exclusionary discourse and 3.80 for those in the control group, who read neither. The second hypothesis was thus confirmed.

Conclusion

We live in a world of competing discourses, the creators of which seek to define social reality and make their view of the world hegemonic. National discourse defines the limits of the nation and the content of its identity. By regulating which myths, symbols, memories and, specifically, members are legitimate or illegitimate, these essentialized discursive structures condition and constrain thought and action. It was against this theoretical backdrop that this article sought to analyze the impact of different conceptualizations of Latvia (as an ethnic homeland or multicultural society) on young Latvians' beliefs about their own group and their attitudes towards Russians. While the current study makes a valuable contribution to debates about the importance of identity framing, it is not without its methodological limitations. Future studies should examine a larger group of participants to further test the validity of the manipulation and increase the power of the findings. Moreover, my study population of university students limits the generalizability of the results to the population at large in terms of level of education and gender. Despite this, the project generated interesting, statistically significant findings on the impact of political discourse on group beliefs and outgroup antipathy among young Latvians. As the results of the research showed, however, the impact of the discourse was much stronger on the respondents' attitudes towards the outgroup than on beliefs about the in-group. While the exposure to different discourses of the nation had a significant positive effect on attitudes towards Russians, only on one of the five beliefs about Latvians did the manipulation have an impact approaching significance. From this we can conclude that discourse is less successful in influencing previously held perceptions of the Self than of the Other. In other words, Latvians appeared to be more likely to be influenced by discourse about Russians than about themselves. To attempt to explain this tendency, we must return to the social psychological processes of categorization and accentuation and the ethnic structure of Latvian society.

As we discussed above, Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory argue that identity formation involves a dual process of categorization and accentuation. In order to create boundaries between social categories, 'like' needs to be grouped with 'like'. We therefore perceive entities which we have placed in a

specific category to be more similar to each other and more different from entities in other categories than they actually are. In this connection, research by Messick and Mackie (1989, pp. 55–9) shows that individuals tend to perceive outgroups to be more homogeneous than in-groups, while Verkuyten and Masson (1995) have further shown that that in an ethnically divided society the correlation between in-group preference is higher among members of the majority than the minority group. This tendency is likely to be stronger if interaction between the in-groups and outgroups is limited. When people listen to discourses about the outgroup, they usually discuss these with colleagues, neighbors, family and friends. If the message contradicts what individuals experience in their daily lives or what their colleagues, neighbors, family and friends tell them, then the discourse is disbelieved. If interaction between the in-group and outgroup is low, however, individuals only associate with other people in their ethnic group, with the result that any discourse about the outgroup is less likely to be contradicted and people will tend to believe what they are told (see Oberschall 2002). As the ethnic structure of Latvian society has been described as one of asymmetrical cross-patterned reticulation,[13] the lower levels of interaction compared with societies structured as per symmetrical cross-patterned reticulation may explain why ethnic Latvians are influenced more by discourse about the Other than about the Self (Zepa & Šūpule 2006, p. 34). Given this finding, international organizations and state institutions should be encouraged also to pay attention to psychological aspects of inter-ethnic relations and, in so doing, focus on attempts to reduce the social distance *vis-à-vis* the outgroup rather than lessen feelings of outgroup-induced insecurity among the in-group.

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Notes

1 See, *inter alia*, Law on Citizenship (adopted 1994; amended 1995, 1997, 1998); Law on the Unrestricted Development and Right to Cultural Autonomy of Latvia's Nationalities and Ethnic Groups (adopted 1991, amended 1994); State Language Law (1999, amended 2000); Education Law (adopted 1998).

2 'OSCE Mission to Latvia Closed', press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 18 December 2001.

3 'Integration Policy in Latvia: A Multi-Faceted Approach', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia website, available at: www.mfa.gov.lv, accessed August 2006. In this article the statistics on 'Russians' relate specifically to ethnic Russians, rather than Russian-speakers more generally.

4 Other reasons given by non-citizens included: uncertainty about passing the language and history examinations; lack of finance; satisfaction with non-citizen

passport; that the naturalization process was humiliating; that they were too busy; that they did not wish to serve in the Latvian army.

5 This section is based on a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between discourse and identity in Mole 2007, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

6 Participants were allowed to self-define their ethnic identity.

7 Thanks to Julie Chalfin for introducing me to this measure.

8 R. J. Eidelson, 'Multi-Level Beliefs as Predictors of Life Satisfaction, Group Identification and Support for the War on Terrorism', unpublished paper, p. 3, available on the website of the Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at: www.psych.upenn.edu/sacsec/eidelson, accessed August 2006.

9 Cronbach's alpha is an index measuring the reliability of the scale.

10 R. J. Eidelson, 'Multi-Level Beliefs as Predictors of Life Satisfaction, Group Identification and Support for the War on Terrorism', unpublished paper, p. 4, available on the website of the Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at: www.psych.upenn.edu/sacsec/eidelson, accessed August 2006.

11 *Ibid*.

12 ANOVA is an analysis of variance. It is a statistical technique allowing for the comparison of different groups to see whether they differ significantly from each other on a particular outcome measure.

13 Latvians and Russians are represented in and pursue a number of different social and professional activities but the representation of each ethnic group in these various activities is not symmetrical.

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