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Synthesis and Conflict: Russian-Speakers' Discursive Response to Latvia's Nationalising State

AMMON CHESKIN

Abstract

Based on media discourse analysis, this article addresses the construction of Russian-speaking identity in Latvia from a discourse-theoretical approach. Through a focus on the discursive elements of identity formation it will be argued that public projections of Russian-speaking identity are both a counter-reaction to, and a synthesis with, constructed 'Latvian', 'Russian' and 'European' identities and discourses. It will be shown that although Latvia's Russian-speaking identity is often constructed negatively, in opposition to the Latvian state and the Latvian 'Other', it is now increasingly premised upon an acceptance of various Latvian narratives and discourses which are enabling the emergence of a more positive Latvian–Russian identity.

IN RECENT YEARS THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF STUDIES focusing on Russian-speakers outside Russia. These have included comparative case studies of post-Soviet 'diasporas' (Melvin 1995), ethnographic research (Laitin 1998), social–psychological approaches (Hagendoorn *et al*. 2001), and 'structuralist' arguments (Galbreath 2005). However, to date there has been very little scholarly attention paid to discourse-theoretical approaches. Consequently, this article explores Russian-speaking identity outside Russia from a discourse-theoretical approach. This research is based primarily on the discourse analysis of a leading Russian-language newspaper in Latvia. It will be argued that such an approach allows us to understand more fully the complex social and political interactions that occur between Russian-speakers, titular majorities, external homelands and international institutions.

Rogers Brubaker posited the need to study three main elements of post-socialist nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe. For Brubaker this nexus consisted of 'national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external ''homelands'' to which they belong' (1996, p. 4). Sensibly, in light of the significant influence of European and international bodies, a number of authors have seen fit to add international institutions to this nexus (Galbreath 2005; Smith 2002; Kelley 2004). Certainly this (updated) nexus serves as a theoretically promising tool with which to study post-socialist and post-Soviet nationalisms and identities. However, while this

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model moves us away from more simplistic, primordial conceptions of nations and nationhood, such as the crude civilisational model proffered by Huntington (1996), this article argues for the need for renewed focus on the discursive elements inherent within each of these four categories of analysis.

Gregory Feldman (2000, p. 406), for example, has argued that 'post-socialist identity discourse in Estonia should be studied as a result of the dialectical relationship between the international context in which Estonia exists and the perceptions of history and culture that elites deploy in the public discourse of Estonia's identity'. Importantly, the elements within this dialectical relationship must be seen as mutually contingent and therefore always liable to change. Elites are able to produce and reproduce 'truths' through their public discourse which essentially redefine the very international context within which identities are formed, thus altering the constructed 'reality' of the international system. To give one example, the military and cultural 'threat' from Russia has been a common theme for Latvian nationalistic parties. Such parties understand all too well the need to create (or at least to embellish) the danger from 'the East'. In this case it is the power of articulation which creates a large part of this threat rather than the objective fact of threat itself.

Because of this, discourse and language should not be separated from power or, by extension, from structures which claim to possess political power. Foucault's concept of a 'regime of truth' is particularly salient here. According to Foucault, 'truth', or the articulations that are commonly accepted as truth, is simultaneously produced by and produces systems of power, or regimes, which sustain and extend it (1980, pp. 111–13). As such, 'truth', or the articulation and construction of 'truth', are cyclical elements fundamentally embedded into, producing and being produced by the international and domestic order. Language and its ability to formulate 'truths' are thus an essential element in the subsequent construction of regimes and structures.

For this reason we must use a more holistic approach to understand contemporary identity politics. Discourses and their construction must be viewed in the context of changing structures and 'realities'. However, once discourse is firmly embedded in any given regime of truth, be it in the form of ideology or the popularisation of 'self-evident truths' concerning the nature of the state, then their production and perpetuation must be seen as integral to that self-same regime. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) this complex process of discursive formation occurs in an antagonistic setting with the hegemonic demands and identity of one group being founded upon the external 'otherness' of another group (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p. 111). This is because, irrespective of the fact that any two people can lay claim to the same nationality or identity (however defined), there will always be an infinite number of differences preventing the suturing of their identity as concrete and final. Put simply, two individuals may both claim to be of the same nationality, but their patterns of behaviour, appearance, likes and dislikes may—and most likely do—differ greatly. Therefore it is only the externality that is able to suture the internality of their identity.

For the case of Latvia this antagonism and hegemonic posturing has been an essential element in various efforts to discursively construct the titular population—'the Latvians'—as well as in the construction of 'Russian-speakers' as a group commonly conceptualised in strict opposition to 'the Latvians'. It should be noted that these linguistic signs of 'Latvian' and 'Russian-speaker' are themselves potentially

truth-creating, discursive mechanisms. In Latvia, for example, the increasingly common use of the term 'Russian-speaker' has helped to turn hundreds of thousands of disparate individuals into an 'imagined', but relatively identifiable, community (Cheskin 2010). Importantly, once such notions gain popular acceptance it becomes possible for people in discursive positions of power to be able to then define the characteristics of these 'Latvians' and 'Russian-speakers'.

Moreover, the field of discursivity has led to the legitimisation and formation of actual political structures and modes of governance. Eglitis (2002), for example, outlines the two main 'Latvian' narratives which have driven and framed the country's post-Soviet transition: spatial normality and temporal normality. Eglitis notes how, in the narrative of spatial normality, Latvia's 'place in space' (Eglitis 2002, p. 16) was used as the core element of the country's transformation. From this perspective Latvia was conceived as being a natural member of the European family of nations, or more broadly 'the West'. In this context normality is defined not only spatially but also in terms of the perceived characteristics of Western European countries such as economic prosperity and democracy.

Temporal normality, as the name suggests, focuses on 'place in time'. Instead of looking towards the West, this narrative centres on Latvia's inter-war republic which lasted from 1918 to 1940, until the time the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union, then invaded by Nazi Germany before again being reincorporated back into the Soviet Union. For many Latvians this romanticised era represents a time of great prosperity. Therefore it is perhaps inevitable that calls were made for the full restoration of the political institutions of the inter-war republic, along with a return to a traditional 'Latvian' way of life that had, in the words of the Latvian Supreme Soviet, 'been brutally violated' throughout the Soviet period (Latvian SSR Supreme Soviet 1989, p. 133).

We can see then, how Latvian narratives and discourses of normality have led to the adoption of real political practices, including the restoration of the *Saeima* (Latvian parliament) and the adoption of the inter-war constitution. However, these narratives have not only served to (re)define Latvia in place and time, but have also helped to (re)define 'Latvians'. The discourses of a 'return to Europe' and a 'return to normality' have also been significant for the construction of Latvia's citizenry and of 'the Latvians'. For example, the initial denial of citizenship rights to Soviet-era immigrants and those people who could not trace their ancestry to pre-war Latvia was largely predicated on the acceptance of the narratives outlined above. Soviet-era immigrants were neither defined as 'normal' nor as 'European' and therefore (initially at least) fell outside of both the discursive and the real body of Latvian citizenry.

Importantly the articulation of these temporal and spatial narratives relies upon their anchoring to external concepts such as 'Europe', 'democracy' and 'prosperity'; Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 112) term these moments 'nodal points':

> the impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations—otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of society, the social only exists, however, as an effort to

> construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, nodal points.

Nodal points play a vital role in giving newly constructed discourses and narratives legitimacy, and in allowing them to fit within understandings, or 'realities', which have been commonly accepted. This does not mean than such external points cannot change; on the contrary they are often the battlegrounds where competing discourses struggle for legitimacy. This all goes to highlight the importance of examining the ways in which antagonistic subject positions vie for supremacy in defining not only internal units, but also external reference points. Hence, we should again be wary of accepting the objective reality of any such signifier at face value. Even external structures and 'realities', such as, for example, military or cultural 'threats', are liable to be manipulated in order to provide temporary suturing to a given subject position.

It was within these contexts that the articulation of the 'Russian-speaking' identity of Latvia's inhabitants was studied in the research reported in this article. Because 'regimes of truth' rely upon the popularised articulation of 'truths', journalistic and political elites were selected as key agents in the construction of popularly conceived identity. In Latvia especially, it is political parties and Russian-language newspapers which often lay claim to representing the interests of Latvia's 'Russian-speakers'. That is not to say that everyone will subscribe to their formulations, or agree with their positions. However, as demonstrated, the production of discourses can lead to seismic changes in power and social relations. In the words of Foucault (1980, p. 93), 'There are manifold relations of power that permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse'.

To illustrate this point, this research comprised discourse analysis of *Chas* (*the Hour*), a leading Russian-language daily. The choice of studying a daily, Russian-language newspaper was deemed appropriate because of the breadth of subject matters which are covered in such a publication, allowing for a fuller investigation of various discourses including economics, politics, history and social concerns. Moreover, as previous media monitoring has found, Russian-language newspapers in Latvia are often staffed by members of political parties and deputy candidates for the Latvian parliament (Society for Openness 'Delna' 2002, p. 30). This would indicate that the discourses within *Chas* may also be linked to political programmes and strategies. As noted previously, it is primarily political parties and newspapers which, in Latvia, attempt to publicly fix meaning to the term 'Russian-speakers' and which also attempt thereafter to 'defend' the interest of this group. For this reason a study of *Chas* allows for an examination of both journalistic discourse and of political discourse emanating from direct journalistic opinion but also from journalistic framing of political events in Latvian political life.

Chas itself can best be described as a tabloid publication. However, in comparison with its nearest Russian-language competitor *Vesti Segodnya* (*Today's News*), *Chas* presents a more liberal stance on Latvian politics. Nonetheless, it is still a far more

opinionated and provocative publication than the other main Russian-language daily *Telegraf*, which positions itself as a professional and impartial source of information.[1] *Chas* was extensively examined for two sixth-month periods separated by a gap of 12 months. The first monitoring period covered 15 November 2008–15 May 2009. The second period ran from 15 May 2010 to 15 November 2010. By adopting this timeframe I was able to cover all the official and non-official cultural and commemorative events which occur annually in Latvia and which inevitably generate a number of specific articles. Additionally, by factoring in a 12-month gap, I was also able to compare the two periods to see if there had been any generally observable trends and evolution in the discourses employed by the newspaper. Also of particular note were the Latvian parliamentary elections which occurred on 2 October 2010.

Engaging with Latvian narratives

The Latvian narratives as described above have clearly played an important role in the formation of Latvian national identity and legitimacy in the post-Soviet era (Smith *et al*. 1998), especially during the years of increased national consciousness and activity, the so-called Awakening (*Atmoda*) at the time of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. The restoration of the political institutions of the inter-war republic, as well as the adoption of the 1922 constitution (*Satversme*) testify to the resonance of restorationist politics and the desire to return Latvia to its 'normal' and necessarily pre-Soviet condition during those heady and revolutionary times of political change.

What has been (and what continues to be) the impact of these narratives and their attendant discourses on Latvia's Russian-speakers? From my analysis it will be shown that for Latvia's 'Russian-speaking' parties these narratives are of paramount importance. For the purposes of this article the relationship between Russian-speakers' political and social identity and Latvian discourse has been broadly divided into three categories (each of which will be explored in some depth below). The first, '*anti-discourse*' (negative identity construction), involves 'Russian' parties and journalists attempting to shore up their own identity by dismantling and deriding Latvian narratives, arguing that their incorrect and morally suspect implementation has been the major reason for Latvia's political and economic instability. Second, '*synthesis*' (integrational identity construction) is perhaps the most interesting yet least documented of these three categories. Instead of simply deconstructing the main narratives of Latvian statehood, Russian-speaking elites argue that they are also committed to the ideals of *Atmoda*, that Russian-speakers are loyal to the Latvian state, and that they support its 'normalisation'. However, they also argue that these Latvian narratives have become distorted in the years following independence. Third, '*articulation of counter-narratives*' (positive identity construction) involves a stage of discursive posturing characterised by attempts to construct new narratives for contemporary Latvia which include and embrace the presence of the country's Russian-speakers. This final element is a logical progression from the earlier stages of anti-discourse and synthesis.

[1]For a brief overview of Latvia's main newspaper publications see Rožukalne (2010a, p. 73).

Anti-discourse

There is much space devoted in Latvia's Russian-language media to the debunking of Latvian discourses of normality. In many ways this is a discursive reaction to what Smith (1999, p. 82) terms a core nation discourse, whereby the legitimacy of a nation state is based on the principles of 'one nation, one language, one political community'. This form of core nation discourse has been evidenced to various degrees in Latvian media and parliamentary discourses (PROVIDUS 2008), and has both a constructive and a destructive macro-function (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 40). Constructively this discourse sets out the legitimising foundations for a stable model of Latvian statehood and governance in the post-Soviet era. Destructively it marginalises the efforts of those people found outside of the core nation discourse to find representation and recognition within this system.

Exclusionary discourses can be found in the Latvian-language media and Latvian public space which depict Russians, Russian-speakers and non-citizens as alien, as occupiers and as separate from the main body of Latvia's 'normal' citizenry (Kruks & Šulmane 2001; PROVIDUS 2008; Rožukalne 2010b). However, although such discourses are visible, it does not necessarily follow that these views represent a majority view, or that more liberal, tolerant discourses are not also existent in Latvia's public media space. However, from the perspective of elites who are positioning themselves as the leaders of the 'Russian-speaking community', objective reflection on diverse opinions is not as important as manipulating discourses which are advantageous to their political and commercial interests.

For this reason, discourses which are perceived to be discriminatory and harmful to 'Russian-speakers' are seized upon as a negative way in which to shore up 'Russian-speaking' identity. On the other hand, the dismantling of these discourses and the narratives that underpin them can also potentially provide Russian-speakers with the chance to create a positive pole of identity for Russian-speakers by creating a legitimate and meaningful place for themselves within contemporary Latvia.

Russian-speaking discourses of Latvia's anti-Europeanness

As Eglitis (2002) has documented, during the times of *Atmoda* Latvian narratives and many Latvian activists claimed that they were restoring normality to Latvia by restoring it to its natural European, democratic and civilised state. These ideas are therefore immediate targets for Russian-speaking discourse in Latvia.

Whereas the spatial narrative of Latvia's development posited that Latvia was rightfully a member of the European family of nations, I found numerous examples of journalists and politicians using Europe to shame the Latvian state. Articles in *Chas* often highlighted differences between 'civilised' Europe and 'backwards' Latvia. For example, one article asked: 'And how many times have our [politicians] led a miscomprehending Europe into bewilderment that a country that considers itself democratic can pass discriminatory, at times overtly racist, laws?'[2]

[2]'Vot takaya al'ternativa: menyat' zakony ili nastupat' na grabli', *Chas*, 20 February 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/02/20/l_029.html?r=30&, accessed 20 February 2009.

Latvia's membership of the EU further facilitates the articulation of this anti-discourse. Tat'yana Zhdanok, member of the European parliament since 2004, and re-elected in 2009, who represents the predominantly Russian-speaking party For Human Rights in a United Latvia (FHRUL, *Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā*) was foremost among those using Europe as a means to discredit Latvia's Europeanness in the pages of *Chas*. Zhdanok is a controversial figure in Latvia, and for some (including many Russian-speakers) represents an extreme political viewpoint. (Under Latvian law she is prohibited from being elected to the *Saeima* due to her former ties with the Communist Party.) Nevertheless, her views are often published in Latvia's media, and as one of only eight Latvian representatives in the European Parliament, she is able to use her position to gain national and even international attention, especially on and around 16 March, a complicated and divisive date in Latvia, when commemorations are held to mark the lives of Latvians who served in the ranks of the *Waffen SS*.

In this respect the fourth node on our quadratic nexus is highly salient. Using this model, we should expect the identity of Latvia's Russian-speakers to be influenced, not only by their relationships to both the Latvian and Russian states, but also by influential European structures and institutions. On a discursive level, if Russian-speaking politicians and journalists can demonstrate that the 'Europe' which Latvia has wanted to return to is in fact irreconcilable with 'actual' European norms, then this effectively serves to delegitimise the current Latvian state.

Thus, when Tat'yana Zhdanok can convince European politicians of the need to hold a plenary session in the European Parliament devoted to 'voting-rights of Latvia's non-citizens in local elections', not only is an issue of fundamental importance to her and her party being highlighted, but differences between 'civilised' Europe and 'backward' Latvia are also highlighted. As Zhdanok notes, 'the fact that the European Parliament, in one of its plenary sessions, is examining the question of the discriminatory position of a concrete group of people in an actual EU country, is a unique event'.[3]

Debunking the myth of restoration

In terms of the temporal narrative employed by Latvian nationalists in the years of the Awakening, I found a great deal of material in my analysis devoted to dispelling ideas of the contemporary Latvian state as a continuation of the inter-war republic. The temporal narrative stressed that the Soviet Union had destroyed the Latvian state along with its natural political, economic and social progression. Therefore the state and its attendant institutions were to be restored to their pre-1940 condition following Latvian independence in 1991. Indeed, in the immediate years following independence, restorationists held sway in Latvia's domestic politics. This can be seen in the restrictive citizenship laws of the time which resulted in Latvian citizenship initially being granted only to people who had been citizens in 1940 and to their descendants. For example, in 1993, while discussing the country's demographic situation, Georgs

[3]As quoted in 'Evroparlament—o negrazhdanakh', *Chas*, 2 February 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/02/02/l_044.html?r=30&, accessed 5 February 2009.

Andrejevs, the then foreign minister, commented on the need for 'affirmative action for Latvians to compensate them for the discrimination they have experienced in their own country' (Budryte 2005, pp. 109–10). Since 1995, with the implementation of a naturalisation law, and 1998, when the process was sped up considerably, this restorationist tendency has somewhat receded in importance. However, the discourse remains. Thus, the constructed group of Russian-speakers are constantly reminded by political elites and journalists of the inequalities in Latvia caused by the questions of citizenship and language.

In order to debunk this Latvian discourse of restoration and temporal normality, a number of strategies were observed in this research. One major strategy was to cite numerous instances of Russian culture and influence existent in Latvia before the inception of the inter-war republic. Therefore, instead of having to accept the title of occupiers and colonists, whose presence is somehow abnormal, *Chas* often printed articles arguing, for example, that 'We [Russians/Russian-speakers] have always been here'.[4]

Russian schools are a central element to this search for historical legitimacy. In 2004 there was a great deal of agitation and tension surrounding the implementation of reforms to Russian upper secondary schools that would have required 60% of all teaching to have been conducted in Latvian. This greatly exacerbated the tendency for language to become one of the most important markers of ethnic identity in Latvia. It also has meant that the issue of language has become one of the most important battle grounds in identity politics and in identity formation. Jubulis noted in 2001, for example, that 'the heterogeneous makeup of the Russian community [in Latvia] has hindered the development of a unified group consciousness, which could then provide the basis for group mobilization' (Jubulis 2001, p. 151). However, in 2004 the Russian language suddenly became the one thing that really was able to (discursively at least) provide the basis for group mobilisation. Indeed, it was at this point that the term 'Russian-speaker' became the linguistic signifier of choice for journalists and politicians alike.[5] Not only was this useful in order to discursively create an imagined community which was much neater than the previously used tags—Russians, Russian diaspora, Russophone community, Soviet-era migrants—but it also provided the opportunity to highlight 'language discrimination' as a negative means to promote the identity of Russian-speakers.

However, while much of the furore surrounding the language reforms has now subsided, Russian schools are still portrayed as 'the cornerstone of Russian culture'.[6] It is therefore with some pride that at the bottom of the article devoted to the 140th anniversary of 'one of the oldest Russian schools in the country' that the author adds: 'P.S. it was only very recently, in December 2008, when the oldest Latvian [latishskaya] secondary school celebrated its anniversary: Ventspils Gymnasium was

[4]'Igor' Gusev: ''my byli zdes' vsegda! . . .''', *Chas*, 3 January 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/01/03/g_039.html?r=32&, accessed 3 January 2009.

[5]For a more detailed account of this process see Cheskin (2010).

[6]'Shkol'nyi vals', *Chas*, 26 January 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/01/26/g_033.html?r=32&, accessed 26 January 2009.

90 years old. That means that the tradition of Russian education in Latvia is half a century older than Latvian education!'[7]

Therefore, Russian-speakers' presence in Latvia is framed and legitimised historically, allowing it to be seen as a 'temporal' normality rather than an abnormality. For this reason the Napoleonic Wars suddenly take on a new significance for Russian-speakers in Latvia. *Chas* reports on a monument to the Russian Empire's victory over Napoleon which now lies in ruins in a 'forgotten' part of the country's capital. The paper draws our attention to Latvia's selective historical memory, noting with some irony:

> In Soviet times there was a full exhibition devoted to the 1812 war in Riga's Museum of History and Navigation. This exhibition is no more. It turns out that the city's history ended in 1710, when Peter the First took Riga, and then started up again in 1857 when the city's fortifications began to be torn down. A full 150 years have been missed out.[8]

The portrayal of Latvia as an anti-democratic and totalitarian state

Linked to a dismissal of both the temporal and spatial narratives of normality is a far more provocative approach that could be seen in the pages of *Chas* as well as in the political rhetoric of Latvia's Russian-speaking politicians. Just as Latvian activists had sought to depict the Soviet Union as totalitarian, and therefore inhumane, during the years of *perestroika*, some of Latvia's Russian-speaking elites now also attempt to perpetuate the idea of contemporary Latvia as totalitarian. Although it may seem absurd upon first inspection to compare today's democratic Latvia with the authoritarian Soviet Union, this tactic should be viewed in the context of Latvian discourses of democratisation, human rights and a return to such freedoms. We should not view these comments as actually trying to create an image of a totalitarian Latvia along the lines of, for example, Friedrich and Brzezinski's paradigm (1965). Rather, we should see it as a critique, not only of the current Latvian state, but of the discourse that legitimised it in the first place.

In the Russian discourse found within *Chas*, recourse to totalitarian imagery and accusations is most commonly seen in response to Russian-speakers' status as non-citizens, and their perceived lack of rights to use the Russian language and culture in Latvia's economic and political space. In *Chas*, under the heading 'Who's last in the language queue?' the article reads:

> The paradox is that the government is increasing the requirements for knowledge of the state language at the same time as reducing the budget of the organisation which gives out the critically important '*apliecības*' [certificates] . . . . Who does this benefit? It benefits those who

[7]'Shkol'nyi vals', *Chas*, 26 January 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/01/26/g_033.html?r=32&, accessed 26 January 2009.

[8]'Pobeda, kotoruyu my poteryali?', *Chas*, 20 November 2008, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2008/11/20/g_011.html?r=32&, accessed 20 November 2008.

> don't need to pass an exam and who have, in the meantime, managed to secure a plush position in the state structure and local government.[9]

Clearly there is an effort to depict Latvian political elites as a class that is not only exploiting Russian-speakers for their own ends, but which is also deceiving Latvians as well. This discursive strategy is reminiscent of criticism levied at the Soviet regime and its *nomenklatura* comprised of bureaucrats and high-ranking party officials, who enjoyed access to goods and services unavailable to ordinary Soviet citizens.

> [The ability to choose to speak Russian] is a threat, but not to integration or to the rights and interests of the Latvian nation. Rather it is a threat to the 'professional Latvians' who, for two decades, have been feeding themselves on a crop of 'defence' of the single state.[10]

Furthermore, explicit comparisons with totalitarian Latvia during the Soviet era and contemporary Latvia are gleefully reproduced in the Russian press. Again, this is most commonly associated with Latvia's language and citizenship laws. The Latvian state is therefore seen as the vehicle by which Russian-speakers are now discriminated against. Instead of the KGB during Soviet times, Latvia now has its own 'inquisitors'—the language inspectors.[11] Instead of Russians having a privileged position in Soviet structures, it is now the Latvians: 'The language inspection's vindictive operations are well known far beyond Latvia's borders. In Europe they are in shock over the actions of this structure'.[12]

Synthesis with Latvian discourse

We have now outlined the main ways in which Latvia's Russian-speaking elites are attempting to dismantle Latvian narratives and discourses which have hitherto served to legitimise the Latvian state. We may therefore move to the next juncture in the formation of Russian-speaking discourse in Latvia—that of synthesis. Here it will be argued that Russian-speaking identity is not formed solely in opposition to Latvian narratives and discourse, and is not solely a negative phenomenon which relies on the othering of 'Latvian nationalists' or 'professional Latvians' etc. Rather, it is also a negotiated synthesis between competing Russian, Latvian, and to a certain extent, European discourses.

For Brubaker, Russia, as the natural external homeland for Latvia's Russian-speakers and Soviet migrants, inevitably plays a significant role in the formation of their national identity. Brubaker cites the example of inter-war Europe to illustrate how 'fault lines' of tension emerge between nationalising states such as Poland, where

[9]'Kto krainii v ocheredi za yazykom?', *Chas*, 26 February 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/02/26/g_023.html?r=32&, accessed 26 February 2009.

[10]'Tsifrovaya ''podnozhka''', *Chas*, 16 June 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/06/16/l_005.html?r=30&, accessed 16 June 2010.

[11]'Godmanis mozhet poskol'znut'sya na yazyke. Latyshskom', *Chas*, 10 February 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/02/10/l_035.html?r=30&, accessed 10 February 2010.

[12]'Russkaya ugroza', *Chas*, 16 September 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/09/16/l_019.html?r=30&, accessed 16 September 2010.

there were sizable German, Belarusian and Ukrainian populations, and the homeland nationalism of Germany and the Soviet Union. Here, the Soviet Union or Germany attempted to exert their influence on peoples that they considered as their own. Therefore, Germans living in Poland had to contend with and manage competing national identities. According to Brubaker this is all the more apparent in nationalising states that are attempting to define and consolidate their statehood such as Latvia and Estonia, where 'their restrictive citizenship policies toward their large Russian minorities, have met with harsh Russian condemnations of ''apartheid'' and ''ethnic cleansing'' and repeated assertions of Russia's right to protect Russians against allegedly massive human rights violations' (Brubaker 1996, p. 108).

Accordingly, a number of the more extreme Latvian politicians often manifest a belief that Moscow is attempting to create a 'fifth column' comprised of Russian-speakers who are loyal to Russia and not to Latvia (Golubeva 2010, p. 167). It was therefore no surprise when, following recent riots in the centre of Riga to demand the dissolution of the government, a number of observers and eyewitnesses sought to lay blame for the riots on Russia and Russian-speakers. The Latvian daily *Neatkarīgā Avīze* (perhaps the most provocative and tabloid of Latvia's Latvian-language newspapers) talked of 'mooing Russian provocateurs',[13] while live radio broadcasts from the events paid close attention to the presence of Russian-speakers at the protest. Initially the event was a peaceful political rally organised by the newly formed Society for a Different Politics (*Sabiedrība citai politikai*). However, the mood soon soured as rioters started throwing objects at the *Saeima* windows and then causing considerable damage to nearby shops and cars. *Latvijas Radio 1* spent a great deal of time discussing a chant of 'Russia Russia' that was heard in the crowd, with their eye-witness reporter noting that the people who initiated the throwing of eggs also held flags for the 'Russian' party Harmony Centre (HC, *Saskaņas centrs*).[14]

Moreover, it can be seen that in the political rhetoric of Latvia's nationalistic parties, Russian-speakers are often closely connected with Russia and Russian influences. Latvian politicians from the nationalistic blocs For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (TB/LNNK, *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK*) and All for Latvia (*Visu Latvijai*), who have recently merged into a single political bloc, categorise parties that claim to represent Russian-speakers as 'anti-Latvian' and 'pro-Russian'.[15] This is naturally a strategy that allows Latvian nationalists to gain legitimacy for their harsh stances against non-Latvians in Latvia. It is clear therefore, that Russians are discursively portrayed as being disloyal to Latvia and loyal to Russia. As the external Other, this portrayal is centrally important to the discursive placement and unification of Latvian nationalists and as such must be seen to form a central element in their hegemonising project.

Because of this, there might be a temptation to view Russian-speaking discourse and identity in Latvia as closely tied to Russian political and cultural influence, and in

[13]*Neatkarīgā Avīze*, 20 January 2009.

[14]'Protesta mītiņš Doma laukumā', *Latvijas Radio 1*, originally broadcast on 13 January 2009, 17:45–19:00, available (in Latvian) at: http://www.latvijasradio.lv/program/1/2009/01/20090113.htm, accessed 20 January 2009.

[15]See, for example, *Diena*, 4 June 2009.

strict opposition to Latvian or Baltic considerations. For example, Konstantin Kosachev, then chairman of Russia's *Duma* Committee on Foreign Affairs, in an interview with *Chas* states:

> We should not restrict our campaigning for the Russian world simply to its cultural and historical aspects. It is all good and well if people love Russia, speak Russian, and play Russian folk instruments. But this is not enough.
>
> Does not every diaspora lobby for the interests of its fatherland from the country of its residence? We can just look at how the Jews, throughout the world, work for the good of Israel, or how the Armenians rejoice in the well-being of Armenia.[16]

However, while it may be true that Russian-speakers in the Baltic states often turn to Russian TV channels and other news sources from Russia (Smith 2008, p. 425), we should refrain from viewing the development of a Russian-speaking identity as under the aegis of Russia or Moscow. Speakers of Russian may subscribe to Russian cable TV channels, but this does not mean that they also subscribe to Russian discourse in its entirety. Certainly, we should view Russia as an important element and even sponsor of identity for their 'compatriots abroad', and as a significant reference point with which to frame their own subject positions. However, adopting the quadratic nexus approach, we must also look to the titular discourses and narratives for a fuller explanation of contemporary Latvian–Russian identity.

The impact of Latvian narratives and discourse on Russian-speakers

In my research there were a number of instances where the Russian-speaking community was framed in relation to 'Latvian' narratives, discourses and symbols. This must therefore be seen as a negotiated result of the dialectic relationship between competing identities and narratives that Latvia's Russian-speakers are faced with. For example, on a very basic level there was often a geographical solidarity with Riga and Latvia rather than Russia. Thus, reporting on a hockey match between Dynamo Moscow and Dynamo Riga, *Chas* laments the loss of 'our' (*nasha*) team, referring to Dynamo Riga.[17] Moreover, there is a generalised conception of 'our people' (*nashi*) which does not necessarily revolve around ethnocentric conceptions of Russianness or the Russian language. In an article entitled 'Our people come top in Italy', 'our people' refers to two Latvian sculptors with particularly Latvian names, but this does not prevent the paper from taking pride in their international achievements.[18] Similarly, in a piece on the renowned Latvian opera singer Kristīna Opolais, the singer is referred to as 'our compatriot' (*sootchestvennitsa*).[19]

[16]'Konstantin Kosachev: "Ne davat' Rodinu v obidu"', *Chas*, 11 December 2008, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2008/12/11/v_022.html?r=3&, accessed 11 December 2008.

[17]'"Dinamo" protiv "Dinamo"', *Chas*, 2 March 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/03/02/s_019.html?r=8&, accessed 2 March 2009.

[18]'Nashi v Italii—pervyi', *Chas*, 27 January 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/01/27/g_026.html?r=32&, accessed 27 January 2007.

[19]'Kristine Opolais: Don Zhuana zhalko do slez', *Chas*, 8 July 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/07/08/g_008.html?r=33&, accessed 8 July 2010.

However, more than a geographical solidarity, my research revealed an acceptance of Latvian symbols and ideals centrally located within Latvian discourse. The Freedom Monument in Riga, which stands as the preeminent symbol of Latvian nationhood and independence, is an obvious rallying point for Latvian nationalistic movements, and was central in the *Atmoda* years as a symbol of hope and Latvian pride, as well as serving as a practical location for demonstrations against Soviet power (Karklins 1994, p. 67). However, notwithstanding the statue's place in Latvian nation-building and symbolism, the Russian-speaking discourse in *Chas* also embraces and co-opts this symbol of Latvia, which is inscribed with the words 'For fatherland and freedom' (also the name of the nationalistic party ever so keen to portray Russian-speakers as disloyal and alien to the state). Discussing the actions of a number of foreign visitors to the nation's capital who had been arrested for urinating on the Freedom Monument, *Chas* states:

> The inhabitants of Riga constantly have to deal with the rowdy behaviour of drunken tourists who come to Latvia to spend a jolly weekend. There is always one of these fun-seekers trying to defile our indestructible symbol—Milda.[20]

Milda is the commonly used name by which Latvians affectionately refer to the Freedom Monument. It is therefore striking that for Russian-speakers this is also portrayed as 'our indestructible symbol'. The adoption of this and other symbols of Latvianness highlights the complex nature of the public discourse of Russian-speakers. While they are keen to remember and preserve links with 'Mother Russia', they also acknowledge Latvia as their actual homeland (*Rodina*). Rodins, in his research, also finds a great degree of co-option of Latvian symbols among the country's non-Latvian population which reveal 'a unification of patriotism and loyalty among the whole population of Latvia' (Rodins 2005, p. 49).

However, one of the most striking aspects of this synthesis with Latvian discourse lies in the insistence that Latvia's Russian-speakers have always been fervent supporters of Latvian independence and the then-stated goals of *Atmoda*. In many respects this assertion runs contrary to the discourse of certain Latvian nationalists, who hope to persuade Latvians that Russian-speakers' allegiances lie, and have always lain, with Russia and the Soviet Union. Indeed, there were many noticeable instances in my research which revealed a solidarity and affection for the *Atmoda* years. *Chas* reports on a protest meeting in Daugavpils, a city mainly populated by ethnic Russians, against the Latvian government. Here the reader is introduced to pensioner Valentina Bogdanova, who shows a cutting from a local newspaper from 1990, explaining:

> It's a meeting in support of an independent Latvia which took place on this very spot 18 years ago. There I am in the photograph. Then I, along with other people from this city, went along to support the Popular Front [*Latvijas tautas fronte*, LTF]. Dobelis spoke, and in Russian, saying that in a free Latvia all inhabitants would be able to live dignified lives, that there

[20]'Muzhik s bol'shim feierverkom', *Chas*, 2 December 2008, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2008/12/02/g_014.html?r=32&, accessed 2 December 2008.

> could be no question of a division between Russians and Latvians …. And I believed it; I applauded, and I voted for an independent Latvia. We have all been deceived.[21]

The Russian-speaking discourse in Latvia is keen to stress Russians' loyalty to the Latvian state and to an independent Latvia. This runs contrary to the stereotype of Russians as presented by TB/LNNK as a direct threat to the sovereignty and integrity of the state. Indeed, although there are historical references to the achievements of the Soviet Union in the Russian-language press of Latvia, there is a noticeable absence of any calls to restore any of the institutions of the Soviet period. During the years of *Atmoda*, a reactionary neo-Soviet narrative (Smith *et al*. 1998, p. 10) which supported the maintenance of Soviet norms and institutions was the staple for the Baltic countries' Interfront movements. However, modern the Russian-speaking discourse in Latvia chooses to focus on the support for the Popular Front of Latvia (LTF) from Russian-speakers. To a large extent this is illustrative of the need to understand the power of discourse in the emergence of Latvia's post-Soviet identities. Karklins notes, for example, that in a republic-wide advisory poll in March 1991, 47% of non-Latvians voted 'Yes' in answer to the question 'Are you for a democratic and independent Republic of Latvia?' (Karklins 1994, pp. 101–2). It is interesting that in the rhetoric of Latvia's 'Russian' political parties and the media, the focus now is necessarily on the 47% of non-Latvians who supported independence.

Conversely, the prominence of the pro-Soviet Interfront organisations during the *Atmoda* years in providing a representative voice for non-Latvians can be seen as disproportionately high. Soviet bureaucrats and similarly interested parties were able to wield their positions of influence, and their places in the structures that existed at the time, to articulate their positions much more effectively and coherently than any other group of Russian-speakers. Added to this, the voices of many 'Russian-speakers' who were supportive of Latvian independence were largely indistinguishable from the 'Latvian' discourses of the time that supported the Popular Front movement (Lapsa *et al*. 2007, p. 171). Therefore, irrespective of the diffuse positions within the non-Latvian community, we can see just how easily public perceptions can be manipulated, and just how important discursive positioning is to the subsequent legitimacy and identity of any given group.

In recent years survey data have revealed that an increasingly high proportion of Latvia's Russian-speakers have a significant attachment to Latvia (Rodins 2005). Certainly this is why an understanding of the synthesis between Russian and Latvian discourse is now so salient to our analysis. Russian-speakers are now responding to, as well as creating, increased feelings of loyalty to Latvia. Importantly, as opposed to the *Atmoda* period, elites are choosing to articulate this loyalty in a more coordinated manner, in a way that claims to represent the discursively constructed group of Russian-speakers. In order to reflect this loyalty *Atmoda* is chosen as a frozen point of time which symbolically represents the Russian-speaking community's full acceptance

[21]'Daugavpilsskoe kadalivo', *Chas*, 23 February 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/02/23/l_018.html?r=30&, accessed 23 February 2009. At the time Dobelis was a *Saeima* representative for the nationalist Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK party.

of the idea of an independent Latvian state. This is the period where Russian-speakers claim to have been working together with Latvians, 'when unity was not just an empty word'.[22]

Articulation of counter-narratives

The next discursive step in attempting to construct a Foucauldian 'regime of truth' for elites is the articulation of discourses and narratives that can replace those that have been rejected. As we have seen, the Russian-speaking discourse has first rejected and then adopted certain aspects of Latvian (as well as Russian) discourse. Here it will be argued that there is an increasingly coherent vision of the ideal form of what Latvia should be from the perspective of the country's Russian-speakers. This ideal is a result of a negotiated synthesis between the main Latvian and Russian discourses, narratives and historical interpretations.

Because Europe plays such a significant role as a legitimising factor in both Russian-speaking and Latvian discourses, it should come as no surprise that Europe again figures strongly in this stage of the Russian-speaking discourse. 'European norms' of multiculturalism are often invoked as positive examples for Latvia's political, cultural and economic development. Therefore, such documents as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provide a solid basis for Russian-speakers to claim the right to practise and celebrate their particular traditions and cultures: 'The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage' (Council of Europe 1995).

In light of this 'European' understanding of multiculturalism, *Chas* chides Juris Asars, the then head of the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration, for not being aware of the content of 'fundamental documents in the field of social integration'.[23] In this article Asars is quoted as saying: 'Our greatest mistake has been that we have allowed national minorities to express themselves and preserve their own cultural traditions with state money'. *Chas* notes, however, that the Secretariat for Integration Affairs itself is a product of EU money and was established as part of the Year of Multicultural Dialogue.

In line with this multicultural conception for contemporary Latvia, *Chas* is keen to cite examples of Latvians and Russians going out of their way to explore the other ethnos' culture and language. The example of schoolgirl Santa Getmančuka is illustrative of this. At a gala-concert to celebrate Tatiana Day, a celebration of Russian culture, *Chas* reports on Santa's rendition of a Russian song: 'Notwithstanding it being very difficult for her to speak Russian, and her Latvian accent which could be heard while she was singing, she performed the song with such feeling and

[22]'Prezident Zatlers: ''nuzhen dialog''', *Chas*, 12 January 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/01/12/l_043.html?r=30&, accessed 12 January 2009.

[23]'Latviya vpadaet v provintsializm …', *Chas*, 11 December 2008, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2008/12/11/g_042.html?r=32&, accessed 11 December 2008.

enthusiasm that the hall simply exploded into applause'. The girl in question is also quoted as saying: 'I liked the fact that at this festival, even when you belong to a different culture, you don't feel like an outsider'.[24]

In one article, entitled 'Ok, labi, davai', *Chas* editor Aleksei Sheinin, who was also a candidate for the political party For a Good Latvia (PLL, *Par labu Latviju*) expresses his delight at hearing Latvian, Russian and English being used interchangeably on the streets of Riga, citing numerous colourful examples of the three languages being used simultaneously—although unfortunately for the purposes of my analysis they are largely untranslatable.[25]

Likewise, *Chas* writes highly favourably of Latvian arts and culture. For example, an album by famed Latvian composer Raimonds Pauls, is singled out for particular praise, with the author commenting that: 'Surely, irrespective of nationality, everybody living in Latvia who loves nature and the country's unique landscapes can learn more about its cultural heritage thanks to these incredibly melodic modern performances of the Latvian nation'.[26]

For Russian-speaking discourse, this approval of Latvian culture plays an important discursive function. For Russian-speakers this is used to highlight the desirability of a multicultural society. Nevertheless, this multiculturalism itself also has a deeper meaning and significance.

Russian-speakers as a bridge between Europe and Russia: the search for belonging

Because Latvia's Russian-speakers effectively straddle competing discourses from Russia and Latvia, an effective way in which to come to terms with the inherent contradictions of their position is to create a unique space that can only be inhabited by 'Latvian-Russians'. There is evidence that Russian-speakers from the Baltic states often feel like strangers when they visit Russia (Zepa 2005). As such, their sense of belonging to Russia is weaker than some people would like to suggest. However, their belonging to Latvia (as we have seen) is also frequently subject to much speculation.

Croucher (2004) asserts that a feeling of belonging is closely connected to the state, and to the reciprocal relationship between any given state and it citizenry. For Russian-speakers their relationship with the state is often subject to strain, a tendency which is often exaggerated in the media and by political parties. Therefore, Russian-speakers' sense of belonging is also subject to question. Many Russian-speakers were initially denied citizenship rights at the outset of the newly formed independent state, which can understandably have led to a feeling of inferiority in terms of their citizenship status (Aasland & Flotten 2001, p. 1028). The findings of the survey 'On the Path to Civil Society' reflect this; whereas 93% of Latvian citizens reported that they

[24]'Do svidan'ya, nash laskovyi prazdnik!', *Chas*, 26 January 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/01/26/g_002.html?r=32&, accessed 26 January 2009.

[25]*Chas*, 6 September 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/09/06/g_043.html?r=32&, accessed 6 September 2010.

[26]'Narodnyi pesni v stile simfodzhaz', *Chas*, 2 March 2009, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2009/03/02/g_002.html?r=33&, accessed 2 March 2009.

felt a personal sense of belonging to Latvian society, only 67% of non-citizens shared this feeling (Zepa *et al.* 2001, p. 83).

One way in which Russian-speaking elites attempt to combat this perceived lack of belonging is to stress the group's unique function as a bridge between Russian and European (including Latvian) civilisations and cultures. This enables the country's Russian-speakers to create a unique identity that is able to embrace both cultures without losing either. Moreover, it facilitates the formation of an identity that has a distinctive purpose, and therefore sense of belonging. This is also a central tenet of Latvia's 'Russian' political parties. In their Founding Declaration, HC declare: 'We are for a "large" Europe which cooperates with its Eastern neighbours, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the countries of the CIS. Latvia must become a leader for constructive dialogue with Russia and the CIS, and become a bridge between the EU and Russia' (Harmony Centre 2005).

Therefore, while the Latvian spatial narrative places Latvia firmly on the side of Europe, the Russian-speaking narrative spans both East and West. Moreover, it enables Russian-speakers to be an integral part of the post-Soviet Latvian Republic. This is most visibly demonstrated in the political arena. A forum in Brussels entitled 'The EU and Russia: New Challenges' attracted much attention in the Russian-language press. For *Chas*, Tat'yana Zhdanok is applauded for her ability to bring together sides from Europe and Russia: 'The only Russian-speaking European Member of Parliament, Tat'yana Zhdanok, has achieved the unachievable: bringing together in one hall people who had literally been on different fronts of the conflict in the Caucasus, namely politicians from Russian and the EU'.[27]

Furthermore, HC has recently been assuming this role of bridge between Latvia and Russia following their victory in the Riga mayoral elections and the appointment of Nils Ušakovs as the Mayor of Riga. Ušakovs has stressed his desire to renew contacts with Russia both economically and culturally. Indeed, to take one example, in July 2009 a delegation from Moscow's city council was invited to Riga, with their representatives claiming that Latvia should not just become a symbolic gateway to Europe for Russia, but a gateway for the large flows of goods that are available from Russia.

However, for some this gateway to Europe is simply another manifestation of Russian chauvinism. Kristīne Doroŋenkova, in her study of Russian media reports on Latvia, observes how the concept of the Baltic as a 'window to Europe' is often propagated in the Russian (*Rossiiskie*) media. She notes that, 'To intellectual Russians, the Baltic States are not just a window, but a bridge between Russia and Europe, constituting "our Europe"' (Doroŋenkova 2008, p. 109). In Russian (*Rossiiskii*) discourse the Baltic states can be conceptualised as 'our Europe' because Russian-speakers, or Russian 'compatriots' abroad are often seen as a natural extension of the Russian nation, as visualised in neo-imperial terms (Morozov 2004, p. 319). Nevertheless, in terms of the articulation of a particular Russian-speaking discourse for Latvian Russian-speakers, the 'bridge' function is not simply to act as a one-way conduit bringing Russian culture and traditions to the Baltic states. Rather,

[27]'Prezumptsiya (ne)vinovnosti dlya RF', *Chas*, 12 December 2008, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2008/12/12/l_030.html?r=30&, accessed 12 December 2008.

Russian-speaking discourse increasingly stresses its nascent Latvian values and inheritance.

Thus, HC politicians are increasingly eager to speak Latvian in public interviews, even when a number of them have obvious difficulties in doing so. Nils Ušakovs even greeted the visiting delegation from Moscow's city council in Latvian before continuing talks in Russian. Therefore, it is apparent that the Russian-speaking counter-narrative should be seen in the context of the processes of syntheses that are occurring between Latvian and Russian discourses.

The evolution of the Russian-speaking discourse

Although, for the purposes of this study I have divided the observed discourses in *Chas* into three broad categories, this does not mean that the discourses are equally used, nor that conflicting discourses (both negative and positive) are not employed by the same people simultaneously. For the sake of academic study it makes good methodological sense to make such divisions, but for politicians and journalists such distinctions are most likely not so explicitly abstracted.

It should be noted also that although 'anti-discourse' as I have termed it, constitutes a significant proportion of the total discursive material that was analysed in my study, the number of instances when it is employed have generally fallen from their apex in 2004 (the time of the education reform). Indeed, this downward trend was fully observable in the two comparable periods of this analysis.

In the second period of analysis there were noticeably fewer articles or sentiments devoted to the 'discrimination' of Russian-speakers in Latvia. Anti-discourse was still present including the usual staple of articles detailing language 'discrimination', caricatures of 'Latvian nationalists', and the incivility of the Latvian state. However, the number of such articles was certainly fewer. Instead there were even instances of journalists claiming that being a Russian-speaker was actually an advantage in Latvia. One commentator stated:

> There has been a thorough change in priorities. For Russian-speakers the so-called ethnic problems: language, education in one's native language, voting rights for non-citizens etc. are no longer so heated …. Today graduates of Russian schools sometimes speak Latvian better than their Latvian counterparts, and have therefore become more competitive on the labour market.[28]

This is indicative of what may be termed a more pragmatic approach to identity formation for Russian-speakers. Although language is still an important issue, and measures to curb the public use of Russian were still met with frank condemnation, there was a shift towards seeing Russian as an economic commodity which placed Russian-speakers in a unique position. Indeed, Russian was seen as a means to ease the effects of the economic crisis in Latvia. For example, the head of Daugavpils University is quoted as asking, 'If we can export sprats to Russia, why can't we also

[28]'I uleteli ''pchely''', *Chas*, 6 October 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/10/06/l_002.html?r=30&, accessed 6 October 2010.

export higher education?'[29] In the same article the journalist even proposes a pragmatic solution to those who fear the use of Russian in Latvian higher education: 'The law could be passed in such a way that only foreigners could be accepted for courses in Russian rather than our native students'.[30]

A further evolution of *Chas* discourse was a partial softening of predicational strategies linked to the 'othering' of Latvians. Although there were still numerous instances of *Chas* provocatively highlighting certain actions of 'Russophobic' Latvians against the interest of Russian-speakers, there were also new portrayals of Latvians who were more sympathetic to the position of Russian-speakers, or at least not anti-Russian. One journalist noted that 'Generally the Latvian political elite are already moving away from national stereotypes'.[31] Amazement was expressed at the former President Vaira Vīķe Freiberga's sentiments that it would be for the good of society if Russian-speaking politicians were to be part of the new government, announcing that she 'unexpectedly has fallen in love with Russians' under the subheading 'Metamorphosis'.[32]

On the other hand, it should be stressed that the negative identity formation associated with depicting 'professional Latvians' and nationalistic, Russophobic, anti-European Latvians did not entirely disappear during this period. Within texts that may be categorised as representing 'synthesis discourse' there was also a noticeable increase in the number of instances when *Chas* journalists reported a solidarity and affection for Latvia and Latvian culture and language. For example, the Latvian school festival of song and dance, in which participants dressed in traditional Latvian costumes and danced traditional Latvian dances, was described as 'an event for children and for adults, and for the country as a whole' under the heading 'The song which unites'.[33]

However, in this second monitoring period there were fewer references to the *Atmoda* period than in the first period of analysis. This perhaps underlines the greater confidence felt by Russian-speaking elites in Latvia, who instead of looking to the past, are increasingly optimistic about their current and future status in Latvia. One article highlighted this in reflecting on the success of the 'Russian *Duma*'—Riga's municipal government which was led by the 'Russian' HC party:

> It was [Riga's municipal government's] fate to show the Latvian electorate that Russians in power not only do not pose a threat to the Latvian state, but dare I say, they can get on with things better than the Latvian ethnocrats [*etnokrati*], even when the government are constantly throwing a spanner in the works.[34]

[29]'"Russkaya bol'" gosudarstvennykh vuzov', *Chas*, 28 June 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/06/28/g_033.html?r=32&, accessed 28 June 2010.

[30]'"Russkaya bol'" gosudarstvennykh vuzov', *Chas*, 28 June 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/06/28/g_033.html?r=32&, accessed 28 June 2010.

[31]'Urbanovich otkhodit v storonu. No nedaleko . . .', *Chas*, 26 August 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/08/26/l_052.html?r=30&, accessed 26 August 2010.

[32]'VVF neozhidanno polyubila russkikh', *Chas*, 7 October 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/10/07/l_035.html?r=30&, accessed 7 October 2010.

[33]'Pesnya, kotoraya ob''edinyaet', *Chas*, 12 July 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/07/12/g_024.html?r=32&, accessed 12 July 2010.

[34]'"Russkaya duma": ispytanie na prochnost'', *Chas*, 4 June 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/06/04/l_025.html?r=30&, accessed 4 June 2010.

Linked to this rise in optimism was also a rise in the number of direct and indirect references to Russian-speakers as a bridge between Latvia and Russia. A great deal of attention was given to Ušakovs' visits to Russia and his calls for greater economic ties with Russia. Added to this, articles on Latvia's economic crisis often focused on the country's unique 'advantageous, geographical position':[35] one article quotes Tat'yana Zhdanok who states: 'Latvia, who best knows the peculiarities of Russia, needs to utilise its [linguistic] advantages and become a mediator for business contacts and to strengthen relations between the Western countries and Russia'.[36]

It therefore seems apparent that the focus of Russian-speaking discourse in *Chas* has moved further away from efforts to dismantle Latvian discourse and is increasingly focusing on the more positive elements of identity construction.

Conclusions

My analysis of *Chas* has revealed a complex picture of the ways in which the publically constructed identity of 'Russian-speakers' is being negotiated in the context of Latvia's almost 20 years of post-Soviet statehood. Naturally, an investigation of only one newspaper cannot tell us everything we need to know and we should thus be aware of the limitations of a discursive approach to studying identity formation. However, a discursive approach does enable us to observe general trends in the identity strategies and positioning of 'Russian-speakers' by elites. Moreover, this will potentially allow us to make generalised predictions for the future of ethno-political relations within Latvia for the coming years. Based on this research, the prognosis is, if not positive, then at least improving.

Using Brubaker's (expanded) nexus we have seen how the conceptualised ideals of Latvia, Russia and Europe are all invoked at different times to cement and legitimise Russian-speaking discourse. We should therefore be very wary of accepting assertions that Latvia's Russian-speakers are simply an extension of Russian chauvinism, or that they, as 'compatriots' of Russians in Russia, represent a loyal 'fifth column' with more loyalty to Moscow than Riga. Such accusations must be understood primarily to belong to the realm of the hegemonic desires of certain Latvian nationalistic forces.

Instead we have seen a dynamic process emerging whereby the relationship to the Latvian state is of increasing importance to Russian-speakers. That is not to say that Russia is not an important element or even sponsor of Russian-speaking identity in Latvia. However, the Russian-speaking community has been forced to adjust to the (discursively proscribed) conditions that it now finds itself in. Indeed, because of the power of discourse to become cemented into social consciousness, we have seen how certain concepts become central in the discursive posturing of any given group.

For our case in hand, such nodal points are abstracts ranging from 'democracy', 'Europe' and 'loyalty', to historical interpretations of Latvia's past. It is because these

[35]'Pabriksu pochudilas' ''ruka Moskvy''', *Chas*, 27 August 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/08/27/l_002.html?r=30&, accessed 27 August 2010.

[36]'Russkomu—ofitsial'nyi status', *Chas*, 20 September 2010, available at: http://chas-daily.com/win/2010/09/20/l_007.html?r=30&, accessed 20 September 2010.

points of reference are so central to the construction of Latvian identity in the first instance (and logically in some form before that), that Russian-speaking discourse is forced to actively engage with them. However, it is through the process of antagonism and discursive posturing that these concepts are being challenged or negotiated and meanings are being purposefully altered. Therefore the Europe of Latvian discourse is a subtly different Europe from that invoked by Russian-speaking discourse.

However, there are a number of paradoxes inherent in the Russian-speaking position. Although the othering of Latvians is essential to the internal unity of 'Russian-speakers', there is a visible desire and trend to portray themselves as Latvian, rather than Russian-Russians. Indeed, great efforts are made to stress the loyalty of Russian-speakers to the Latvian state, its independence and its ongoing democratic development. Nevertheless, the constant overemphasis on the actions of Latvian 'nationalists' (usually at the expense of portrayals of moderate Latvians) can leave no doubt that Russian-speakers still define themselves in opposition to the discursive representations that 'Latvians' give to them. This 'self-marginalising strategy' (Golubeva *et al*. 2007, p. 32) thus maintains the distinctness of the two groups while allowing 'Russian-speakers' to retain their internal unity.

However, in order to marginalise the Latvian hegemonic position, 'We', for Russian-speakers, embraces the 'civilised' nations of old Europe. By linking their own discourses with European discourses of equality, racial and cultural tolerance (which are in fact Russian-speaking discourses as much as they are somehow 'European facts'), we can see a shift in the relational nodal network that Russian-speakers are attempting to operate within.

On the other hand, Russian-speaking elites have carefully been crafting out a space for themselves within the narratives of an independent, post-Soviet Latvia. In order to find such a place, however, they have been forced to adopt many positions congruent with Latvian discourses. In so doing they have moved away from wholesale 'pro-Russian' and '*homo Sovieticus*' identities and instead have sought a meaningful role as Latvian Russian-speakers. Increasingly, it would seem, it is this dual, or 'bridge' identity which Russian-speaking elites are attempting to promote.

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